

**BLM Eastern Interior Field Office Agency Report to the EIRAC for their October 2023 meeting.
9/5/2023**

Dall Sheep

Glacier Mountain, GMU 20E

ADFG conducted a minimum count survey via Supercub with funding by BLM. A total of 14 sheep were observed. This was similar to the 2022 count of 12 sheep which was lowest count among survey record to 2000. Similarly low counts in the two prior years (22 in 2021 and 12 in 2022) make it unlikely that these low counts were due to sheep movements outside of the survey area or to sheep being missed. In contrast, the total number of sheep observed in 2000-2019 surveys varied from 63 (in 2013 and 2016) to 159 (in 2012). There were 9 ewe-like, 4 lambs, and 1 sublegal ram observed. Lamb numbers were higher than the zero lambs observed the previous year and 2 lambs observed in 2021, and low compared to the year 2000 to 2019 range of 3 (2013) to 30 (in 2017).

White Mountains, GMU 25C

Surveys were conducted by ADFG (with funding support from BLM) and Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge. A total of 159 sheep were observed (98 ewelike, 34 lambs and 27 rams). This represents a large decline from peak counts in 1999 but is slightly higher than lowest counts in the early 1980s. The count in 2012 was 491 sheep (292 ewelike, 55 lamb, and 144 rams) and in 2020 was 240 sheep (166 ewelike, 25 lambs, 29 rams). There was almost no change between the 2022 partial survey (areas East of Beaver Creek) and survey counts in the same areas in 2023.

Caribou

RC860 Fall Fortymile Caribou Early Hunting Season Summary

The Federal subsistence season opened on August 1 with a harvest limit of 2 bulls. A portion of the Fortymile herd was located in the Steese Highway area and a total of 25 bulls were reported harvested by rural community residents by August 9. In that time period, Youth Hunt permit holders reported a harvest of 20 bulls.

The State season opened on August 10th, with a harvest limit of one bull, and a summer quota of 750 bulls, 340 of which were allocated to Zones 1 and 4. A winter harvest quota of 250 caribou was planned. ADFG announced prior to the State hunt opening that the State season in the Steese Highway area (Zones 1 and 4) would close after four. Very high numbers of hunters participated in the State hunt, including many who normally hunt in the Nelchina hunt. Total reported harvest by August 17 was 680 caribou (eight of those were in Zone 2). The Federal hunt has remained open, but ADFG announced that the State season in Zones 1 and 4 would remain closed for the remainder of the Fall season. It is possible that the State winter season will not open in some or all zones, depending on harvest during remainder of the Fall season.

Steese Caribou Habitat Monitoring

The Eastern Interior Field Office and the Salcha-Delta Soil and Water Conservation District cooperated to re-visit alpine long-term caribou habitat monitoring plots established by BLM in 2021. Most sites re-visited were located in the Birch Creek portion of the Steese National Conservation Area with fewer in the western portion of the White Mountains National Recreation Area. This will allow a preliminary assessment of vegetation changes during a period of time when relatively high use of these areas occurred by Fortymile Caribou.

White Mountains Caribou Herd Monitoring

The overlap of Fortymile and White Mountains Caribou herds during the fall and winter in the last ten years has made it difficult to maintain radiocollars or obtain composition counts and no radiocollars have functioned on the herd for the last two years. As a result, neither fall composition counts nor population estimates for this small herd are available. BLM and ADFG are cooperating with a goal of deploying GPS radiocollars on up to eight White Mountains caribou this winter. If successful, this would facilitate better assessments of population status.

Moose

Draanjik Cooperative Moose Study

EIFO, Yukon-Charley National Preserve, and Arctic National Wildlife Refuge continue to monitor movements, calving rates, and survival of moose in north-eastern Alaska. 25 adult females were monitored in the Little Black and Draanjik drainages in 2023. General movement patterns have been summarized in past reports and include summer movements north and east into Yukon Territory or movements north and west into Yukon Flats Refuge by a large portion of collared moose. In 2023, the calving rate based on GPS data was 96% and the average in 2021 and 2022 was 84%. Twinning rate among cows observed from the air with calves was 54% this summer but averaged 33% the previous two summers. Survival of observed calves through their first year of life averaged 22% in 2021 and 2022 monitoring years. Annual adult survival averaged 92% in 2021 and 2022.

Note: All results reported here are preliminary.