

Western Interior Regional Advisory Council

Wildlife Special Action Request

Reduce the caribou harvest limit across the range of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) from five caribou per day to four caribou per year, only one of which may be a cow for the remainder of the 2022-2024 regulatory cycle. Specifically, reduce the harvest limit in Units 21D, remainder; 24A, remainder; 24B, remainder; 24C; 24D; and all caribou hunt areas within Units 22, 23, and 26A.

Existing Federal Regulation

Units 21D, remainder; 22; 23; 24A, remainder; 24B, remainder; 24C; 24D; 26A - Caribou

5 caribou per day

Proposed Federal Regulation

Units 21D, remainder; 22; 23; 24A, remainder; 24B, remainder; 24C; 24D; 26A - Caribou

~~5 caribou per day~~ 4 caribou per year; however, no more than 1 cow may be taken

Why is this special action needed?

Data from ADF&G biologists, presented to the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) Working Group at their December 2022 meeting, illustrate that there has been continued decline in the WACH. The July 2022 photo census estimated 164,000 caribou in the WACH, which is down from 188,000 in 2021. Census numbers for past years: 2020 – no census; 2019 – 244,000; 2018 – no census; 2017 – 259,000; 2016 – 201,000. In the two years between the 2019 and 2021 census, the herd declined nearly 12% per year. Additionally, data shows that the cow survival rate was 71% in 2021, well below the average of 81% (1981-2020). The WACH Working Group is intending to propose a reduction in harvest limits from 5 caribou a day to 4 caribou per year, with no more than one cow allowed for the 2024- 2026 regulatory cycle.

The WIRAC is greatly concerned about the precipitous decline of the WACH, which is approaching 1976 levels, and feel that immediate action is needed to slow the decline and prevent the herd from reaching a point it could not recover from. We feel that the harvest recommendations set forth by the WACH Working Group are a good starting point for the conservation of the WACH while still allowing some harvest. We believe incidental mortality of the herd is affecting the overall population and feel that there is an immediate need to address the situation. The WIRAC recognizes that federally qualified subsistence users are already facing food insecurities, but this drastic reduction of caribou harvest and protection of cows is necessary to protect the remaining caribou herd. We feel that restricting all users across the entire range of the WACH is the most equitable method to reduce harvest.