

Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group

Goal: To work together to ensure the long-term conservation of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd and the ecosystem on which it depends, to maintain traditional and other uses for the benefit of all people now and in the future.

Chair: Vern Cleveland, Sr. Vice-Chair: Cyrus Harris
P.O. Box 175, Nome, AK 99762

January 29, 2026

Office of Subsistence Management
Attn: Subsistence Policy Coordinator
1011 East Tudor Road, Mail Stop 121
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

On behalf of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group (Working Group), I submit the following Special Action Request to the Federal Subsistence Board.

Action request: Limit the caribou harvest to four caribou per year per hunter, only one of which can be a cow. This request would specially reduce harvest limits in Units 22, 23 and southwest portion of 26A.

Current regulations: Units 22, 23, 26A, west of the Colville River drainage upstream from the Nuka River and drainages of the Chukchi Sea, south and west of and including the Kuk and Kugrua River drainages—15 caribou, only 1 may be a cow.

Proposed regulations: Units 22, 23, 26A, west of the Colville River drainage upstream from the Nuka River and drainages of the Chukchi Sea, south and west of and including the Kuk and Kugrua River drainages —15 caribou **4 caribou**, only 1 may be a cow.

Unusual conditions: Data from Alaska Fish & Game biologists illustrate a continual decline in the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH). The July 2025 photo census estimated the herd at 121,000 caribou, representing an approximately 20 percent decline from 2023.

At its annual meeting the WACH Working Group assigned the management level “Critical, Declining” to the herd based on the current census (less than 130,000) and adult cow survival rate less than 80%.

The WACH Working Group identifies an immediate need to address the current herd decline by limiting the harvest of both bulls and cows to allow the herd population to stabilize and begin to recover.

Adverse effects: The WACH was once the largest caribou herd in Alaska, but over the past two decades it has declined by nearly 70 percent. Without management actions such as harvest restrictions, the herd is expected to continue declining. As herd size decreases, this will adversely impact Northwest Alaskan communities that rely on caribou for food security and cultural practices. This harvest restriction should be implemented by the Board to ensure the long-term health of the caribou herd and for the well-being of the communities that depend on it.

Request Purpose: The requested action is to ensure the viability of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd and to continue to the subsistence uses of the caribou herd.

Regulatory change timing: The critical, declining status of the WACH demonstrates the immediate need for a regulatory change before the next Board cycle. If the herd continues to decline at its current rate, its population could fall below 100,000 caribou by the next regulatory cycle. In just six years, the herd has lost the number of caribou roughly equivalent to its current population, indicating that without immediate action, recovery is unlikely under existing regulations.

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