

North Slope Regional Advisory Council

Wildlife Special Action Request

The North Slope Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC) requests the closure of federal public lands in the southwest portion of Unit 26A to caribou hunting by non-federally qualified users (NFQU) for the 2026-2028 regulatory cycle.

Existing Federal Regulation

Unit 26—Caribou

Unit 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, by State registration permit as follows: Calves may not be taken.

Bulls may be harvested.

July 1-Oct. 14.

Dec. 6-June 30.

Cows may be harvested; however, cows accompanied by calves may not be taken July 16-Oct. 15.

July 16-Mar. 15.

Proposed Federal Regulation

Unit 26—Caribou

Unit 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, by State registration permit as follows: Calves may not be taken.

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Cows may be harvested; however, cows accompanied by calves may not be taken July 16-Oct. 15.

July 16-Mar. 15.

Federal public lands are closed to caribou hunting, except by federally qualified subsistence users hunting under these regulations for the 2026/27 and 2027/28 regulatory years.

Why is this special action needed?

Data presented to the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) Working Group at their December 2025 meeting illustrates the continued decline in the WACH, now estimated at 120,618 animals. As a response to the herd's declining numbers, the WACH Working Group assigned the management level "Critical, Declining" to the herd based on the current census of approximately 121,000 caribou and an adult cow survival rate of less than 80%. The WACH Working Group submitted Wildlife Special Action request, WSA26-01, requesting a reduction in the Federal harvest limit for the WACH from *15 caribou, only 1 may be a cow* to *4 caribou, only 1 may be a cow* in Units 22, 23, and the southwest portion of 26A.

Because Wildlife Special Action WSA26-01 would greatly impact residents of the communities of Wainwright, Point Lay, and Point Hope, the NSRAC considers the closure of federal public lands in the southwest portion of Unit 26A to NFQUs to be necessary for the continuation of subsistence uses of caribou. The Council also notes that NFQUs frequently fly into hunting sites located directly along the WACH migratory pathway and believes the closure will directly benefit the herd. The Council asserts that federally qualified subsistence users (FQSU) should not be the only users to take action to ensure the continued viability of this caribou herd, and that subsistence uses should be given priority over the uses of NFQUs, as stated in ANILCA.