

NWX- US FISH & WILDLIFE

Moderator: Robbin Lavine

March 30, 2022

3:26 pm CT

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing by. This call is being recorded. If you have any objections, you may disconnect at this time. I would like to now introduce our host, Sue Detweiler. Sue, you may begin.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you for that operator. And we're just starting the public portion of the meeting here. And I just wanted to recap, we had just finished establishing a quorum and I wanted, now that everybody is online, I just wanted to go through the quorum list so that everybody knows who all on the board is online, as well as some of the other key staff that we have.

And going through the roll call, we do have all eight board members here. We have (Philip Hooge) from National Park Service, he is acting for Sara Creachbaum the Park Service Board member.

We have Thomas Heinlein from BLM, we have Sara Boario from Fish and Wildlife Service, we have Greg Risdahl, who is sitting in for Dave Schmid at the Forest Service Board member, we have Gene Peltola, from Bureau of Indian Affairs, Rhonda Pitka, public member, Charles Brower, a public member, and we also have Chair Anthony Christianson.

And we also have Ken Lord from Department of Interior Regional Solicitor's Office. We have liaisons to the board Ben Mulligan and Mark Burch and we have several council members on.

We have - or council chairs on. We have Jack Reakoff from Region 6 Western Interior, from Region 7 Seward Peninsula, Louis Green is - Chair Louis Green is not able to attend today so Nissa Pilcher, who is the Council Coordinator, will be standing in on behalf of Mr. Green.

From Region 8 we have Thomas Baker, from Region 10 we have Gordon Brower. And I'll just take this moment here to check to see if Sue Entsminger from Region 9 has joined?

It sounds like she may not have joined yet. And so apologize for that duplication of efforts there Mr. Chair, just wanted to make sure everybody who just joined us was aware of all of the key members who are participating in the meeting.

So again, back to you Mr. Chair. Thank you.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you Sue. And again we can go ahead and open up the floor anyone who wants to - why don't we first just - I'll open up the floor, entertain a motion to approve your agenda as presented. And once we can get that moved forward we'll go ahead and open up the floor for some...

Charlie Brower: So moved Mr. Chair.

Anthony Christianson: Hey, Charlie you're welcome.

Charlie Brower: I so move to approve the agenda.

Anthony Christianson: A motion has been made to accept the agenda as presented. Can I get a second?

(Philip Hooge): I second.

Anthony Christianson: Motion been made to review and adopt the agenda as presented by staff. Any discussion or opposition?

(Nathan): Hey Tony, it's (Nathan) real quick. Can you remind everybody to state their name when they, you know, second and whatnot? Thank you.

Anthony Christianson: Yes, and please for the record can you state your name and clearly - for the record (unintelligible).

Charlie Brower: Charlie Brower moved to approve the agenda, public member.

Anthony Christianson: Okay. Thank you, Charlie. The second?

(Philip Hooge): (Philip Hooge) moved to second.

Anthony Christianson: Appreciate that guys. There's a motion on the floor and seconded. Now of course open for discussion or call for the question of there's no discussion?

Man: A question?

Anthony Christianson: I'll approve the - in support of the agenda say aye please?

(Group): Aye.

Anthony Christianson: Any opposition to the agenda as presented by staff signify by saying aye? Hearing none, motion carries unanimously to accept the agenda as presented.

We'll go ahead and - now I just before we move on again we have some welcome and introduction. I just want to make sure we got the agenda here reviewing on the top.

Before we do move on to the next one again I did offer an opportunity there to introduce yourself if you want to or any information between board members before we move on to Number 3 here. So I'll entertain that at this time, and then we'll move on.

(Philip Hooge): Mr. Chairman, I would like to introduce myself. I am (Philip Hooge), Deputy Regional Director in Alaska for the National Park Service. I would like to apologize for Sara Creachbaum, who had to attend a previously scheduled meeting of all NPS leadership at this time.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you and welcome. Thank you for doing this. Any other board members?

Sara Boario: Yes, thank you Mr. Chair.

Greg Risdahl: Mr. Chairman.

Anthony Christianson: Guess what, ladies first.

Sara Boario: Thank you Mr. Chair. This is Sara Boario. I'm the new Regional Director for the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska, and pleased to join you all from my first meeting.

Looking forward to introducing myself more in the weeks and months ahead, but briefly just wanted to share a little bit about myself. I was raised and grew up across Alaska in a number of welcoming communities, Yakutat, Wrangell, Sandy Point and Fairbanks.

And over the past 20 years I've been engaged in conservation and subsistence issues in a variety of ways, including with the Forest Service, Fish Wildlife Service and as a staff in the Alaska State Senate many years ago. Thank you for that opportunity.

Anthony Christianson: Yes, welcome aboard and good to see you here. Any - and then I heard the next guy. You have the floor. Thank you.

Greg Risdahl: Yes, thank you Mr. Chair. This is Greg Risdahl. I'm the Subsistence Program Leader for the US Forest Service up here in Alaska. And I'll be asking for Dave Schmid today. Pleased to be here. Thank you very much.

Anthony Christianson: Welcome today Greg. And anybody else want to have - introduce?

Gordon Brower: Mr. Chair, this is Gordon Brower, the North Slope Regional Advisory Chair.

Anthony Christianson: Hey, Gordon, good to hear your voice. You're welcome.

Gordon Brower: ((Foreign Language Spoken 07:12)). I'll be here representing the North Slope Region 10 Regional Advisory Councils position. So thank you, and I'm just sitting here up in the arctic. Good afternoon.

Anthony Christianson: Good afternoon. All right, all from the board? Any other RAC member, board members like to introduce share any info?

Thomas Baker: Yes, Mr. Chair. This is Thomas Baker, Chair of the Northwest Arctic RAC. I'll be speaking on behalf of Northwest Arctic today, and thanks for the opportunity.

Anthony Christianson: Welcome, thanks for calling in. All right, sounds like we're winding down. I would just like to welcome all you aboard. Welcome one of the RAC chairs too welcome then to speak the position for the Regional Advisory Council the - appreciate the service that you guys do for the program.

So we'll go ahead and we'll move on to our next agenda item, which is to Wildlife Temporary Special Action Request WSA21-01, which is to close the federal public lands and Unit 23 and 26A to caribou hunting by non-federally qualified users from August 1 to September 30, 2022. And so we'll go ahead and call on the staff, Hannah, at this time to present the information.

Hannah Voorhees: Thank you, and good afternoon Mr. Chair and members of the board. This is Hannah Voorhees, Anthropologist with the Office of Subsistence Management. And Wildlife Division Lead, (Lisa Gretigan) is also on the call today.

This will be a longer presentation than is typical due to the need to cover a great amount of feedback that was gathered from different groups at the board's request. Wildlife Special Action Request WSA21-01 request closure of moose and caribou hunting to non-federally qualified users in Unit 23 and 26A from August 1 to September 30.

Originally, this request was submitted for the 2021 hunting season. The Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council submitted this request in February 2021 due to delays in caribou migration and lack of caribou during the traditional harvest season. The council expressed concern that non-local hunters and transporters are interfering with caribou migration.

In June 2021, the board deferred WSA21-01 to the 2022 to 2023 regulatory year and requested that OSM seek additional input on concerns related to caribou from multiple stakeholders. For simplicity, the analysis has now been divided into WSA21-01A for caribou and WSA21-01B for moose. I am presenting the analysis for caribou. Following my presentation Thomas Plank will present WSA21-1B for moose for your consideration.

As requested, when the board deferred OSM sought additional input from the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group, Federal Lands Managing Agency, local fish and game Advisory Committee, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Regional Advisory Councils, commercial guides and transporters, and subsistence users in the area.

Regulatory history for this analysis begins on Page 10. All federal public lands in Unit 23 were closed to caribou hunting by non-federally qualified users for the 2016 to 2017 regulatory year, that closure was due to conservation and the impact of non-local hunting. Beginning in the 2017 to 2018 regulatory year, the current targeted Noatak closure went into place, first as a special action and then as standard regulation.

There are some zones within Unit 23 and 26A where air transportation of caribou and moose hunters is already restricted. There's a map of these controlled use areas on Page 18 of the analysis. It's also worth noting that

under state regulations a nonresident hunt for caribou remains open in both Unit 23 and 26A.

The biological background begins on Page 20. The Western arctic herd peaked near 500,000 caribou in 2003, declining to about 200,000 caribou in 2016. In recent years the herd seemed to be recovering with approximately 244,000 caribou in 2019, but the most recent photo census in 2021 estimated the herd population at only 188,000, that's 188,000.

The timing of fall migration has become more variable in recent years. And since 2017 there has been a substantial delay before caribou cross the Kobuk and (Felowik) Rivers, but the timing of a Noatak crossing has remained average.

The percentage of caribou crossing all three rivers has also declined in recent years. The proportion of caribou using certain migration paths does vary each year.

Additionally, caribou demonstrate low fidelity to wintering grounds which have shifted over the past decade from the Seward Peninsula to the Brooks Range. Changes in wintering locations, herd size, vegetation and weather likely influenced these recent changes in fall migration.

Harvest history begins on Page 37. Given the current population estimate of 188,000 caribou, the harvestable surplus is 11,280 caribou.

Fall is the traditional harvest season for residents of Unit 23. Prior to freeze up bulls are preferred because they're fatter than cows, after freeze up cows are preferred because bulls are skinnier and in rut, but for this reason delayed

migrations may result in a shift towards harvesting cows as communities miss the opportunity to harvest bulls prior to freeze up.

While there's much uncertainty in harvest estimates for the Western arctic herd total harvest has generally been estimated at 12,000 caribou per year. Historically, local hunters account for approximately 95% of the total herd harvest.

Community harvest parallels local caribou availability rather than population trends. Between 1998 and 2020 reported harvest by non-federally qualified users ranged from 131 to 657 caribou each year. Eighty-five percent to 90% of non-local harvest occurs between August 25 and October 7.

Information on transporter and guide activities in the unit, which has been requested by councils in the past, begins on Page 39. For Noatak National Preserve most transported hunters are nonresidents of Alaska. Between 2017 and 2020 an average of 246 hunters were transported into the preserve each year.

Details of OSMs outreach process and results began on Page 55 of the analysis. Following my presentation you will hear a summary of public comments and recommendations from multiple entities. Here I focus on feedback from local subsistence users, as well as transporters and guides.

So we're moving on to Page 57 of the analysis. In the fall of 2021 caribou arrived very late again, if at all, in communities in Unit 23 continuing the trends that led to this request. If asked I can go into greater detail on each community's experience.

Virtually all local residents who weighed in since deferral were in support. Communities were settled in their current locations because of reliable caribou migration.

Local residents consistently reiterated that non-locals do not follow the traditional law of letting the lead caribou pass, which can result in herd diversion and a small number of hunters having a disproportionate impact on subsistence for entire communities. Local residents feel that their traditional knowledge of how to steward caribou developed over generations is not being respected or followed by outsiders.

Caribou is not simply food but essential to people's being. Without curbing people's mental and physical health are damaged, the younger generation cannot be taught traditions around hunting and using caribou.

Local subsistence users expressed frustration about having to fight for access to traditional foods and were also frustrated about the length of time they have raised this issue without relief. Local subsistence users also emphasize the extremely high cost of fuel and food in their region, people cannot afford to travel far looking for caribou and return without them and with uncertainty they have to weigh the costs of store food versus fuel as matters of survival. The parallel COVID-19 pandemic, and resulting scarcity in the area, has exacerbated food insecurity.

There is agreement between traditional ecological knowledge and the scientific literature that changes in temperature, wind direction, snow depth and vegetation all effect caribou migration. In addition, the Red Dog Mine Road appears to delay or deflect migration for at least a portion of the herd. Different user groups also agree that predation is a factor.

Whether it's caused by one or a combination of these factors, testimony shows that the reduced availability of caribou in Unit 23 is negatively impacting federally qualified subsistence users nutritional, cultural and social well-being.

Now we are on Page 69 of the analysis. During OSMs outreach process individual transporters and guides, as well as organizations representing them, expressed their opposition to this request both before and after the new population estimate was released.

The reasons given include that it would cause harm to licensees without justification, that guide businesses are small, vulnerable and have deep community roots and that caribou hunted by transported and guided hunters are offset by bear and wolf hunts.

Displacement of users and increased conflict on state land is raised, and one transporter recalled this being an issue during the 2016 full closure to federal public lands in Unit 23. Additionally, it was stated that the closure would not address air traffic into villages in the region or the use of motorized boats on the Noatak River.

Transporters and guides also said that adequate protection is already in place and testified that they do not believe aircraft affect caribou, but acknowledged that migration has been unusual in recent years. Some raised changing weather, predators and the Red Dog Mine Road as having effects on caribou movement.

On Page 71, you will see feedback from federal land managers. During outreach manager stated that the broad scope of their request spanning two species and units made it difficult to address.

Representatives echoed other concerns that the closure would push non-federally qualified users onto adjacent lands, including state lands or brown communities. It was noted that the Northwest Arctic Council's request was an attempt to compromise through limiting the temporal scope of their request, but a further geographical compromise could be made. Representatives agree that better data is needed on where transporters, guides and non-local hunters are going in the units.

When differing in 2021 a board member asked whether ANILCA Section 810 analysis had been conducted for the impacts of transporters and guides on subsistence, what the outcome was and whether this had any effect on stipulations? You'll see the full results of that inquiry on Page 71.

But in short, analysis conducted by BLM and the Selawik Refuge, found that effects of transporter and guide activity would be negligible, in part due to spatial separation of user groups. Western Arctic parklands found that transporter operations and sport hunting have location specific, season specific moderate to major negative impacts on subsistence caribou hunting in Noatak National Preserve, but this does not significantly restrict subsistence use in the preserve.

Plans for a more comprehensive environmental assessment for transporter and guide activity, and the development of a plan for their operation in the preserve those - that was planned for 2000 - I'm sorry in 2008 when the original analysis was conducted that was planned. In 2009 the environmental assessment was initiated, but was never finalized.

Finally, I should note that local fish and game advisory committees in Units 23 and 26A were contacted via written correspondence for their feedback, but

were not meeting due to COVID-19 and did not respond. All other feedback will be addressed following my presentation.

We're moving on to Page 80 now. Following deferral and revised analysis, the OSM conclusion on WSA20-01A is neutral. The analysis outlined two main actions for consideration.

Number 1, approve WSA20-01A with modification to close caribou hunting to non-federally qualified users on BLM managed lands between the Noatak and Kobuk Rivers and all of Noatak National Preserve in Unit 23 only August 1 to September 30, 2022, or Number 2, reject WSA20-01A.

First, some points to consider under the approved modification option. Testimony about lack of local caribou availability in the Northwest Arctic converges with recent evidence of Western Arctic herd population decline.

The most recent population estimate indicates that the herd has declined 24% from 2019 to 2021. The population decline may be contributing to lack of caribou availability in Unit 23.

The herd is now being managed at the preservative declining level. And under the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group Managements Plan recommendations at this level include closure of the nonresident season under state regulations, as well as possible closure of some federal public lands to non-federally qualified users.

Furthermore, the best available data suggests that the harvestable surplus may be exceeded. Although the population decline affects the herd throughout its range, the geographical modification suggested would most directly benefit

these communities in the units who have been unable to continue their caribou subsistence. This would also most directly benefit the herd itself.

The delay in caribou migration has primarily occurred between a Noatak and Kobuk Rivers based on local testimony and GPU collar caribou data. Closing lands north of the Noatak River within the preserve may be necessary for the conservation of healthy populations, as this is where much of the non-local harvest is concentrated.

OSM does not support a full closure of federal public lands in Unit 23 and 26A. Non-federally qualified users rarely harvest caribou in other federal public lands in the unit.

Additionally, closing hunting to non-federally qualified users on federal public lands and Unit 26A is not warranted. Testimony gathered through the analysis process shows that federally qualified subsistence users in Unit 26A are meeting their subsistence needs for caribou and are not facing the same challenges as those in Unit 23.

The next points to consider under the reject option. Currently, it cannot be demonstrated that the requested closure alone would result in the desired effect of restoring the timing and extent of the herd's migration as other factors such as changing weather, Red Dog Mine Road and predation are likely at play.

If Unit 23 and 26A are close to the harvest of caribou by non-federally qualified users for August and September 2022, user conflicts and disruption of caribou movement may increase on state lands. Additionally, non federally qualified users would still be able to access and harvest caribou and gravel

bars below the mean high water mark and in navigable waters within federal public lands, as these areas fall under state jurisdiction.

While the Western Arctic caribou Herd Working Groups management plan recommends possible closure of federal public lands to non-federally qualified users under the current preservative declining management level the working group did not think immediate regulatory action was necessary at their most recent meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the board. That concludes my presentation. I'm available to answer any questions.

Charlie Brower: Mr. Chair.

Anthony Christianson: Yes, go ahead.

Charlie Brower: I didn't get that last number of the latest count. What was the number again?

Anthony Christianson: I think she said 188,00 give or take. Could you clarify that for Charlie, please?

Hannah Voorhees: Yes, sure. Charlie, yes, the most recent photo census result was 188,000 caribou. Previously, two years ago, the photo census led to an estimate of 244,000.

Charlie Brower: Thank you.

Greg Peltola: Mr. Chairman may I?

Anthony Christianson: Yes, Gene, you have the floor.

Greg Peltola: Thank you Mr. Chair. So just to clarify the numbers are reiterated the previous phot census was 244 K, most recent was 88,000 - 188,000, which represents approximately 1/4 reduction over the two year period. Is that correct?

Hannah Voorhees: That is correct.

Greg Peltola: Thank you. Thank you Mr. Chair.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you. Any other questions from the board for staff presentation?

Rhonda Pitka: Hi, this is Rhonda. Yes, I have a question.

Anthony Christianson: Yes, you have the floor Rhonda.

Rhonda Pitka: Okay, so under OSMs conclusion and justification it says that both sides have demonstrated valid arguments. So on the one side where it says rejecting WSA21-1A how does that affect the users in the area? If we reject it, then that means the users would still have the current regulations to go under right? And then also I think that's - I think you that's it for right now. Thank you.

Hannah Voorhees: Through the chair, this is Hannah. And yes that's correct. If this request is not approved then that would constitute maintenance of the status quo.

Anthony Christianson: Any other questions from the board for staff?

Rhonda Pitka: Oh, sorry so I'm sorry. So in the 810 analysis it says that it was from 2017. Was there any other 810 analysis done besides the one that was done in 2017 where it showed some effects to the migration? Thank you.

Hannah Voorhees: Through the chair, this is Hanna again. If you look at Appendix 3 all the 810 analysis are there. And there's also a summary of them on, let's see, page that it's on, it would be 71.

So there were, depending on the agency they shared, you know, either one, two, three or four 810 analysis with me - with OSM with them. And so each of the land managers in the area has conducted an analysis.

In some cases they are done only for an individual operator or company, and in other cases they're done as a blanket analysis for all transporters and guides.

Rhonda Pitka: Oh, okay I see it now, thank you. It's on Page like 156. And it talks about low flying aircraft and how their mitigation was to issue permits, correct? Thank you. I knew you were going to get that sir.

Anthony Christianson: The floor is open. Any other board discussion or questions for staff? All right, now thank you and appreciate the presentation. You did a good job.

And I'll go ahead and move us on to the next part of the agenda, which is the - I'm flipping back and forth here sorry guys, Regional Advisory Council recommendations.

Sue Detweiler: Mr. Chair, this is Sue. I believe we were going to next have a summary of public hearing comments by Robbin LaVine.

Anthony Christianson: Oh okay, I must be looking at the wrong thing here. Thank you Sue. I'll - what I'll do here Sue I'll let you all track the agenda for us and then I'll take over from there, so I appreciate the clarification. Thank you.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Robbin LaVine Thank you Mr. Chair and members of the board. Thank you, Sue. For the record, my name is Robbin LaVine. And I'm the Subsistence Policy Coordinator for OSM.

And I'm going to summarize the public comments and testimony that we received on Wildlife Special Action 20-01. Public comments received through the end of 2021 are also described in the analysis beginning on Page 57.

Before I start with the summary I will briefly review our standard public comment process for temporary special actions such as WSA21-01. Fish and wildlife regulatory cycles are a public process that spanned two years.

Special actions allow the board to address critical situations outside of the normal regulatory cycle. They are temporary, we cannot extend into the next regulatory cycle should they be passed.

The proposal, or this process sorry, is intended to allow the board to act quickly to address urgent issues. The Special Action Regulations for temporary action such as this one only require a public hearing.

However, for WSA21-01 the board requested additional information and analysis and due to the high public interest in this request, as well as additional information that became available on the Western Arctic caribou herd population status, further opportunities for public input were provided.

So these included four telephonic public hearings. The first was standard practice for special action from requests, and it was held on April 23 of 2021.

Due to great interest in this request a written public comment period was also provided April 16 through the 20th of 2021. Following deferral in June of 2021, and the board's request to seek feedback on concerns related to caribou, additional public hearings were held on November 17 and December 2 of last year.

And then finally, following 80th induced release of a new reduced Western Arctic caribou herd population estimate a fourth public hearing was held on March 21 of 2022 to allow the public to respond to this significant new information. The comments from this final public hearing were not summarized in the written analysis due to time constraints, but they are summarized here.

Next, I will give an overview of views expressed in opposition and support of the special action request during public comment opportunities. The majority of individuals providing public comments were in opposition. And many of these individuals self-identified as non-local Alaskan residents or non-residents of Alaska.

The reasons for opposition included decisions regarding wildlife management should always be science based, and this closure is not supported by available science. The herd population is not a conservation concern, there is not evidence that air traffic has delayed caribou migration and caribou movement is unpredictable. There are other factors causing changes in the herd population status, such as climate change and impact from snow machines, four wheelers, boats and the Red Dog Mine.

Other caribou herds have higher pressures, and the hunting doesn't impact their movements. Non-subsistence harvest is a very small percentage of the total harvest.

Subsistence harvest of caribou has remained high, while non-local caribou harvest is negligible demonstrating that there is a subsistence priority. Federal public land should be open to all.

Expensive once in a lifetime experiences by nonresidents of Alaska will be lost if the hunt is restricted to local users and often involving family members. There will be economic losses to guides, outfitters and others who are involved in these hunts.

Non-local and out of state hunters provide an economic contribution to the state and to local communities. Non-local hunters often provide harvested meat to the communities.

If there is a food shortage in local communities there are other ways to deal with it. Distinguishing between sport and subsistence hunting is not fair or valid. This action would represent federal overreach. This is a mechanism to keep non-locals out of the area.

The Western Arctic caribou herd can support both subsistence and non-subsistence harvest even at its current population level. This action would create further division between rural and non-rural Alaskans.

It would prevent non-rural Alaskans with family in the region from returning and hunting. Management should be left to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group.

Non-subsistence hunters do not harvest cows, they focus on older bulls for their antlers. More nuanced solutions are needed. Local harvest needs to be better quantified for action before action can be taken.

Federal managers should defer to state management, and this is federal overreach, and it violates ANILCA. At the most recent public hearing, following release of the reduced herd population estimate, some speaking in opposition acknowledged that the population status was a reason for concern, but did not feel it warranted a closure and suggested that more restrictions on cow harvest were needed.

Most support for Wildlife Special Action 21-01 came from self-identified local subsistence users. The reasons given for support of the closure during public comment periods included shooting at caribou when the first group is passing through or airplane activity can divert whole groups of caribou and present - prevent subsistence users from harvesting caribou.

Caribou are noticeably less abundant. There is a food shortage and people are unable to put away enough caribou.

Subsistence should have a priority over trophy hunting when people cannot get caribou. Food security in rural Alaska is even more critical during the pandemic.

Caribou hunting is essential to the identity as a people, to identity as a people. Caribou and moose are essential for physical health. Addiction and mental health problems result when caribou are not available. We should not have to fight for our food.

When - without caribou we cannot pass down our traditional knowledge.
Hunting during freeze up following late migration is more dangerous.

Traditional knowledge and indigenous science are not being taken into account. Local hunting rules are based on time tested practices that are not being followed by non-local hunters.

The decision to spend money on food at the store, which is extremely expensive, or for fuel to go hunting amid uncertainty these are now questions of survival. This action would be for a short period of time.

There has been an increase in plane activity, and data on plane activity is not being properly tracked or shared. We need to preserve what's left with global warming.

When meat is shared by non-local hunters it is not in a suitable condition to eat. Stewardship should be local. This action is well within federal authority, and the federal government has a trust responsibility.

ANILCA is unique and guarantees subsistence protections. And finally, the state of Alaska has not acted. One commenter also noted that there will be less testimony from local residents because there are fewer of us.

At the most recent public hearing local residents in support of the request again reported lack of or very late migration of caribou in Unit 23 in 2021 and early 2022. Participants also said that impacts to caribou are likely cumulative and every little intervention helps. One participant said that impacts of non-local hunters to the area north of Noatak River is of particular concern.

Thank you. Mr. Chair, this completes my summary of public comments received via our public hearings and written public comment period. And at this time I will be reading you comments submitted by the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group, followed by comments from the Cape Krusenstern National Monument Subsistence Resource Commission.

The Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group submitted the following letter, the subject comments to Federal Subsistence Board on Wildlife Proposals. This letter was submitted February 3 of 2022 to the Federal Subsistence Board.

At its December 15, 2021 meeting the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group voted to submit the following comments to the Federal Subsistence Board regarding wildlife regulatory proposals affecting the harvest of the Western Arctic caribou herd that will be considered in the spring of 2020 to a board meeting. They include comments on Wildlife Proposal 22-47, Wildlife Closure Review 22-45 and comments on Wildlife Special Action 21-01, and those comments I'll read to you now.

The comment includes or states, "The Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group voted to not support WSA21-01, the vote three yes 11 opposed." As presented to the public to date the Special Action Request WSA21-01 both caribou and moose and that confused consideration of this question.

The working group determined that they needed to comment on WSA21-01 as it had been presented to the public and in the FSB record to this point, which is that it addresses both caribou and moose. As noted the vote on that motion failed. The working group did not vote on the question of a closure to caribou only.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, members of the council or the board. The final letter I have to read to you is from the Cape Kruzenstern National Monument Subsistence Resource Commission.

And it reads, "Dear Chairman Christiansen, at the spring meeting of the Cape Kruzenstern Subsistence Resource Commission, held on March 1, Commission members considered WSA21-01A and WSA21-01B. The SRC voted unanimously to support the proposal related to caribou as submitted.

The SRC voted unanimously to support OSM modification of WSA21-01B regarding non-federally qualified user harvest of moose. The SRC cited a declining population of caribou and moose and communities that have not been able to harvest or have had a lot harder time harvesting caribou and moose in recent years as the justification.

In addition to the members general knowledge of decline in the numbers and opportunities for these animals, member Hannah Loon mentioned that the lower Kobuk rarely sees caribou in the fall time anymore. And member Larry Westlake said that hunting in front of the herd on the Noatak River affects the migration.

The SRC was supportive of a long term solution that would include protecting migratory routes through the Northwest Arctic and allow for non-federally qualified user caribou harvest in other areas as well as the business reliant - businesses reliant on non-federally qualified user harvest.

In this discussion the SRC was concerned about harvest on state lands, including the river and interested in a way to work together on the issue. In closing, thank you for the opportunity to comment on WSA21-01 A and B.

Sincerely, Alex Whiting, Chair of the Cape Krusenstern National Monuments
Subsistence Resource Commission."

And thank you, Mr. Chair. That concludes my presentation.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you, Robbin. Any questions for the staff for public
testimony from the board?

Greg Peltola: Mr. Chair, BIA.

Anthony Christianson: Yes, Gene you have the floor.

Greg Peltola: Thank you, thank you Mr. Chair. Yes, I was wondering if you could clarify
for me again, I may have missed it. In the one comment or a correspondent, so
to speak literally provided from the Western Arctic Caribou Heard Working
Group, what was that entity's recommendation? And if they provided any
rationale for the recommendation. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Robbin LaVine Thank you, Mr. Chair through the chair, this is Robbin. The comment was that
the Western Arctic Caribou Heard Working Group did not support WSA21-
01.

Their vote was three in support and 11 opposed. And they did not provide
further justification aside from the fact that WSA21-01 addresses both caribou
and moose, it confuses consideration of the question.

The group determined that they need to comment on WSA21-01 as it has been
presented to the public and in the FSB record to the point of their meeting,
which was December of last year. And until that time it addresses both
caribou and moose.

As noted the vote on the motion failed. The working group did not vote on the question of a closure for caribou only. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Greg Peltola: Mr. Chair, BIA. Thank you Robin, appreciate that clarification.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you. Any other questions from the board to stop?

Charlie Brower: Mr. Chair?

Anthony Christianson: Yes, Charlie.

Charlie Brower: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Robbin, thank you. You say that there was no evidence of air traffic that bothered the migration.

As a hunter of my own, up here in the far north, I believe whoever made a comment on those didn't have very much experience on the weight, the sighting of the caribou when you're out hunting. As for myself I waited for some caribou for three hours that were coming off the horizon coming towards me.

And they with - and all of a sudden an airplane came out of nowhere without seeing us, swoop down and chase - looked at the caribou and they, you know, disappeared. But - and you stated that there's not enough evidence to counter air traffic bothers the migration.

It does bother the migration. I've seen it myself. So I'm just kind of wary about that you say that there's more work being done to clarify the situation. I can see migration of caribous on that Robbin?

Robbin LaVine Thank you, through the chair. I - can you please ask that question again?

Greg Peltola: No, I'm just referring to the - there was no evidence of air traffic that bothered the migration or had effect on the migration of the caribou. As I witnessed for myself I've seen it happen. I was just wondering if - you say that there's some more work being done to verify this issue?

(Lisa Gretigan): And Chair this is Lisa, I can answer that if you like.

Anthony Christianson: Yes, Lisa. Thank you.

(Lisa Gretigan): Yes, so Robbin was just summarizing the public comments that, you know, were stated through our public hearings. But as far as studies being done on the effect of aircraft on caribou there has been several studies as well as a lot of testimony, you know, similar to your own about people's personal experience with aircraft while caribou hunting.

And those are summarized in the analysis which, you know, if you're interested in more of the details of those studies, you know, I'm happy to provide those or Hannah could as well. But as far as more studies in the future I think there are some but, you know, we don't have the details of those studies.

But it is something, you know, that's certainly an ongoing concern, so there's continuing to be more work done to examine that along with, you know, all the other factors. So thank you, Mr. Chair.

Charlie Brower: Thank you. I just want to reiterate Mr. Chair?

Anthony Christianson: Yes Charlie, you have the floor.

Charlie Brower: In light of that, you know, there's always a difference between the transporter and the local hunters do verify and protect their intent. So there's always a different interpretation, so I just want to bring that out. Thank you.

And also Mr. Chair if I may, I'm just referring to economic loss to guide hunters and so on. And everything that was said about the comments I agree, the high cost of living and so on and including hunting, so I just want to express that concern. Thank you.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you, Charlie. Any other board comments or questions for staff?

Charlie Brower: Well Mr. Chair, one more final question to Robbin on the Western Caribou Working Group. On then vote you stated there are three yes and 11 no?

Robbin LaVine For the chair, that is correct.

Charlie Brower: And just to verify or any knowledge of who were the three yes and who were the 11 nos on that? I know there's different fluctuation of agencies in their guide hunters and so on and a few subsistence hunters representation, so I was just curious. Thank you.

Hannah Voorhees: Through the chair, this is Hannah.

Anthony Christianson: Yes, Hannah you have the floor.

Hanna Voorhees: In response to Charlie's question, there was a request from the group that their perspective be presented as an entity. But if you would like further details you

can also look at Page 73. I believe that the breakdown was, you know, reasonably along local versus non-local residences. Thank you.

Charlie Brower: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you Charlie. Any other questions from the board for staff on the public testimony portion? All right, thank the staff at this time. Thank you very much. And Sue, I'll call you for the next order of the agenda.

Sue Detweiler: Yes, Mr. Chair. Now we are at the Regional Advisory Council recommendations. And we have four that may want to provide comments Northwest Arctic, North Slope, Seward Peninsula and Western Interior. And I would advise just going in that order starting with Northwest Arctic, Mr. Baker.

Anthony Christianson: So moved. All in - board chairs, thank you.

Thomas Baker: Yes, this is Thomas Baker in Kotzebue. Just looking at the agenda I think we skipped a couple of things, actually there's supposed to be a summary of tribal and Alaska Native Corporation comments by Orville Lind.

Man: No, they're coming later to my agenda.

((Crosstalk))

Anthony Christianson: We still have that on the agenda yet. So that's the order of the agenda, and we'll get to the Orville Lind part. Thank you.

Thomas Baker: Okay, I must have an older version, but thank you, Mr. Chair, members of the board.

Anthony Christianson: Yes.

Thomas Baker: For the record my name is Thomas Baker.

Anthony Christianson: Yes, thank you Thomas. I think I have an old agenda as well (Tom) so no biggie.

Thomas Baker: All right, thank you sir. So again for the record, my name is Thomas Baker. I serve as the Chair for the Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council.

The Northwest Arctic RAC submitted and supports WSA21-01A. The council is very concerned about the Western Arctic caribou herds population decline as it seems to be declining much faster than it has in the past. The Special Action Request will help protect the herd during this upcoming hunting season and there are a few other ways to meaningfully conserve the herd while also preserving the continuation of subsistence uses.

The council noted that if any - that if only federal public lands in Unit 23 were closed it would just push non-local hunters to the North Slope and adjacent areas. They supported a more unified approach in the closure the council also acknowledged that decreasing cow harvest is important for the herds conservation and that sacrifices in harvest will need to be made, but more education across the region is needed to raise awareness of the current status of the herd.

The council stressed that caribou are a critical subsistence resource and discussed the need for restrictions on state lands, as well as possible federally

qualified subsistence users. They also asked law enforcement and federal agencies listen to local people who live in the area year-round.

That is the position and justification of the council, and just speaking individually this is a subject very near and dear to my heart. As a lifelong subsistence user and resident of this area of Alaska, my family has always been here, and we've always been caribou hunters.

And the overwhelming opposition to this attempt to try and self-manage and help co-manage the herd that we have going through our region each year is very disheartening, especially considering people saying that there is no science backing these decisions, that there's purely emotion, people getting overly emotional, trying to keep outsiders out when with the current numbers and the counts that have been published.

There is scientific evidence that the herd is declining and something needs to be done. This action has been pushed and pushed and pushed, and I feel that I speak for just about everybody in our region of Alaska that this is something that needs to be addressed and it needs to be acted on. And this is one of the few ways that we can make a meaningful effort to protect the animals of this herd, as well as provide subsistence opportunities for local people.

At the end of the day there are enough animals to be harvested by both residents and nonresidents of the region of the State of Alaska. It's just that if the animals aren't coming through our communities there are no opportunities for local people to be harvesting animals. If this closure were to take place and (guys) and transporters were pushed onto state land closer to the communities and to the rivers, then that would mean that the animals are going to the communities and to the rivers.

And then people would be able to see how the local people are hunting and not be 150 miles north of the nearest community, diverting the herd. I'm thankful for the opportunity to speak today. And if anyone has any questions, I'm more than willing to answer them. Thank you.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you. I appreciate the presentation. Any question for (Roger)? All right. Hearing none, we'll move onto the next one. Sue?

Sue Detweiler: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And first, I want to apologize. It sounds like there are a couple of different drafts of the agenda going around. And I'm not quite sure how that happened. But anyway, what I am working from on my agenda as far as the next steps go, for dealing with this special action, are completing the Regional Advisory Council recommendations, which is where we are right now.

And then next would be the summary of Tribal and Alaska Native Corporation comments by Orville Lind, followed by opportunity for comment from the State of Alaska, and then followed by policy coordinator providing interagency staff committee comments. So that's what I have as far as the sequence of next input. And then all of those presentations then would be followed by board discussion and board action.

So having said that, back to the current agenda item with the Regional Advisory Council recommendations. The next one on the list would be North Slope and Mr. Brower.

Eugene Peltola: Mr. Chair, BIA?

Anthony Christianson: Yes, Gene. Go ahead.

Eugene Peltola: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before we move on to Mr. Brower with the North Slope, could I get clarification from the Northwest side RAC? Were they in support or opposition to the proposal?

Thomas Baker: Through the Chair this is Thomas Baker, Northwest side RAC Chair. We submitted and we fully support WSA 21-01(a).

Eugene Peltola: Thank you, sir. I appreciate it. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Anthony Christianson: Go ahead, Sue. You have the floor again.

Sue Detweiler: So back - I'm sorry. Next was North Slope, Mr. Brower?

Gordon Brower: Yes. Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Gordon Brower. I serve as the North Slope Regional Advisory Chair for Region 10 in - and I'm going to go ahead and provide the position of the North Slope. And we did become concerned about the declining population of caribou.

And, you know, we - we've noticed that for many years from a peak of 490,000 then to 240,000. Now we're under 200,000 and looking at 188,000 is my understanding. But keeping also in mind that caribou move around and before the pipeline and other traditional knowledge would be in the loop about caribou commingling and sometimes big herds would collide. And half the population of one herd would take off with another.

And those are just observations from old timers that talk about what caribou do. And we are very concerned about the need for local harvest and looking at the harvestable surplus. We understand there's caribou and these resources provide an economic engine. But at the same time, we need to make sure the communities need to put food on the table and devise ways and means to

make sure that there is a rural subsistence priority in place, but to allow for other users to benefit as well.

So with that, I'm going to go ahead and - for WSA 21-01(a) Caribou, and once again, my name is Gordon Brower. I live in Barrow and (Nocalvic). And I've lived here a majority about my life. And I always returned up here. And because of the abundance of resources and I serve as a whaling captain in my father's stead along with my brother Louis.

I subsist on the lands and NPRA, and access to these caribou that we're talking about. So it's a very important resource, and we have lots and lots of observations up here. My cabin is 75 miles southeast of Barrow. I make my way up there either by airplane or by boat in the summer, and snow machines in the wintertime. And I'm getting ready to haul some furniture for my cabin. Our families use these areas for hundreds of years.

I could say that and because my grandmother has a sod house that - where we put our modern cabin is close by an old sod house. And to my understanding from - my dad talked about it, it was his mother's place to go fishing. So with that, I am the Chair for the North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council. And the North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council supports WSA 21-01(a), as modified by OSM; OSM Option number 1.

To close hunting to non-federally qualified users on BLM managed lands between the Noatak and the Kougarok Rivers, and all of the Noatak National Preserve in Unit 23 only August 1 to September 30, as depicted on Map 7. The Council believes that the caribou population declined warrants intervention to a direct closure in Unit 23. But a closure is not needed in Unit 26(a).

And there are lots of observations of young hunters and myself and others that subsist, even go outside of my house and see caribou roaming around. And we hear that from other communities as well. So these caribou - and one other thing, we try to argue about harvestable surplus and amounts necessary for subsistence before.

And it turns out the calculation of the Western Arctic caribou herd was mixed in with the (unintelligible) herd. And I distinctly recall some of those arguments, as those two were kind of categorized together in determining harvestable surplus. It's just those arguments had been had in the past. So but closure is not needed in Unit 26(a) as caribou have come around and have been available to communities in Unit 26(a).

And people have been able to meet their caribou subsistence needs in the North Slope Region. The council supports their neighbors in the Northwest Arctic because of the herd decline and non-resident hunters coming in front of the herd and changing migration routes, directly affecting communities in Unit 23.

However, as originally submitted, their request was very sweeping in its inclusion of Unit 26(a) which is beyond what's needed at this time. The council does not want to arbitrarily close a region if it is not warranted. Again, for the record, my name is Gordon Brower. I'm the Chair of the North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council.

The North Slope Regional Advisory Council supports WSA 21-01(b) with modifications. But I think this is when we get to - well I think I'd better read this because I think 21(a) includes moose and caribou. So I will - the North Slope Regional Advisory Council supports WSA 21-01(b) with OSM

modification to close moose hunting to non-federally qualified users in federal public lands in Unit 23 only.

Justification - the council sees that there is a demonstrated conservation need in Unit 23 due to the declining moose population. However, there are other factors in Unit 26(a) that don't warrant the extension of the moose closure beyond Unit 23. The most affected area is the communities in Unit 23 that have not been able to harvest subsistence moose due to the low moose population as demonstrated by the analysis.

And that's the extent of the opinion and recommendation of the North Slope Regional Advisory Council. Thank you.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you for that, Gordon. I appreciate that. Any questions for Gordon?

Eugene Peltola: Mr. Chair, BIA?

Anthony Christianson: Yes. You have the floor, Gene.

Eugene Peltola: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes. Gordon, thank you. I appreciate the presentation. For clarification, the North Slope Regional Advisory Council did support the recommendations, is that correct?

Gordon Brower: Yes. North Slope did support the recommendations as modified by OSM.

Eugene Peltola: Okay. Thank you, Gordon. I appreciate it. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you. I appreciate it. Then we will be taking up the moose one separately after this one, Gordon. So you'll have another obligation - I

mean another opportunity to speak to the moose one. And so we'll go ahead and any other board questions for Gordon? All right. Hearing none, we'll go ahead and Sue, you can call in the next RAC Chair.

Sue Detweiler: The (Seward) Peninsula. (Louis Green), if he's here. Otherwise, it's Nissa Bates Pilcher, Pilcher Bates. I'm sorry.

Nissa Bates Pilcher: Hello, Mr. Chair, members of the board. For the record, my name is Hello, Mr. Chairman of the board, for the record, my name is Nissa Bates Pilcher, and I am the Council Coordinator for the Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council. In the absence of the Council Chair Green, I will present the Council's position to the board. The Seward Peninsula Council supports WSA 21-01(a).

The Council agreed with and supported the Northwest Arctic Council, their neighbors to the north, who are much closer to the caribou. This council has previously stated our support for similar efforts for Unit 23 in the past. Subsistence users in this region are having to travel unusually far to get caribou and those efforts are not always successful.

More information needs to be collected on the climatic and population changes that this herd is currently facing. This concludes the Seward Peninsula Council recommendation to the board on WSA 21-01(a). Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the board.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you. Any questions for the RAC?

Eugene Peltola: Mr. Chair, BIA?

Anthony Christianson: Yes, Gene?

Eugene Peltola: Just thank you, Mr. Chair. Just for clarification, the Seward Pen did support the proposal. Is that correct?

Nissa Bates Pilcher: Correct. Support as written.

Eugene Peltola: Thank you. I appreciate it. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Anthony Christianson: Any other questions? Okay. Sue, moving onto the last one?

Sue Detweiler: Yes. Thank you. Western Interior, Jack Reakoff?

Jack Reakoff: Good afternoon, Federal Subsistence Board members. My name is Jack Reakoff. I live in (Weizman). I'm the Western Interior Regional Advisory Council Chair. (Weizman) is in the Upper (Taika) River Drainage. The Western Interior Regional Advisory Council did not take action on WSA 21-01(a), but our council did discuss it extensively.

The Council believes that this issue falls outside of our region. The Western Arctic caribou herd has not been coming in the Western Interior region across the divide into the Koyukuk River Drainage. We have been getting Western Arctic caribou coming through the mountains, coming over towards Anaktuvuk Pass, but they're not migrating south of the Kobuk River as much.

However, the Council believes that there should be a better understanding of where and when the migration is occurring, so that local users are aware of this movement. The council also believes that there should not be any harvest of cows during the herds' southerly migration. The issues revolve around the smaller the herd, the less they want to migrate. This is inherent with caribou.

And so they - when I was a kid, the Western Arctic herd used to come down the (Alatma John) and North Mark of the Koyukuk.

And they wintered in the (Hadzan) and Ray Mountains north of the Yukon Flats. Then they shifted in 1973 back way far west and we never saw caribou in this valley, where I live, for 25 years. So caribou migrations. So the herds or the (unintelligible) cow caribou lead migration. That's the leaders of the herd. And so our council is concerned about the high harvest of cow caribou and the declining population.

And so we feel that in the future the Western Arctic caribou (unintelligible) and management needs (unintelligible) this cow caribou harvest. So we can't keep killing so many cows. They come later; they are - people are forced into shooting cows that they really should shoot those smaller bulls, because we do have a lot of bulls. And they should shoot bulls in the spring migration.

And our council is concerned about the population overall health. We defer this to the region and that we're mainly affected by it. We are getting Western Arctic caribou coming through the (Brooks) Range and the eastern portion of our - the eastern portion of the recent historical range. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you, Jack. Good to hear you. And any questions for Jack from the board?

Eugene Peltola: Mr. Chair, BIA?

Anthony Christianson: You have the floor, Gene.

Eugene Peltola: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, Jack. So if I understand correctly, the Western Interior deferred to impacted regional advisory councils. Is that correct?

Jack Reakoff: That's correct.

((Crosstalk))

Eugene Peltola: Understanding that they added the caveat about particular sex harvest.

Jack Reakoff: Yes. We...

Eugene Peltola: Okay.

Jack Reakoff: We discussed the issue. We didn't take action on the proposal. We did feel that the Federal Subsistence Board should be aware that we had other concerns that were outside of this proposal.

Eugene Peltola: Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Jack. I appreciate the comments. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Jack Reakoff: Thank you.

Anthony Christianson: Any other questions from the board? All right. Hearing none, I appreciate all the board RAC Chairs calling in and giving the presentations for Regional Advisory Council position. Sue, next on the agenda?

Sue Detweiler: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's Summary of Tribal and Alaska Native Corporation Comments with Orville Lind.

Orville Lind: Thank you, Sue. Mr. Chairman, and board members, good afternoon. For the record, my name is Orville Lind. I'm the Native Liaison for the Office of Subsistence Management. And I will begin with the first tribal and that's consultation, which was held on April 28, 2021. And we begin with the Native village of Selawik, which just mentioned that they had a resolution to submit to OSM. However, they could not locate it as she had to catch an early flight and - but she was going to send that to OSM.

We did share details from the public hearing held before this consultation and received about 250 people that called in and 120 people testified. And there was some concern and hope that more tribes and corporations could call in and some felt that they did not have a sufficient opportunity in the public hearing. And so we resent the invitation for the consultations that morning, to join us later on that afternoon, for the (ANSCA) consultations.

The other one is that most of the calls were against the closure. The majority of the comments were in opposition, but there were several calls in also favor of the closure. In the (ANSCA) consultation held that afternoon, the (NANAM) Corporation members, stated it's really a challenge to get the word out and input from tribes, in hopes that there is additional outreach.

Lots of subsistence going on this time of the season. Hope they get another opportunity for consultation. And they are in full support of Wildlife Special Action 21-01. They know that they're familiar with closures that do work. Alleviating pressure on the caribou herd allowed them to return to the previous and typical migration and routes. The change in the migration impacting federal qualified users' ability to get food, the pandemic has added to the problem of getting food; they are more reliant on subsistence food more than ever.

Income has been lost because of the pandemic. The tribes rely on subsistence activities to pass down culture and traditions. Regarding comments from last Friday's public meeting, hunters give meat to federally qualified users in the past, and it is appreciated. But it's not enough. It does not take the place of gathering food for yourself, for your community, and does not support the traditional practices and transmission of culture.

A public member did ask after thanking the (NANAM) representative for her comments, and asked a question - as you mentioned, donation of hunter harvested meat, where is it given; how is it distributed; and does it go to the communities? And the (NANAM) member replied and stated sometimes people reach out to individuals and also to the whole community. She also responded that donations are not required. It is voluntary.

And there's no particular method in place. Sometimes it goes to an organization or to someone who has received meat in the past. US Fish & Wildlife Service member asked a question - if all federal lands are closed are private native lands still open? And again, a (NANAM) resident replied that - corporation resident replied that they have an access program on the corporation lands and they are managed locally by the tribes.

There was also Arctic Slope Regional Council member added that like (NANAM) Corporation, they prohibit sport and guided hunting on corporation lands.. Closing federal lands may push hunters closer to their villages. Also want to know this would preclude shareholders that do not live in the villages, from hunting on closed federal lands. OSM staff added that the non-local hunters would not be qualified to hunt on federal lands if they are closed. Only people - communities with C&P.

The ASRC also added that this confirms that our young people would not be able to return to the villages to hunt, and it is a big concern for them. Another (NANAM) Corp member added that for clarification, non-locals would still be able to hunt on corporation and state lands as staff confirmed. The (NOTAC) controlled use area, the CUA, has allowed subsistence users to continue to hunt and harvest. So it has helped.

Also, we have a late migration. We are forced to target cows. This is a concern because studies show that it can be detrimental to the herd. We also do not see much money coming into the villages as was reported at the public meeting on Friday. There were also comments about aircraft not affecting caribou. These comments were in reference to high flying commercial aircraft.

Our concern is not with commercial aircraft. It is with small aircraft flying low. Small aircraft flying low definitely disturbs caribou. I have seen this first hand myself. Ranger (herd) stated that used to place the snow machine in front of migrating caribou to keep them from their reindeer, and the caribou would turn. The caribou would avoid this area on the return as well. I also wanted to mention that they shared a harvest among families and community members.

The Native village of (Kayan) stated that their community supported this Special Action Request. Our members have struggled to get food recently. People had to go further in the last ten years or so. We have received money for gasoline, food, and (shells) from the Maniilaq Association, to those who hunt for village members. Looking for the harvest reports in 2013, 107 caribou and one moose, were harvested. In 2014 150 caribou and one moose were taken.

In 2016 130 caribou were taken. In 2017 we started to see an interruption and only 15 caribou were harvested for the elders in 2018. Forty-two caribou were

taken in 2019, 22 caribou and two moose were taken in 2020. Twenty-seven caribou were taken for the elders. The Native village of Point Hope member said in 2017 to 2018 were very tough years. In 2017 the population was 180,000, less than half of its peak of 500,000.

We've been hunting these animals for thousands of years. They feed and clothe us and for thousands of years that's why we are here, living where we live. The Maniilaq Association helps those who are not able to hunt and to get enough food. And we thank them for this. Because of the high cost of living and gas and few jobs, we rely on subsistence caribou. When we see low flying aircraft we are concerned.

We like to see airplanes, have - we like to see airplanes have bigger numbers so we can read them, speaking about tail numbers. It is not airplanes take guided hunters. Some people are dropped off by transporters right in front of what caribou will come through. It is very hard for local hunters to see this and to get their food. Caribou are coming later and they're not as abundant as they were. There are less than half of what there used to be.

Caribou are primary food source for some communities; the cost of gas and heating oil is very high. We strongly support this proposal to close hunting on federal land for this short period of time. (NANAM) - a resident asked a question where will the - when will the board make a decision on special action 21-01. OSM staff replied that there wasn't a date set for the board meeting yet. But it will likely be after the first week of June. And this was confirmed by Federal Fish & Wildlife Service.

Native village of (Cayana) mentioned that she didn't know how the decision process takes place. Some of us are not able to get in on calls, like last Friday. How does the board make a decision? And what must the board legally

consider in its decision? OSM staff replied that the process takes in the biological background; (TEK); RAC decisions; how state regulations articulate and line up with federal regulations, etc.

Overall, a closure can be approved to protect resource or for the continuation of subsistence. It cannot be an unnecessary restriction, however. Also for the board's policy for closing federal lands to non-federal qualified users, so the board may consider other alternatives, but it depends on the particulars of each situation.

A tribal member asked if there will be another tribal consultation meeting. And of course, they only have to ask. I replied yes, we will do more outreach and try to set up a final date for the tribes and corps to have another village - or have another consultation session. The village of Point Hope member, mentioned that April is a busy time for people in our villages. Plus he waited on the phone for three hours and did not get through.

Most of the callers were from Anchorage or from the south. It is hard for people to attend when they are out hunting. They are hunting ducks and seal now, while there is still ice. They are hunting whales too - belugas and bowhead whales. There is no open water now, but we are out hunting. Thank you for listening to us and our people. A lot of our local hunters are shy and ask us to speak for them. A lot of them do not read the bulletin boards because they are out hunting. Thank you for giving this opportunity and extending it.

Another Buckland member said that when he was a member of the RAC about 20 years ago, he also sat on the Seward Pen Regional Advisory Council. He thanked of letting tribes comment on the hunting and unit 23. We have 771 tribal members. Five hundred are in Buckland. The caribou are coming later

and later the last few years. When they do come in August it's hard to get around.

As a result, a lot of our members are not getting their caribou. I'm 67 he replied, and I used to see a few thousand caribou at a time, when it went down to 500 here and there, then down to 100. Now our younger hunters say there may be 50 at a time. Caribou are important to our people and we need time to get them. There are a few bears that I hear about the airplanes. They are chasing them - caribou away from the river.

This is what's happening in my village. Please, I ask that the board consider what our people are asking for. We do the things we need to do together. We are not asking for a permanent season. We're only asking for one special season. Another Native from Point Hope mentioned that they were looking for something to document unregistered air strips for lack of a better term.

They were apparently common comment at the public hearing that Friday, that we had to prove the airplanes were interfering with caribou and causing conflicts with local users. And is the term unregistered runway legitimate? The National Wildlife Refuge Management and others were telling this to us. Further, again stated that we think that the people are staying behind this disturbance. Is there any kind of investigation going on?

This has been happening the last four years. It's been extreme in the last two years. OSM staff did reply that they are drawing on the National Park Service data for transporter services for the past five years, including number of caribou harvested, number of hunters, number of air (unintelligible) flights, etc. OSM replied that that kind of data was not needed in the past. But now it is and we are being diligent to try and find the information.

Tribal member also stated that the cost of living and gasoline rates in the villages, hunters like the meat left by non-resident - hunters like the meat left by non-resident hunters, but often by the time the elders get it, it is often spoiled. It is want and waste. The caribou herds are followed. They move away. When we hunt we do not camp on the same side where the caribou are crossing, to avoid scaring them away and changing their migration.

A (NANAM) Corporation member also said that many of our people do not have jobs. We have high unemployment rates for (unintelligible) in the past and likely higher now. The pandemic has made it worse. It is a nice gesture to give food, but as stated before, it does not replace our need to practice our traditions and pass them onto our youth.

A Point Hope resident mentioned that they wanted to remind everyone that they are confined to a time limit on Friday hearings, which was noticed. However, he mentioned that we do not have a time limit here now. He also stated that do they know that they have few moose in our area, in their area? But they do not take moose now. He caught one in 1980s 30 years ago, and got caught and went to jail. He also said he hadn't taken (one shifts).

We have to have a permit to hunt them now. When we see moose it is not season. It is not season to catch one. If we do, we get in trouble for it. OSM mentioned that (unintelligible) talks about the effective climate change on caribou, including migration. They also know that people, subsistence users are avoiding areas where there is noise, that places greater stress on villagers for subsistence. This is an emerging body of literature addressing this question, and will be included in the analysis.

A Point Hope member did reply that this was the first time that he heard about data like this from satellite callers, which from (John Trent). Do you use that

data? People thought that the data should be used because it gives them an unfair advantage in catching caribou.

The Native village of Point Hope also stated that the board going to make a decision and how it is going to affect their people, they have lived there all their lives; the caribou is part of the way of life; part of their way of living. The board makes decisions based on science, but our people have been here for thousands of years. Current individuals have been here 80 years.

We're always having to fight for our way of life. (TEK) should be given more consideration, traditional (equitable) knowledge. We're also having defend ourselves. This is one year thing of short time period. We want to try to see if it works. I hope the board will support us. We will be here for time immortal. And that concludes the consultation for the first time, and that was again, April 28th. I will now go into the second consultation after requests came in.

We went ahead and conducted the consultation for tribes incorporation May 26th, on the same special action, 21-01. There were - a question from Point Hope residents asking why that his family could not hunt there because it's not being a resident of Point Hope. And he asked if there was some type of paperwork involved. OSM of course, presented to OBU of ANILCA and subsistence priority was reserved for all rural residents in Alaska with C&P in that area.

There was a resident from (Kastibu), stated that the issue has gone on a long time and has gotten progressively worse. It has been brought to the attention of residents, especially of Unit 23. IT is merely about placement of hunters and it's causing animals to change migration routes. There's no real way to monitor the hunting activities. So it's hard to enforce. Locals have tried reaching out to the guides and expressing their concerns.

The US Fish & Wildlife that the real problem may be where the location of hunters are being dropped off, to where aircraft traffic and noise being the issue with respect to potential diversion of animals. A (Kastibu) resident replied that he would (work a dead horse) where he had to scare caribou off the runway. And so he said it's not aircraft making noise but hunters themselves, causing herds to go in a different direction.

Also the hunters, outfitters go further north into the southern half of Unit 26(a), where the caribou still in their (summit) grounds before migrating down. So previous attempts to mitigate a user conflict of hunters being dropped off right next to the river, and intercept some caribou that are heading toward the villages, that causes them to herd further north, so passing villages, and that's what causes some issues. And that concluded the consultation held on May 26th.

Again, with the further request to have more consultations, we conducted our third and final consultation on January 27th. And we had a resident from Buckland stated that they didn't harvest caribou only until two weeks prior. He also mentioned that they would appreciate it if (unintelligible) could stop hunters until October 15th. They'd like to see the first caribou go by before harvest begins.

They are trying to cooperate with everyone and people depend on caribou meat for subsistence foods. They used to harvest ten a day; now five a day. There are 11 villages in this Northwest Arctic District in Unit 23. They are trying to help caribou recover so that their numbers will be abundant. Local reports say that caribou are heading east toward Canada. During the (ANSCA) consultation the Buckland resident asked if there was a way to track where non-locals are going.

Again, the ASRC member stated that they have been making comments on the special action in the past and they are absolutely in support. However, the only concern they have in Unit 26 is that most of the outside hunting from non-local federally qualified users in the National Petroleum Reserve - for the most part, those lands are closed that could push people to the east towards state lands, potentially creating a trespass issue on ASRC lands, which we do not have budget for.

We do support protecting the migration routes and the caribou. A resident of (NANAM) Corporation mentioned that they are in support of the Special Action 21-01, and are concerned about the late migration of the caribou which are impacted from outfitters and transporters staging hunters further north in the region, which causes the interruption of the normal migration routes. He mentioned that this created an extreme hardship on the subsistence users, which the caribou are not there to harvest.

With that, it is mentioned that the situation prevents them to continue traditional subsistence practice there. Additionally, it adds to the hardship of the high cost of fuel and groceries, which subsistence users are having to travel also further and costing more. A resident from Buckland stated that they were excited that caribou showed up there. They are still having hardships as living costs are skyrocketing.

A (Kastibu) resident stated that they're in support of WSA, Special Action 21-01. They're concerned that both caribou and moose are declining in their areas. Mr. Chair, board members, that concludes the tribal consultations and corporation consultations. I am free for any questions.

Man:

Mr. Chair?

Anthony Christianson: Yes. You have the floor.

Man: Just a correction on the name. It's Maniilaq. I just want...

Orville Lind: Maniilaq. (Unintelligible).

Anthony Christianson: Any further questions for consultation? Thank you for that extensive outreach there Orville. Thank you for your presentation. I appreciate it. We'll go ahead and move on now to the next agenda item, which is Opportunity for the State of Alaska Liaison. Mr. Mulligan, you have the floor.

Ben Mulligan: Thank you, Chairman Christianson. I appreciate that. For the record, my name is Ben Mulligan. I'm going to represent the Office of the Department of Fish and Game. We have reviewed the updated information for Wildlife Special Action 21-01 Part A and still oppose the Special Action Request. Because even now with the rationale does not meet the requirements for such a closure under the provisions of Section 8 of ANILCA.

One can not only look to the new population survey to make a determination. The demographics of the Western Arctic caribou herd and the harvest by non-federally qualified users, also needs to be considered. Based on previous harvest trends it is reasonable to anticipate that non-federally qualified users will take roughly 350 caribou which is mostly bulls, out of a herd of 188,000 animals.

This represents only .19% of the total population of that herd, or just 3% of the estimated harvestable surplus of 11,300 caribou for the 2022-2023 season. Which is without even considering the harvestable surplus from the (Tesupuk)

herd, which is still on the upper end of the range of the amount necessary for subsistence of 8000 to 12,000 caribou.

This means that between the two herds there is more than enough estimated harvestable surplus to meet (ANS). As mentioned, non-federally qualified users are overwhelmingly harvesting bull caribou and the current bull to cow ratio found during the 2021 survey is 47 bulls to 100 cows, which is well above the objective ratio of 30 bulls to 100 cows.

Given this information, the anticipated harvest by non-federally qualified users, will not threaten the biological health of the herd or have an impact on the harvestable surplus. Recently, we heard from the Alaska Wildlife Troopers, the state's peace officers charged with enforcing its Fish & Wildlife's laws and regulations, and they recently informed us they had not observed first hand, any systemic user conflicts in the area.

The reports have indicated they never observed federally qualified users far from their boats and from river systems where non-federally qualified users predominantly utilize aircraft to travel to their desired hunting areas. The two user groups are never within proximity to one another.

With regards to non-federally qualified users deflecting the Western Arctic caribou herd migration by not letting the lead cow pass, or by the transporters traversing the landscape by aircraft and upsetting migration, it would once again be appropriate for proposals to be submitted to address the specific transportation concerns that we have heard.

From harvest records, we know only a handful of cows are harvested by non-local Alaska residents, since non-resident Alaskans cannot harvest, so it would

only fall to these non-local Alaska residents. And with such a small number of cows being harvested it is unlikely to cause a change in migration.

The Alaska Wildlife Troopers have received complaints of low flying aircraft during the last two hunting seasons, and I encourage anyone who sees those folks who could be harassing wildlife, to report them. However, none of these complaints in the last couple of years, could be tied to any actual harassment or deflection of caribou. In one instance one video was taken of the aircraft. There appeared to be no issue with the pilot's behavior.

Aircraft was flying at an adequate height and traveling in a straight line to its destination. During their near daily patrol flights, troopers' observations had been that caribou are by and large, unresponsive to aircraft flying overhead. Occasionally they will startle and run for a few seconds until the plane passes, at which point they stop running and resume grazing.

These observations are corroborated by a study published in 2017 (unintelligible) that found that caribou may be temporarily affected by hunters, but deflections of herd migrations have not been detected. With one last comment, Mr. Chair, in considering OSM's modification, (AS&D) doesn't see this modification as a meaningful compromise from a blanket closure of GMU 23 as the only federal lands left open will be BLM lands on the (Lisbon) Peninsula.

What will likely end up happening is what would happen in - under a complete closure of GMU 23. And you'll see increased activity near the communities of the area. Thank you for this opportunity.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you, Mr. Mulligan. Any questions for the state? Okay.
Hearing none, we'll go ahead and move on. Thank you, Mr. Mulligan, again.
We'll move onto public coordinator providing (ISC) comments. Robbin?

Robbin Lavine: Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the board. Again, as directed, this is Robbin Lavine and I'm the Subsistence Policy Coordinator for OSM. I'll be presenting comments developed by the interagency Staff Committee. And they - on Wildlife Special Action 21-01(a), and they are as follows.

The (ISC) acknowledges the importance of concerns voiced by federally qualified subsistence users in Units 23 and 26(a) regarding food security and the continuation of subsistence uses. The (ISC) further acknowledges the traditional ecological knowledge of local people who live in close proximity to the caribou herds, and steward the land and resources.

We continue to inform the situation. We recommend collaborative cross-agency efforts to better understand the patterns and external impacts to migration in the Western Arctic caribou herd. WSA 21-01 addresses food security concerns in the short term. The (ISC) believes that long term solutions need to be developed as well, and will support such efforts. We further encourage that co-equal attention be given to traditional knowledge and western science in understanding and managing subsistence resources.

It is clear from public testimony gathered at Regional Advisory Council meetings and at the public hearings for WSA 21-01(a) that many federally qualified subsistence users living in Unit 23 have not been able to meet their subsistence needs with respect to caribou harvest. The recent 24% decline in the Western Arctic caribou herd population between 2019 and 2021, may be contributing to this lack of caribou availability.

And the Western Arctic caribou herd working group voted to change the herd's management status to the preservative declining category in response to this decline. Under this management regime closure of some federal public lands may be warranted. The long term effects of aircraft and non-local hunting activity on caribou migration remain unclear, though short term effects on individual harvest success by federally qualified subsistence users, is occurring based on local testimony.

There are likely multiple factors contributing to the alteration of the Western Arctic caribou herd migratory route and timing. But in times of shortage, and when the continuation of subsistence uses of the resources being impacted. The board is obligated to consider restrictions to non-federally qualified users as specified in ANILCA Section 815.3.

Even though caribou harvest by non-federally qualified users is small compared to overall harvest of the Western Arctic caribou herd, rural residents of Unit 23 have repeatedly testified that placement of hunters along migratory routes and the harvest of lead animals, are impacting herd migration independent of the overall magnitude of this harvest.

Most of the harvest by non-federally qualified users along with much of the user conflicts, occur within the Noatak National Preserve in Unit 23. If the board decides to implement additional closures it may be prudent to focus on this area rather than all of federal lands in Units 23 and 26(a), to best address the concerns identified by the proponent of the Special Action Request and to reduce hunting pressure by non-federally qualified users on nearby state lands. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Sue Detweiler: So this is Sue Detweiler. Tony just texted me that he just got dropped off the call. So while he's waiting, I think the interim Chair next in line would be

Rhonda Pitka. And the next - we would be moving it to the next portion - well, actually we'd be - this would be an opportunity for the board members to ask any questions of Mr. Mulligan.

Rhonda Pitka: Hi. This is Rhonda. Okay. So I'd like to open the floor for questions, for either Mr. Mulligan or Robbin Lavine for the (ISC) comments. Thank you.

Eugene Peltola: Madam Chair, BIA?

Rhonda Pitka: Go ahead, Mr. Peltola.

Eugene Peltola: Thank you. Rhonda. Ben, this is Unit BIA. Looking at the most recent photo census, has the state considered any actions which are recommended with regard to caribou harvest recommendations, contained in the Western Arctic caribou herd management - cooperative management plan which was revised in December 2019 with regard to the 188,000 estimate which is below the 200,000 threshold?

Ben Mulligan: Through the Chair, Mr. Peltola, not at this time.

Eugene Peltola: Okay. Thank you. That's all I had.

Sue Detweiler: Yes. Madam Chair and Mr. Peltola, and Ben, my apologies. This is Sue Detweiler again. We actually had just finished the (ISC) comments and so technically speaking, we would have - that would have been an opportunity for comments of Robbin Lavine for (ISC) comments. So anyway, I'm glad we had the opportunity to circle back with Mr. Mulligan. But that still leaves us at the same point in the agenda where we haven't moved of yet, from any - the opportunity for the board to ask any questions of the (ISC).

Eugene Peltola: Madam Chair, BIA?

((Crosstalk))

Eugene Peltola: Sue, when Ben gave the state's position I didn't have any questions. But since the (ISC) recommendation did mention the preserve management regime under the Western Arctic caribou herd cooperative management plan as revised December 2019, I took the opportunity to come back and get clarification from the state. Thank you.

Rhonda Pitka: I appreciate the clarification. Thank you so much. Other questions for the (ISC), Robbin Lavine?

Eugene Peltola: Madam Chair, BIA, one for the (ISC).

Rhonda Pitka: Go ahead, Mr. Peltola.

Eugene Peltola: Thank you, Madam Chair. So under the (ISC)'s recommendation and also the OSM recommendation, I understand there are a little bit different caveats, but based on the recommendation and I don't recall if it was presented or not, but of the options which were presented, what do you recall the acreage in the impacted areas?

Robbin Lavine: Thank you. Through the Chair, this is Robbin Lavine. And for the discussion of acreage, I'm going to pass that over to my colleagues. But before I do, I do want to make a distinction. The interagency staff committee has provided a comment. And per our procedures, when regional advisory councils who do have difference, make recommendations to the board, the (ISC) then does not make a recommendation. They do make a comment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I will - and (unintelligible), and I hear our - Tony is back on. And for the question about acreage, I am going to refer to our Wildlife Division Supervisor, (Lisa Gretigan). Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Eugene Peltola: And Mr. Chair, if it makes it any easier, Gene BIA again, I'd be happy with percentages as opposed to - of the game as we (unintelligible) as opposed to total acreage.

Anthony Christianson: Sounds fine.

(Lisa Gretigan): All right. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is (Lisa Gretigan) for the record. And the percentage of federal lands that would be closed under the (ISC) recommendation, is 35% of the federal lands in Unit 23 and about 16% of the federal public lands in - when you're combining the 23 and Unit 26(a) it's only about .08% of the lands in Unit 26(a).

And then if you're looking at all lands in Units 23 and 26(a) versus only federal public lands, the (ISC) recommendation proposes closure of about 25% of the all landing Unit 23. And then when you're looking at 23 and 26(a) combined, it'd be about 11% of all land. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And let me know if there are any follow up questions or I - hopefully that addressed your question, Member Peltola.

Eugene Peltola: Thank you, (Lisa). That's exactly what I was looking for.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you, (Lisa). Any other questions? All right. Hearing no more questions, we'll go ahead and move onto the next agenda item. And we are - I believe that's Board Discussion?

Sue Detweiler: Mr. Chair, what you could do is next steps would be for a board member to make a motion to adopt. And if seconded, then the board would deliberate and develop a justification for its action.

Anthony Christianson: All right. The floor is open for the board to entertain a motion at this time.

Thomas Heinlein: All right. Mr. Chair, for the record, this is Thomas Heinlein. I'm the Acting Alaska State RAC with the Bureau of Land Management. I move to approve Wildlife Special Action Request 21-01(a) with modification, to close Noatak National Preserve, including the Nigu River portion of the Preserve and GMU 26, and BLM managed lands between the Noatak and Kobuk Rivers in Unit 23, to caribou hunting by non-federally qualified users from August 1st through September 30th during the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 regulatory years.

If I get a second, I'd like to explain why I intend (unintelligible) in support of my motion.

Man: Yes. I second the motion....

Charlie Brower: Second by Charlie Brower.

Man: (Unintelligible) the discussion.

((Crosstalk))

(Philip Hooge): This is (Philip Hooge), National Park Service. I second that motion.

Anthony Christianson: All right. We have three seconds. So I think the first (unintelligible) was Charlie (unintelligible). So go ahead. The floor is open for discussion and justification. Thank you.

Thomas Heinlein: All right. Thank you. At its December 2021 meeting, the Western Arctic Caribou herd working group voted to change the management status of the Western Arctic caribou herd from conservative declining to preservative declining. At this management level the elimination of the non-resident season under state regulations, enclosure of some federal lands may be necessary. Between 2019 and 2021 the caribou herd population declined 24% from 244,000 to 188,000.

This, when considered along with the fact that many federally qualified subsistence users have not been able to harvest caribou over the past several years more in (unintelligible) by the board. While many factors such as weather, climate change, and changes to the historical extent in timing of caribou migration, may be contributing to lower harvest by federally qualified subsistence users.

The board should act to help ensure that rural residents are able to meet their subsistence needs and to provide for a subsistence priority as required under Section 804 of ANILCA. Further, the reason for the Special Action Request was concern about the placement of non-federally qualified users along caribou migration routes, the harvest of lead animals, and disruption of caribou migration independent of the low overall harvest by non-federally qualified users.

Therefore, non-federally qualified harvests should be eliminated in some areas in times of shortage, to ensure the continuation of subsistence uses of the caribou resource that is described in Section 815 of ANILCA. Additionally,

the harvestable surplus may already be exceeded. And while accurate harvest information is not yet available, a conservative approach is warranted.

As indicated in the analysis for Wildlife Special Action 21-01, most of the harvest by non-federally qualified users along with much of the user conflicts, occurs within Noatak National Preserve within Unit 23. Feedback from local users as indicated at any non-local hunting on the north side of the Noatak and Kobuk Rivers, is problematic as traditional ecological knowledge dictates that caribou should only be hunted on the south side of rivers.

Extension of the existing closure north to the boundary of the Noatak National Preserve could help ameliorate these concerns. Additionally, recent delays in caribou migrations have occurred between the Noatak and Kobuk Rivers, and therefore additional closures should also be considered on federal public lands in this area.

This targeted closure also reflects the fact that most non-federally qualified users are not harvesting caribou on other federal public lands within Unit 23 such as Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, Case of the Arctic National Preserve, other scattered (beyond) lands in the unit, or within the (unintelligible) wildlife refuge.

This suggested partial closure represents a compromise between the total closure of public lands in Units 23 and 26(a), as requested by the (component), while also precluding an unnecessary restriction on non-subsistence uses as specified in 50 CFR 100.19. A closure of all federal public lands in Units 23 and 26(a) is not warranted at this time and is not supported by substantial evidence as stated in ANILCA Section 805(c).

Any closures within the affected units should target areas of highest user conflict in areas that minimize disruption of caribou migratory routes that may lead to federally qualified users being unable to meet their subsistence needs. Furthermore, as stated by the North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council, communities in Unit 26(a) have been able to meet the subsistence needs with respect to caribou, so closure in this unit is not warranted at this time.

Finally, I believe that this closure should be in effect for both 2022 and 2023, to assess whether the closure will help to address the concerns brought up by the component, and to alleviate the administrative burden of having to submit another Special Action Request next year. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you. The floor is open for discussion.

Eugene Peltola: Mr. Chair, BIA.

Anthony Christianson: You have the floor, Gene.

Eugene Peltola: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before we go into board discussion, I was wondering if (unintelligible) maybe would be willing to read the motion itself, before it got into justification, so it's clear what the motion was that was made. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thomas Heinlein: Absolutely. For the record again, this is Thomas Heinlein, the Acting Alaska State Director for the Bureau of Land Management. I move to approve Wildlife Special Action Request 21-01(a) with modification, to close Noatak National Preserve, including the Nigu River Portion of the Preserve in GMU 26, and BLM managed lands between the Noatak and Kobuk that was in Unit 23, to caribou hunting by non-federally qualified users from August 1st

through September 30th during the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 regulatory years. Thank you.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you, Tom. I appreciate that. Any other questions, deliberation, or clarifications?

Thomas Heinlein: Mr. Chair, BLM.

Anthony Christianson: Yes. You have the floor, BLM.

Thomas Heinlein: I just wanted to re-clarify, in the motion when I mentioned GMU 26, it's GMU 26(a). Thank you.

Anthony Christianson: Thanks. Any further discussion? Deliberation?

Eugene Peltola: Mr. Chair, BIA.

Anthony Christianson: Yes. BIA, Gene, you have the floor.

Eugene Peltola: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So when as a body, we first took up this Special Action Request, I made the motion to delay action. I have to try to get the groups together to come up with a more targeted closure because that was suggested by the Special Action Request for the board's consideration. I know that some may be pleased; some may not be pleased about where we've gotten to today.

Although, what is under consideration by the board now is instead of an outbreak closure of game management unit(s), plural. We are now looking at consideration of 35% of federal lands in GMU 23, 8/10 of 1% of GMU 26(a). That is just federal lands. When you take into consideration all lands, in 23 it

is 24.69% in 23, and .06 or 6/100 of a percent of 26(a). Roughly 11-1/2% of all lands available.

I have heard mention of whether it be the State of Alaska or the (ISC), mentioned the portion of caribou herds' cooperative management plan. The Western Arctic caribou herd working group opposed because they felt it was not appropriate to provide comment on a proposal to address caribou and moose, of which one of the bigger species could be considered outside their purview of consideration, with no further justification beyond that.

In the (ISC) presentation, it mentions that the population estimate as presented, was 188,000 down from - down about roughly 1/4 or 25% over two years. That would put it under the Western Arctic caribou herd cooperative management plan which we have as was revised as of December 2019 under the preservative management to regime, which we had heard mentioned.

Under the caribou harvest recommendations which may include - this is one, no harvest of calves; two, limit harvest of cows by raising hunter permits and/or village (quarters); three, limit the subsistence harvest (unintelligible) maintain at least 30 to 100 - 30 bulls, 100 cows; and then four, harvest restricted to residents only according to state and federal law. Closures (unintelligible) federal public lands to non-qualified users may be necessary.

Of the compromise which has been presented by Bureau of Land Management today, I think we meet a part of that threshold under four, which is closure of some federal public lands to non-qualified users as may be necessary. As for the subsistence harvest of bulls, the current bull ratio is above the targeted, which is good; the limit of harvest of cows by resident hunters.

If we look at the current existing regulations, there is some prohibition on the harvest of the cows, especially those accompanied by calves. And that's campaign under 50 CFR 100.26(n)(23). And it differs between the area in the vicinity of Point Hope versus GMU 23 (manager). So at least a portion of cow harvest has been - is already addressed via regulation.

Now with the comments from the Western Interior herd, you heard our Western Interior Regional Advisory Council Chair express interest about the composition of the harvest. That has - that could be addressed at a - and then let me step back a little bit further. In addition to, they called the management recommendation may include, you know, harvest of calves. So here we are on March 30th, addressing the special action, and we have a wildlife meeting coming up in less than two weeks.

I should point out that it might be a possibility, and I'd have to defer to either the solicitor's office, or OSM with what I'm about to say. But under our wildlife regulatory regular scheduled meeting, we do have a caribou proposal which has addressed calf harvest. Of interest is that it is a proposal to align federal regulations with state. And of note is that the calf restrictions for Unit 23 were removed last wildlife cycle.

I understand that regulations have to move forward with regard to our population information. Although it could - that could be addressed at a later date, during the April meeting. So I wanted to address the four criteria in the caribou harvest recommendations. The current proposal addresses some of those that the board and the Regional Advisory Council felt strongly about other aspects that might be able to be addressed in the April meeting.

I would also note that - so in my career in Alaska of which I spent over a decade in Northwest Alaska, and all of my career in Alaska, I've heard similar

many discussions about are there herds within the state? The biggest fear is now we're looking at a 25% reduction in the Western Arctic caribou herd. Like I mentioned, I heard summary discussions about population declines, although harvest is still sustainable.

And some of those herds we learned that we're harvesting on a declining population, which pretty much meant that the bottom end was a lot lower than it could be. So with that, Mr. Chair, I think that what has been presented is a reasonable accommodation. Not everybody would be happy with it, but I think it's giving fair consideration for all of the points that have been raised today, on this proposal. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Anthony Christianson: Anymore points? Questions?

(Philip Hooge): Mr. Chair, this is (Philip Hooge), National Park Service.

Anthony Christianson: You have the floor (unintelligible).

(Philip Hooge): The National Park Service supports the BLM modification to the motion. We have listened to our Subsistence Resource Commissions' and the Regional Advisory Councils' concerns regarding user conflicts. And, you know, pointing out the disruption in the Western caribou herd migration patterns. We believe it's imperative to ensure the continuation of subsistence use of caribou for federally qualified subsistence users. And we take our obligation to do so under Section 815 of ANILCA, seriously.

The closures within Unit 23 and the small portion of Unit 26(a), target areas of highest user conflict and minimize potential disruption of caribou migratory routes that may lead to federally qualified users being unable to meet their subsistence needs. At the same time, these closures should minimize hunting

pressure in other areas due to the displacement of non-federally qualified users on neighboring lands. Thank you.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you. Any other board members? All right.

Greg Risdahl: Mr. Chair? This is Greg Risdahl.

Anthony Christianson: Greg, you have the floor.

Greg Risdahl: Representing the USDA Forest Service.

Anthony Christianson: Yes, Greg. You have the floor.

Greg Risdahl: Thank you, Mr. Chair. For the record, my name is Greg Risdahl, I am acting for the USDA Forest Service, Regional Forrester, Dave Schmid, today, and representing the Forest Service as its board member. First, I want to express my appreciation for the excellent analysis by OSM staff, and for going out to the public to collect additional information and bringing it to everybody here today, to discuss and consider. Thank you to all.

Forest Service will vote in support of WSA 21-01(a) for the reasons clearly articulated to the Bureau of Land Management justification. The reasons given in justification are targeted compromise to close only those federal public lands where the most conflict has occurred between federally qualified users and non-federally qualified users, while leaving other federally public lands in Units 23 and 26(a), open to all users.

Nearly every year the Board of Councils hear testimony from federally qualified users throughout the region, that their subsistence needs for caribou are not being met. In addition to concerns about food security, some of the

specific points made in this temporary special action request include placement of non-federally qualified users along caribou migration routes; harvest of lead animals, in particular, cows; and disruption of the caribou migration.

At its recent Western Arctic caribou herd working group meetings the working group voted to change the management status of the Western Arctic caribou herd from conservative declining to preservative declining, based on the population dropping from an estimated 244,000 animals in 2019 to 188,000 in 2021.

As several folks have mentioned already, including Mr. Peltola, this constitutes an estimate of a 20% decline in this total caribou population. There's a long history of conflict in this region between federally qualified users and non-federally qualified users as it relates to caribou hunting and harvest.

Fortunately, the board and state and other partners, have worked together over the years, over the decades, to try to alleviate conflicts using several different management strategies and implementing a variety of solutions. The board, state, and other partners, need to continue to work together toward a long term resolution or resolutions, to ensure that federally qualified users can meet their subsistence needs first as required by Section 804 of ANILCA.

Therefore, as the BLM stated in their justification, in times of shortage a conservative approach is warranted. That includes eliminating non-federally qualified harvest in some areas, to ensure the continuation of subsistence uses. Finally, we also agree with BLM that this closure would remain in effect for both the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 hunting seasons, to best be able to assess

its effectiveness. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak in support of temporary Special Action WSA 21-01(a).

Anthony Christianson: Thank you.

Sara Boario: Mr. Chair, Sara Boario with the Fish & Wildlife Service.

Anthony Christianson: Yes.

Sara Boario: (Unintelligible) also in support of the modification presented by my colleague from the BLM, which is consistent with the recommendations we've heard from the North Slope Regional Advisory Council and the Interagency Staff Committee, which suggests a partial closure may be prudent.

We've seen the declining population data and at the December 2021 meeting, the Western Arctic caribou herd working group voted to change the management level of the herd from conservative declining to preservative declining as we've heard several times today. At this level one of the recommendations is harvest restricted to residents only. Closure of some federal public lands to non-qualified users may be necessary. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you. Any other board comments? Call for questions.

Eugene Peltola: Question, BIA.

Anthony Christianson: Question's been called. Roll call, please, Sue?

Sue Detweiler: So, Mr. Chair, the motion is to approve WSA 21-01(a) with the modification to close Noatak National Preserve including the Nigu River portion of the

preserve in Unit 26(a), and BLM lands between the Noatak and Kobuk Rivers in Unit 23, to caribou hunting by non-federally qualified users, from August 1st through September 30th during the 2022 to 2023, and the 2023 to 2024 regulatory years. And I will start the roll with maker of the motion, Mr. Heinlein from BLM.

Thomas Heinlein: I vote to approve.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. Mr. Peltola from BIA?

Eugene Peltola: BIA votes to approve based on the justification provided in the presentation by OSM and the covenant from the (ISC), in addition to (unintelligible) deference to the northwest (unintelligible) the Seward Peninsula Regional Advisory Councils.

Sue Detweiler: Okay. Thank you. National Park Service, Mr. (Hooge)?

(Philip Hooge): I vote to approve.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. Sara Boario, Fish & Wildlife Service?

Sara Boario: The Service votes to approve.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. And Dave Schmid, Forest Service - or, I'm sorry, for Mr. (Schmidt), Greg Risdahl?

Greg Risdahl: Thank you, Sue. The Forest Service approves.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. Public Member, Rhonda Pitka?

Rhonda Pitka: Hi. Yes. I, I approve with the justifications set forward by OSM. And in deference to the (unintelligible). Thank you.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. Public Member Charles Brower?

Charlie Brower: I support with the modification provided by OSM. Thank you.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. For clarification, Mr. Brower, did you actually mean with the modification provided by BLM?

Charlie Brower: No.

Sue Detweiler: Oh. Okay. So the - so are you supporting the motion as stated by the Chair then?

Charlie Brower: I am supporting as presented by recommendation from OSM and (ISC).

Sue Detweiler: Okay. So yes, I'm - I might need a little bit of help here with (Robert Smuhl)s because I believe the motion presented with - by BLM was with the modification that was different than the motion - than the proposal by OSM. And if I'm understanding this correctly, if somebody could jump in and correct me if I'm wrong. But the motion from BLM was similar to OSM's but it added in the Nigu portion of the Preserve in addition to what OSM had recommended.

Anthony Christianson: That's correct. So Charlie, in essence, would be not in support of this. He wants to support the original motion. Is that correct, Charlie?

Charlie Brower: That's correct.

Anthony Christianson: Yes.

Sue Detweiler: Okay. So I show - I record - Mr. Brower, shall I record your vote as a no on the motion as presented?

Charlie Brower: No. I support the motion.

Anthony Christianson: He supports the motion as presented. I think he's just misunderstood there.

(Susan Detweiler): Okay. Okay. I understand. Okay. So finally, Chair Christianson, what is your vote?

Anthony Christianson: Yes. I support.

(Susan Detweiler): Okay. Thank you. That makes it a unanimous vote in support of the motion. So the motion passes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you. We'll take a five minute break.

Eugene Peltola: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Anthony Christianson: Yes. Thank you, guys. Thank you, all to stop for that one. We'll come back here in a few minutes.

Charlie Brower: Hello? Anyone on?

Robbin Lavine: Hello, Charlie. This is Robbin.

Charlie Brower: Okay. I'm on now, from our break.

Sue Detweiler: We haven't - this is Sue. We haven't yet heard the Chair come back on, yet.

Charlie Brower: Okay. Thank you.

Charlie Brower: Robbin, are you - I'm close to a phone. Robbin?

Robbin Lavine: Charlie, can you - yes, Charlie?

Charlie Brower: Are you going to call me at (907) 367-4466?

Robbin Lavine: Yes. One moment. 367?

Charlie Brower: 4466.

Robbin Lavine: Will do.

Operator: This is the Operator. We will be reconvening the meeting momentarily. Please stand by.

Sue Detweiler: So while we're doing that I'll start reestablishing the form here. Let's see. I hear Anthony Christianson is on. Public Member Charlie Brower, are you on?

Charlie Brower: I'm on.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. Public Member Rhonda Pitka, are you on?

Rhonda Pitka: Hi. I'm here.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you, Rhonda. Greg Risdahl for Forest Service?

Greg Risdahl: Here, Sue.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. Thomas Heinlein, BLM?

Thomas Heinlein: Present.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. Gene Peltola, BIA?

Eugene Peltola: Roger that and 10-4.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. Sara Boario, Fish & Wildlife Service?

Sara Boario: Present.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. (Philip Hooge), Park Service?

(Philip Hooge): Present.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. Mr. Chair, we have a full board present. Did you drop back off the line, Mr. Chair?

Anthony Christianson: Yes. I'm on here.

Sue Detweiler: Oh, okay. We just established a quorum, so I think we're ready for the next agenda item whenever you're ready.

Anthony Christianson: Yes. Call on staff to present. Thank you.

Sue Detweiler: Okay. So yes, actually Mr. Chair, the next agenda item is to deal with the second portion of WSA 21-01 which is - Part B, which is to close federal public lands in Units 23 and 26(a) to moose hunting by non-federally qualified subsistence users from August 1 to September 30, 2022. And Tom Plank from our office, will be presenting that information.

Tom Plank: Hello, Mr. Chair, members of the board, my name is Tom Plank, Wildlife Biologist with the Office of Subsistence Management and the Wildlife Division Supervisor (Lisa Gretigan), and anthropologist, Hannah Voorhees, are also on the call today. Are you all able to hear me?

Woman: Yes.

Tom Plank: Thank you. I will be presenting WSA 21-01(b) for your recommendation. This is the portion of WSA 21-01 pertaining to moose. The Northwest Arctic Council submitted temporary Wildlife Special Action, WSA 21-01 in February last year. And the council requested that federal public lands in Units 23 and 26(a) be closed to hunting for moose, by non-federally qualified users from August 1st to September 30th, due to a decline in moose population.

In June 2021 the board deferred WSA 21-01 through the 2022-2023 regulatory year. At that time the board asked OSM to include comparisons of moose harvest, survey areas within Unit 23, in their analysis. If approved, this special action would now apply to the 2022-2023 hunting season. Changes implemented in both state and federal subsistence regulations since 2017, have placed restrictions on moose hunting in Unit 23.

Under federal regulations, the bull and cow seasons were shortened in 2018 and the cow season was closed in 2019. In 2020, the harvest limit changed to

one antlered bull. Under state regulations, the harvest limit changed to one antlered bull in 2017 and the non-resident moose season was closed in 2018.

Additionally, the state's RM 880 permit is only locally available in July, requiring an extra trip for non-local hunters which limits their participation. In Unit 26(a) there has not been a non-resident moose hunt since 2013. The Unit 23 moose population has declined substantially from an estimated 7500 moose in 2016 to an estimated 5600 moose in 2019. Bull/cow ratios have also declined and low calf/cow ratios indicate a decline in population.

The Unit 26(a) moose population is concentrated along rivers in the southeastern portion of the unit, and the population remains low at around 400 animals, but may be rebounded. Since 2005, reported moose harvests in Unit 23, have averaged 142 moose. Since 2017 when (ADF&G) closed the non-resident moose hunt, Unit 23 residents have accounted for 76% of the reported harvest and non-local residents, 24%.

Total harvest estimates for moose in Unit 23 range from 250 to 450 moose per year, which likely exceeds the harvestable surplus. However, harvest by non-federally qualified users has only averaged 27 moose per year, since 2017. Most of a reported harvest occurs during August and September. The Kobuk River Drainage which has the most moose in Unit 23, also experiences the highest harvest pressure in the unit.

In Unit 26(a) total reported moose harvest averages only 3.5 moose per year, and a harvest of non-federally qualified users averages only one moose per year. Since expanding into the Northwest Arctic and then the North Slope region in the mid-20th Century, moose had become an important secondary resource for local residents. Declines in caribou tend to increase reliance on alternative resources including moose.

The board directed OSM to compare moose harvest by survey area. OSM utilizes data to consider whether a partial federal lands closure would be appropriate. Please see page 23 for this new information. Analysis of harvest by local and non-local residents by major river drainage in Unit 23 reveal that the moose harvest correlates directly with the moose abundance.

The Kobuk River Drainage contained the highest moose population and harvest levels by both user groups. Given the substantial moose population declines across Unit 23, low calf/cow ratios, decline in bull/cow ratios, the relatively high harvest pressure within the Kobuk River Drainage, and the positive correlation between non-federally qualified harvest and moose abundance, OSM does not consider a partial closure to be an effective alternative.

A partial closure would also increase regulatory complexity in user confusion. If this request is approved only federally qualified subsistence users would be able to harvest moose on federally public lands in Units 23 and 26(a) in August and September this year. Approval of this request could aid in recovery of the Unit 23 moose population by reducing moose harvest by non-federally qualified users. Closures to non-federally qualified users during September, may also reduce disturbance to mating moose.

While non-federally qualified users are limited to bulls only, the bull/cow ratios have declined across most of Unit 23. However, non-federally qualified users only harvest around 27 moose each year from Unit 23 and it is uncertain whether a closure would substantially reduce harvest overall, or simply increase it on state managed lands which could also increase user conflict and crowding on state lands, especially those near communities and Native lands.

Currently, the state's non-resident season is closed and harvest by non-local residents in Unit 26(a) is very low, at an average of less than one moose per year. Therefore, approving this request would probably not contribute to conservation conserving the Unit 26(a) moose population, which while low, has not experienced drastic declines in recent years.

If approved, people with family connections in Unit 23 or 26(a) who are now residing outside of region, would not be able to harvest moose on federally public lands during August and September, as they are no longer federally qualified subsistence users. OSM's conclusion is to support WSA 21-01(b) with modification to close hunting - to close moose hunting to non-federally qualified users on federal public lands in Unit 23 only.

This request seeks to reduce most harvest during the peak of the hunting season, by non-federally qualified users to protect a decline in moose population in Unit 23, that is important to federally qualified subsistence users. There are substantial conservation concerns that threaten viability of Unit 23 moose population. Surveys indicate substantial declines in almost every survey area, and population estimates are below state objectives.

Composition metrics are also poor, as bull/cow ratios have declined and calf/cow ratios are low, and are indicative of decline in moose population. Additionally, the harvestable surplus may be ceded. Regulatory changes have been made to reduce moose harvest and promote population recovery in Unit 23 under both federal and state regulations since 2017. However, moose populations have continued to decline.

Approval of this request could aid in recovery of the Unit 23 moose population by reducing moose harvest by non-federally qualified users. In Unit 26(a) currently harvest by non-local residents is very low at an average

of one per year. Therefore, approval of this request would probably not contribute to conserving the moose population, and would be an unnecessary restriction to non-subsistence users.

The Unit 26(a) control use area is already closed and use of aircraft for hunting moose from July 1st through September 30th, as well as January 1st to March 31st. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Members of the board, I'd be happy to field any questions.

Rhonda Pitka: Hi. This is Rhonda. Did Tony get kicked off the line again?

Anthony Christianson: Hello. I'm on the line. Sorry. Next on the agenda, please.

Sue Detweiler: Yes. Mr. Chair, we just finished Tom Plank's presentation. And now would be the time for board members to ask any clarification questions of the presentation.

Anthony Christianson: Thank you, Sue. The floor is open. Can I take - I need to take a five minute break. I'm having something happen right here. Can Rhonda take over chairing for a second, please? I'll be - I'll stay on the line, but I've got to step away for a second.

Rhonda Pitka: Of course I can. Okay. So if there are no clarifying questions for Mr. Plank, I think we'll move onto the summary of public hearing comments and public comments.

Sue Detweiler: Yes.

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you.

Robbin Lavine: Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the board. Again, for the record, this is Robbin Lavine, Assistant Policy Coordinator for OSM. And now I'm going to be summarizing the public comments and testimony received on WSA 21-01(b). Public comments received through the end of 2021 are also described in the analysis beginning on page 35. As previously noted, a public hearing was first held for Wildlife Special Action 21-01 in April 2021, as a standard.

Due to great interest this request, a public written comment period was also held in April 2021. When the board deferred, they specifically requested feedback on concerns related to caribou. Most of the comments received throughout the public engagement process focused on caribou. In many cases, comments did not distinguish between moose and caribou. For those general comments on closures of federal public lands, I refer you back to my previous presentation.

Here I will just summarize the comments directly made regarding moose during the public hearings. Those public comments in opposition to the closure, made the following points. Unit 23 has a short season limited to bulls. And Unit 26(a) has no resident hunt. Hunters in 26(a) are not able to use aircraft for access under state regulations in the Colville River Drainage, limiting hunters from (Nowiskquit) with only boat access on the Colville River.

Moose are a recent arrival and marginal in this area, regardless of hunting pressure. A closure would be federal overreach. The data do not support a conservation concern. Moose range naturally expands and declines, but harvest has remained stable; 26(a) should not have been included.

Those public comments in support of the closure made these following points. There are not enough moose available for the local residents to meet their subsistence needs. When access to caribou declines there is an increased pressure to harvest moose. Moose were in a steep decline and both WSA 21-01(a) and (b) would help by reducing harvest pressure on the moose before they are gone. Thank you, Mr. Chair, members of the board. That is the end of my summary of public comments.

In addition, I can refer you to my earlier presentation on public comments submitted by the Western Arctic caribou herd working group and the Subsistence Resource Commission (Cape Crusenstern). And I had a little problem with my PDF files actually. So I can't access them. However, I may refer you back to those comments.

If you recall, the Western Arctic caribou herd working group did not support the Wildlife Special Action 21-01. And there was support - and I'm sorry, folks, just hang on. Hang on with me for just a moment.

Rhonda Pitka: Absolutely, Robbin. Take your time.

Robbin Lavine: Thank you. I am trying to open this document and it's not opening. One more moment. I think I know the problem. Thank you all very much, for your patience. Here it is. Again, the Cape (Crusenstern) National Monument Subsistence Resource Commission voted unanimously to support the OSM modification of Wildlife Special Action 21-01(b) regarding non-federally qualified user harvest of moose.

The SRC cited a declining population of caribou and moose in communities that have not been able to harvest or have had a lot harder time harvesting caribou and moose in recent years, are cited as a justification. In addition to

members' general knowledge of the decline in numbers and opportunities for these animals, member (Hannah Loon) mentioned that the Lower Kobuk rarely sees caribou.

(Larry Westlake) says hunting at the front of the herd affects the migration and again, they are in support of Wildlife Special Action 21-01(a) and (b) and they thank you for your time and attention. Thank you, Mr. Chair, members of the council.

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you very much for that presentation of public comment. Does anybody have any clarifying questions of Ms. Lavine? Thank you. Hearing none, I'd like to move into Regional Advisory Council Recommendation. I think we'll start with Northwest Arctic.

Thomas Baker: Thank you. This is Thomas Baker for the record. Again, for the record, my name is Thomas Baker. I Chair the Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council. The Northwest Arctic RAC submitted and supports WSA 21-01(b). Our justification is that the council supported the Special Action to protect the moose population and to continue subsistence opportunity and uses of moose.

The council also know that moose experience high (predation) rates by wolves and bears and deep snow exacerbates this. As has been discussed with this portion of this Wildlife Special Action Request, originally this was lumped in with the caribou. And the justification at that time when this was originally put together by the RAC, was to do whatever possible to limit the amount of pressure on both moose and caribou, but mainly caribou, during the hunting season.

And the thought process at that time was having hunters going from moose in the same areas where there may be caribou migrating through may still create some kind of conflict. Moose populations have had a lot of (predation) rate, high (predation) rate again, by predators. And we have looked into getting more information regarding the status of those populations of wolves, bears, and seeing what else can be done to protect the moose population.

If there are any questions I am more than willing to answer them as best I can at this time.

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you, Mr. Baker. I appreciate it. Does anybody have any - I think that we'll have questions right now. Does anybody have any questions of Northwest Arctic Regional Advisory Council? Hearing none, thank you for your time, Mr. Baker. We'd like to get the Regional Advisory Council recommendation from the North Slope Regional Advisory Council. Thank you.

Gordon Brower: Good afternoon. This is Gordon Brower, Chair for the North Slope Regional Advisory Council. For WSA 21-01(b) moves. And again, for the record, my name is Gordon Brower. I Chair the North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council. The North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council supports WSA 21-01(b) with OSM modifications to close moose hunting to federally qualified users on federal public lands in Unit 23 only.

Justification - the council sees that there is a demonstrated conservation need in Unit 23 due to the declining moose population. However, there are other factors in Unit 26(a) that don't warrant the extension of the moose closure beyond Unit 23. The most affected area is the communities within Unit 23 that have not been able to harvest subsistence moose due to low moose population as demonstrated by the analysis. Thank you very much.

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you very much, Mr. Brower. I appreciate it. Does anybody have any questions right now, for Mr. Brower and the North Slope Regional Advisory Council? Hearing none, thank you for your time, Mr. Brower. Orville Lind, right now we're onto the summary of Tribal Alaska Native Corporation comments. Thank you.

Orville Lind: Thank you, Madam Chair, board members. I'm going to refer to the - all the information I shared earlier. And the only mention of moose was in the January 27th Tribal and Corporate Consultations. Residents from (Katibu) mentioned that they had concerns that moose were declining in the area. That's all I have, Madam Chair. Thank you.

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you very much, Mr. Lind. Does anybody have any clarifying questions to ask of (southern) consultations? If not, I would like to open the floor for opportunity for comments in the State of Alaska liaison to the board, Ben Mulligan. Thank you.

Ben Mulligan: Thank you, Madam Chair. For the record again, my name is Ben Mulligan at the Alaska Department of Fish & Game. The Alaska Department of Fish & Game opposes Part B of this Special Action Request. My testimony will mainly focus on GMU 23 moose since non-local harvest in GMU 26(a) is minuscule, averaging only one moose per year and therefore AFG can find no reason under ANILCA, to enact this closure in that GMU.

The current population estimate for GMU 23 is 5600 moose with an established ANS amount of 325 to 400 animals. Considering this population is managed with a 6% harvest rate, harvestable surplus is 334 moose. This shows the current moose population in this GMU is not only within the

population objective of 3500 to 9200 moose, the amount of harvestable surplus still falls within the range amount necessary for subsistence.

Currently, hunting is only open to Alaskan residents with a registration hunt and a general harvest ticket being used in this area. The registration permit allows for the harvest of one antlered bull between July 1st to December 31st in GMU 23 north of and including, the (Singlic) River Drainage between August 1st, December 31st and the remainder of GMU 23.

The registration permits are only available for pickups in person from licensed vendors within the GMU from June 1st to July 15th. Alternately, residents may harvest one bull with 50 inch antlers or with four or more brow tines on at least one side, under the state's general harvest ticket between September 1st to September 20th.

Currently, Alaskan residents wishing to hunt on federal land must possess either of these permits in order to hunt. Moose hunting on Cape (Crusenstern) National Monument in (Kovok) Valley National Park, is limited to residents of only GMU 23 and must be conducted under federal subsistence. And that federal subsistence season is from August 1st to December 31st, and allows for the take of one antlered bull.

When examining harvests federally qualified users have accounted for 69% to 86% of harvest between 2016 and 2020, with non-local residents accounting for 14% to 31% over the same period. Residency of the registration permit holders have seen a shift over the last five years, with an ever-increasing number of permits issued to local residents, and an ever-decreasing number to non-local residents with 2020 having 585 total permits issued to GMU 23 residents and 46 permits issued to non-local residents.

Participation under the general harvest ticket has also decreased overall from 6900 in regulatory year '16 to only 31 in regulatory year '20. Given that the moose population is still within its objective and there's a harvestable surplus that is within the range of ANS, AF&G opposed closing federal public lands within GMU 23 as well. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you, Mr. Mulligan. I appreciate it. Does anybody have any questions right now, for Mr. Mulligan? Hearing none, I - hello? I'm not sure if I'm still online.

Sue Detweiler: Yes. You are, Madam Chair.

Man: We can still hear you.

Rhonda Pitka: Oh my goodness. Okay, great. Okay. So I thought that I was talking to no one for a while. At this time I'd like to ask Policy Coordinator to provide the (ISC) comments. Robbin Lavine? Thank you.

Robbin Lavine: Thank you, Madam Chair, members of the board. Again, Robbin Lavine with the Office of Subsistence Management. The Interagency Staff Committee comments on Wildlife Special Action 21-01(b) are as follows. A closure to moose hunting in Unit 23 to non-federally qualified users may be warranted. As shown in the analysis, there are substantial conservation concerns that threaten the moose population the unit.

Surveys indicate substantial declines in almost every survey area, and population estimates are below state objectives. Additionally, the harvestable surplus has likely been exceeded. Regulatory changes have been made to reduce moose harvest and promote population recovery in Unit 23, under both federal and state regulations since 2017.

Despite these efforts, moose populations have continued to decline. Closure of moose hunting to non-federally qualified users in Unit 23 may aid in the recovery of the moose population, and may provide additional harvest opportunities for federally qualified subsistence users. A closure to moose hunting in Unit 26(a) may not be effective in addressing the concerns of the proponent of the Special Action Request.

Moose harvest by non-federally qualified users, is very low in the unit. And closure of moose hunting to this user group, would not aid in the conservation of moose populations. Nor is it likely to result in additional harvest opportunities for federally qualified subsistence users.

Additionally, moose populations are at the edge of their distribution range in Unit 26(a) and are likely - are limited by marginal habitat available in the area. Finally, the Unit 26(a) controlled use area is already closed to the use of aircraft for hunting moose from July 1st to September 14th, as well as January 1st to March 31st, which already limits moose hunting opportunities by non-federally qualified users. Thank you, Madam Chair. And I am done with my presentation.

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you very much. I appreciate that. Does anybody have any questions about the (ISC) comments? If not, I'd like to ask - I'd like to open the floor for a board member to make a motion.

Thomas Heinlein: Madam Chair, BLM.

Rhonda Pitka: Yes. Please go ahead.

Thomas Heinlein: Yes. For the record, this is Thomas Heinlein. I'm the Acting Alaska State Director for the Bureau of Land Management. Madam Chair, I move to approve Temporary Wildlife Special Action Request WSA 21-01(b) with modification, to only close moose hunting to non-federally qualified users in Unit 23 from August 1 through September 30, during the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 regulatory years. If I get a second, I will explain why I intend to vote in favor of my motion.

((Crosstalk))

Man: ...second.

Man: Seconded.

Thomas Heinlein: Okay. Thank you.

Rhonda Pitka: I heard a second by BIA. Go ahead. Thank you.

Thomas Heinlein: All right. Thank you. Closure to moose hunting in Unit 23 to non-federally qualified users is warranted. Surveys show a substantial population decline in estimates of below state objectives, indicating concern for the conservation of the moose population the unit. And it's likely that the harvestable surplus has been exceeded.

While there have been changes made under both federal and state regulations to address the issue, they do not appear to have been adequate to slow the decline of the moose population in the unit. Closure of moose hunting to non-federally qualified users would - could help to slow this decline. We'll provide for subsistence priority to federally qualified subsistence users and it's warranted under Section 815.3 of ANILCA.

Providing for subsistence priority to federally qualified subsistence users, it is particularly important at this time due to the lack of caribou availability as a traditional food resource in Unit 23. Also, I believe this closure could be in effect for both 2022 and 2023 to assess the effectiveness of the closure on moose populations in Unit 23. A closure to moose hunting in Unit 26(a) to non-federally qualified users, is not warranted.

Harvest by non-federally qualified users is very low. And therefore, closure of moose hunting to this user group, is unlikely to aid in the conservation of the moose population, nor in providing additional hunting opportunities for federally qualified subsistence users. Moose are at the end of their range in Unit 26(a) and are limited by marginal (unintelligible) and habitat available in the area.

Additionally, moose hunting by non-federally qualified users in the unit, is already greatly limited by the Unit 26(a) controlled use area, which is closed to the use of aircraft for hunting moose from July 1 through September 14. Because of these reasons, closure of federal public lands in Unit 26(a) is not supported by substantial evidence as stated in ANILCA Section 805(c) and is consistent with the recommendation of the North Slope Regional Advisory Council. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you. So I'd like to open the floor now for discussion.

(Philip Hooge): This is (Philip Hooge) with the National Parks Service. The National Park Service - the National Park Service supports the BLM motion as modified, as best insuring subsistence priority, while not putting an unnecessary burden on non-federally qualified users. Thank you.

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you for that. Is there any other discussion?

Eugene Peltola: Madam Chair, BIA.

Rhonda Pitka: Go ahead, BIA.

Eugene Peltola: Thank you, much. I appreciate it. So the Bureau of Indian Affairs is in support of the motion as presented by the Bureau of Land Management and their articulation for their motion, in addition to the analysis provided in the (ISC) comments, and also in taking consideration deference to the Regional Advisory Council for the Northwest Arctic. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you. Is there any further discussion?

Sara Boario: Madam Chair?

Man: Madam Chair?

Sara Boario: The Fish & Wildlife Service also supports the motion...

Man: This is (Unintelligible).

Sara Boario: ...consistent with the recommendations of the North Slope Regional Advisory Council and the data that provides sufficient biological information to indicate there are conservation concerns for the moose population in Unit 23. We support the (ISC) comments, recognition of the conservation concerns for moose population, in Unit 23, and that a closure in Unit 26(a) may not be warranted due to naturally limiting factors in the region. Thank you.

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you for that. I appreciate it. Is there any other discussion on this motion?

Man: Madam Chair, this is (Craig Riswell), acting for the US Forest Service.

Rhonda Pitka: Yes. Go ahead, (Craig).

Man: Thank you. The Forest Service will vote in support of WSA 21-01(b) for the reasons again, stated in the Bureau of Land Management justification, and the comments provided by the (ISC). This motion only closes federal public lands Unit 23 to moose hunting by non-federally qualified users, while leaving open federal public lands in Unit 26(a).

A closure to moose hunting and Unit 23 to non-federally qualified users is warranted because surveys indicate there has been a substantial decline in the moose population. Populations are below state objectives and a harvestable surplus may have already been exceeded. During this time when federally qualified users have not been able to meet their subsistence needs for caribou in Unit 23 providing additional Native subsistence food resources is particularly important.

A closure to moose hunting by non-federally qualified users in Unit 26(a) is not warranted because moose harvest by non-federally qualified users is extremely low. Moose habitat is limited, and they are at the very edge of their range in this unit. As noted for our support for WSA 21-01(a), we also support the moose closure to non-federally qualified users in 21(b), in Unit 23, for both the 2022 and 2023-2024 hunting seasons, to be able to best assess the closure's effectiveness. Thank you again, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to speak.

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you for that. I appreciate it. Is there any other board discussion?
Hearing none, I'd like to ask someone to call the question.

Eugene Peltola: BIA calls the question.

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you. The question has been called. Ms. (Detweiler), can you please poll the board? Thank you.

Sue Detweiler: Yes. Thank you. The motion on the floor is to approve temporary Wildlife Special Action Request WSA 21-01(b) with modification to only close moose hunting to non-federally qualified users in Unit 23, from August 1 through September 30, during the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 regulatory years. I'll start with Mr. Heinlein from BLM.

Thomas Heinlein: Thank you. The Bureau of Land Management votes to approve.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. Mr. Peltola, BIA?

Eugene Peltola: BIA votes to approve for reasons previously articulated.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. Sara Boario, Fish & Wildlife Service?

Sara Boario: The Service votes to approve.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. (Philip Hooge), National Park Service?

(Philip Hooge): The National Park Service votes to approve.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. Greg Risdahl, Forest Service?

Greg Risdahl: The Forest Service approves.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. Public Member, Rhonda Pitka?

Rhonda Pitka: I support. Thank you.

Sue Detweiler: Thank you. Public Member, Charlie Brower? Mr. Brower, are you online?
Okay. Anthony Christianson, Chair, did you come back? Okay. Okay. So we
have six votes, two not present. So it looks like the motion passes with a vote
of six.

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you. Sorry. I couldn't find my mute button. The motion was approved.
And now I'd like to have someone make a motion to adjourn.

Greg Risdahl: Forest Service motion - makes the motion to adjourn.

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you. Can I get a second for that?

(Philip Hooge): National Park Service seconds that. (Philip Hooge).

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you very much. All in favor of voting to adjourn say aye. Please say
aye.

Man: Aye.

Woman: Aye.

Man: Aye.

Rhonda Pitka: Thank you all for your time.

Woman: Thank you.

Rhonda Pitka: Have a good...

Man: Thank you.

Rhonda Pitka: ...day everyone.

Sue Detweiler: Okay. Bye.

Man: Thank you.

END