



National Park Service Update
Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve
Northwest Arctic Regional Advisory Council Meeting
November 3-4, 2020

Subsistence

The Gates of the Arctic National Park Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC) met on April 15, 2020 via teleconference. The SRC received updates on the Ambler Mining District Road project and the Board of Game regulatory proposal results for the Western Arctic and Western Region and the Interior/Northeast Arctic Region. Additionally, the SRC heard updates on wildlife projects from NPS staff. The next SRC meeting is scheduled for November 18-19, 2020 via teleconference. SRC members are interested in hearing updates on commercial use operations within the Park and Preserve.

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Western Arctic Caribou Herd

- The April 2020 project to collect caribou pellets in order to analyze diets was delayed and has been rescheduled for April 2021. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game did not schedule a census for the Western Arctic Herd during the summer of 2020.
- A recent paper (<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/bugpower.htm>) reviewed the effects of bugs on caribou. Caribou increase their movements during peak insect harassment, evading and running away from these parasites. These behavioral responses scale up to physiological effects as caribou move to less productive habitats to reduce harassment which increases energetic costs due to locomotion, reduces nutrient intake due to less time spent foraging, and can lead to poorer physiological condition

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Grizzly Bears

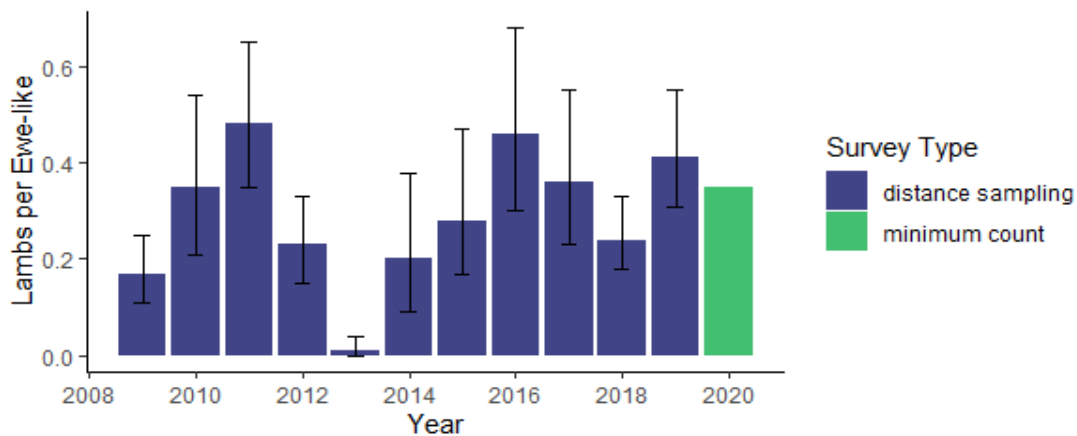
Results from a 2014-2017 bear collaring project continue to come out. Recently, a paper (<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/beardiets.htm>) on Brooks Range grizzly bears revealed that a large number of bears had salmon as a main component of their late summer diet. This led to NPS researchers to look at the GPS data more closely and they found they could use the bear's movement data to identify streams with salmon that were previously unmapped (<https://www.nps.gov/articles/aps-19-1-2.htm>). NPS biologists shared this finding with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and they were able to add a hundred miles of new salmon stream to the official Anadromous Stream Catalog in the project area (<https://www.nps.gov/articles/aps-19-1-3.htm>). Another paper showed analysis of diets can vary by looking at different segments of bear hair samples (<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/hairanalysis.htm>).



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Dall's Sheep Survey

In July of 2020, the NPS conducted an aerial survey of Dall's sheep in the Itkilik preserve. Due to concerns about Covid-19, we replaced the normal distance sampling protocol (which requires an onboard observer), with a pilot-only count. Poor weather prevented the pilot from surveying half of the area, so the total sheep count is not comparable to past years. Of the 376 total sheep observed, 82 were lambs and 237 were ewe-like (ewes, yearlings, or young rams). This results in a lamb:ewe-like ratio of 0.35, which is higher than average and indicates a healthy reproductive rate. Surveys planned for 2021 will help determine whether this translates into population growth.



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Ambler Mining District Road

The Department of the Interior through the National Park Service and the Department of Transportation through the Federal Highways Administration issued a Record of Decision on the access route and right-of-way through Gates of the Arctic National Preserve Kobuk unit. The decision was based on an Environmental and Economic Analysis (EEA) and determines the most economically feasible and prudent route with the least impact allowing for construction, operation, maintenance and reclamation of a private, industrial-access road within the Preserve. The EEA and decision includes mitigation measures to protect wetlands, fish, wildlife and their habitat as well as subsistence hunting and fishing activities, and the route selected across the Kobuk Preserve unit follows the route selected by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Land Management Record of Decision.

The full Department of Interior press release on the Ambler Road Decision is available at: <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases>

The Final National Park Service/Federal Highway Administration EEA and Record of Decision is available at: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/publichome.cfm>