Northeast Alaska - Units 25A, 25B, 25D, 26B & 26C

Proposal 170

5 AAC 85.025 (a)(19) and (21). Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

Decrease the caribou hunting bag limit for residents in Unit 24A remainder from 10 caribou to 5 bulls, and in Unit 26B remainder from 5 caribou to 5 bulls as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

Units and Bag Limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
(19)		
…		
Unit 24(A) Remainder		
RESIDENT HUNTERS:		
5 bulls [10 CARIBOU]	July 1 – Apr. 30	
NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:		
2 bulls		Aug 1 – Sept. 30
(21)		
…		
Unit 26(B) Remainder		
RESIDENT HUNTERS:		
5 bulls [5 CARIBOU]	July 1 – Apr. 30	
NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:		
2 bulls		Aug 1 – Sept. 15

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

The 2025 Central Arctic Herd (CAH) population estimate indicated there was a decrease in the population from 2022 (34,642 caribou, 95% CI 32,419–36,866) to 2025 (26,621 caribou, 95% CI

25,466 – 27,775). The 2025 population estimate is below the intensive management objective for this herd of 28,000–32,000 caribou. The CAH range primarily encompasses Units 26B and Unit 24A.

To decrease harvest pressure on the reproductive component of the herd, the department recommends that the bag limits for units 24(A) and 26(B) be changed from any caribou bag limits to a 5 bull only bag limit. At the current population size and trend, there is no longer a harvestable surplus of cow caribou to support the current any caribou bag limits. However, the harvestable surplus of bulls is adequate to support continued bull harvest as long-term estimates indicate bull:cow ratios have remained above the management objective of 40 bulls per 100 cows.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F26-029)
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Proposal 171

5 AAC 85.025 (a)(19) and (21). Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

Create a registration hunt for cow caribou in units 24A and 26B for residents, to allow a limited harvest of cows to be taken when available, with season dates and bag limit to be announced as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

Units and Bag Limits	**Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)**	**Nonresident Open Season**
(19) …		
Unit 24(A) Remainder		
RESIDENT HUNTERS: 10 caribou	July 1 – Apr. 30	
<u>Up to 2 cows may be taken by registration permit only, during a season to be announced from July 1 – April 30</u>	**<u>TBA</u>**	
NONRESIDENT HUNTERS: 2 bulls		Aug 1 – Sept. 30

(21)
…

Unit 26(B) Remainder

RESIDENT HUNTERS:

5 caribou	July 1 – Apr. 30
<u>Up to 2 cows may be taken by registration permit only, during a season to be announced from July 1 – April 30</u>	**<u>TBA</u>**

NONRESIDENT HUNTERS:

2 bulls	Aug 1 – Sept. 15

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

The 2025 Central Arctic Herd (CAH) population estimate indicated there was a decrease in the population from 2022 (34,642 caribou, 95% CI 32,419–36,866) to 2025 (26,621 caribou, 95% CI 25,466 – 27,775). The 2025 population estimate is below the intensive management objective for this herd of 28,000–32,000 caribou. The CAH range primarily encompasses Units 26B and Unit 24A.

To decrease harvest pressure on the reproductive component of the herd, the department recommends in a separate proposal that the bag limits for units 24(A) and 26(B) be changed from either a 10 caribou or 5 caribou bag limit to a 5 bull only bag limit, which will continue to be administered as a general season harvest ticket hunt. At the current population size and trend, there is no longer a harvestable surplus of cow caribou to support the current any caribou bag limits. However, The CAH population has fluctuated regularly above and below the intensive management objective over the past 25 years. This has resulted in the department seeking regulatory changes to either liberalize or restrict harvest opportunity at most Interior Region Board of Game meetings. This proposal seeks to implement an adaptive regulatory structure for cow caribou to maximize harvest opportunity when harvestable surplus exists or restrict harvest during times of conservation. In addition, a registration permit would allow the department to determine an in-season quota to prevent over-harvest of cows when warranted.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F26-030)
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Proposal 172

5 AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

Reduce the resident bag limit for caribou in 26B remainder as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

Reduce the resident **BAG LIMIT 5 BULL CARIBOU PER REGULATORY YEAR IN 26B REMAINDER JULY 1 -OCT 1 - NOV 1-JUNE 30**

[RESIDENTS FIVE CARIBOU JULY 1-APRIL 30]

The proposal focuses on best use of the limited bull caribou, eliminating cow harvest entirely. The season is set for Bull caribou when they are best to eat. Bulls start into the rut in early October, they become unusable for food while breeding. It is best reproductive management to not disrupt the breeding cows and bulls during the rut.

Bulls are very run down after the intense short breeding activity. The poor flavor is cleared out by November, they have used all fat as well as muscle protein they can be eaten in early November but not prime, but are typically regained most muscle by February 1.

Cows have increasing gestational demands in February. If winter conditions are severe cows will draw significant protein from muscle to support the fetus. Breakup timing is of critical importance for all caribou. When the temperatures warm up to above freezing normally in late April, the Cotton Grass Sedge Tussock shoots up the flower blossom high in protein. The shape of the tussock and open habitat allow it to be the first large protein source for caribou muscle loss and final fetal development. Deep snow and late spring timings are very detrimental to caribou if they don't have access to this resource.

Arctic Caribou will seek and eat predominantly Tussock flowers as they move towards calving and summer range. Like all grasses the tussock flower is pollinated by the wind. In early summer after the Tussock is pollinated they are switching to wildflowers. Woolly Lousewort, Dryas, Fireweed, and other flowers are important protein/ nectar for lactating cow caribou and Bulls growing and accumulating fat.

Early hot weather is extremely bad for caribou. The Tussock will pollinate too quickly, pollinating insects will be very active in the long days to pollinate the wildflowers in a short period of time. Mosquitoes and parasitic fly harassment exacerbates the ability to gain fat and produce quality lactation. Cows will be thin in falls after a long hot summer, and calf weights will be below normal. These calve can become a weak cohort with these cows delayed reproduction until 4 years old.

Lichen is always eaten throughout the year by caribou to maintain the microbiome in their digestive system. Lichen intake is vastly reduced during spring and summer normally. Lichen intake will increase in summer if high protein feed is lost.

Bulls will not have as thick of fat in fall after a hot summer, especially after a late spring. Five year old bulls are skeletal mature and dominate breeding due to the larger fat reserves than younger

growing bulls. The large bulls will be especially run down post rut after a hot summer. A good rule of thumb is; if caribou aggregate in summer to facilitate a survey they are in hardship at that time.

Cows are in lactation through the fall right before the rut. It is not best management to harvest cows in summer or fall when in lactation. The cow caribou are real skinny and meat is not of the same quality as in Early October and early winter.

If limited cow harvest can eventually be supported it should only be from early October to February. Bulls can be harvested most of the year except for during the rut, and just after the rut.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

Decline Central Arctic herd has declined 61% since 2010, 23% since 2022 to 2026.

continued cow caribou harvest is not sustainable at this time. Cow caribou almost never have twins. Cow caribou short yearling that experience hardships like hot summer as a calf, deep snow, rain icing in winter, and late spring will typically not produce its first calf until her fourth birthday. Currently large percentage of recruited cows have lost one year of production, affecting overall recruitment. This weak cohort with a 10 year life span would only have 6 calves at best. Strong cohorts with better conditions will produce at 3 years, or 7 total calves in her life span.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?

I have discussed these issues with the Koyukuk River AC members as I am chairman, Western Interior Regional Advisory Council and other Regions. I discuss caribou management with ADFG managers about what strategies to use to address the current situation with all the Northern Caribou herds. I discuss these issues with Federal management NPS, USFWS, and BLM as well as the Federal Subsistence Board. I talk about these caribou issues with people that travel up the Dalton Highway to hunt the Arctic caribou.

PROPOSED BY: Jack Reakoff (OI-F26-108)
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<u>Proposal 173</u>

5 AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

Reduce the bag limit for Carioubou in 24B reaminder as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

<u>BAG LIMIT 5 BULL CARIBOU PER REGULATORY YEAR IN 24A REMAINDER JULY 1 -OCT 1 - NOV 1-JUNE 30</u>

[RESIDENTS TEN CARIBOU JULY 1-APRIL 30]

The proposal focuses on best use of the limited bull caribou, eliminating cow harvest entirely. The season is set for Bull caribou when they are best to eat. Bulls start into the rut in early October, they become unusable for food while breeding. It is best reproductive management to not disrupt the breeding cows and bulls during the rut.

Bulls are very run down after the intense short breeding activity. The poor flavor is cleared out by November, they have used all fat as well as muscle protein they can be eaten in early November but not prime, but are typically regained most muscle by February 1.

Cows have increasing gestational demands in February. If winter conditions are severe cows will draw significant protein from muscle to support the fetus. Breakup timing is of critical importance for all caribou. When the temperatures warm up to above freezing normally in late April, the Cotton Grass Sedge Tussock shoots up the flower blossom high in protein. The shape of the tussock and open habitat allow it to be the first large protein source for caribou muscle loss and final fetal development. Deep snow and late spring timings are very detrimental to caribou if they don't have access to this resource.

Arctic Caribou will seek and eat predominantly Tussock flowers as they move towards calving and summer range. Like all grasses the tussock flower is pollinated by the wind. In early summer after the Tussock is pollinated they are switching to wildflowers. Woolly Lousewort, Dryas, Fireweed, and other flowers are important protein/ nectar for lactating cow caribou and Bulls growing and accumulating fat.

Early hot weather is extremely bad for caribou. The Tussock will pollinate too quickly, pollinating insects will be very active in the long days to pollinate the wildflowers in a short period of time. Mosquitoes and parasitic fly harassment exacerbates the ability to gain fat and produce quality lactation. Cows will be thin in falls after a long hot summer, and calf weights will be below normal. These calve can become a weak cohort with these cows delayed reproduction until 4 years old.

Lichen is always eaten throughout the year by caribou to maintain the microbiome in their digestive system. Lichen intake is vastly reduced during spring and summer normally. Lichen intake will increase in summer if high protein feed is lost.

Bulls will not have as thick of fat in fall after a hot summer, especially after a late spring. Five year old bulls are skeletal mature and dominate breeding due to the larger fat reserves than younger growing bulls. The large bulls will be especially run down post rut after a hot summer. A good rule of thumb is; if caribou aggregate in summer to facilitate a survey they are in hardship at that time.

Cows are in lactation through the fall right before the rut. It is not best management to harvest cows in summer or fall when in lactation. The cow caribou are real skinny and meat is not of the same quality as in Early October and early winter.

If limited cow harvest can eventually be supported it should only be from early October to February. Bulls can be harvested most of the year except for during the rut, and just after the rut.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

I would like to address the caribou decline of all four Arctic caribou herds Western Arctic, Central, and Porcupine. Although Teshukpuk herd is stable but not significant in 24A.

GMU 24A remainder caribou can have all four herds present in winter, spring and fall. Western has been west out of this unit recently. Severe weather weakening of these populations, combined with cow harvest and predation.

Currently the Porcupine herd has declined 33% since 2017. Central Arctic herd has declined 61%, These two herds can not support cow harvest and large bag limits with road access.

There are bulls to harvest with a longer season to offset the necessary elimination of cow harvest.

Sustained yield conservation is paramount, as they are an important food resource for Alaskans subsistence use.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?

PROPOSED BY: Jack Reakoff (OI-F26-106)
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<u>Proposal 174</u>

5 AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

Change the bag limit for caribou to 5 bulls within the Dalton Highway cooridor managment area of GMU 25A as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

<u>WITHIN THE DALTON HIGHWAY CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT AREA GMU 25A RESIDENT BAG LIMIT 5 BULL CARIBOU PER REGULATORY YEAR JULY 1 -OCT 1 - NOV 1-JUNE 30</u>

[RESIDENTS TEN CARIBOU JULY 1-APRIL 30]

The proposal focuses on best use of the limited bull caribou, eliminating cow harvest entirely. The season is set for Bull caribou when they are best to eat. Bulls start into the rut in early October, they become unusable for food while breeding. It is best reproductive management to not disrupt the breeding cows and bulls during the rut.

Bulls are very run down after the intense short breeding activity. The poor flavor is cleared out by November, they have used all fat as well as muscle protein they can be eaten in early November but not prime, but are typically regained most muscle by February 1.

Cows have increasing gestational demands in February. If winter conditions are severe cows will draw significant protein from muscle to support the fetus. Breakup timing is of critical importance for all caribou. When the temperatures warm up to above freezing normally in late April, the Cotton Grass Sedge Tussock shoots up the flower blossom high in protein. The shape of the

tussock and open habitat allow it to be the first large protein source for caribou muscle loss and final fetal development. Deep snow and late spring timings are very detrimental to caribou if they don't have access to this resource.

Arctic Caribou will seek and eat predominantly Tussock flowers as they move towards calving and summer range. Like all grasses the tussock flower is pollinated by the wind. In early summer after the Tussock is pollinated they are switching to wildflowers. Woolly Lousewort, Dryas, Fireweed, and other flowers are important protein/ nectar for lactating cow caribou and Bulls growing and accumulating fat.

Early hot weather is extremely bad for caribou. The Tussock will pollinate too quickly, pollinating insects will be very active in the long days to pollinate the wildflowers in a short period of time. Mosquitoes and parasitic fly harassment exacerbates the ability to gain fat and produce quality lactation. Cows will be thin in falls after a long hot summer, and calf weights will be below normal. These calve can become a weak cohort with these cows delayed reproduction until 4 years old.

Lichen is always eaten throughout the year by caribou to maintain the microbiome in their digestive system. Lichen intake is vastly reduced during spring and summer normally. Lichen intake will increase in summer if high protein feed is lost.

Bulls will not have as thick of fat in fall after a hot summer, especially after a late spring. Five year old bulls are skeletal mature and dominate breeding due to the larger fat reserves than younger growing bulls. The large bulls will be especially run down post rut after a hot summer. A good rule of thumb is; if caribou aggregate in summer to facilitate a survey they are in hardship at that time.

Cows are in lactation through the fall right before the rut. It is not best management to harvest cows in summer or fall when in lactation. The cow caribou are real skinny and meat is not of the same quality as in Early October and early winter.

If limited cow harvest can eventually be supported it should only be from early October to February. Bulls can be harvested most of the year except for during the rut, and just after the rut.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

GMU 25A caribou can have all four herds present in winter, spring and fall. Western has been west out of this unit recently. Severe weather weakening of these populations, combined with cow harvest and predation.

Currently the Porcupine herd has declined 33% since 2017. Central Arctic herd has declined 61% since 2010, 23% since 2022 to 2026. , These two herds can not support cow harvest and large bag limits with road access.

There are bulls to harvest with a longer season to offset the necessary elimination of cow harvest.

Sustained yield conservation is paramount, as they are an important food resource for Alaskans subsistence use.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?

I have discussed these issues with the Koyukuk River AC members as I am chairman,

Western Interior Regional Advisory Council and other Regions. I discuss caribou management with ADFG managers about what strategies to use to address the current situation with all the Northern Caribou herds. I discuss these issues with Federal management NPS, USFWS, and BLM as well as the Federal Subsistence Board. I talk about these caribou issues with people that travel up the Dalton Highway to hunt the Arctic caribou.

PROPOSED BY: Jack Reakoff (OI-F26-146)
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<u>Proposal 175</u>

5 AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

Central Arctic Caribou Herd Reduce nonresident bag limit to one bull with a season Aug 1 – Sept 15. Eliminate the opportunity for residents to take cows as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

Reduce nonresident bag limit to one bull with a season Aug 1 – Sept 15. With the herd in decline and increasing nonresident participation, nonresidents should be limited to 1 bull only.

Eliminate the opportunity for residents to take cows. With the herd in decline, we should not allow any cow harvests until the population increases. Even a limited cow harvest can affect growth of the herd.

26B Remainder Caribou
Resident season July 1 – April 30
Bag Limit: 5 Bulls

Nonresident season Aug 1 – Sept 15
Bag Limit: 1 Bull

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

Decline in Central Arctic Caribou Herd
Increasing Nonresident Participation
Crowding Issues Along Rivers

The 2025 photocensus estimate of Central Arctic Herd (CAH) caribou showed a population of 26,600 animals, a decline of 8,000 caribou from the previous estimate in 2022. The current

population estimate is below the Intensive Management (IM) population objective of 28,000 – 32,000 animals.

The chart below from ADFG shows a significant increase in the number of nonresident hunters hunting the Central Arctic caribou herd in Unit 26B.

	Number of hunters	
Year	Nonresidents	Residents
2010	373	1424
2011	278	1361
2012	310	1244
2013	461	1087
2014	465	1029
2015	472	842
2016	351	794
2017	266	358
2018	198	310
2019	256	329
2020	209	501
2021	457	479
2022	570	580
2023	753	799
2024	1034	1127
2025	1001	

Along with increasing nonresident hunters, there has been an increase in the number of transporters catering to nonresident hunters, with airboat transporters flooding the Ivishak and other rivers with hunters, resulting in crowding and conflicts and numerous complaints.

Residents have a much longer season (July 1 – April 30) than nonresidents and are currently allowed to take five caribou, one of which may be a cow. In 2024 (data not available for 2025 yet) 228 cows were taken from the declining CAH by residents.

Nonresidents have an Aug 1 – Sept 15 season and a 2-bull bag limit. As the chart below shows, nonresidents harvested 50% of the CAH in 2024

residency	Number of caribou taken/hunter during 2024						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	total caribou
Nonresident hunters	497	501	36				
caribou taken by nonresidents		501	72				573
resident hunters	716	290	92	22	2	5	
caribou taken by residents		290	184	66	8	25	573

The CAH is important for feeding Alaskans and is below the IM population objective. There should be no cow harvests allowed until the herd increases. The nonresident bag limit should be reduced.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?

Thanks to Department staff for the charts and data!

PROPOSED BY: Resident Hunters of Alaska (OI-F26-091)
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<u>Proposal 176</u>

5 AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

Shorten the nonresident caribou season in GMU 26B to Aug 1-30th as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

I recommend shortened the Non resident season to Aug 1-30th. This would shorten the season, take and over-access issue.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

There are two issues with 26B. One is the declining herd numbers between the porcupine herd and Central arctic herd. The second is an access issue with Nonresidents coming up in non-regulated amounts. This puts additional strain on the caribou herd and pushes the herd away from access from residents.

ADFG photocensus:

(Fairbanks) A photocensus of the Porcupine caribou herd (PCH) was completed on July 4, 2025, and resulted in a population estimate of 143,000 caribou. The following day, a photocensus of the Central Arctic caribou herd (CAH) was completed and resulted in a population estimate of 26,600 caribou.

Both herds have declined since their previous photocensus estimates and the declines were expected based on annual monitoring of adult survival, parturition (pregnancy) rates, and calf survival.

Porcupine caribou herd summary The 2025 PCH photocensus estimate of 143,000 caribou is lower than the previous photocensus in 2017. The 2017 photocensus estimate was 218,000 caribou, which was the most caribou ever estimated in this herd since monitoring began in the 1970s. This herd has experienced periods of growth and decline since photocensus efforts began. In 1979, the herd was around 106,000 caribou, grew to 178,000 in 1989, declined to 123,000 in 2001, and then increased to 218,000 in 2017. This current period of decline is steeper than was observed during the decline in the 1990s. A reduction in adult survival, calf survival, and other population metrics

since 2017 supports the photocensus results that the herd is in a decline. Future photocensus population estimates and monitoring of the herd will continue to document the nature and duration of this decline. Central Arctic herd summary The 2025 CAH photocensus estimate of 26,600 is lower than the previous photocensus in 2022 which estimated 34,600 caribou. Previously, the CAH experienced a population peak in 2010 at 68,400 caribou and then declined to 22,600 in 2016. Similar to the PCH, reduced adult survival, calf survival, and parturition rates support the photocensus results indicating that the CAH is no longer growing and has declined since 2022.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?

I developed this on my own based on field observations and ADFG reporting.

PROPOSED BY: Brian Watkins (OI-F26-005)
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<u>Proposal 177</u>

5 AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

Modify the nonresident caribou hunting in GMU 26B to a draw tag system as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

N- 26B- Draw Tag- Aug 1- Sept 15

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

There are two issues with 26B. One is the declining herd numbers between the porcupine herd and Central arctic herd. (adfg photocensus information below) The second is an access issue with Nonresidents coming up in non-regulated amounts. This puts additional strain on the caribou herd and pushes the herd away from the DHCMA road access. This would also allow increased revenue for the department with draw hunt applications.

ADFG photocensus:

(Fairbanks) A photocensus of the Porcupine caribou herd (PCH) was completed on July 4, 2025, and resulted in a population estimate of 143,000 caribou. The following day, a photocensus of the Central Arctic caribou herd (CAH) was completed and resulted in a population estimate of 26,600 caribou.

Both herds have declined since their previous photocensus estimates and the declines were expected based on annual monitoring of adult survival, parturition (pregnancy) rates, and calf survival.

Porcupine caribou herd summary The 2025 PCH photocensus estimate of 143,000 caribou is lower than the previous photocensus in 2017. The 2017 photocensus estimate was 218,000 caribou, which was the most caribou ever estimated in this herd since monitoring began in the 1970s. This

herd has experienced periods of growth and decline since photocensus efforts began. In 1979, the herd was around 106,000 caribou, grew to 178,000 in 1989, declined to 123,000 in 2001, and then increased to 218,000 in 2017. This current period of decline is steeper than was observed during the decline in the 1990s. A reduction in adult survival, calf survival, and other population metrics since 2017 supports the photocensus results that the herd is in a decline. Future photocensus population estimates and monitoring of the herd will continue to document the nature and duration of this decline. Central Arctic herd summary The 2025 CAH photocensus estimate of 26,600 is lower than the previous photocensus in 2022 which estimated 34,600 caribou. Previously, the CAH experienced a population peak in 2010 at 68,400 caribou and then declined to 22,600 in 2016. Similar to the PCH, reduced adult survival, calf survival, and parturition rates support the photocensus results indicating that the CAH is no longer growing and has declined since 2022.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?

I developed this on my own based on field observations and ADFG reporting.

PROPOSED BY: Brian Watkins (OI-F26-006)
****

<u>Proposal 178</u>

5 AAC 85.025. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou.

Modify the nonresident caribou hunting in GMU 26B to a draw tag system with three separate hunts as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

N- 26B- Draw Tag- Split into 3 Separate tags Aug 1- Aug 15 maximum 20

Aug 16- Aug 31 Maximum 20

Sept 1- Sept 15 Maximum 20

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

There are two issues with 26B. One is the declining herd numbers between the porcupine herd and Central arctic herd. (adfg photocensus information below) The second is an access issue with Nonresidents coming up in non-regulated amounts. This puts additional strain on the caribou herd and pushes the herd away from the DHCMA road access. This would also allow increased revenue for the department with draw hunt applications.

ADFG photocensus:

(Fairbanks) A photocensus of the Porcupine caribou herd (PCH) was completed on July 4, 2025, and resulted in a population estimate of 143,000 caribou. The following day, a photocensus of the

Central Arctic caribou herd (CAH) was completed and resulted in a population estimate of 26,600 caribou.

Both herds have declined since their previous photocensus estimates and the declines were expected based on annual monitoring of adult survival, parturition (pregnancy) rates, and calf survival.

Porcupine caribou herd summary The 2025 PCH photocensus estimate of 143,000 caribou is lower than the previous photocensus in 2017. The 2017 photocensus estimate was 218,000 caribou, which was the most caribou ever estimated in this herd since monitoring began in the 1970s. This herd has experienced periods of growth and decline since photocensus efforts began. In 1979, the herd was around 106,000 caribou, grew to 178,000 in 1989, declined to 123,000 in 2001, and then increased to 218,000 in 2017. This current period of decline is steeper than was observed during the decline in the 1990s. A reduction in adult survival, calf survival, and other population metrics since 2017 supports the photocensus results that the herd is in a decline. Future photocensus population estimates and monitoring of the herd will continue to document the nature and duration of this decline. Central Arctic herd summary The 2025 CAH photocensus estimate of 26,600 is lower than the previous photocensus in 2022 which estimated 34,600 caribou. Previously, the CAH experienced a population peak in 2010 at 68,400 caribou and then declined to 22,600 in 2016. Similar to the PCH, reduced adult survival, calf survival, and parturition rates support the photocensus results indicating that the CAH is no longer growing and has declined since 2022.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?

I developed this on my own based on field observations and ADFG reporting.

PROPOSED BY: Brian Watkins (OI-F26-015)
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<u>Proposal 179</u>

5 AAC 85.025; 92.069. Hunting seasons and bag limits for caribou; Special provisions for moose and caribou drawing permit hunts.

Require nonresident caribou hunters that are not accompanied by a guide or a resident second degree of kindred to participate in a limited draw permit system as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

GMU 26B Nonresident Caribou Draw Permit System

Proposed Regulatory Action

Place nonresident caribou hunters NOT using a registered guide, and NOT accompanied by resident second-degree of kindred ON A DRAW TAG ALLOCATION IN GMU 26B

Overview of the Proposal

<u>This proposal would place nonresident caribou hunters NOT using a registered guide, and NOT accompanied by resident second-degree of kindred in Game Management Unit 26B on a limited draw permit system.</u>

Nonresident caribou hunters using a registered guide, or accompanied by resident second-degree of kindred in GMU 26B would still be on a harvest ticket permit structure.

Under this structure:

- **Up to 250 permits for non resident caribou hunters NOT using a registered guide, and NOT accompanied by resident second-degree of kindred would be available annually**
- **Season dates: August 1 – September 15**
- **Bag limit: One bull caribou per permit holder**

This framework establishes a reasonable cap on total nonresident participation while still maintaining opportunity for nonresident hunters.

Proposal Justification

Increasing Nonresident Hunting Pressure

Harvest data used in this proposal was obtained from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) and compares resident and nonresident hunting statistics within Unit 26B. ADFG staff were able to provide nonresident harvest and participation data for the full fifteen-year period from 2010–2025. However, resident harvest data for 2025 was not yet finalized at the time this proposal was written because the spring season was still ongoing. According to ADFG staff, preliminary 2025 resident data is tracking similarly to 2024 levels. Therefore, statistical comparisons in this proposal use nonresident data from 2010–2025 and resident data from 2010–2024.

Based on preliminary data from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, nonresident hunting pressure in Unit 26B has steadily increased in recent years. Since 2021, nonresident hunters have accounted for nearly 50 percent of the total hunting pressure in the unit.

Nonresident Share of Total Hunting Pressure – GMU 26B

Year	Percent of Total Hunting Pressure (Nonresident)
2010	20.75%
2011	16.96%
2012	19.94%
2013	29.78%
2014	31.12%
2015	35.92%
2016	30.65%
2017	42.62%
2018	38.97%
2019	43.76%
2020	29.40%
2021	48.82%
2022	49.56%
2023	48.52%
2024	47.80%

This increase has resulted in:

- Noticeable overcrowding
- Increased competition between resident and nonresident hunters
- Concentration of hunting pressure along road and river corridors
- Decreased Alaska resident hunter satisfaction

As a result, many Alaska residents are experiencing diminished hunt quality and increased difficulty harvesting caribou for their families.

If average resident hunter participation remains around 1,000 hunters* (a level reached in only 6 of the 14 years from 2010–2024, Meaning the percentage of nonresident hunting pressure will likely be higher than listed), the proposed permit allocation would effectively

cap unguided nonresident hunters at approximately 20% of total hunting pressure each year in Unit 26B.

Importance of Accessible Caribou Hunting for Alaska Residents

Across Alaska, ungulate populations accessible from the road system or reachable by reasonable boat travel in many regions of the state have declined and are struggling. As a result, the remaining accessible hunting opportunities are becoming increasingly important for resident hunters who rely on wild game to feed their families.

Unit 26B and the Central Arctic Caribou Herd (CACH) represent one of the few remaining opportunities for Alaska residents to harvest caribou without drawing a limited permit or paying extremely expensive transporter fly-in costs to access remote areas. Because of this, Unit 26B is becoming an increasingly important food security resource for Alaska residents. Due to unlimited nonresident opportunity and growing demand, many transporters now only offer flat-rate drop hunts at premium prices rather than traditional hourly billing for flight time — a cost structure that the vast majority of Alaska residents cannot reasonably afford.

Effects of Unlimited Nonresident Opportunity

Currently, several factors are contributing to increasing pressure in Unit 26B:

- Unlimited nonresident hunting opportunity
- A liberal nonresident bag limit
- Increasing numbers of transporters, hunt planners, and other businesses catering to DIY nonresident hunters

These factors have led to a substantial rise in nonresident participation, particularly in areas that are road-accessible or boat-accessible. In these areas, hunters are often concentrated into relatively small portions of the unit.

When nonresident opportunity remains unlimited, it can also create a feedback cycle in which increased numbers of nonresident hunters attract additional transporters and commercial services, which in turn make the hunt even more accessible to additional nonresident hunters. As services expand and participation grows, hunting pressure can continue to increase year after year.

Over time, this dynamic has accelerated hunting pressure and intensified crowding in the most accessible portions of the unit. Without reasonable limits on participation, these trends will likely continue to worsen.

Hunter Density and Declining Hunt Quality

While the Central Arctic Caribou Herd may still support harvest biologically, excessive hunter density can significantly reduce hunt quality, hunter satisfaction, and opportunity for resident hunters.

High hunter density can result in:

- Reduced ability for hunters to locate animals
- Increased competition and crowding among hunters in accessible areas
- Greater likelihood of user conflicts

When participation levels become so high that crowding and competition prevent many residents from having a quality hunt, it becomes appropriate to evaluate and implement management tools that help restore balance.

Herd Status and Proactive Management

Recent population surveys indicate that the Central Arctic Caribou Herd is currently estimated at approximately 26,700 animals, a decline from the previous estimate of approximately 34,600 animals in 2022.

Taking proactive steps to manage participation levels before more serious conservation concerns arise is a responsible and precautionary approach to wildlife management. Establishing reasonable limits on nonresident participation would demonstrate that the Board of Game is willing to act proactively in the interest of long-term herd sustainability, while also recognizing the importance of maintaining hunt quality and hunter satisfaction for Alaska residents who rely on these opportunities to harvest wild food for their families.

Precedent for This Management Approach

A similar management structure already exists in Game Management Units 1, 2, and 3 for black bear hunting. In those units, Alaska experienced a substantial increase in DIY nonresident hunters and transporter services, creating rapidly increasing hunting pressure.

In that situation, land managers and regulatory agencies could not effectively regulate the expanding transporter sector, which allowed participation to increase quickly as additional services began catering to DIY nonresident hunters. Guided hunting activity, however, was already regulated through land manager permitting systems, and hunting by Alaska residents and nonresidents accompanied by a resident second-degree of kindred was not identified as a source of the increasing pressure concerns.

As a result, the Board of Game implemented a draw permit system specifically for nonresident hunters NOT using a registered guide and NOT accompanied by a resident

second-degree of kindred. This regulatory structure allowed managers to place reasonable limits on the segment of hunters responsible for the rapid increase in participation while still maintaining opportunity for guided hunters and traditional resident-family hunting arrangements.

The same underlying conditions now exist in Unit 26B, where rapidly increasing participation by DIY nonresident hunters—often facilitated by transporters and hunt-planning services—is contributing to rising hunting pressure, user conflicts, and decreased hunter satisfaction. Implementing a similar regulatory structure in Unit 26B would follow an established management approach that has already been adopted by the Board of Game in other regions of Alaska when faced with comparable circumstances.

Benefits of a Limited Draw System

Placing DIY nonresident hunting opportunity on a limited draw permit system with a one-bull bag limit represents a reasonable and balanced management action.

This approach would:

- Maintain nonresident hunting opportunity
- Establish a clear cap on nonresident participation
- Reduce crowding in heavily used areas
- Minimize user conflicts between hunters
- Improve overall hunt quality and hunter satisfaction for Alaska residents

Second degree of kindred and Guided Hunting Justification

Maintaining nonresident caribou hunters using a registered guide or accompanied by a resident second-degree of kindred on a harvest ticket system would ensure that these hunters continue to have reasonable opportunity to hunt while the primary source of increasing participation—unguided nonresident hunters—would be managed through a draw permit structure.

Preliminary data from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game indicates that, on average, fewer than 30 guided nonresident caribou hunters participate in Unit 26B annually, representing a very small and consistent portion of overall hunting participation within the unit.

Three federal guide concessions on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in GMU 26B — ARC 10, ARC 9, and ARC 6 — operate within the area affected by this proposal, and portions of Gates of the Arctic National Preserve may also support guided hunting activity. These federally authorized guiding operations represent a relatively small and defined portion of overall hunting activity in the unit and are not the primary drivers of the increasing

nonresident pressure and crowding concerns addressed by this proposal. Hunting guides operating on these federal lands already have limits on the numbers of hunters they can take each year put in place the federal land manager.

Because guided hunters and nonresidents hunting with resident family members typically represent a smaller and more controlled segment of overall hunting participation, maintaining harvest ticket opportunity for these hunters would allow these traditional hunting arrangements to continue while the draw permit system focuses on moderating the rapidly increasing participation of unguided nonresident hunters.

Additionally:

- Transporters and other businesses catering to DIY nonresident caribou hunters would still be able to offer their services to significant pool of nonresident draw permit holders
- These businesses would also still be able to provide and offer services to Alaska residents

Intent of the Proposal

The intent of this proposal is not to eliminate nonresident hunting opportunity. Rather, the goal is to:

- Implement a reasonable management structure
- Balance opportunity among user groups
- Reduce excessive crowding in accessible areas and improve hunter satisfaction
- Protect the ability of Alaska residents to harvest caribou for their families

By proactively managing DIY nonresident participation through a draw permit system, the Board of Game can help ensure that Unit 26B remains a sustainable and high-quality hunting opportunity for current and future generations of Alaskans while still allowing nonresident hunters to participate in a fair and regulated manner.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

Overcrowding, user conflict, and decreasing hunter satisfaction in Unit 26b for caribou hunting.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?

Yes this proposal was discussed with numerous other Alaska residents, hunting guides in 26B, and was supported by the Mat Su Valley AC.

PROPOSED BY: Grant Kopplin (OI-F26-026)
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Proposal 180

5 AAC 92.510. Areas closed to hunting.

Require archery hunters along the Dalton Highway in Unit 26B to be a minimum distance from the edge of the road; 5 miles for rifle hunters and 100 yards for archers during August and September as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

I propose that the board adopt regulations that archery hunters, like rifle hunters, are required to be a minimum distance from the edge of the road; 5 miles for rifle hunters and 100 yards for archers. The regulatory change for archery would only be in effect during the peak time for hunting from highway vehicles, August and September. This change would encourage hunters to use designated parking areas rather than parking wherever is most convenient to the Caribou they are following with their vehicles. This change would also make it illegal for archery hunters using highway vehicles from shooting from areas close to the road, like roadside ditches, which some view as a practice inconsistent with fair chase. My conversations with state troopers indicate that this would be a clear, enforceable change.

Possible new wording of regulation: Archery hunters in GMU 26B must be at least 100 yards from the edge of the Dalton Highway when actively shooting at any game species during August and September.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

I would like the board to address safety concerns associated with Caribou hunters using highway vehicles along the Dalton Highway in Unit 26B. Data from the ADF&G shows that between 2010 and 2024 the total number of hunters (residents and non-residents) using highway vehicles in this GMU has increased from 1033 to 1219. The increase is particularly notably during August and September when most hunt this area.

Personal observations after hunting GMU 26B since 1992 and conversation with individuals from the ADF&G, DOT, trucking companies, the Alaska State Troopers, and other hunters all indicated that incidents between vehicular traffic on the Dalton and hunters in highway vehicles, particularly archery hunters, are increasing. Without setbacks, like are in place for rifle hunters, archery hunters are more likely to park along the highway in unsafe ways to gain quick access to Caribou.

In addition to safety concerns, others expressed concerns about fair chase and the quality of the hunting experience when hunters are shadowing Caribou in their vehicle and then jumping out for a quick shot from a roadside ditch.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?

I talked with ADF&G biologists, DOT employees with oversight for the Dalton Highway, trucking companies using the Dalton Highway, and the Alaska State Troopers. I presented this proposal to

the Fairbanks AC on 18 March 2026 and I subsequently amended the proposal based on the feedback I received at that meeting.

PROPOSED BY: Mark Lindberg (OI-F26-041)
****

Proposal 181

5 AAC 92.510. Areas closed to hunting.

Create a quarter mile set back in GMU 26B along the Dalton Highway right of way Boundary during the non-resident archery hunting season as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

Within Game Management Unit 26B, no person may release an arrow at any game animal, or position themselves to release an arrow at any game animal, *within one-quarter (1/4) mile of the Dalton Highway right-of-way boundary during the Non Resident season.*

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

Bow hunting is currently permitted to the Dalton Highway right-of-way in Unit 26B. The corridor sees daily heavy commercial traffic, and federal Executive Order 14153 has opened 2.1 million acres along the Dalton to expanded energy development, with a projected increase in truck traffic. Tourist use is also increasing annually.

Current regulations place active bow hunting and high-volume industrial and tourist traffic in the same narrow corridor simultaneously. This creates a public safety conflict and elevated wounding, as shots from the road do not allow for proper field assessment. A 1/4-mile setback establishes a clear, enforceable buffer between active hunting and road traffic. It reduces wounding, improves safety for all corridor users, and is specific, measurable, and enforceable by existing personnel with no additional staffing or infrastructure required. Increased industrial traffic under current federal development policy will intensify this conflict if no action is taken.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?

I worked with F&G and spoke to other truckers on the haul road to determine a potential solution to the problem at hand.

PROPOSED BY: James Haveron (OI-F26-107)
****

<u>Proposal 182</u>

5 AAC 92.530. Management areas.

Establish a Central Arctic Management Area (CAMA) within Game Management Unit 26B as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

This proposal would create a new regulatory management area within Game Management Unit 26B called the Central Arctic Management Area (CAMA) and place nonresident caribou hunters NOT using a registered guide, and NOT accompanied by a resident second-degree of kindred, ON A DRAW TAG ALLOCATION within both the Central Arctic Management Area (CAMA) and the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area (DHCMA).

Under this proposal:

- Up to 100 total nonresident draw permits would be issued annually (DCXXX)
- Bag limit: 1 bull caribou
- Season: August 1 – September 15
- Hunt area: All lands encompassed by the DHCMA and the CAMA within 26B

This structure establishes a reasonable cap on nonresident participation in the most accessible portions of Unit 26B while maintaining nonresident opportunity. It is intended to reduce crowding, minimize user conflicts, and increase hunter satisfaction. Nonresident Caribou hunters would still be able to hunt caribou with a harvest ticket under state regulations in 26B remainder.

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO?

This proposal would establish the Central Arctic Management Area (CAMA) within Game Management Unit 26B. The CAMA is specifically designed to encompass the river systems accessible from the Dalton Highway that are heavily relied upon by Alaska residents. These river corridors represent the only practical opportunity for residents to travel beyond the road system without the use of an aircraft and are critical travel routes for those attempting to meet subsistence needs.

These drainages have been extensively utilized by residents for generations and function as the primary access network in this region. It is important that all river systems that are potentially accessible by boat or airboat are included within the CAMA to ensure that nonresident hunting pressure does not simply shift into adjacent, unregulated areas.

The upstream navigability points identified in this proposal were intentionally selected as reasonable high-water limits of motorized access. This approach ensures that the regulatory boundary remains effective under varying conditions and prevents the displacement of hunting pressure into areas that could otherwise still be reached by boat during favorable conditions.

Area Description

- The CAMA would consist of river corridors accessible by jet boat or airboat from the Sagavanirktok River and its tributaries
- The CAMA would begin where the listed drainages exit the DHCMA and extend to the defined navigability points
- Boundaries would extend 5 miles outward from each bank of included rivers and tributaries
- This creates a 10-mile-wide corridor along these drainages outside the DHCMA

Upstream Navigability Points (CAMA Boundary Definition)

River / Tributary	Upstream Navigability Point (Lat/Long)	Notes
Sagavanirktok River	68°29'52.93"N, 149° 0'31.03"W	Upstream navigability point
Ribdon River	68°38’25.01”N, 148°15’59.93”W	Upstream navigability point
Lupine River	68°47'33.87"N 148° 6'36.78"W	Upstream navigability point
Ivishak River	69° 0'41.30"N 147°20'25.09"W	Upstream navigability point
Saviukviayak River	68°50’39.74”N, 147°58’20.32”W	Upstream navigability point
Echooka River	69°7’20.51”N, 147°3’31.65”W	Upstream navigability point
Sagavanirktok River (Downstream)	70°14’31.69”N, 147°50’0.22”W	Northern extent to Arctic Ocean. This would encompass the area accessible by boat outside of the Deadhorse closed area.

*These points represent the reasonable upstream extent of motorized boat access and define the upstream and downstream boundaries of the CAMA corridors. *

Boundary Integration

- Where CAMA overlaps with the DHCMA or other CAMA corridors, the areas would:
  - Merge and function as a single management area for nonresident draw permits
  - Retain existing regulations specific to each area
- Key distinction:
  - DHCMA: Bow-only restriction remains
  - CAMA: Standard weapon regulations apply

Nonresident Hunter Access Options

Successful permit holders may:

- Hunt along the Dalton Highway within the DHCMA, or
- Access river corridors within the CAMA using:
  - Transporter services
  - Boat rentals
  - Personal watercraft

This maintains flexibility for nonresident hunters while ensuring participation remains limited and predictable.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSAL?

1. Addresses Increasing Nonresident Pressure

Preliminary Alaska Department of Fish and Game data shows nonresident hunting pressure in Unit 26B has steadily increased and has accounted for nearly 50% of total hunting pressure since 2021.

This increase is most evident in areas accessible by road and boat, where hunters are concentrated into relatively small portions of the unit.

Hunter Participation Trends by Access Type

Year	Nonresident (Boat/Airboat)	Nonresident (Highway Access)	Resident (Boat/Airboat)	Resident (Highway Access)
2021	131	202	66	353
2022	177	247	101	416
2023	266	331	180	529
2024	346	456	229	763
2025	295	448	N/A	N/A

Note: 2025 resident data was not available at the time of this proposal. ADF&G indicates participation is tracking within historical averages.

These trends clearly demonstrate the rapid increase in nonresident participation—particularly in the most accessible areas. Prior to 2021, available data consistently showed significantly more resident hunters than nonresident hunters utilizing boats and airboats for access. In recent years, this trend has shifted, reflecting a sharp increase in do-it-yourself (DIY) nonresident hunters, many of whom rely on transporter services. Highway-access participation by nonresidents has also increased substantially and is now approaching resident participation levels, which historically did not occur. As a result, many Alaska residents are beginning to abandon these areas and the associated subsistence opportunities due to increasing crowding and pressure from nonresident hunters.

Protects Resident Access to Critical Hunting Areas

The Dalton Highway and Sagavanirktok River system represent some of the most accessible caribou hunting opportunities in northern Alaska.

These areas are heavily relied upon by Alaska residents who:

- Do not have the ability to fly into remote areas
- Depend on these accessible corridors for food security

Unit 26B remains one of the few areas where residents can harvest caribou without:

- Drawing a permit
- Paying significant costs for fly-in access

Addresses the Importance of Accessible Caribou Hunting for Alaska Residents

Across Alaska, ungulate populations accessible from the road system or reachable by reasonable boat travel have declined and are struggling. As a result, the remaining accessible hunting opportunities are becoming increasingly important for resident hunters who rely on wild game to feed their families.

Unit 26B and the Central Arctic Caribou Herd (CACH) represent one of the few remaining opportunities for Alaska residents to harvest caribou without drawing a limited permit or paying extremely expensive transporter fly-in costs to access remote areas. Due to unlimited nonresident opportunity and growing demand, many air transporters now offer flat-rate drop hunts at premium prices rather than traditional hourly billing for flight time—a cost structure that the vast majority of Alaska residents cannot reasonably afford.

Because of this, Unit 26B is becoming an increasingly important food security resource for Alaska residents, particularly those who depend on accessible, lower-cost hunting opportunities to provide meat for their families.

Addresses the Effects of Unlimited Nonresident Opportunity and Hunter Density

Several factors are contributing to increasing pressure in Unit 26B:

- Unlimited nonresident hunting opportunity
- A liberal nonresident bag limit
- Increasing numbers of transporters, hunt planners, and other businesses catering to DIY nonresident hunters

These conditions have led to a substantial rise in nonresident participation, particularly in road- and boat-accessible areas where hunters are concentrated into relatively small portions of the unit.

When nonresident opportunity remains unlimited, it creates a feedback cycle in which increasing numbers of hunters attract additional transporters and commercial services, which in turn make these hunts even more accessible to additional nonresident hunters. As services expand and participation grows, hunting pressure can continue to increase year after year.

Over time, this dynamic accelerates hunting pressure and intensifies crowding in the most accessible portions of the unit. Without reasonable limits on participation, these trends will likely continue to worsen.

While the Central Arctic Caribou Herd may still support harvest biologically, excessive hunter density can significantly reduce hunt quality, hunter satisfaction, and opportunity for resident hunters.

High hunter density can result in:

- Reduced ability for hunters to locate animals
- Increased competition and crowding among hunters in accessible areas
- Greater likelihood of user conflicts

When participation levels become high enough that crowding and competition prevent many residents from having a quality hunt, it becomes appropriate to implement management tools that restore balance. This proposal directly addresses these issues by placing reasonable limits on the segment of hunters driving the majority of increased pressure.

Applies Proven Wildlife Management Principles

Across North America, wildlife managers recognize that hunter density—not just population levels—affects hunt quality and opportunity.

In highly accessible areas, limited entry systems are commonly used to:

- Maintain reasonable hunter density
- Preserve hunt quality

- Ensure fair distribution of opportunity

Applying this approach in Unit 26B aligns with widely accepted management practices.

Provides Proactive, Responsible Management

Recent surveys indicate the Central Arctic Caribou Herd has declined since its 2022 estimate of approximately 34,600 animals.

While the herd may still support additional bull caribou harvest, these trends support taking measured, proactive management steps. This proposal is not a reactionary restriction, but a forward-looking framework that helps ensure long-term sustainability and improve several issues such as overcrowding, declining hunter satisfaction, and declining hunt quality.

Establishes a Clear and Flexible Management Framework

Creating the CAMA provides:

- A clearly defined regulatory management area
- A framework for future adjustments if needed
- Improved ability for ADF&G and the Board of Game to manage pressure in accessible areas

While initially complex, this structure simplifies long-term management. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game GIS section would be responsible for developing the official regulatory boundaries for the CAMA. ADF&G GIS staff were contacted and provided an overview of the proposed area, and they indicated that mapping and implementing these boundaries is feasible and well within their capabilities.

Manages the Entire Accessible Landscape as One System

The Dalton Highway corridor and Sagavanirktok River system function as a single accessible hunting landscape.

Managing only one of these areas would likely shift pressure to the other, increasing crowding elsewhere.

This proposal manages both together to:

- Prevent displacement of pressure
- Maintain balance across the system

Maintains Opportunity While Establishing a Cap

This proposal does not eliminate nonresident hunting opportunity.

Instead, it:

- Maintains meaningful access for nonresidents
- Establishes a predictable cap on participation
- Balances nonresident hunting pressure in areas heavily utilized by residents

Maintains Appropriate Opportunity for Guided and Family-Based Hunting

This proposal intentionally allows nonresident caribou hunters who are using a registered guide, as well as nonresident hunters accompanied by a resident second-degree of kindred, to continue hunting within the CAMA and DHCMA with a harvest ticket.

Much of the land encompassed by the proposed CAMA falls within federal ANWR guide use areas ARC 09 and ARC 10, where guiding activity is already subject to strict federal oversight and limitations on the number of clients that can be taken annually. As a result, guided hunting activity in these areas is limited, regulated, and predictable, and is not a primary driver of increased hunting pressure or user conflicts.

Maintaining this opportunity ensures that existing guide operations can continue to operate within their authorized areas and continue to provide services to an already limited number of clients without disruption. This is consistent with current land management frameworks and avoids unintended impacts to federally regulated guiding systems.

Similarly, nonresident hunters accompanied by a resident second-degree of kindred represent a very small and consistent portion of overall hunting pressure. These hunts are family-based, occur at a limited scale, and are not contributing to the increasing crowding and competition observed in accessible areas.

The primary source of increased pressure and conflict in Unit 26B is the rapid growth in do-it-yourself (DIY) nonresident hunting, particularly in areas accessible by road and boat. By focusing the draw permit structure specifically on this segment of hunters, the proposal directly addresses the root cause of user conflicts while avoiding unnecessary restrictions on guided and family-based hunting.

A similar management structure already exists in Southeast Alaska for black bear hunting in Game Management Units 1, 2, and 3. In those units, Alaska experienced a substantial increase in DIY nonresident hunters and transporter services, resulting in rapidly increasing hunting pressure. Land managers and regulatory agencies could not effectively regulate the expanding transporter sector, while guided hunting activity was already controlled through land manager

permitting systems and resident and second-degree-of-kindred hunting was not identified as a driver of the problem.

In response, the Board of Game implemented a draw permit system specifically for nonresident hunters NOT using a registered guide and NOT accompanied by a resident second-degree of kindred. This approach allowed managers to place reasonable limits on the segment of hunters responsible for the rapid increase in participation while maintaining opportunity for guided hunters and traditional resident-family hunting arrangements. The same underlying conditions now exist in Unit 26B, and applying this proven structure follows an established and effective management approach already adopted by the Board of Game.

Outside of the ANWR guide use areas, there is currently little to none known guided hunting occurring on the state land within the DHCMA and proposed CAMA. While these lands are state-managed and guiding could potentially expand in the future, any such increase would be identifiable and addressable. By establishing the CAMA and associated regulatory framework now, the Board of Game would have a clear and effective mechanism already in place to implement additional management tools if guided pressure on state land within the DHCMA and CAMA were to emerge as a concern. This ensures that future issues could be addressed in a targeted and efficient manner without requiring a complete restructuring of regulations.

CONCLUSION

This proposal represents a balanced and practical approach to managing one of Alaska's most important and accessible caribou hunting areas.

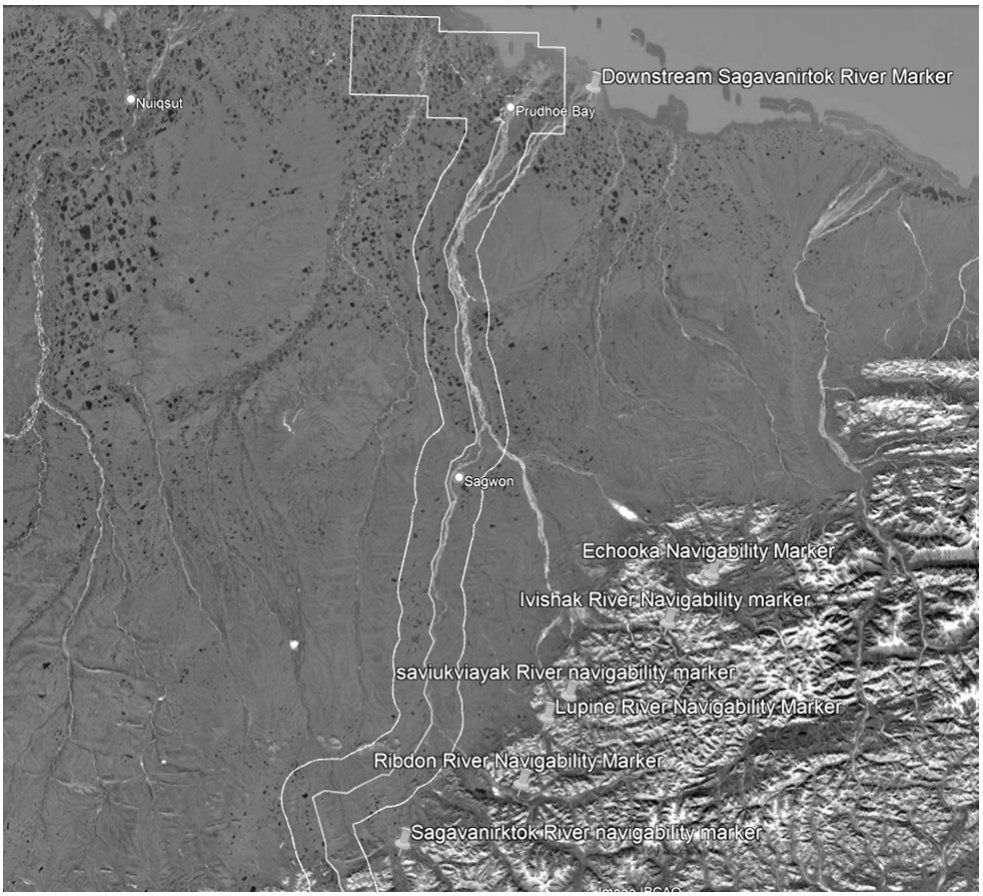
By creating the CAMA and placing nonresident hunting opportunity within the CAMA and DHCMA on a limited draw permit system, the Board of Game can:

- Reduce crowding and user conflicts
- Protect resident hunting opportunity
- Increase hunter satisfaction
- Ensure long-term usability of these areas

At the same time, nonresident hunters would continue to have fair and regulated access.

This approach ensures that Unit 26B remains a viable and accessible hunting opportunity for current and future generations of Alaskans.

PICTURE SHOWING DRAINAGES AND NAVIGABILITY POINTS



** A color version of this map is available online at https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=gameboard.proposalbook*

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

Overcrowding, user conflict, and decreasing hunter satisfaction in Unit 26b for caribou hunting

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?

Yes this proposal was discussed with numerous other Alaska residents, hunting guides in 26B, and was supported unanimously by the Mat Su Valley AC.

PROPOSED BY: Grant Kopplin (OI-F26-025)
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<u>Proposal 183</u>

5 AAC 85.045 (a)(24). Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose.

Change the resident spring moose season from "to be announced" to April 1–April 14 in Unit 26B excluding the Canning River drainage as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

Units and Bag Limits	Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)	Nonresident Open Season
(24)		
…		
Unit 26(B), excluding the Canning River drainage		
RESIDENT HUNTERS:		
1 bull by drawing permit only; up to 30 permits may be issued	Sept. 1 – Sept. 14	
1 bull; [DURING THE PERIOD FEB. 15–APRIL 15, UP TO A 14 DAY SEASON MAY BE ANNOUNCED BY EMERGENCY ORDER]	**Apr. 1 – Apr. 14** [(TO BE ANNOUNCED)]	
…		

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

The moose population has fluctuated between 100 and 600 moose in Unit 26B since the department began implementing regular surveys in 2003. This population has been growing, with the most recent population count at 390 moose in April 2024. When the population surpassed the management objective of 200 moose, harvest was reinstated in regulatory year2022. Harvest during the spring hunt is rare but can be important for subsistence users. Formalizing this hunt period in regulation alleviates the need to issue an emergency order each year and allows the hunt dates to be printed in the regulation book. If the population drops below 200 moose, an emergency order would be issued to close the spring hunt and, if necessary, the fall drawing permit hunt would not be held.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F26-027)

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Proposal 184

5 AAC 85.045. Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose.

Require antler destruction upon taking of moose in tier II area as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

25D (Tier II area) Moose Hunt: Antler destruction upon taking animal, trophy value must be destroyed by sawing top half of one side of antler.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

Low Moose Population. This proposal supports subsistence hunting, which is crucial for local food security. Moose hunting holds cultural importance for many communities and maintains traditional practices is vital for the cultural heritage.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?

I discussed proposal with some local hunters. They were all in agreement this a good proposal. I also tried working with local AC, but couldn't get a quorum together.

PROPOSED BY: Walter Peter (OI-F26-130)
****

Proposal 185

5 AAC 85.045. Hunting seasons and bag limits for moose.

Require antler destruction upon taking of moose in 25D remainder as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

25D Remainder Moose hunt: Antler Destruction, upon taking animal. Trophy value must be destroyed by sawing top half of one side antler.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

Low Moose Pop. This proposal supports subsistence hunting, which is crucial for local food security. Moose hunting holds cultural Importance for many communities and maintaining Traditional Practices is vital for our Cultural Heritage.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee?

Discussed with local hunters in my community. All were in Agreement this is a good proposal. I tried working with local A.C. but couldn't get a quorum together.

PROPOSED BY: Walter Peter (OI-F26-134)
****

<u>Proposal 186</u>

5 AAC 85.020 (a)(24). Hunting seasons and bag limits for brown bear.

Eliminate the drawing permit for nonresident hunters in Unit26B for brown bears as follows:

What solution do you recommend? In other words, if the board adopted your solution, what would the new regulation say?

Eliminate the drawing permit for nonresident hunters in Unit26B for brown bears.

Units and Bag Limits	**Resident Open Season (Subsistence and General Hunts)**	**Nonresident Open Season**
(24)		
…		
Unit 26(B), that portion within the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area		
[RESIDENT HUNTERS:] 1 bear every regulatory year by bow and arrow only;	Aug. 10–June 15	**<u>Aug. 10–June 15</u>**
[NONRESIDENT HUNTERS: 1 BEAR EVERY REGULATORY YEAR BY DRAWING PERMIT ONLY; BY BOW AND ARROW ONLY; UP TO 20 PERMITS MAY BE ISSUED IN COMBINATION WITH THE REMAINDER OF 26(B)]		[AUG. 10–JUNE 15]
Remainder of Unit 26(B)		
[RESIDENT HUNTERS:] 1 bear every regulatory year	Aug. 10–June 15	**<u>Aug. 10–June 15</u>**
[NONRESIDENT HUNTERS: 1 BEAR EVERY REGULATORY YEAR BY DRAWING PERMIT		[AUG. 10–JUNE 15]

ONLY; BY BOW AND ARROW
ONLY; UP TO 20 PERMITS
MAY BE ISSUED IN COMBINATION
WITH THAT PORTION OF UNIT 26(B)
WITHIN THE DALTON HIGHWAY
CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT AREA]

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?

The management objectives for brown bears in Unit 26B includes managing for a 3-year mean annual human-caused brown bear mortality of ≤27 bears ≥2-years old of which no more than 12 are female.

Hunting pressure for brown bears in Unit 26B remains low. The 5-year (regulatory year (RY) 24-RY20) mean annual harvest from all hunts was 16 bears per year (range =12-23), of which an average of 4 per year were female (range= 2-8). For the past 5 years (RY24-RY20), an average of 7 nonresident hunters (range = 4-10) participated in the drawing harvest (DB987) with an average harvest of 4 bears per year. By removing the requirement for nonresidents to have a drawing permit, more nonresident hunter participation will be allowed to utilize the harvestable surplus.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F26-033)
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