

PROPOSAL 80

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

In Unit 26B Remainder, modify the resident season and bag limit for caribou; open a resident registration permit hunt; and change the nonresident general season hunt to a registration permit as follows:

Increase resident opportunity in Unit 26B Remainder:

Residents **5 bulls** [2 BULLS] **July 1 – April 30** [AUG. 1 – APRIL 30]

Allocate a certain limited resident only cow harvest after August 15th with a defined quota based on Department of Fish and Game (department) analysis:

Residents 1 cow by registration permit Aug 15 -March 30, report within 5 days of harvest, no more than 5 caribou total may be taken

What we are trying to accomplish with this proposal is what should have happened at the last Region III (Interior and Eastern Arctic Region) meeting, and what we believe would have happened if the new language in Alaska Statute 16.05.256 was in place; ensuring that resident opportunity for the allowable harvest is fully realized.

The department will have to look at these new proposed bag limits and season dates, along with lost caribou hunting opportunity for the Nelchina herd, to come up with a projection of what the resident participation and harvest rates may be. We don't want to go over the current allowable harvest; we want the herd to recover. But we want residents to have increased opportunity to achieve the allowable harvest.

In conjunction with this expansion of resident opportunity, we want to decrease the nonresident opportunity in Unit 26B Remainder so that nonresidents harvest no more than 10% of the total harvest.

Set a quota for nonresident harvests based on department projections of resident harvests, so nonresidents take no more than 10 percent of the total harvest, and close hunt when quota is met:

Nonresidents: 1 bull **by registration permit available online August 1- September 15, report within 5 days of harvest**

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

Resident Hunting Opportunities for the Central Arctic Caribou herd.

At the last Region III Board of Game (board) meeting, due to a severe decline in the Central Arctic Caribou Herd (CAH) – an identified big game prey population under our Intensive Management (IM) Law important for high levels of human harvest by Alaskans – the board voted to significantly reduce seasons and bag limits for both resident and nonresident hunters.

The CAH population had suddenly and sharply declined to about 23,000 animals, which was below the IM population objective of 28,000 to 32,000 animals. The department recommended a maximum allowable harvest of 580 bulls (no cows) from Unit 26B Remainder, south of 69°30' North, west and east of the haul road and including the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area. The board, during deliberations approved the following changes for Unit 26B Remainder:

Residents **2 bulls** [5 CARIBOU] **Aug 1 – April 30** [JULY 1 – APRIL 30]

Nonresidents **1 bull** [5 CARIBOU] **Aug. 1 – Sept. 15** [JULY 1 – APRIL 30]

The board approved these changes based on department projections that 43 percent of the harvest would be taken by nonresident hunters. Since these changes, however, nonresidents now take the majority of the CAH harvest in Unit 26B Remainder.

This does not at all comply with AS 16.05.255(d) that states “*Regulations adopted under (a) of this section must provide that, consistent with the provisions of AS 16.05.258, the taking of moose, deer, elk, and caribou by residents for personal or family consumption has preference over taking by nonresidents.*”

Neither did the board conform to AS 16.05.255(e) or AS 16.05.255(f) that speak to when the board significantly reduces seasons and bag limits for residents and when an intensive management program would be instituted for an identified big game prey population whose highest and best use is to feed Alaskans.

This decision by the board to significantly reduce resident opportunities while at the same time allocating such a high percentage of the harvest to nonresidents is what sparked the introduction of Senate Bill 87 in the 31st Legislature that would change the language of AS 16.05.256 to require the board when restricting resident hunting opportunities to put nonresidents on some kind of a permit system. SB 87 reads:

Sec. 16.05.256. Nonresident and nonresident alien permits.

*Whenever it is necessary to restrict the taking of big game so that the opportunity for state residents to take big game can be reasonably satisfied in accordance with sustained yield principles, the Board of Game **shall** [MAY], through a permit system, limit the taking of big game by nonresidents and nonresident aliens to accomplish that purpose.*

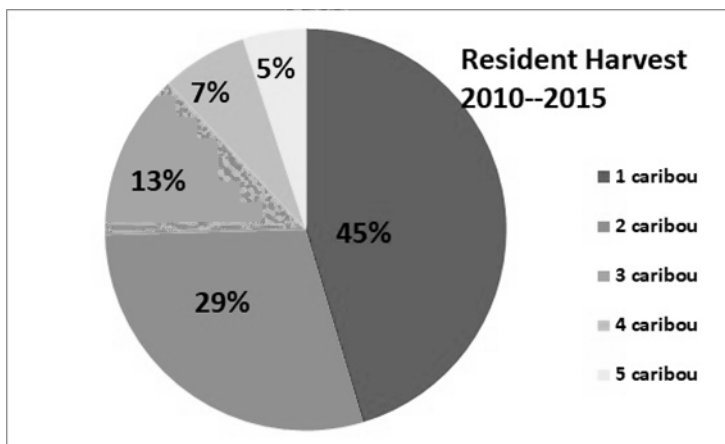
Had this change been in place we believe we would not have the situation we have now where resident hunting opportunities were significantly reduced and it led to nonresidents taking the majority of the harvest of this diminished caribou herd.

Below is harvest data from the department. As it turned out, even though nonresidents now take the majority of the CAH in Unit 26B Remainder, the combined harvests since the reduced seasons and bag limits are under the allowable harvest of 580 caribou for Unit 26B Remainder.

Year	males	females	Total harvest	Total hunters
2010	978	234	1238	1622
2011	814	346	1172	1401
2012	726	275	1007	1430
2013	729	135	868	1462
2014	720	196	916	1433
2015	530	225	756	1256
2016	316	268	585	1063
2017	223	7	230	619
2018Prelim	146	3	149	317

Year	Resident hunters	Resident harvest	Nonresident hunters	Nonresident harvest
2010	1201	953	371	280
2011	1045	935	264	228
2012	1126	773	295	235
2013	1014	530	441	331
2014	987	555	442	358
2015	807	414	449	342
2016	705	403	358	183
2017	348	109	268	118
2018Prelim	181	71	136	78

The graph below illustrates that residents lost 25 percent of their harvest opportunity with the reduction in bag limits from five to two caribou.



Harvest opportunity for residents was also significantly reduced with the reduced season and elimination of any cow harvests.

Essentially, the board reduced resident opportunity so much that for many it was no longer worth the time and expense to drive north and participate in this hunt. We see this in the resident participation rate dropping so much. And the caribou simply are not as prevalent as they were in the past along a certain migration pattern.

It's important in conjunction with this proposal to point out that resident hunters recently lost 4,500 permits available for the Nelchina caribou hunt. Due to a decline in that herd, the 5,000 permits formerly available to resident hunters was reduced to 500 permits. This is the only remaining general season caribou hunt along the road system, and with the significant decline in available Nelchina caribou hunting opportunities, we anticipate many of those 4,500 residents will be looking north to this hunt to put meat in their freezers if residents are given more harvest opportunity.

In these circumstances, where an identified prey population under our 5AAC 92.108 Intensive Management regulations has declined to the point the population is under the minimum population objective, and seasons and bag limits need to be reduced, nonresident hunters should bear the brunt of any restrictions. Nonresidents should not end up taking more than ten percent of the harvest in these situations, regardless of whether the total harvest is under the allowable harvest. Nonresidents should be placed on a permit system that significantly reduces their harvest opportunity until the population has recovered.

PROPOSED BY: Resident Hunters of Alaska

(EG-F19-131)
