

Caribou Trails

News from the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group

Summer 2018, Issue 18

Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group

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Photos credit ADF&G, unless noted

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Western Arctic caribou herd shows mixed signs after a decade of decline

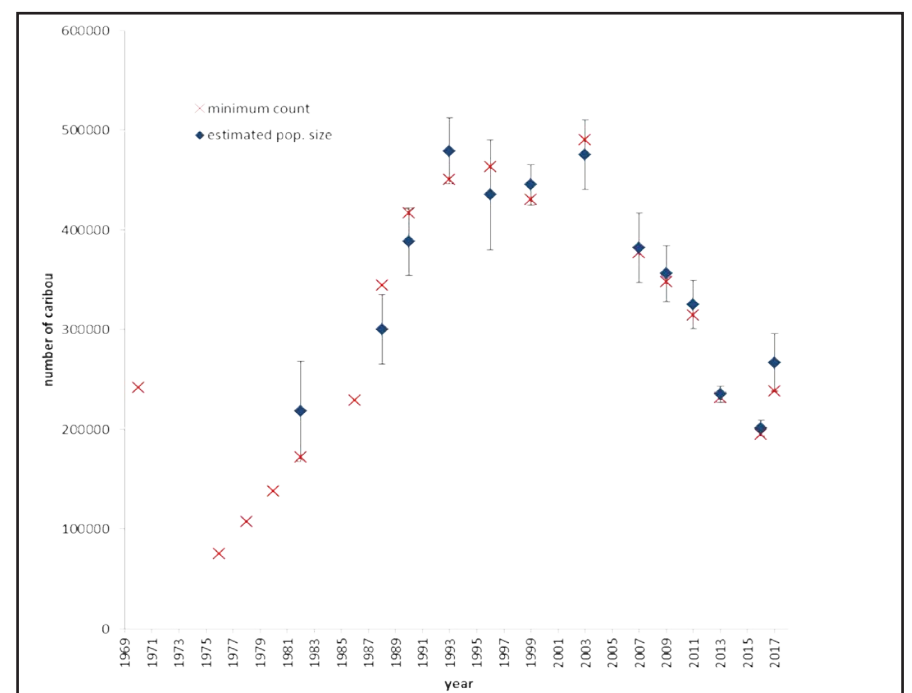
After more than a decade of decline, Alaska’s largest caribou herd is showing both positive and negative indicators of short-term population change. Counts of the Western Arctic caribou herd (WAH) completed from the summer 2017 photocensus tallied 239,055 animals. This raises the most recent herd estimate to 259,000 — up from 201,000 caribou a year earlier.

Accuracy of the 2017 Western Arctic caribou herd photocensus was improved through implementation of a new digital photography system. The system supports higher flight altitudes and larger photo footprints that allow photography of large caribou groups that in the past might not have been photographable. The improved photo quality also allows for more precise counting. “We believe the superior photo quality has led us to identify and count more calves than in the past; however, there is no doubt the herd increased between 2016 and 2017,” said wildlife biologist Lincoln Parrett.

In the most recent years preceding the 2017 census female adult survival and calf recruitment were very high. Unfortunately, last winter’s severe conditions appeared to be tough on the WAH. Biologists monitor adult female mortality rates by recording deaths from radio collared caribou. The adult female mortality rate from last winter is on track to be one of the five worst since 1985. “It is likely the herd didn’t grow during 2018, and probably remained stable or possibly declined,” said wildlife biologist Lincoln Parrett.

Given the change in camera systems and the high 2018 adult female mortality ADF&G biologists were very interested

in completing a photocensus for the WAH this July. However, the right conditions never materialized to take pictures. “We were able to locate the WAH and organize caribou into groups for photography, but the caribou never aggregated to the point we could photograph them. Eventually, the caribou made it to the mountains and the migration combined with poor weather prevented a successful photocensus this



Western Arctic caribou herd population

year”, said WAH biologist Alex Hansen. For the moment, the best available information leads ADF&G managers to believe the population growth experienced between 2016 and 2017 has been curbed, at least temporarily.

On a positive note, information gathered during spring calf recruitment and calving surveys showed encouraging results going into the summer of 2018. Alaska’s caribou herds frequently experience cyclic highs and lows influenced by natural factors including range condition, weather, disease, and predation; the effects of these factors on the population varies and can be hard to anticipate. ADF&G biologists have high hopes of a successful photocensus during the summer of 2019.

TAIKUU

The Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group would like to say a big TAIKUU to those who take time to fill out Caribou Registration Permits RC907 (Units 23 and 26A) and RC800 (Unit 22). Permits provide valuable information on harvest, behavior, and caribou distribution. By providing this information you are helping biologists better understand the caribou to ensure hunting now and for future generations.

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Practice outdoor ethics with Iñupiat Ilitqusiat

Guidance from the Native Village of Kotzebue

In the past, local people had to work very hard to harvest caribou, traveling up toward the North Slope, Colville River, and Upper Noatak. Hunters were gone for weeks or months at a time. They didn't take caribou for granted, but developed a deep respect for the animals.

A culture of song, dance and tradition developed to honor caribou. Without the knowledge of our parents and grandparents, and their conservation of the caribou, we wouldn't be where we are today.

Caribou should be treated with respect. Tuttu are integral to our culture, and we want to have these animals return every year. We need to practice respectful, responsible hunting.

Today's hunters need to carry on this conservation and respect so we will have caribou for future generations.

How can you harvest your caribou without disrespecting them?

Consider hunting with a partner or a group. You can work together and make a plan of how to get close to the caribou or move them toward another hunter's position. Through sharing and cooperation everyone will receive a portion of the harvest.



Historic photos of Anaktuvuk hunters courtesy of the Anchorage Museum of History & Art



Honoring traditional values in hunting

Winter caribou hunting

- ✓ Take your time. Observe caribou groups before you approach.
- ✓ Pick out the animals you want to harvest.
- ✓ Look for animals that are fat and in good shape before you shoot. The shape of the back, the color/quality of the hide, and the upward curve of the tail can be clues to look for.
- ✓ When mature bulls are in rut, younger bulls and barren cows can still provide good meat. Do not shoot cows with calves. If you want to take a cow, wait to see if it has a calf with it. Avoid pregnant cows when possible, they are the breeding stock of the herd.
- ✓ Don't shoot aimlessly into a bunched up group of caribou. Wait until they separate, and target specific animals.
- ✓ Chasing caribou and causing them to run is bad for the health of the animals and results in poor quality meat. If you must chase, pick out one animal to harvest and move it away from the rest of the group.
- ✓ Use the terrain: look for high ground, hills, cover, or deep snow. Caribou will often go to high ground if they are being approached. You can make a plan to take advantage of this or try to move caribou toward deep snow, which will allow you to get closer.
- ✓ Show respect for the caribou after it is harvested. You are responsible for the caribou you shoot. Take good care of the meat and all the parts. This is how we give thanks to the animal that gives itself to us.
- ✓ Not only is waste of caribou disrespectful, it is illegal.
- ✓ In the wintertime, an effective way to tenderize the meat is not to butcher the animal too soon. You may gut the animal out in the country, but keep the skin on and don't take the animal apart. Then, bury it in the snow for a few days. The hide will keep the meat from freezing, and the retained heat will tenderize your meat.

Wasting meat offends everyone

and it's against the law!



Most of the meat from these animals was salvaged and given to villagers—but it had begun to spoil. While no one was cited, the loss of meat angered everyone in the community. Similar instances in the future may be legally challenged.

- Alaska Law requires that all moose and caribou meat must be salvaged for human consumption.
- In Unit 23 (prior to Oct 1) you are also required to leave the meat on the ribs, front quarters and hindquarters until it is brought out of the field. Meat may be de-boned once it has been transported to a state-maintained airport.
- Antlers may not be removed from the kill site until all the meat has been packed out.
- Meat must be transported out of the field in edible condition before or at the same time as the antlers.
- Failure to salvage meat carries a minimum fine of \$2,000 and seven days in jail.



Trophy antlers require trophy meat

- Don't shoot it if you can't pack it all out.
- Don't shoot early into a long hunt or float, or in warm weather.
- Plan carefully with your guide or transporter—a delayed pick-up is not an excuse for letting meat spoil.
- Bad weather is not an excuse for bad meat—care for it properly.
- Don't give questionable meat away—nobody wants it.
- There are no freezers or meat storage facilities in Kotzebue.

- Keep your meat clean. Keep your meat on the bone.
- Keep your meat dry. Keep your meat in breathable cloth game bags - **not plastic bags!**
- Keep your meat cool.

Legal in and out of the field. Properly salvaged.	Legal out of the field only. Properly de-boned.	Illegal in or out of the field. Inadequate salvage.
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Your 'wilderness' is somebody else's backyard

Alaska Natives have been hunting, fishing and living here for thousands of years. Today federal and state managed lands provide opportunities for anyone to hunt, camp, fish and recreate—but you are still expected to do so legally and respectfully.

- Leave a clean camp. Remove all garbage. Burn toilet paper.
- Dismantle fire rings and all site modifications. Don't trespass on private lands or subsistence camps. Don't interfere with someone else's hunting.

Respecting 10,000 years of knowledge

Alaska Native hunting traditions have evolved to allow for harvest of caribou without displacing their historic migration routes. Following these local practices is good for the caribou and good for hunter relations.

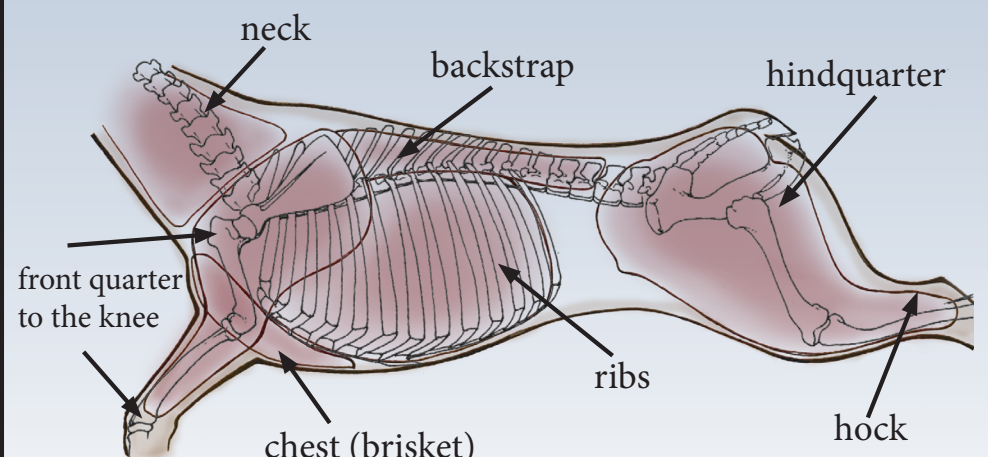
- Allow the first groups of caribou to pass undisturbed. There will be more following these leaders.
- If hunting along the Kobuk River, hunt only on the south side to allow the caribou to cross undisturbed.
- Do not place hunting camps so that they block the caribou trails or redirect the migration route.



This message supported by: Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game 907-442-1711, Selawik National Wildlife Refuge 907-442-3799, Northwest Arctic Borough, Western Arctic National Parklands, Bureau of Land Management. To report violations please call the Alaska State Troopers: Kotzebue 442-3222, Galena 656-1634 or toll free 1-800-478-3377

Traditional law and western law agree: wasting meat offends everyone!

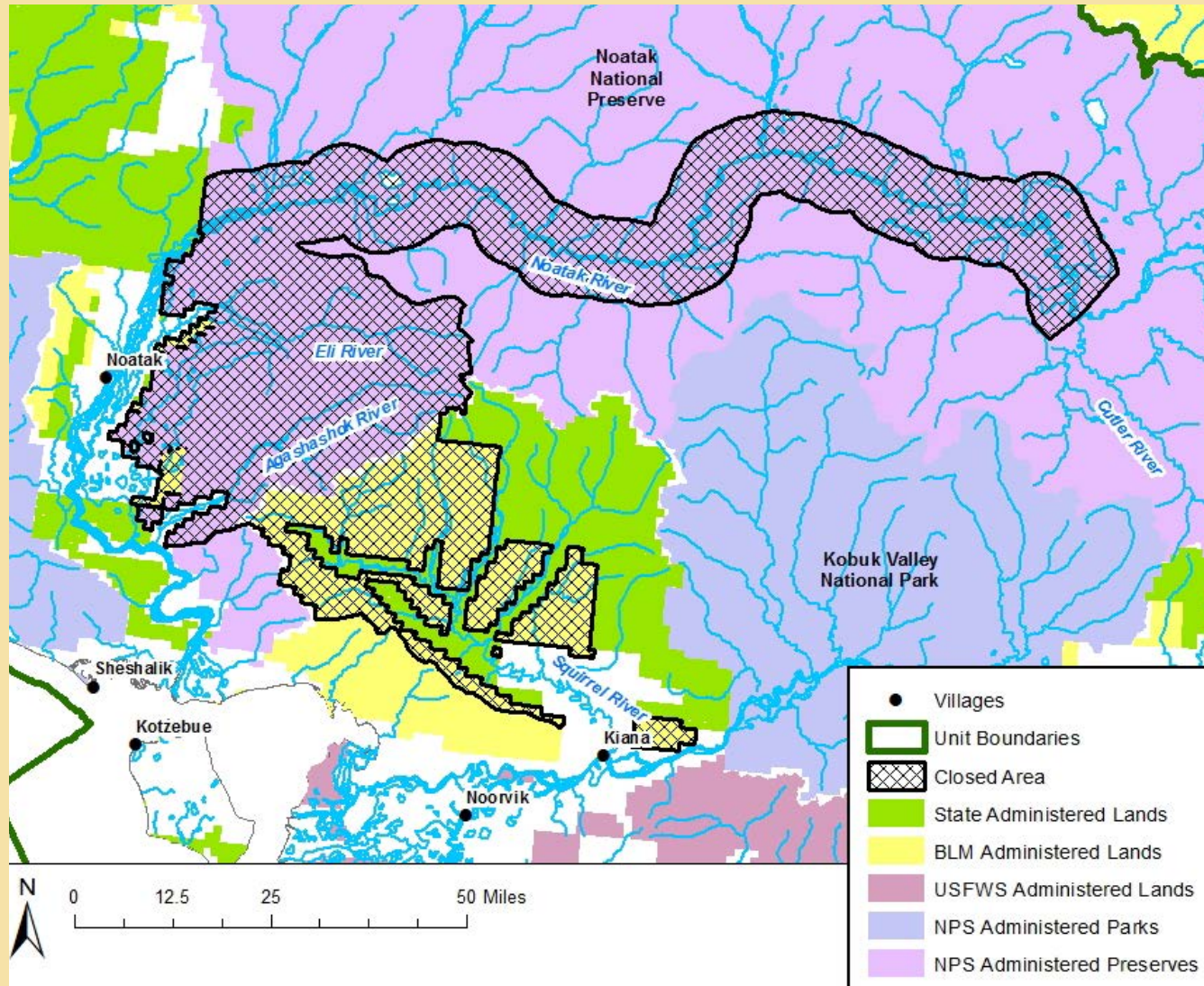
Some people hunt for meat, some people hunt for trophy antlers, and some hunt for both, but the law about caring for the meat is the same for everyone.



Caribou regulatory updates for federal lands

Unit 23 closure

The following federal lands in Unit 23 are closed to caribou hunting by non-federally qualified subsistence users until further notice: a 10-mile wide corridor (5 miles either side) along the Noatak River from the western boundary of the Noatak National Preserve upstream to the confluence with the Cutler River, as well as the Eli, Agashashok, and Squirrel River drainages. This is the same area as the 2017-2018 temporary closure. Non-federally qualified users are generally those who live outside of the range of the Western Arctic caribou herd. For more specific information, contact federal land managers for the above mentioned areas – National Park Service for Noatak/Eli/Agashashok, and Bureau of Land Management for the Squirrel River.



Caribou hunt reporting

Federal lands

The Federal Subsistence Board approved a measure which aligns caribou hunt reporting requirements with State registration permit requirements on Federal lands in Game Management Units 22, 23 and 26A. This means caribou hunters in 22, 23, and 26A need to report the results of their hunt regardless of which lands they hunt on.



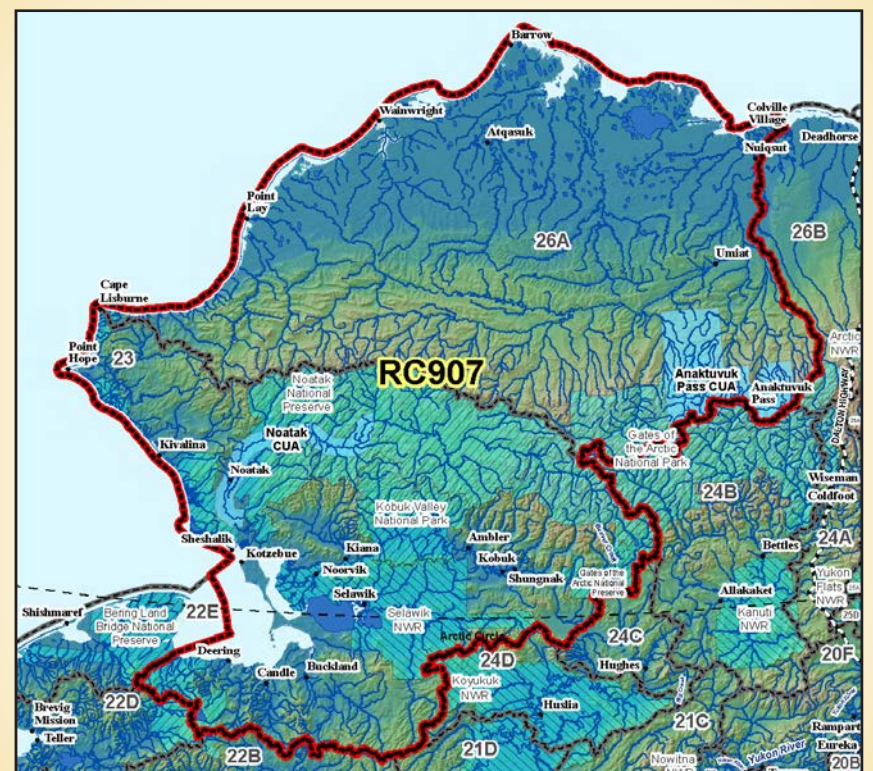
RC907 Permit Hunt- Alaska residents

Caribou hunt - Reporting requirements

Successful Hunters: report in person, online at www.hunt.alaska.gov, by telephone (907)442-3420 (you can leave a recorded message), outside drop box at Kotzebue ADF&G, or by pre-paid mail.

Unsuccessful Hunters: unsuccessful hunters and those who did not hunt must submit their report by July 15.

Internet reporting: you may report online at <http://www.hunt.alaska.gov>



Caribou population levels through the years



How do caribou numbers today compare to caribou numbers in the past?

Aside from the recent rebound seen in 2017, the past decade the Western Arctic herd has declined, but how does that compare to the long-term average?

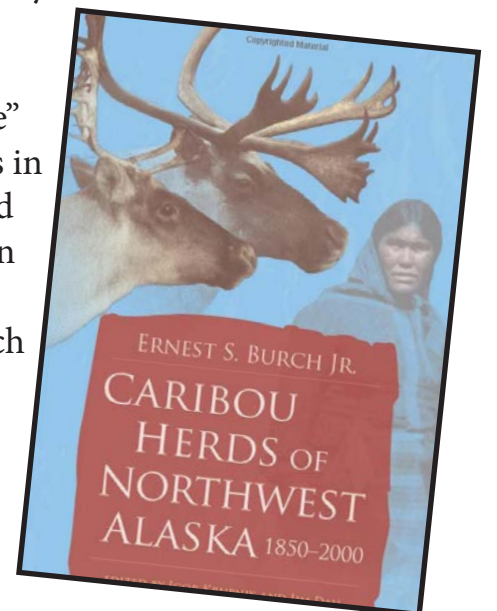
Caribou numbers never stay exactly level, but go up and down depending on food supply, predator levels, weather, and more. In the time that biologists have been counting the Western Arctic herd, they have documented periods of growth and decline. The first photocensus of this herd was done in 1970, when 243,000 animals were counted. Since then, herd size has ranged between 75,000 and 490,000 animals.

Discovering caribou abundance using traditional knowledge

To return to the time before western science data, we can turn to the knowledge of our region's elders. Traditional knowledge and oral history of caribou goes back several generations or more. Historians, anthropologists and others who have worked with local indigenous knowledge holders have recorded much of this information. Additional insights come from elders' remarks at meetings and in other interviews. Although caribou have been widespread and relatively abundant across northwest Alaska in recent decades, traditional knowledge and oral history make it clear that this has not always been the case. This longer term view may help to put our recent decline in perspective, as well as offer food for thought about what may occur when caribou populations crash.

Want to learn more?

A great source for those interested in learning more is *Caribou Herds of Northwest Alaska, 1850-2000* by Ernest S. Burch, Jr.; edited by I. Krupnik and J. Dau. Burch pulled together decades of oral history work to "contribute to a more informed perspective" on changes in the size and distribution of caribou herds. Much of this timeline was based on his book.



CHANGES IN CARIBOU POPULATION OVER TIME

1870'S - 1880'S

Crash of the caribou population complete on the Seward Peninsula (1870's) and Kotzebue Sound drainages (1880's). As the caribou population shrank, so did the herd's territory. Caribou primarily stayed in the northern part of their range (upper Noatak, North Slope) during times of scarcity.

1860'S

A time of widespread famines and human migration. Declines in caribou population (and also walrus and bowhead whale).

1890'S

Government-led importation of reindeer begins in an attempt to supplement food supply in the absence of caribou

1900'S - 1930'S

Reindeer herds increase and spread throughout the region.

1900'S - 1940'S

Subsistence hunters travel north of the Brooks Range in order to harvest caribou. Hunters were gone for weeks or months.

1930'S

Caribou numbers begin to increase, and their range slowly expands southward again.

1940'S

Elders from the Upper Kobuk report seeing the first returning caribou around this time

1940'S - 1950'S

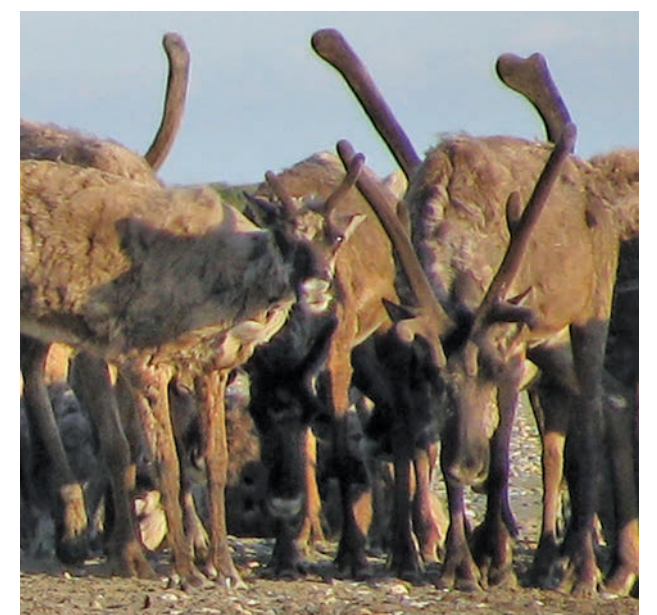
Elders from Selawik speak of hunting trips to the north toward Kiana or the upper Kobuk, that would still take several weeks. First caribou seen near Selawik in the latter 1950's.

1960'S - 1970'S

Reindeer industry in the northern NANA region declines as caribou range expands. Reindeer would follow migrating caribou as they came through.

1990'S - 2000'S

Reindeer herding declines along the northern and eastern Seward Peninsula, decreasing as the caribou populations rose to 490,000 caribou.



Ambler Mining District Industrial Access Project

Project Overview

The Ambler Mining District Industrial Access Project (Ambler Road project) is a proposal to build a 211-mile long industrial road connecting the Ambler Mining District with the Dalton Highway. The proposed gravel road would cross lands managed by a multitude of agencies including (see map, courtesy of AIDEA):

Alaska Native Corporations

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

National Park Service (NPS)

State of Alaska

The project was requested by the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA), a state economic development agency. The BLM is leading efforts to conduct an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project, in cooperation with state, federal and Native partners, including the Alaska Department of Natural Resources and the Northwest Arctic Borough. A parallel effort by NPS is producing an Environmental and Economic Analysis (EEA) that will analyze alternative routes through Gates of the Arctic National Preserve.

The Path Forward

Scoping processes to gather input on what the project should analyze were completed for both the EIS and EEA at the end of January, 2018. BLM and NPS released reports on their department webpages in April summarizing the scoping comments they received. NPS also sent hard copies of the EEA scoping report to communities within the herd range.

Now that scoping reports have been completed, gaps in existing data and preliminary alternatives for the Ambler Road are being analyzed. A draft EIS is planned to be issued in early 2019, followed by a 45-day public comment period, public meetings and ANILCA Section 810 hearings.

Your input is needed!

This project is not yet finalized. As the process moves forward there will be more opportunity to hear your input. To find out more please contact:

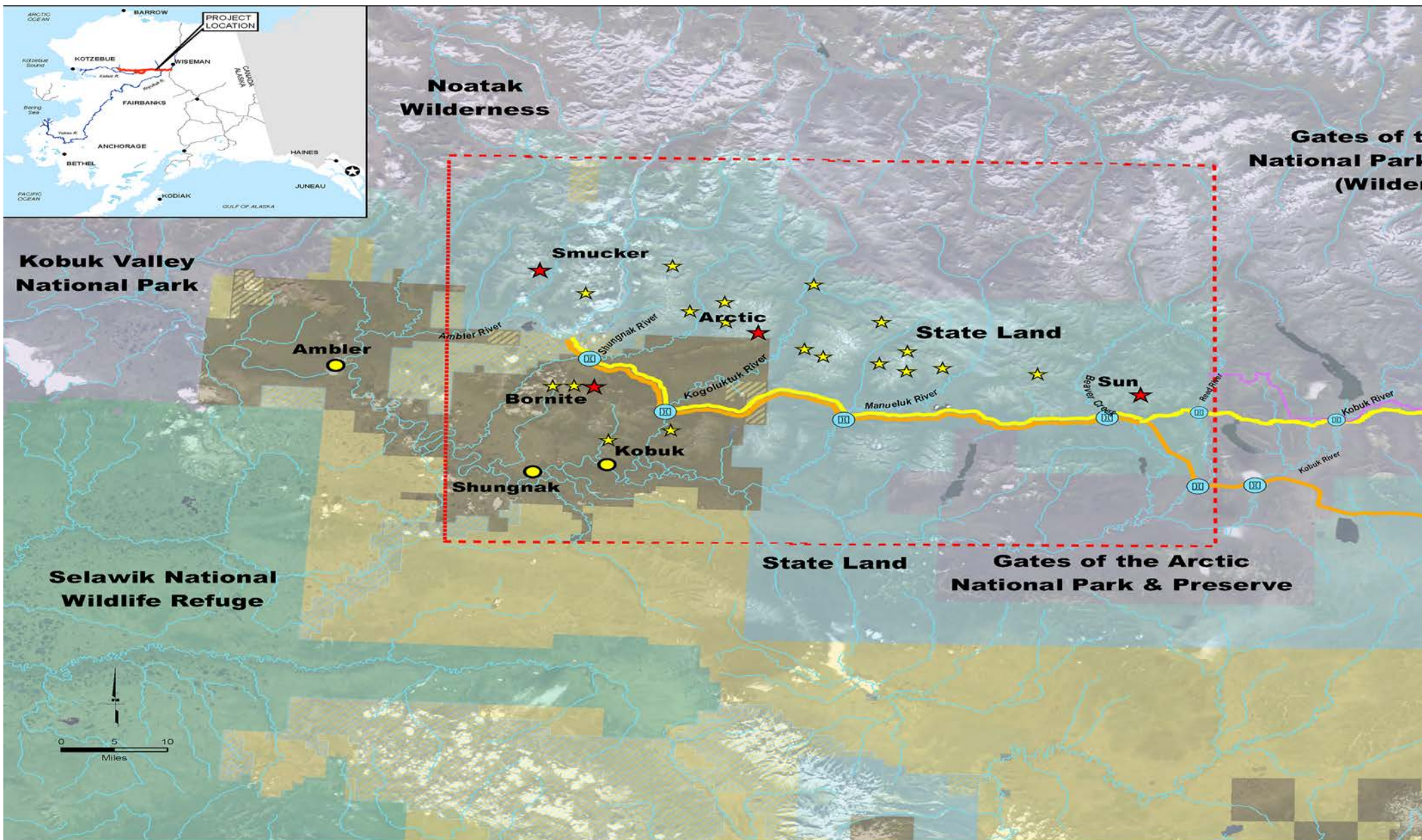
Bureau of Land Management
<https://www.blm.gov/programs/planning-and-nepa/plans-in-development/alaska/AmblerRoadEIS>

Tim La Marr
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National Park Service
<https://www.nps.gov/gaar/learn/management/ambler-row.htm>

Greg Dudgeon
 Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve Superintendent
 greg_dudgeon@nps.gov, 907-457-5752



Ambler Mining District	AMDIAP Preferred Corridor (211 Miles)	Existing Roads	Proposed Large Roads
Major Mineral Deposit	AMDIAP Alternative Corridor (228 Miles)	Milepost 161	Cities
Mineral Resources		Rivers and Streams	Wilderness Boundaries

Sources:
 Ambler Mining District - Geology and Geochemistry of the Arctic Prospect, Ambler District, Alaska Schmidt, Jeanine Marie, Stanford University Ph.D. 1984
 Mineral Resources / Major Mineral Deposits - Hawley, C.C. and Vant, M. K. 2009, Report on Minerals, Western Alaska Access Planning Study, Inventory Report
 Land Ownership - BLM 2016

Ambler Mining District Industrial Access Project

Working Group submits comments to BLM and NPS

There was much discussion of the Ambler Road project at the 2017 Working Group meeting, along with presentations by BLM, NPS, and Trilogy Metals, one of the companies interested in developing the Ambler Mining District.

While many Working Group members expressed strong opinions about the project, the Working Group ultimately decided to take no action to support or oppose the project at this time. The Working Group may make a recommendation later as more information is made available, and did not want to weaken a later position by taking a stance during scoping.

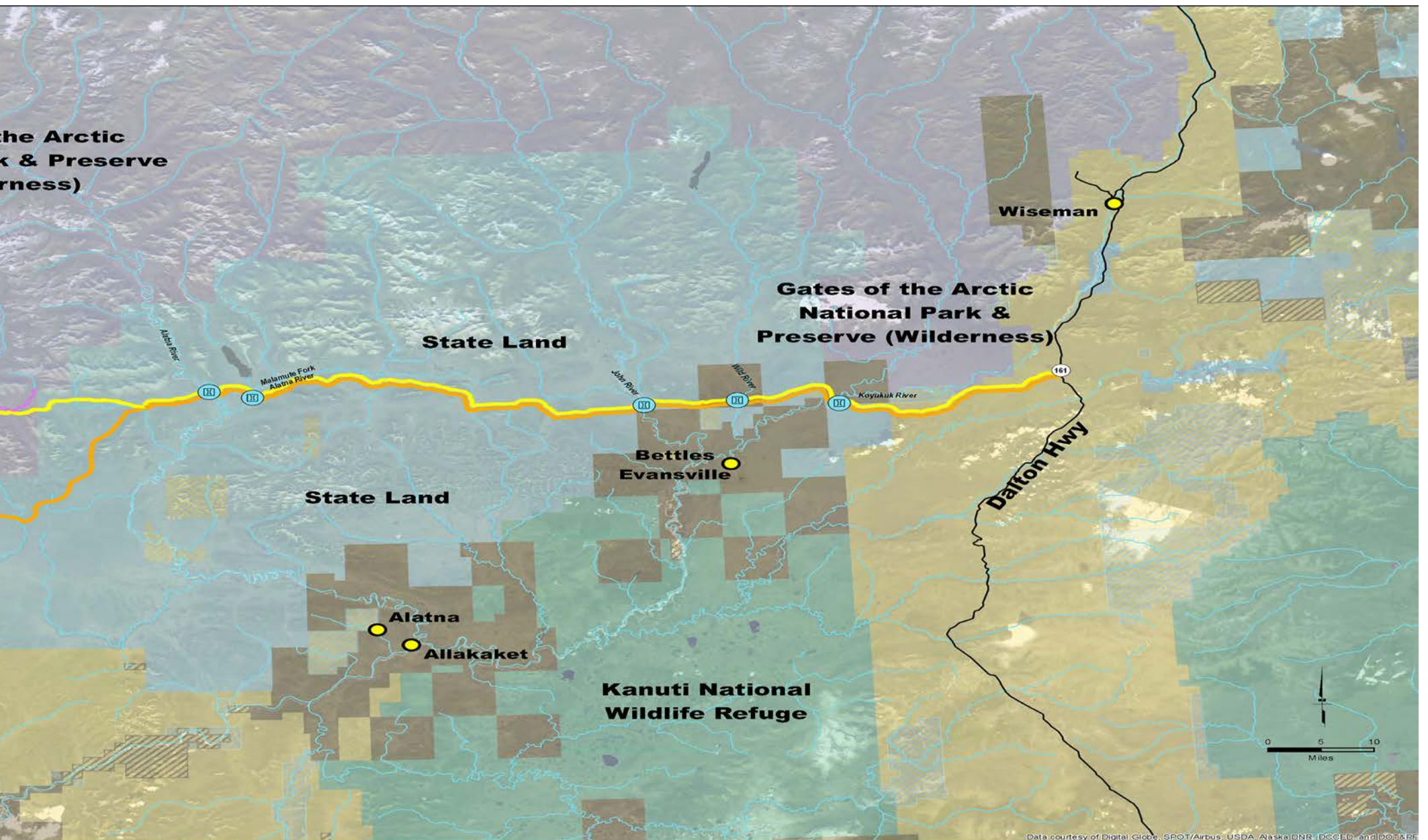
The Working Group submitted scoping comments to both BLM and NPS. These comments asked that the Ambler Road project commit to minimizing impacts to the WAH and reaffirmed our focus on promoting a sustainable herd, the habitat it requires, and the people who depend upon it. A number of other points also were emphasized, including use of the best scientific and

traditional knowledge to analyze potential impacts to caribou, analyzing social and economic implications for communities and the effects on hunting and user conflict, and urging increased opportunities for public engagement and comment if the project moves forward.

In June, the Working Group asked BLM to apply for a waiver of page and time limits for the EIS. A Secretarial Order by the Department of the Interior, which includes both BLM and NPS, would limit EIS documents to a maximum of 300 pages and the EIS process to one year. The Working Group was concerned that such limits would restrict full consideration of project impacts on caribou and users and would reduce opportunities for communication and input from the Working Group and other stakeholders across the herd range.



The Western Arctic Caribou Herd near Cape Lisburne



INDUSTRIAL ACCESS PROJECT

- Bridge
- Boundary
- Bureau of Land Management (Federal Land)
- Fish and Wildlife Service (Federal Land)
- National Park Service (Federal Land)
- ANCSA (Native Corporation Land)
- ANCSA Selected
- State Land
- State Selected

New digital systems sharpen Alaska caribou counts

Counting the herd

Counting caribou in Alaska's largest herds has become more effective, thanks to a pair of newly acquired digital aerial camera systems. The systems replace World War II-era black-and-white film cameras. Last summer, the new camera system enabled biologists to pinpoint numbers for the Porcupine, Fortymile, Central Arctic, Teshekuk, and Western Arctic caribou herds.

"At least three of those herds wouldn't have been photographed (last summer) without the new system," said Wildlife Biologist Nate Pamperin of Fairbanks. During the summer when caribou are harassed by insects, the herd groups together and escapes to the ridgelines, snowfields, and coastlines. This type of grouping behavior allows biologists to monitor caribou by flying over herds with cameras mounted in small aircraft and taking photographs of the groups.

Why are surveys necessary?

Caribou are used by many people in and around Alaska, including local community residents, resident non-local hunters, and non-resident hunters. To ensure that there are enough animals in the herd to sustain current harvest by these groups, herd managers need to know the population size. Without this information, they must manage the herd conservatively and cannot increase or decrease hunting opportunity according to herd population dynamics. Photocensus counts are important caribou management tools that help biologists track and manage herd population trends. Each year the Working Group discusses the survey results and uses them to help inform their recommendations for herd management. Findings are used by advisory and regulatory boards as well as state and federal wildlife managers to help determine bag limits and hunting seasons. Regular herd surveys also allow biologists to detect problems in the herd early on, before there is a serious decline. Disturbance to the caribou during these surveys is minimal and the information gained is extremely valuable.

New technology

Since the 1970's, ADF&G has used the same World War II era black and white film camera to photocensus Alaska's caribou herds. The old systems, which featured Zeiss RMK-A large-format film cameras, functioned poorly in low light conditions, covered limited ground swaths, and cost precious time by requiring pilots to periodically land and reload film. In the fall of 2016, the department upgraded to a new digital system that is linked to GPS and compatible with innovative software. There are four main benefits to the new system:

1. Photos can be taken under a wide range of light conditions. ADF&G can now survey when skies are overcast.
2. Individual photos have a larger footprint, so fewer transects and less time are needed to photograph the herd. This reduces disturbance to caribou.
3. Digital imagery along with GPS information allows for automated alignment of the photos and eliminates the manual layout process that was used with film.
4. Images are in color and high resolution. This makes it easier to pick out individual caribou, so population estimates are more accurate.

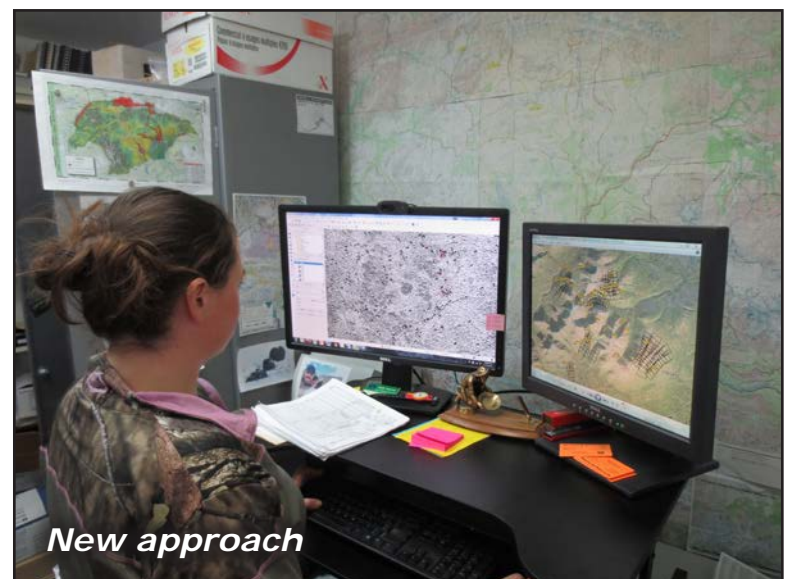


Photocensus image of caribou grouped on a snowfield to avoid biting insects.



Old approach

ADF&G biologist Jason Caikoski manually lines up black and white photos of caribou to count every animal in the herd.



New approach

The new digital system is compatible with computer software that seamlessly aligns multiple color photos, eliminating the manual process of lining up individual photos.

News from the range

Working Group meeting highlights

Nominations for new members of the Working Group were accepted as follows: Seat 3 alternate, Eli Nukapigak; Seat 6 primary Jake Jacobson and alternate Thor Stacey. Motion carried unanimously.

Biologists from ADF&G updated members on the status of the herd. The total herd estimate currently stands at 259,000. Biological data indicate that the herd's prior decline has stabilized.

ADF&G and NPS continue to collar and track caribou, although very few adults were encountered and collared at Onion Portage in fall 2017. Work also continues on the calf mortality study each spring.

NPS described the Caribou Hunter Success Working Group's role in helping Kobuk Valley Subsistence Resource Commission to develop and distribute traditional hunting guidelines called the *Iñupiat Iłitqusiāt, Anunialguliq: Hunter's Success for Carbiou Hunting*.

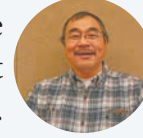
Observations around the range

In the area near the Lower Kobuk River, many people did not see any caribou this year.



Vern Cleveland

The fall 2017 caribou migration was late around Kotzebue. The first group seemed to start on time, but then stopped. Indigenous knowledge says that caribou do follow along with the weather. Their late start may be due to climate change.



Cyrus Harris

On the Seward Peninsula, caribou are expanding out to use previously unused forage. In 2017, caribou went toward Shaktoolik and Unalakleet, for the first time in 10 years.



Charlie Lean

Making caribou skin sleeping bags:

Skin winter caribou and hang skin up until dry.

Use an ulu and scraper to clean the caribou skins.

After the skin is sufficiently scraped, use a special solution to soften the skin. This solution can be made from many things but the best is a combination of sourdough or fish water, salt, and soap.

Once the solution is made, scrape the solution gently into the skin. If the skin is nice and dry, you will actually hear the skin membrane snapping and crackling as the solution is added.

After the skin has been scraped gently with the solution, let the skin dry again.

Cut the skins into oval sleeping bag shapes and then begin sewing. Sewing takes place with as many women as can fit around the bag. Two skins are together and the third skin acts as an extension to make the bag longer with a hood. The bag is sewn together with caribou sinew.

Sinew is taken from the caribou along the back strap. After the sinew is dried, pull small strings, similar to dental floss off the main strip. Twist the sinews strings to make them into thread. The sinew is very strong and does not stretch out like thread and makes the seams waterproof.

Students at Onion Portage

Students from the villages of Kiana and Ambler attended Onion Portage in 2017. Although few caribou were spotted crossing the Kobuk River last year, students learned from biologists and cultural knowledge bearers about the natural history and archaeology of the area. They also learned how biologists track caribou using the VHF receiver and antenna.

These students did a great job showing everyone how patience is key when it comes to caribou!



New digital systems sharpen Alaska caribou counts (cont.)

The new digital systems each feature three medium-format 100-megapixel cameras in gyro-stabilized mounts with GPS and inertial measurement units to record position, pitch, roll, and yaw. The technology allows biologists to conduct photocensus work under low light conditions and to capture wider swaths of country. "Our Western Arctic herd count would not have happened with film last summer because of poor light on the second day," said Pamperin. "In several other situations last year the larger ground swath of the new system allowed us to photograph large groups that were rapidly moving or widely scattered – situations that were problematic for the film systems." The digital cameras produce superior color images that can be inspected immediately for quality. In addition, new software enables individual images to be stitched together and georeferenced so that each caribou group can be viewed as a single image mosaic. In the past, staff had to manually lay out 9-inch by 9-inch printed photographs, delineate overlap, and determine which parts of each photo were to be counted. It was a tedious process that sometimes took weeks to accomplish. The new systems were purchased with funds generated by hunters and shooting sports enthusiasts through payment of federal taxes on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment, and through state hunting license and tag fees. For more information about caribou photocensus work, contact Nate Pamperin at (907) 459-7377 or nathan.pamperin@alaska.gov.

Looking at migration through the years

Migration is always changing

“Ugh! Where are all the caribou?” “Hey! Look at all the caribou!” These two different reactions occur all the time in northwestern Alaska, even in the same year. Why? The simple reason for this is the caribou follow different migration paths all the time. For the past few years, migration variations have left the village of Noatak wondering *where are all the caribou?* For many years, Ambler continually watched caribou cross the Kobuk River during the fall migrations, despite the population decline from 490,000 caribou in 2003 to 201,000 caribou in 2016.

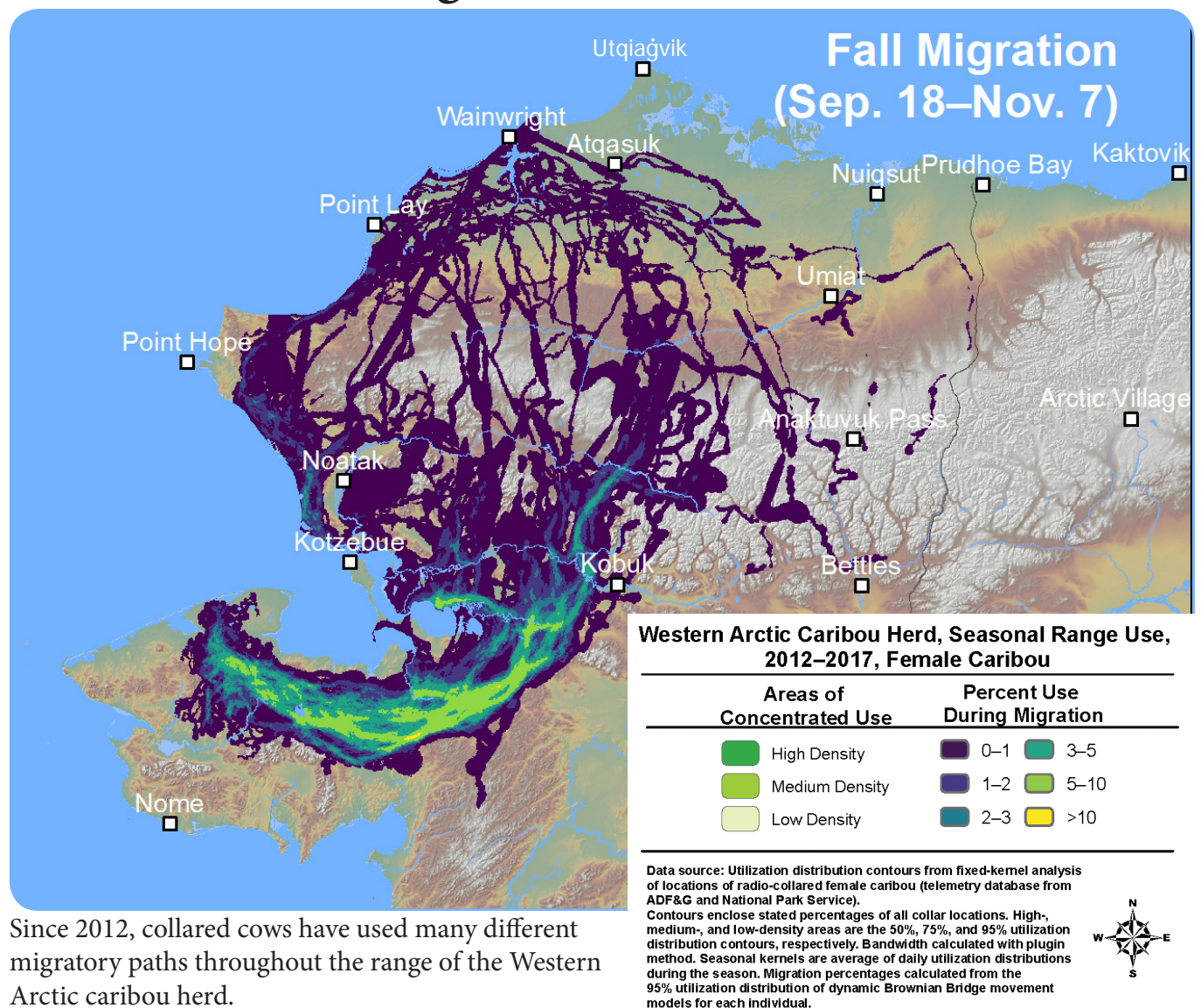
Last fall, caribou did what caribou do, and that’s do something different. Instead of migrating south after crossing the Noatak River in September and October, much of the herd turned west towards the village of Noatak. While the community of Noatak enjoyed the bounty of the herd, residents in Ambler waited and waited. Even as the herd increased in numbers to 259,000 in 2017, some communities were left wondering *where did all the caribou go?*

Fall migration

So, where did they go? After getting close to Noatak, most of the herd retraced their route back to the east, where they started. A few finally did turn south, but most of them stayed north and did not cross the Kobuk River. They wintered on the North Slope and in the mountains of Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, along with caribou from Teshekpuk and Central Arctic Herds. This is the second year in a row that nearly half of the radio collared caribou did not cross the Kobuk River in a southward migration.

Over the past 20 years, migration patterns consisted of a majority of the herd crossing the Kobuk River during their fall migration, leaving only a few scattered groups to overwinter near Point Lay or Wainwright. For many years, the Nulato Hills were commonly used as a winter range. Migration patterns are ever changing and in recent years many caribou have been wintering in the central and western parts of the Seward Peninsula.

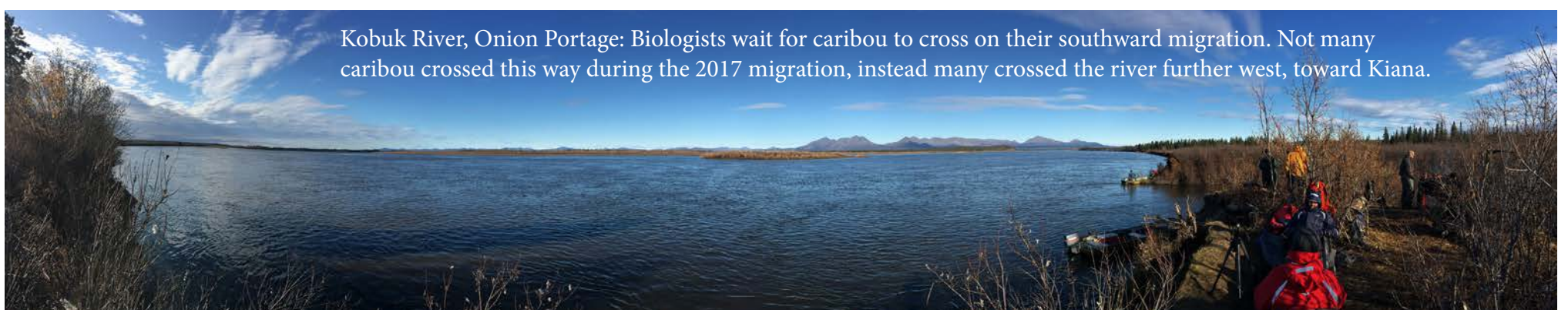
2012-2017 Fall migration of collared cows



Since 2012, collared cows have used many different migratory paths throughout the range of the Western Arctic caribou herd.

Spring migration

In April, led by the pregnant cows, the spring migration northward begins, often taking the caribou along the same trails that they used during the fall migration. Calving typically takes place in early June, before the tundra turns green, in the Utukok uplands. The calves can keep up with the herd in just a few days. The entire herd heads southwest to the Lisburne Hills, where they form spectacular aggregations to reduce insect harassment. After the harassment declines, the herd scatters eastwards up and down the rugged Brooks Range and spilling out onto the North Slope. Slowly, as the vegetation turns brown, small groups of caribou come together forming larger bands and the next migration cycle begins.



Kobuk River, Onion Portage: Biologists wait for caribou to cross on their southward migration. Not many caribou crossed this way during the 2017 migration, instead many crossed the river further west, toward Kiana.

Listening to our elders

Larry Westlake, Sr. of Kiana



Larry and Christina Westlake at the Western Arctic Herd Working Group meeting, December 2017

Each year the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group's meeting kicks off with remarks from a guest elder. Over the years, many wonderful and knowledgeable individuals have shared their insights with the group. At the December 2017 meeting the guest elder was Mr. Larry Westlake Sr. of Kiana.

Aaquuraqpauraq Lawrence "Larry" Westlake Sr. is the son of the late Teddy and Jenny Westlake of Kiana.

In addition to his pursuits as a subsistence hunter and

fisherman, Mr. Westlake has participated in dog mushing, search and rescue, and as a member of our nation's military. He is a recognized leader in the Northwest Arctic who has served in many local and regional roles.

At the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group meeting, Mr. Westlake explained "when we talk about caribou, we talk about our dinner table, our clothing, and our survival. That's the importance of the caribou herd." He told how he learned to hunt caribou as a young man, mainly hunting in the winter months. "The caribou herd was I'd say 100 miles up from where I live in Kiana, on the Noatak valley. It takes a couple days to get there with a dog team—our only transportation those days. But the first day was always the longest day, probably a 12-hour trip, where we would get to the end of the tree line. We'd camp out there, prepare to get poles for our tent, little branches for our floor, and things like that, and gave the dogs a good rest before we got to the hunting ground."

Mr. Westlake also spoke about how elders played a critical role in caribou hunting. "The caribou wasn't a very big herd at that time, but with the help of our elders and knowledge of the land and the herd – they were the best managers on earth because

they knew that the herd had to survive so they could survive themselves. They [the elders] were a big part of the growth of our caribou herd. While the herd started migrating south, that was a pretty fast migration as far as I could remember, and the growth was gaining pretty good. When they finally came to the edge of the Kobuk River, at Kiana, we could see them. And it came to that point, the elders called a meeting. We had a traditional council that controlled the village in those days. They came back to the hunters for us to wait two days when the caribou came to the north shorelines of the Kobuk. [The elders] told us that if we let the caribou cross without hunting them for two days, we'll have caribou for the rest of our lives. And they were so right. All through the years we had enough caribou. We respected the elders, we respected their guidelines, and we did what we were told. You know it's hard to sit there in those days to watch the caribou herd just migrating over to that point, but the respect was there."

Now that he is an elder himself, Mr. Westlake is helping give guidance to younger hunters. Through his involvement with the Kiana Elders' Council, Larry has worked to bring forward elder wisdom and practical guidance to the many hunters who come to the Kiana area each fall. The Elders Council produced a flyer entitled "Caribou Hunter Success" which was widely distributed across Northwest Alaska. This effort grew, through the inclusion of more regional residents, agencies and organizations, to become the "Caribou Hunter Success" working group. One main goal of this group is to document and share elders' knowledge on caribou and caribou hunting to inform younger hunters of today, following in the example set by Mr. Larry Westlake and the Kiana elders.

In regards to the Kiana Elders' Council's work, Mr. Westlake says "the best thing about this is supporting the migration of the caribou. If you have a camp, we recommend you camp on the south side [of the Kobuk River]. We have to support the migration and hunt as they cross.

"The initiative speaks of sharing. That is one of the most important traditions that we have in our Native life, is sharing. We grew up with sharing everything we have. We just have to bring our culture back and use some of these important guidelines that we grew up with."

In memory of those who helped make the WG successful



Raymond Stoney

Raymond Stoney of Kiana, was a founding member of the Working Group and a former chairman. His hard work brought agencies and people together as he helped guide the group through the

creation of its original Management Plan.

"We lived off the country. We would hunt caribou every year by dog team and travel up to 100 miles over the Brooks Range."



Wendell Booth

Wendell Booth of Noatak was a long-time member of the subsistence committee at Red Dog Mine, helping to establish practices that allowed for caribou passage and subsistence harvest. He

willingly shared his traditional knowledge with agencies and researchers, helping to protect the Western Arctic caribou herd and subsistence uses while allowing economic development to flourish.

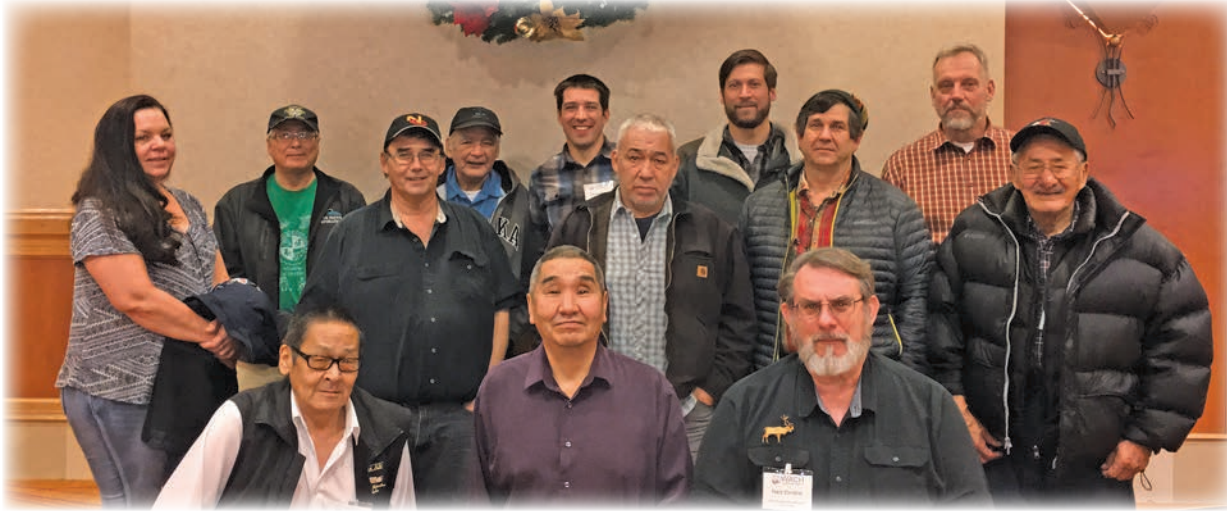


Phil Driver

Phil Driver, a founding member of the Working Group, was a long-time vice chair of the group. While representing hunting guides, he respected local knowledge bearers and

subsistence hunters and helped create a collaborative spirit at meetings. *"Being a part of the WAH WG is a great honor. Serving as the vice-chair is one of the most important things I do."*

Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group



Back row, left to right: Julie Owen, Morris Nassuk, Pollock Simon, Sr., Tim Fullman, Thor Stacey, Charlie Lean; middle row: Tom Gray, William Bernhardt, Allen Barrette, Benedict Jones; front row: Ron Moto, Sr., Vern Cleveland, Neil DeWitt

Working for you and caribou!

Contact your local Working Group representative or one of the agencies to share comments, concerns or to get involved.

Voting Chairs

Anchorage Fish & Game Advisory Committee
 Buckland, Deering, Selawik
 Anaktuvuk Pass & Nuiqsut
 Elim, Golovin, White Mountain
 Fairbanks Hunters
 Hunting Guides
 Kivalina & Noatak
 Kotzebue
 Koyukuk River (Huslia, Hughes, Alaskaket, Bettles, Wiseman)
 Lower Kobuk River (Noorvik & Kiana)
 Middle Yukon River (Galena, Koyukuk, Nulato, Kaltag)
 Point Hope & Point Lay
 Nome
 Conservationists
 N. Seward Peninsula (Teller, Brevig, Wales, Shishmaref)
 Reindeer Herders Association
 S. Seward Peninsula
 (Koyuk, Shaktoolik, Unalakleet, Stebbins, St. Michael, Kotlik)
 Transporters
 Upper Kobuk River (Ambler, Shungnak, Kobuk)
 Atkasuk, Utqiagvik & Wainwright

Representatives

Neil DeWitt
 Ron Moto, Sr.
 Esther Hugo
 Charles Saccheus
 Allen Barrette
 Jake Jacobson
 Enoch Mitchell
 Cyrus Harris (Vice-Chair)
 Pollock Simon, Sr.
 Vern Cleveland Sr. (Chairman)
 Benedict Jones
 Steve Oomituk
 Charlie Lean
 Tim Fullman
 Elmer Seetot, Jr.
 Tom Gray

 Morris Nassuk
 Julie Owen
 William Bernhardt
 Oliver Peetook

Alternates

Kenny Rodgers
 Percy Ballott
 Eli Nukapigak
 Morris Nakaruk
 Rod Arno
 John (Thor) Stacey
 Daniel Foster, Sr.
 Willie Goodwin
 Jack Reakoff
 Kirk Sampson
 Micky Stickman
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 Jacob Martin
 David Krause
 Christine Komanaseak
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Please send questions regarding Caribou Trails to:

Kristen Romanoff -ADF&G, kristen.romanoff@alaska.gov

❖ To Report Violations call:
 ❖ 1-800-478-3377

Run on Down to the Next Caribou Meeting:

December 12 - 13, 2018

Anchorage, AK

Check the website soon for details!

www.westernarcticcaribou.net

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