

Porcupine and Central Arctic Caribou Herd News



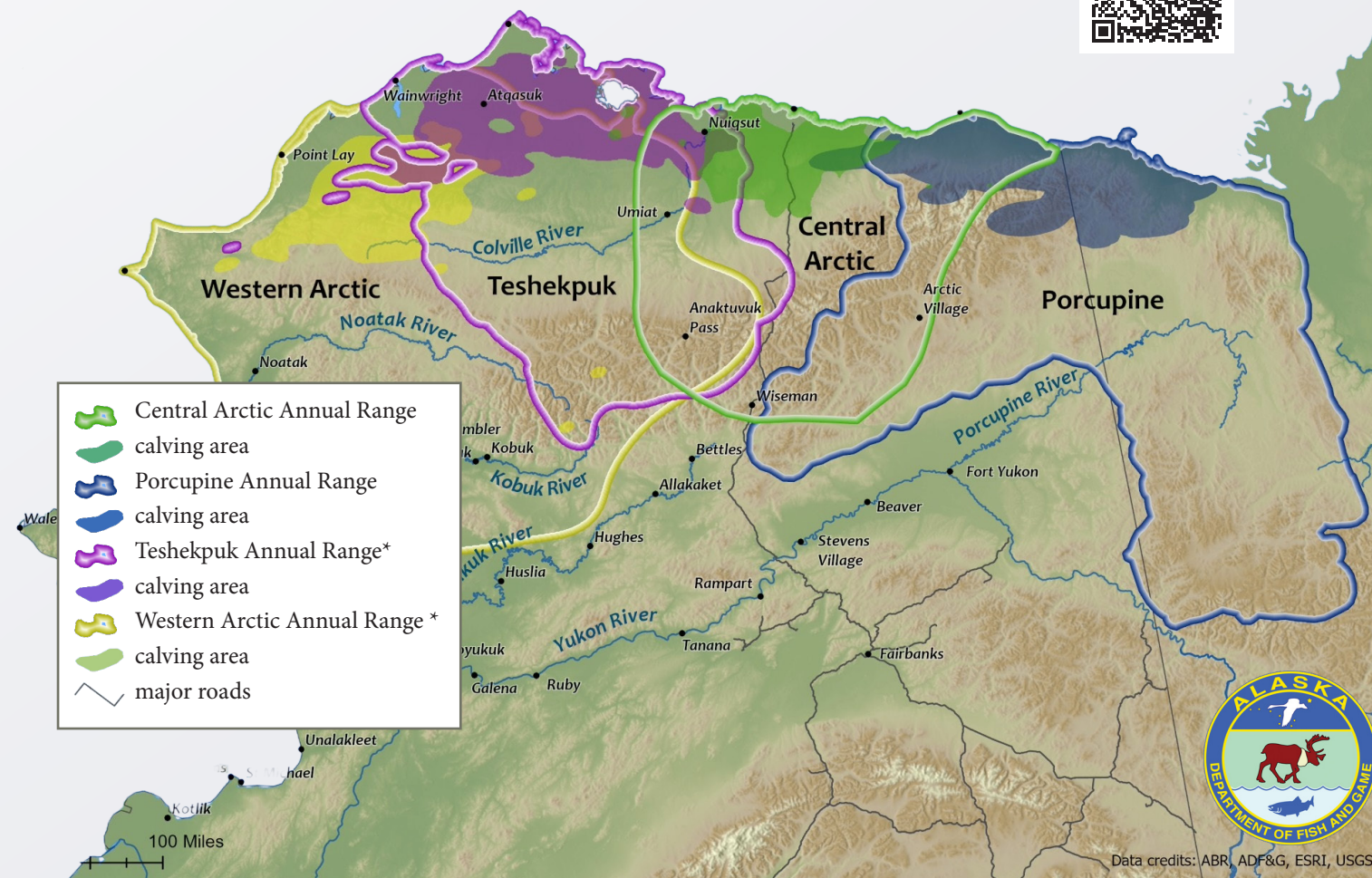
Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Spring 2026

Recent surveys show the Porcupine and Central Arctic caribou herds have declined significantly, with populations now estimated at 143,000 (PCH) and 26,600 (CAH).

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) completed a photocensus of the Porcupine (PCH) and Central Arctic (CAH) caribou herds in the summer of 2025. Results show both herds have declined since their last counts: the PCH has declined an estimated 34% since 2017, and the CAH is down an estimated 23% since 2022. These changes were expected based on ongoing monitoring of survival and birth rates. Caribou populations naturally cycle through periods of growth and decline, and biologists will continue tracking these trends closely. Read on to learn about the range, health status, and monitoring efforts of these two herds. **Scan the QR code to read the advisory announcement.**



North Slope Caribou Herds Range Map



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The Porcupine Caribou Herd

The Porcupine Caribou Herd (PCH) migrates across approximately 78,000 miles of remote landscape in the eastern Arctic.

The PCH migrates across the Arctic slope, Brooks Range, and northeastern Alaska, and extends into the Yukon and Northwest Territories of Canada. Over the past decade, the herd's seasonal movements have included calving on the coastal plain in early June and spending summers in the Brooks Range. The herd is cooperatively managed under an international agreement between Alaska and Canada to conserve and ensure sustainable use.

Lower reproduction, nutritional stress, and reduced adult female survival appear to be factors contributing to the herd's decline— from 218,000 in 2017 to an estimated 143,000 in 2025.

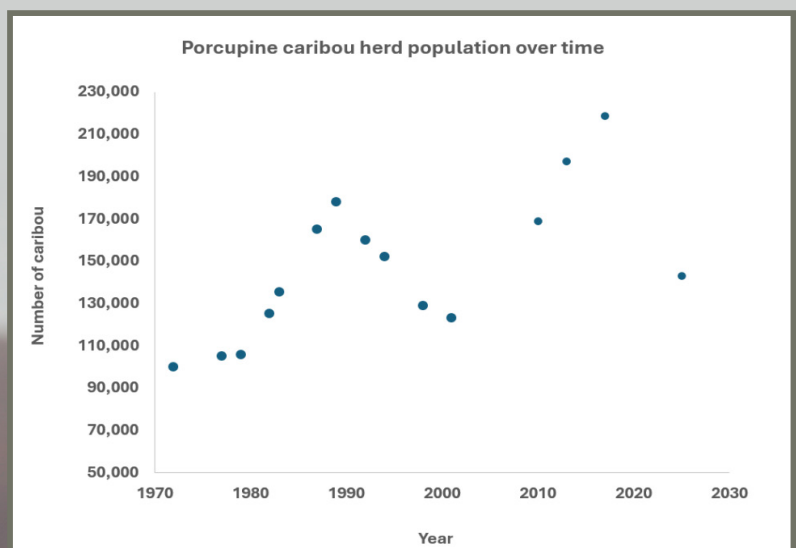
From 2005 through 2013, all female caribou (three years and older) consistently had high birth rates of 70-80%. This strong reproduction rate helped the herd grow to a record high of 218,000 animals in 2017. However, recent data shows a different story. Younger adult females (three-year-olds) are now reproducing at lower rates, likely because they are not getting enough nutrition early in life.

This delay in reproduction means fewer calves are born each year, contributing to the herds' decline. Reproduction is only part of the picture; survival rates are shifting as well. When adult female caribou survival is at 85% or higher, the herd is generally stable or increasing. Survival rates below 85% indicate the population is likely declining. For the PCH, recent dips below 85% survival rates are also driving the population decline.

The PCH is expected to continue declining until survival and reproduction improve.



Caribou grouped together on snow patches to escape biting insects.



The Central Arctic Caribou Herd

The Central Arctic Herd (CAH) ranges across the central Arctic slope and south into the Central Brooks Range.

The CAH range extends across Alaska's North Slope, and is intersected by the Dalton Highway corridor, making it one of the most accessible herds for hunters. Seasonal movements include calving on tundra habitats near the coast in early summer, followed by dispersal across the North Slope and southward towards the Brooks Range in winter.

The 2025 photocensus estimate for the CAH is 26,600.

The CAH has experienced substantial fluctuations over the past 15 years. The herd reached a peak of about 68,400 caribou in 2010, then dropped sharply to 22,600 in 2016. The herd later increased to 34,600 in 2022 before declining again to 26,600 in 2025. These fluctuations highlight that the herd can recover and rebound. Recent trends of lower calf survival and reduced adult survival have contributed to this decline.

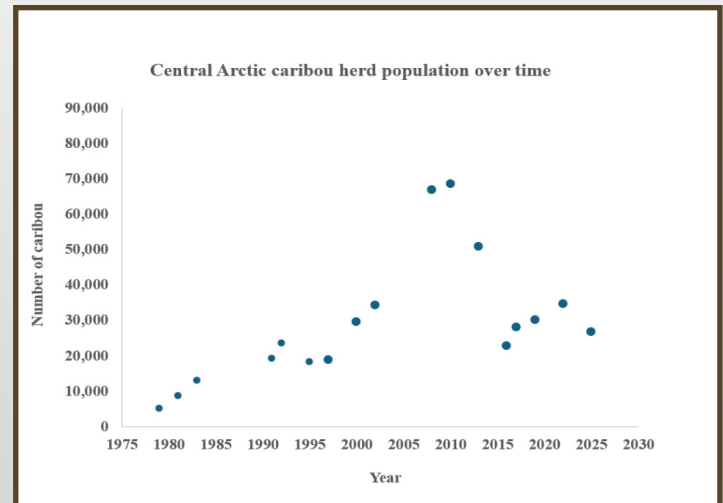
CAH calving rates remain normal, but calf survival is declining.

- Caribou birth rates remain stable and close to the long-term average of 85%.
- Early season calf survival has dropped to the mid- to low-60% range in the last three years, compared to 70% or higher in growth years.
- Fall 2024 composition (the age and sex make up of the herd) surveys show a lower calf-to-cow ratio than in previous years.
- Adult survival averaged 85% over the last three years. For comparison, the average adult survival was 88% during past periods of herd growth (2005-2010 and 2017-2021).

Together, these indicators suggest that while cows are still producing calves at expected rates, reduced survival of young caribou may be limiting overall herd growth.

The CAH continues with a pattern of growth and decline. ADF&G will continue to monitor the herd to track changes in population trajectory.

The future of the CAH is uncertain. While the herd has historically fluctuated around population management objectives, recent indicators such as lower calf survival and reduced adult survival suggest the herd may be experiencing some stress. Environmental challenges, nutrition, and changing distribution patterns could contribute to herd fluctuations. Although current harvest levels remain biologically sustainable, managers are monitoring the herd closely.



The management objective for the herd is 28,000 to 32,000 animals.



Beginning July 1, 2026, the resident bag limit for Unit 26B Remainder will change to 5 bulls.

Upcoming regulation changes for CAH harvest

Because the Central Arctic herd is below population objectives cow harvest is no longer warranted. Beginning July 1, 2026, the resident bag limit for Unit 26B Remainder will change to 5 bulls. The Board of Game will address the management strategy for Central Arctic caribou harvest at their March 2027 meeting. These changes are intended to support herd recovery, and managers will reassess cow harvest once the population reaches or exceeds the management objective of 28,000 caribou.

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address

Counting Caribou

Obtaining an accurate population estimate for caribou is very challenging. Environmental conditions must align perfectly for the caribou to group up and become available for the photocensus airplane to acquire high quality digital images. For many herds there is only one chance each year when this occurs. In many years, the conditions for a count don't come together, and a count is not possible.

Learn more about counting caribou!



We want to hear from you! If you have questions, comments, or concerns about the PCH or CAH, please contact:

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Check out these helpful guides for hunting the PCH and CAH

The Dalton Highway

Visitor Guide



Bull or Cow?

How to distinguish between bull and cow caribou in the field

