

Unit 23 Working Group Teleconference October 12, 2009 – 2:00-4:00 pm

Summary of Discussion

The Unit 23 Working Group met via teleconference on Monday, October 12, 2009, from 2:00-4:00 p.m. A list of members in attendance is attached.

The objectives of the teleconference were to:

- Review the two proposals submitted by the Unit 23 Working Group to the Alaska Board of Game and discuss preparations for the November 13-16, 2009, Board meeting.
- Brief update on a draft statute being prepared by Representative Reggie Joule's office to provide the Big Game Commercial Services Board (BGCSB) with the authority to regulate transporters.
- Informally discuss the 2009 hunting season.
- Consider schedule for future Unit 23 Working Group meetings.

Proposals to Alaska Board of Game

The Unit 23 Working Group submitted two proposals to the Alaska Board of Game for their consideration at the November 13-16, 2009, meeting in Nome. The proposals are:

- Proposal #19 – Implement a mandatory orientation requirement for pilots who transport hunters or game in Unit 23
- Proposal #22 – Lengthen the aircraft closure period in the Noatak Controlled Use Area (CUA) to August 15-September 30 (from current dates of August 25-September 15)

The following working group members are planning to attend the Board meeting and can speak during public testimony in support of these proposals: Charlie Gregg, Enoch Mitchell, Phil Driver, Joe Schuster. Pete Schaeffer may also attend. The Northwest Arctic Borough will provide funding for an additional Noatak resident to attend (Charlie Gregg will contact Enoch Mitchell to arrange.) Jan Caulfield, Unit 23 facilitator, will provide a brief report on behalf of the Unit 23 Working Group, to provide background on the proposals and status of the Working Group process.

Proposed Statute Change Regarding BGCSB Regulation of Transporters

The Working Group requested that Representative Reggie Joule introduce legislation to expand the BGCSB's authorities to regulate transporter numbers and use areas (as it has for guides) and change the definition of "transportation services" to require air taxi operators that transport clients for big game hunting in the field to comply with regulations that address transporters. Elizabeth Hensley, of Rep. Joule's office, explained the draft bill (Attachment 1) and requested comments on the bill from Working Group members. Working group members should provide any comments to: Elizabeth Hensley, Email: Elizabeth.hensley@legis.state.ak.us Phone: 907-269-0162

Discussion of 2009 Hunting Season

Working Group members offered the following comments about the 2009 hunting season:

Caribou Abundance and Distribution – general impressions:

- The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) does not yet have the results of the July 2009 census of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd. The census count may not be available until spring 2010.
- One Working Group member noted that caribou numbers near Kivalina were very low; seemingly lower than during the 1970s. Caribou have been passing further to the east during the past several years.
- ADF&G commented that caribou seemed to move south through a few narrow corridors. They were not abundant near most villages, and most villages did not get enough caribou (exceptions may be upper Kobuk, Selawik, Buckland).
- Several Working Group members noted that there were very few large bulls seen this year; mostly females and young bulls (areas mentioned included Noatak, Kivalina, Point Hope, and generally areas northwest of the Kobuk River).
- ADF&G noted the lack of larger mature bulls when collaring caribou at Onion Portage.
- One working group member noted that caribou numbers in the Selawik area seemed higher than in the last few years, and the age and sex composition did not seem to be different than in past years.
- ADF&G noted that a pulse of caribou crossed Onion Portage early in the fall and were hunted in the Selawik and Buckland areas.
- The Working Group asked Jan Caulfield to send them recent scientific articles about caribou population abundance (See Attachments 2-5, listed below).

Hunting Activity, Enforcement & Coordination

- There generally seemed to be fewer non-local hunters in Unit 23 this year.
- ADF&G received more complaints from residents about hunting conflicts than in 2006-2008. Scarcity of caribou may have heightened residents' sensitivity and concern.
- The Northwest Arctic Borough (NWAB) received complaints about hunting and camping on NANA land near Kobuk, a plane flying too low and disturbing caribou on the Wulik River, same day flying/hunting in the Squirrel River area, and a case of meat waste near the Kelly River.
- The federal land management agencies and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) presented information about permitted guides and transporters on public lands in Unit 23 to the NWAB Planning Commission and to communities in the region on August 18.

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other federal agencies worked closely with NANA Purcell Security trespass officers in the villages, to improve communication and enforcement.
- People with concerns are reporting aircraft numbers and descriptions, which is very helpful for enforcement.
- The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) had more presence in the region than in past seasons, including an August 17 meeting with the NWAB, August 18 Planning Commission meeting, mid-August and September flights over the Squirrel River, and meeting with Kiana about the Squirrel River management plan that is underway. BLM permitted seven guides in Unit 23, but only three or four were active in 2009. BLM issued five transporter permits in Unit 23; the agency has not yet received transporter activity reports.
- DNR did not receive any calls from the public or from Trooper Eric Lorrington with complaints about enforcement concerns.
- The NWAB noted that only three operators have complied with the borough requirement that guides and transporters receive a permit to operate in the Borough. They will follow-up with noncompliant operators over the winter.

Future Working Group Meeting

No decision was made regarding scheduling a next meeting of the Unit 23 Working Group. The group would prefer to wait until after the Board of Game meeting to decide about a future meeting. Jan Caulfield will contact group members later in November. The group needs to consider what it would want to accomplish at a final meeting, and what should be the final product from the group's work.

Other topics / assignments:

- Noted that the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group will be meeting in Anchorage on December 8-10. The requested an update on the Unit 23 Working Group.
- The group asked Jan Caulfield to contact the Division of Occupational Licensing, suggest that they remind guides and transporters to provide latitude/longitude information on their activity reports. (NOTE: The Division confirmed via email on 10-22-09 that they have been contacting operators to get latitude/longitude information.)
- Also attached (Attachment 6) is the final "Benefits Based Management Study for the Squirrel River Area," prepared by the Department of Resources Management, University of Alaska Fairbanks for the BLM. The report summarizes results of focus groups and interviews with residents of Kiana and Noorvik and surveys of non-local residents (conducted in fall 2008), regarding their views of conflicts between local residents and non-local hunters in the Squirrel River area of Unit 23. BLM will consider this report as it prepares a management plan for the land it manages in the Squirrel River area.

Attachments:

1. WORK DRAFT statute (House Bill) regarding BGCSB regulatory authority over transporters. “An Act relating to regulations adopted by the Big Game Commercial Services Board and to the definition of ‘transportation services’ in relation to big game hunting.”
2. Charles J. Hanley, Associated Press, October 4, 2009, “Mighty caribou herds dwindle, warming blamed”
3. Vors LS, Boyce MS (2009) Global declines of caribou and reindeer. *Global Change Biology*.
4. Sharma S, Couturier S, Cote SD (2009) Impacts of climate change on the seasonal distribution of migratory caribou. *Global Change Biology*, **15**, 2549-2562.
5. Dau J (2009) The Adaptable Caribou. *Fair Chase*, **16**, 16-23.
6. Harrington, AM, Fix PJ (2009) Benefits Based Management Study for the Squirrel River Area. Department of Resources Management, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Unit 23 Working Group Membership
& Attendance at October 12, 2009 Teleconference

Name	Affiliations
Lee Anne Ayres	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Kerry Cope (unable to attend)	Big Game Commercial Services Board
Jim Dau	Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Phil Driver	Alaska Professional Hunting Association Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group
Mike Fleagle	Federal Subsistence Board
Charlie Gregg (unable to attend)	Northwest Arctic Borough
Cyrus Harris (unable to attend)	Maniilaq Association
George Helfrich (unable to attend)	National Park Service
Shelly Jacobson	Bureau of Land Management
Cliff Judkins	Board of Game
Victor Karmun (unable to attend)	Northwest Arctic Regional Advisory Council Kotzebue Sound Advisory Committee
Melvin Lee	Upper Kobuk Advisory Committee
Dianna Leinberger	Alaska Department of Natural Resources
Enoch Mitchell	Noatak/Kivalina Advisory Committee
Ron Moto, Sr. (unable to attend)	North Seward Peninsula Advisory Committee
Walter Sampson (unable to attend)	NANA Regional Corporation
Pete Schaeffer	Kotzebue Sound Advisory Council
Joe Schuster	Alaska Professional Hunting Association Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group
Ted Spraker	Board of Game Big Game Commercial Services Board
Raymond Stone (unable to attend)	Northwest Arctic Regional Advisory Council Lower Kobuk Advisory Committee Big Game Commercial Services Board Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group
Alex Whiting (unable to attend)	Kotzebue IRA

Others in attendance:

Jan Caulfield, Facilitator
 Mark Burch, ADF&G
 Peter Bente, ADF&G
 Elizabeth Hensley, Rep. Joule's Office
 Grant Hildreth, NWAB
 Ukallaysaaq Tom Okleasik, NWAB
 Duane Powers, NWAB
 Sky Starkey
 Charlotte Westing, ADF&G