

**Unit 23 Working Group Meeting
October 29-31, 2008 – Kotzebue, Alaska
Meeting Summary**

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1.0 Introduction

The Unit 23 Working Group met on October 29-31, 2008, in Kotzebue, Alaska, at the Northwest Arctic Borough (NWAB) Assembly Chambers. The group was formed in early 2008 to discuss fall hunting conflicts between local hunters, nonlocal hunters and commercial operators (guides, transporters) in Game Management Unit (GMU) 23, in northwest Alaska.¹ The group intends to work together by consensus, to develop solutions to fall hunting conflicts that will be sent as advisory recommendations to regulatory boards, land and wildlife management agencies, and others to evaluate and consider for implementation. Working Group members are listed in Attachment 1. Jan Caulfield facilitated the meeting,² assisted by Mark Burch of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G).

The objectives of the October meeting were to:

- Briefly review status & results of work assigned at April 2008 meeting.
- Share information & updates -- current situation, coming opportunities.
- Select priority issues the group wants to address at this and future meetings.
- Discuss possible solutions for priority issues – Work toward advisory recommendations from the Working Group that will reduce user conflicts.
- Provide public comment opportunities.

Section 2.0 presents seven consensus agreements reached by the Working Group at this meeting and follow-up assignments. Section 3.0 is a general summary of topics

¹ The Unit 23 Working Group met for the first time in April 2008. See Unit 23 project web site for additional information and meeting summaries: www.wildlife.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=planning.unit23

² Jan Caulfield, Unit 23 Facilitator, 114 S. Franklin St., Ste. 202, Juneau, AK 99801, 907-523-4610, janc@gci.net

discussed; Section 4.0 gives notice of future meeting dates and possible discussion topics. Public comments are summarized in Section 5.0.

All Working Group meetings are open to the public. The October meeting was broadcast on public radio station KOTZ each morning. Attachment 2 list members of the public and agency staff who attended and/or provided public comment. The meeting agenda is in Attachment 3.

The Working Group is scheduled to meet again on January 30-31 and April 2-4, 2009, in Kotzebue at the Northwest Arctic Borough Assembly Chambers. A sub-group is planning to travel to Shungnak on January 28 or 29, 2009, to attend a public meeting hosted by the Upper Kobuk Fish and Game Advisory Committee (AC).

2.0 Consensus Agreements and Assignments

At its October 29-31, 2008 meeting, the Working Group reached consensus agreement on the following recommendations:

2.1 Proposal to Board of Game – Extend Dates of Noatak Controlled Use Area

The Working Group agreed to submit a proposal to the Alaska Board of Game that would extend the dates of the closure to the use of aircraft for big game hunting in the Noatak Controlled Use Area (CUA) to August 1 - September 30 (from the current dates of August 25-September 15). (See Section 3.4.2 for more information).

The proposal will be submitted to the Board of Game in time for the Board's consideration at its November 2009 meeting, which will focus on regulatory changes in Northwest Alaska. If adopted by the Board, the regulation will take effect for the 2010 hunting season.

Assignment: Jim Dau will draft the regulatory proposal and circulate it for review by the Working Group, and the group can confirm its support for the exact language at its January 2009 meeting. (Note: If the Working Group intends to submit a companion proposal to the Federal Subsistence Board (FSB), it would need to be submitted between January-April 2009, for FSB consideration at its January 2010 meeting; the regulation would take effect July 2010.)

2.2 Recommend BGCSB Have Statutory Authority to Regulate Transporters

The Working Group agreed to send a letter to the Alaska State Legislature (through Representative Reggie Joule and Senator Donald Olson) to request that the Big Game Commercial Services Board (BGCSB) be given statutory authority to regulate transporters. The letter should:

- Request that the Board be given statutory authority to regulate transporter numbers and use areas, as it has for big game guide services³.

³ It was noted that the BGCSB already has authority to require a transporter activity report (12 AAC 75.400) and adopt and enforce standards of operation/ethics for transporters (12 AAC 75.440.)

- Request that the current statutory definition for “transportation services” (AS 08.54.790(10)) be modified to require that air taxi operators who transport clients for big game hunting as an “incidental portion of its business” file a transporter activity report and comply with other regulations that address big game transportation services.
- Recommend that staffing for the BGCSB be increased in the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, to allow them to effectively assist the Board with this expanded authority.

Assignment: Jan Caulfield will draft letter to Rep. Joule and Sen. Olson, presenting this consensus recommendation (coordinate with Ted Spraker and Mike Fleagle on draft letter).

2.3 Agency Coordination – Planning and Management

The Working Group agreed that the federal land management agencies (BLM, USFWS, NPS) should coordinate their planning and management to the maximum extent possible, to provide an integrated and consistent approach to addressing user conflicts on federal lands in Unit 23. The Working Group recommended that a letter be sent to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior (copied to the Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior for Alaska). The letter will provide a briefing on the Unit 23 Working Group process, requesting coordination among these federal agencies, and recognize the coordination that is already occurring. NOTE: Federal agency representatives have met several times since the October meeting, to expand their coordination. (See Section 3.4.2 for more information.)

Assignment: Federal agency representatives on the Working Group will pursue this additional coordination, and will coordinate with DNR and the NWAB. Jan Caulfield will draft a letter from the Working Group to the Secretary of the Interior and the Special Assistant for Alaska (coordinate with Mike Fleagle on draft letter).

2.4 Letter to BGCSB Regarding Areas Where Transporters Operate

The Working Group requested that a letter be sent to the BGCSB Chair (copied to federal and state agencies, and BGCSB staff) asking that transporters operating in Unit 23 be asked to identify the primary areas in which they expect to operate, in advance of each hunting season. This will make it possible to encourage improved communication between transporters and local communities prior to and during the hunting season.

Assignment: Jan Caulfield will draft letter, in consultation with Ted Spraker (BGCSB member.)

2.5 Pre-Season Meeting with Commercial Service Providers

The Working Group recommended that an annual meeting be held to provide orientation to commercial service providers (guides, transporters) on ways to avoid conflicts during the fall hunting season, and to establish open lines of communication with land management agencies, the NWAB and others before the season begins.

NOTE: This pre-season meeting would build on the progress that has already been made in improving communication and awareness in Unit 23. The group recommends that the following continue: (1) annual letter to guides and transporters from the Unit 23 Working Group, encouraging operators take steps to avoid conflicts, (2) wide distribution of the educational booklet *Hunting Legal – Hunting Smart in Unit 23*, and (3) annual arrangement with KOTZ to serve as a clearinghouse for information about meat donation to local residents.

Assignment: At future WG meeting, need additional discussion about a pre-season orientation meeting; for example: who should host; appropriate dates and locations; meeting content and format; number of meeting sessions to offer; how to make information available to commercial service providers who do not base in Kotzebue; etc.

2.6 Communication with New Commercial Service Providers

Assignment: Ted Spraker, a member of the BGCSB, committed to working with any commercial service providers who are new to Unit 23 (through BGCSB staff) to ensure that they are aware of the issues and sensitivities in Unit 23 – to avoid conflicts during the hunting season.

2.7 Conduct Public Meeting in Shungnak

The Working Group requested that a public meeting be held in Shungnak (in association with the Upper Kobuk AC) to present information about the Unit 23 Working Group and hear from Upper Kobuk villages about specific concerns with fall hunting conflicts and possible solutions in this area of Unit 23. (Note: The meeting will be held in January 2009, prior to the Unit 23 Working Group meeting.)

Assignment: Mark Burch (ADF&G) will coordinate with Reggie Cleveland to set up the meeting; will coordinate travel and logistics (with NPS); and will communicate with Working Group members regarding who is available to attend.

3.0 Summary of Working Group Discussion

This section provides a brief summary of Working Group discussion under each agenda topic. (Agenda in Attachment 3).

3.1 Introductions & Opening Remarks

The meeting began with welcoming remarks by Mayor Sikauraq Whiting of the NWAB. Mayor Whiting thanked the Working Group, again emphasized the importance of subsistence to the people in the region, and indicated her support for this collaborative process to resolve fall hunting conflicts. Mayor Whiting noted that rules and regulations must be understandable and as consistent as possible across land ownerships. She emphasized the responsibility of ensuring that elders can hunt and have their local traditional foods.

In opening remarks, several group members noted that caribou had migrated in late August/early September 2008, which is earlier than in several past years. If the dates of

the Noatak CUA had been changed to September 9-30 (as had been proposed by the Working Group in July 2008), restrictions on aircraft access for big game hunting would not have been in place during the migration. (See Section 2.1)

Several members expressed that it is important that the Working Group should approve recommendation only if they believe there is a reasonable opportunity the recommendations will be acted on and will make a difference. It is important to be clear with the public about what can be accomplished in this process.

In remarks to the Working Group, Representative Reggie Joule encouraged the group to work toward consensus on its recommendations – to strengthen the recommendations and make it more likely that they will be acted on.

At the request of Charlie Gregg, NWAB, additional time for public comment phone-in was provided on Friday, October 31.

3.2 Progress Since April 2008 Working Group Meeting

The Working Group reviewed work that had been accomplished since the first meeting in April 2008:

- Noatak & Kiana Public Meetings, May 2008: As recommended by the full Working Group, a number of members traveled to Kiana and Noatak on May 21 & 22, 2008, to attend public meetings hosted by the Lower Kobuk and Noatak-Kivalina ACs. Issues raised by the public included aircraft disturbance of local hunting, aircraft and boat disturbance of caribou when they are crossing rivers or approaching local hunting parties, enforcement, and concerns about meat care and waste. The public generally supported a proposal to change the dates of the Noatak CUA to later in September, but did not support a proposal to increase the caribou bag limit for non-Alaska resident hunters from one to two caribou in portions of Unit 23 due to concern about potential increase in meat waste.⁴ A summary of the Noatak and Kiana meetings is posted on the Unit 23 Working Group project web site.
- Letter to Guides and Transporters, June 2008: A letter was sent to all guides and transporters operating in Unit 23, signed by the Working Group, asking them to avoid fall hunting conflicts and to ensure that all clients receive a copy of the hunter education booklet, *Hunting Legal – Hunting Smart in Unit 23, Northwest Alaska*.
- Proposal to Board of Game, July 2008: The Working Group submitted a proposal to the Board of Game that would have (1) shifted the dates of the closure to the use of aircraft for big game hunting in the Noatak CUA to September 9-30 (from the current dates of August 25-Sept. 15); and (2) increased the non-Alaska resident caribou bag limit from one to two caribou per year in areas farther from important subsistence hunting areas. The Board of Game did not approve the proposal at its meeting on July 2, 2008. The Board was concerned that the public would be confused if the new CUA date differed from the date published in the (already printed) regulations book.

⁴ The Noatak CUA date change and bag limit change was proposed by the Working Group to the Board of Game, but was not approved.

The Board also noted that there was not wide public support for the bag limit change in the region, and not complete consensus of the Working Group. The Board encouraged the Working Group to continue its work, and to submit any proposals for regulatory change for consideration at the November 2009 Board meeting.

- Public comments submitted to Working Group: The group was provided with copies of all public comments received from April-October 2008.

3.3 Roundtable Discussion and Presentations

Working group members shared information/updates about things that had happened since April 2008, relevant to Unit 23 hunting issues. A summary of the discussion and presentations is provided in Attachment 4.

3.4 Discussion of Issues

The October 2008 meeting packet included a draft list of issues related to user conflicts that have been raised during the Unit 23 Working Group process, through public comments, interviews and meetings. The issues were not listed in priority order. Possible ways to resolve conflicts that have been suggested were also listed.

At this meeting, Working Group discussion focused on ways to reduce user conflicts in areas that are used heavily by nonlocal hunters, and are also important areas for local hunting and/or are caribou migration routes. The group's discussion focused on opportunities to:

- reduce conflict through improved communication and education of hunters and commercial service providers; and
- address conflicts that may arise in areas heavily used by both nonlocal and local hunters, and/or areas important to caribou migration.

The group also talked generally about the overall level and density of nonlocal hunting, camps and activity in Unit 23, and how that may relate to the occurrence and intensity of conflicts during hunting season. While the overall numbers of nonlocal hunters in Unit 23 has declined from its historic high in 2006, it is important to prepare for possible increased interest in the future -- and be ready to respond with management tools that will manage use and prevent conflicts. At its October meeting, the Working Group tried to discuss which of the six Guide Use Areas are already "at capacity" for nonlocal hunting use and which areas might be able to accommodate more use. However, the discussion did not yield any specific results or recommendations. There is some interest in discussing this further at future Working Group meetings.

3.4.1 Communication and Education

The group noted that progress seems to have been made in the past several years in reducing conflict through communication and education. There have been few complaints received by enforcement agencies during the 2007 and 2008 seasons, evidence of better meat care, more local distribution of cared-for meat by nonlocal hunters, and greater awareness among nonlocal hunters and businesses of the importance

of avoiding conflicts. The group strongly recommends that communication and education efforts continue -- and be increased. (See Recommendations 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6, above.)

It was noted that it is important to communicate effectively with commercial service providers that are not based in Kotzebue. This will be discussed further at the January meeting.

It was also noted that the BGCSB has the authority to address complaints regarding the actions or ethics of guides and transporters, but is rarely contacted.

3.4.2 Managing Areas of Intensive Use

The major river corridors in Unit 23 are the most likely areas for conflicts to occur, due to the importance of these areas to local hunting activity and (in some locations) to the caribou migration. The Noatak River is particularly important, since it is "higher upstream" in the fall caribou migration. Local use along the Kobuk River corridor is also intensive. Areas within 30-40 miles of villages receive higher local hunting use, due to proximity. The Squirrel, Aggie and Eli River areas receive high use by nonlocal hunters, within areas used by local hunters and areas important to caribou migration. Areas hunted by locals and nonlocals can move from year to year and depend on the location and abundance of caribou.

Noatak Controlled Use Area: The Noatak River corridor has been managed as a CUA since the 1988-1989 regulatory year to restrict the use of aircraft for big game hunting. The Working Group discussed that the dates when caribou are in the river corridor cannot be reliably predicted and are difficult to "bracket" with only a three-week period. To ensure that the CUA is effective, the Working Group reached a consensus agreement to submit a proposal to the Board of Game to extend the dates of the Noatak CUA to August 1 to September 30. (See Recommendation 2.1, above.) The group also briefly considered a recommendation to extend the Noatak CUA upstream to the Nimiuktuk River. However, it was noted that this would extend the CUA into GUA 23-03, which has relatively low use by nonlocal hunters. The group will not recommend this change, due to lack of consensus.

Kobuk River Corridor: To gain a better understanding of hunting use along the Kobuk River, the Working Group recommended that some members travel to Shungnak prior to the next meeting to meet with the Upper Kobuk AC and members of the public. (See Recommendation 2.7 above.) Working Group members previously met with the Lower Kobuk AC and residents of Kiana and Noorvik in May 2008. Results of interviews with residents of Kiana and Noorvik, conducted by the BLM, will be shared with the Working Group at its January 2009 meeting.

Federal, State and Borough Coordination: Areas intensively used by nonlocal hunters in Unit 23 are generally managed by the ADF&G, NPS (Noatak Preserve), BLM (Squirrel River), USFWS (Selawik Refuge) or DNR (Squirrel River). The Working Group recognized that it would be productive for these agencies to work together (and with the

NWAB) to consider specific management controls on land use and commercial operations to reduce user conflicts and to prepare for any future increase in nonlocal hunting use. (See Recommendation 2.3). Areas of coordination could include:

- Coordinate enforcement efforts among federal and state agencies, NWAB and NANA.
- Coordinate upcoming federal land management planning processes⁵ – to ensure effective and efficient public involvement efforts (e.g., scoping meetings, interviews, surveys); ensure that the issues raised in the Unit 23 Working Group process are fully addressed in planning; allow for planners to consider user conflicts and levels and densities of nonlocal hunting in an *integrated* manner on public lands in Unit 23; etc.
- Work toward a more consistent set of permit stipulations for guides and transporters that addresses the issues related to user conflicts in Unit 23, and support the standards set for guides and transporters by the BGCSB.
- Host and/or participate in pre-season meeting(s) with guides and transporters.
- Consider opportunities for coordination of management and planning on BLM and State lands (e.g., BGCSB regulation of guides on BLM land, DNR cooperation in a land management planning in the Squirrel River area).
- Pursue a consistent approach to management of air taxis that provide incidental transportation services for hunting on federal lands.

The agencies will report to the Working Group on this type of coordination at the January meeting.

Regulation of Transporters by BGCSB: Currently, the BGCSB does not have authority to regulate the number of transporters (and air taxis) that transport hunters. During its discussion of the level and density of nonlocal hunting use in Unit 23, the Working Group recommended that the BGCSB be given this statutory authority and additional staffing -- to give the Board a new significant tool for managing levels and locations of use. In addition, the group recommended that legislation clarify that air taxis that incidentally transport hunters be managed as "transporters." (See Recommendation 2.2)

4.0 Future Meeting Schedule & Topics

Mark Burch will work with Reggie Cleveland to set up a public meeting in Shungnak with the Upper Kobuk AC on Wednesday, January 28, or Thursday, January 29.

⁵ Within the next 15 months to three years, federal agencies will be preparing management plans that will address commercial services provided for hunting, and other uses, on federal public lands in Unit 23. Areas for which plans will be prepared include the Noatak Preserve (NPS), Selawik Refuge (USFWS), and Squirrel River area (BLM).

The Working Group will meet next on January 30-31, 2009, in Kotzebue. Working Group members asked that the following topics be included on the January agenda:

- Report results of BLM surveys and interviews related to use in the Squirrel River area. (Also need to consider whether surveys/interviews should be conducted in other communities to document uses in other intensively hunted areas.)
- Deering/Buckland spring caribou migration issues.
- Get well-cared-for meat into villages to benefit local residents.
- Increase the economic benefit of nonlocal hunting to residents of Unit 23 (e.g. discuss meat processing, local participation in guiding/transporting). NOTE: BGCSB member Brenda Rabne is very interested in hearing ideas about ways to involve more local residents (statewide) in providing commercial services for hunting.
- Ensure that air taxis that provide transportation for big game hunting are being addressed and managed.
- Communicate effectively with operators based in communities outside of Unit 23 (Bettles, Fairbanks, Galena.)
- Further discussion of an approach of determining the number and density of nonlocal hunters that can be accommodated in Unit 23, with no or only very low levels of user conflict

The following meeting is scheduled for April 2-4, 2009, in Kotzebue. Agencies requested discussion of coordinated enforcement efforts in fall 2009.

The Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group (WACHWG) is meeting December 10-11 in Anchorage at the Diamond Center Hotel. Mark Burch will present information about the Unit 23 Working Group process and recommendations to date.

5.0 Public Comments

The public was invited to comment during late morning sessions on Thursday, October 30 and Friday, October 31. Comments were welcomed from people attending the meeting in Kotzebue, as well as through a toll-free telephone line. Written comment forms were also provided, for people to complete and mail-in at their convenience.

The following points were during the public comment periods. Comments are grouped under general topic headings, and are not listed in any order of priority.

Importance of Subsistence Hunting and Local Foods

- Subsistence priority is very important. Need to consider the federal subsistence priority provided by ANILCA in the group's discussions and in solutions.
- The village of Buckland has not had caribou come near the village during early fall for the last five years.
- When local foods are not available, people have health problems.

- Local people hunt for their own use and share; do not over hunt; have respect for land. Concern that non-local hunters do not have the same ethic.
- The caribou herd is down 25% in the 2007 count. Need to attend to the herd.
- Traditional knowledge must be respected.
- Food and fuel costs in villages are tremendously high and rising; subsistence fishing and hunting are becoming even more essential as the cost to purchase food rises. Can't afford for hunts to be unsuccessful due to user conflicts or disturbance of migrating caribou.
- Concern about decline in availability of moose (Buckland area).

Concerns about disruption of caribou

- Need to let first group of caribou cross the river to avoid disruption of migration.
- Concern about the effect of air carrier transporters on caribou migration paths.
- It is important to have hunting success close to home. Fuels costs are so high that people cannot afford to go farther to get caribou.
- Float plane activity / landings create noise that disturbs migration and hunting.

Comments on regulation of hunters and commercial businesses (guides, transporters)

- Focus on transporters, as the service providers that are the most unregulated.
- Big Game Commercial Services Board should regulate transporters.
- Working Group should collaborate with the NWAB to assist with compliance with local laws and permits. Move toward one-stop shop for commercial service permits.
- Need to address (and survey) guides and transporters who operate out of Fairbanks, Galena and Bettles (not just those who base out of Kotzebue airport).
- There should be a limit on the number of clients an air transporter can bring out.
- Should limit the number and density of non-local hunters in the guide use areas to ensure that conflicts do not escalate in the future.
- There have been some conflicts with commercial services provider in Buckland.

User Conflicts

- There have been fewer complaints in the past several years about conflicts with non-local hunters in the field; but no confidence that this will be the case in the future.
- Need to look at tools that can limit non-local hunters to a reasonable level, to keep conflicts down.
- Non-local hunters in the area between Selawik and Buckland block the herd from coming by those villages. Local hunters cannot afford to follow the displaced herd.
- There are no conflicts during spring hunting, when caribou have no antlers. The aspect of hunting for trophy antlers is what creates the conflict and meat waste.

Local people do not appreciate this motivation. Suggest agencies require cutting of antlers to reduce trophy value; require hunt to focus on meat.

- The behavior of many non-local hunters causes conflict.
- Airplane overflights or “whizzing boats” scare caribou when they are about to cross the rivers. This disrupts local hunting.
- Local people feel they would like to put up No Trespassing signs on Native allotments.

Noatak Controlled Use Area (CUA)

- Believe that the Board of Game was very open to a change in dates to the Noatak CUA, but did not adopt the proposal in July 2008 because it was linked to a more controversial change in the non-resident caribou bag limit.

Meat handling and waste

- Having public radio station KOTZ serve as a clearinghouse for meat donation is helpful.
- Meat needs to be well taken care of; concern about wanton waste.
- Meat that transporters are trying to donate to local people at the airport is often dirty or spoiled. Need to do a better job of getting meat to Kotzebue quickly; would improve relationships between transporters and local residents.
- Traditional way is not to waste meat. Has found wasted meat in the field; some people do not want to learn how to care for meat properly.

Possible local economic and other benefits to the region

- Need to make it easier for local residents to be able to guide non-local hunters.
- Guides and transporters add to the economy of our region. But, need to keep at a reasonable level.

Comments on Unit 23 Working Group process

- Appreciate work of the Working Group members.
- It is important to come together to find solutions that will give respect to the caribou.
- It is important to have village representation on the Working Group.
- Appreciate seeing Inupiaq people on the Working Group; bringing lots of knowledge and history to the group.

Other

- Concern that there may be illegal drug use by clients in the field or payment for commercial services in drugs.
- Question about muskox harvest regulation, under new drawing permit regulation (ADF&G agreed to contact this commenter directly to answer their question.)

Unit 23 Working Group Membership – October 2008

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

**Public & Agency Attendance List
Unit 23 Working Group Meeting**

October 29-31, 2008 – Kotzebue, Alaska

Name	Affiliation
Ken Adkisson	National Park Service (NPS), Western Arctic Parklands (WEAR)
Susan Bucknell	Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)
Kim Franklin	NWAB
Bish Gallahorn	public
Willie Goodwin	NPS, WEAR
Representative Reggie Joule	Alaska State Legislature
Grant Hildreth	NWAB
Marci Johnson	NPS, WEAR
Pierre Lonewolf	KSAC (radio)
Eric Loring	Alaska Wildlife Troopers
Diane Okleasik	public
Ukallaysaaq T. Okleasik	NWAB Planning Director
Bill Overbaugh	BLM
Julie Owen	Northern Air Trophy
John Schaeffer	NWAB Assembly
Sky Starkey	NWAB Attorney
Clarence Summers	NPS Regional Office
Charlotte Westing	ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation
Mayor Sikauraq Whiting	NWAB

Public comments presented by:

Percy Ballott, Buckland
 Roberta Thomas, Buckland
 Johnny Hadley, Buckland
 Marlene Moto, Deering
 Myra Upicksoun, Kotzebue
 Sophie Foster, Kotzebue
 Bish Gallahorn, Kotzebue
 Diane Okleasik, Kotzebue
 Ukallaysaaq T. Okleasik, Kotzebue
 Bobby Wells, Noorvik
 Chuck Schaeffer, Ivik
 Vernetta Nay Moberly, Kotzebue

Unit 23 Working Group October 29-31, 2008

Northwest Arctic Borough Assembly Chambers
9:00 am – 5:00 p.m. Wednesday & Thursday
8:30 am – 1:00 p.m. Friday

*Public ration station KOTZ broadcast the meeting from 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon each day.
Tune to 89.9 FM or AM 720, or listen via the web at www.kotz.org*

AGENDA

Meeting Objectives

- Briefly review status & results of work assigned at April 2008 meeting
- Share information & updates -- current situation, coming opportunities
- Select priority issues the group wants to address at this and future meetings
- Discuss possible solutions for priority issues – Work toward advisory recommendations from the Working Group that will reduce user conflicts
- Public comment opportunities
- Confirm future meeting dates

Wednesday, October 29

Coffee/Refreshments

Opening – Review Between-Meeting Progress

9:00 a.m. Welcome, Introductions

- Members introduce themselves (Attachment 1) – brief opening remarks
- Review agenda, meeting objectives, communication ground rules (Attachment 2) – Jan Caulfield, Facilitator
- Review typical steps in cooperative conflict resolution or planning process (Attachment 3)
- Review Working Group's mission, goal, objectives, general principles (from Charter, Attachment 4)

9:30 a.m. Between-Meeting Progress

- Meetings in Noatak & Kiana with Advisory Committees and public (May 2008) (Attachment 5)
- Letter to guides and transporters (June 2008) (Attachment 6)

- Proposal to Board of Game regarding change in Noatak Controlled Use Area (CUA) and non-resident bag limit (not approved – July 2008)
- Public comments received since April 2008 (Attachment 7)

10:15 a.m. Break

Share Information – Updates

10:30 a.m. Roundtable Discussion and Presentations –

Share information & updates. Topics include (but are not limited to):

- Fall 2008 hunting season – Informal Working Group discussion; if the situation is better, what is making the difference?
- Updated information regarding caribou population and migration, harvest data, use of commercial services – Jim Dau, ADFG
- Updated information on camp locations – Lee Anne Ayres, USFWS
- Survey of non-local hunters using Squirrel River area & focus group meetings with local hunters in Kiana and Noorvik – Shelly Jacobson, BLM (Attachment 8)
- NPS management of commercial services in Noatak Park & Preserve in 2008 season, and 2008 field observations – George Helfrich, NPS
- Update on Big Game Commercial Services Board proposal regarding new guide use areas – Jeanne Proulx, DNR
- Other topics raised by Working Group members

12:00 p.m. Lunch

1:15 p.m. Continue Information Sharing

2:15 p.m. Break

Agree on Priority Issues – Plan for Working Through Them

2:30 p.m. Agree to Issues & Order in Which Group Wants to Address Them

- Review issues statements – Developed at last meeting and added to through between-meeting public comment (see Attachment 9)
- Prioritize topics – High priority to address in short-term; lower priority, longer-term
- Review and discuss tools that are available to manage uses (e.g., agency authorities to manage lands, uses and users).

5:00 p.m. Adjourn for evening

Thursday, October 30

Coffee/Refreshments

9:00 a.m. Welcome – Announcements – Review Agenda/Tasks for the Day

Discuss Issues – Brainstorm and Evaluate Possible Solutions

9:10 a.m. Begin Working Group Discussion of Priority Issue(s)

- FOCUS – Be as specific as possible. What problem is the group trying to address? What would the group like the new outcome to be?
- Brainstorm multiple solutions and tools to address
- Discuss possible solutions
- What criteria are used to select among different options?
- Is additional information, data, analysis of various alternatives, and/or public consultation needed?

10:15 a.m. Break

10:30 –

11:30 a.m. Public Comment Opportunity – Telephone Call-In

Toll-free phone call-in for people outside of Kotzebue.

Dial 1-800-315-6338, enter code 23#. Time per comment will be limited, to ensure opportunity for those who want to speak.

11:30 a.m. Continue Comment Period for Public in Attendance in Kotzebue

12:30 p.m. Lunch

1:15 p.m. Continue Working Group Discussion of Issues

Mid-afternoon break

5:00 p.m. Adjourn

Friday, October 31

Coffee/Refreshments

8:30 a.m. Welcome – Announcements – Review Agenda/Tasks for the Day

8:40 a.m. Continue Working Group Discussion of Issues

11:00 a.m. Public Comment Opportunity – Telephone Call-In

Toll-free phone call-in for people outside of Kotzebue.

Dial 1-800-315-6338, enter code 23#.

Closing – Next Steps and Meetings

12:00 noon Wrap-up / Summary / Future Meeting Schedule

- Future Meeting Schedule (proposed: January 29-31; April 2-4)
- Tasks, actions, schedule – to follow-up on agreements from this meeting and to prepare for next meetings

1:00 p.m. Adjourn

Roundtable Discussion and Presentations

The following information was shared by members of the Unit 23 Working Group during a roundtable discussion/presentation session on October 29, 2008.

Jim Dau, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) presented the following updated information about caribou population, hunter participation and harvest:

- The July 2007 enumeration of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd resulted in a population estimate of 377,000, which is about 23% reduction from the 2003 count of 490,000.
- The numbers of nonlocal hunters declined to about 600 hunters in 2007, from a high of over 750 in 2006.
- In 2007, the trend continued that a greater proportion of nonlocal hunters have been non-Alaska residents, with the balance being Alaskans who do not live in Unit 23.
- For 1998-2007, caribou is the primary game species hunted by nonlocal hunters.
- Nonlocal hunting effort is concentrated during the month of September, with a trend seen in the period 1998-2007 toward later hunting dates.
- The areas most heavily used by nonlocal hunters in Unit 23 from 1998-2007 include Guide Use Areas (GUA) 23-06 and 23-05. GUA 23-06 includes the lower Noatak River; Eli, Aggie and Squirrel River areas. It is the mostly densely used area by nonlocal hunters, with an average nonlocal hunter density of 3.61 hunters per hundred square miles. GUA 23-05 includes the mainstem of the Kobuk River from the mouth to the Park, the Baldwin Peninsula, and the Selawik Refuge. It has an average annual nonlocal hunter density of 2.36 hunters per hundred square miles. In both GUAs, the highest use by nonlocal hunters was in 2006.⁶
- Community harvest assessment data indicate that local harvesting dates overlap with the September time period when nonlocal hunter participation is highest.
- Fall caribou migration patterns from 1988-2006 show four major north-south migration routes between Ambler and Shungnak, in the Salmon River area, in the Aggie/Eli area, and along the coast at Krusenstern. The migrating caribou rejoin in the Selawik area.

Lee Anne Ayres, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) presented maps showing the distribution of hunting camps (both local and nonlocal) sighted by air by federal and state management and enforcement staff in 2006-2008.⁷ Camps were most concentrated along the Noatak River and its tributaries, in the Squirrel River drainages, and along the Selawik and Tagagawik Rivers. However, there are limitations to the value of this data, as not all areas in Unit 23 received equal aerial survey attention, and the time and length of camping at each location is not known. The number of campers (contributing to hunter density on the landscape) is also not known.

The Working Group recommended that agencies no longer use this approach to identify areas of high hunting use. More complete data on hunting use areas is needed. It would

⁶ Note: Factual information in this paragraph corrected on February 21, 2009.

⁷ Camps on NPS lands represent aircraft accessed hunter camps visited by NPS staff. Camps on all other agency lands are temporary tent camps observed from the air.

be more accurate and cost-effective to get that information through reports filed by guides and transporters with the Division of Occupational Licensing, provided the information is properly collected, analyzed and reported.

Shelly Jacobson, Bureau of Land Management (BLM):

- For 13 days during the 2008 fall hunting season, BLM surveyed nonlocal hunters who had returned from hunting in the Squirrel River area. Twenty hunters were surveyed regarding their experiences with hunting and recreation. Surveys were given at the Kotzebue Airport.
- BLM is also interviewing local hunters in Noorvik and Kiana, and will also conduct a survey of Kotzebue residents.
- All survey and interview results will be shared with the Working Group when available.
- The Working Group should consider whether it would be valuable to use this survey tool in other communities, perhaps along with other land management agency planning projects.
- In 2008, BLM renewed permits for the eight previously permitted guides in the Squirrel River area – and will hold that level, pending completion of a Special Recreation Management Plan for the area. The agency did not begin issuing permits to transporters in 2008, but required them to report the number of clients transported rather than issuing permits.
- There are State and NWAB land selections in the Squirrel River area that will transfer from BLM management to these entities. State DNR will assume management of most of the lands along the river corridors, which are more heavily used for hunting.
- BLM would like to coordinate with other federal agencies and with NANA on enforcement efforts during the fall hunting season.

George Helfrich, National Park Service (NPS):

- In 2008, the NPS took a new action by establishing an interim cap on the numbers of guides, transporters and clients in the Noatak Preserve. This will be in place while the Unit 23 Working Group is considering its recommendations related to reducing user conflicts, and the NPS is preparing its Big Game Commercial Services Plan.
- In 2008, there were three guides under contract to the NPS, all operating in GUA 23-02. Guides were limited to 12 clients each, for a total of 36 hunters.
- Eight transporters operated under Commercial Use Authorization (CUA), with a maximum of 357 clients in the Preserve. The highest number of clients for any transporter was 163 people.
- Air taxis that provide transportation to hunters, their gear and game (even as an “incidental portion” of their business as defined by Alaska Statute 08.54.790) were required by the NPS to obtain an Incidental Big Game Transportation Services CUA, and were considered to be “transporters” for NPS management purposes. These air taxis were required to provide the NPS with a copy of the State of Alaska’s Big Game Transporter Activity Report.
- Dan Stevenson, NPS enforcement, noted that staff had contacted about 30% of the hunters in the Preserve and field checked 50-60 camps. In 2008, they noted a marked improvement in meat care, with more use of cloth bags for meat storage. He noted

that enforcement staff is an important conduit of information to nonlocal hunters on meat care and ways to avoid conflict.

- Transporters are not allowed to establish a camp and cycle clients through; everything must be removed from the field each time a client is removed.
- 2008 Activity Reports are not due until February 2009, so use/client data will not be available until then.

Dianna Leinberger, Department of Natural Resources (DNR):

- Hunting and resource gathering are “generally allowed uses” on State land. No permits are needed and DNR has no data about this type of personal use. DNR consults with local areas when considering permits. It is important to note that DNR is a land management agency, not a manager of people.
- Commercial operator authorization / registration administered by DNR:
 - Commercial recreation registration is required for use of State land by commercial recreation operators who require no infrastructure; number of operators is unlimited.
 - Commercial recreation permit (CRP) is required for businesses using infrastructure on State land for less than 14 days; number is unlimited.
 - Land use permit (LUP) is required for businesses using infrastructure on State land more than 14 days; number is unlimited.
- DNR is assisting the Big Game Commercial Services Board (BGCSB) in developing a program to establish sole use of big game guide use areas. A guide lease or permit would authorize a limited number of guide/outfitters (one to three) to conduct commercial big game guiding operations within a specific guide use area. In Unit 23, the proposed boundaries for the guide use areas are little changed from the six existing GUA boundaries. DNR is also assisting with drafting selection criteria, by which guides/outfitters would be awarded use of specific areas. The BGCSB is taking public comment on the proposed program and GUA boundaries and will meet on December 9-11 in Anchorage to consider approval of the regulations. For more information, go to www.dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/hottopics/gua.cfm

Charlie Gregg, Northwest Arctic Borough (NWAB):

- During the 2008 fall hunt, the NWAB developed a photo catalog of transporters airplanes, so that the public and villages can recognize individual planes and monitor activities.
- In 2009, the Borough would like to coordinate its enforcement activities with NANA Purcell Security.
- The Borough distributed 32 applications for NWAB transporter permits to commercial service providers; five permit applications were submitted for Borough approval.

Kerry Cope, representative of Alaska Professional Hunters Association and BGCSB:

- Noted that the company that he works for was involved in less transporter activity in 2008 than in 2007, down from the use of two airplanes to one.

Phil Driver, representative of Alaska Professional Hunters Association and Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group (WACHWG):

- Noted that caribou in GUA 23-01 (near Kivalina) were migrating in such a way that they were crossing the rivers from south to north.
- Hunting went well this season; no disturbances of hunting that he was aware of.

Enoch Mitchell, Noatak-Kivalina AC:

- The restriction on using aircraft for big game hunting in the Noatak CUA was very helpful.
- Need to have flexible dates for the CUA, so can be certain it will be in place when caribou are migrating through the area.
- There were some conflicts in 2008 with overflights that were at low altitudes.
- Not aware of much conflict between local and nonlocal hunters.

Pete Schaeffer, Kotzebue Sound AC:

- The season was generally good for local hunting of caribou in 2008.
- ACs need to compare notes about what they think happened with the caribou migration in 2008 and why – and suggest how this information might be addressed in the Unit 23 process.

Hazel Smith, Maniilaq:

- The Working Group needs to keep Mayor Whiting's opening remarks in mind – the work the group is doing is for the elders, so they can hunt and have local foods.

Victor Karmun, Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council:

- It was a good fall; the caribou hunted were large and healthy. Many grizzly bears in area.

Ron Moto, North Seward Peninsula AC:

- Deering doesn't usually see caribou until December. In 2008, they are early. There are also many bears in the area.

Reggie Cleveland, Upper Kobuk AC:

- Caribou migration patterns have changed; had to go as far downriver as Onion Portage to find caribou.
- There are sometimes problems with regular commercial flights; pilots flying too low.