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FEDERAL SUBSISTENCE BOARD MEETING

TELECONFERENCE - ALASKA

October 19, 2023

MEMBERS PRESENT:

- Anthony Christianson, Chairman
- Rhonda Pitka, Public Member
- Charles Brower, Public Member
- Sara Boario, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Steve Cohn, Bureau of Land Management
- Sarah Creachbaum, National Park Service
- Glenn Chen, Bureau of Indian Affairs

Ken Lord, Solicitor's Office

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P R O C E E D I N G S

(Teleconference - 10/19/2023)

(On record)

MS. DETWILER: This is part of the quorum call, so, Tina, are you recording.

REPORTER: I am online, Sue, do you want me to start recording right now?

MS. DETWILER: Yes. Why don't we go ahead because we're going to start going through the Board members and we should it have it on record, you know, to make sure we have a quorum here.

REPORTER: Okay, give me one second. Okay, we're onrin -- I mean, sorry, we're on record, go ahead.

(Laughter)

MS. DETWILER: Okay. Thank you. This is Sue Detwiler and I appreciate everybody's patience while we worked to get this meeting up and running, and hopefully it'll be fine. First we'll start calling the roll for the Federal Subsistence Board members and start with Bureau of Indian Affairs.

(No comments)

MS. DETWILER: Bureau of Land Management, Steve Cohn.

(No comments)

MS. DETWILER: And maybe having a little trouble callingin through the telephone line.

Fish and Wildlife Service, Sara Boario.

MS. BOARIO: Good afternoon, Sue and everyone, this is Sara and I'm present. Thank you.

MS. CREACHBAUM: I'm here.

MS. DETWILER: Oh, Sarah, good to hear you.

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1 U.S. Forest Service. Chad VanOrmer.

2

3 (No comments)

4

5 MS. DETWILER: Chad VanOrmer, is that

6 you?

7

8 MS. LAVINE: He may not be on yet.

9

10 MS. DETWILER: Okay. Thank you.

11

12 MS. DETWILER: Public Member Charlie

13 Brower.

14

15 MR. BROWER: Here.

16

17 MS. DETWILER: Public Member Rhonda

18 Pitka.

19

20 MS. PITKA: I'm here.

21

22 MS. DETWILER: Thank you, Charlie.

23

24 Chair Anthony Christianson.

25

26 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Here.

27

28 MS. DETWILER: Okay, Liaisons to the

29 Board. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Mark Burch.

30

31 MR. MULLIGAN: Good afternoon. Ben

32 Mulligan here and I think Mark is on listen only.

33

34 MS. DETWILER: And Regional Advisory

35 Council Chairs. There are two Councils that are

36 directly affected by this proposal. Southcentral.

37

38 MS. PILCHER: Good morning, Sue, this

39 is Nissa Pilcher, Council Coordinator for the

40 Southcentral Regional Advisory Council.

41

42 MS. DETWILER: Nissa. And Eastern

43 Interior Regional Advisory Council.

44

45 (No comments)

46

47 MS. DETWILER: Council Coordinator

48 Brooke McDavid was going to call in to represent the

49 Council, the Eastern Interior Council.

50

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1 Let me go back and doublecheck.

2

3 Bureau of Indian Affairs, Glenn Chen.

4

5 (No comments)

6

7 MS. DETWILER: Bureau of Land
8 Management Steve Cohn.

9

10 (No comments)

11

12 MS. DETWILER: U.S. Forest Service Chad
13 VanOrmer.

14

15 MR. RISDAHL: Excuse me, Sue, Chad is
16 trying to get on.

17

18 MS. DETWILER: Okay.

19

20 MR. RISDAHL: He hadn't gotten the new
21 invite yet and I see we are doing this on Teams this
22 time; is that correct?

23

24 MS. DETWILER: Yes.

25

26 MS. RISDAHL: Okay. Okay, I'll make
27 sure he gets it, thank you.

28

29 MS. DETWILER: Thank you. Chair
30 Christianson, we currently have five out of eight.

31

32 MR. COHN:

33

34 MS. DETWILER: Chair Christianson, we
35 currently have five out of eight Board members online.

36

37 MR. CHEN: Hello, Sue, this is Glenn
38 Chen from BIA, I'm present.

39

40 MS. DETWILER: Thank you, Glenn.

41

42 MS. MCDAVID: And, hi, Sue, this is
43 Brooke McDavid, Council Coordinator for Eastern
44 Interior standing in for the Chair.

45

46 MS. DETWILER: Thank you. Board
47 members who have not been able to get on yet are Bureau
48 of Land Management, Steve Cohn and U.S. Forest Service
49 Chad VanOrmer, who I understand is trying to get on.

50

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1 MS. LAVINE: Steve Cohn.

2

3 MS. DETWILER: Okay, Steve Cohn is on.

4

5 MR. COHN: Hi, Sue, I'm on. Yeah,
6 thank you.

7

8 MS. DETWILER: All right, thank you.
9 And I believe Chad VanOrmer is trying to call in so
10 Chair Christianson we have seven of eight Board members
11 online with Forest Service in the process of calling
12 in.

13

14 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Okay, it sounds
15 like we'll go ahead and call this meeting to order.

16

17 MS. DETWILER: All right. We've
18 established a quorum by calling the roll and so I'm
19 handing it off back to you, Mr. Chair. The next item
20 would be review and adopt the agenda.

21

22 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Yes. So
23 welcome everybody. Thank you for taking the time to
24 call in, sorry again about the call in number. I thank
25 the Staff for getting that back out to everybody and
26 everybody figuring it out. We'll go ahead and review
27 and adopt the agenda here. So if I can get a motion to
28 adopt the agenda.

29

30 MR. BROWER: Mr. Chair.

31

32 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Yes.

33

34 MR. BROWER: Mr. Chair, I so move.

35

36 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Okay. Motion
37 made. Any second.

38

39 MS. BOARIO: I second.

40

41 MS. DETWILER: We have a second from
42 Member Boario.

43

44 (Off record comments)

45

46 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: So we have a
47 review and adopt the agenda, we have a second. Any
48 opposition to the agenda as presented.

49

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1 (No opposition)

2

3 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Signify by
4 saying aye.

5

6 UNIDENTIFIED VOICE: Aye.

7

8 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Hearing no --
9 hearing no opposition -- oh, did you say aye.....

10

11 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: We'll just
12 adopt the agenda as presented.

13

14 MS. DETWILER: Okay.

15

16 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Okay, hearing
17 no opposition we'll move on to Wildlife Temporary
18 Special Action Request WSA23-02/04, we'll call on the
19 analysis, Brian.

20

21 Brian you have the floor.

22

23 MR. UBELAKER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.
24 Good afternoon everybody. Members of the Board. For
25 the record my name is Brian Ubelaker and I am a
26 Wildlife Biologist with the Office of Subsistence
27 Management. I will be presenting a brief summary of the
28 analysis for Wildlife Special Action Request WSA23-02,
29 which was submitted by the Alaska Department of Fish
30 and Game, and WSA23-04, which was submitted by the
31 Alaska Board of Game.

32

33 WSA23-02 requests closing the Federal
34 winter caribou hunts on the Nelchina Caribou Herd in
35 Units 12 and 13 for the 2023/24 regulatory year.

36

37 WSA23-04 requests closing the Federal
38 winter caribou hunts on the Nelchina Caribou Herd
39 within Units 11, 12 and 13 for the 2023/24 regulatory
40 year.

41

42 The proponent sate the most recent
43 abundant estimates in July of 2023 was 8,823 animals
44 which is about half of the fall 2022 estimate of 17,433
45 and about 25 percent of the State management objectives
46 of 35 to 40,000 caribou. In addition, the latest
47 composition ratios associated with the herd of 23 bulls
48 to 100 cows and 13 calves to 100 cows are well below
49 management objectives.

50

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1 Observed productivity of the herd has
2 not been sufficient for population growth sine 2021.
3 Based on the most recent data, the proponents
4 determined there is no harvestable surplus for the
5 winter 2023/24 season and ADF&G did not offer any hunts
6 on the Nelchina Caribou Herd in Unit 13 for 2023.

7
8 The regulatory history of the Nelchina
9 Caribou Herd is as complex as it is long.

10
11 Numerous changes in both Federal and
12 State regulations regarding season lengths, harvest
13 limits, Federal public land closures and sex
14 restrictions have been implemented since the early
15 1990s. All regulations changes have trended in concert
16 with population estimates. As the population
17 increased, regulations eased, and as the population
18 decreased regulations tightened.

19
20 Starting as recently as 2019 numerous
21 actions have been taken to restrict harvest on this
22 herd as the population started to diminish. A trend
23 that has continued to the current season. These
24 actions have culminated in the Alaska Department of
25 Fish and Game closing all State hunts in Unit 13 for
26 regulatory year for 2023 and '24. Federal public lands
27 in Unit 13 were closed during the fall hunt by
28 Emergency Special Action, WSA23-01 and 03 and Emergency
29 Special Action WSA23-06, which closed all Federal
30 winter caribou hunts in Units 11, 12 and 13 for 60
31 days.

32
33 A public hearing for this special
34 action was held in August 2023 by teleconference and
35 tribal and ANCSA Corporation consultations were held in
36 September of '23 as well. Most members of the public
37 and tribal representatives stressed reluctance support
38 for the closure. The public hearing marked the first
39 time that many residents had learned of the new
40 dramatically lower population estimate for the herd.
41 Several long-time residents of the Copper River Basin
42 identified the current decline as the most dramatic of
43 their lifetimes and expressed frustration with the
44 current management of the herd. Most residents also
45 expressed frustration there had been no opportunity for
46 a Section .804 analysis. They also felt that there had
47 been a lack of transparency and timeliness with the
48 State's communication of population numbers. Some
49 suggested an .804 analysis would have been requested
50

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1 had data been more widely shared. Concerns were also
2 shared over the amount of newer and privately owned
3 lands and homes in the traditional Nelchina Herd
4 territory. These led to concerns over saturation of
5 recreational users in competition and conflict were
6 voiced.

7
8 Since the 1990s ADF&G has aimed to
9 maintained a fall post-hunt population of 25 to 45,000
10 caribou. With minimum ratios of 40 bulls and 40 calves
11 to 100 cows with the goal of providing for the harvest
12 of three to 6,000 caribou annually. The State manages
13 the Nelchina Caribou Herd for maximum sustained yield,
14 principally by annual adjustments in harvest quotas.

15
16 In the summer of 2019 the Nelchina
17 Caribou Herd population estimate peaked at 53,500
18 caribou but has since fallen to only 8,823 caribou in
19 July of 2023. Natural factors believed to contribute
20 to this decline include deep snow across the range
21 during winter and late spring thaw that delayed green
22 up, migration and calving. These factors led to
23 increased adult mortality and reduced calf recruitment.
24 Composition survey results from July of 2023 showed the
25 lowest bull to cow ratio and calf to cow ratio
26 recorded, indicating low recruitment rates for 2023.

27
28 The Nelchina Caribou Herd is a popular
29 herd to hunt and experiences heavy harvest pressure due
30 to its road accessibility and proximity to Fairbanks
31 and Anchorage. Harvest quotas are adjusted annually to
32 achieve State management objectives and to keep the
33 herd from growing to unsustainable levels. Over 95
34 percent total Nelchina Caribou Herd harvest occurs in
35 Unit 13 during the fall season. Over the last 20 years
36 harvest of Nelchina Caribou under State regulations
37 range from 519 to 5,785 caribou per year. Over the
38 same period caribou harvest under Federal regulations
39 in Unit 13 range from 102 to 610 caribou per year,
40 averaging 14 percent.

41
42 Federal caribou harvest in Unit 12 sees
43 less participation than the Unit 13 hunt. It still
44 produces an annual harvest of 28 caribou on average.
45 This hunt allows for the harvest of cows during the
46 winter when they may be pregnant. Cow harvest has
47 averaged 40 percent of total harvest.

48
49 One alternative considered was to
50

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1 remove the portion of Denali National Park in Unit 13E
2 from the closure.

3

4

(Teams Breakup - Indiscernible)

5

6

7 MR. UBELAKER: Another alternative
8 considered was limited hunting opportunity of
9 Federally-qualified subsistence users who would be
10 identified through a Section .804 analysis. However
11 this was beyond the scope of the request and currently
12 there is no harvestable surplus.

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A final alternative considered was to provide an exception for caribou harvest by cultural and educational permits, which are not permitted when Federal public lands are closed.

Due to the short timeframe of this request and serious conservation concerns for the Nelchina Herd, this alternative was not further considered.

On a related note, funerary and mortuary ceremonial harvests are accepted (sic] from Federal land or season closures and are subject to the appropriate Federal land manager.

Any action taken on this temporary special action will supersede the action taken by Emergency Special Action WSA23-06, which enacted this closure for 60 days. If this special action is approved there will be no harvest of caribou from the Nelchina Caribou Herd on Federal public lands in Units 11, 12 or 13 by any users for the winter season for regulatory year 2023 and '24. This will be a major reduction in an important subsistence resource available to Federally-qualified subsistence users. While this restriction would eliminate a much relied upon natural resource, the major reduction of harvest may conserve the Nelchina Caribou Herd and aid in its recover.

Conservation concerns warrant closing caribou hunting on Federal public lands given the drastic population decline to 8,823 caribou. Hunting pressure and harvest may exacerbate this decline and slow recovery of the herd. Closing the hunts and eliminating harvest mortality may aid in maintaining the current population and bolster productivity and

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1 recruitment of the herd. Since ADF&G closed all State
2 caribou seasons in Unit 13, closing the Federal winter
3 seasons in Units 11, 12 and 13 will further protect the
4 surviving caribou in the Nelchina Caribou Herd helping
5 to ensure its continuing viability.

6
7 Therefore, OSM's conclusion is to
8 support WSA23-04 and take no action on WSA23-02.

9
10 That is the end of my summary, Mr.
11 Chair, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

12
13 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Thank you,
14 Brian. Any questions from the Board for Staff
15 analysis.

16
17 (No comments)

18
19 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: All right,
20 hearing none, public testimony. Operator, if anybody
21 at this time would like to be recognized to testify
22 this is their opportunity.

23
24 MS. LAVINE: If you would like to
25 provide public testimony please press star, six.

26
27 MS. LINNELL: Hello.

28
29 MS. LAVINE: Hi, Karen, please speak.

30
31 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Hello.

32
33 MS. LINNELL: Hi, this is Karen
34 Linnell, Ahtna InterTribal Resource Commission.

35
36 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Yes, Karen, you
37 have the floor.

38
39 MS. LINNELL: Thank you. We did submit
40 some comments regarding this hunt. And the numbers for
41 the caribou were not given to the local in-season
42 managers or anybody until the day before the hearing
43 last time, which is concerning. The other -- you know,
44 it didn't leave a lot of time for us to look at it and
45 provide good, you know, incorporate that into our
46 comments.

47
48 But I'd like to say that regardless of
49 whether these special action requests request an .804
50

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1 analysis, we are requesting an .804 analysis be done on
2 this with the subsistence prioritization for when the
3 caribou start to come back, that there be a step
4 approach to hunting. This should not ever be an all or
5 nothing process and I feel that it should have been
6 done by OSM when they knew the numbers were starting to
7 drop last year without a formal request. It's part of
8 your job to do that kind of thing. It shouldn't be up
9 to the public to make them follow through with things
10 like this. So that's what I'd like to say, that it
11 shouldn't be up to us to inform you that, hey, it's
12 time to set a priority for these because it's -- it's
13 something that's under ANILCA that should be done
14 automatically.

15

16 So I'd like to thank the Board for your
17 time and your consideration in this and, you know,
18 we're -- I've heard multiple stories on when this might
19 come to -- might come to a -- when we might be able to
20 hunt again. A former area biologist said it could be
21 20, 30 years, you know, that's over a generation. And
22 I have several grandkids that are just starting to come
23 of age, I've given them their first rifle and caribou
24 hunts are a good hunt to teach children on. So I just
25 wanted to thank you, again, for your time and for your
26 consideration in this, you know, we were reluctant in a
27 closure but we were only reluctant because it shouldn't
28 be an all or nothing process. There should be a step
29 down approach.

30

31 And I just want to, I guess, you know,
32 that my hopes is, is that the State and the Federal
33 agencies will work together on developing a recovery
34 plan for the Nelchina Caribou Herd and prioritize
35 subsistence in that plan.

36

37 So thank you very much.

38

39 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Thank you,
40 Karen, for calling in. Any questions for Karen from
41 the Board.

42

43 (No comments)

44

45 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: I appreciate
46 you taking the time to call in and share your
47 information and testimony. Operator, is there any
48 others that would like to be recognized.

49

50

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1 MS. LAVINE: Again, for those of you
2 who are online and would like to make a comment, you
3 may be muted and so you would need to press star, six
4 to unmute your phones.

5
6 Thanks.

7
8 (No comments)

9
10 MS. LAVINE: Again, if you would like
11 to provide the Board with public testimony at this time
12 press star, six to unmute your phone.

13
14 MS. LINNELL: Just one thing, Mr.
15 Chair. You may not have a lot of participants on the
16 call because the wrong number was posted on the agenda
17 and on the website so we got it because we emailed the
18 Director and told her we can't get through. So thank
19 you so much.

20
21 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Okay, thanks,
22 Karen, appreciate it.

23
24 All right, if we're not hearing any
25 more, we'll go ahead and move on in the agenda, Liaison
26 is to the Board, Southcentral.

27
28 MS. PILCHER: Hello, Mr. Chair.
29 Members of the Board. For the record my name is Nissa
30 Pilcher. I am the Council Coordinator for the
31 Southcentral Regional Advisory Council. I'm standing
32 in for Chairman Encelewski, who -- and will be giving
33 the Council's recommendation today.

34
35 The Southcentral Regional Advisory
36 Council is in support of WSA23-02 and 04. The Council
37 found the action was necessary due to conservation
38 concerns and that it was supported by substantial
39 evidence.

40
41 The Council also voiced support for a
42 Section .804 user prioritization analysis to be
43 conducted so that it will be available when the
44 resource returns to levels where some harvest may be --
45 could be allowed.

46
47 Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the
48 Board. That concludes the recommendation by the
49 Southcentral Council.

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1 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Thank you,
2 Nissa. Any questions from the Board.

3
4 (No comments)

5
6 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Hearing none
7 we'll move on. Eastern Interior, we'll call on Brooke.

8
9 MS. MCDAVID: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair
10 and members of the Board. This is Brooke McDavid. I'm
11 the Coordinator for the Eastern Interior Council and
12 I'm standing in for Chair Entsminger today.

13
14 The Eastern Interior Council also
15 supported WSA23-02 and 04 to close the winter Nelchina
16 Caribou Herd season hunt. The Council recognized the
17 need to conserve the herd due to low numbers and that
18 no harvestable surplus is currently available.

19
20 The Council also expressed frustration
21 over mismanagement of the herd and hopes that State and
22 Federal managers will work better together in the
23 future so that subsistence users who rely on the herd
24 can get the food they need.

25
26 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

27
28 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Thank you. Any
29 questions from the Board.

30
31 (No comments)

32
33 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: All right,
34 hearing none, we'll move on to the Alaska Department of
35 Fish and Game comments. Ben Mulligan.

36
37 MR. MULLIGAN: Good afternoon, Mr.
38 Chair. For the record my name is Ben Mulligan, Deputy
39 Commissioner for the Alaska Department of Fish and
40 Game. Unfortunately the issue before you is nothing
41 new as you have acted on our previous temporary special
42 action and others and on a couple of emergency special
43 actions as well to conserve the Nelchina Caribou Herd
44 during the fall season and now part of the winter
45 season and we appreciate the actions you have taken to-
46 date.

47
48 Today I am testifying in support of the
49 continued conservation of this caribou herd and ask for
50

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1 you to approve the special action request in front of
2 you, which would basically replace the action that you
3 took at the end of last month, WSA23-06, which closed
4 Units 11, 12 and 13 for that 60 day period and now
5 asking for it for the remainder of the '23/24
6 regulatory year.

7
8 You know it is not taken lightly, the
9 actions that are having to be taken to conserve this
10 herd and the impact it has on all Alaskans who depend
11 on this resource to fill their freezer and just
12 maintain that, you know, traditional way of life,
13 wherever they may reside. But for the sake of the
14 conservation and the rebuilding of this herd and for
15 its future we ask you to support the closure request.

16
17 Just as a, I would say a couple of side
18 notes, you know, we've heard about communication issues
19 and we do take that seriously and we do try our best to
20 make sure that as soon as we have final information we
21 do share it. In this instance, I know there wasn't a
22 lot of time, just given the nature of when surveys are
23 best conducted and when the hunt happens and so we
24 understand that that was a short turnaround time for
25 everyone. We were trying our best, even before that,
26 to reach out to the BLM Glennallen Field Office to let
27 them know what was going on, to have good communication
28 with the Federal in-season manager, you know, we passed
29 on additional information between the time that those
30 had been submitted to OSM, you know, the memo that Mr.
31 Ubelaker cites is from us and I imagine, you know,
32 we've heard from the -- at the RAC meetings how serious
33 this is and I know that our Advisory Committees in the
34 State process are all ramping up we will have further
35 discussions with the public as far as what occurred and
36 what is going to happen in the future and how we are
37 best prepared to get out of this slump in the Nelchina
38 Caribou Herd.

39
40 Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If you have
41 any questions I am here, but if not, thank you for the
42 opportunity.

43
44 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: All right,
45 thank you, Mr. Mulligan. Appreciate you calling in
46 today and sharing that information. Any questions from
47 the Board.

48
49 MS. BOARIO: Mr. Chair, Fish and
50

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1 Wildlife Service.

2

3 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Yes, you have
4 the floor.

5

6 MS. BOARIO: Is it -- is it okay,
7 Robbin, sorry, you're looking at me, I'm just making
8 sure it's okay.

9

10 MS. LAVINE: Uh-huh.

11

12 MS. BOARIO: Okay. Thank you, Mr.
13 Chair.

14

15 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Yes, go ahead.

16

17 MR. BOARIO: Mr. Mulligan, in regards
18 to getting out of this slump can you share, can the
19 State share anything else with us regarding what you
20 see as the long-term recovery plan for this herd from
21 your perspective?

22

23 MR. MULLIGAN: I mean so you -- oh,
24 sorry, through the Chair. Dr. Boario. There's going
25 to be several aspects that -- I don't think I can share
26 definitively what's going to happen. And as we've
27 heard, you know, whatever we do moving forward will
28 require, you know, stakeholder outreach, land owner
29 outreach, the whole -- but when -- you know, when we
30 look at trying to rebuild the population we look at
31 several different aspects of kind of the scenarios that
32 we can move and, you know, one you're seeing is right
33 now is, you know, control of harvest. The other is
34 that I'm sure you're all aware, this herd also has
35 metrics that have to do with initiating an intensive
36 management program and so we will look at that. We
37 also look at the habitat of the herd to see if anything
38 changes, if there's anything that can be done in that
39 regard. So there's -- you know, there's several
40 prongs of possibilities but I think until we move
41 forward with our latest data that we're going to see
42 from the fall numbers and also just what we're going to
43 hear from other folks; that's as much as I can give
44 you.

45

46 MS. BOARIO: Okay, thank you, Mr.
47 Mulligan.

48

49 MS. PITKA: Hi, this is Rhonda Pitka.

50

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1 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Yes, Rhonda,
2 you have the floor.

3
4 MS. PITKA: Yeah, so you mentioned some
5 stakeholder outreach. What does that entail because we
6 just heard Karen Linnell say that there was very little
7 outreach from the State on this issue. What does that
8 outreach look like for the State?

9
10 MR. MULLIGAN: Through the Chair.
11 Member Pitka. You know I will -- I don't -- I'm pretty
12 positive that we did not reach out before the decision
13 to be made -- to close was made to anybody but
14 sometimes given, like I said before, when data comes in
15 and we've got to make a decision before hunting season
16 begins, unfortunately we have to make those swift
17 decisions for the conservation of the species. But,
18 you know, afterwards, you know, outreach was done, you
19 know, I can't say I talked to Ms. Linnell, but I know
20 that outreach was done to -- for them after the fact --
21 like I said that is no excuse for it, but it's just the
22 nature of how things had to happen, but we all -- I
23 mean outreach will include the numerous ACs that have
24 members that are either directly involved or have an
25 interest in the rebuilding of the Nelchina Caribou
26 Herd. We're already hearing it, requests, you know,
27 for information and have our folks talk about the
28 Nelchina Herd from your guys' relevant RACs and we'll
29 -- the Glennallen Office is already getting an earful.
30 So, you know, we're going to lean on our Advisory
31 Committees and participation in other public venues.
32 You know we'll have invites from various organizations,
33 I'm sure from AITRC, from some of the hunting
34 conservation groups, just talk to them as well and
35 engage them over the winter. So I guess that's, I
36 mean, what we're looking at right now.

37
38 MS. PITKA: Thank you.

39
40 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Thank you,
41 Rhonda. Ben. I think we also -- Wrangell-St. Elias
42 wanted to speak if there's no more questions for the
43 State.

44
45 (No comments)

46
47 MS. CELLARIUS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.
48 This is Barbara Cellarius. I could give you the
49 Wrangell-St. Elias comment when you're ready.
50

0017

1 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: You have the
2 floor.

3
4 MS. CELLARIUS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.
5 For the record my name is Barbara Cellarius and I'm the
6 Cultural Anthropologist and Subsistence Coordinator for
7 Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, however,
8 today I'm going to be presenting a comment from the
9 Wrangell-St. Elias National Park Subsistence Resource
10 Commission, which is a Federal Advisory Committee that
11 represents subsistence users of Federal lands within
12 Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

13
14 The Wrangell-St. Elias National Park
15 Subsistence Resource Commission unanimously supported
16 Temporary Special Action WSA02/04, and with the
17 additional request that OSM immediately begin an ANILCA
18 Section .804 subsistence user prioritization analysis
19 and that that analysis include both State and Federal
20 harvest data. The Commission supports the closure due
21 to conservation concerns associated with the current
22 population status of the Nelchina Caribou Herd.
23 However, it is also concerned about the impact of the
24 closure on the continuation of customary and
25 traditional subsistence uses, especially if it takes a
26 long time for the herd to recover. An .804 analysis is
27 needed to identify which Federally-qualified rural
28 communities are most dependent on the resource so that
29 when there is a harvestable surplus there can be a
30 limited Federal subsistence hunt for those communities
31 with a small quota to continue customary and
32 traditional uses.

33
34 Thank you for the opportunity to
35 comment.

36
37 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Thank you for
38 taking the time to call in. Any questions from the
39 Board.

40
41 (No comments)

42
43 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: All right,
44 hearing none we'll move on to InterAgency Staff
45 Committee comments. Robbin, you have the floor.

46
47 MS. LAVINE: Mr. Chair. Members of the
48 Board. The InterAgency Staff Committee comment is as
49 follows:
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0018

1 It is clear from the analysis for
2 WSA23-02/04 that the Nelchina Caribou Herd is in
3 serious decline. The most recent 2023 summer herd
4 estimate was 8,823 animals, well below the State
5 management objective of 35,000 to 45,000 caribou. The
6 composition survey results from July '23 show the
7 lowest bull to cow ratio of 23 to 100. It also
8 resulted in the lowest observed calf/cow ratio of 13 to
9 100 indicating a very low recruitment rate for 2023.
10 High overwinter mortality over the last two years
11 coupled with low recruitment rates have resulted in no
12 harvestable surplus being available for the Nelchina
13 Caribou Herd and, therefore, this winter hunting season
14 should be closed to all users on Federal public lands
15 in Units 11, 12, and 13. All State seasons have
16 already been closed in Unit 13 and there is no State
17 winter season in Unit 11 and only a fall State season
18 in Unit 12.

19
20 This closure is needed to ensure the
21 continued viability of the herd as described in ANILCA,
22 Section .816(b) and is consistent with the
23 recommendations of the Southcentral and Eastern
24 Interior Regional Advisory Councils.

25
26 While this closure is needed to ensure
27 the continued viability of the Nushagak -- the Nelchina
28 Caribou Herd as described in ANILCA Section .816(b),
29 the InterAgency Staff Committee is concerned about the
30 impacts of this closure on the continuation of
31 subsistence uses. Although not a part of this request,
32 a prioritization among Federally-qualified subsistence
33 users through a Section .804 analysis would give the
34 Federal Subsistence Board greater opportunity and
35 flexibility in implementing Title VIII of ANILCA and
36 the Federal subsistence priority.

37
38 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

39
40 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Thank you,
41 Robbin. Any questions for Robbin.

42
43 (No comments)

44
45 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: We'll move on
46 to Board discussion with liaisons, any questions,
47 anybody.

48
49 (No comments)

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0019

1 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Open the floor
2 for Board motion.

3
4 MS. CREACHBAUM: Mr. Chair. Sarah
5 Creachbaum, National Park Service.

6
7 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: You have the
8 floor Sarah.

9
10 MS. CREACHBAUM: Thank you. Mr. Chair,
11 I move to approve Wildlife Special Action WSA23-04 and
12 take no action on WSA23-02. If I get a second I'll
13 explain why I intend to vote to support my motion.

14
15 MS. BOARIO: Fish and Wildlife
16 Service.....

17
18 MR. BROWER: Second.

19
20 MS. BOARIO:seconds.

21
22 MS. CREACHBAUM: Thank you. Mr. Chair.
23 It's clear from the analysis for WSA23-02 and 04 that
24 the Nelchina Caribou Herd is in serious decline. The
25 most recent 2023 summer herd estimate was 8,823
26 animals, well below the State management objective of
27 35,000/40,000 caribou. Extreme weather conditions and
28 the delayed onset of spring conditions during the last
29 two winters led to high mortality and low recruitment
30 rates for the Nelchina Caribou Herd and the lowest
31 bull/cow and calf/cow ratios ever reserved -- observed.

32
33 This recent population decline has
34 resulted in no harvestable surplus being available and,
35 therefore, the winter -- therefore, the winter of
36 2023/2024 hunting season should be closed to all users
37 on Federal public lands in Units 11, 12 and 13. All
38 State seasons have already been closed in Unit 13 and
39 there is no State winter season in Unit 11, and in Unit
40 12 only a fall State season was open.

41
42 This closure is needed to ensure the
43 continued viability of the Nelchina Caribou Herd as
44 described in ANILCA Section .816(b) and is consistent
45 in with the recommendations of the Southcentral and
46 Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory
47 Councils and the Wrangell-St. Elias Subsistence
48 Council.

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0020

1 While this closure is needed to ensure
2 the continued viability of the caribou herd, I'm deeply
3 concerned about the impacts of this closure on the
4 continuation of subsistence uses and, therefore,
5 request that the Board direct the Office of Subsistence
6 Management to initiate an ANILCA Section .804
7 subsistence prioritization analysis. The .804 analysis
8 should identify which communities are most dependent on
9 the resource and, thus, who have priority when
10 opportunity when opportunity for a limited harvest does
11 occur. Further, I would like to request the support of
12 OSM Staff in developing a concise harvest management
13 strategy, allocation plan and decision framework for
14 when biological conditions of the herd could allow for
15 some small Federal subsistence harvest. A Section .804
16 analysis along with the additional management
17 information will give the Federal Subsistence Board a
18 way forward to implement Title VIII of ANILCA and a
19 Federal subsistence priority for the consideration of
20 the fall 2024 and future hunts in a manner that's
21 transparent to the agencies as well as to the public.

22
23 It's clear from the analysis, public
24 testimony and tribal and ANCSA consultation that there
25 will be a need for a long-term management and recovery
26 plan for the Nelchina Caribou Herd. I encourage all
27 involved to work together on this to ensure the
28 recovery and resilience of this herd for future
29 generations.

30
31 I would also like to the Federal
32 Subsistence Program to further explore alternatives
33 considered as to how cultural and education permit
34 programs may be implemented if conservation closures
35 persist in subsequent years. This will be an important
36 way to support cultural continuation, connection to the
37 caribou and handing down of knowledge through
38 generations.

39
40 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

41
42 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Thank you. The
43 floor is open for discussion, deliberation.

44
45 MS. PITKA: This is Rhonda Pitka.

46
47 MR. LORD: Mr. Chair.

48
49 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Yes, Rhonda,
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1 you have the floor.

2

3 MS. PITKA: Yeah, I would just like to
4 add, I agree with the justification and thank you for
5 all that information and, you know, really excellent
6 justification. So I would also like to add that I
7 would like for the State of Alaska to come up with a
8 framework around caribou management in the State of
9 Alaska. We've seen herds continually declining
10 throughout the state and, you know, these types of
11 closures require us to have a lot of cooperation and
12 public outreach and excellent communication. So I
13 think maybe going forward, having a caribou management
14 strategy or a plan of some sort would be crucial to the
15 future of how we hunt caribou.

16

17 Thank you.

18

19 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Thank you,
20 Rhonda.

21

22 MR. LORD: Mr. Chair, this is Ken Lord.

23

24 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Ken, you have
25 the floor.

26

27 MR. LORD: Mr. Chair. On the issue of
28 educational and cultural harvest, as well as for
29 religious ceremonies that are part of a funerary or
30 mortuary cycle, I'd like to be sure that the Board is
31 clear as to whether those, any or all of those, remain
32 open or were intended to be closed as part of this
33 closure.

34

35 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Yeah, that's a
36 good point for clarification. I would almost -- yeah,
37 so do we have an answer for that? ISC, what was the
38 intent?

39

40 MS. LAVINE: Mr. Board, this is -- Mr.
41 Chair, this is Robbin.

42

43 (Laughter)

44

45 MS. LAVINE: That's my day today.

46

47 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Robbin.

48

49 MS. LAVINE: Mr. Chair. There may be

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1 an opportunity for the Board to actually clarify your
2 intent in regards to these particular options. I
3 understand that there may be some cultural and
4 educational programs already in existence in the Copper
5 River Basin that would be impacted by this closure, and
6 potentially it -- Ken correct me if I'm wrong, but
7 potentially the Board could carve out support for the --
8 for these continuing opportunities of limited harvest
9 for either mortuary, funerary opportunities or cultural
10 and educational program permits which typically have
11 one or two animals associated with their education
12 permits.

13

14 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

15

16 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Thank you for
17 that. Any other Board thoughts on moving forward with
18 this if it's a complete closure or if we hold the one
19 or two harvest opportunities open.

20

21 MS. PITKA: Tony, this is Rhonda.

22

23 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Rhonda, you
24 have the floor.

25

26 MS. PITKA: I can't support the closure
27 if there's no funerary or religious permits.

28

29 MS. BOARIO: No, you're totally.....

30

31 MS. LAVINE: Ms. Boario, go ahead.

32

33 MS. BOARIO: Mr. Chair. Sara, Fish and
34 Wildlife Service. I wanted to clarify, too, building
35 on Rhonda's comments, we would need an amendment to the
36 motion if we were to do that as written. Just making
37 sure I -- because, Robbin, you were seeming to suggest
38 we could do that now. Rhonda, you're saying you'd like
39 to make sure that's clear now. Okay, go ahead.

40

41 MS. LAVINE: And, Mr. Chair, this is
42 Robbin.

43

44 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Yes, Robbin.

45

46 MS. LAVINE: I think Hannah has some
47 clarifications in regards to both of these two options.

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49 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Hannah has the

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1 floor.

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MS. VOORHEES: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yes, so I just wanted to clarify that based on my understanding of advice that we have received at OSM in the past from Ken Lord and others, so we do not need to make a special exception for the, what we call the traditional religious ceremony, or these are funerary, mortuary potlatches, those -- this refers to the possibility of wildlife that can be taken outside of a season or harvest limits for those ceremonies. And that would already be a possibility, you don't need to do anything extra to ensure that that is still possible.

But in terms of a cultural and educational permit, my understanding is that you would need to explicitly state that the camp -- there is one camp operating now and, you know, Barbara Cellarius can correct me if I'm wrong, but the Chickaloon Culture Camp, for example, allows for the harvest of two caribou and that, along with additional opportunities that might be requested could not go forward if there is a closure to Federal lands unless the Board specifically states their intent that they are able to do so.

Thank you.

MR. LORD: Mr. Chair, this is Ken.

CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Ken, yes.

MR. LORD: Just a little bit of a clarification there. My advice was that it was a reasonable interpretation of the regulation that ceremonial, or religious ceremonies would, or funeral ceremonies would be allowed even in the event of a closure, but the best case scenario is if the Board is very clear on its intent.

MS. BOARIO: So an amendment.

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE: Yes.

MS. BOARIO: Okay.

(Laughter)

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1 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: The floor is
2 open for an amendment basically to amend the original
3 motion to include the language that will allow for the
4 taking of an animal during funerary or ceremonial but
5 that we may have to forego and close the educational
6 permit, or do we keep it, I think that's where we're
7 at?

8
9 MS. PITKA: Yeah, the amendment.
10 Sorry, I'll make the amendment, like Tony said.

11
12 MS. DETWILER: So, Mr. Chair, could I
13 ask for a clarification then on what the motion is, is
14 it to.....

15
16 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: The motion is
17 to amend the original motion to include the language
18 that there will be the exception to allow the harvest
19 for funerary or ceremonial, the low hanging fruit, the
20 other one is do we allow for the cultural education
21 permit to go forward or not, so that's the question
22 there. But the amendment motion would read that we
23 would allow for the funerary, I believe probably the
24 other one would probably have to go away would be my
25 mind.

26
27 MS. PITKA: Yeah, I thought it was a
28 package, the religious, funerary and the cultural and
29 camp.

30
31 REPORTER: Okay, hang on a second.
32 Wait, excuse me, so was that, you, Rhonda, talking just
33 there?

34
35 MS. PITKA: Yeah, that was me.

36
37 REPORTER: Okay, thank you. Go ahead,
38 Tony.

39
40 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Okay, thank you
41 for that Rhonda. So the amendment is to include the
42 accepted harvest for education, I don't know if two
43 animals would hurt anything and it would probably be a
44 good place where they could talk about regulations and
45 the impacts of a closure to the people in the area, so
46 it's a package. There's a motion to amend to include
47 those special permits.

48
49 MS. CREACHBAUM: National Park Service
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0025

1 seconds.

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CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: So there's a second. Any more discussion or deliberation on -- the motion will be to amend the original motion to include that we'll fully close it with the exception of the special use permit for educational, ceremonial and cultural purposes, funerary.

Any further discussion.

MR. BROWER: Is there a second?

CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Yeah, there's a second. So the floor is open for discussion.

(No comments)

CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: All in favor of the amended motion signify by saying aye.

IN UNISON: Aye.

CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Opposed, same sign.

(No opposing votes)

CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Motion carries unanimous to amend the original motion to include the language that we just stated, so we'll go back to the original motion now on the floor to close the harvest of the caribou herd with the amended language. The floor is open for deliberation and discussion again.

(No comments)

CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Call for the question.

MR. BROWER: Question.

CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Question's been called. All in favor of the motion to -- that's on the floor signify by saying aye.

IN UNISON: Aye.

CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Opposition,

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1 same sign.

2

3 (No opposing votes)

4

5 (Teleconference interference -
6 participants not muted)

7

8 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Unanimous
9 consent -- I mean unanimous vote to support this
10 special action. All right, thank you guys. We know
11 this is a tough one, add it to the pile of hardships in
12 the state with resources dwindling so, just, again,
13 good luck to the Staff in the .804 analysis process and
14 outreach and education about the closure and look
15 forward to a management plan and strategy conservation
16 step program to reintroduce the harvest opportunities.

17

18 So thank you all.

19

20 The floor is open for a motion to
21 adjourn.

22

23 MR. BROWER: So moved, Mr. Chair.

24

25 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Motion been
26 made to adjourn.

27

28 MS. BOARIO: Second. The Service
29 seconds.

30

31 CHAIRMAN CHRISTIANSON: Second made.
32 All right. No opposition to the motion to adjourn.
33 You guys have a good day and enjoy the sunshine.

34

35 (Off record)

36

37 (END OF PROCEEDINGS)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)
) ss.
STATE OF ALASKA)

I, Salena A. Hile, Notary Public in and for the state of Alaska and reporter of Computer Matrix Court Reporters, LLC, do hereby certify:

THAT the foregoing, contain a full, true and correct Transcript of the FEDERAL SUBSISTENCE BOARD MEETING taken electronically by our firm on the 19th day of October 2023;

THAT the transcript is a true and correct transcript requested to be transcribed and thereafter transcribed by under my direction and reduced to print to the best of our knowledge and ability;

THAT I am not an employee, attorney, or party interested in any way in this action.

DATED at Anchorage, Alaska, this 19th day of October 2023.

Salena A. Hile
Notary Public, State of Alaska
My Commission Expires: 09/16/26