



Federal Subsistence Board News Release



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Land Management
National Park Service
Bureau of Indian Affairs

Forest Service

For Immediate Release:
October 20, 2023

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Federal Subsistence Board Closes Federal Public Lands to Caribou Hunting by All Users in Units 11, 12, and 13 for 2023-2024

The Federal Subsistence Board (Board) took no action on WSA23-02 and approved WSA23-04 with modification to close Federal public lands to caribou hunting by all users in Units 11, 12, and 13 for the 2023/24 regulatory due to conservation concerns. This action closes the “may be announced” seasons in Units 11 and 12 and the winter hunt in Unit 13 from Oct. 21, 2023–Mar. 31, 2024. The modification was to provide an exception for traditional religious ceremonies and cultural/educational program permit harvest.

Temporary Wildlife Special Action WSA23-02, submitted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), requested closure of all winter caribou hunts in Units 12 and 13 for the 2023/24 regulatory year. Temporary Wildlife Special Action WSA23-04, submitted by the Alaska Board of Game, requested closure of all winter caribou hunts in Units 11, 12, and 13. Both requests were due to a dramatic decline in the Nelchina caribou herd population.

The most recent population information indicates the Nelchina Caribou Herd is in serious decline with no harvestable surplus. The July 2023 estimate was 8,823 animals, well below the State management objective of 35,000–40,000 caribou. Additionally, the July 2023 composition metrics are concerning, with a calf:cow ratio of 13:100 and a bull:cow ratio of 23:100, both of which are the lowest ever observed. ADF&G has closed the State Nelchina caribou hunts in Unit 13, and it is prudent that Federal lands be closed in unison to protect the viability of the herd. Such a closure is consistent with ANILCA Section 816(b) and with the recommendations of the Southcentral and Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils.

The Board additionally expressed deep concern about the impacts of this closure on the continuation of subsistence uses and the need for a long-term management and recovery plan for the herd. The Board amended the request to allow caribou harvests for memorial potlatches and cultural programs to support cultural continuation and handing down of knowledge through generations.

Additional information on the Federal Subsistence Management Program may be found on the web at www.doi.gov/subsistence or by visiting www.facebook.com/subsistencealaska.

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