



United States Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Arctic National Parklands
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Park / Superintendent's Report

Team updates

This summer, we took applications for a new position, Subsistence Liaison and general park ranger, to be hired from and based in one of three villages -- Noatak, Kiana and Ambler. There were many interested people in the villages. We will make an offer shortly and are thrilled about this new position. The duties include community and tribal relations, helping with subsistence issues, and participating in fieldwork, including boat and snowmachine operations, cabin maintenance, and research projects in the backcountry.

In August, we also announced an interpretive ranger position locally. The park will continue to announce jobs locally—via a special hiring authority—and we encourage folks interested in working with the NPS to contact our office.

Park staff were very busy with fieldwork this summer, at Feniak Lake, the upper Noatak River, along the Kobuk River, the Great Kobuk Sand Dunes, Sisualik and Anigaak. While high water levels impacted river trips and landings into August, we accomplished many great projects safely. Park staff also spent quality time in villages, notably Noatak, Ambler, and Kiana, for a variety of projects.

Western Arctic Caribou Herd

Park staff helped to organize village hunter meetings across the borough to discuss hunting and subsistence regulations, seasons, hunter success, caribou population decline and possible management actions. Last spring, staff also attended public and agency meetings about the special action request to the FSB to reduce caribou bag limits for subsistence hunters. There are important proposals before the Federal Subsistence Board right now involving the Western Arctic Caribou Herd, and we encourage everyone to stay engaged and to speak up via public meetings, tribal consultation and various subsistence committees. Staff are also supporting the logistics for this year's Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group meetings.

Satellite collar data from the Western Arctic Caribou Herd from last winter indicated a poor year for caribou survival, with record deaths among collared animals. NPS and State of Alaska staff will discuss the latest findings in depth during our fall meetings.

Closure of Noatak National Preserve to non-federally qualified hunters for moose and caribou

This was the second year that Noatak National Preserve was closed to caribou and moose hunting for non-federally qualified subsistence users via Wildlife Special Action 21-01A. The closure was for two years, 2022-2023, and is only for federal lands. The Northwest Arctic RAC proposed continuing the closure beyond 2023 to the Federal Subsistence Board. We encourage people to weigh in on the proposal.

Historically, caribou have been the big attraction for nonlocal hunters entering the Preserve. In 2022, there was minimal non-local hunting activity in the Preserve, as we reported during our spring meetings. As of mid-August 2023, there were nonlocal hunters passing through Kotzebue to hunt caribou in the region.

We conducted numerous patrols in the Preserve this year to evaluate visitor activity, including hunting. We'll have more data to share during the October meeting.

Trail to Great Kobuk Sand Dunes

Park staff examined an existing access point and informal trail to the Great Kobuk Sand Dunes, from the Kobuk River. A route is marked with flagging but there is no actual path on the ground. We have discussed whether a formal trail would be a good or bad thing, and would like to hear from commission members and the public about it. Some people argued a formal trail would be helpful, providing an access point to floaters and local people who want to see the dunes; others have said a trail could encourage more non-local interest in the area, which may hurt subsistence users and residents. We'd like to hear your thoughts about a trail from the Kobuk River to the Sand Dunes.