



National Park Service Update
Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve
Northwest Arctic Regional Advisory Council Meeting
October 16-17, 2023

Subsistence Update

The Gates of the Arctic National Park Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC) met in-person and via teleconference on April 18-19, 2023 in Fairbanks, Alaska. There were a variety of presentations shared with the SRC including a Carnivore Local Knowledge project by the Wildlife Conservation Society, a Dall's Sheep Collaring project by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and a Mercury in Lake Food Webs project by U.S. Geological Survey. In addition, there were NPS staff updates on the Western Arctic Caribou Herd, a discussion on Park management including wilderness management, and NPS staffing. The next SRC meeting is scheduled for the week of November 13, 2023 in Fairbanks and via teleconference. At this upcoming meeting, there will be continued discussion on the Western Arctic Caribou Herd and Dall's sheep management, as well as both federal and state hunting and trapping regulatory proposals.

For more information, please contact Marcy Okada marcy_okada@nps.gov and (907) 455-0639

Western Arctic Caribou Herd

The Western Arctic Herd, for decades the state's largest caribou herd, has declined by 2/3's over the past 20 years. The most recent census was in 2022 and showed the herd had declined to 164,000 animals. Unfortunately, this recent winter was one of the most difficult winters, in terms of adult female survival, ever. Only 85% of the collared animals survived between December 2022 and April 2023 (a 5-month period). To put this into perspective, over an average 12-month period, we see about 81% survival (range 65-92%). Winter, at least in the past, wasn't typically a season of low survival. If we include May and June, the survival rate for this 7-month period is just 77%. Only four 12-month periods have had a lower survival rate than this since 1987. Such low survival is very concerning and may indicate continued decline of the herd, because adult female survival is a main driver of the population. Biologists with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game completed a photo census this summer and are actively working to count the results. Possible regulatory change is currently under debate and will be decided by the Federal Subsistence Board and Board of Game in coming months. Spreading the message that we need to conserve healthy adult females will be critical in the coming years to help the herd rebound. For more information, please contact Kyle Joly at kyle_joly@nps.gov

Dall's Sheep Survey

The National Park Service conducted distance sampling surveys for Dall's sheep from June 29th – July 14th, 2023 in Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve and in partnership with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) on BLM and State managed lands surrounding the Dalton Highway Management Corridor. We received a few days of assistance from a biologist and pilot from Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Surveys were flown in the Itkillik Preserve area of northeast Gates of Arctic as well as the southeastern portion between the Dalton Highway and the John River. Unfortunately, we did not finish surveys in the Anaktuvuk Pass survey area because of cloudy weather, wind, and limited available flight time. Population estimates will be generated and distributed this winter.