

WACH MANAGEMENT PROGRAM COMPONENTS -
DRAFT

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Preamble

Mr. Chairman, and members of the Board of Game, we in the Subsistence Section are pleased to be part of the process of charting out a new route through which the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) management efforts could become more meaningful to both users and managers.

The suggestions which appear in this paper are considered to be complementary to the Game Division's discussion of management alternatives for the WACH. We would like your attention for a few minutes while we review what we feel are meaningful additional components. We recognize that the Department needs to formulate a complete management program that takes into account the entire range of processes and variables that bear on the long-range ultimate health of the resource. This will not be an easy process nor will it be short, but we feel that it is in the best interest of both the resource and its users that it be put into motion now.

WACH Management Program Components - DRAFT

I. Primary Objective:

To provide optimum subsistence and recreational harvest of WACH while not compromising conservation efforts.

II. Summary of Possible Program Components:

- A. Institute harvest ticket system.
- B. Institute a multi-faceted information and education program that provides for a long-term user/researcher/manager dialogue.

- C. Define 1) Game Division data needs, 2) Subsistence Section data needs, and 3) Habitat Protection Section data needs; and implement appropriate research programs.
- D. Form a standing intra-Departmental WACH management group and an advisory technical committee.

III. Program Components:

The following components are presented to allow the Board of Game and members of the Department an initial look at the direction in which the Subsistence Section is proceeding at this time and to stimulate discussion and hopefully program elaboration.

A. Harvest Ticket System:

As has been pointed out by Game Division, the current permit system should be replaced by a system with a voluntary harvest reporting mechanism that provides improved harvest information for management purposes. In order to make the "new improved" system work for us, several avenues should be utilized:

1. Issuance of harvest tickets when hunter buys hunting license;
2. If bag limit is more than one, provide one harvest report for each animal allowed;
3. Develop transferable harvest ticket regulation, variable bag limit, and/or other solutions to customary harvest and sharing practices;
4. Use mail-out procedure (outlined elsewhere by Game Division) to account for non-response bias;

5. Assure that each village has a license vendor; and
6. Provide ADF&G personnel with license books and harvest tickets for field distribution.

There are other elements that ought to be considered in making this system work, and they are discussed in the following section.

B. Information and Education:

An information and education program should be carried out through a joint effort of Subsistence Section, Game Division, Habitat Protection Section, Fish and Wildlife Protection, and Public Communication Section. There may be a need to establish a coordinating group for this effort. Objectives of this effort are to assure local participation in:

1. Management program formulation through:
 - a. Providing user group with opportunities to discuss principles, assumptions, and data behind management decisions with other users and Department personnel (researchers and managers). Sponsor meetings of representatives from all user communities and appropriate local government level for discussions--not decisions.
 - b. Developing an information program that explains the reasons behind licensing, harvest tickets, seasons, bag limits, and the role of enforcement in the wise

use of resources (a dialogue of how this was accomplished on a local level in the past might be meaningful for all parties) using such tools as radio and television spots, village visits to all communities involved in harvesting WAC, and meeting with both officials and the general public (using slide shows, movies, etc.) to solicit input.

- c. Systematically compiling information on 1) what the users feel they need in terms of harvest (seasons, numbers, and sex composition, etc.) over time; 2) what they feel the long-term population size should be; and 3) how soon this is desirable to reach considering the impact of total numbers harvested and the sex composition.
- d. Providing for the flow of this information back to user groups and the Department (and redistribution of the information within the Department via the Subsistence Section's computer network and other available means).
- e. Incorporating information gathered in c. (above) in the Draft Management Recommendations (on such matters as desirable herd size, harvest levels numbers and sex composition, age structure, distribution, and discussions on whether the herd should be permitted to fluctuate widely in population size, and if maximum or optimum sustained yield principles should

apply) formulated by the Department's research and management staff.

- f. Reviewing the Draft Management Recommendations with the user group to receive final input and approval before proceeding with the formulation of an overall management plan.

2. Management program support through:

- a. Local advisory committee formulation and support of regulatory proposals aimed at implementing management program.
- b. User group testimonies in support of management program at Board of Game meetings.
- c. Local compliance with and enforcement of regulations formulated through manager/researcher/user dialogue.
- d. Cooperation by user group in Department quest for refined harvest information.

We envision this program component to be a long-term commitment by the Department and that it, or parts of it, be applied to the assessment and correction of the management plan as needed.

C. Data Needs and Research Efforts

At the present time, insufficient research data on a variety of system components and detailed variables hamper the long-term

success of any comprehensive management effort. Data needs will always continue to plague us. However, we have identified numerous gaps that could be filled within a reasonable amount of time, without undue additional cost (with the realization that funding for longitudinal studies must be committed), and that would greatly advance our understanding of herd interaction with variables such as predation, winter survival rates, hunter harvest, and habitat types. The following represents a starting point for the Department's research efforts:

1. Game Division: Determine age-specific mortality rates and natural mortality rates for age classes over 1 year old; improve significantly the predation loss estimates; continue population estimation program at or above 1978 level; plan for yearly photocensus and yearling calving ground estimates; continue spring survival counts; develop better population status information on the Central Arctic Herd and the Porcupine Herd; and finally have financial and personnel freedom to predict and test predictions on herd population dynamics (based on input from other inter- and intra-Department information sources).
2. Subsistence Section: Provide basic communications link between the user group and the Department and provide user-based information on variables such as: dynamics of resource harvest, seasonal and long-term variations in harvest strategies, harvest component estimates in and

over time (including crippling losses), village resource area structure and function, role of alternate resources in village economies, functional and numerical responses to major resource abundance/scarcity in and over time, resource use patterns, resource redistribution patterns, impact of development (on harvest patterns, opportunities, and practices), and performance of regulations in meeting user needs.

3. Habitat Protection Section: Current work on habitat mapping needs to be continued (and perhaps accelerated for it currently is contributing little to hypothesis testing); delineate and formulate protection of important habitat (will require interagency coordination and commitment from private landowners); formulate detailed plans (interagency) on containing development activities and transportation access to areas with minimal wildlife values and opportunities; study effect of fire damage on range; evaluate reindeer herding plans and potential conflicts; and exert effort toward acquiring increased role in habitat protection.

D. The WACH Management Group and Technical Committee

The experiences of other countries (notably Canada) in dealing with similar resource problems suggest that a standing caribou management group with an advisory technical committee should be

established. Objectives of this WACH management group would be to coordinate research on and management of the WACH (and other arctic Alaska caribou herds). Members of the group should be ADF&G Regional Supervisors/Research Coordinators/Division Directors and perhaps should also include experts from DNR, USFWS, BLM, and NPS (in an advisory capacity). All members must have direct responsibilities in arctic Alaska prior to engagement in the group.

Responsibilities of the advisory technical committee would be to carry out research, information and education programs, and to advise the management group. Members of this committee would most reasonably be Department researchers and I&E personnel with outside participation from other agencies and user group representatives.

The first activity of the management group and the technical committee would be to carry out an I&E program at the earliest possible opportunity to assess initial direction of the management effort.

This is, in the main, our suggested approach and we are continuing efforts to fill in and improve on the program. Any comments and/or suggestions are certainly welcome.