

NUSHAGAK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

9 a.m. March 2, 2012

Dillingham City Council Chambers

DILLINGHAM, ALASKA

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Chairman Hans Nicholson called the meeting to order at 10:08am.

2. ROLL CALL/ESTABLISH QUORUM

Members present at roll call were: Curt Armstrong, Frank Woods, Hans Nicholson, Dan Dunaway, Lloyd O'Connor, Gusti Chythlook-Aleknagik, Jonathan Forsling-Togiak, George Taylor-Ekwok. Hans excused Robin Samuelson and Chris Carr because of prior commitments. Quorum established.

3. Approve Agenda

After amendments, Gusti Chythlook moved to approve and Frank Woods seconded.

4. Introduce Staff and Guests

The ADF&G staff present for all or part of the meeting included: Jim Woolington, Area Biologist Wildlife Conservation; Fred Burk, ADF&G Enforcement; Andy Aderman, TNWR; Ted Krieg, ADF&G Division of Subsistence; Craig Schwanke, ADF&G Sport Fish; Mike Mason, KDLG; Members of the public, Robert Heyano, William A. Johnson, Steve Perkins.

5. New Business

a. Mulchatna Caribou Herd Predation Management Plan Area

Jim Woolington explained that during the last BOG cycle, they changed the Intensive Management objectives for the Mulchatna Caribou Herd. The new IM objectives are: Population 30,000-80,000 and Harvest 2400-8000. During the years of 1999 thru 2010 hunter participation and harvest experienced a slow decline mainly because of caribou distribution and access. Proposal #119 will address the Predation Management Plan Area. Last year, the BOG approved a predator control plan on wolves to be implemented in the caribou calving grounds in Units 17 and 9. Effective dates for wolf control would run from March 1 to April 30, 2012.

Prior to 1996 caribou cows lived 10+ years and bulls less. This year, the bull/cow ratio show signs of improving but the calf/cow ratios are not. The primary reason is predation by wolves and bears. He feels that the herd is beginning to rebuild as bull/cow and calf/cow ratios are improving. Caribou are healthier with better overall weight and condition. In years past, Jim explains that the Northern and Southern calving groups

mixed somewhat, but he doesn't see that anymore. He feels that if it were not for predation on the calving grounds, the calf/cow ratio survival would be higher allowing a faster recovery of the herd.

During the spring 2011 Caribou Calf Mortality Project, he showed chart of wolf harvest locations in proximity to calving areas and communities. In 2010, 79 wolves were harvested and 39 in 2009. The Southern Caribou Herd calves after May 15, usually between May 22-25 and by the end of June, they are moving back out west to Unit 18 and 19.

Jim explains the Predator Control Management Area. It is in Unit 17b,c and consists of a 5000 sq. mile area. Last week he flew a wolf density survey and estimated that there is approximately a minimum of 40-50 wolves in the area. He needed fresh snow to track the wolves. Each plane flew drainages. One problem encountered was that there was little snow east, but good snow coverage in the western area. This year the Department issued 34 Pilot Permits. Each applicant had to go through a background check and had to be familiar with the area. Each wolf has to be salvaged. Most pilots were those who had experience in other Predator Control Areas. The Plan is similar to Unit 9E. The Department's goal is to take all wolves in the calving area. The Department will use a different locking tag when a wolf is taken.

Committee wanted to know why the wolf control project is starting so late and wants it to start earlier in subsequent years and to expand the area.

Another concern is that with the short window of opportunity of starting in March, weather may prevent participation. A longer season would be more flexible and could reduce that risk.

Jonathan motions to an earlier start date of the Mulchatna Caribou Herd Predation Management Plan in subsequent years to November 10, seconded by Frank.

Lem Butler and Bruce ____ sign in by teleconference at 11:10 am.

One thought is that fliers cannot land when there is no snow and before things freeze up prior to November.

Enforcement is concerned that with increased airplane activity, they will be using radios and are concerned about potential illegal use during the winter moose registration hunt season. Also, local trappers usually take most wolves during the months of January-February. Of issue is that pelts are not prime during March-April.

One suggestion was to start the same day as trapping season, but declined after discussion on competing with local trappers.

One local village resident indicated that if locals were given the opportunity, it would be nice if they could benefit economically and encourages the Department to give them a call if they need assistance.

A committee member suggests the State offering “Bounties” on wolves, but was quickly informed that under State Statute, “Bounties” were not allowed.

Jim explains that this plan is patterned after the one in Unit 9E. Lem and Bruce stress that the most important time for the wolf hunters to be effective is right before the caribou calving season. They would like to see all of the wolves killed in this area. There was a lot of ensuing discussion on expansion, modification of time and area for the Plan. End result was that the committee supports the Departments plan for 2012.

Jonathan moves to offer an amendment to his motion of the starting date of November 10, changing it to January 1 in subsequent years, Frank concurs.

Committee votes Unanimously to support.

Vote on main motion, as amended. Unanimous support.

Jim mentions that the BOG call for proposal deadline for Units 9 and 17 is May 1, 2012. Jim feels that the best way to tweak the Plan is to adjust the boundaries. ½ of the MCH Caribou calving area is in Unit 19 near Lime Village.

The Department did a Calf Mortality Study in the Southern Calving Area, Unit 17 near Kemuk Mountain. During the first two weeks of calving, mortality on collared calves indicated that 39% were taken by wolves, 39% by bears, 4% starved, 3% drowned, and 4% were unknown. 40% caribou calves died within the first two weeks. Bears kill most within 5-10 days and wolves up to two weeks. Only 50% of caribou calves survive to 5 months. With the Plan in effect, the Departments goal is to achieve a range of 7-10% herd growth per year.

There was some discussion on “what if” they killed all the bears in the Control Area? The Department replied that it would take 7-15 years for the bears to come back to the same level that they were. With wolves, it would only take 2-3 years. In all program areas, wolves have to be taken out every year, otherwise they repopulate quickly.

It’s been difficult to get the bear numbers down even with the liberalization of time, area, and bag limits. One recommendation is to put in a proposal for a bear control program similar to wolves.

Another suggestion is to add the Northern Caribou Calving Area in Unit 19b to the management plan. There is a BOG proposal that will address this to be taken up later.

Break: 12:15 pm.

Back to order at 1:30 pm.

b. Board of Game Proposals

Proposal 157. Jim explains intent, purpose, and effect. This would expand wolf control throughout the range of the Mulchatna Caribou Herd in Unit 19a,b (Northern Calving Area).

Jonathan moves to adopt, Frank seconds.

Wolf control in Unit 19a has been in effect since 2004. Currently it starts December every year. To amend the Predation Management Plan, this proposal will increase the original area by 50%. The Department doesn't think that they'll see any appreciable change because of bears. They would like to shoot brown/black bears using Department helicopters.

Jonathan encourages going further west into Unit 17a. He supports the proposal. Dan supports but is concerned about the controversy and political uproar nationally. He feels that there should be periodic effective reviews on its effect.

Hans asks if the caribou mortality in Unit 19a,b is similar to 17? Jim reports that last year near Tundra Lake, out of 7 collared calves, 6 died. This is too small of a sample for mortality results. He feels that even with wolves reduced in 19a, bears may be more of a problem. They will know more by this summer.

2011 Caribou Calf Mortality Study in Unit 17:

	Southern Calving Grounds	Northern Calving Grounds
Calves collared	81	7
Survived 2 weeks	60%	17%
Survived 5 months	44%	0%

There were some questions about population and harvest objectives. Bruce responds that this is what drives the Predator Management Plans. If the caribou IM numbers are too high it would preclude predator control.

The Department would like to see the MCH grow and eventually see liberalizing harvest later. Bruce comments that once the herd reaches it's 80,000 population objective; the predator management plan ceases and feels that the Department can be more flexible with changing the harvest objective to control growth.

Action on Proposal 157: Unanimous support.

Proposal 158. Jonathan moves to adopt, Dan seconds.

Jonathan supports and would like to include 17a. After discussion the committee agrees by consensus to take **no action**.

Proposal 159. Frank moves to adopt, Dan seconds. A member of the public thought that the lower population range objective of 30,000 is not sufficient to meet subsistence needs and feels that it should be higher. The MCH now winters in the Kuskokwim where they have huge numbers of hunters there. He questions the harvest numbers in Unit 18? How accurate are they there? He feels that there is a lot of unreported harvest.

The Department feels that the Harvest Objective should be 8-10 % of the Population Objective.

Ted Krieg, ADF&G Div. of Subsistence indicates that Subsistence Harvest Information in Unit 18 for the past few years will be available soon.

Frank suggests that we take this up during our BOG cycle.

Committee agrees by consensus to take no action.

c. Public Notice

A member of the public questions if proper public notice of this meeting was given. Hans replies that he depended on AC support to give proper notice. He was in communication with Jim even while he was stateside and plans for the meeting was made well in advance and thought that staff took care of it.

Hans mentions that the next scheduled meeting is for March 20. Adequate public notice will go out (14 days) because elections will be held.

d. Board Support Person

Frank suggests that the chair write a letter to fill the local AC Coordinator position in Dillingham. He says that BBNA can to outreach work too.

Another suggestion is for the Chair to write a letter to Ex. Director, Commissioner, Edgmond, Hoffman. The State would fund and enter in to a contractual agreement with BBNA to fill this position. He feels that we need someone right away as we have the Bristol Bay BOF, and BOG cycles coming up this year.

Frank moves that the NAC Chair draft/adopt a letter for BBNA to contract the AC Coordinator position. Funds would come out of the operating budget. Jonathan seconds.

Committee votes unanimous in support.

Bruce mentions that the Department put in for additional money. \$60,000 for AC meetings.

7. Time and place next meeting

Hans reports that he has scheduled a March 20 meeting to be held here at the Dillingham City Chambers to hold elections and to formulate BOF and BOG proposals. BOG deadline is April 10 BOG deadline is May 1.

Jonathan, Togiak AC Chair, says that he has scheduled a meeting on the 19th or 20th.

8. Adjourn

After thanking everyone for their participation, Chairman Nicholson adjourned the meeting at 3:25 pm.