



Federal Subsistence Board News Release



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

Forest Service

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Changes in Federal Caribou Hunting Regulations in Unit 23

Frequently asked questions on closure of Federal public lands to caribou hunting by non-federally qualified users.

In April 2024, the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) adopted Wildlife Proposal WP24-30/31 with modification to close Federal public lands in Unit 23 to caribou hunting by non-federally qualified users from Aug. 1 – Oct. 31 unless the Western Arctic Caribou herd population estimate exceeds 200,000 caribou. This regulation will become effective July 1, 2024. This fact sheet addresses common questions and concerns about the closure.

1. Exactly where does the Federal closure apply?

The closure to non-federally qualified users applies to all Federal public lands in Unit 23. Collectively, this area is about 32,300 square miles and is a combination of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. National Park lands (See Map).

2. What activities are prohibited within the closure areas?

Non-federally qualified users (anyone hunting under State regulations) may not hunt for or harvest caribou within the closure area. However, non-federally qualified users hunting under State regulations may still travel through, camp, and hunt/trap for other species on Federal public lands within the closure area. The closure area also remains open to all other activities such as hiking, boating, wildlife viewing, etc.

3. Who is eligible to hunt caribou on Federal public lands in Unit 23?

As of July 1, 2024, only federally qualified subsistence users are eligible to hunt caribou on Federal public lands in Unit 23. Federally qualified subsistence users are rural Alaskan residents who have been determined by the Federal Subsistence Board to have customary and traditional use of caribou in Unit 23. This includes residents of the following units and communities: 21D west of the Koyukuk and Yukon Rivers, Galena, 22, 23, 24 including residents of Wiseman but not including other residents of the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area, and 26A.

4. How long will this closure be in effect?

This closure is codified Federal regulation and will remain in effect unless the population estimate of the Western Arctic caribou herd exceeds 200,000 caribou, or unless a proposal to rescind the closure is submitted and adopted by the Board.

5. Can a non-federally qualified user take caribou on gravel bars along navigable waters below the “ordinary high water mark” when the adjacent uplands are Federal public lands?

Yes. Lands below the ordinary high water mark of navigable waters are outside of Federal jurisdiction for the subsistence harvest of wildlife.

6. How is “ordinary high water mark” defined?

The ordinary high water mark means “that line on the shore established by the fluctuations of water and indicated by physical characteristics such as a clear, natural line impressed on the bank, shelving, changes in the character of soil, destruction of terrestrial vegetation, the presence of litter and debris, or other appropriate means that consider the characteristics of the surrounding areas” (33 CFR 328.3).

7. Can a non-federally qualified user help a federally qualified subsistence user hunt caribou in the closed areas?

If you are not eligible to hunt caribou, you can be present but cannot participate in the attempt to take or taking of caribou on Federal public lands in the closure area. Once the take is complete, you may assist the hunter with the cleaning, salvage, or processing of a legally harvested animal. *Take or taking*, as used with respect to fish or wildlife, means to pursue, hunt, shoot, trap, net, capture, collect, kill, harm, or attempt to engage in any such conduct (50 CFR 100.4).

8. Why did the Board enact this closure?

The Board stated that the ongoing precipitous decline of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd warrants strong measures to aid in the recovery and conservation of this population. While exact causes of the decline are uncertain, reducing human harvest is the most controllable factor. Since December 2021, the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group determined the herd should be managed at the preservative declining level and under this framework it is recommended to restrict harvest to residents only and closure of some Federal public lands to non-federally qualified users may be necessary as a tool in the aid to the recovery.

Communities in the Northwest Arctic region are not meeting their subsistence needs and every caribou counts. The closure supports the recommendation of the Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils. The population threshold ensures that the closure does not result in unnecessary restrictions to non-federally qualified users and will not remain in effect longer than necessary when caribou populations recover.

9. Who should I contact if I have further questions about this closure?

Please contact the Office of Subsistence Management at (907) 786-3888, (800) 478-1456 or subsistence@fws.gov.

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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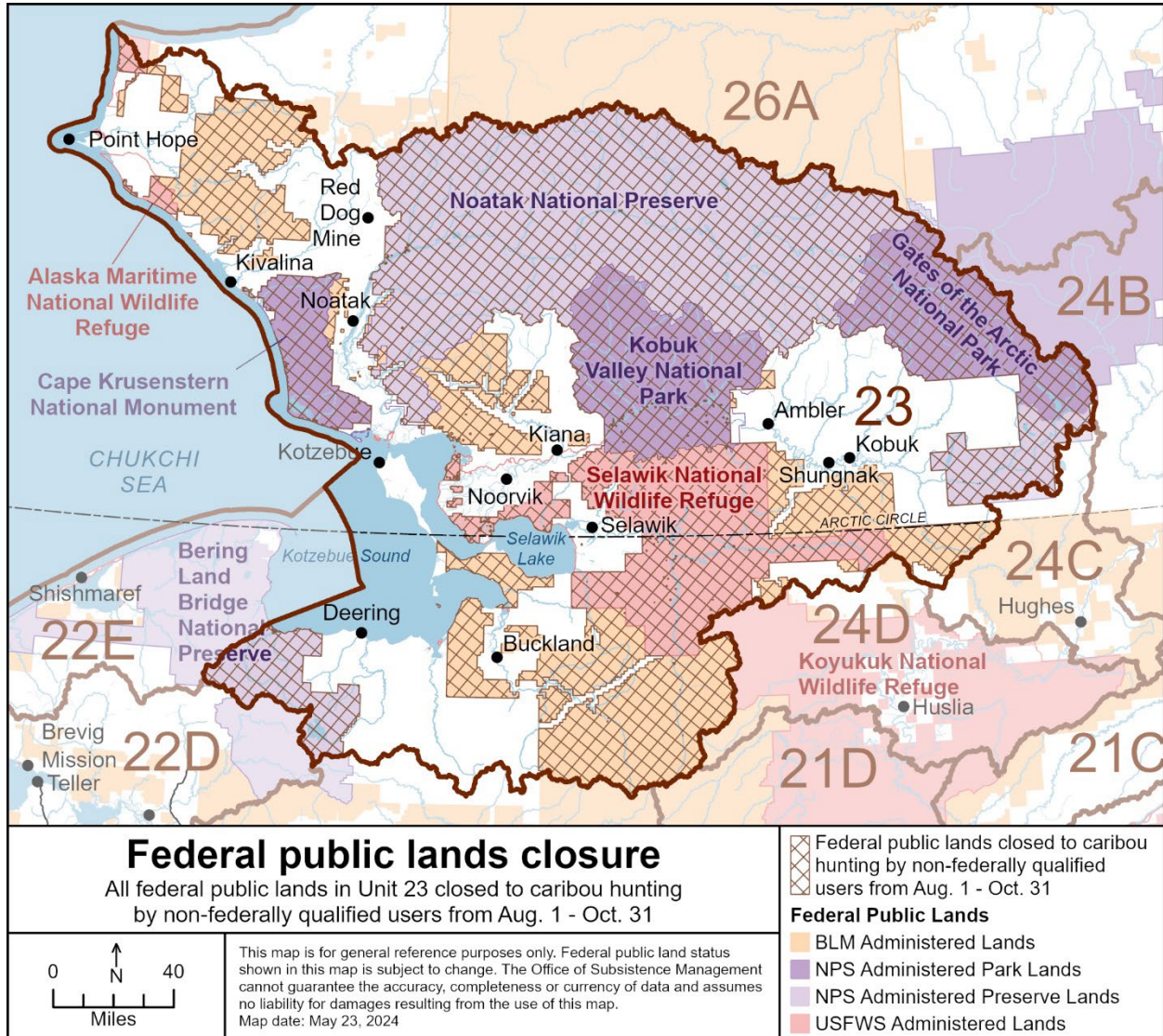


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