



United States Department of the Interior
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
1011 East Tudor Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99503
(907) 786-3357

Dear Reader:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), has prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze management options, including a No Action alternative, for responding to the declining Unimak Island caribou herd (UCH).

In 2009, all hunting for caribou on Unimak Island, including subsistence hunting, was suspended for conservation reasons. While caribou herds throughout Alaska commonly undergo major fluctuations in population size, the current downward trend of the UCH may be noncyclic and irreversible without management intervention. Since 2005, there has been little calf recruitment into the UCH and it has an unusually low number of males in proportion to females. From 2002 through 2009, the UCH declined from a population of approximately 1,261 to the present low of 400.

In March 2010 the Alaska Board of Game (BOG) established the "Unimak Wolf Management Area." This action established state caribou and wolf population objectives for Unimak Island and authorized the ADF&G to conduct wolf control operations to achieve those objectives. The ADF&G is a cooperating agency with the Service in the preparation of this EA in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) because of the broad authorities both agencies have for managing fish, wildlife, and habitat resources on Unimak Island.

The BOG's Unimak plan is included in Appendix C of this EA, along with a modification recently proposed by the ADF&G that will be considered at the BOG's spring 2011 meeting. The BOG's approved Unimak Wolf Management Area plan is ADF&G's Proposed Action (Alternative B) in this EA. The EA analyzes a No Action alternative and three predator control alternatives. Although the ADF&G has identified a proposed action, the Service has not identified a preferred alternative at this time. We are interested in the public's views.

The Service understands that any proposal using helicopters or fixed-wing aircraft as a shooting platform for predator control will be controversial. Two of the alternatives evaluated include aircraft while a third is ground-based but with aircraft support. The ADF&G's Proposed Action (Alternative B) uses helicopters as shooting platforms. Alternative C uses fixed-wing aircraft for shooting or ground-based teams with helicopter support. Alternative D eliminates aerial gunning completely, although aircraft will be used for logistic support of ground-based control actions.

The decision to be made by the Service is to determine which alternative addresses the current state of the UCH in the manner that is most consistent with, and necessary to achieve, the Refuge purposes and mission and, to the extent practical, is in accordance with the ADF&G's mission and mandates.

Please provide comments on this EA by January 31, 2011. Comments should be specific, addressing merits of the alternatives and adequacy of the environmental analysis. The Service has a contract with GAP Solutions, Inc. to assist with preparing the EA and collecting your comments. They can be submitted to the Service using any of the following methods:

Email: fw7_izembek_planning@fws.gov

Fax: 1-800-507-8557

U.S. Mail: GAP Solutions, Inc.
Unimak Caribou Herd Environmental Assessment
P. O. Box 2026
Pocatello, ID 83206-2026

The document is available online at <http://alaska.fws.gov/nwr/planning/nepa.htm>

Following the closing of the comment period, the Service will examine the comments and determine whether the Environmental Assessment action warrants a "Finding of No Significant Impact". If a Finding of No Significant Impact is warranted, we will select an alternative and implement the selected alternative on Unimak Island starting in May 2011.