



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Region 7 - Alaska

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News

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USFWS Seeks Comments on Draft Assessment of Unimak Island Wolf and Caribou Issues

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) released today an Environmental Assessment (EA) of management alternatives for the Unimak Island caribou herd (UCH). The Service, in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), has prepared an EA to analyze management options for responding to the declining Unimak Island caribou herd.

The UCH size has fluctuated considerably over the last century, from a high of 7,000 in 1925 to near-zero in the 1950s. From 2002 through 2009, the UCH declined from a population of approximately 1,261 to the present low of 400. In 2009, all hunting for caribou on Unimak Island, including subsistence hunting, was suspended.

In March 2010 the Alaska Board of Game established the “Unimak Wolf Management Area.” This action established population objectives for caribou and wolf on Unimak Island and authorized the ADF&G to conduct wolf control operations to achieve those objectives. Because most lands on Unimak Island are part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, the Service must approve any such actions on those federal lands.

“This environmental assessment process will allow us to protect natural diversity on the refuge and fulfill the refuge purpose of providing opportunities for subsistence harvest,” said the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Alaska Regional Director Geoffrey L. Haskett.

The alternatives described in detail in this EA and analyzed for their impacts to the environment include a No Action alternative (Alternative A) without predator control; the ADF&G’s proposal to use airplanes and helicopters to selectively shoot wolves preying on caribou calves (Alternative B); Alternative C, which shifts the shooting of wolves from helicopter to fixed-wing aircraft; and Alternative D, which eliminates aerial gunning completely, though aircraft would be used to support ground-based control actions. While these alternatives are presented, the Service has not selected a preferred alternative, pending completion of public comment on the EA.

The comment period on this EA is open through January 31, 2011. Comments submitted should be specific, addressing the merits of the alternatives and the adequacy of the environmental analysis. The Service has a contract with GAP Solutions, Inc. to assist with preparing the EA and collecting your comments. Comments 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 EA document is available online at <http://alaska.fws.gov/nwr/planning/nepa.htm>. If you need a paper copy, please contact John Martin, Regional Refuge Ecologist, at U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1011 E. Tudor Rd., Anchorage, Alaska 99503. Phone: 907-786-3670.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.