



ADF&G Press Release

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ADF&G Reports Increase in Teshekpuk and Central Arctic Caribou Herds

Two arctic caribou herds are increasing, according to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game reports. According to recent photocensuses, the Teshekpuk Caribou Herd has increased from 45,000 animals in 2002 to just over 64,000 animals in 2009, and the Central Arctic herd (CAH) has grown from about 32,000 in 2002 to approximately 67,000 in 2009.

The Teshekpuk and Central Arctic herds are the only arctic herds known to be increasing at this time. The Western Arctic and Porcupine herds, located on either side of the Teshekpuk and CAH, appear to be decreasing in number. Many herds across Canada also appear to be decreasing, but scientists have not yet determined causes of the declines.

Department staff believe good production rates, good weather, low predation, and good habitat have combined to allow these two particular herds to increase rapidly.

Theories that changes in herd numbers reflect a mixing of caribou from several different herds have not been supported by the photocensuses or radio-tracking data. "We can't say no mixing takes place with neighboring herds, but we found no collared animals from neighboring herds within the Teshekpuk herd during the photocensus," said Caribou Biologist Lincoln Parrett.

Ft. Yukon Area Biologist Beth Lenart found only four collared caribou from neighboring herds in the CAH during that photocensus. "Even if each collared animal represented a thousand caribou, it wouldn't be enough to explain the increase in Central Arctic Herd size," Lenart said. "The herd is growing rapidly right now."

Photo censuses of both herds were completed in July 2009. Biologists radio-track collared caribou to locate groups of animals which are photographed by a large-format camera in the

belly of another plane. The photos are examined under magnifying glasses and individual caribou are counted.

Survey conditions were excellent for both censuses, which produced very high quality photos. Based on the number of collared animals located within the larger groups, biologists believe about 95% of the animals in each herd were photographed, making the photocensus results a minimum number but a solid estimate for each herd.

The increase in numbers for the arctic herds comes as good news to many North Slope communities who fill their meat racks and freezers by hunting Teshekpuk caribou. The herd typically lives year-round on the western North Slope, and is an extremely important resource for the people of Barrow, Nuiqsut, Wainwright, Anaktuvuk Pass, and Atkasuk. The CAH is commonly hunted by Alaskans from all over the state as well as nonresident hunters.