



Caribou Vital Sign Annual Report for the Arctic Network Inventory and Monitoring Program

September 2014-August 2015

Natural Resource Report NPS/ARCN/NRR—2015/1090



ON THE COVER

Caribou foraging east of Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, late winter 2012.

Photograph by: Kyle Joly

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This report is available from the Arctic Inventory and Monitoring Network's Caribou Vital Signs webpage (<http://science.nature.nps.gov/im/units/arcn/index.cfm?rq=12&vsid=19>) under the 'Documents' tab and the Natural Resource Publications Management website (<http://www.nature.nps.gov/publications/nrpm/>). To receive this report in a format optimized for screen readers, please email irma@nps.gov.

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Abstract/Executive Summary

Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) are an integral part of the ecological and cultural fabric of northwest Alaska. Western Arctic Herd (WAH) caribou roam over this entire region, including all 5 Arctic Network Inventory and Monitoring Program (ARCN) National Park Units. Conservation of healthy caribou populations are specifically mentioned within the enabling legislation (Alaska National Interests Lands Conservation Act or ANILCA) of 3 of these Parks and is of critical concern to subsistence hunters within this region. Caribou are, by far, the most abundant large mammal in northwest Alaska and are famous for their long-distance migrations and large population oscillations. For these reasons, ARCN chose WAH caribou as a Vital Sign for long-term monitoring.

This report documents the monitoring results of this Vital Sign during its 6th year (September 2014 – August 2015) of implementation. Results from the previous years of monitoring are also included for ease of comparison. Periodic syntheses of these data will be performed and reported on as appropriate. National Park Service (NPS) monitoring of the WAH is done in conjunction and cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG), US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) – Selawik National Wildlife Refuge, and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) – Central Yukon Field Office. NPS-sponsored monitoring of the herd relies heavily on the use of Global Positioning System (GPS) radiotelemetry collars that are capable of transmitting location data to a satellite. Given the extremely remote area that the WAH inhabits, this system provides the most efficient and accurate means to track individual caribou. These data are being utilized to monitor the timing and location of migrations, as well as seasonal distributions of WAH caribou. Monitoring movement and the phenology of movement is perhaps the simplest means to track the influence of climate change, natural perturbations, development, and other potential impacts on a species – an analysis of which is outside the scope of this current report.

This report also documents the NPS commitment and involvement with the WAH Working Group. The group is composed of important stakeholders including representatives for rural villages, sport hunters, conservationists, hunting guides, hunting transporters, and reindeer herders. In addition, all of the agencies charged with managing the WAH, including the ADFG, NPS, FWS and BLM, serve as advisors to the group. Information gathered by the Caribou Vital Sign monitoring program are intended to supplement and complement existing data streams gathered by the other cooperating agencies and will be important in future management decisions.

Acknowledgments

The ADFG, BLM, FWS, and students of the regional high schools helped with collar deployments. Washington State University conducted the dietary analyses. We thank Regan Sarwas for the comprehensive technical database and GIS assistance that made this report possible. We thank Jim Herriges, Eric Wald, Mat Sorum and Jim Lawler for reviewing drafts that improved this paper.

List of Acronyms

ADFG – Alaska Department of Fish and Game

ARCN – Arctic Inventory and Monitoring Network

BELA – Bering Land Bridge National Preserve

BLM – Bureau of Land Management

CAKR – Cape Krusenstern National Monument

FWS – US Fish and Wildlife Service

GAAR – Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve

KOVA – Kobuk Valley National Park

NOAT – Noatak National Preserve

WAH – Western Arctic Herd

Introduction

This report is the latest in a series of annual reports documenting long-term monitoring of the Western Arctic Herd (WAH). Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) were chosen to be a Vital Sign of the National Park Service (NPS)'s Arctic Inventory and Monitoring Network (ARCN) because they: (1) are an extremely important subsistence species that occur in all park units (Gates of the Arctic Park and Preserve (GAAR); Noatak National Preserve (NOAT); Cape Krusenstern National Monument (CAKR), Kobuk Valley National Park (KOVA) and Bering Land Bridge National Preserve (BELA)) within ARCN; (2) are specifically identified in the enabling legislation (Alaska National Interest Lands Claim Act [ANILCA]) of GAAR, KOVA and NOAT to be managed for natural and healthy populations; (3) directly impact reindeer and reindeer herders in BELA; (4) are considered good indicators of the condition of park ecosystems because they consume lichens and fungi (which derive their nutrients from the atmosphere and thus are sensitive to pollutants) making them good bio-indicators of environmental toxins; (5) are of great importance to park visitors because of the opportunities to view caribou in Alaskan parks; (6) are an example of the ever more rare natural phenomenon of long distance migration of a large land mammal; (7) are an integral part of the ecology and social fabric of northwest Alaska; and, (8) can be compared with national and international datasets for caribou herds across the Arctic region to gain insight into the ecology of the WAH or Arctic ecology in general.

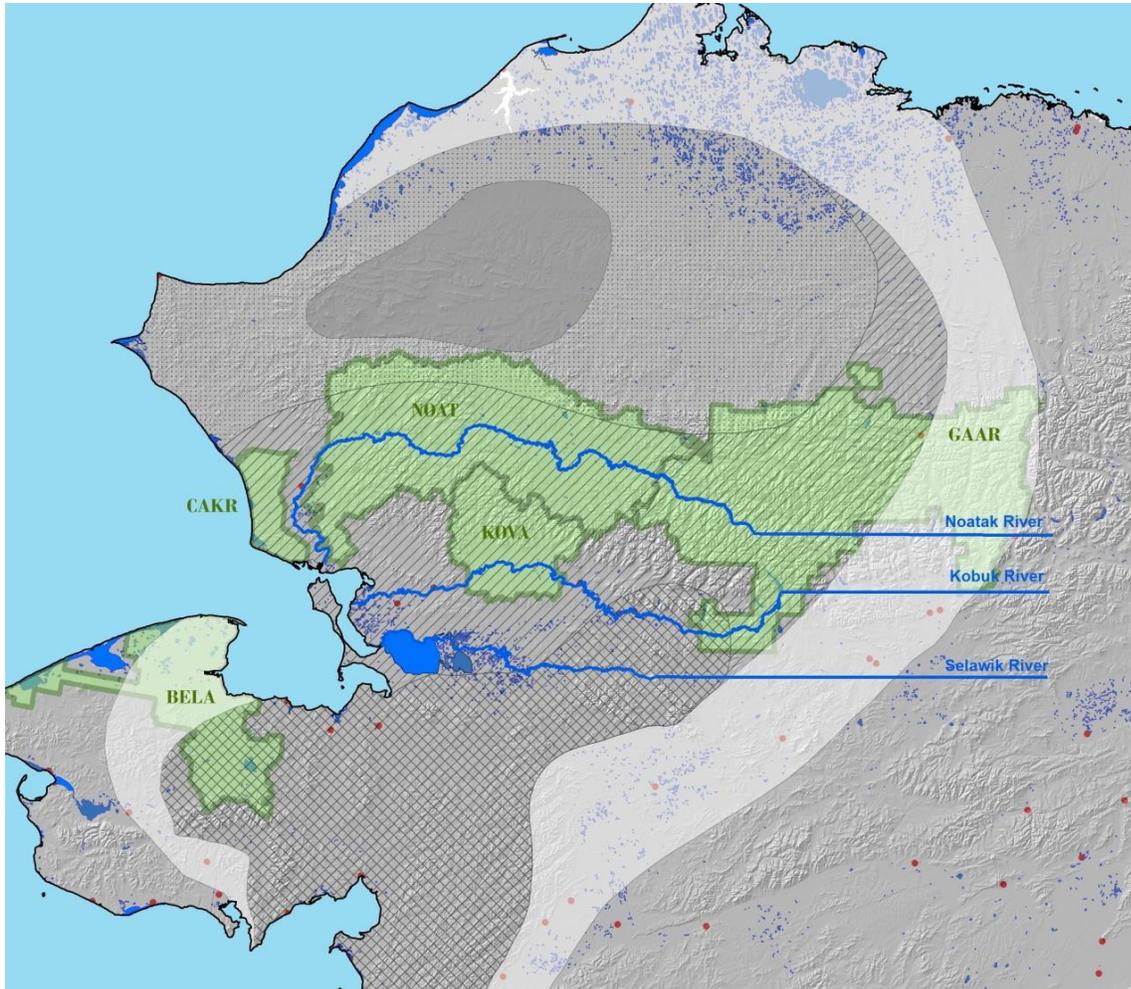
Of the 4 Alaska Arctic caribou herds, only the WAH regularly utilizes all 5 ARCN park units (Figure 1). WAH caribou are of great importance to people from both consumptive and non-consumptive viewpoints, and to the ecosystem as a whole. At an estimated population size of over 490,000 animals in 2003 (Dau 2007), the WAH is a significant ecological force in northwest Alaska and is the largest caribou herd in the state. More recent estimates (235,000 caribou in 2013; Dau 2013) show the herd to be greatly reduced from the 2003 population peak and may no longer be the state's largest. The heritage and traditions of Alaska Natives in approximately 40 subsistence-based communities in the region have been shaped by the availability of these caribou (Western Arctic Herd Working Group 2003). The availability of WAH also affects the economy of this region. The presence and relative abundance of WAH caribou have substantial impacts on the populations of wolves, bears, and wolverines in the area. Caribou integrate regional environmental conditions in northwestern Alaska because of their migratory nature. Caribou may have substantial effects on plant and lichen communities and by extension to wildlife communities, either directly through browsing and grazing, or indirectly through biogeochemical cycling. While the primary objectives of monitoring will be to track the distribution and migrations of caribou, a variety of ancillary data (e.g., survival) will be obtained in the monitoring process that are likely to have great value for park and wildlife management, ungulate research, and evaluating long-term changes in the WAH.

This report documents the results of ARCN caribou monitoring for the 6th year (September 2014 – August 2015) of the program. The caribou monitoring protocols contain the detailed methodology employed to obtain the results presented here (Joly et al. 2012). Periodic syntheses of these data will be performed and reported on as appropriate.

Measurable Objectives – Core Program

- Capture and radio-collar WAH caribou to maintain a sample size of 30-40 GPS collars.
- Obtain frequent (>2/day) location data via GPS-satellite telemetry.
- Membership, attendance and activity on the WAH Working Group Technical Committee.
- Attendance and involvement at WAH Working Group meetings.
- Obtain herd and environmental condition data by radio tracking in October and April.
- Define seasonal ranges (i.e., calving, insect relief, summer, winter).
- Define migratory corridors.
- Detect changes in range distribution over time.
- Detect changes in adult survivorship over time.
- Detect changes in migration routes and movement phenology over time.
- Detect changes in the location and timing of calving (using GPS data).

Figure 1. Study area and the range of the Western Arctic Herd. Generalized range data courtesy of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Dark gray delineates calving area, stippled summer range, hatched migratory areas, cross-hatched core winter range and light gray is outer range. The red dots indicate villages and towns. Green polygons are NPS units.



Methods

The methods outlined here are provided to give the reader a brief summary of the methods and analyses that were conducted to monitor the WAH. Detailed methodologies used to develop this report can be found in the ARCN Caribou Vital Sign Protocol (Joly et al. 2012, available at <http://science.nature.nps.gov/im/units/arcn/index.cfm?rq=12&vsid=19>).

Collar deployments

All collars have been deployed at Onion Portage, KOVA, typically in early to mid-September. Caribou are captured by hand using motorboats to intercept animals as they swim across the Kobuk River using protocols approved by a State of Alaska Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). NPS collars were only deployed on adult (> 2 years old) female caribou. Captures are conducted in conjunction and cooperation with the ADFG, FWS and BLM. Every collar is equipped with GPS technology that can transmit position data to satellites that can regularly be downloaded in an office setting. Collars are programmed to collect locations every 8 hours throughout the year (i.e., 1095 relocations per caribou per {non-leap} year).

Year One Survivorship

Survivorship reported here merely represents how many caribou that were collared in September in this reporting period (i.e., 2014) remained alive through the end of the monitoring year (i.e., August 2015). The number that survived plus the number that died and the number that had collar failures will equal 100%. A robust analysis of survivorship of all collared individuals (i.e., including caribou collars having only Platform Terminal Terminals (PTT) or Very High Frequency (VHF) capabilities), which takes into account the duration that the individual has been collared and total sample size, is anticipated to be provided by the ADFG in their Survey and Inventory reports.

Seasonal Range Use

Both 50% and 95% utilization distribution kernels (Worton 1989) were developed using ArcGIS and new ArcGIS tools developed by the NPS. Kernels were developed for the year (September 1-August 31) and for the following seasons: calving period (May 28-June 14), insect relief (June 15-July 14), late-summer (July 15-August 31), and winter (December 1 – March 31). Kernels were created for individual caribou each season and then compiled so that individuals, regardless of the number of relocations per individual, were weighted evenly (normalized). Results from every year of monitoring are also included for ease of comparison. The Least Squares Cross Validation (LSCV) smoothing parameter (Worton 1989) is utilized for all kernels (Joly et al. 2012). All collars were deployed at one location (Onion Portage, KOVA). As a result, their distribution throughout the first winter was not considered representative of the entire herd. At calving (8 months later), the collared caribou were considered mixed with the herd in general based on the distribution of collars deployed in previous years (Joly, *pers. obs.*). Range use and distribution analyses only considered collared caribou that were mixed.

Distribution and movements

The GPS radiocollar data were used to determine what percentage of GPS-collared caribou were found in each ARCN park unit during summer (June, July and August), fall (September, October and November), winter (December, January, February and March) and spring (April and May). ArcGIS was used to determine distances and velocities between successive GPS relocations. Annual distance moved was the sum of the distances between successive GPS relocations.

Migration Phenology

ArcGIS was used to analyze the GPS data to determine when individual caribou crossed the Selawik, Kobuk and Noatak Rivers on their northward (“spring”; typically between April 1- June 15) and southward (“fall”; typically September 1-November 30) migrations. The percentage of GPS-collared caribou that crossed each specified river, and the average date they crossed were calculated.

Migration Routes

A histogram of the longitudes at which the collared caribou crossed the Noatak River (the first major river crossed) heading southward was developed as a visual aid to understand the geographic distribution of the fall migration. Categories of longitudes are based on equal numbers of river miles rather than equal distribution of longitudes to account for the primarily north-south direction of the river at its mouth.

The minimum distance, and date for which that occurred, between individual GPS-collared caribou and the villages of Noatak, Shungnak and Selawik and Onion Portage, during the spring (April 1- May 31) and fall migrations (September 1-November 30), were calculated using ArcGIS.

Results

Collar deployments

During the reporting period, 5 additional GPS collars were deployed. Since the inception of this project, nearly 250,000 GPS locations have been gathered (Table 1). It is expected that about 10-12 collars will have to be deployed annually to maintain the sample size due to mortalities and the short life-span of GPS collars (~4 years). Over the 6 years of monitoring, approximately 61% of collared cows appeared to have a calf at heel at the time they were captured. All active collars deployed in 2010 and 2011 automatically dropped off caribou in 2015 as they were reaching the end of their predicted lifespan. Collars have primarily been deployed during the first half of September, except in 2013 when most were deployed October 1.

Year One Survivorship

Approximately 60% of the 5 caribou collared in September 2014 survived through August 2015 (Table 1). For the first 6 years of monitoring, there are a total of 185 datasets that contain a complete year of locations.

Table 1. Collar deployment overview. Number and survivorship (% +/- standard deviation) of GPS-satellite collars deployed on adult (>2 year old) female caribou at Onion Portage, Kobuk Valley National Park, number of collared caribou that appeared to be accompanied by a calf, and approximate number of GPS locations acquired. Captures were conducted in September at the beginning of the monitoring year (September – August).

Monitoring Year	Collars Deployed	Survived 1st Year	Died	Collar Failures	With Calf (% ± 95% CI)	Active Collars at end of year	Total GPS Locations
2009-2010	39	31 (79.5 ± 13.3%)	7 (17.9 ± 12.6%)	1 (2.6 %)	25 (64.1 ± 15.8%)	31	39,086
2010-2011	15	13 (86.7 ± 19.5%)	2 (13.3 ± 19.5%)	0 (0.0 %)	10 (66.7 ± 27.0%)	39	48,892
2011-2012	14	10 (71.4 ± 27.1%)	3 (21.4 ± 24.6%)	1 (7.1 %)	10 (71.4 ± 27.1%)	36	46,706
2012-2013	12	8 (66.7 ± 31.3%)	4 (33.3 ± 31.3%)	0 (0.0 %)	7 (58.3 ± 32.7%)	34	42,965
2013-2014	10	8 (80.0 ± 42.2%)	2 (20.0 ± 42.2%)	0 (0.0 %)	3 (30.0 ± 48.3%)	33	41,710
2014-2015	5	3 (60.0 ± 54.8%)	2 (40.0 ± 54.8%)	0 (0.0 %)	3 (60.0 ± 54.8%)	15	29,427
Total	95				58 (61.1 ± 10.0%)	188	248,786

Seasonal Range Use

The 50% and 95% utilization distributions (kernels) are depicted for the following ranges: 2014-2015 annual range (Figure 2; Table 2; only for caribou collared from 2010-2013; however most caribou collared before 2012 dropped their collars prior to the end of the reporting year and were not used), calving grounds for 2015 (Figure 3; Table 3), insect relief areas for 2015 (Figure 4; Table 4), summer range for 2015 (Figure 5; Table 5), and the 2014-2015 winter range (Figure 6; Table 6; only for caribou collared from 2010-2013). All ARCN Park units were utilized by collared WAH caribou during this reporting period. Collared caribou were primarily north of Park units during calving and northwest during insect relief periods. Calving areas have been fairly consistent, with greatest variability attributable to those cows likely to be non-parturient. A small portion of NOAT was identified as part of the 2015 core insect relief area, similar to 2012-2014. Insect relief areas have shown strong consistency during the course of monitoring. GAAR, and to a lesser extent NOAT and even KOVA, were used during the late summer of 2015. BELA was heavily utilized again during the winter of 2014-2015. GAAR was also utilized during the winter (2014-2015).

Figure 2. Annual (September 1 – August 31) range use of Western Arctic Herd caribou. Light orange depicts the 95% kernel and dark orange the 50% kernel. Green hatched areas are NPS units.

2014-2015

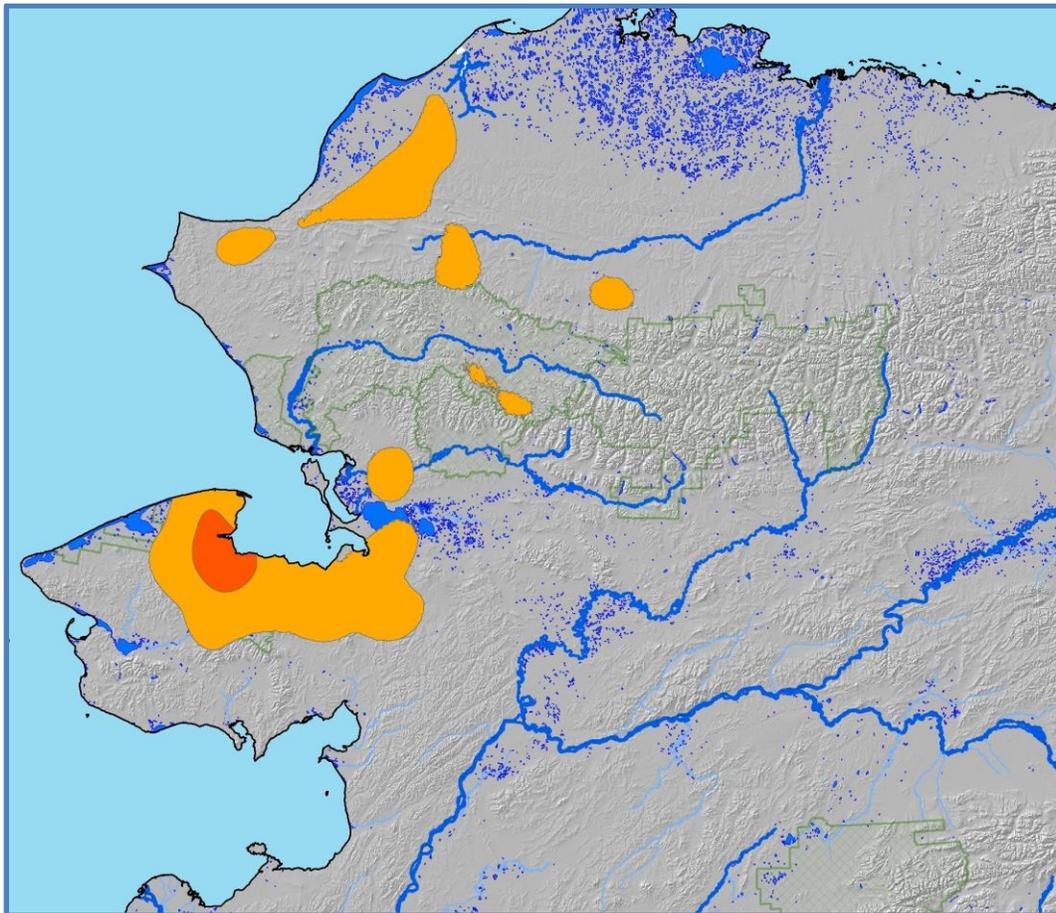
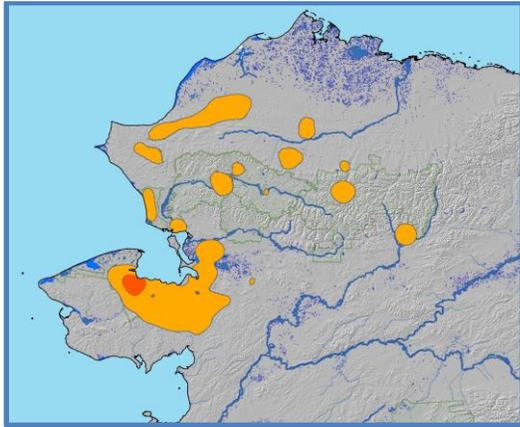
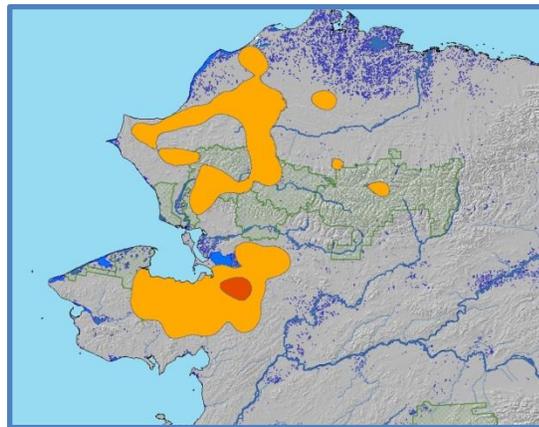


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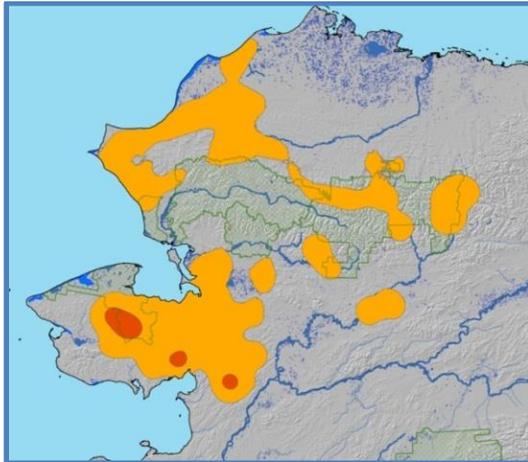
2013-2014



2012-2013



2011-2012



2010-2011

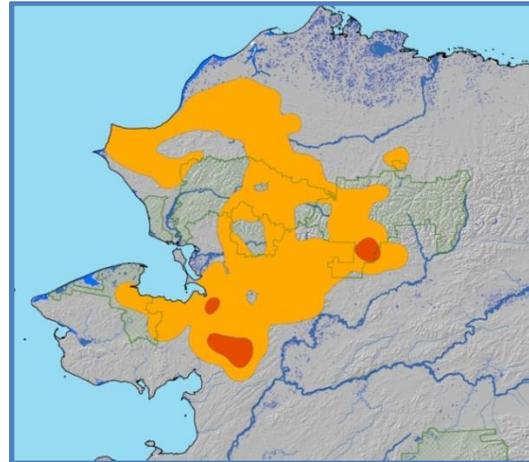


Table 2. Sample sizes and areas of Western Arctic Herd caribou annual (September 1 – August 31) range 95% and 50% kernels.

Year	Sample Size	95% kernel area (km ²)	50% kernel area (km ²)
2014-2015	12	42049	3366
2013-2014	25	46678	1618
2012-2013	34	72778	2169
2011-2012	36	125906	4374
2010-2011	26	136415	6058

Figure 3. Calving period (May 28-June 14) area use by Western Arctic Herd caribou. Light orange depicts the 95% kernel and dark orange the 50% kernel. Green hatched areas are Park units. These kernels include all (both parturient and non-parturient) GPS-collared cows.

2015

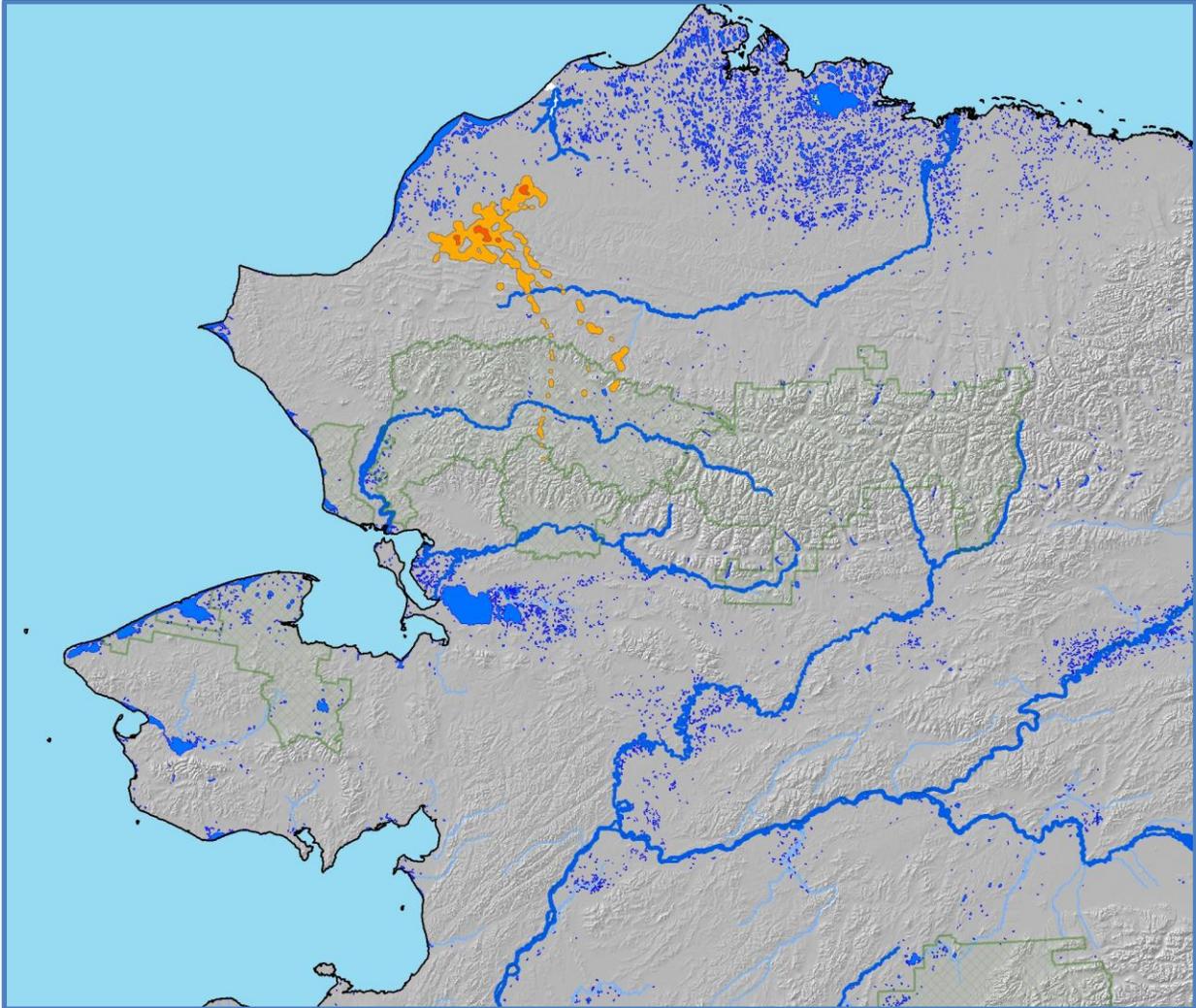
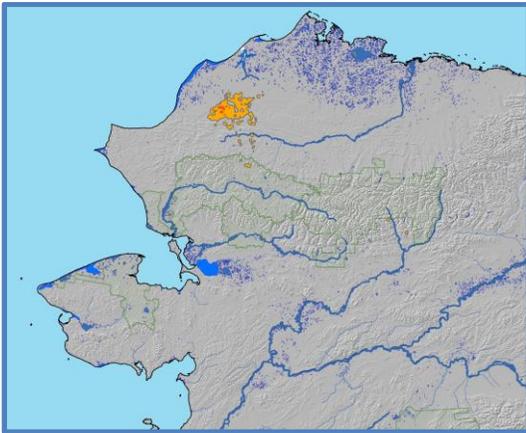
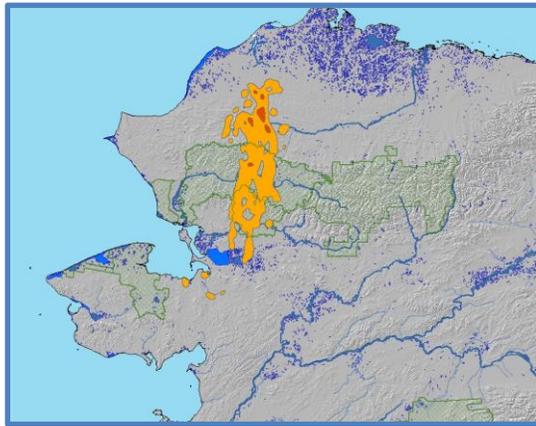


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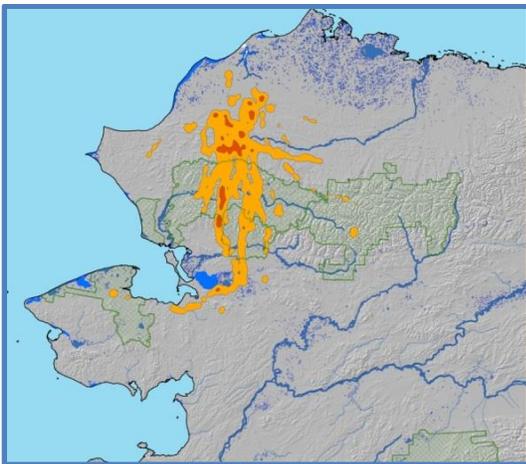
2014



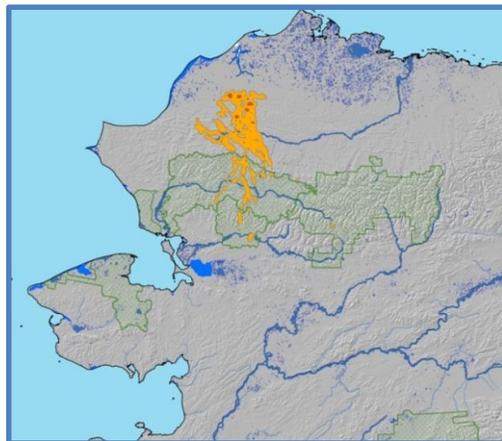
2013



2012



2011



2010

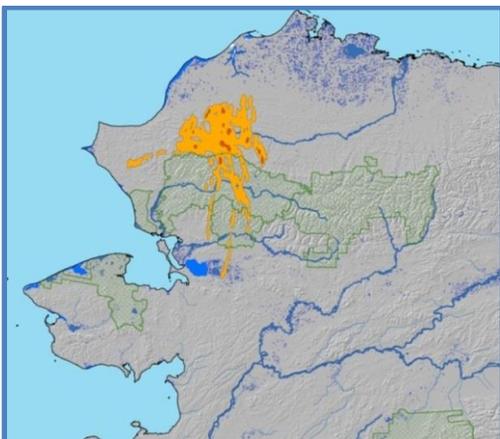


Table 3. Sample sizes and areas of Western Arctic Herd caribou calving period (May 28 – June 14) 95% and 50% kernels.

Year	Sample Size	95% kernel area (km ²)	50% kernel area (km ²)
2015	18	3887	201
2014	43	3623	149
2013	40	21870	749
2012	38	31219	2118
2011	42	11429	291
2010	33	18362	707

Figure 4. Insect relief (June 15-July 14) area use of Western Arctic Herd caribou. Light orange depicts the 95% kernel and dark orange the 50% kernel. Green hatched areas are Park units. 2015

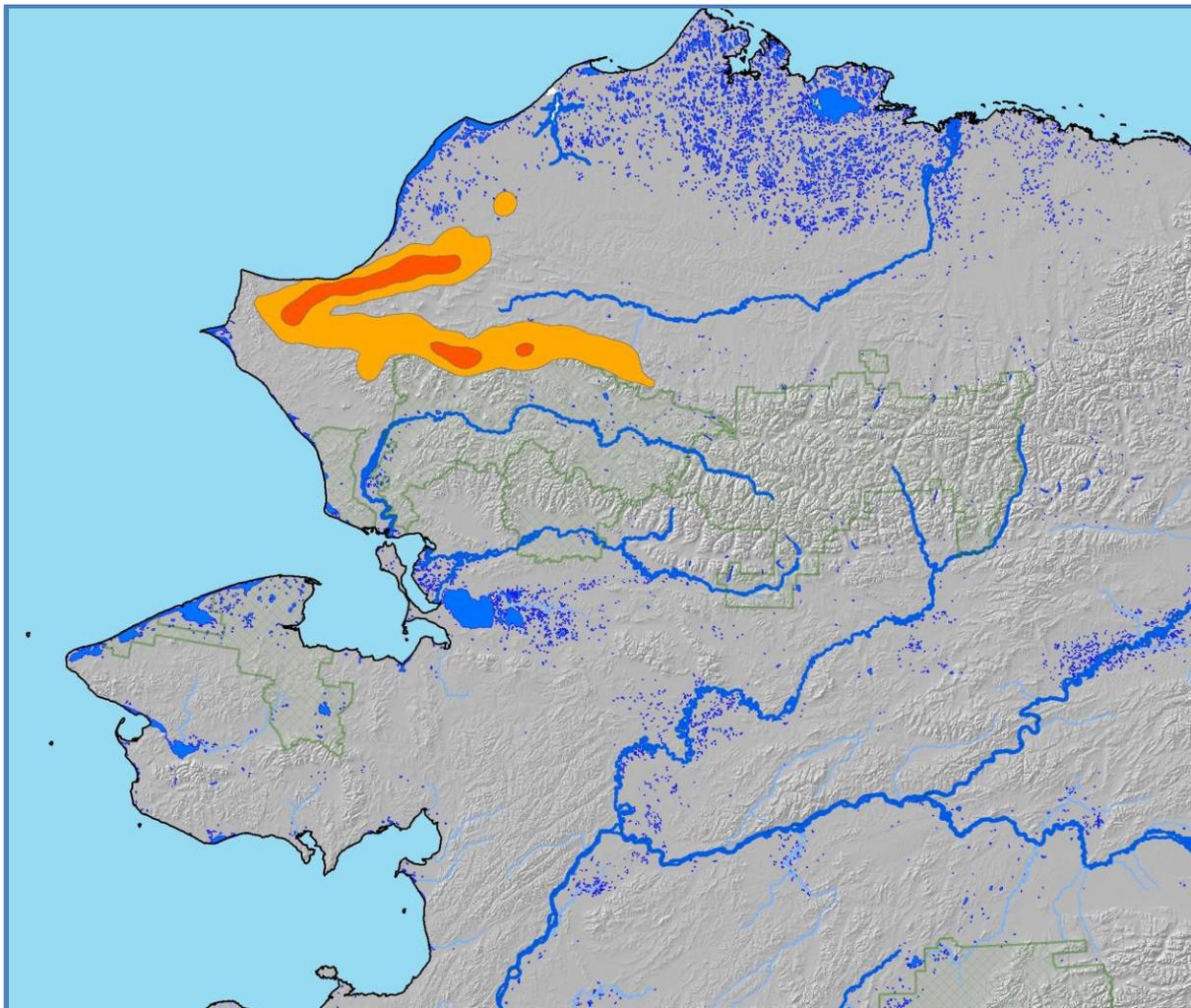
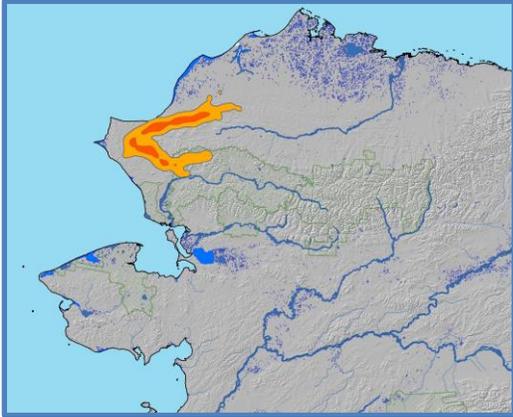
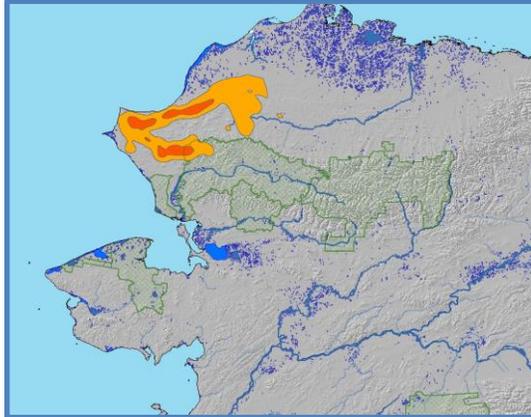


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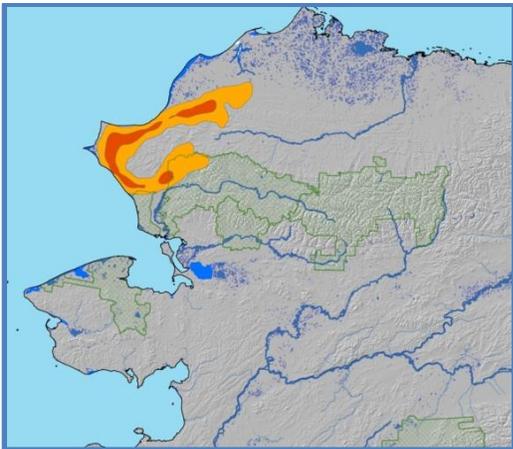
2014



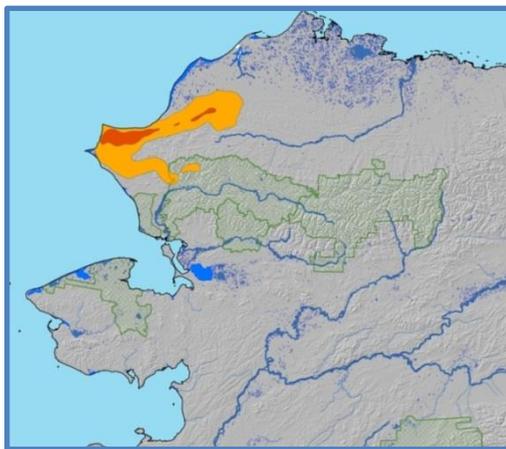
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2012



2011



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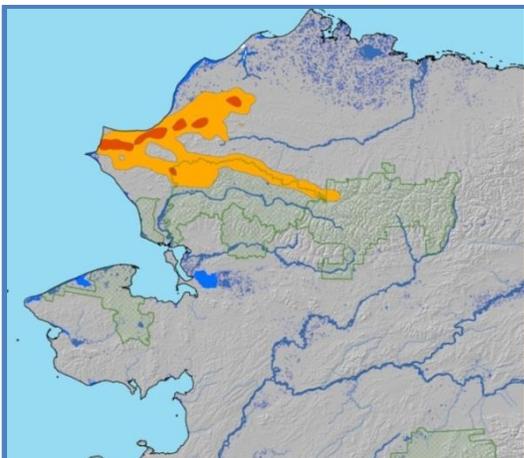


Table 4. Sample sizes and areas of Western Arctic Herd caribou insect relief (June 15 – July 14) area 95% and 50% kernels.

Year	Sample Size	95% kernel area (km2)	50% kernel area (km2)
2015	16	17804	3158
2014	34	14020	3058
2013	36	22043	3688
2012	38	24476	5505
2011	40	20734	2737
2010	33	31142	3468

Figure 5. Late-summer (July 15-August 31) range use of Western Arctic Herd caribou. Light orange depicts the 95% kernel and dark orange the 50% kernel. Green hatched areas are Park units.

2015

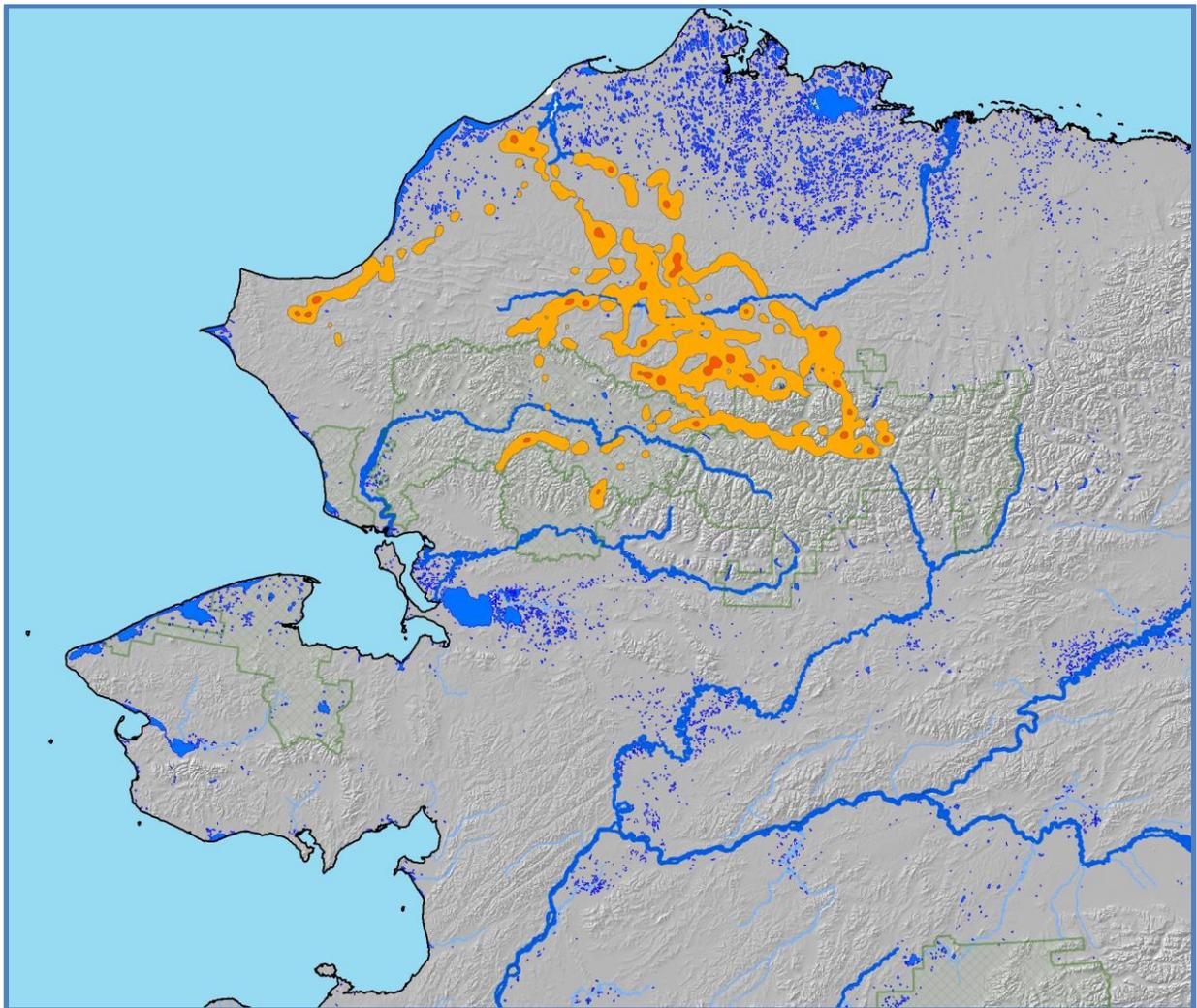
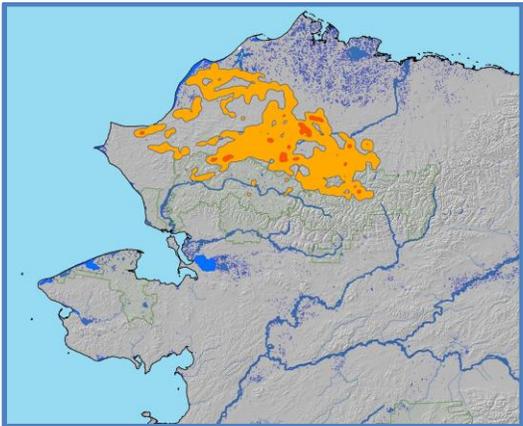
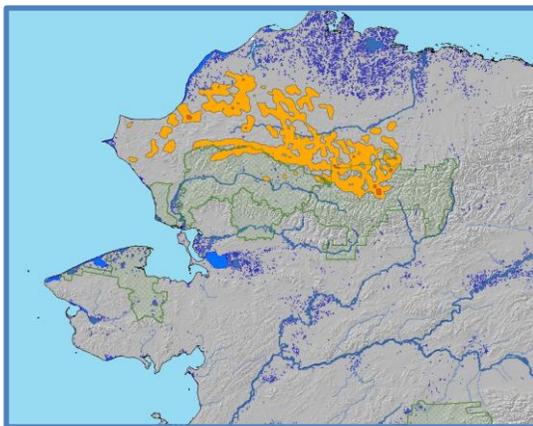


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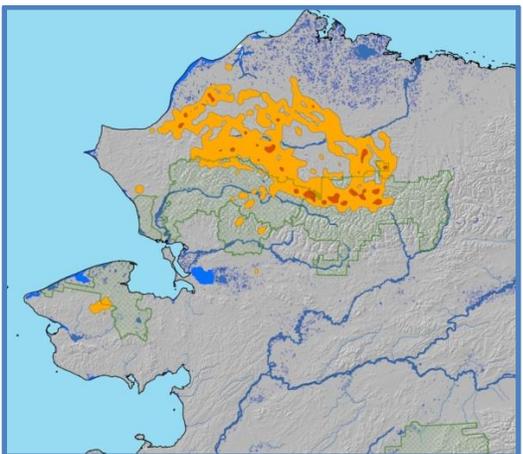
2014



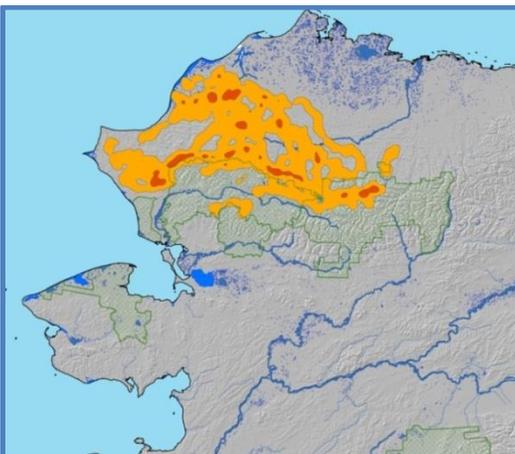
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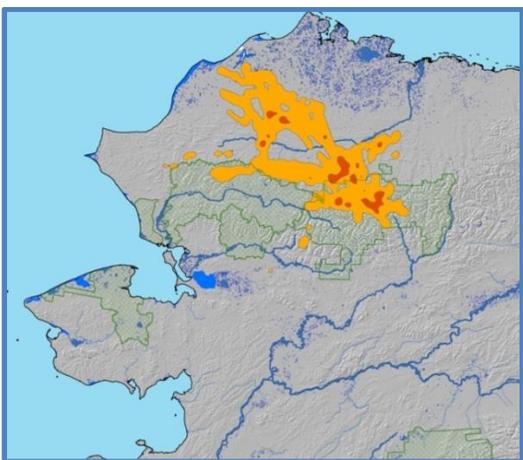


Table 5. Sample sizes and areas of Western Arctic Herd caribou late-summer (July 15 – August 31) 95% and 50% kernels.

Year	Sample Size	95% kernel area (km ²)	50% kernel area (km ²)
2015	15	24949	1047
2014	33	47886	1807
2013	36	35253	359
2012	38	49736	2236
2011	39	64807	4373
2010	31	43859	2914

Figure 6. Winter (December 1 - March 31) range use of Western Arctic Herd caribou. Light orange depicts the 95% kernel and dark orange the 50% kernel. Green hatched areas are Park units.

2014-2015

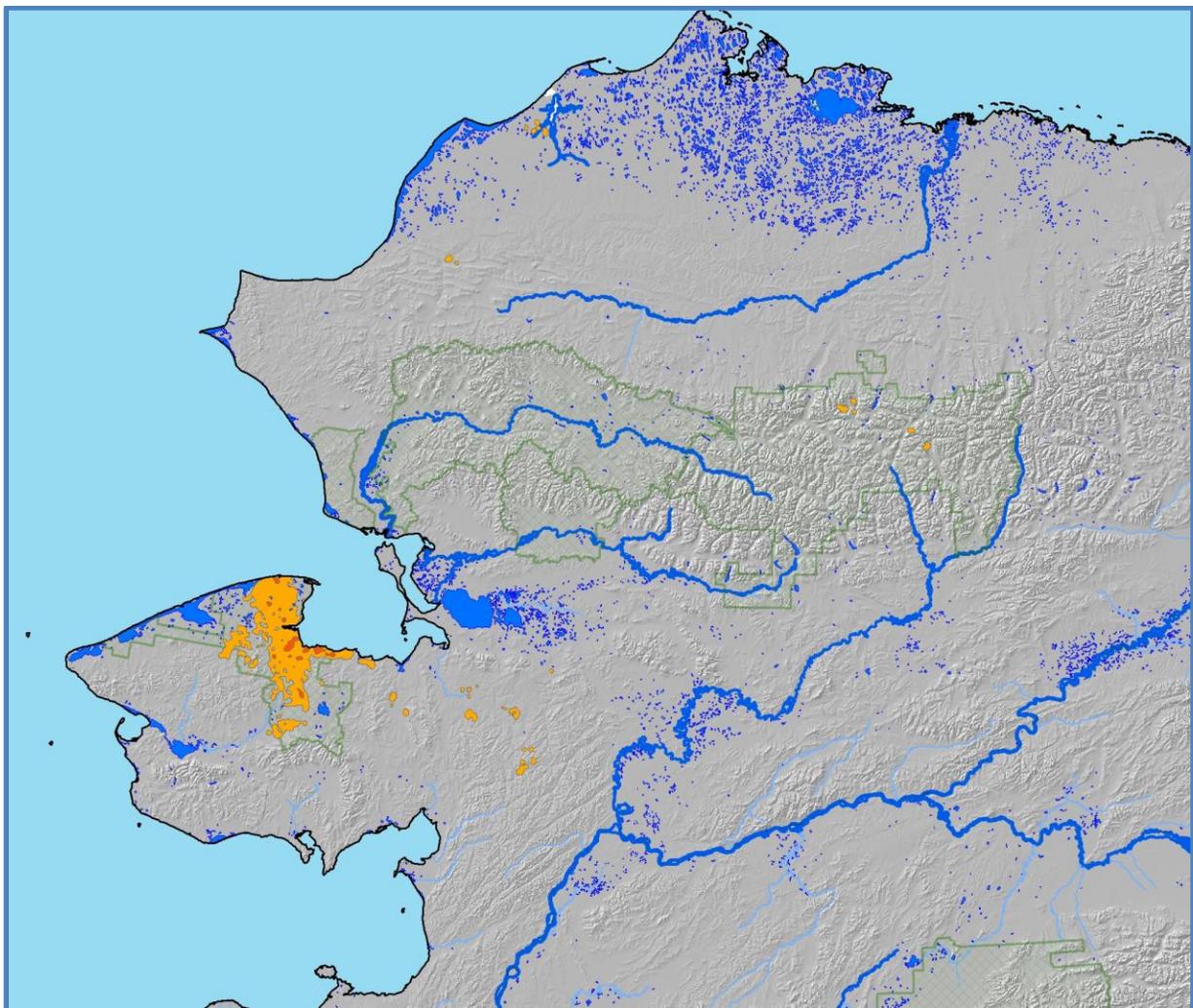
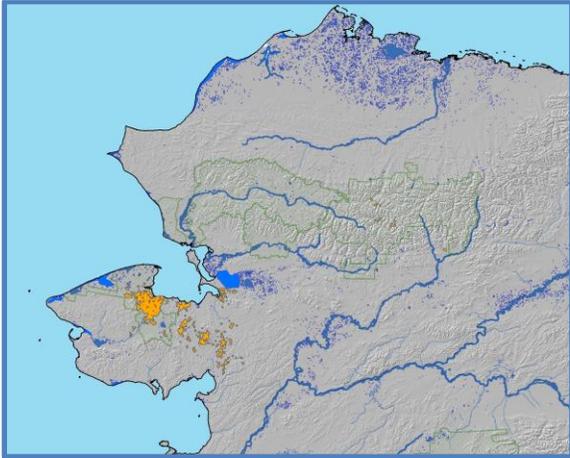
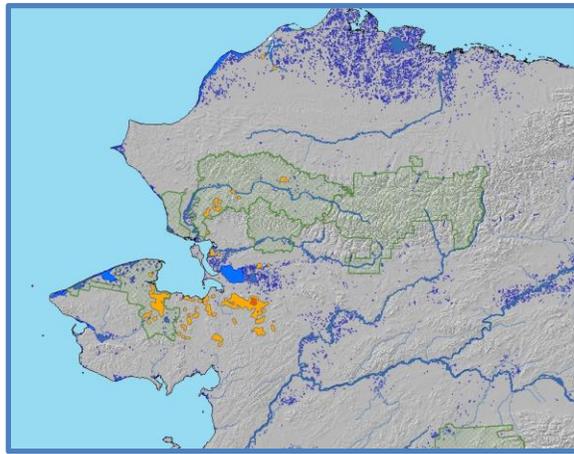


Figure 6. (continued)

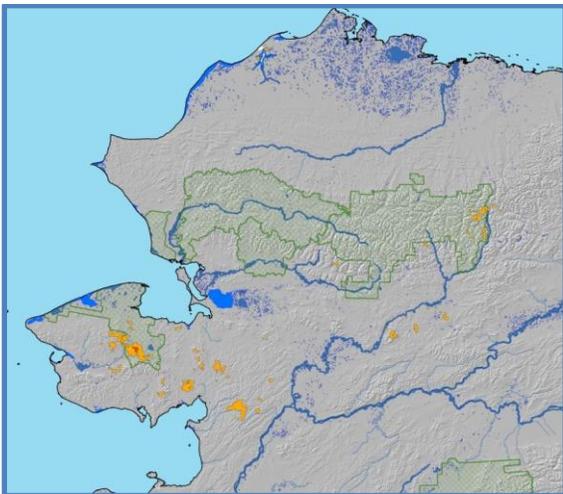
2013-2014



2012-2013



2011-2012



2010-2011

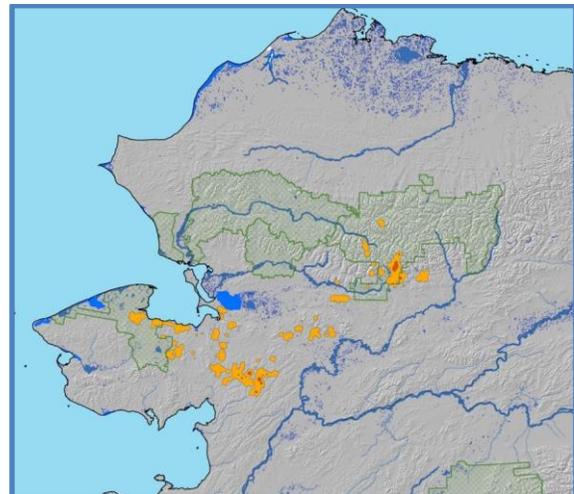


Table 6. Sample sizes and areas of Western Arctic Herd caribou winter range (December 1 – March 31) 95% and 50% kernels.

Year	Sample Size	95% kernel area (km²)	50% kernel area (km²)
2014-2015	24	5314	240
2013-2014	35	4338	105
2012-2013	30	5801	131
2011-2012	40	3933	86
2010-2011	27	9170	274
Year	Sample Size	95% kernel area (km ²)	50% kernel area (km ²)

Distribution and movements

Usage of the 5 ARCN Parks is detailed in Table 7. All 5 ARCN Park units were utilized during the study period. NOAT recorded the highest percentage of use in spring and summer but BELA had the highest in fall and winter. KOVA is the only ARCN Park unit that has not had collared caribou overwinter in it. More individual GPS-collared caribou entered BELA during the winter of 2014-2015 than any other winter; continuing a trend that started at the inception of the project (Table 7). Annual movement distances are summarized in Table 8. WAH caribou continued to exhibit some of the longest migrations of any terrestrial mammal. The mean distance traveled by all collared caribou this reporting year was the greatest since the start of this project surpassing the old record by nearly 100 km.

Table 7. Percent of Western Arctic Herd (WAH) collars that entered different Park units including Bering Land Bridge National Preserve (BELA), Cape Krusenstern National Monument (CAKR), Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (GAAR), Kobuk Valley National Park (KOVA), and Noatak National Preserve (NOAT). Fall is September, October, and November. Winter is December, January, February, and March. Spring is April and May. Summer is June, July and August.

Season	Sample Size	BELA	CAKR	GAAR	KOVA	NOAT
Fall 2010	29	3.6	0.0	51.7	62.1	89.7
Fall 2011	39	12.8	28.2	33.3	33.3	46.2
Fall 2012	38	26.3	7.9	10.5	36.8	84.2
Fall 2013	35	0.0	8.6	20.0	57.1	88.6
Fall 2014	32	81.3	9.4	25.0	43.8	71.9
Winter 2010-2011	28	7.1	0.0	32.1	0.0	0.0
Winter 2011-2012	31	16.1	0.0	35.5	0.0	0.0
Winter 2012-2013	36	30.6	8.3	0.0	0.0	11.1
Winter 2013-2014	35	60.0	0.0	8.6	0.0	0.0
Winter 2014-2015	31	77.4	0.0	6.5	0.0	0.0
Spring 2011	28	3.6	0.0	35.7	42.9	82.1
Spring 2012	29	17.2	0.0	27.6	31.0	48.3
Spring 2013	30	13.3	0.0	0.0	66.7	70.0
Spring 2014	35	45.7	0.0	8.6	14.3	88.6
Spring 2015	22	59.1	0.0	9.1	27.3	81.8
Summer 2010	30	0.0	0.0	90.0	10.0	100.0
Summer 2011	40	0.0	0.0	37.5	10.0	65.0
Summer 2012	39	2.6	0.0	59.0	20.5	92.3
Summer 2013	41	0.0	0.0	51.2	31.7	87.8
Summer 2014	34	0.0	0.0	58.8	0.0	91.4
Summer 2015	23	0.0	0.0	34.8	8.7	73.9

Table 8. Annual distance (September 1 – August 31) moved by GPS-collared Western Arctic Herd caribou cows.

Monitoring Year	Sample Size	Mean Distance (SD)	Maximum Distance
2009-2010	31	3254 (237) km	3724 km
2010-2011	39	3045 (323) km	3747 km
2011-2012	36	3085 (485) km	3758 km
2012-2013	34	3071 (304) km	3636 km
2013-2014	24	3392 (521) km	4404 km
2014-2015	15	3487 (330) km	4076 km
Total	179		

Migration Phenology

The results for when and how many GPS-collared caribou crossed the Noatak, Kobuk and Selawik Rivers on their annual ‘spring’ and ‘fall’ migrations are detailed in Table 9. The timing for collared caribou in the fall 2014 migration was the earliest we have documented thus far and, based on conversations with local rural residents, was similar to timing prior to the start of monitoring efforts. Variation in the date of crossing the Kobuk River during this monitoring period was the lowest ever reported. The date that the first collared caribou crossed the Kobuk River in 2014 (September 7) was the earliest since 2011 (date of first collar crossing: 2013 = September 24, 2012 = September 15; 2011 = August 30, and 2010 = August 28). The timing of the spring 2015 migration was earlier than every other year except 2014. Regardless of start date, the duration of spring migration is similar among years (9-15 days), unlike fall migration. The last 2 years (2015 and 2014) have had the longest spring migration duration (15 days).

Table 9. Timing and prevalence of river crossing events by Western Arctic Herd caribou. Reported results are average date (standard deviation in number of days); percentage of collared cows crossing; and sample size. A). Results for generally southward ‘fall’ migration. B). Results for generally northward ‘spring’ migration. Dates are for the first crossing if the individual re-crosses. ‘Spring migration’ is not limited to the months of April and May as some cows cross the Noatak in early June.

A. Fall

Year	Noatak River Crossing Date (SD); % Crossed; N	Kobuk River Crossing Date (SD); % Crossed; N	Selawik River Crossing Date (SD); % Crossed; N
2010	Sep 24 (16.4); 96.7%; 30	Oct 12 (17.6); 76.7%; 30	Oct 24 (11.7); 62.1%; 29
2011	Sep 27 (37.2); 74.4%; 39	Oct 13 (27.0); 71.8%; 39	Oct 19 (27.4); 61.5%; 39
2012	Oct 8 (20.8); 84.8%; 33	Oct 11 (17.7); 78.8%; 33	Oct 14 (18.1); 70.0%; 33
2013	Sep 26 (16.9); 100%*; 35	Oct 7 (17.4); 91.4%; 35	Oct 12 (16.4); 88.6%; 35
2014	Sep 12 (20.7); 90.6%; 32	Sep 30 (17.1); 90.6%; 32	Oct 6 (16.2); 90.6%; 32

* Two caribou (‘0937’ and ‘1110’) re-crossed the Noatak in the fall and overwintered north of the Brooks Range.

B. Spring

Year	Noatak River Crossing Date (SD); % Crossed; N	Kobuk River Crossing Date (SD); % Crossed; N	Selawik River Crossing Date (SD); % Crossed; N
2011	May 18 (11.8); 96.3%; 27	May 15 (5.8); 70.4%; 27	May 9 (5.8); 55.5%; 27
2012	June 7 (26.7); 74.4%; 43	May 29 (26.4); 69.7%; 43	May 26 (27.5); 69.7%; 43
2013	May 31 (6.2); 93.1%; 29	May 26 (8.1); 79.3%; 29	May 21 (10.2); 79.3%; 29
2014	May 8 (7.3); 91.2 %; 34	Apr 27 (4.1); 88.2%; 34	Apr 23 (3.6); 88.2%; 34
2015	May 18 (6.5); 85.0%; 20	May 9 (6.3); 85.7%; 21	May 3 (4.6); 82.6%; 22

Migration Routes

A histogram (Figure 7) of where caribou crossed the Noatak River provides a visual depiction of the geographic spread of the fall migration. The 2014 migration was tightly focused geographically to the east. The 3 caribou that crossed the lower section of the river did so in November and none crossed the lower half of the Noatak River between late August and the end of October.

Figure 7. Distribution of caribou crossing the Noatak River during fall. This histogram depicts where collared female caribou crossed the Noatak River, generally from north to south, on their fall migration. Relative percentages (top number) and absolute number (middle number) of caribou are provided. The river is divided into seven (lowest number) color-coded segments which are displayed in the background. The middle five segments are 100 river kilometers long, while the westernmost segment (red) is 200 km (before extending into the Chukchi Sea) and the easternmost (yellow) runs as far east as WAH caribou are known to migrate.

2014

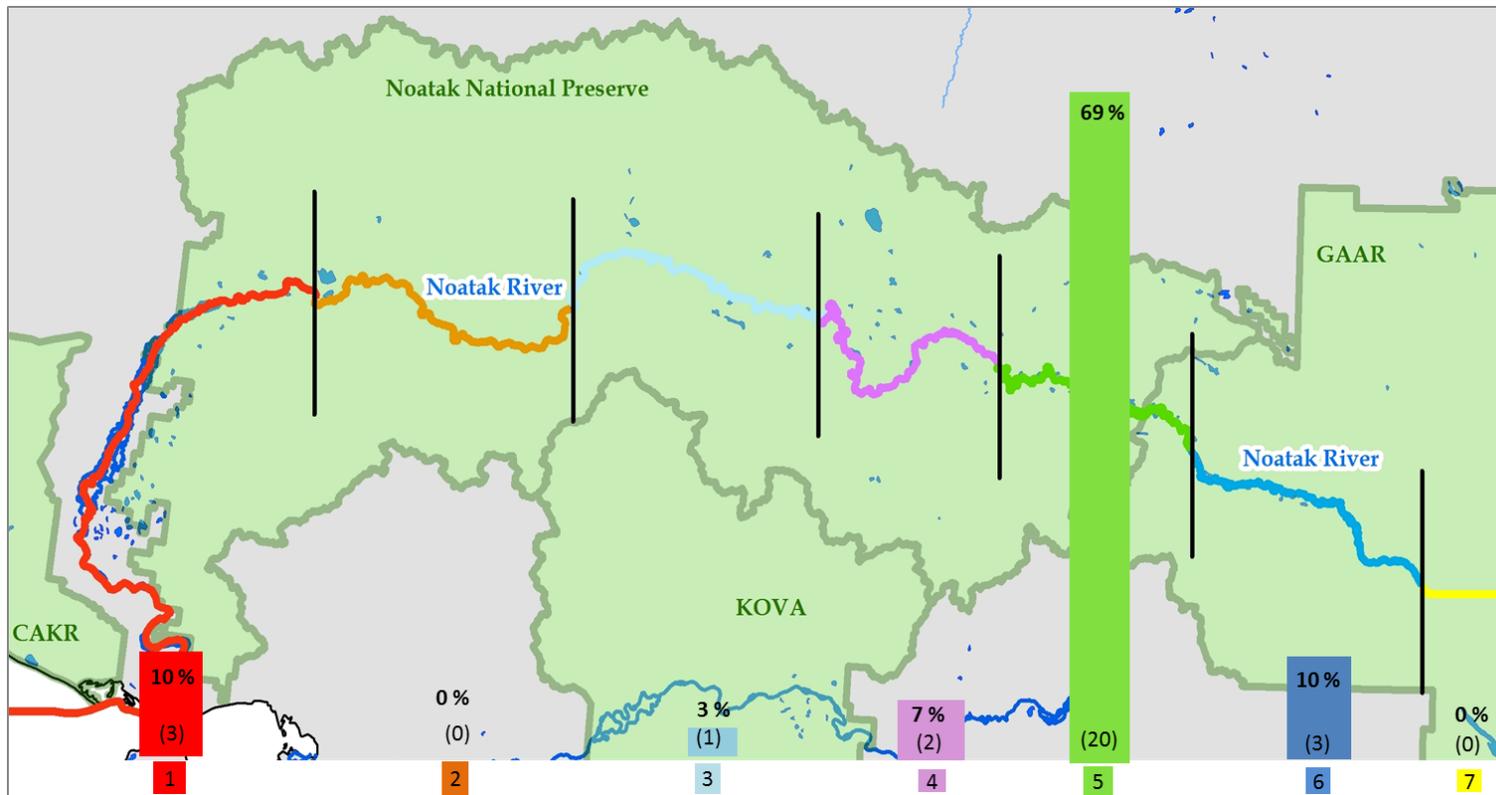
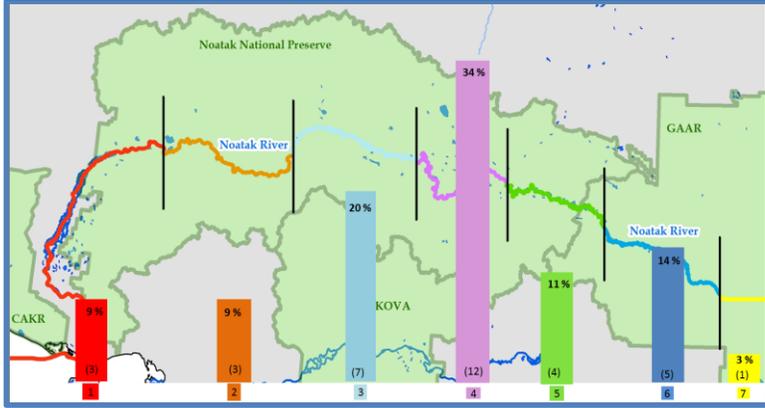
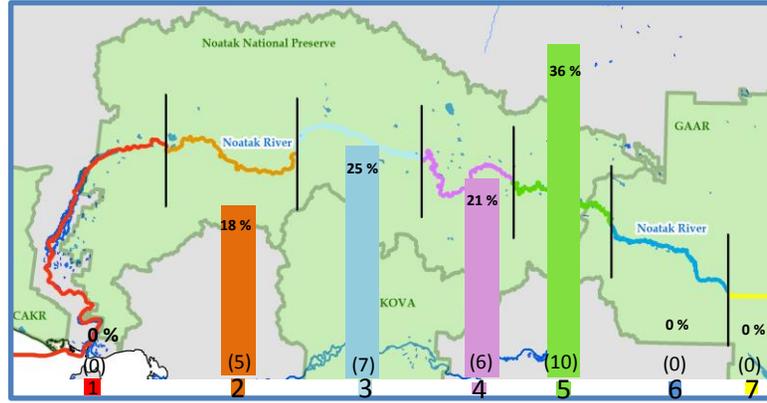


Figure 7 (Continued). Distribution of caribou crossing the Noatak River during fall.

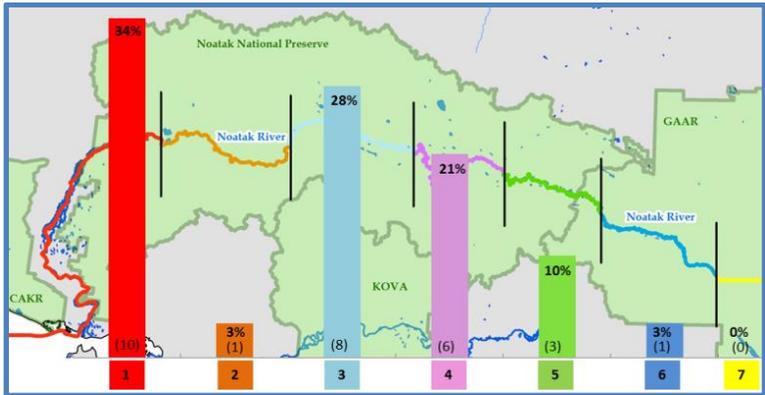
2013



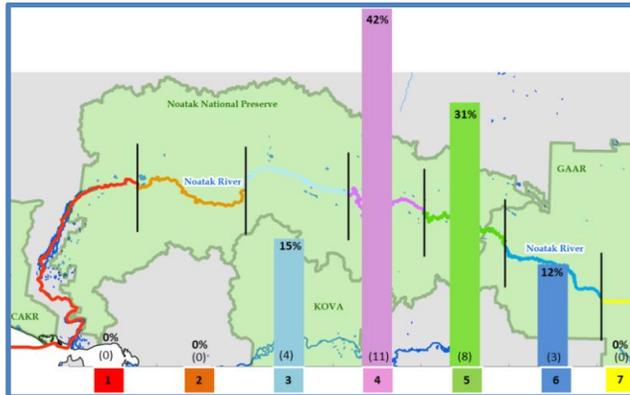
2012



2011



2010



The timing and minimum distance GPS-collared caribou were to the villages of Noatak, Shungnak and Selawik as well as Onion Portage on their annual ‘spring’ and ‘fall’ migrations are detailed in Table 10. Onion Portage, which has been used as a Kobuk River crossing by caribou for more than 10,000 years, is utilized both during the fall and spring migrations (Anderson 1968). The fall 2014 migration took caribou close to Onion Portage; similar to every other year except 2011. It was also the earliest date recorded by our monitoring efforts that caribou came close to Onion Portage. The spring 2015 migration, similar to 2014 and 2013, took caribou closer to Selawik rather than more easterly locations and was early relative to past years with the exception of 2014.

Table 10. Minimum distance and date that collared Western Arctic Herd caribou passed the northwest Arctic villages of Noatak, Shungnak, and Selawik, and the historical caribou river crossing location of Onion Portage, KOVA. Reported results are average distance in kilometers (standard deviation); average date (standard deviation); and sample size. A). Results for generally southward, fall (September, October, November) migration. B) Results for generally northward, spring (April and May) migration.

A) Fall

Year	Noatak	Shungnak	Selawik	Onion Portage
	Distance (SD); Date (SD); n	Distance (SD); Date (SD); n	Distance (SD); Date (SD); n	Distance (SD); Date (SD); n
2010	176.8 (54.2); Oct 7 (17.6); 29	36.6 (37.3); Oct 8 (15.5); 29	86.1 (53.1); Oct 20 (12.7); 29	32.6 (32.7); Oct 3 (14.6); 29
2011	123.8 (83.6); Sep 30 (28.1); 39	140.0 (106.5); Oct 19 (27.1); 39	118.4 (117.7); Oct 12 (29.4); 39	122.8 (96.9); Oct 14 (27.0); 39
2012	155.0 (61.1); Oct 22 (31.7); 34	78.1 (87.1); Oct 16 (19.9); 34	81.6 (49.9); Oct 24 (20.0); 34	58.5 (71.6); Oct 13 (19.8); 34
2013	146.8 (69.7); Oct 14 (25.9); 35	83.8 (53.2); Oct 11 (19.1); 35	63.9 (59.3); Oct 15 (17.1); 35	60.4 (52.4); Oct 9 (20.0); 35
2014	171.0 (78.6); Oct 20 (25.4); 32	64.2 (79.1); Oct 5 (23.8); 32	90.4 (90.3); Oct 7 (17.9); 32	54.9 (80.2); Sep 28 (22.5); 32

B) Spring

Year	Noatak	Shungnak	Selawik	Onion Portage
	Distance (SD); Date (SD); n			
2011	202.3 (40.7); May 20 (9.8); 27	74.5 (46.7); May 9 (12.0); 27	110.3 (97.4); May 12 (7.78); 27	64.8 (60.3); May 15 (8.2); 27
2012	178.2 (97.2); May 26 (7.7); 29	142.1 (69.4); May 22 (10.3); 29	117.0 (116.7); May 22 (9.8); 29	117.0 (72.5); May 23 (10.3); 29
2013	138.5 (52.4); May 23 (14.1); 30	123.9 (57.5); May 18 (17.2); 30	58.3 (68.9); May 11 (20.0); 30	79.4 (57.0); May 19 (17.5); 30
2014	117.1 (81.1); May 5 (8.5); 35	143.1 (28.7); Apr 27 (7.8); 35	53.2 (85.5); Apr 26 (8.3); 35	102.6 (45.9); Apr 29 (7.4); 35
2015	131.2 (62.4); May 9 (14.1); 24	151.7 (66.1); May 4 (13.6); 24	61.6 (101.5); May 2 (12.7); 24	111.4 (73.5); May 6 (14.0); 24

Western Arctic Herd Working Group

Several NPS employees, including ARCN's Caribou Vital Sign Monitoring Lead, attended and presented information at the December 2014 meeting. The Caribou Vital Sign lead acted as the NPS representative on the Technical Committee and contributed to the 'Caribou Trails' newsletters. NPS, through GAAR and Western Arctic Parklands, contributed financially to support the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group and the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Technical meeting.

New Products Completed Prior to the End of Reporting Period

Information on the WAH was disseminated in number of mediums in 2014/2015 (see below). Most of the following products can be found on ARCN's Caribou Vital Sign webpage, which is located at <http://science.nature.nps.gov/im/units/arcn/index.cfm?rq=12&vsid=19>, under the "Documents" tab.

Technical Reports

Joly, K. 2014. Caribou vital sign annual report for the Arctic Network Inventory and Monitoring Program: September 2013-August 2014. Natural Resource Data Series NPS/ARCN/NRDS—2014/729. National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado. 26 pp.

Scientific Journal Articles

Joly, K., S. K. Wasser, and R. Booth. 2015. Non-invasive assessment of the interrelationships of diet, pregnancy rate, group composition, and physiological and nutritional stress of barren-ground caribou in late winter. PLoS One 10 (6): e0127586. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0127586.

Macander, M. J., C. S. Swingley, **K. Joly**, and M. Reynolds. 2015. Landsat-based snow persistence map for northwest Alaska. Remote Sensing of Environment 163: 23-31.

Wilson, R. R., D. D. Gustine, and **K. Joly**. 2014. Evaluating potential effects of an industrial road on winter habitat of caribou in north-central Alaska. Arctic 67: 472-482.

Outreach

Provided caribou information to GeoFest and Envirothon educational programs as well as multiple media outlets.

Discussion

This report is the 6th installation of the Annual Report in the Natural Resources Data Series of ARCN's Caribou Vital Sign monitoring program, covering September 2014 until the end of August 2015. GPS collars were deployed in the Western Arctic Herd for the first time during 2009. An additional 5 GPS collars were deployed during this reporting period. Almost 250,000 relocations have been collected during the first 6 years of vital sign monitoring. Although inference is poor due to small sample sizes, the high first-year mortality rates of adult females (21 % in the first 6 monitoring years) may be reflective of the downward trend of the herd (Dau 2013) and, thus, will require larger collar deployments in the future to keep the sample size of GPS-collared caribou around 40 animals. Range use by GPS-collared cows during 2014-2015 was similar to range use by the herd for the past several years. The size of the annual range has been declining each monitoring year and coincides with a period of decline in the number of caribou in the herd. BELA was again a core wintering area for the herd during this reporting period and use of this area continued to grow as it has done during each year of monitoring thus far. WAH caribou used NOAT more consistently, over the year, than other park units. WAH caribou continue to display some of the longest annual migrations of any terrestrial mammal in the world (see Fancy et al. 1989). The average annual movement recorded during this reporting period (3487 km) was longer than in any other monitoring year. Diet and hormone analyses were completed and published in a separate journal article. Consistent with other reports, importance of lichens to the diet of WAH caribou during late winter was documented. It will be a number of years before trends in migration phenology and herd distribution can be quantitatively evaluated. A large number of products and presentations have been developed in conjunction with monitoring this Vital Sign; many of which are available on-line at <http://science.nature.nps.gov/im/units/arcn/index.cfm?rq=12&vsid=19>, under the 'Documents' tab.

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NPS NPS 953/130676, November 2015

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