

Bills seeks earlier caribou season

From Our Juneau Bureau

JUNEAU — House Resolution 23 by Leo Schaeffer (D-Kotzebue) has been introduced in the State House requesting an earlier opening of the caribou season in the Arctic game management units. Under the bill, hunters could begin on September 1 rather than October 1.

Citing the recent serious depletion of the Western Arctic Caribou herd and the fact that bulls have already begun to rut on October 1, making them unfit for human consumption; Schaeffer says with so few caribou available, "wastage of this nature is intolerable."

Bob Hinman, Director of Game for the Department of Fish and Game says the October 1 opening date was the result of "the time crunch involved in the

regular board meeting last fall—it was our intention and the board's that the opening date would be modified in subsequent years." He says the staff has no opposition to changing the date to September 1, saying it would be more acceptable than October 1 and that it will come before the Board of Game meeting on March 29. Hinman said, "We already have numerous proposals on what we should do with the management of the herd, from 'soup to nuts.'"

According to Department of Fish and Game, statistics the Western Arctic herd has declined from 242,000 to 60,000 in 1976. Since then the taking of caribou in game management units 23, 24, 26A and 26B has been reduced from fifteen per year to one bull by permit only.