

# Emergency closure announced

By MARY DOWNES

An emergency closure order on caribou hunting in the western arctic was announced last week by the Dept. of Fish and Game. According to Robert Rausch, Game Division director, the closure will be effective Aug. 14 and will expire Oct. 1, or when superseded by emergency regulations promulgated by the Board of Game.

Involved in the closure are: units 26(A) and 26(B), by the western and central portions of the North Slope; units 23

and 24, the Kobuk and Noatak River drainages; and the upper Koyukuk River drainage, south of the Brooks Range.

Rausch said the closure was only a temporary measure designed to prevent any over-harvest of the western arctic caribou herd until the Board of Game can consider and adopt amended regulations in a meeting next month.

The emergency order stated that "it is obvious that continued use of this resource

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at the present rate will result in further decline and possible extirpation of the herd, which is of paramount importance to rural residents of northwestern Alaska as a major food source."

"We realize that this action will present a real hardship on arctic residents," Rausch said, "but the long-range importance of this herd as a food source to these people makes it necessary that we take all possible action to protect the resource."

The Dept. of Fish and Game does not know all the factors leading to the decline of the caribou herd, Rausch said. The closure and proposed new regulations are designed to permit the herd to regain its former status by reducing the mortality rate. The purpose of increasing the herd is to allow it to become once again a significant factor in the sustenance of northwest

Alaskans.

The Board of Game, in a meeting last April, passed regulations that restricted the hunting of the herd to a minor degree, based on 1975 estimates which showed the herd to number about 100,000 animals. Biologists, in an extensive study this past spring and summer, have estimated the 1976 population of the herd to number about 50,000, including calves. The report by the biologists states over 40,000 caribou may have been killed in a combined take by humans and wolves in the 1975-76 season.

A series of regulation proposals, the result of public hearings in Barrow, Kotzebue and Fairbanks, will be presented for public comment at a Board of Game meeting scheduled for Sept. 20-21 in Fairbanks. The purpose of the meeting is to consider proposed changes in the

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affected hunting regulations. stated that the regulations, if adopted, "will greatly curtail hunter harvest in these units."

The new proposed regulations include a bag limit of one bull, the banning of the barter of caribou and their use as dog food, restricting the area open to hunting and season restrictions. In addition to the western arctic caribou herd regulations, proposals for regulating the eastern arctic Porcupine caribou herd will be discussed.

The board is inviting public comment on the proposed changes in the hunting regulations. The hearing, slated to begin at 9 a.m., Sept. 20, at Alaskaland's Civic Center, is open to both oral and written comments from the public. The board requests that written comments be submitted to them on or before Sept. 14 to assure board members of sufficient time for the study of comments

so more consideration of them may be given.

Copies of the proposed regulations may be requested from the Board of Game, Support

Bldg., Attn: Game Division, Juneau, Alaska 99801. Written comments concerning them may be submitted at the above address.

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