

Hunting prohibited from Western Arctic

JUNEAU—Hunting caribou from the Western Arctic caribou herd is prohibited for at least a year, following action by the state Board of Game in Juneau early this month. Commissioner James W. Brooks of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game says that although the herd was once a major source of food for residents of the Western Arctic area, recent massive reductions in the herd size have forced significant changes.

The board originally planned to follow an approach similar to last year's, allowing a certain number of animals to be taken. However, a recent court decision

declared that the state's method of granting permits on the basis of need was illegal. Another court action led to a delay in the state's planned wolf reduction program in the area. Brooks says that difficulties in management that resulted from the decisions forced the board to close the area to all caribou hunting.

The Board of Game also considered five proposals to establish new subsistence hunting areas, to allow more game for local residents. Three of the proposals were rejected, but the board agreed in principle to two, Kalskag and Paradise, in Game Management Units 18 and 21. A board spokesman said that since the main problem was considered to be competition from the use of aircraft in hunting moose, the board felt that the most appropriate action would be the establishment of "controlled use areas". As a result, new proposals will be published for adoption later this spring.

The board further restricted antlerless moose hunting, partly

because fewer hunts were proposed, and partly because a law passed in 1975 mandates approval of the hunts by a majority of the citizen advisory committees in the areas affected. In at least one case, a unit served by only two committees could not be opened to antlerless hunting after a tie vote. As a result, antlerless moose hunting will be permitted in only five of the state's 26 Game Management Units during the 1977-78 season. The five are units: 6, 16, 22, 23, and a part of unit 19.

The board also took up the subject of creating a standard

closure of big game hunting in all areas less than one-fourth of a mile from a state highway, but dropped the concept after members of the public voiced strong opposition. Reasons for the objections included a fear of further restrictions in land available for hunting, the difficulty of enforcement, the closure of private lands that would result, and the potential for unintentional violations.

In other action the board extended a prohibition against hunting the same day airborne by restricting hunting to at least three hours after the midnight following the flight. The action

was in response to reports of hunters taking advantage of the long hours of daylight in the northern part of the state by landing shortly before midnight and hunting shortly after. In related action the board eliminated the one exception to the law which has allowed same day caribou hunting in units 9 and 17, thus making the prohibition statewide.

Finally in major action the board established new sub-unit boundaries in several Game Management Units to aid management and to reflect differing use patterns within the units.