

Grazing

Background

The raising and herding of domesticated reindeer within the Seward Peninsula has occurred since their introduction in 1892. Historically, the area used for grazing has encompassed nearly the entirety of the Peninsula, an area of about 15 million acres. Currently, most reindeer herders practice an extensive management style of herding. Animals either move about on their own accord or are herded between winter and summer calving sites, but always within a given area of the Seward Peninsula. The raising and herding of these reindeer has been a significant component of the local economy, providing, through either the sale of velvet antlers or harvested meat, significant employment and revenue generation. While the importance of the reindeer herds remains significant, there has been a marked decrease in their number and, therefore, in associated employment and revenues. This decline is related to the increase of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) and its southern and westward expansion into the range hitherto used for reindeer herding in the Seward Peninsula. All but the far western extent of the Seward Peninsula is now occupied by the caribou of the WACH.

As a result of the competition for forage and the commingling and loss of reindeer to the WACH, most reindeer herders have lost 75-100 percent of their herd. This loss, amounting to over 17,000 reindeer, represents a significant revenue loss. Some of the herders have developed adaptive strategies but it remains to be seen if these techniques will be effective in stemming additional reindeer losses to the WACH. The following management guidelines are provided on the basis that reindeer herding will remain an important component of the rural, Native way of life and an important segment of the local economy.

Because of the expansive range needed for reindeer herding, grazing occurs throughout the Peninsula on private, state, and federal land. The State and federal governments manage reindeer herding comprehensively, with the majority landowner being given the authority to authorize herding activities on both state and federal land.

While reindeer herding is the dominant, and at the present time only form of grazing that occurs on state land, other forms of grazing may occur in the future within the planning area, and the following standards will apply to these as well.

Goals

Grazing Opportunities. Continue to provide opportunities for grazing on state lands in the Seward Peninsula.

Availability of State Land. Make units with existing forage and rangeland resources available for short-term and long-term grazing.

Contribute to Local Economy. Provide state land for the continuation of reindeer herding on the Seward Peninsula and thereby support local employment and a more diversified local economy.

Management Guidelines

A. Use of State Land for Grazing. Grazing on state land is appropriate for the duration of the area plan. This activity occurs within the Northwest Seward Peninsula, Southwest Seward Peninsula, and Norton Sound regions.

B. Multiple Use. All land use designations and classifications are multiple use. Lands used for grazing will be managed as multiple use lands to support a variety of public benefits, including fish and wildlife habitat and harvest, water quality maintenance, public recreation, and public access.

C. Access and Use. Public access across and public use of grazing lands may not be limited by persons holding grazing leases or permits unless approved as part of a grazing operations plan. (11 AAC 60.130)

D. Authorizations. Authorizations are to be issued consistent with the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the National Park Service, State of Alaska, and the Bureau of Land Management. Authorizations, under the MOU, can be issued to a single permittee by the majority land owner where there is split state and federal ownership.

E. Grazing Operations Plans. If grazing operation plans are required, they should be developed in cooperation with ADF&G and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. When permits are reissued to a permittee, the effects of past reindeer herding operations are to be taken into consideration. Within the planning area, the minimum requirements of these plans are:

1. A physical resource map showing: location, acreage, and configuration of the authorized area and proposed range improvements including corrals, feedlots, watering sites, fences, improved pasture, line shacks, or similar facilities.
2. A plan of operations that includes the physical resource map and associated information, herd characteristics (size, state of health, and use areas), and proposed practices to meet the standards and procedures of applicable NRCS standards. If warranted, operation plans can designate temporary sites outside of national parks as 'safe areas' and/or can provide management techniques (corralling, supplemental feeding, or other means) to reduce the commingling and outmigration of reindeer. It is recognized that the designation of safe areas will be dependent on the specific location, potential wildlife conflicts, forage zones, and topography of an area.

3. An assessment of the effects of prior grazing operations on fish and wildlife populations. This requirement only applies if the commingling and outmigration of reindeer to the WACH has not occurred.

F. Permit Utilization. State land affected by a grazing permit is only to be used for the purposes stated in the permit, and in accordance with the land classification.
(11 AAC 60.060)

G. Lands Designated Settlement. To minimize conflicts between grazing and settlement, new grazing authorizations shall not be issued on state lands designated Settlement. Reindeer herding may continue on areas designated Settlement under existing grazing authorizations and they can continue to do so as long as they are a preexisting, valid right.

H. Grazing On Important Habitat Lands. Grazing may be prohibited in certain habitats if DNR determines, in consultation with Alaska Department of Fish and Game, that impacts can not be mitigated through specific management guidelines. Examples of areas that may require consideration are areas of winter moose concentration, waterfowl nesting areas, endangered species habitat, important caribou habitats, Dall sheep habitat, and areas of brown bear concentration.

I. Other Guidelines Affecting Grazing. Other guidelines may affect grazing; see particularly the sections on Settlement and Fish and Wildlife in this Chapter.