

# Agency will hunt invasive caribou on remote Alaska island

April 21 2015, by Dan Joling

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Hunters from a federal agency will travel to a remote island in the Aleutians to kill caribou, an invasive species that threatens wilderness vegetation.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is moving forward with plans to protect Kagalaska Island, part of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge.

Caribou swim to the wilderness island of Kagalaska from Adak, where they were introduced 57 years ago to provide sport hunting opportunities for military personnel.

There might be only a handful of caribou on Kagalaska or none at all, refuge manager Steve Delehanty said. But the Fish and Wildlife Service doesn't want a new, unchecked herd that could spread to other [islands](#).

"If we didn't do anything, after a few years, it wouldn't be two or four or six anymore," Delehanty said. "There would be 60 or 600, and that's what we're trying to avoid."

U.S. Department of Agriculture personnel from an animal control unit will do the shooting. They will be on the island for two days in late May.

"It's basically long hikes around the island in an organized, logical fashion," Delehanty said.

At the urging of the state, the Fish and Wildlife Service will send four extra people on the trip to salvage meat from any caribou killed and take it to Adak, where it will be used as food for people who need it.

If it's a rare day with clear skies, the big game animals should be easier to spot on the uninhabited, treeless island. If it's two days of fog, caribou might go undetected, Delehanty said.

Adak is a 283-square-mile island 1,300 miles southwest of Anchorage. The military built an airfield on the island during World War II. It was used as a Naval Air Station until 1997.

The nearest native caribou are 500 miles away. Military officials requested that [caribou](#) be planted on Adak in 1958 to give Navy personnel opportunities for recreational hunting.

Caribou need only swim a few hundred yards to cross the channel between Adak and 46-square-mile Kagalaska.

When Adak held 1,000 to 6,000 people, sport hunting kept the herd to 200 to 400 animals. After the base closed, the herd by 2012 had grown to an estimated 2,700 animals. Their only predators are people, and they feed on lichen beds and other vegetation.

Kagalaska has an inactive volcano but no trees. Vegetation is mostly tundra and lichens with mosses and alpine plants on uplands and mountain slopes.

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