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How Will Alaska Caribou Respond to Changing Climate?

International research suggests caribou herds may struggle in coming decades



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Study Says Caribou Could Struggle with Changing Climate

ANCHORAGE - Caribou may have a grim future in Alaska if findings of a new report are correct.

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Research headed by Laval University in Quebec suggests Arctic caribou herds will not fare well in the changing Arctic climate.

Scientists took genetic samples from herds in Alaska, Canada, Russia and Scandinavia with the goal of learning how changing habitat affects genetic diversity.

The report published Sunday in the [Journal Nature Climate Change](#) relied on information provided by the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

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The study used climate reconstructions stretching back 21,000 years to predict where caribou habitat likely existed over time.

By looking at caribou DNA, the scientists discovered that shifting habitats reduce a herd's ability to adapt to change.

UAF wildlife ecology professor Kris Hundertmark said Alaska caribou are mostly doing well now, but in the coming decades will see reduced habitat.

Over the next 60 years, that could have consequences for subsistence hunting, Hundertmark said.

"The people that rely on caribou passing by their village to say be able to harvest those caribou may actually see dramatic declines," he said.

In a state where many people rely on the large animals for food, the "dramatic decline" would affect people all over Alaska, particularly in the Southwest region.

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