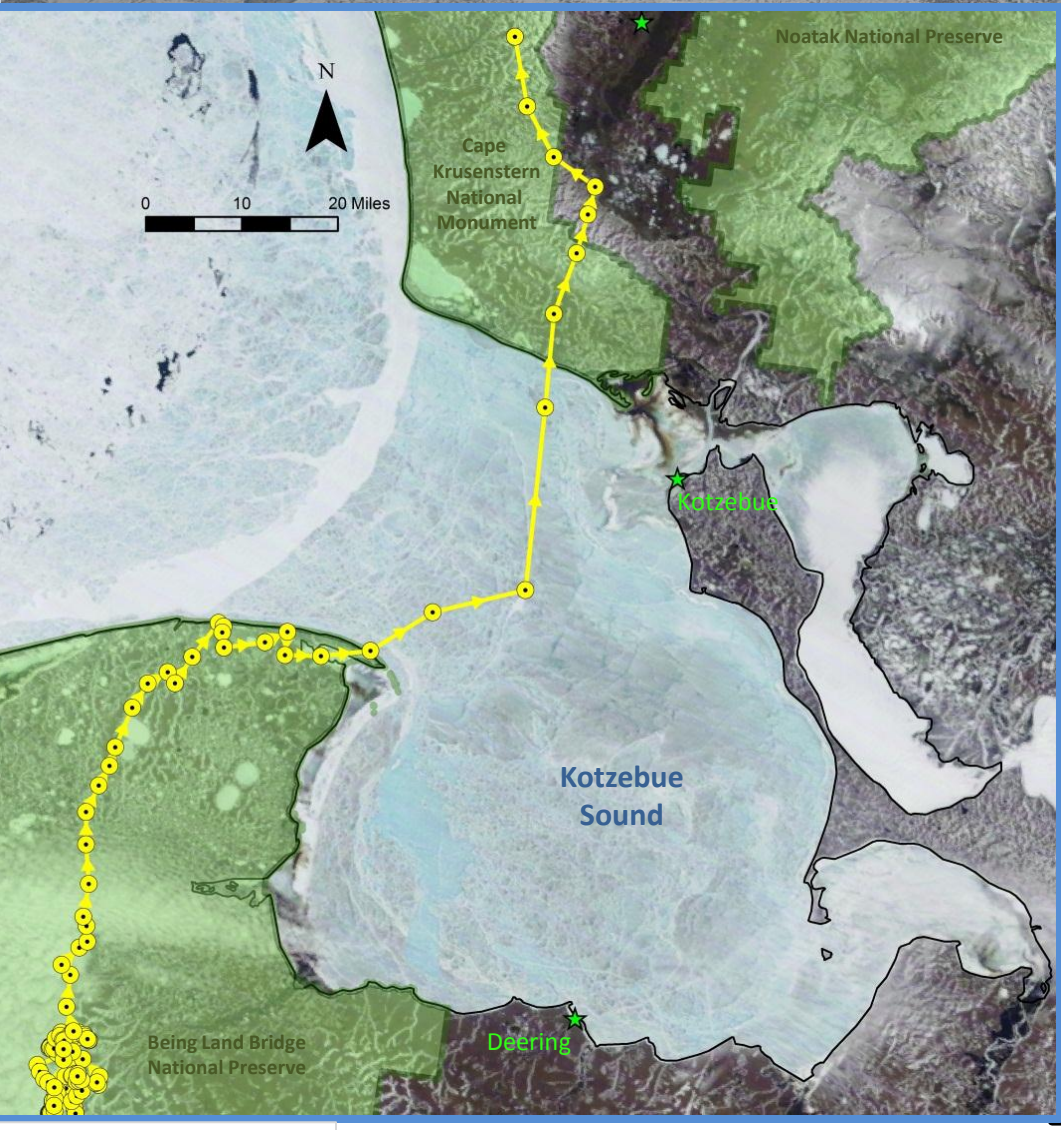
Daring *Dash* Across Sea Ice



Above: Movements (yellow line) and locations (yellow circles with black dots) of a Western Arctic Herd caribou cow crossing the frozen water of Kotzebue Sound. The background is a MODIS satellite image from the actual day (May 26, 2012) the caribou crossed the sea ice. This movement would not have been possible in 2011, as much of the Sound was ice-free in late May.

Below: A caribou cow (uncollared) and calf, June 4.
Photo: M. Johnson, NPS

Below: Sea ice conditions of crossing on June 6, 2012.
Photo: M. Johnson, NPS

Caribou cow risks crossing 40 miles of frozen ocean on its spring migration to reach the calving grounds

This caribou wintered within Bering Land Bridge NP, near Serpentine Hotsprings, and began her northern spring migration rather late - on May 15th, 2012. A week later, on May 22nd, she reached the Chukchi Sea coast to see a vast expanse of ice between her and the calving grounds. She paused a day then worked her way east to Cape Espenberg. Rather than working her way south to the village of Deering and around Kotzebue Sound, she chanced crossing the frozen sea on May 25th. Possibly sensing the large risk she was taking, she dramatically sped up and crossed 40 miles of pack ice in just over a day, reaching Cape Krusenstern on May 26th. Without much hesitation, she continued her march to the calving grounds.

For more information, contact: Kyle Joly, Wildlife Biologist, NPS, Fairbanks,, 907-455-0626, Kyle_Joly@nps.gov