



WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE WILDLIFE REPORT UPDATE

Fall 2026

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Mentasta Caribou Herd Monitoring

- An estimated 280 adult caribou (90% CI: 229-380) were observed during the population survey conducted on June 24, 2026 (Table 1).
- A composition survey is scheduled for late September 2026 to assess calf-bull-cow ratios.
- Thirty-seven GPS collars are currently deployed on Mentasta caribou.
- During 2026 and 2027, a project is underway to analyze data on changing herd overlap among the Mentasta, Nelchina, and Chisana caribou herds within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park.

Table 1. Population parameters for the Mentasta caribou herd.

Year	Estimated Adults (90% CI)	Calf:Cow Ratio	Bull:Cow Ratio
2017	285 (237-385)	20	87
2018	349 (289-475)	22	92
2019	335 (277-459)	28	95
2020	642 (545-833)	-	-
2021	470 (388-629)	12	20
2023	258 (203-374)	-	-
2024	189 (148-278)	26	33
2025	162 (137-227)	40	132
2026	280 (229-380)	-	-

Chisana Caribou Herd Monitoring

- A coordinated population survey of the Chisana caribou herd will be conducted in mid-October 2026 with ADF&G and Environment Canada.
- The fall 2025 composition survey showed above-average calf-to-cow (3-year avg = 25) and bull-to-cow (3-year avg = 37) ratios, supporting a limited bulls-only subsistence hunt.
- Thirty-five GPS collars and twelve VHF collars are currently deployed on Chisana caribou.

Moose Monitoring

- An analysis and article are nearing completion that assess how extreme snow events influence the spatial and temporal patterns of moose distribution within parts of Wrangell-St. Elias.
- A moose population survey is planned for November 2026, with results expected in spring 2026.

Dall's Sheep

- Sheep surveys were completed across a five-million-acre area in the southern Wrangell, University, St. Elias, and Chugach ranges in July 2026 (Figure 1).
- A total of 143 ten-mile transects were flown by three aircraft over nine days, totaling 81 survey hours, and roughly 1,250 individual sheep were classified by sex and age.
- Results will be available in spring 2027.
- These Park-wide sheep surveys will inform whether an observed snow-gradient is influencing changes in sheep populations relative to the 2010-2011 baseline period.

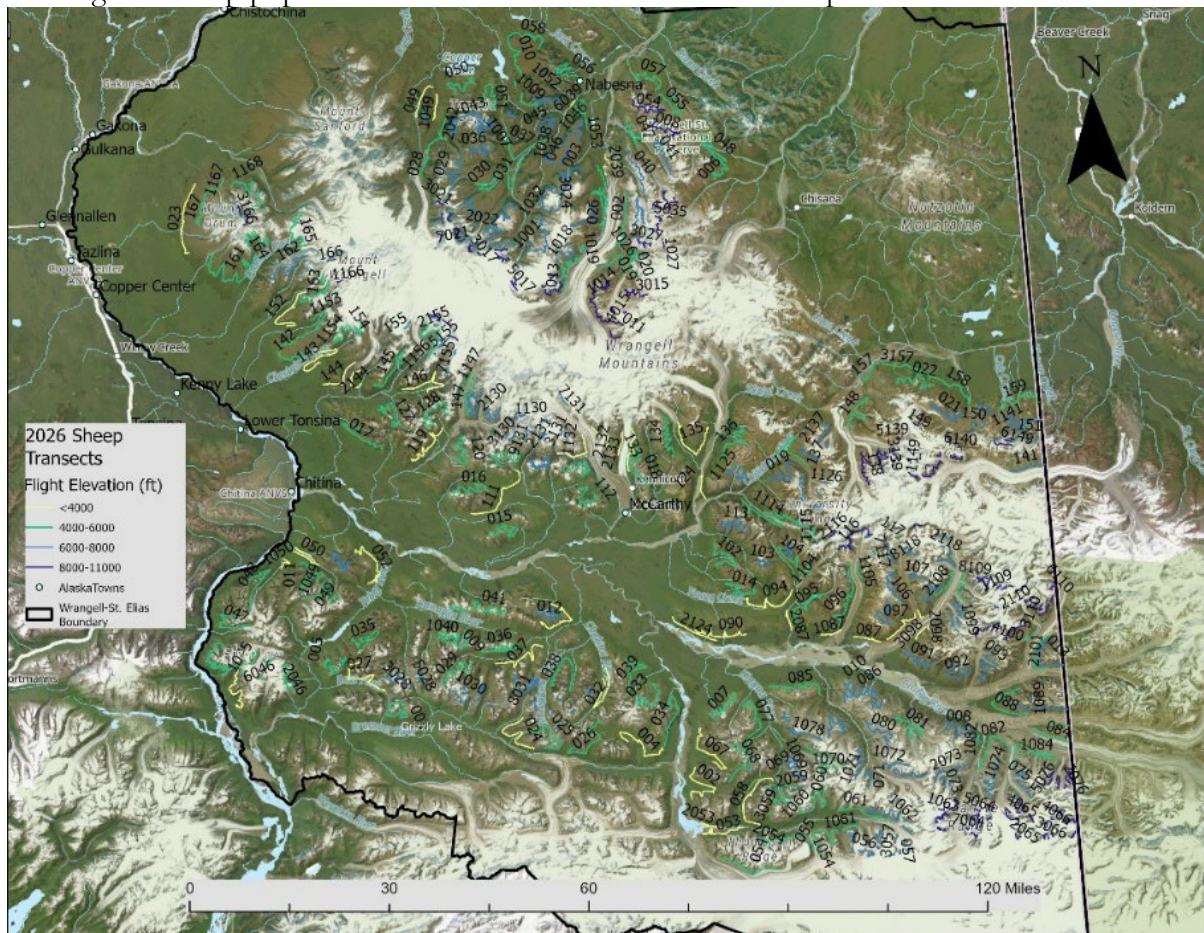


Figure 1. Wrangell-St. Elias Dall's Sheep Survey Area, 2026.

Microplastic on the Malaspina and Yakutat Forelands

- Shorebirds are being used as early-warning indicators of coastal ecosystem health.
- In May 2026, work continued to assess plastic pollution levels and potential impacts on coastal areas of the Park.
- From May 9-18, 2026, shorebirds were captured and their tissues (feces, blood) collected to evaluate possible plastic contamination.
- A total of 11 shorebirds across three species were captured, and 196 fecal samples from six species were collected by observing discrete flocks of migrating birds.
- Samples are currently being processed by a collaborator at Auburn University to determine the presence, concentration, type, and size of plastics in the collected tissues.



Figure 2. A captured Dunlin (left), mist-netting shorebirds at night (middle), and collection of shorebird fecal samples for microplastic testing on the Yakutat and Malaspina Forelands, Wrangell-St. Elias.

Foraging Dynamics of Apex Predators on Subsistence Resources - Interior Copper and Chitina Rivers, and Coastal Malaspina Forelands

- In 2026, efforts began to examine bald eagle and bear foraging patterns along the Copper and Chitina Rivers and the coastal Malaspina Forelands.
- Over 400 river miles were rafted and 25 miles hiked to collect eagle and bear scat and hair samples for diet analysis.
- This monitoring aims to quantify the diets of the region's two primary apex predators and understand how they use shifting resources across seasons to inform management decisions.
- During summer 2026, we deployed small (1x1m²) tarps near 17 occupied eagle nests and set 24 bear hair sampler along the Copper and Chitina Rivers and the Malaspina Forelands (Figure 3). A total of 151 hair samples were collected and are currently being processed to evaluate the use of various subsistence food sources.

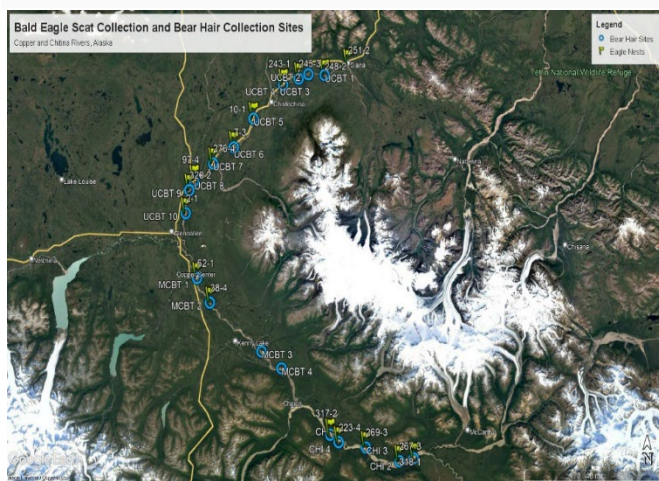


Figure 3. Bald eagle and bear hair sampling sites (left) and a coastal hair-sampling site in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.