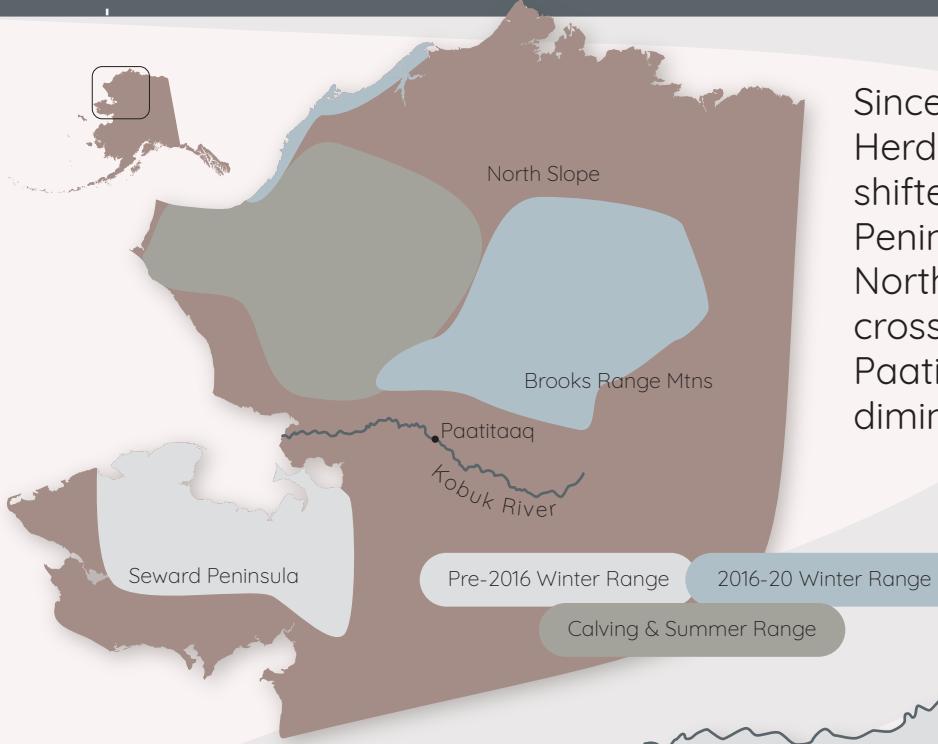


Migration & Memory

Shifts in Western Arctic Caribou Herd migrations may be an adaptation to unpredictable winter conditions on the Seward Peninsula



In this study, survival was not better for caribou who wintered north of the Kobuk River, but it was more predictable. Survival south of the Kobuk River could be high, but only when environmental conditions were ideal.

Since 2016, the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) in Alaska has largely shifted its winter range from the Seward Peninsula to the Brooks Range and North Slope. Their use of traditional river crossings of the Kobuk River, such as Paatitaaq (Onion Portage) have diminished.



The best predictor for whether caribou decided to migrate south of the Kobuk River in a given year was how high survival was south of the Kobuk in the previous year. In other words, caribou remembered if many of their companions died the previous winter and, if so, were more likely to winter north of the Kobuk.

