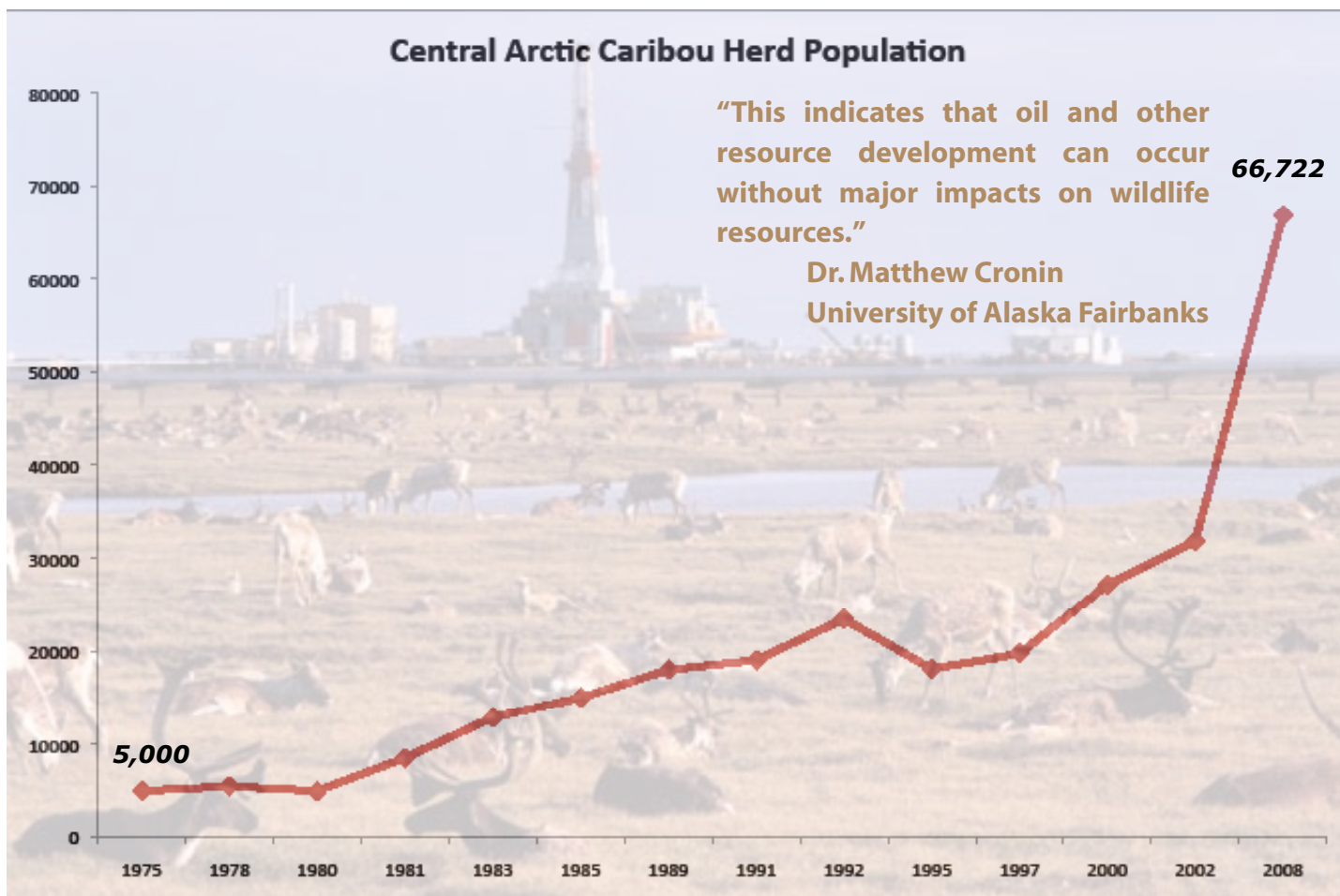


Co-existing with oil development, Central Arctic caribou herd thrives, population at record high



The Alaska Department of Fish and Game has reported that the Central Arctic caribou herd, which occupies summer ranges that include the Prudhoe Bay and Kuparuk oil fields, grew sharply in numbers between 2002 and 2008.

The herd included approximately 67,000 animals in summer 2008, compared to 32,000 in 2002. The herd had less than 5,000 animals in 1975, several years before North Slope oil production commenced.

The Teshekpuk Lake herd to the west of Kuparuk also increased in population to 64,000 animals in 2008, up from 45,000 in 2002. The two herds are the only ones in the Arctic known to be increasing at this time, the Department said. The other two Alaskan Arctic herds, the Western Arctic herd, whose

range is west and south of the Teshekpuk Lake herd, and the Porcupine herd, with a summer range in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge east of Prudhoe Bay and winter ranges in the Brooks Range and Canada, are decreasing, as are many herds across Canada.

The department has not yet determined the causes of the changes in numbers in the different herds, but believes good reproduction rates, good weather, low predation and good habitat have combined to allow the Central Arctic and Teshekpuk Lake herds to increase rapidly. Movement among the herds may also account for some of the relative increases and decreases in numbers.

The increase in population is good news for many North Slope communities that hunt caribou. The Teshekpuk herd is an important

subsistence resource for Barrow and villages in the region while the Central Arctic herd is commonly hunted by Alaskans from all over the state.

“Although some local disturbance impacts may occur, North Slope oil field developments have not resulted in decreased numbers of caribou,” noted Dr. Matthew Cronin, a specialist in animal genetics and a research associate professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences in Palmer. “This indicates that oil and other resource development can occur without major impacts on wildlife resources,” Cronin added. “The North Slope oilfields and caribou herds are a good example of achieving multiple use management.”