

Summary of the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board's Southampton Island Caribou Total Allowable Harvest and Non-quota Limitations in-person Public Hearing

On December 10th and 11th, 2013, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB or Board) held an in-person public hearing in Iqaluit to receive and consider submissions concerning the level of regional total allowable harvest, the basic needs level, and two non-quota limitations for the caribou population on Southampton Island, including White Island.

Michael D'Eca, legal counsel for the NWMB stated the purpose of the hearing as follows:

1. In July 2012 the Government of Nunavut-Minister of Environment made an interim decision (NLCA 5.3.23) to set a total allowable harvest of 1,000 for the Southampton Island Caribou population. The Minister also established two Non-quota Limitations: one which prohibits the harvesting of mature bulls and one which prohibits the harvesting of cow/calf pairs. Through this hearing the NWMB will meet its obligations under the NLCA to review interim decisions made by the Minister
2. To determine what the total allowable harvest for the Southampton Island caribou Population should be based on the most reliable evidence
3. To determine if the NWMB should continue to restrict the harvest of mature bulls
4. To determine if the NWMB should continue to restrict the harvest of cow/calf pairs
5. To determine what the basic needs level should be for this population

Mitch Campbell from the Government of Nunavut presented the request for decision to set the total allowable harvest for the population at 800 caribou and to maintain the two current non-quota limitations. He also presented the results of the 2013 aerial survey demonstrating that population had declined since 2011 but at a much slower rate than before the total allowable harvest of 1000 and non-quota limitations were put in place. He stated that reducing the total allowable harvest to 800 should stop the decline and stabilize the population.

Several key issues were discussed during this hearing. They are as follows:

1. Both the NWMB and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc have stated that the basic needs levels includes all Inuit harvest, both subsistence and commercial harvest. The Government of Nunavut does not have a position on this matter. Concern was raised by both the NWMB and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc that without knowing the Government of Nunavut position on what types of harvest are included in a basic needs level a procedurally fair decision cannot be made. The setting of a basic needs level which constitutes Inuit first right of access to the total allowable harvest is extremely important. Therefore, it is very important to know all parties positions on what is included in a basic needs level before making a decision.

2. Concerns were raised by some hearing parties that the harvest number reported during the Nunavut Wildlife Harvest Study was not accurate. There was also concern that the commercial harvest numbers reported during that time were inaccurate because only the meat that was approved by the government meat inspector and sent to be processed was included in the total reported commercial harvest. Once a basic needs level is set it remains the same and can only be adjusted if application is made to the NWMB to do so. Therefore, it is important to have accurate harvest numbers to use when setting the basic needs level.
3. During the hearing it was determined that two additional communities who were not included in the hearing had harvested caribou from White Island during the Nunavut Wildlife Harvest Study. These two communities are Chesterfield Inlet and Rankin Inlet.
4. Nunavut Tunngavik Inc voiced concern that if the non-quota limitation restricting the harvest of mature bulls was to remain in place how would it be enforced. The Government of Nunavut was asked to provide a legal definition of a mature bull. After much discussion it was decided that the Government of Nunavut would remove the Non-quota limitation which restricts the harvesting of mature bulls from their request for decision as it is not possible for a harvester to determine what constitutes a mature bull. Therefore, this non-quota limitation would not be enforceable.

To ensure that a procedurally fair decision is made, the Board decided not to close the hearing but rather to defer the hearing and resume it in the Spring of 2014. This would allow further time and opportunity for parties to file written submissions and specifically to allow time to hear the Government of Nunavut's position on what types of harvest are included in a basic needs level; to ensure that all parties who harvest from the Southampton Island caribou population are involved in the hearing process; and to allow communities time to provide the best available harvest numbers to be used in the calculation of a basic needs levels.