



Yellowknives Dene First Nation

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Nunavut Wildlife Management Board
P.O. Box 1379
Iqaluit, Nunavut
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Intervention Submission: Proposal to Decrease the Total Allowable Harvest for Bathurst Caribou from 30 to 0

The Yellowknives Dene First Nation (YKDFN) is pleased to provide this written intervention to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (the Board) regarding the proposed change in total allowable harvesting of Bathurst Caribou.

Since time immemorial, generation after generation of the Yellowknives Dene have harvested and survived from the Bathurst Caribou Herd. The Herd has provided us the sustenance we required to survive, especially in times of need when food was scarce. They are our lifeline to the land, they are our lifeline to our ancestors, and they are our lifeline to the creator. Today, the population of the Bathurst Caribou is at an all-time low. We have never seen such low numbers. This is an unprecedented crisis and action must be taken by all parties to ensure the survival of the herd.

According to our Elders, the Yellowknives Dene and the Caribou have survived as one since creation. During the summer months we would survive on fish, plants, and berries around the Yellowknife area until fall time when ice begins to form. We relied on the Caribou to arrive in the early winter to begin our annual migration up to the Barren Lands (present day Nunavut). After following the herd north into the Barren Lands, we would survive until springtime, then make our way back south of the tree line. This harvesting migration is how we lived our nomadic lifestyle, and it's derived from the caribou migration.

Our traditions and cultural practices have been shaped by the Caribou. One of our most significant traditional objects is our drum. It's created from the hide of the Caribou, along with the sinew. The drum provides us with a connection to the Creator and has guided us spiritually from generation to generation. Many of our tools come from the bones of the Caribou. Our clothing for warmth and protection came from the Caribou's hide and sinew as well. These items have provided us with the necessities of survival.

Each part of Caribou has a use, and nothing is wasted. We take special care in ensuring that the life the Caribou has given us is used entirely. Much of who we are would have ceased to exist had it not been for the caribou to guide us.

As I'm sure the Board is aware, we, the Yellowknives Dene have overlap in land use and have formed long-standing relationships with our Inuit neighbors. This overlap is evident from the place names of lakes and areas presently in the Nunavut Territory. Contwoyto Lake for example is a Chipewyan word, given from our Dene ancestors.

The Dene people share with the Inuit a great respect for the animal that has kept us all healthy for generations. Now we must stand together to protect them, just as they have protected us. It is of the utmost importance to protect the Bathurst Caribou Herd for both the future generations of Dene and Inuit.

Through our mutual relationship with caribou, both Dene and Inuit are rights-bearing Indigenous peoples with constitutionally protected relationships to the Caribou. We understand the difficulty in food security this proposed change may create for residents of Nunavut, and we know the Board will listen carefully to the thoughts of the Inuit and the Dene on this proposal.

It is our understanding that some of the total allowable harvest of Bathurst Caribou is used for big game hunting, including trophy hunting. The YKDFN cannot support this unnecessary form of harvesting. We ask the Board to consider only allowing harvesting for sustenance as an immediate action. We look forward to reassessing and increasing the harvest of Bathurst Caribou in the future when their population increases. However, the generation of today must protect the herd for the generation of tomorrow.

We reiterate the importance of Caribou and the absolute necessity to ensure their survival for the future generations. However, it is well known that Dene and Inuit harvesting is not the root cause of the decline of the Bathurst Caribou herd. Changes in the Indigenous harvesting will not reverse the decline of the herd. Nonetheless, present day harvesters are limiting their traditional activities based on the necessity to protect the herd.

The YKDFN would greatly appreciate the Boards involvement in reducing disturbance to the Bathurst Caribou regarding development projects proposed within both jurisdictions (Nunavut and NWT) as they will contribute to cumulative effects across the Bathurst Herd range. It is all party's responsibility to ensure the Bathurst Caribou recover; as such, industry must pay the toll that Traditional Harvesters continually have to pay. There must be action on all fronts to reduce the disturbance to the Bathurst Caribou.


In addition to working with industry, we request the Board to continue to advocate for protection and perseverance of the Bathurst Caribou herd with other Government of Nunavut (GN) agencies and public institutions such as the Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB). The YKDFN will continue to seek protection for the herd across its range, especially in the Northwest Territories.

To better mitigate the consequences of restricting harvesting and to ensure the protection and conservation of the Bathurst Caribou Herd, the YKDFN would be pleased to meet with Nunavut and Northwest Territories rights holders and the respective Nunavut and Northwest Territories Governments and Industry to discuss potential traditional and scientific solutions to achieve these goals as a consortium. We also believe that by having ongoing Nation-to-Nation and inter-territorial meetings we would be able to join insights otherwise unavailable to us working independently. We look forward to initiating regular meetings to this end.

In addition to having meetings on harvesting and conservation, the YKDFN would like to support cultural exchanges between our peoples. The Dene and Inuit have lived side by side for many generations and historically we would exchange cultural items of significance. We are hopeful that we can build a stronger relationship between our peoples by reviving these activities in near future.

The Yellowknives Dene thank the Board and the other Intervenors for their time and effort in making a very important decision. The outcomes of the decisions we make today will have a significant impact on our future generations. As such, we trust that the board will stand true in preserving such a critical resource.

Mahsi Cho (Thank You),



CEO Jason Snaggs,
Yellowknives Dene First Nation



Chief Ernest Betsina
Yellowknives Dene First Nation

Cc.

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