



**SUBMISSION TO THE**

**NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD**

**FOR**

**Information:**

**Decision: X**

**Issue: Bluenose-East Caribou herd population estimate from 2018 calving ground photographic survey and harvest recommendations.**

**Background:**

- The Bluenose East caribou herd (BNE) is a shared herd harvested by hunters in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.
- The BNE has shown a declining trend since 2000, with a continuous decline from 2010 to 2015. During this period, the herd declined from 120,000 to 38,500 caribou (2015).
- During the January 20, 2016 Bluenose-East Allocation meeting, the HTO of Kugluktuk recommended an allocation of 35% instead of 36% to allow for a minimal 2% harvest for each of the five small communities of NWT.
- The Minister of Environment implemented a Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) of 340 caribou for the BNE in 2016 and supported the development of a community management plan.
- The Kugluktuk HTO has worked with Conservation Officers to implement and enforce the TAH. The full TAH of 340 was never met, and the current harvest from the Kugluktuk community averages approximately 170 caribou (e.g. in 2015/2016 the harvest was 265 (pre-TAH), in 2016/2017 the harvest was 232 animals, in 2017/2018 the harvest was 174 animals, and in 2018/2019 the harvest was 93 animals).

**Current Status:**

- The June 2018 aerial photo survey results confirm that the BNE has continued to decline, with a total population estimate of 19,249 caribou. This is a significant decline from the 2015 population estimate of 38,592 caribou.
- Additional observations show conditions indicative of a declining herd: there is a below normal adult female survival rate (0.72) and low calf productivity (0.19).
- During the Advisory Committee for Cooperation on Wildlife Management (ACCWM) November 2018 meeting, the 2018 survey results were presented and the board members proposed a red status for the BNE.

- The Kugluktuk Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO) has developed a community-based management plan for the Bluenose-East herd. The HTO has been working with the Department of Environment (DOE) to finalize the plan with intentions to submit the plan to the NWMB regular meeting in December. Since 2016, the Kugluktuk HTO has already implemented the following management actions:
  - No organized community or sport caribou hunts
  - HTO does not support sale/purchase of caribou under the country food distribution program
  - HTO supports shift in harvest to alternate species like muskoxen
  - Creation of a no harvest zone for the BNE around the community.
- On January 14, 2019, The Tłı̄ch̄ Government (TG) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Government of Northwest Territories (ENR-GNWT) submitted a joint management proposal for to the Wek'èezhii Renewable Resources Board (WRRB). Management recommendations included a 1.5% harvest rate, which resulted in a recommended herd-wide TAH of 300 bulls.
- On June 16, 2019, the WRRB determined that a total allowable harvest of 193 bulls only should be implemented for all users for the BNE for 2019 to 2021 (harvest rate of 1%). The WRRB decision only applies to users within the Wek'èezhii region.
- The WRRB communicated that “a serious conservation concern exists” for the Bluenose-East Caribou herd
- The DOE has engaged with and continues to work closely with the affected community and respective co-management partners (Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., HTOs, and Kitikmeot Regional Wildlife Board) and the Northwest Territories on management actions needed to address the Bluenose-East caribou decline.

**Consultations:**

- On February 20 2019, the 2018 survey results were communicated to the Kugluktuk HTO. This was an information meeting.
- On June 12, 2019, the survey results were communicated again. DOE informed co-management partners of its recommendation to change the TAH to 107 with a Non-Quota Limitation (NQL) of bulls only. The Kugluktuk Hunter and Trapper Organization (KHTO) responded that since the establishment of the TAH in 2016, harvesting has been kept under 340 caribou.
- On August 29, 2019, the Kugluktuk HTO held a public meeting to discuss the DOE harvest recommendations for the BNE herd. At this meeting, the public voted to have a TAH of 250 with a 1:1 harvest sex ratio. Some community members feel that there

should not be any harvest restrictions for Kugluktuk harvesters of the BNE herd, and that the harvest could be managed through a community based management plan.

- On October 2, 2019, a second consultation took place with the HTO. The Kugluktuk HTO were not clear on their recommended a limit; some agreed with community recommendation of 250 caribou while others recommended 150 caribou. There was consensus from the HTO and community that they would prefer to have a 1:1 sex ratio. The sex ratio is requested for cultural and food security reasons, as a 1:1 ratio could allow harvesting different sexes at different times of the year for bedding, clothing, or taste preferences. The HTO feels that a bull only harvest will limit harvest of caribou to August and September when bulls are locally available. A higher TAH was proposed due to the concern of food security and scarcity for Kugluktukmuit that has resulted from the decline of the BNE caribou herd.

### **Recommendations:**

- *The Department of Environment recommends the NWMB reduce the TAH for the Bluenose East caribou herd to 107 caribou with the Non-Quota Limitation of a male only harvest.*