



## **Baker Lake Hunters and Trappers Organization**

### **Presentation to Nunavut Wildlife Management Board Caribou Habitat Workshop**

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Basil Quinangnaq and Warren Bernauer

## **Introduction**

- The Baker Lake Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO) has requested mining and exploration activity be banned in caribou calving grounds and at important caribou water crossings.
- This request is based on Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit – the traditional knowledge and teachings passed on from generations, and the wisdom and values of Baker Lake Elders
- Baker Lake hunters and Elders have been fighting to protect these areas for decades
- In September 2015, the Baker Lake HTO held a workshop with hunters and Elders, to discuss and share knowledge about these sensitive areas
- In preparation for the workshop, Warren Bernauer conducted background research for the HTO. Warren wrote a report summarizing the documented knowledge of these areas, the importance of these areas to Inuit, and the long history of Baker Lake hunters fighting to protect these areas.

## Caribou Water Crossings

- Caribou water crossings are some of the most important areas for caribou hunting for Baker Lake Inuit, both historically and today.
- Caribou are very sensitive to disturbance at water crossings.
- Inuit have many traditional rules for how water crossings should be treated.
  - Do not walk, hunt, skin animals, cache meat or camp on the side of the river where caribou enter the water. Even footprints will disturb caribou.
  - Camp upstream from water crossings; camps should not be visible from the crossing
  - Clean up all animal remains near a crossing. Even blood on the ground should be buried.
  - Dogs and people should be silent at water crossings
  - Do not hunt the first group of caribou that cross the water. The rest of the herd follows this leading group, and if the leaders are hunted, the others may not follow across the water at the crossing.
  - Do not hunt the first caribou in the group (the leaders of the group). This will disorient the other caribou who follow. The leaders should be allowed to pass, and the followers can be hunted.
- Baker Lake Inuit continue to pass these traditional teachings on to the next generations of hunters.
- Mining and exploration activity is inconsistent with these teachings.
- There are many archeological sites near water crossings. Elders teach us not to disturb archeological sites.
- In the 1970s, Baker Lake Inuit were very upset about mineral exploration near water crossings on the Thelon River, the Kazan River, and the east-end of Baker Lake. They tried to have these areas protected from mining by:
  - Sending petitions to the Federal Government, asking them to stop exploration in these areas.
  - Submitting a “land freeze” proposal to the Federal Government, asking them to stop exploration in these areas.
  - Taking the Federal Government to court, with the support of Inuit Tapirisat of Canada. This court case was a major milestone for the negotiation of the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement
- When the land claim agreement was settled, Baker Lake Inuit selected many of these water crossings as Inuit Owned Lands. The Baker Lake HTO believes these lands were selected so Inuit could protect them.
- Mining companies have been issued permits near almost all of these crossings. Baker Lake hunters do not feel they were properly consulted on this.
- At the September 2015 workshop, Elders were very passionate and firm – they want to keep mining and exploration at least 25 km away from important caribou water crossings. These water crossings were mapped at the workshop.

## Caribou Calving Grounds

- Caribou calving grounds are less important for hunting by Baker Lake Inuit.
  - Most camps were located at water crossings or along migration routes, not in the calving grounds.
  - During the calving season, Baker Lake hunters focus on hunting caribou bulls, because bull meat tastes better than cow/calf meat at this time of year.
- Elders teach us not to disturb caribou during calving – they teach hunters to stay out of calving grounds during calving season, and to avoid hunting cows with calves during calving and post-calving seasons.
- The rules for water crossings should help inform our discussion about calving grounds – traditional knowledge clearly shows that sensitive caribou habitat like water crossings and calving grounds must not be disturbed or altered.
- Baker Lake Elders have repeatedly recommended that mining should not take place in calving grounds. This guidance from Elders is based on their values and wisdom. Following the values and wisdom of our Elders is the basis of Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit.
- Elders predict that, if there is mining in the calving grounds, the herds will scatter and decline.
- Baker Lake Inuit have been concerned about mining and exploration activity in calving grounds for a very long time.
  - Baker Lake was strongly opposed to the Kiggavik mine proposed in the late 1980s. A major concern was that the company proposing Kiggavik also had mineral claims in the Beverly calving grounds. The community was worried that the company would start mining at Kiggavik, and then branch out into the calving grounds.
  - Baker Lake Elders requested we stop Uravan’s exploration project in the Beverly calving grounds in 2008.
  - The Baker Lake HTO was opposed to Anconia exploring in the Qamanirjuaq calving grounds in 2012.
  - The Baker Lake HTO, Chesterfield Inlet HTO, and Repulse Bay HTO were opposed to the Kiggavik mine proposal in 2015. A major concern was that once uranium mining started at Kiggavik, it could spread to other areas like calving grounds and water crossings.
- At the September 2015 workshop, Elders were very passionate and firm – they want to keep mining and exploration out of caribou calving grounds.
- For some Elders this was an issue of justice – the Government tells Inuit not to hunt in the wildlife sanctuary, so Inuit should be able to tell the mining companies not to explore or mine in the calving grounds.
- Participants agreed that the full traditional calving grounds should be protected.