



SUBMISSION TO THE

NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD

FOR

Information: X

Decision:

Issue: Baffin Island Caribou 2019 Spring Composition Survey

Background:

- The first island-wide survey of Baffin Island caribou occurred in March 2014, and the results indicated there are currently very few caribou on Baffin Island. The population was estimated to be 4,652 caribou (3,462–6,250 with a 95% Confidence Interval).
- In August 2015, the Minister of Environment accepted the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board's (NWMB's) decision to allow a Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) of 250 male caribou, thereby ending an 8 month harvest moratorium that started in January 2015.
- A draft Baffin Island Caribou Management Plan, initiated in December 2014 with input from ten affected Hunters and Trappers Organizations, Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., and Parks Canada, was submitted to the NWMB for decision in March 2016. The plan was sent back to the Department of Environment for revisions and further consultation.
- Consultations on the draft Management Plan occurred March 16–April 7, 2015 and then again January 7-18, 2019. Both rounds of consultation included discussions on caribou collaring under the research and monitoring component of the Plan. While there was support for collaring from several of the communities initially in 2015, other communities were unsure at the time. There was stronger support expressed by communities during the 2019 consultations.
- Potential for spatially separated and geographically discrete subpopulations of caribou on Baffin Island are suggested through Inuit Qaujimagatunqangit and past scientific analyses, supporting the potential benefits of telemetry research and monitoring.
- Results from composition surveys done in 2015 and 2016 indicated good numbers of calves were being produced but there was low over-winter calf survival. The 2017 and 2018 spring composition surveys, for north, south and central Baffin, were completed and suggested good overwinter calf survival for the survey areas in north central and south Baffin, except Prince Charles Island.

- A final summary report of the results from 2015-2018 caribou composition surveys was distributed to co-management partners and Hunters and Trappers Organizations (HTOs) in September 2018.

Current Status:

- A final report of the results from 2019 caribou composition surveys was distributed to co-management partners and Hunters and Trappers Organizations (HTOs) in November 2019.
- In the spring of 2019 we classified 1,584 caribou (bulls, cows, yearlings, and calves) on southern Baffin Island.
- All regions combined or otherwise, produced ratios within or above the suggested 30 calves per 100 cow baseline from taiga wintering populations. High calf recruitment, such as the numbers recorded in this 2019 South Baffin composition survey, are necessary for the population to have an increasing trend and start recovering.
- Regional variations in calf:cow ratios were observed over relatively short distances (less than 100 km), and some evidence supports different groupings or subpopulations across the island. It would be unwise to manage island-wide populations on trends observed at this scale in a single survey season.
- The reported calf:cow ratios should not be applied to the population across Baffin Island in its entirety. A second abundance survey is needed to verify observed trends and the applicability of the taiga wintering caribou baseline values. To limit seasonal and sampling variability, trend indices require long term data sets from all areas of Baffin Island and therefore caution should be taken until more years of data have been collected.
- Telemetry research through satellite collars on caribou, at this time in the population cycle, could identify important caribou critical habitats. Identification of key over-wintering habitats, as a potential limiting factor in Baffin Island caribou survival, is of particular importance.

Consultations:

- Community consultations are being planned with HTO representatives from Kimmirut, Qikiqtarjuaq, Clyde River, Pangnirtung, Iqaluit, Cape Dorset, Hall Beach, Igloolik, Arctic Bay and Pond Inlet for the fall of 2019 and winter of 2020.

Recommendations:

- N/A