

Research Project Updates and Proposals, September 18, 2017
Grise Fiord Hamlet Building 19:00-21:40
Meeting with Iviq Hunters and Trappers Association

In attendance: Amon Akeeagok, Aksakjuk Ningiuk, Liza Ningiu, Jeffrey Qaunaq, Terry Noah (Manager), Benjamin Baranowski (GN-CO), and Matt Fredlund (GN-Wildlife Tech).

The meeting which was originally planned for Sept 17 was postponed to the following day due to lack of access to the building on the weekend.

Amon and Jeffrey introduced Matt and the purpose of the meeting; Matt provided an overview of the following research results to date and upcoming projects for comment (Appendix 1); Amon and Jeffrey provided translation throughout the meeting.

Devon Island Survey Results, 2016 – Matt showed a map with transects and the strata to demonstrate how the survey focused search effort in areas of greatest probability of observing caribou and muskoxen (MX). A map with the locations of all caribou and MX as well as tracks was shown to give a representation of the distribution. It was also mentioned that although no caribou were seen on Devon directly across from Grise Fiord (GF), in the final report it is mentioned that the GF HTA has observed tuktu there recently. The search effort in hours flown as well as a minimum count of 14 Peary caribou (not an estimate) was presented. It is believed that, as with the previous survey in 2008, the caribou population persists at very low numbers. To the contrary, a large increase in muskox was observed relative to the previous survey in 2008, with a 2016 population estimate of 1,963 (± 343 SE) muskox (Appendix 1). The recommendations in the report were talked about, although at the time of the presentation the TAH for Muskox had already been increased to 100 as had previously been consulted on with the HTA.

Comments – Jeffrey commented that he is glad the MX population is good, but wishes the TAH could be removed, since the TAH of 100 won't be reached anyway the hunt should be unlimited. Aksakjuk was part of the 2016 survey and did see lots of MX, he also made the comment that PC and MX don't mingle because caribou don't like the smell of MX. Liza commented that the survey should happen when there is no snow to see the PC better as it is hard to see caribou from an airplane, also in 1962 there were no caribou on Devon so the population has been increasing since then.

Lougheed Island Survey Results, 2016 - Matt showed a map of the flight lines and locations of all caribou seen on the island (on and off transect). The caribou population was estimated at 140 (\pm SE33) Peary caribou, with no MX or wolves seen during the survey (although wolf tracks had been seen that summer). The caribou population estimate has decreased from 205-672 (95% CI) estimated in 2007 survey (Appendix 1). Management recommendations from the report supported no changes in caribou management, and asked what was thought of including Lougheed into the Bathurst Island Group for future surveys?

Comments – Jeffrey made the comment that when there is less MX there is more caribou, and more MX there is less caribou. He also wants to leave Lougheed with Ringnes Island Group or there would be no caribou in the RIG. Liza stated that if changes are planned she wants proper consultations to occur before any comments or decisions. Matt did make it clear that no changes are planned but just wanted to learn more about these populations as it was in the report's recommendations. Liza also added that this area is more important to Resolute Bay so they should have say over it.

Prince of Wales, Somerset Survey Results, 2016 – Matt showed a map with transects, MX group locations (on and off transect) as well as the population estimate of 3052 (± 440) Muskoxen, with approximately half on each of Prince of Wales and half on Somerset Islands. No caribou were seen during the survey, however hunters did report seeing caribou during the same time frame. Even with a slightly declining trend in the MX population, implementing a TAH is not required for the continued sustainable use of muskoxen in MX-06, which are generally harvested at low levels. Even without a TAH, harvest reporting would still be important to maintain. Since no caribou were seen, it was recommended that no caribou harvest occur, although hunting is not likely the limiting factor (Appendix 1).

Comments – Matt asked if harvesting from a large group or a small group has a larger impact on MX populations. Liza said traditionally Inuit don't take whole groups. Once collars are on MX (instead of on caribou) the numbers will decrease. Jeffrey said that a large harvest of MX won't increase caribou numbers. Liza mentioned that in 1980, Somerset caribou numbers were high and there were no MX, but once MX were seen there then caribou moved away. The caribou traveled further south (Cambridge Bay area. She was on the Committee for Environment (DOE) and said the caribou from Coral Harbour (Southampton Island) included Peary caribou from the high arctic.

Genetics Update, 2016 – Matt showed a map of the general genetic division between the various caribou herds, as well as a map that shows the extent of the last glacial maxima. Showed maps with a greater break down between the high arctic islands, and mentioned how the genetic work shows that Peary caribou are from a lineage that is ~96,000-185,000 years old. And they were isolated until ~8,000 years ago (Appendix 1).

Comments – Jeffrey brought up if they have survived 185,000 years why worry about their numbers now?

High Arctic Wolf Update, 2017 – This portion of the presentation was prepared by Morgan Anderson and presented by Matt. Matt mentioned that as of spring 2017 all 4 collars that were on wolves were offline. Due to various reasons, one falling off, one malfunctioning and being removed by the researchers in the summer 2017 as well as two collars were just missing and the wolves were not seen. The movements, kill sites, dens, and two new collars that were deployed were mentioned as well, with plans to deploy more in the following year (Appendix 1).

Comments – N/A

Central Ellesmere Island Survey Update, 2017 – Matt showed maps of transects, flight paths, as well as locations of seen caribou (14), MX (2163), and tracks. The sizes of groups of MX ranged from 1-43. The results are still being worked on and will be sent to the HTA as soon as the report is completed (Appendix 1).

Comments – N/A

Upcoming Surveys – Matt showed a map with Northern Ellesmere Island (NEI) and Axel Heiberg to show where the next surveys may be occurring. NEI will probably happen in March/April 2018, and Axel Heiberg in March/April 2019; however at this time final commitments could not be made. If the NEI survey occurs in 2018 it will be done with Helicopter (83 hrs) and fixed wing (43 hr) surveys. Survey methods and sampling design were discussed, along with the need for 3-5 community members to participate in the survey from Grise Fiord or Resolute Bay. For the Axel Heiberg survey, it would all be completed with helicopter (70hrs) and requiring 1-2 community observers (Appendix 1).

Comments – Liza said they don't really go up there so not very concerned. Aksakjuk said the caribou and MX are still there. Amon asked why in March? Matt responded that it is to do with weather reasons and the greatest chance of success based on past projects, as well as past consultations with HTA's.

Harvest Reporting – Matt brought up that harvest reporting is important for managers to make informed decisions and the when a TAH is in place it is mandatory; however, if there is not currently a TAH it is still important to have harvest records – both as a great tool in the management of wildlife and also to benefit the determination of Basic Needs Level (BNL) for Grise Fiord under the Nunavut Agreement.

Comments – Jeffrey reiterated to the board that MX harvest reporting is mandatory. The members also gave the general acknowledgement that they know we need the harvest reports.

Closing of meeting – Matt showed a map showing all the locations of MX and PC from the most recent surveys to get input on any disagreements of changes that may have occurred since the latest survey (Appendix 1). Matt thanked the board for meeting with him and sharing their knowledge and he looks forward to working with them in the years to come.

Comments – Jeffrey mentioned that looking at the maps it shows where there are so many MX there are less caribou. Caribou are moving away from areas with MX.