

HTO Consultations Report Bluenose East Caribou Management Recommendations

February-October 2019



Department of Environment, Government of Nunavut, Kugluktuk, NU

Executive Summary

Government of Nunavut, Department of Environment (DOE) representatives conducted, in February an information session with the Hunters and Trappers Organizations (HTO) of Kugluktuk, in June Part 1 and October Part 2 of the consultation with the co-management partners. The primary purpose of the consultation was to consult on the recommended Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) based on the results of the 2018 Bluenose-East calving ground photographic survey. During the consultations, feedback from the HTO and co-management partners was received regarding the survey and management recommendations.

The Bluenose East (BNE) caribou herd is a fundamental part of their current subsistence, and the declining population of this herd is creating concerns for food security. The rate of this decline is worrisome. At present, there is a TAH of 340 on the BNE but this TAH needs to be adjusted in response to the most recent population estimate from the 2018 survey. HTO and community members are showing strong initiatives and stewardship in implementing community-based actions to address the current decline. The HTO would like their own management initiatives to be recognized. This report attempts to summarize the comments made by the co-management partners during these meetings.

Preface

This report represents the Department of Environment's best efforts to accurately capture all of the information that was shared during consultation meetings with the Hunters and Trappers Organizations.

The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Environment, Nunavut or Government of Nunavut.

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1.0 Report Purpose and Structure

This report is intended to collate and summarize comments, questions, concerns, and suggestions raised during the consultations held with the co-management partners on the proposed management recommendations for the Bluenose-East Caribou herd (BNE). The summary and notes herein only reflect what was shared during the meeting.

2.1 Purpose of Consultations

On February 20, 2019, a meeting was organized with the Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT) Biologist to share the 2018 BNE survey results as GNWT is the lead jurisdiction for the monitoring of the BNE herd. The objective of the meetings to follow was to consult on the proposed Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) the DOE was recommending to help address the continued decline of the herd. These meetings were an opportunity to record concerns and comments from the management partners in order to potentially accommodate their requests and highlight their current community-based management initiatives. The Kugluktuk Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO) was consulted as the designated representatives of the hunting community under the Nunavut Agreement.

2.2 Format of Meetings

The meetings were held during the evening and during the day with varying lengths. Some were approximately 3 hours while others were full day meetings. Information such as herd status, recommendations from the survey report, and harvest management decisions from management groups in the Northwest Territories were presented. The Nunavut co-management partners' perspectives were recorded. The presentation format by the GNWT was informal and the co-management partners were invited to ask questions, raise concerns, and make suggestions on the proposed recommendations. It was an open dialogue. The DOE lead consultations were also an open dialogue with the HTO.

3.0 Public and HTO Consultation Summary

The objective for this consultation was made clear and pertinent information was given to the HTO Board well in advance of the consultation, and at the start of the meeting. There were many questions, concerns, and suggestions raised by the HTO Board. The BNE herd has an important contribution to the subsistence of the community of Kugluktuk. HTO Board stated their desire to have an expanded wolf harvest programs that would help support harvesters by providing more money per wolf. The following section summarized the consultations.

3.1. Kugluktuk HTO- Information Meeting on 2018 survey results

Purpose of the Consultations:

A special meeting was organized in Kugluktuk on February 20, 2019. The primary purpose of the meeting was to inform the Kugluktuk HTO of the 2018 survey results and the new Bluenose East herd estimate. The meeting was an opportunity to inform the audience of the current harvest management recommendations in the Northwest Territories.

Date: February 20, 2019 from 3:10 pm to 6:30 pm

Representatives:

HTO: Bobby, Anivilok Kevin Klengenber (Chairperson), Jacob, Myles Peterson, Alannah, Stanley Carpenter, Jayko Palongayak

NWT Biologist: Jan Adamczewski

Dalhousie: Lucia Fanning, Jade Owen

NWT Biologist: Steve Barlock

DOE: Terry Milton, Russell Akeaagok, Allen Niptinatiak, Kevin Methuen, Lisa-Marie Leclerc

Summary of the Discussion:

The BNE is an inter-jurisdictional herd and the GNWT is the lead jurisdiction for monitoring this herd. Jan Adamczewski, GNWT Environment and Natural Resources Biologist, gave his presentation on the 2018 June calving ground survey. It was specified that survey methodology has remained the same since 2010, and so change in number could not be attributable to the method. The observation of caribou on the ground was difficult due to the high percentage of snow cover still on the ground, which was accounted for by additional analyses. The total estimate of adult BNE caribou is 19,249 animals. The pregnancy rate for this herd is good, 83%, but the fall calf:cow ratio is low, 0.25, and the cow adult survival is low, 0.72. The harvest has remained low, so overharvest is not likely to be a cause of the continuation of the declining trend.

With this estimate, the Advisory Committee for Cooperation on Wildlife Management (ACCWM) updated the status of the BNE from orange to red. The Tlicho Government and GNWT recommendation is to lower the harvest from 750 caribou (2016 Wek'èezhii Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) decision) to 300 bulls only. In addition to a reduction in the total harvest, the GNWT is increasing the wolf incentive in the BNE winter range, and promoting additional management recommendations for habitat protection and education.

Since the herd has declined significantly, the GNWT will be increasing the intensity of monitoring on this herd. Thus there will be a population survey every 2 years, a composition survey in June/October and March of each year and the number of collars on this herd will increase from 50 to 75.

Comments and questions:

Some question was asked on the survey methodology. A board member asked why the coast was surveyed in 2015 but not in 2018. This area was not flown during the 2018 reconnaissance survey because the collared animals had just arrived in the calving ground, there were no animal there in 2015, and they are known to use the area at a later time in the year during post-calving.

3.2. First Consultation on DOE TAH recommendation

Purpose of the Consultations:

A consultation was organized in Kugluktuk on June 12, 2019. The primary purpose of the meeting was to engage the co-management partners in an ongoing dialogue on the BNE herd future management recommendations. The meeting was an opportunity to inform the audience that the DOE recommend a lower TAH of 107 bulls only based on the available new scientific information.

Date: June 12, 2019

Representatives:

Attendees: Jan (GNWT), Coral Newman (KIA summer student), Geoff Clark (KIA), Cheryl (NTI), Terry (DOE), Allen (DOE) Breale (DOE summer student), Lisa (DOE), Kevin (DOE), Amanda (HTO manager) and Bobby (HTO secretary).

Larry Adjun (no show, excused)

Summary of the Discussion:

The survey results were once more presented, as well as the current management recommendation in the Northwest Territories. The BNE caribou herd population estimate is 19,149 caribou, down 50% from 2015. The vital rates of the herd show no sign of recovery (pregnancy rate of 83% is good, a low calf:cow ratio in the fall of 25%, and low cow adult survival of 72%). The decline seems to be attributed to natural causes and predation; harvest was kept under recommended level the past three years due to the difficulty to access the herd.

While the Kitikmeot Inuit Association (KIA) representative said that he trusts the information provided in the report and has no question, the Kugluktuk HTO still has not met to review the report. At that time, they could not provide their support for the report and the results presented. Both acknowledge that there is a decline, but feel that it is normal and it is part of the natural cycle. The KIA opinion is that there is no need to consider this situation a crisis. KIA recognizes that there is still a conservation concern that needs to be addressed for the BNE.

It was proposed that since the harvesting rate has been lower than 340 caribou since the implementation of the TAH, a limitation on harvest is not needed. The HTO has a lot of issues with the "interim TAH" of 340. Community felt that it has been imposed on them. The HTO is working on an alternative option for BNE management. The Kugluktuk HTO feels that the community-based management plan they have developed should be seen as an alternative to a TAH. Although the community-based management plan has not been accepted by NWMB, some actions, which have already been implemented, have proven to be affective, according to the Kugluktuk HTO. Such tools include: no sport harvest/commercial harvest, the no hunting zone, caribou sample collections, education about caribou, and use of alternative meat sources (muskox, fish, and ptarmigan).

The effectiveness of the current community based management actions is likely supported by the fact that there is a TAH in place and the support from the Conservation Officers. Thus, since there is new information available, the co-management partners should work together to help the HTO update and improve their plan. With the current herd estimate and the rate of the decline, the DOE is recommending a TAH of 107 bulls only. The HTO is opposed to a TAH, and any bull only harvest. This will not be supported by the members.

Predators were an important part of the discussion. The KIA would be supportive of overall predator management, where emphasis of the program should target cultural activities and teaching of the harvest skills. If needed, KIA will be supportive of more intensive intervention to control predators. KIA is willing to allocate more funding for wolf incentive, so money can go to hunters to offset the price of the harvest. In fact, the Kugluktuk HTO has been complaining that the current \$300 payment for wolf samples is too low. The HTO neglected to recognize that the total available funds for a harvested wolf are much higher than \$300 when the payment for the fur and other government incentive programs are included. Since the initiation of the Support for Active Harvesters Program wolf sample collection project, the harvesters have submitted 100 wolf samples. According to the HTO, this number could have been more if the incentive was higher. They do not necessarily want a wolf population management program, but more money for the wolf so they might use this money to compensate for household grocery expenses. They also mentioned that Grizzly Bear play an important part in regulating caribou population dynamics. There is a lot of observation of Grizzly bear with 2 to 4 cubs, which suggest that they are doing very well. Thus, the Kugluktuk HTO is looking to increase the sport hunt to 15 (15 just for the community) to regulate the high productivity of this caribou predator.

Recommendation to the GN:

Since the HTO chair was not present, along with most board members, the HTO was only given two week notice to prepare for this meeting, and they did not read the survey report yet, they did not want to talk about future management recommendations, such as decreasing the TAH. They see this meeting as part 1 of the consultation. They require a quorum to talk about revising the TAH. They also felt it is not appropriate to conduct a public meeting on the subject, because the board had no time to discuss (the community base management plan nor DOE recommendations). All board members are out on the land, and there was no quorum.

Comments and questions:

N/A

3.3. HTO Public Consultation with Community on TAH recommendation

Purpose of the Consultations: The HTO held a meeting open to the public to seek community feedback and input on the DOE TAH recommendation.

Date: August 28, 2019

Representatives: Kevin Methuen (DOE), Russell Akeeagok (DOE), Terry Milton (DOE), Larry Adjun (KHTO Chair), Bobby Anavilok (KHTO), Jayko Palongayak (KHTO), Jorgen Bolt (NWMB)

Summary of the Discussion:

Attendance was around 35 people, meeting lasted about two hours. Russell Akeeagok (COII) prepared actual harvest numbers since the implementation of the TAH and HTO chairperson Larry Adjun went over these a number of times for the public. He also explained our proposal, and how the population has continued to decline. Kevin explained that the DOE proposal represented Kugluktuk's share of a 1.5% harvest rate for the latest population estimate, following the same justification for the TAH that is currently in place (340). Kevin also briefly touched on the WRRB ruling of 1% harvest rate that was implemented in Northwest Territories, saying that the DOE recommendation is less restrictive and allows for more harvest opportunities while still considering conservation of the herd.

Larry Adjun explained that the wolf sample collection program amount is too low and that the DOE recently dismissed their proposal for more grizzly bear sport hunt tags. Overall, there was great resistance to the proposal of bulls only. This community harvests by sex depending on the time of year, generally focusing only on female harvest in the winter and spring, males in summer. This is to allow them to use different part of the animal and fur quality to make different items.

Near the end of the meeting, Larry prompted the community to either accept the DOE proposal or provide a counter proposal. Two individuals proposed a counter of 250 either sex ratio, with the rationale that the DOE is likely to counter with at least half that. They passed a motion on this recommendation. No one else in the community opposed, or provided another recommendation and the meeting was adjourned.

Recommendation to the GN: Public made a motion for a TAH of 250 either sex harvest.

Comments and questions: N/A

3.4. DOE Consultation on TAH recommendation to KHTO

Purpose of the Consultations: Consult the Kugluktuk HTO on the DOE TAH recommendation of 107 caribou with a Non-Quota Limitation (NQL) of a bull only harvest for Bluenose East caribou and incorporate their comments before submission to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB).

Date: October 2, 2019

Representatives: DOE (Lisa-Marie Leclerc, Kate England, Kevin Methuen, Terry Milton, Allen Niptanatiak);

NWMB (Jorgen Bolt, Kyle Ritchie); KHTO (Full board present)

Summary of the Discussion:

The meeting was 3 hours long and there was a lot of discussion about the Bluenose East herd decline, TAH, the community based management plan, and related issues. It was stated that during the public meeting which occurred on August 28, 2019, the public made a motion to recommend the TAH at 250 either sex caribou.

There was some discussion regarding sex ratio, with the implication that a bull only harvest would restrict the harvest season to August and September, which would lead to intensity of harvest and limit availability of harvested food. An either sex harvest would allow harvest pressure and country food availability to be more continuous (allow getting specific types of skin, meet cultural needs for foods). Some flexibility around this was discussed, e.g. "mainly bulls" or 60:40, but there was no consensus amongst the HTO members. As publicly elected members, they need to follow the motion that was passed.

Kugluktuk HTO estimates that 600 caribou of different herds were harvested for Kugluktuk last year, so they are worried about being able to compensate for loss of available animals through a reduced TAH, and if Beverly herd doesn't return this year. They need to know where they will get other country foods to compensate and they are already getting alternatives from fish and moose, but are very concerned. It was stated that if 107 is passed, illegal harvest will occur and create a further divide between the HTO and DOE enforcement

The main topic of conversation was predator control. The point was made that most wolves killed these past winters are tundra wolves and not the timber wolves which predate the West Kitikmeot caribou. Wolf harvest at Point Lake can assist Bathurst and Beverly caribou herds as these are their predators, likewise around Great Bear Lake for Bluenose East. The closing remark from the HTO was "it's easier to control predators than control caribou harvest with a TAH".

Kugluktuk HTO will engage with DOE over the next few weeks to prepare the community based management plan for re-submission to the December meeting

Recommendation to the GN:

The HTO support their member motion for a TAH of 250 either sex harvest.

Comments and questions: N/A

4.0 Conclusion- Next Steps

Since 2016, the Bluenose- East Caribou herd population survey results have been discussed on numerous occasions with the HTOs and other co-management partners. The DOE has committed to increasing the frequency of community and HTOs meetings to communicate key information as the research program progresses. The current DOE management recommendations are consistent with what is recommended for Bluenose East caribou by the GNWT and it is an appropriate response to the current population status of the herd. The next steps will be the submission of recommendation to the NWMB to assure that effective conservation measures are in place to help the herd recover