

**Bathurst and Bluenose East Caribou Technical Workshop
October 9-10, 2014**

Tree of Peace, Yellowknife

“putting caribou first”

1.0 Background

On August 27, 2014 leaders from across the NWT met in Yellowknife at the request of the Minister of ENR to discuss recent survey results for the Bathurst and Bluenose East caribou herds. The two herds appear to be in serious decline based on new survey results. The leadership meeting concluded with two key findings:

- *There is a clear consensus that there has been and continues to be a significant decline in the Bathurst and Bluenose-East caribou herds. The causes of the declines are unclear. Harvest restrictions on the Bathurst herd have slowed its decline but now it appears to be declining further.*
- *There is hesitation about further harvest restrictions without knowing with any certainty the real cause of the decline. There is desire for co-management which should also include industry and Nunavut (or others who contribute to the decline).*

One outcome of the meeting was agreement to create a technical working group for the two herds. The technical working group is charged with reducing uncertainties regarding the causes behind the herd declines and developing a corresponding plan of action.

The technical working group met on October 9-10, 2014 and will meet again on October 22-23, 2014. The central objective of the first meeting was to develop a draft action plan for consideration by the respective leadership prior to the second meeting, which will focus on refining the draft action plan, including its implementation.

The October 9-10, 2014 meeting included the following central objectives:

- common understanding of the current status of the Bathurst and Bluenose-East caribou herds based on surveys, community observations and trends;
- common understanding of the respective pressures the herds face and potential mitigation measures;
- common understanding of the steps that are currently being taken to address the pressures;
- common understanding of the gaps that remain and the steps that can be taken to address them;
- agreement on a draft action plan to address the gaps and pressures that can be taken back to the respective leadership for further discussion prior to the next meeting

The meeting included:

- presentations and discussion of the recent survey results for the Bluenose-East and Bathurst herds in the context of past surveys and developing trends;

- discussion of the actions that should be undertaken focusing on the key pressures for each of the herds in the context of what is currently being done and the gaps and challenges; and
- discussion of the key elements of a draft action plan to address the gaps and challenges that participants would take back to their respective leadership for discussion and direction prior to the next meeting on October 22-23, 2014.

The agenda for the October 9-10 meeting and the list of participants are attached at annex 1 and annex 2.

This report summarizes the key results of the October 9-10, 2014 meeting and potential components of an action plan. The latter are listed in section 7 below, by category and by potential actions. Please note that while consensus was achieved on some possible measures, in most cases no such consensus emerged and the list of actions simply represents ideas put forward during the meeting. It will be up to the participants and their respective leadership to determine which of the possible actions they support and wish to see implemented as part of a package of actions. As has been stated many times, while harvest reductions may be important and even necessary, harvest reductions on their own will not arrest the current downward trend in caribou numbers in both herds. The October 22-23, 2014 meeting is intended to refine possible actions, agree upon a “package” of actions and their implementation, and to bring that agreement forward to the November leadership meeting.

Aboriginal participants at the October 9-10, 2014 meeting requested a separate caucus during the October 22-23, 2014 meeting. The other participants in the meeting supported this initiative. Further discussion with ENR officials will be necessary to sort out the details of the caucus in the context of the October 22-23, 2014 meeting.

2.0 Meeting Overview

Day one of the two-day meeting began with an opening prayer, introductory remarks by Ernie Campbell, DM of ENR and brief orientation remarks by the facilitator, followed by round-table introductions and expectations. Most participants echoed the key objectives set out for the agenda, i.e., a common understanding of the current status and trends of the two herds, the respective pressures they face, the steps currently being taken to address those pressures, the key gaps, and recommended actions to address those gaps. Many participants also emphasized the need to recognize that whatever plan is decided upon, it needs to be a collective plan that involves all affected and responsible parties – including governments (federal, GNWT and GN, and Aboriginal), industry, resource management boards and communities. All agreed that harvesting restrictions alone will not return the herds to health and that all parties had a role in developing and implementing a comprehensive solution.

Opening remarks were followed by a series of presentations (see the attached agenda at Annex 1) and subsequent discussions. The presentations are available on the website created by ENR to disseminate information related to the current situation with regard to the Bluenose East and Bathurst herds (<http://twq.enr.gov.nt.ca/documents>; permission to access the site can be obtained via Nicole McCutchen, Manager, Wildlife Research and Management (Nicole.McCutchen@gov.nt.ca). The site includes management plans, scientific and TK reports and studies, and other related reference

materials. Documents will continue to be added to the website as they become available.

Amendments to the agenda included a decision to set John Boulanger's presentation on the statistical reliability of the survey results aside (he did present to a small group during lunch of the second day) and given time constraints, the deferral of Karin Clark's presentation on cumulative effects to the morning of the second day. Boulanger's presentation was set aside because there was no indication among participants that further discussion of the survey results was needed: participants were of the consensus view that the results are reliable and that the two herds are continuing to decline in numbers at an alarming rate. Finally, instead of forming smaller break-out groups on the morning of the second day, the group elected to stay in plenary for the discussions.

3.0 Key Areas of Consensus Regarding the Herds and Potential Actions

The discussions following each presentation during day one and on the morning of day two revealed numerous areas of broad consensus. These included:

- while the herds are clearly in trouble (numbers are low and the trend is down), the situation is particularly critical for the Bathurst herd;
- in both cases, the downward trend is a result of "natural" factors (e.g., weather, predation), induced factors (e.g., harvesting, possible increased energetic costs related to avoidance of industrial developments including roads) and cumulative effects;
- while the herds are experiencing similar trends, the pressures on the herds are not the same and nor will be the action plans although there are common pressures and there will be common actions;
- harvesting limits on their own will not arrest the current declines. Additional action is needed, perhaps including predator control and limits to industrial growth;
- strong action is required now by all parties to the full extent of their mandates and abilities, and all parties need to be fully engaged in developing and implementing comprehensive solutions in the short, medium and long terms;
- the leadership of all organizations needs to be more fully engaged in finding, implementing and supporting those actions, once they are put into motion;
- support (ownership) by communities for the action plans is crucial to the success of the action plans;
- the important work (and lessons learned) of the Porcupine Caribou Management Board, the ACCWM and the Bathurst planning process needs to be incorporated in the action plans that are developed for the Bathurst and Bluenose East herds. These initiatives have resulted in broad frameworks for herd stewardship. Short term actions should be consistent with these frameworks.

4.0 Pressures on the Herds

There are numerous single and multiple pressures on each herd, including natural cycles, contaminants, disease, parasites, habitat limitations (notably the loss of winter range due to fires and the possible reduction of good quality summer forage due to

drought), harvesting (particularly of cows), predation by wolves and bears, disturbances related to industry (winter road traffic, mine site activities, aircraft flights at low levels, etc), and the cumulative effects of all these pressures.

Contaminants, disease and parasites are not seen to be significant pressures, particularly when herds are in low numbers as they are now. Caribou do cycle naturally, as has been shown through a number of scientific and TK studies. While the current situation appears to reflect a natural cycle, there are other pressures at play that are likely exacerbating the situation.

With regard to weather, while it may not be possible to prevent the negative effects of weather and climate change, it is important to understand those effects to enable better prediction and planning. For example, the effect of drought possibly reducing the quality of summer forage, combined with forest fires reducing the amount of suitable winter range (for the Bathurst herd in particular), combined with heavy winter snowfalls reducing access to winter forage collectively place considerable stress on the health of individual animals and the herds as a whole. Poor summer range may prevent cows from gaining condition conducive to getting pregnant; calves may be lost over the summer as well. The cumulative effect of changes in weather may result in low cow and calf survival and continued low pregnancy rates. Heavier snowfalls may in some years further reduce access to winter forage in the remaining unburnt areas, putting yet more stress on the herds. Ultimately, those responsible for caribou stewardship will need to understand the effects of these factors on caribou numbers when they are planning other measures, including possible harvest restrictions or limits to development on the range.

Forest fires in 2014 significantly reduced the amount of suitable winter range north and northwest of Great Slave Lake, and may result in the Bathurst herd moving further west into the winter range of the Bluenose East herd. This would make the herd increasingly vulnerable to overharvesting as there are currently no harvesting limits for Zone R/BC/01.

With regard to predation, while it is clear that tundra wolves are the most important predator as they prey almost exclusively on caribou and bears take numbers of caribou, there was little common ground about the desirability or effectiveness of wolf control measures to increase caribou survival. Little is known about the extent of bear predation, let alone the potential effectiveness of bear control. Wolf control and bear control are controversial topics. That said, predation by wolves and bear are no doubt causing significant pressure on herd survival.

Concerns about the effects of industrial development in the caribou range, particularly that of the Bathurst, are well known. Mining, winter roads, aircraft movements, mineral exploration camps – all create zones of influence with regard to factors such as noise and dust, barriers to caribou movements, and direct (e.g., collisions) and indirect mortality (e.g., increased vulnerability to predation through inadequate road design, fencing and so on). Effects related to increased energetic costs resulting from these and other disturbances contribute to cumulative effects. Issues related to disturbance are of lesser concern for the Bluenose East whose range is at present relatively unaffected by developments, although several developments (mines and all-season and winter roads) are pending. Roads, particularly where accessible by pickup trucks, have increased access to key caribou ranges for hunters.

Finally, the cumulative effects of all these and other pressures on the herds are no doubt the real cause of the continued declines. There is no single “smoking gun”. Instead, the combine effects of natural cycles, weather, harvesting, predation, industry disturbances, disease and parasites are ultimately responsible for the current situation. Some of these pressures can be controlled by people, others cannot. The focus therefore needs to be on the measures that can be applied to reduce those pressures we can affect.

5.0 Measures in Place

Presenters described a number of actions – both short-term and long-term – that are currently being implemented. These include:

- Aboriginal harvest restrictions on the Bathurst herd;
- elimination of resident and outfitter hunts on both herds;
- range planning and cumulative effects studies and programs led by ENR with the cooperation of industry and other parties;
- a more focused approach by the GNWT to caribou stewardship in environmental assessment and regulatory reviews;
- various research and monitoring programs and regular herd surveys;
- discussions between GN and GNWT officials regarding the harvest of Bathurst caribou in Nunavut;
- discussions with Alaskan researchers regarding the feasibility of wolf control programs in the Bluenose East and Bathurst ranges;
- herd modelling studies;
- engagement of the Aboriginal leadership in the NWT with regard to the current crisis, including the leadership meeting in August 2014 and the planned follow-up meeting in November 2014;
- the work of the ACCWM and the Bathurst initiative between the Tl̓ich̓ Government and ENR; and,
- the work of the Caribou Technical Working Group including this meeting and the planned follow-up meeting on October 22-23, 2014.

Further details are provided in the presentations which can be found on the reference website.

6.0 Important Gaps

Participants identified a number of significant gaps and needs including:

- effective engagement with Nunavut government officials, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board and communities regarding harvesting limits and possible predator control on the calving grounds;
- better and more current information regarding summer forage;
- enhanced surveys;
- the need for more collars to better track caribou movements and survival;
- more complete harvest data collection by all harvesters;
- more effective leadership and better education regarding current caribou issues and respectful harvesting;
- simple and clear models to demonstrate the results on herd survival of changing harvest patterns, predator controls and other factors;

- more effective control and reduction of the harvest of Bathurst caribou in zone R/BC/01;
- possible constraints on the Bluenose East harvest;
- reducing the harvest of cows in both herds; and,
- improved understanding of the effects of predation and possible predator controls.

7.0 Potential Actions and Requirements

Following the final presentation on the morning of the second day, participants began to discuss possible actions related to the following topics:

- habitat;
- predation;
- harvesting;
- disturbance; and,
- education.

7.1 Possible Actions Regarding Habitat

- **improved and (near) real-time summer forage information:**
 - creation of a regional vegetation monitoring protocol;
 - development of representative sample plots;
 - application of remote sensing information including satellite imagery;
 - coordination with industry and GN, and sound information management systems.
- **improved fire management to prevent future fires from burning important winter range forage and migration corridors:**
 - ENR/GNWT to fight fires on caribou range as Priority 1-equivalent fires;
 - significant additional firefighting resources including aircraft and ground crews;
 - improved fire prediction and response times;
 - improved real time monitoring;
 - better engagement with TK holders to identify important habitat and constraints to fire fighting.

7.2 Possible Actions Regarding Predator Control

- **improved understanding of predator (especially wolves) impacts on caribou survival, on the entire range:**
 - additional research and monitoring of wolves and bears;
 - additional collars on wolves and bears to determine how many caribou they are taking, their migration patterns, pup/cub survival and other related information;
 - incorporation of TK in all aspects of studies;
 - improved engagement with Nunavut communities, governments and organizations.

- **improved understanding of the feasibility and effectiveness of wolf control with respect to caribou survival:**
 - application by ENR of the Alaskan wolf control feasibility template;
 - further work with Alaskan specialists including possible participation by Alaskans in the October 22-23, 2014 meeting;
 - engagement with NWT and Nunavut communities and agencies to determine the cultural acceptability and likely effectiveness of targeted wolf control programs before decisions are made.
- **increased wolf harvest:**
 - additional incentives (e.g., higher payments for wolf pelts);
 - open the incentive program to resident hunters;
 - engage experienced wolf hunters to operate in teams in critical areas, e.g., caribou migration corridors;
 - further discussion with Aboriginal communities and organizations to determine overall receptiveness to organized predator control.

7.3 Possible Actions Regarding Caribou Harvests

- **reduced total harvest of the Bathurst herd, including reduced percentage of cows taken (80/20 bull/cow ratio) and improved management of incidental take of Bathurst caribou outside the current control zones:**
 - sub-zoning to accompany movements of Bathurst caribou;
 - increased number of collars to enable better tracking of the herd;
 - improved (mandatory?) harvest monitoring, reporting and enforcement;
 - reduced harvest of cows (80/20 bull:cow ratio may be feasible; 0 cow harvest desirable but likely not feasible);
 - focus on harvesting young bulls;
 - further limits on total Bathurst harvest;
 - prevent sale of caribou meat and avoid wastage;
 - closure of Zone R/BC/01 to all harvest given that the Bathurst herd may use that area for wintering following the 2014 fire season;
 - establish sub-zones to prevent harvest of Bathurst caribou ("portable" protection measure);
 - reduction or elimination of the current allowable harvest in the control zone;
 - assisted hunts in the Ahiak/Beverly winter range when Bathurst caribou are known to be absent;
 - assignment of tag management to communities or Aboriginal governments;
 - considerable further discussion with affected parties;
 - coordination with the joint Tlîchô/ENR Bathurst caribou planning initiative.
- **reduced harvest of Bluenose East herd:**
 - considerable further discussion with affected parties based on a clear demonstration that a reduced harvest is necessary;
 - focus on harvesting young bulls;
 - prevent sale of caribou meat;
 - reduced take of cows (80/20 bull/cow);

- improved (mandatory?) harvest monitoring, reporting and enforcement;
 - closure of Zone R/BC/01;
 - increased number of collars to enable better monitoring of herd movements;
 - possible assignment of tag management to communities;
 - coordination with the ACCWM management plan.
- **caribou substitution options:**
 - increased harvest of moose, musk ox, fish;
 - assisted hunts in areas where caribou numbers are still healthy and the herd can sustain a small additional harvest.
- **enforcement:**
 - ENR and the communities to work more closely together to ensure that once the rules are set (including no meat wastage), people respect them and those who don't are dealt with effectively;
 - community issuance of tags and responsibility for ensuring accurate reporting of harvests.
- **increased role for renewable resource boards:**
 - additional resources, education and capacity to ensure that the board are able to exercise their full mandates.
- **improved modelling:**
 - clear and simple models to demonstrate various effects on the herds of, for example, reduced total harvest, 80/20 bull/cow harvest, 0 cow harvest, young bull only harvest, status quo harvest, and so on.
- **increased action on other fronts:**
 - commitments by other parties, including Nunavut government and organizations, to reduce their impact on herd health, to increase monitoring and research efforts, to consider predator controls, to reduce disturbances and to increase the direct engagement of communities and TK holders in all aspects of caribou stewardship;
 - limit harvesters to transporting caribou kill by toboggan rather than truck;
 - identification of go/no go zones in conjunction with communities.

7.4 Possible Actions Regarding Disturbance

- **reduced disturbance by industry (including winter road traffic) on caribou range:**
 - improved engagement of industry and government leaders to place priority on caribou stewardship;
 - improved research and monitoring over the caribou range;
 - improved coordination among industry (mining, exploration and winter road Joint Venture companies), governments and communities to reduce industry disturbances;
 - improved traffic control on winter roads, and more effective monitoring and enforcement;

- improved all weather and winter road design to avoid direct and indirect negative effects on caribou;
 - consideration of limits to growth, e.g., limiting additional development on the caribou range until effects of existing developments have been significantly reduced and the herds are recovering;
 - no development on calving grounds and seasonal restrictions at other times of year, e.g., during post-calving aggregations, winter foraging.
- **improved range planning:**
 - more focused and accelerated efforts to by ENR with respect to its range planning initiative.
- **improved consideration of caribou stewardship concerns in environmental assessments and regulatory reviews:**
 - more effort by proponents, governments and other interveners in environmental assessment and regulatory reviews to bring caribou issues to the fore, including cumulative effects considerations;
 - better understanding of cumulative effects and application of that knowledge in environmental assessments and regulatory reviews;
 - improved data management, including centralized repositories, standard data collection protocols and clear management roles and responsibilities.
- **regulations under the *NWT Wildlife Act*:**
 - on a priority basis, create regulations to prevent and mitigate effects of development on caribou, pursuant to the *Wildlife Act*.
- **role of new Department of Lands:**
 - can develop policy directives, lease conditions, stronger enforcement and best practices to minimize impacts on caribou;
 - can undertake short-term or emergency land withdrawals and potential for longer term withdrawals;
 - can cooperate with Transport Canada on low-level flight notices;
 - can encourage more voluntary efforts by industry;
 - initiating land use planning exercises to provide greater certainty for all parties; plans can include special consideration for caribou habitat and disturbances.

7.5 Possible Actions Regarding Education

- **community outreach programs**
 - educate hunters and communities about the effects of harvesting cows vs bulls using simple models including Caribou Calculator;
 - visit schools and educate kids about caribou stewardship, the current situation and the need to treat caribou (e.g., avoiding wastage) and the land with respect;
 - educate the leadership and engage the leadership in educating others and in supporting stewardship measures using local radio and other communication means including education for a and other meetings;

- proposed Sahtu Renewable Resources Board caribou workshop in Déline prior to the November leadership meeting;
- gain industry support (resources and contributions in kind) for education programs;
- apply lessons learned in other management initiatives, e.g., Porcupine Caribou Management Plan, ACCWM in developing community buy-in for conservation measures including harvest constraints.

8.0 Conclusion

Participants had full and frank discussions during the two day meeting. Most felt that the objectives of the meeting had been achieved. Common ground appeared to be reached on a number of points. These include:

- recognition that both herds are in serious decline and the situation is most concerning for the Bathurst herd;
- support for continued and perhaps increased limitations on the harvest of the Bathurst herd and cautious support for limitations on the harvest of the Bluenose East herd;
- recognition that the current harvest of cows is a significant problem for both herds and needs to be reduced to acceptable levels. The 80/20 bull to cow ratio was generally accepted, with an emphasis on harvesting young bulls;
- recognition that while reductions in predator numbers may be helpful, all factors related to a wolf control program must be considered carefully and discussed broadly before a decision to proceed is taken;
- while there is support in general for harvest limits, that support is conditional on other steps being taken, particularly by industry and governments. A number of possible actions are outlined in section 7 of this report. There was no consensus on the “package” of measures that should be implemented. Almost all will require additional resources from government and industry.
- community buy-in is essential and may require community management of tags. Mandatory reporting of harvest may be acceptable if that reporting is done through the communities or renewable resource boards, rather than directly to government;
- Government of Nunavut and Nunavut agencies (including the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board) need to be part of the solution. More complete participation and engagement by Nunavut agencies is needed for meaningful progress in a number of areas;
- harvesting alternate species (with possible government support), encouraging trade and barter of alternate country foods, the prohibition of the sale of caribou meat and increased enforcement were all seen as necessary components of an overall action plan.

Over the next two weeks participants will be briefing their respective leadership on the results of the meeting and getting direction as to the next steps, in preparation for the October 22-23, 2014 meeting. An Aboriginal caucus has been proposed as part of this meeting. In addition, the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board is planning a caribou workshop in Déline prior to the November leadership meeting.

Annex 1: Meeting Agenda

Bathurst and Bluenose East Caribou Technical Workshop October 9-10, 2014

Tree of Peace, Yellowknife, NWT

The October 9-10, 2014 workshop will focus on the following:

- presentations and discussion of the recent survey results for the Bluenose-East and Bathurst herds in the context of past surveys and developing trends;
- discussion of the actions that should be undertaken focusing on the key pressures for each of the herds in the context of what is currently being done and the gaps and challenges;
- development of a draft action plan to address the gaps and challenges that participants can then take back to their respective leaderships for discussion and direction prior to the next meeting on October 22-23, 2014.

The agenda for the October 9-10 workshop is set out below. An agenda for the October 22-23, 2014 workshop will be drafted and distributed following the first meeting.

Meeting Objectives

- common understanding of the current status of the Bathurst and Bluenose-East caribou herds based on surveys, community observations and trends;
- common understanding of the respective pressures the herds face and potential mitigation measures;
- common understanding of the steps that are currently being taken to address the pressures;
- common understanding of the gaps that remain and the steps that can be taken to address them;
- agreement on a draft action plan to address the gaps and pressures that can be taken back to the respective leadership for further discussion prior to the next meeting

October 9, 2014

0830

- Opening prayer
- Opening remarks: welcome, context, expectations (Ernie Campbell, Deputy Minister, ENR))
- Housekeeping, agenda review, meeting expectations (facilitator; round table)

0930

- 2014 Bathurst and Bluenose East survey results and herd status (Jan Adamczewski)
- Survey reliability (John Boulanger)

Discussion

1030 – 1045 Break

1045

- Review of background and context including:
 - ACCWM Bluenose-East caribou management plan (Jody Pelllissey)
 - Bathurst caribou management planning initiatives (Joe Rabesca)
 - Porcupine caribou management plan (Marsha Branigan)

Discussion

1200 – 1300 Lunch

1300

- Application of TK in caribou management (Deb Simmons)

Discussion

1400

- Overview of natural cycles and key pressures: description, implications for caribou (by herd), mitigation measures, current actions and gaps. Topics to be discussed will include:
 - caribou cycles (Jan Adamczewski);
 - contaminants, disease and parasites (Bruno Croft);
 - habitat (including climate change and fire) (Bruno Croft);
 - harvesting (John Boulanger);
 - predation by wolves and grizzlies (Dean Cluff);
 - industry disturbances and cumulative effects (Karin Clark).

Discussion

1515 – 1530 Break

1515

- Continuation of above discussion

1600

- Summary of significant gaps and challenges (facilitator)
- Identification of a short list of the things really matter, and which can we actually do something about (all)

Discussion

1645

- wrap-up for the day (round table)

Adjournment for the day

October 10, 2014

0830

- welcome, housekeeping

0845

- review of previous day discussion and highlights
- continuation of previous day's discussion (if needed)
- options for addressing key gaps and challenges, by herd and by key pressure

Discussion

1000-1015 Break

1015

- continue above

1200 – 1300 Lunch

1300

- Review of morning discussion, summary of management options and key actions
Discussion
- Develop draft action plan based on previous discussion (break-out groups)
Discussion

1500 – 1515 Break

1515

- Continue above
- Reports from break-out groups
Discussion

1630

- Agenda for October 22-23, 2014 meeting
- Wrap-up summary, next steps, concluding remarks
- Closing prayer

Adjournment of the meeting

Annex 2: List of Participants
Bathurst and Bluenose East Caribou Technical Workshop
October 9 – 10, 2014

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