



## SUBMISSION TO THE

## NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD

## FOR

## Information:

Decision: **X**

**Issue: Recommendation to address the decline of the Bluenose East caribou herd.**

### **Background**

- The Bluenose East caribou herd is a shared herd harvested by hunters in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.
- A harvest monitoring program suggests approximately 3,500 caribou were harvested in 2009 -2010. Subsistence harvest in Nunavut accounted for between 1000–1500 caribou annually, which represents 36% of the overall harvest. There is no commercial or sport harvest on this herd in Nunavut.
- The June 2014 reconnaissance survey suggests that Bluenose East caribou (one year or older) on the calving ground have further declined by approximately 30% between 2013 and 2014. This is higher than the estimated annual rate of decline of 16.4% (CL= 7-29%) between the 2010 and 2013 surveys.
- In the past, the calving ground reconnaissance surveys have been a reliable index of abundance in tracking population trend when compared to full population assessments and trend based on aerial photo-surveys conducted every 3 years.
- In December 2014, the Government of Northwest Territories implemented an interim harvest restriction of 1,800 caribou for the 2014-2015 winter harvest season.
- The Bluenose East Caribou herd has shown a declining trend since 2000, with a continuous decline from 2010 to 2015. During this period, the herd declined from 123,000 to 38,500 caribou (2015).

### **Current Status**

- The Bluenose East Caribou herd decline is believed to be the result of natural cyclical fluctuation. It is not known if or to what extent harvesting or other human activities like mineral exploration and development may be contributing to the decline.
- Ongoing discussions on short and long term management actions are being held with various Nunavut wildlife management organizations, the public and First Nations governments in NWT, and the GNWT.

- The June 2015 aerial photo-plane survey results confirm the herd has continued to decline, with a total population estimate of 38,592 caribou. This is a significant decline from the 2013 population estimate of 68,000 caribou and represents a 21% annual rate of decline.
- Additional observations show conditions indicative of a declining herd: there is a below normal adult female survival rate (0.7) and calf cow ratio (0.2).
- In June 2015, the total preliminary estimate of breeding females is 17,396, which is considerably below the 2013 estimate.
- On January 14-15, 2015, DOE conducted consultations with the Kugluktuk HTO to set a TAH. In the interim, and until new scientific and Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit information became available, a TAH of 1000 Bluenose East caribou was recommended.
- According to the “Taking Care of Caribou” Management plan, accepted by the KRWB, the ACWM on December 18 2015 assessed the herd in the orange zone based on the 2015 population estimate and trend indicators. To minimize harvest risk, a recommended harvest rate for a herd in orange is 2.5%. Assuming there are approximately 38,500 caribou, this represents an overall sustainable harvest of 950 caribou, where the applied historical harvest allocation (36%) results in a TAH of 340 for Nunavut.
- The Kugluktuk HTO has already implemented the following voluntary management actions:
  - No organized community caribou hunts
  - HTO does not support sale/ purchase of caribou under the country food distribution program
  - HTO supports shift in harvest to alternate species like muskoxen
  - No sport or commercial harvest of Bluenose East caribou in Nunavut
  - Increase in educational and public awareness programs by HTO and DOE
- DOE has engaged with and continues to work closely with the affected community and respective co-management partners (NTI, HTOs, KRWB) and the NWT on management actions needed to address the Bluenose East caribou decline.

### **Consultations:**

- Co-management consultations on the decline and conservation concern occurred:
  - September 9, 2014 - Kugluktuk HTO board meeting
  - September 22, 2014 - Kugluktuk community information and consultations
  - October 9-10, 2014 - Technical Meeting 1, GN and NTI participation
  - October 15-18, 2014 - KWRB AGM meeting
  - October 22-23, 2014 - Technical Meeting 2, GN participation
  - October 31, 2014 - Kugluktuk HTO board meeting
- Consultations with the Kugluktuk HTO to specifically discuss a recommended TAH of 1,000 occurred on February 11, 2015. While there was recognition of

conservation concerns and the need for harvest limitations, there was no consensus on the proposed TAH of 1000.

- From March 2 to 6, 2015 a caribou educational week was hosted by the HTO with presentations by DOE in Kugluktuk to educate the community about the Bluenose East caribou decline.
- On January 14-15, 2016, following the Nunavut Wildlife Management Process, the HTO of Cambridge Bay, Kugluktuk, Bathurst and Bay Chimo, KRWB, and NTI were consulted on a GN-recommended revised Total Allowable Harvest of 340 caribou.
- Although the new status of the herd was agreed upon, no consensus on the TAH was reached.
- To help the recovery of the herd, all the HTOs were consistent in recommending incentives to increase harvest of predators (mainly wolf) and protection of the calving ground.
- During the January 20, 2016 Bluenose-East Allocation Meeting, the HTO of Kugluktuk recommended an allocation of 35% instead of 36% to allow for a minimal 2% harvest for each of the five small communities of NWT.

## **Recommendations**

- That the NWMB establish a Nunavut TAH of 340 male caribou for the Bluenose East Herd.