

SOUTHAMPTON ISLAND CARIBOU - STATUS AND COMMERCIAL HARVEST**Information:****Decision: X****ISSUE:**

The Coral Harbour Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO) is requesting an increase of 500 commercial caribou tags (4,000 to 4,500), and an increase of 50 sport hunting tags (10 to 60) for WMU J/2 (Southampton Island).

BACKGROUND:

Forty eight caribou were re-introduced to Southampton Island from neighbouring Coats Island in 1967. The estimated herd size in July 1995 was 18,275 (excluding calves). Evaluation of caribou body condition to date suggests that the population remains healthy. Although wolves have recently re-occupied the island, low numbers and local hunting pressure will likely limit the role wolves can play over the short-term in the herd's population dynamics.

The Department of Renewable Resources has been monitoring the domestic caribou harvest on Southampton Island. Hunters in Coral Harbour reported taking about 1,000 caribou annually for domestic use. The HTO suggests that reporting is incomplete and the annual domestic harvest is actually closer to 1,500 - 2,000 caribou. Renewable Resources will begin collecting harvest data monthly in 1996 and will collect this information until the Nunavut Harvest Study is in place.

The additional 500 commercial tags will facilitate an uninspected harvest to supply caribou meat to the Rankin Inlet meat plant for use within the NWT. In November and December 1995, 410 caribou were harvested for the Rankin Inlet plant. An increased quota has been requested so that the quota for the inspected commercial harvest can remain at 4000.

The request for 50 additional tags for sport hunting is relatively small and will be comprised primarily of bull caribou. This increased harvest will have little impact on the herd.

If all the quota is taken and the domestic harvest is as high as the HTO suspects, the 1996 harvest will likely halt population growth. Management strategies will then need to focus on ensuring a long-term sustainable harvest.

Biological research is required to monitor condition and pregnancy rates, determine calf recruitment rates, and obtain an updated estimate of herd size. Another key initiative should address range ecology. By quantifying lichen biomass resources, and by improving our understanding of the environmental parameters which regulate herd dynamics, we will be able to better manage this caribou resource. A research proposal

to address these items will be developed for Nunavut Wildlife Management Board consideration during 1996.

CONSULTATIONS:

At the Kewatin Wildlife Federation general meeting in October 1995, the KWF approved and supported Coral Harbour's request for 500 additional commercial caribou tags, and an additional 50 caribou sport hunting tags from the Southampton Island herd.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) The request for an additional 50 sport hunting tags should be approved.
- b) The request for an additional 500 commercial tags should be approved for 1995/96 and 1996/97 only. The sustainability of the quota should be re-evaluated in 1996 before any extension of the increase is approved.

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