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Nunavut Wildlife Management Board

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Conserving wildlife through the application of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and scientific knowledge

July 10, 2020

Honourable Joe Savikataaq
Minister of Environment
Government of Nunavut

Nunavut Wildlife Management Board's Decision on the Proposal to Reduce the Total Allowable Harvest of Bluenose-East Caribou from 340 to 107 and Establish a Non-Quota Limitation of Males-only

Dear Minister Savikataaq:

Background

Proposal for Decision

On October 31, 2019, the Government of Nunavut submitted a proposal for a decision to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB or Board) to recommend a decrease in the Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) for the Bluenose-east caribou herd from 340 to 107. The proposal also requested that the NWMB should establish a Non-Quota Limitation to restrict harvesting of Bluenose-east caribou to males-only.

The Government of Nunavut's Proposal was based on the results of the most recent Bluenose-east caribou scientific population study led by the Government of Northwest Territories, in partnership with the Government of Nunavut, in 2018. The aerial photographic survey produced a population estimate of 19,294 adult caribou (95% confidence interval = 16,527–22,524), an indication that the population has declined by about 50% between 2015 and 2018. The study also found that female survival and calf productivity is low. Human harvesting contributed very little to the most recent decline, but the study suggests that future harvesting, if not responsibly managed, could impact the herd's recovery.

The Bluenose-east caribou herd is transboundary, traditionally harvested by several Northwest Territories Indigenous groups and the community of Kugluktuk in Nunavut. Their range extends from Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories to the herd's traditional calving grounds west of Kugluktuk, Nunavut.

In 2016, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) assessed the Bluenose-east and other barren-ground caribou herds as Threatened. Consultations with Nunavut communities and Inuit organizations on the proposed listing are ongoing.



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In 2018, the Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT) and the Tlicho Government jointly recommended that the herd-wide TAH for Bluenose-east caribou be reduced from 750 to 300 in response to the drastic, measured population decline of approximately 50% between 2015 and 2018. A proportional user-to-user allocation agreement was also reached in 2015 and is the basis for the Nunavut portion of the recommended TAH (107; 35.8% of the recommended herd-wide quota). In June 2019, the Wek'ëezhii Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) and governments in the Northwest Territories (NWT) established a TAH of 193, bulls only, for all users within the Wek'ëezhii region, for the period 2019–2021, following an in-person hearing. The number (193) corresponds to the NWT portion specified in the user-to-user allocation agreement (64.2%).

The NWMB considered the Government of Nunavut's proposal during its In-Camera meeting on December 5, 2019 (IC004-2019). The Board also considered a submission from the Kugluktuk Hunters and Trappers Organization (Kugluktuk HTO) regarding the management of the Bluenose-east caribou herd. The Kugluktuk HTO did not support the Government of Nunavut's proposal. Given the disagreement between stakeholders regarding the future direction for management of the herd, the NWMB decided to hold an in-person public hearing to gather more information from co-management partners, community members, users from other jurisdictions, and other interested parties, before making a decision.

NWMB Public Hearing

The NWMB's In-Person Public Hearing was held in Kugluktuk, Nunavut, on March 2–3, 2020, at the Community Hall. In attendance at the hearing were representatives of the Government of Nunavut, Kugluktuk HTO, the Kitikmeot Inuit Association (KIA), the Kitikmeot Regional Wildlife Board (KRWB), Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI), the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), the Wek'ëezhii Renewable Resources Board, the Délı̄në Got'ı̄në Government and Délı̄në Renewable Resource Council, the Sahtu Renewable Resource Board, the Yellowknife Dene First Nations, and members of the public.

In addition to the oral submissions presented at the hearing, the NWMB received written submissions from the Government of Nunavut, the Kugluktuk HTO, GNWT, KIA, KRWB, NTI, the Wek'ëezhii Renewable Resources Board, the Délı̄në Got'ı̄në Government and Délı̄në Renewable Resource Council, the Sahtu Renewable Resource Board, and Yellowknife Dene First Nations.



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Changes to the Total Allowable Harvest (TAH)

In deciding on the Government of Nunavut's proposal for a TAH of 107 and males-only NQL, the Board considered evidence that the Bluenose-east herd has declined and may continue to decline in the future. The Board heard Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit evidence that most caribou herds undergo natural population fluctuations in the past and that Bluenose-east caribou can recover from the current decline. The Board also recognized—based on the evidence provided—that the potential cumulative threats to the Bluenose-east caribou herd are not fully understood and may be different from the past. Based on this information, the Board determined that stakeholders must consider all possible measures to promote the herd's recovery.

The Board received no credible evidence to suggest that the population decline is driven by human harvesting or by emigration from the Bluenose-east to either a different location or another caribou herd. Instead, the Board considered that other factors raised by stakeholders such as vegetation changes and predation might be causing the decline. The Board stresses the importance of a comprehensive cumulative effects study and an Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit study, to better understand and address the causes of the Bluenose-east caribou population decline and the potential for its recovery.

Based on the evidence provided at the hearing, the Board concluded that the Government of Nunavut's proposal to lower the TAH for Bluenose-east caribou to 107 focuses primarily on managing harvest without precisely identifying the conservation concern associated with the current TAH of 340.

The Board also considered arguments that a TAH of 107 could impact Inuit food security and cultural continuity, increase hunting pressure on the Dolphin and Union caribou herd and other wildlife, and erode local confidence and trust in the wildlife management system. In the Board's view, there is no evidence to suggest that the Government of Nunavut thoroughly assessed and considered the alternative TAH of 250 proposed by the community of Kugluktuk during government consultations. The Board is aware that the HTO also discussed a TAH of 150 as an acceptable alternative to 107.

Further, the Board considered past harvest records showing that less than half of the TAH has been harvested each year from Bluenose-east caribou since the establishment of the TAH in 2016 (Harvest levels are: 2016–17 = 163, 2017–18 = 174, 2018–19 = 93, and 2019–20 = 128). This level of harvest is probably due to limited access to the herd,



implemented as a part of the Kugluktuk community-based caribou management plan (such as alternate species harvesting, a no-hunting zone around the community, ban on sport hunting) will offset any conservation concerns associated with the harvest of females. Finally, the Board heard evidence from Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit that a male-only harvest could impact herd productivity, given the role that males and in particular bulls, play in population maintenance (reproduction, migration, calve protection from predators, and habitat selection).

Based on this evidence, the Board concluded that there is a need to maintain yearly access to female caribou by harvesters from Kugluktuk to sustain essential cultural practices, while also ensuring that overharvesting of female caribou does not occur. The Board, therefore, decided to establish a sex-selective NQL of up to a 1:1 female to male ratio, pursuant to Section 5.6.48 of the Nunavut Agreement. Under this NQL, up to 50%, but not more, of the total harvest may be female caribou.

Predator Research and Management Recommendations

At the NWMB's Public Hearing on Bluenose-east caribou, evidence was presented that predators of Bluenose-east caribou are responsible for direct mortalities. The NWMB recognizes that although predators are an essential part of a healthy ecosystem and play a vital role in maintaining prey population fitness and health, predation can also negatively impact cow and calf survival of small caribou populations.

The NWMB is supportive of on-the-ground predation control measures that have been put in place by the Governments of Nunavut and NWT. The Government of Nunavut's wolf sample collection program pays harvesters \$300 for each wolf sample (skin, hair, and a piece of the skull) returned to Conservation Officers. In the NWT, the *Enhanced North Slave Wolf Harvest Incentive Program* encourages wolf harvesting on the wintering range of the Bathurst and Bluenose-east herds and rewards harvesters up to \$1,950 per pelt, depending on the quality. The Board applauds the Government of NWT for inviting Inuit harvesters from Kugluktuk to participate in NWT wolf harvest programs in areas where the wolf harvest incentive zone overlaps with Nunavut Inuit traditional used areas.

At the hearing, the Board heard from the Kugluktuk HTO that an increase in wolf removal incentives is needed to sustain ground-based removal of wolves. The Board encourages the Government of Nunavut to consider increasing incentives for ground-based removal of wolves in the short term, particularly on the Bluenose-east caribou calving grounds. In the long-term, the Board identified the need for more information on predator abundance and distribution (especially wolverines and grizzly bears), as well as on the effectiveness of the current wolf management programs. Without this information, it will be challenging to effectively evaluate the effects of predation on



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NWMB is not striking a Basic Needs Levels for the Bluenose-east caribou, nor is it in a position to do so as the Basic Needs Level was not a part of the Public Hearing. The Board presumes in this case that Inuit have a Basic Needs Level at least equal to the full amount of the TAH set by the Board.

Conclusion

The Board recognizes that most caribou herds in Nunavut and across the Arctic are experiencing rapid declines. For the Bluenose-east caribou herd, the reported decline by approximately 50% between 2015 and 2018 necessitates an improved collaboration amongst relevant stakeholders in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories to manage the herd. The Board also recognizes that in Nunavut, Inuit are the most directly impacted by the implementation of a reduced TAH. The Government of Nunavut should recognize that Inuit also have a desire to ensure caribou remain sustainable. Alternative measures to promote recovery of the Bluenose-east herd are likely more challenging, but the engagement of Inuit (that are directly affected by harvest restrictions) in management of the Bluenose-east herd is important now, and into the future.

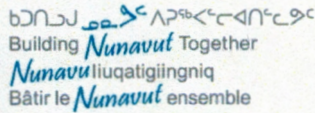
The NWMB hereby forwards its decisions to you for your consideration pursuant to Section 5.3.8 of the *Nunavut Agreement*. The NWMB recognizes the importance of this decision to stakeholders across the entire range of Bluenose-east caribou herd and looks forward to your prompt reply and timely completion of the *Nunavut Agreement* Article 5 decision-making process.

Should you or your officials have any questions or concerns about the contents of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact the NWMB.

Sincerely,

Daniel Shewchuk
Chairperson
Nunavut Wildlife Management Board

c.c. Drikus Gissing, Director of Wildlife Research and Management, Government of Nunavut-Department of Environment;
Jason Aliqatuqtuq, Director of Wildlife Operations, Government of Nunavut.





ᑦᑕᑕ 24, 2020

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