

May 27, 2016

Daniel Shewchuk, Acting Chair
Nunavut Wildlife Management Board
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Email: receptionist@nwmb.com

Via Email
receptionist@nwmb.com

Re: Public Hearing of the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board to Consider a Total Allowable Harvest for Nunavut Harvesters of the Bathurst Caribou Herd

Dear Mr. Shewchuk:

The following comments are submitted on behalf of the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board (WRRB), to be considered during the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board's (NWMB) public hearing for the Bathurst caribou herd, scheduled for June 14-15, 2016 in Cambridge Bay, NU. The Board wishes to thank the NWMB for granting the WRRB 'witness' status at the hearing, which permits the Board to make a presentation, respond to any questions, and observe the remainder of the hearing.

The WRRB has a mandate for wildlife, plant and forest management in Wek'èezhì and adheres to the principles and practices of conservation in fulfilling its duties. The Board shares responsibility for managing and monitoring the Bathurst caribou herd. The Board's comments provide the NWMB with additional information about the involvement of the WRRB in management of the Bathurst caribou herd in the Northwest Territories (NWT), specifically Wek'èezhì, and Nunavut.

Bathurst Caribou Herd Management in NWT

Since its inception in 2006, the WRRB has been invested in managing the Bathurst caribou herd. The Board has conducted three proceedings to address caribou harvest limitations in 2007, 2010, and 2016 for a herd that has continued a declining trend since 2003. Reports from the 2010 proceedings and Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and Tłchq Government (TG) responses are available on the WRRB website.

2016 Proceeding

In December 2015, TG and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), GNWT submitted the *Joint Proposal on Caribou Management Actions for the Bathurst Herd: 2016-2019* to the Board, which proposed new restrictions on hunter harvest, predator

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management to reduce wolf populations on the winter range of the Bathurst caribou herd and ongoing biological monitoring. More specifically, TG and ENR proposed the closure of all harvesting of the Bathurst caribou herd, including all aboriginal harvesting. The WRRB considers any specific restriction of harvest or component of harvest by way of a quota as the establishment of a total allowable harvest (TAH).

The WRRB complied with Section 12.3.10 of the Tłıchq Agreement and held a public hearing in Yellowknife, NT on February 23-24, 2016. In order to allow careful consideration of all of the information on the record and to meet legislated timelines, the WRRB has decided to prepare two separate reports to respond to the proposed management actions in the joint management proposal. The attached Reasons for Decision report, Part A, was submitted to TG and ENR on May 26, 2016. It deals with the governments' request for a TAH. Part B will deal with additional predator management actions, biological and environmental monitoring, and cumulative effects and will be submitted at the end of August 2016.

As per Section 12.5.5(a)(i) of the Tłıchq Agreement, the WRRB has sole responsibility for making a final determination with respect to a TAH for a population or stock of wildlife in Wek'èezhì. The WRRB determined that a total allowable harvest of zero shall be implemented for all users of the Bathurst caribou herd within Wek'èezhì for 2016-2019. Additionally, the WRRB recommended regular monitoring of the caribou wildlife management units and Bathurst caribou harvest as well as timely implementation of hunter education programs in all Tłıchq communities.

The Board also provided recommendations to TG and ENR regarding wolf management actions, including a pilot wolf training program for Tłıchq harvesters and a wolf feasibility assessment, led by the Board, to examine all options for wolf management, including costs, practicality and effectiveness.

Long-term Management Planning and Range Management

Further, the Board has participated in long-term management planning processes with TG and ENR, including the Bathurst Caribou Management Planning Working Group and the Bathurst Caribou Range Planning Working Group. The WRRB would like to see a management and range plan developed and implemented before the herd declines any further. There is a real possibility of extirpation and not having a management or range plan in place now is a real concern.

Bathurst Caribou Herd Management in Nunavut

While the WRRB's involvement in management processes in Nunavut has been limited, the Board has submitted comments to both the Nunavut Planning Commission (NPC) and the Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) related to the Bathurst caribou herd.

On June 9, 2015, the WRRB forwarded the following position to the NPC: *“the Bathurst and Bluenose-East calving and post-calving grounds should be areas where no exploration or development occurs at any time, as those areas are of the utmost importance to the health and sustainability of both herds”*. While the Board believes that all parts of barren-ground caribou annual range warrant some level of protection, the WRRB believes the calving and post-calving grounds should receive the highest level of protection. In the Board’s view, these areas should have no exploration or development on them at any time, as they are of significant importance for caribou.

The WRRB also provided comment to the NIRB, on July 17, 2015, for the proposed APEX Geoscience Ltd.’s “Muskox Diamond” Project proposal, noting the sensitive situation for the Bathurst caribou herd and the importance of minimizing disturbance to caribou during the calving season.

Conclusion

With the Bathurst caribou herd in such a perilous state, the Board believes that all peoples who harvest the herd must do their part to ensure the herd’s recovery. Users and managers must act now, in whatever ways possible, to protect the herd so future recovery may be possible. With harvest of the Bathurst caribou herd closed in the NWT, the WRRB encourages the NWMB to take a similar approach to the protection of Bathurst caribou in Nunavut.

The WRRB looks forward to continuing a collaborative relationship with the NWMB regarding barren-ground caribou. If you have any questions, please contact the office at (867) 873-5740 or jpellissey@wrrb.ca.

Sincerely,



J. Grant Pryznyk
Chair

Attachment

Cc Jason Akearok, Executive Director, NWMB
Hon. Wally Schumann, Minister, ENR
Ernie Campbell, Deputy Minister, ENR
Lynda Yonge, Director of Wildlife, ENR
Grand Chief Eddie Erasmus, TG
Laura Duncan, Tłıchq Executive Officer, TG