

SEP 02 2015

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Bathurst Calving Ground Survey Follow-up

We are writing to follow-up on our letter of July 9, 2015, wherein we provided you with an initial update regarding the Bathurst and Bluenose-East caribou calving ground surveys that were conducted in June 2015. This letter focuses on the Bathurst herd, and I will be sending another letter regarding the Bluenose-East herd in the coming weeks.

As we indicated in our previous letter, the survey was done at the peak of calving with good weather and visibility. This helped ensure that we were able to collect excellent data and photographs.

Regrettably, the concerns we identified as a result of the 2014 reconnaissance survey findings have now been verified by the photo survey. The survey shows the following:

- The total number of breeding cows in the Bathurst herd has declined to about 8,000 animals. This is approximately a 50 percent decline from 2009 and 2012, when there were approximately 16,000 breeding cows estimated in the herd.
- Further analysis is needed but it is expected that the total population estimate for the Bathurst herd will likely be somewhere between 16,000 – 22,000 animals. This is a further decline from an estimated total population of 35,000 animals in 2012.
- There was a lower pregnancy rate in 2015 than in previous surveys.
- The calf survival rate has been below 30 calves for every 100 cows in recent years.
- The cow survival rate continues to be below normal. An annual rate of 82-85 percent is needed to maintain a healthy herd.

These results are extremely worrisome as the estimates show that not only is there a continued decline in the population since the 2012 calving ground photo survey, there has been a further 50 percent decline in breeding females since the 2012 survey. The number of animals has continued to decline even without the added pressure of harvesting, and with the continued incentives to harvest predators.

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Given these circumstances, it is absolutely critical that we work together quickly to put in place an interim plan to support this herd. In past years, fall hunts of the Bathurst herd have begun as early as mid-August and early September. We need to take steps now to conserve the herd over the course of the 2015-2016 hunting season, while we develop a Bathurst herd management proposal with traditional users for review by the Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) for the 2016-2017 season. We are hopeful that we will be able to work with all user groups and develop a comprehensive proposal for submission to the WRRB. We are mindful however, that the board process takes time, and that proposals will require broad consultations, community meetings, and review by the Board.

Given the disappointing results of the Bathurst survey, the time required to finalize a proposal through the WRRB process, and the fact that the 2015-2016 harvesting season is upon us, it is important to consider all options available to help ensure the long term sustainability of this herd. These options could include:

i. Continuation of the Mobile Core Bathurst Conservation Area:

Last season, we worked together to establish a Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Conservation Area that moved with the caribou as they moved across the land in Wildlife Management Zones R/BC/02 and R/BC/03. There was no harvest allowed in the mobile conservation area. The location of the conservation area was determined by the location of collared Bathurst animals. This allowed us to be flexible and define the area based on the movement of the animals. The conservation area was mapped weekly and maps were distributed widely by Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), the Tłìchq, and Yellowknives Dene First Nation to their membership (sample map attached). This weekly update also provided an opportunity for the sharing of information on numerous issues ranging from predator sightings to harvest reporting, ice/snow conditions, and animal health. This approach provided protection to the Bathurst herd within a small area around the caribou rather than closing the entire R/BC/02 and R/BC/03 zones to all barren ground caribou harvest.

ii. Continue requirement for RBC/02 and RBC/03 Authorizations:

Any barren ground caribou harvested in R/BC/02 or R/BC/03 outside of the Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Conservation Area would again require an appropriate authorization. Authorizations would be managed and administered by the respective Aboriginal governments who would be responsible for ensuring that sound harvest reporting data is provided back to ENR on a regular basis.

iii. Continuation of Ongoing Collaborative Efforts:

Over the past year we have been working on implementing recommendations for additional actions put forward by the political leaders during our meetings last fall. These include:

- Participating in environmental assessments and land use planning processes to encourage the protection of caribou calving grounds and other important caribou habitat;
- Continuing discussions on the establishment of a Bathurst Caribou Board with representative from all traditional users;
- Leading a multi-party range planning process to develop land use recommendations for the Bathurst range;
- Developing frameworks for monitoring, assessing, and managing cumulative effects on this herd;
- Enhanced education/communication regarding the serious issues facing caribou;
- Maintaining the increased wolf harvest incentive program;
- Enhancing community monitoring and enforcement activities (ie joint community monitors, joint check stations, organized “sight your rifle” events, etc.);
- Enhanced communication regarding the existing system and the need to report wolf/caribou interaction, sightings, and prioritizing the collection of harvest data information.

iv. Tlìcho Letter/Proposal – August 25:

We are also mindful of a letter and proposal recently forwarded by the Tlìchʔ Government to the WRRB. That letter suggests a series of management actions related to the Bathurst herd; some of which may warrant further discussions amongst user groups.

We recognize that the survey results will be disappointing to many people who have been hoping the herd would have begun to show signs of recovery and could sustain a harvest. We are hopeful, however, that we can work together to establish some interim measures to ensure that subsistence harvesters have the ability to harvest and minimize the impact of the hardship caused by the limited harvest.

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We are seeking your input and comment on possible management actions for the 2015-16 harvest seasons. Given the timeline, we would appreciate receiving that input by September 18, 2015.

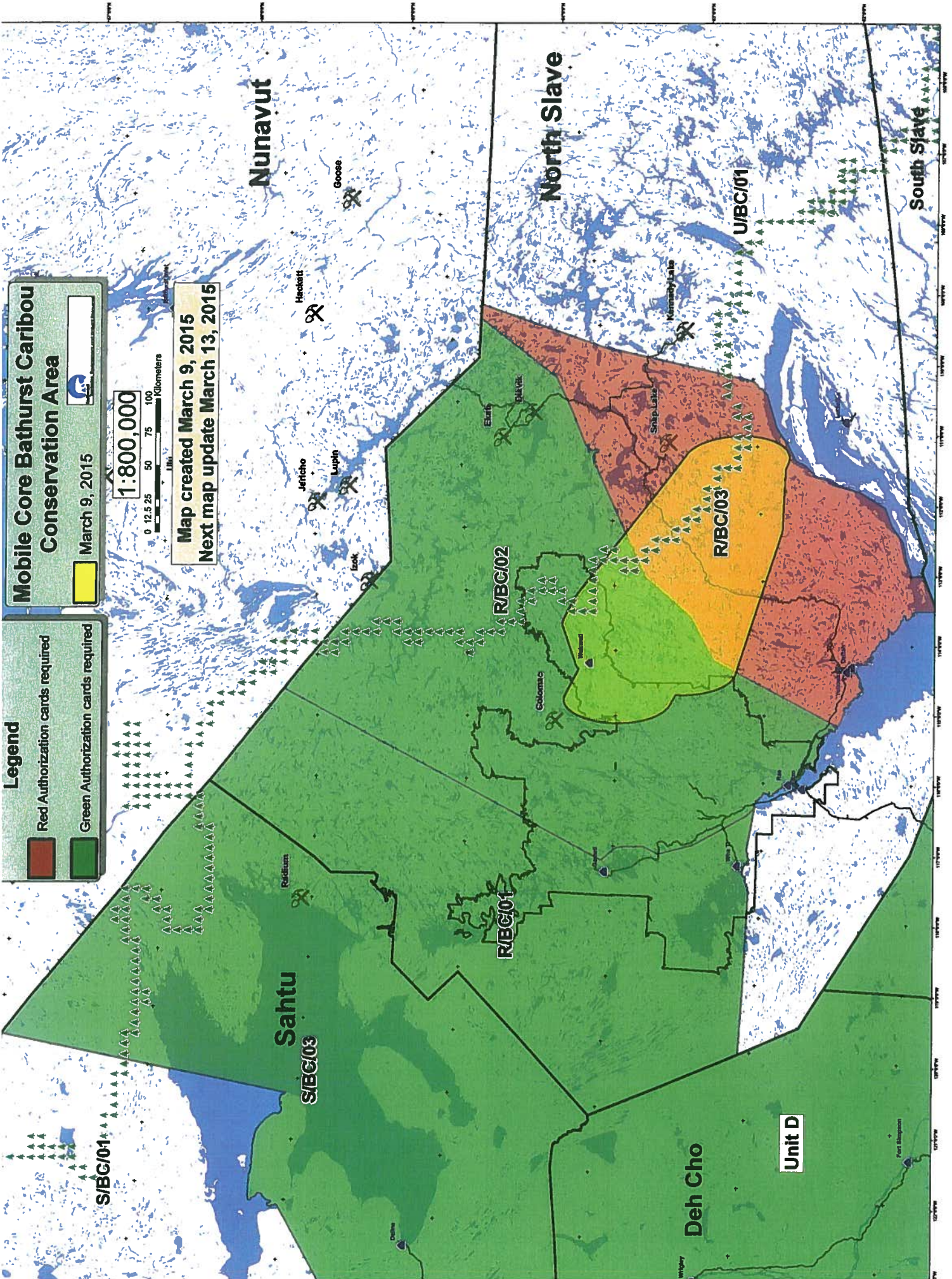
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several fluid, overlapping strokes that form a stylized representation of the name Ernie Campbell.

Ernie Campbell
Deputy Minister

Attachment

c. Ms. Jody Pellissey, Executive Director, WRRB



Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Conservation Area

March 9, 2015

1:800,000

0 12.5 25 50 75 100 Kilometers

Map created March 9, 2015
Next map update March 13, 2015

Legend

Red Authorization cards required

Green Authorization cards required

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