

# **Taking Care of Caribou: The Cape Bathurst, Bluenose West and Bluenose East Barren Ground Caribou Herds Management Plan**

## **Community Consultations. Kugluktuk, Nunavut. August 2011**

The following information was gathered during the community consultations conducted on the Management Plan by the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB or Board) in Kugluktuk during the week of August 1, 2011. The consultations were conducted by NWMB staff as per direction of the Board in response to a request by the community to be involved in a second round of engagements. This information will be presented to the Board when they consider approving the Management Plan at their Regular Meeting 003-2011 which is to be held in Kugluktuk during the week of September 12, 2011, and will be forwarded to the Advisory Committee for the Cooperation on Wildlife Management (ACCWM) and relevant co-management partners of the NWMB. It has been organized below to correspond with various sections of the Management Plan.

### **Section 2.2. Working together now and into the future**

- Co-management and cooperation between parties is key to the success of a plan like this. Discussions should occur regularly between managers and resources users from different jurisdictions if they are going to effectively co-manage the same resources/herds.

### **Section 4.0 What we are trying to do with the plan**

- It should be a priority to collect traditional knowledge from our elders – we are losing them quickly.
- The information held by members of the communities is a great resource.
- It is important to address the concerns and incorporate the input of the communities and to promote the management plan as such. It will help increase compliance, allowing the herds to respond positively. Hunters and elders have always managed the herds in their own way – to have a management plan that is effective, you have to respect these principles.

### **Section 7.0 How well are the herds doing?**

- There was some concern with the population estimates for the surveys done before 1999 given that the data were reanalyzed after the Bluenose herd was split into the Cape Bathurst, Bluenose west and Bluenose east herds.

### **Section 8.0 How and what we monitor**

- Radio collaring produces valuable data for monitoring movement; this should be continued since the caribou movement patterns are changing. This is especially important as surveys may not detect caribou if they have moved to a different location than they have used in the past.

#### **Section 8.1.4 Body condition and health**

- Caribou health should be monitored on an on-going basis.
- The number of diseased caribou is increasing and there are different types of diseases are being reported now - namely lungs stuck to the rib cage, pus in the joints, tape worm cysts, sandpaper skin.

- Community members need information from scientists about some of these diseases - it isn't always known if the meat is safe for consumption or not.
- There was interest in Kugluktuk hunters participating in a health monitoring program, and consensus that samples should be collected by hunters using kits that could be provided to them (bags, gloves, and labels) and submitting the samples for testing.
- Past health monitoring programs have often not reported the results to the community or to the harvester that submitted the sample, and when results were reported it was 7-8 months later. This is too long to wait when the meat is needed for food. Shorter waiting times and better feedback to the community and the reporting harvester would help increase reporting rates.

### **Section 8.2.1 Harvest Levels**

- Harvest data collection should be continuous.
- All of the HTOs should issue books or calendars for harvesters to record their information, which would be useful to both traditional knowledge and science (Kugluktuk HTO is in their second year of a harvest calendar program).
- The data will be invaluable to the communities if a TAH is ever established as well as in many other management applications.

### **Section 8.2.2 Predators**

- Wolf numbers are very high, individuals are healthy, and the packs are large (30+ in some packs). The elders have reported that when this happens they will kill indiscriminately, taking more than they will use. This is of concern especially when the caribou numbers are low.
- When wolf numbers are lower they help keep the herd strong by killing off the old and weak individuals. This is not always the case in the early fall, during the rut, when the bulls often get tired and can't move. Sometimes two males will get their antlers cloaked together as well. Both of these things make even the stronger bulls more susceptible to predation.
- The younger generation does not hunt predators as often as in the past.
- Traditionally, the mainland people did not hunt predators on the caribou wintering grounds.
- There is interest in a bounty program to help offset the high costs of harvesting, and help decrease the number of wolves in the area. There were similar programs in the 1960s and 1970s (poison bait stations and killing off pups in the den) that the elders feel were effective.
- There are high densities of grizzly bears, which are not hunted very often.
- Wolverines also present a problem; harvesters have reported seeing them chase small herds of caribou to near exhaustion.
- The increase in predator numbers can also present a safety concern to people.

### **Section 8.2.3 Environment and Habitat**

- A single bad year for weather – a bad fall, an icy winter, and poor snow – can affect a lot of caribou; the population can decrease dramatically in one year.
- When the snow is hard or crusty in some areas, it can change the migration pattern of a herd.
- Many caribou have drowned in recent years with a late freeze-up near Kugluktuk and Cambridge Bay. Their instinct is to cross the water ways, but the ice may not be formed or is too thin. The instinct is so strong to move ahead and cross the ice that the caribou may drown through the ice.
- The caribou will also sometimes go into the water to escape insects.

- In recent years, herds have turned around on their migration paths and went back towards the south where they are able to reach their food through softer snow.
- We are not able to control the weather, so the focus should be on collecting good information on it and how it is changing. Local weather records can be compared to data on caribou observations to get a better understanding of the effects of changing weather on caribou and their movements.
- It is important for communities and researchers to identify critical habitat – especially calving grounds - and to protect it.
- The caribou compete with the musk-oxen for habitat and food. There are currently too many musk-oxen in the region, and they are driving away the caribou by destroying the caribou's food source. Kugluktuk has been conducting community musk-oxen harvests to help reduce the hunting pressure on caribou or when the caribou become too scarce.

### **Section 9.1      How herd numbers change over time**

- Recovery from the lows in the population cycle is taking longer now than in the past.

### **Section 9.2      When do we take action?**

- The concept of having the different colors or categories to associated with herd status, and the use of thresholds based on population size was well received overall.
- The problem is that these plans aren't developed until there is concern for the species or population and then it takes so long to get to the Action Plan, which has the details that are needed to begin acting. By then, the population has often changed (i.e. species is in even more danger or has recovered).

### **Section 9.3      How we use herd monitoring information to make decisions**

- The communities should be credited for having more capacity to assist in monitoring activities than is currently recognized in the plan. The harvesters can provide more specific information, such as assisting with sample collection, surveys, and detailed mapping information on caribou movement patterns.
- Three years between surveys is too long; if the population can decrease (or increase) in a single year, surveys need to occur more often.
- People, especially the younger generation, don't travel as far now to harvest caribou as they used to, and they don't go as often – they tend to follow the coast in the summer rather than going inland. This could affect the number and locations of observations that are reported.

### **Section 9.4.1 & 9.5      Harvest / Management actions based on herd status**

#### *Subsistence harvest limitations (red or orange status)*

- There was disagreement with placing a total allowable harvest on caribou in these herds because it is too early to know what is really happening with the populations – it has just recently been discovered that the Bluenose East herd is increasing for example. The information has to be complete and accurate before these decisions are made given the degree of impact they will have on the communities.
- Putting a TAH in place takes time (as per the decision process outlined in the Nunavut land Claims Agreement). By the time it is in place it may not be needed anymore. Also, it takes a long time to change the TAH again when the situation improves.

- The number of caribou you need can change between years –it depends on who you are feeding - such as elders and others in the community that cannot harvest for themselves - as well as what other species are abundant in a given year.
- Nunavut communities are small, and the number of people in these communities who harvest caribou is small compared to the larger communities in NWT. Placing limits on resident and Inuit subsistence harvesting in Nunavut likely won't have an effect on the herds.
- It was suggested that communities consult with their local HTOs about how to limit their harvests; it can be done at a community level so that it can be changed again when the herds rebound.

*Sex selective harvesting (red or orange status)*

- People have traditionally hunted males in August and September, but not later during the rut because the meat smells too strong. Females are in their prime during the winter. Hunts tend to be seasonal this way, although sometimes there is no choice when people need the food.
- It isn't right to recommend a bulls-only or bulls-majority harvest as this will weaken the herd. The recommendation should be to take the weaker or older individuals, both male and female, to leave the strongest bulls to protect the herd and pass on their strong genes.

*Non-resident / outfitter harvest (yellow or green status)*

- Sports hunters don't understand that the bulls are important to the herd. They tend to go for the largest, strongest bulls, but they should be left in the herd to pass on their genes. The practices involved in sports hunts contradict the law of "survival of the fittest" and removing the best bulls will weaken the herd.
- The NWT cancelled sports hunts years ago, but this didn't apply to Nunavut, so sports hunters moved to the Nunavut side of the border. This doesn't make sense since they are the same herds – we need to have consistent regulations across the range of the herds to protect them effectively.
- In recent years, there have been upwards of 60 export permits issued to sports hunters, which translates to 60 of the best bulls being removed from the herds. One community member who worked with an outfitting company in the past reported an average of 140 bulls being shot within a 6 week period every year.
- The Kugluktuk HTO recently passed a motion to stop sports hunting in the area for this reason.

*Trade and barter of traditional foods (red or orange status)*

- Barter or trade between community members or between communities is against the principles of IQ – it should be sharing between people who have access to the resources and those who do not.
- It is a good idea to share meat between communities when it is available in one area and not another, but to send enough to help the people in another community is extremely expensive, even with the reduced shipping rate on country foods.
- The concept of community freezers should be revisited. People who need the meat can go there and get some, it promotes sharing, and older hunters can meet others there to help show them how to prepare and preserve the meat properly.

*Other recommendations for inclusion*

- When the first caribou are passing through an area, it is important to let them pass without harvesting them. These animals lead the group, while the ones behind follow their tracks and their scent. If the first caribou are caught, the others don't know where to go and the group can be diverted. To maintain their natural migration path it is important to let the leaders pass by unharmed.

#### **Section 9.4.2 & 9.5      Land use activities / Management actions based on herd status**

- There should be a moratorium on industrial activity on or near calving grounds at any herd status.

#### **Section 9.4.4 & 9.5      Communication and education / Management actions based on herd status**

- There is a need for education on how to properly track animals, kill them efficiently, and skin them, prepare the meat, and reduce waste. This should include when to harvest what types of caribou (for example, the meat from males is not good in the fall during the rut). The younger generation doesn't have as many of these skills, or they are not as well developed as they should be. There is too much waste as the entire animal is not used very often any more.
- This education should include school visits starting in kindergarten, but there is also a need to reach those that are older and have finished school. It was recognized that the education is largely a community responsibility – it should be learned from parents and grandparents, but it was suggested that sponsors of the Management Plan could assist with some of the costs of these educational sessions and workshops as part of their community involvement / education.
- It is also important to educate industry on how to avoid harassment and to properly monitor and record wildlife observations. These records should be shared with the local HTO offices.
- The management plan is intended to manage people, but it is impossible to manage everybody everywhere all at the same time. We have to focus education to where it is needed the most.

#### **Section 9.6      Process to make decisions**

- The communities should be highly involved in the decision making process – this will increase buy-in and compliance as there will be more respect given for regulations that are developed internally.

#### **Section 10.0      How we communicate**

- It is important to keep the community updated on research results and management decisions. There has to be emphasis on maintaining constant contact with the communities.
- It would be best to use community radio to provide updates and information when there are more people listening (such as during "North Beat"). The stations are often looking for people to do 10-15 minutes interviews – this would be a great way to get the information out to as many people as possible. It should also be done when it is peak caribou harvesting season.