

# Summary

Barren-ground Caribou was assessed as a Threatened species by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) in November 2016 because of steep population declines. According to the COSEWIC criteria, Barren-ground Caribou could have been assessed as Endangered but were downgraded due to existing co-management efforts by governments, wildlife management boards and communities, and because Barren-ground Caribou do not appear to be facing imminent extinction at this time. Most Barren-ground Caribou herds have shown large declines since 1990. Across Canada, Barren-ground Caribou have declined from around 2 million individuals in the early 1990s to about 800,000 in 2016 - a 56.8% decline over three generations (between 1989 and 2016). Recent abundance surveys, since the COSEWIC assessment, have shown further declines in some populations, including the Bluenose-East, Bathurst, and Beverly herds. A Threatened species is likely to become Endangered unless threats are addressed. Potential threats to Barren-ground Caribou include: climate and weather changes affecting forage availability, predation, parasites and diseases; industrial exploration and development; fragmentation of habitat in their winter range from forest fires and increasing human presence; increased human population and an increased demand for caribou meat.

Under the *Species at Risk Act (SARA)*, the federal Minister of the Environment must consult relevant provinces, territories and wildlife management boards before making a recommendation to the Governor in Council on whether to accept COSEWIC's assessment and add Barren-ground Caribou to *SARA* as a Threatened species. It is important to note that no decision regarding the *SARA*-listing proposal has been made to date. To inform the federal Minister's recommendation regarding the *SARA*-listing proposal, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) consulted Hunter and Trapper Organizations, Regional Wildlife Organizations, communities, and other organizations (i.e. Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, Regional Inuit Associations, Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board) in Nunavut from 2018 to 2021. The purpose of the consultations was: 1) to explain the COSEWIC assessment, the *SARA*-listing process, and the implications of listing Barren-ground Caribou as a Threatened species under *SARA*; 2) to gather comments, other information, and formal positions from implicated parties regarding the *SARA*-listing proposal, to inform the federal Minister's recommendation to the Governor in Council; and 3) to address questions and concerns raised.

Under the *Nunavut Agreement*, ECCC consults Hunter and Trapper Organizations (HTOs), Regional Wildlife Organizations (RWOs), Nunavut communities, and other organizations before seeking a decision from the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB). Prior to initiating consultations, ECCC presented its consultation plan to NWMB and sought feedback from NWMB on the proposed consultation approach (December 2017). Information updates were presented periodically to NWMB during the consultation process (March 2019 and March 2020), and ECCC worked closely with the Government of Nunavut (GN) and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) to improve the consultation approach following the first round of consultations. Throughout the consultations, ECCC worked collaboratively with partner organizations in Nunavut, and staff from partner organizations (NWMB, NTI, Regional Inuit Associations, RWOs, etc.) were invited to attend ECCC's consultation meetings, and attended when able. To help build capacity for Inuit engagement regarding the *SARA*-listing proposal,

ECCC also developed a funding agreement with NTI to facilitate internal dialogue amongst Inuit communities and organizations on caribou management and conservation.

## **Consultation**

On January 25, 2018, written consultation materials were distributed to communities and partners outlined in the consultation plan. ECCC held the first round of consultation meetings from February 2018 to February 2019 in the Qikiqtaaluk, Kivalliq and Kitikmeot regions. As HTOs are the local authority for wildlife management in each community, ECCC consulted the HTO for each Nunavut community within the Barren-ground Caribou range. ECCC's consultation meetings with HTOs were held with the HTO members and if requested, a public meeting was also held during the first round of consultations. At each meeting, ECCC presented information to explain the COSEWIC assessment, the SARA-listing process, and the implications of listing Barren-ground Caribou as a Threatened species under SARA.

Following the first round of consultations, ECCC worked closely with GN and NTI to modify the consultation approach and review presentation materials, in order to respond to questions and concerns that were raised during the first round. Presentation materials were adapted to provide additional information and emphasis put into addressing outstanding concerns and clarify common misconceptions and questions about the proposed SARA-listing. Additional information was included and emphasis put on the summaries of previous consultation feedback; COSEWIC's assessment process and the SARA-listing processes; the role of IQ and Inuit involvement; Inuit harvest rights and wildlife management processes under the *Nunavut Agreement*; the potential benefits of listing Barren-ground Caribou under SARA; and local herd information. Through discussions with NTI and the GN, ECCC developed a plan to consult with the regional wildlife boards at their fall 2019 annual general meetings (AGM), in order to provide an update on consultations to date and seek guidance on the need for further consultations in each region. ECCC attended the Kivalliq and Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board AGMs in the fall of 2019, but was unable to attend the Kitikmeot Regional Wildlife Board AGM in 2019 due to the federal election. At the Kivalliq Wildlife Board AGM, it was suggested that additional meetings in the Kivalliq region were required, and a second round of in-person meetings was held with HTOs in the Kivalliq region in February 2020. Through discussions with KRWB's Regional Coordinator, it was suggested that additional meetings in the Kitikmeot region were also required. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, only virtual meetings were conducted with all but one of the Kitikmeot region HTOs from January 2021 to June 2021. ECCC also attended the Kitikmeot Regional Wildlife Board AGM in March 2021 to provide a brief update on the current status of consultations in the Kitikmeot, which were ongoing at the time. There was no request for additional meetings from the Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board. Consultation meetings with additional organizations (i.e. NTI, Regional Inuit Associations, Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board) were also held between 2018 and 2021.

Over the course of the consultations, ECCC adjusted its approach and provided a number of accommodations in order to better address the concerns, feedback, and requests raised by Inuit communities and organizations. These accommodations included having additional meetings, providing detailed responses to all questions received, altering and adapting presentations based on feedback received, inviting experts to meetings, collaboration with partners, and delaying the timing of the submission to NWMB for decision.

## **Results**

During each consultation meeting, ECCC staff had open discussions during which board members and attendees asked questions, voiced opinions, and shared knowledge about caribou in their area. Attendees were invited to provide comments, other information or a formal position on the *SARA*-listing proposal. After each meeting, ECCC prepared meeting summaries, and HTOs were provided an opportunity to review and validate the summaries before they were finalized. A range of common comments and concerns were received during the consultations. Core concerns shared by at least 50% of the communities across all regions included that caribou distribution is always changing; that predation is the main threat or cause of decline; the need for Inuit involvement in all stages of the *SARA* process and the importance of including IQ in all stages of the *SARA* process; that caribou populations undergo natural fluctuations; the need for herd-level assessments; that caribou are not declining; potential prohibitions on harvesting rights; and a limited understanding of the *SARA* process. Additional input that was shared by less than 50% of the communities and usually not by all regions, included disagreeing with the survey methodology; disagreeing with the current regulations, restrictions or quotas; the need for more information to support decisions (both western science and IQ); observed increases and decreases in local herds; concerns about scientists disturbing caribou; and that Inuit harvest is done properly.

Results can be seen below, with more detailed tables available in Section 4 Summary of Feedback. Those parties who have not submitted a response are not included below but can be seen in Section 4.

	Response Type		
	Do Not Support	Support	Indifferent
Wildlife Boards	Kitikmeot Regional Wildlife Board	-	-
BQCMB	-	X	-
Government of Nunavut	X	-	-
Hunters and Trappers Organizations	Iqaluit, Kimmirut, Spence Bay, Kurairojuark, Issatik, Aiviit, Arviq, Baker Lake	-	Clyde River, Cape Dorset
Community Responses	Aiviq (Cape Dorset) (8). Naujaat (Arviq) (1)	Kimmirut (1)	Clyde River (1)

Although not all organizations and HTO's submitted a formal position, ECCC still received extensive comments, questions and feedback during consultation meetings, which provide insight into Inuit views regarding the *SARA*-listing proposal. Inuit organizations engaged in open, thoughtful dialogue with ECCC to express their ideas and views on the proposal.

The following report and appendices summarize the results of the Nunavut consultations. This document is being submitted to NWMB for its decision on the proposed listing of Barren-ground Caribou as Threatened under the federal *Species at Risk Act (SARA)* as per the *Nunavut Agreement* s.5.2.34 (f) and 5.3.16-5.3.23.