



SUBMISSION TO THE

NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD

FOR

Information:

Decision: X

Issue: Recommendation to address the decline of the Bathurst caribou herd.

Background:

- In the mid-1980's close to half a million Bathurst caribou were present on their annual range. From 2006 to 2009 the herd declined to about 32,000 caribou. and the herd was estimated at 35,000 caribou in 2012 suggesting the herd had been relatively stable from 2009 to 2012 (Figure 1).
- In December 2010 new management regulations were adopted by the Northwest Territories to address conservation concerns. This included the closure of outfitting and commercial harvest as well as a limitation of the aboriginal harvest to a maximum of 300 caribou.
- In Nunavut, the Bathurst Caribou herd is harvested by Kugluktuk, Bathurst Inlet and Bay Chimo (with an estimated overall harvest of 100 per year, of which 70 are for sport hunts). When the herd was at historic highs and closer to Kugluktuk, that community also harvested from the herd.
- In June 2014, a reconnaissance survey was flown near the peak of calving. The total estimated number of caribou at least one year old was $3,594 \pm 2,133$ compared to $14,390 \pm 6,109$ in June 2012. This survey suggests that Bathurst caribou on the calving ground (one year older) have further declined between 2013 and 2014.
- In the past, the calving ground reconnaissance surveys have been a reliable index of abundance in tracking population trend when compared to full population assessments and trend based on aerial photo-surveys.
- In December 2014 the Northwest Territories implemented a harvest moratorium in for the 2014 - 2015 winter harvest season. They are allowing a harvest of 15 caribou that can be harvested under a special permit, for ceremonial purposes only.

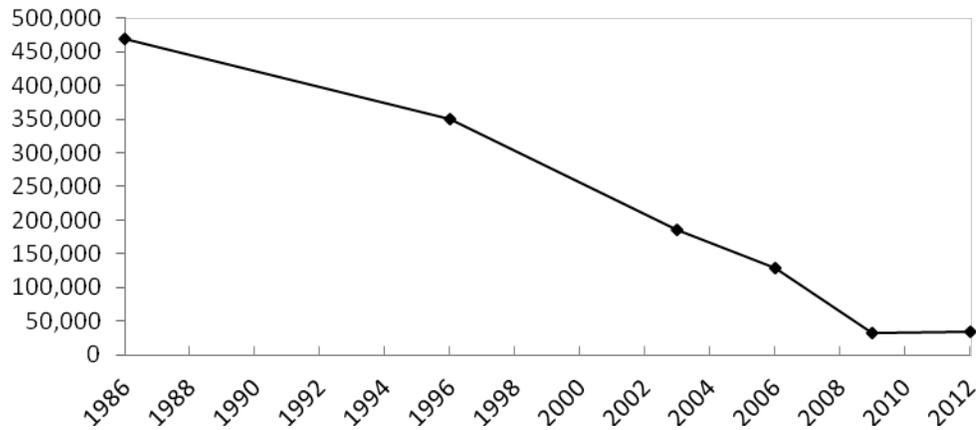


Figure 1 Survey history of the Bathurst Caribou Herd from 1986 to 2012.

Current Status

- The Bathurst herd decline is believed to be the result of natural cyclical fluctuation. It is not known if and/or to what extent harvesting or other human activities like mineral exploration and development may be contributing to the decline.
- Ongoing discussions on short and long-term management actions are being held with various Nunavut wildlife management organizations, the public and First Nations governments in NWT, and the GNWT.
- Results from a June 2015 survey of the Bathurst calving ground confirmed a further decline in the number of breeding cows, estimated at 8,075 animals compared to 14,390 in June 2012.
- The new 2015 population estimate is 19,700 Bathurst caribou, which is significantly lower than the 2012 population estimate of 35,000 caribou. The 2015 estimate is 37% lower than the 2012 estimate with an annual decline of 14%.
- Additional observations show a consistent indication of a declining herd: there is a below normal adult female survival rate and calf cow ratio.

Consultations:

- The following consultations have been conducted on the conservation issues:
 - September 9, 2014 - Kugluktuk HTO board meeting
 - September 22, 2014 - Kugluktuk community information and consultations
 - October 1, 2014 - Bay Chimo and Bathurst HTO meeting
 - October 9-10, 2014 - Technical Meeting 1, GN and NTI participation
 - October 15-18, 2014 - KWRB AGM meeting
 - October 22-23, 2014 - Technical Meeting 2, GN participation
 - October 31, 2014 - Kugluktuk HTO board meeting

- Consultations to specifically discuss an interim TAH of 100 with NTI, Bathurst Inlet and Bay Chimo HTOs, and the KRWB occurred on January 30, 2015 and on February 11, 2015 with the HTO of Kugluktuk. While there was recognition of substantial conservation concerns and the need for harvest limitations, there was no consensus on the proposed TAH of 100.
- On January 14-15, 2016, following the Nunavut Wildlife Management Process, Cambridge Bay, Kugluktuk, Bathurst and Bay Chimo HTOs, KRWB, and NTI were consulted on a revised GN-recommended Total Allowable Harvest of 30 male caribou.
- Although the future decline of the herd was agreed upon, no consensus on the TAH was reached.
- To increase positive recovery measures, all the HTOs were consistent in recommending incentives to increase harvest of predators (mainly wolf) , protection of the calving ground and establish a long-term management planning process (management plan) that involves all users.

Recommendation

- That the NWMB establish a Nunavut TAH of 30 male caribou for the Bathurst Herd.