

Summary of the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board's report, entitled "Reasons for Decisions Related to a Joint Proposal for the Management of Bathurst Ɂekwò (Barren-ground caribou) Herd – PART B"

The Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) is responsible for wildlife management in Wek'èezhì and shares responsibility for managing and monitoring the Bathurst caribou herd. In September 2015, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) reported that, in their view, the Bathurst herd had continued to decline significantly and that further management actions were required.

In December 2015, the Tłıchǫ Government (TG) and ENR 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 management to reduce wolf populations on the winter range of the Bathurst caribou herd and ongoing biological monitoring. The WRRB considered any specific restriction of harvest or component of harvest as the establishment of a total allowable harvest (TAH). After review and analysis of the proposal, the WRRB complied with Section 12.3.10 of the Tłıchǫ Agreement and held a public hearing in Yellowknife, NT on February 23-24, 2016.

The WRRB concluded, based on all available Aboriginal and scientific evidence, that a serious conservation concern exists for the Bathurst Ɂekwò herd and that additional management actions are vital for herd recovery. However, in order to allow careful consideration of all of the evidence on the record and to meet legislated timelines, the WRRB decided to prepare two separate reports to respond to the proposed management actions in the joint management proposal. The first report, Part A, dealt with the proposed harvest management actions that required regulation changes in order for new regulations to be in place for the start of the 2016/17 harvest season, as well as the proposed mobile wolf-hunter camp and the wolf feasibility assessment.

As the Bathurst caribou herd situation is so dire, the Board feels that it would be irresponsible to address harvest management only as there is a real risk that the herd will be extirpated within a few short years. Therefore, this second report, Part B, dealt with self-regulation, additional predator management actions, biological and environmental monitoring, and cumulative effects.

The WRRB understands that in order for Tłıchǫ Citizens to fully take ownership of the Board's determinations and recommendations, it is imperative that Tłıchǫ laws are implemented to continue the Tłıchǫ way of life and maintain their cultural and spiritual connection with caribou. Therefore, the WRRB recommended consultations with Tłıchǫ communities to determine a path forward for implementation of Tłıchǫ laws.

In addition, the WRRB recommended several Tłıchǫ Knowledge (TK) research and monitoring programs focusing on wolves, grizzly bears, stress and other impacts on caribou from collars and aircraft over-flights, and an assessment of quality and quantity of both summer and winter forage.

The Board recommended a biological assessment of grizzly bear as well as requesting that the Barren-ground Caribou Technical Working Group (BGCTWG) prioritize biological monitoring indicators and develop thresholds under which management actions can be taken and evaluated. All scientific and TK monitoring data is to be provided to BGCTWG annually to ensure ongoing adaptive management.

The WRRB recommended the implementation of Tł̨ch̨q Land Use Plan Directives as well as completing a Land Use Plan for the remainder of Wek'èezhì. In addition, the completion of the Bathurst Caribou Range Plan and the long-term Bathurst Caribou Management Plan are requested with measures to be implemented in the interim to provide guidance to users and managers of the Bathurst caribou herd range.

The Board recommended the development of criteria to protect key caribou habitat, including water crossings and *tataa* (corridors between bodies of water), using the Conservation Area approach in the NWT's *Wildlife Act*, offsets and values-at-risk in a fire management plan. Additionally, the WRRB recommended the continued refinement of the Inventory of Landscape Change, the integration of Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat Protection Plans and Wildlife Effects Monitoring Programs objectives for monitoring the effects of development on caribou in Wek'èezhì, and the development of monitoring thresholds for climate indicators.

With the “*unprecedented severity of the decline and potential collapse*”¹ of the Bathurst ʔekwò herd, there must be commitment, collaboration and communication amongst all users and managers “*to develop knowledge, to develop the best plans, to develop the capacity to implement actions and to monitor*”.² Additionally, research into the drivers of the decline and the relationships between ʔekwò, other wildlife and people is imperative for understanding the Bathurst herd. As noted by John Nishi, TG,

*“... where there is considerable uncertainty in our current state of knowledge of the key drivers responsible for the continued decline, an adaptive co-management approach is well suited to generate new information or new knowledge through sharing of traditional and scientific perspectives, sustaining social and cultural learning, and prepare for adaptation to transformative change, such as that imposed by the dramatic decline in caribou abundance, the recommended closure of caribou hunting, and the potential impacts to Tł̨ch̨q culture, language, and way of life”.*³

¹ PR (BATH) – 153: Transcript – February 23, 2016 (Day 1) – Bathurst Caribou Herd Public Hearing. p 109-110.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.