



Chamber of Mines Caribou Protection Measures – Technical Review

Executive Summary

The NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines commissioned a technical review of the Government of Nunavut (GN)'s recommendations for caribou areas to the Nunavut Planning Commission (NPC). The principle technical issues identified with the GN's recommended caribou core calving grounds and the NPC's proposed protection measures for the Draft Nunavut Land Use Plan include the following:

- **The recommendations are not supported by a biological rationale** — The proposed protected areas are based solely on the presumption that excluding all industrial activity from calving grounds is “critical” to herd productivity, yet no supporting rationale is provided.
- **The proposed measures are not supported by peer review** — It is not apparent if the GN's approach has been peer reviewed or if there is general acceptance of the approach among the scientific and traditional knowledge community with expertise in northern wildlife biology.
- **There is insufficient information regarding the process for implementation of protection measures** — The proposed review period is too infrequent to respond to potential changes in caribou calving areas and there is no documentation of how calving ground habitat protection will be integrated with other population management tools (e.g. harvest monitoring, collection of population demographics, population modeling, etc.).

After a review of nearly 50 years of published research on tundra migratory caribou and general understanding of traditional knowledge and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, it is unclear exactly how much or if habitat protection will contribute to recovery or sustainability of caribou. It is an overstatement to suggest that habitat protection (to the point of not disturbing any habitat) is “critical” — it is not. Caribou habitat use is dynamic. The level of habitat loss that will trigger an effect is unknown and there is no evidence to date suggesting that there has been one, or will be one in the near future for the mainland Nunavut caribou herds.

Since at least 1978, when caribou protection measures were first implemented to protect Qamanirjuaq and Beverly caribou, the measures have been used throughout the territory on various projects, including exploration and development. Those measures have continued to focus on reducing disturbance to caribou, and that protection will continue into the future regardless of the results of this land use planning process. The exploration and mining industry should continue to implement and develop those protection measures and incorporate new tools and develop enhanced measures with new data and analytical methods. That, in combination with other management tools (e.g. managing or reducing caribou mortality), and continuing research and response to knowledge about habitat effects, will be key to caribou population sustainability. In addition to the current protection of the caribou themselves, habitat protection may one day become an important management focus.