

Summary of the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board's report, entitled "Reasons for Decisions Related to a Joint Proposal for the Management of Bluenose-East ʔekwò (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 Bluenose-East caribou herd. In November 2015, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) reported that, in their view, the Bluenose-East 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 Management Actions for Bluenose-East Caribou 2016-2019* to the Board, which proposed new restrictions on hunter harvest, predator management and ongoing monitoring. More specifically, TG and ENR proposed implementing a herd-wide total allowable harvest of 950 bulls-only and allocation for the Bluenose-East caribou herd and conducting a feasibility assessment of a full range of wolf management actions. The WRRB considers 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 Behchokò, NT on April 6-8, 2016.

The WRRB concluded, based on all available Aboriginal and scientific evidence, that a serious conservation concern exists for the Bluenose-East caribou 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 will require 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 wolf feasibility assessment.

As the Bluenose-East ʔekwò herd situation is so dismal, the Board feels that it would be irresponsible to limit its discussion to harvest management as there is a real risk that the herd will follow the same path as the Bathurst caribou herd and face extirpation. Therefore, this second report, Part B, dealt with self-regulation, additional predator management actions, biological and environmental monitoring, and cumulative effects.

In anticipation of the proposal, the ʔehdzo Got'ıne Gots'ę Nákedı/Sahtú Renewable Resources Board (SRRB) and the WRRB signed a *"Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Collaborative Efforts for the Management of the Bluenose-East Caribou Herd"* in October 2015 to ensure management of proceedings related to the Bluenose-East ʔekwò herd would be as effective as possible. Each Board conducted its own proceeding, including public hearings in both the Sahtú and Wek'èezhì areas, and submitted their own Reasons for Decision report.

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 bears 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 Tłıchǫ Land Use Plan Directives as well as completing a Land Use Plan for the remainder of Wek'èezhì. The Board also 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 development of monitoring thresholds for climate indicators.

With the Bluenose-East caribou herd in a critical state, all users and managers must act now, in whatever ways possible, to protect the herd so future recovery may be possible. In addition, research into the drivers of the decline and the relationships between caribou, other wildlife and people are imperative for understanding the Bluenose-East herd.

“But we also know that there was natural declines. But after taking its course, being in that natural environment, they --it kind of recovered itself. But the challenges today is not natural. It's global. It's got a lot to do with a lot of different factors that didn't exist at the time. So the challenges are great.”¹

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¹ PR (BNE) – 044: Transcript – February 24, 2016 (Day 1) – Bathurst Caribou Herd Public Hearing. p. 138.