

Calving Grounds

Our IQ is clear – there should be no mining or exploration on calving grounds. These areas are sacred for caribou and Inuit. Caribou are very sensitive to disturbance when they give birth and immediately afterwards. Even if exploration is stopped seasonally, the disturbance to the land would impact calving. This may cause the herds to decline further.

Baker Lake Inuit did not traditionally live or camp in calving areas. We do not hunt female caribou during calving or immediately after giving birth. We respect this sensitive area for caribou. The mining industry should do the same, and not mine and explore in calving grounds.

We know that caribou give birth in the same general areas year after year. Within these general areas, there is variation. Just like farmers let their fields lie fallow to regenerate nutrients, caribou instinctively leave parts of the calving grounds to regenerate their food supply. This entire traditional areas for calving must be protected. The Government of Nunavut and Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board should have maps of these areas.

Water Crossings

Water crossings must be protected for their heritage value, their value to Inuit hunting, and their ecological value.

Before moving to the community of Baker Lake, water crossings were very important hunting areas for the Inuit that lived on the Kazan River, Thelon River, Pelly/Garry Lakes, and Baker Lake. Our ancestors would hunt caribou in qajaqs with spears when the caribou crossed rivers and lakes. Today, many hunters in Baker Lake continue to hunt caribou when they emerge from the water on the Thelon River, Kazan River, and Baker Lake. This is one of the most important hunting practices that feeds our community.

Caribou are very sensitive to disturbance before they cross the water. Our ancestors had many traditional rules for how we should treat water crossings, which we still respect today. We were taught not to walk, hunt, skin animals, cache meat or camp on the side of the river where caribou enter the water. We were taught to camp upstream from water crossings, and that our camps should not be visible from the crossing. We clean up all animal remains near a crossing – even blood on the ground must be buried. Dogs and people must be silent at water crossings. If Inuit must be so careful at water crossings in order to not disturb caribou, how can we allow mining in these areas?

Because water crossings have been important to Inuit for so long, there are many archaeological sites near water crossings. Our ancestors always taught us to not disturb these sites, and to leave archaeological remains alone.

The Baker Lake HTO identified water crossings that it would like protected. A map of these water crossing locations is included in Appendix A.

Migration Routes

Caribou migration routes also need some protection. If the migration routes are not protected, caribou will not be able to reach water crossings and calving grounds. Any mining or exploration activity must stop prior to when caribou herds approach, and not resume until the caribou have well passed.

Supporting Documents

The IQ we refer to in this proposal has been well documented. In Appendix B, there is a report from a day long workshop the Baker Lake HTO held in September 2015 on Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit of caribou habitat. In Appendix C, there is a literature review on Inuit knowledge and use of caribou water crossings and calving grounds prepared by a consultant. We hope the information in these reports will help you understand why calving grounds and water crossings must be protected.

Thank you very much for consideration of our proposal.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Richard', followed by a long, horizontal, wavy line that extends to the right.

Richard Aksawnee
Chair, Baker Lake Hunters and Trappers Organization

Cc:

Cathy Towtongie, President, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated
David Ningeongan, President, Kivalliq Inuit Association
Thomas Elytook, Baker Lake Director, Kivalliq Inuit Association
Joedee Joedee, Mayor, Baker Lake
Stanley Adjuk, Chair, Kivalliq Wildlife Board
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Jonathan Savoy, Senior Planner, Nunavut Planning Commission
Karla Letto, Wildlife Biologist, Nunavut Wildlife Management Board
Leah Muckpah, Regional Coordinator, Kivalliq Wildlife Management Board

Attachment A – Maps of Water Crossings of Importance to Baker Lake Inuit Heritage and Land Use

Attachment B – Baker Lake Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit of Caribou Habitat: Workshop Report

Attachment C – Baker Lake Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit of Caribou Habitat: Background Report