

Interim report
As of 12 Jan 2011

Porcupine Caribou harvesting, 2010/11

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Interim summary – Porcupine Caribou harvesting, 2010/11

Background

In early fall 2009 the Government of Yukon (YG) implemented new regulations for all hunters hunting Porcupine Caribou in Yukon. Licensed hunters (Yukon Residents and Non-Residents) are now limited to 1 bull from the Porcupine Caribou Herd and one additional caribou from other Yukon herds. The season for licensed hunters was unchanged at 1 August to 31 January. Aboriginal hunters are restricted to bulls only but there is no limit on the total number of caribou they may take. During the 2010 – 2011 season, the bull only regulation was not enforced with aboriginal hunters however hunters were asked to voluntarily harvest only bulls. All hunters are required to report their harvest; a new form was designed to record harvest by aboriginal hunters. The regulations will be reviewed once the Porcupine Caribou Herd Harvest Management Plan in Canada is implemented.

YG has operated a check station at the south end of the Dempster Highway each fall since 1985. This station intercepts south-bound hunters. For the 2010 – 2011 season, the mobile check station that was manned by 2 YG casual employees last year was replaced by Yukon Conservation Officer patrols. The Officers were based at the Eagle Plains Hotel but 'patrolling' the highway as necessary.

Caribou and hunting activity

The Government of the Northwest Territories opened their check station on the north Dempster Highway in late July following the Midway Lake Music Festival. The Yukon Resident season opened on August 1st. Small groups of caribou making summer dispersal movements in the north Dempster region were being hunted in early to mid August, mostly by Mackenzie delta hunters. In mid August Yukon Conservation Officers were patrolling the Dempster Highway, mostly on weekends when more hunting takes place. There was another small peak of harvesting in mid August (now mostly on the Yukon side of the border) by Tetlit Gwich'in and Inuvialuit hunters and a few Yukon resident hunters.

By early September, very few caribou were in the area of the Yukon-NWT border. There were still hunters every day, mostly from NWT, but very few caribou were taken. Occasional caribou were harvested by hunters hiking onto the mountains near the Highway. It seems that the summer group of animals had been harvested or had moved further away from the highway.

In Old Crow, reports were of some caribou harvesting in August, but it was minimal, and reported to be mostly bulls. The collared caribou moved westward and did not cross the Porcupine River in big numbers as they usually do in September.

There was another peak of high hunting activity in mid October along the north Dempster. Hunters had to travel relatively far to the west and east of the highway to get these caribou. By late October-early November, more caribou had shown up on the north end and hunting activity was the highest seen for the year so far.

Hunting activity again slowed in November and December as few caribou were available along the Dempster and in Old Crow and colder weather set in.

Other dates to note

- Snowmachine use north of Ogilvie River opened 21 Oct 2010. Snowmachine use south of Ogilvie will open in mid January 2011.
- The Mackenzie River ferry closed 28 Oct 2010. The Peel River ferry closed 3 Nov 2010. The Peel River ice crossing was opened to light traffic on 8 Nov 2010.
- Overlap subzones with Hart River caribou were closed 5 November 2010.
- YG coordinated a shooting workshop near the Arctic Circle over the Remembrance Day weekend. From 11 to 14 November 2010, one group of 2 Resident hunters stopped in at the workshop.

Operation of the check station and patrols

The south Dempster Check Station was manned by our long-term staff this season Michele Dubois, Faye Chamberlain, Sandra Hall, and Victor Henry.

The north Patrols were mostly conducted by Auxiliary-on-call Conservation Officer Ken Alderson. When Ken was on time off, Dawson District CO's covered most shifts. Other District CO's helped cover shifts on occasion. Most of the officers' time was spent on the Dempster Highway with the occasional trip to Old Crow.

	South Dempster Check Station	North Dempster patrols
First day	September 15, 2010	September 15, 2010
Last day	November 30, 2010	On-going as of January 12, 2011
Total staff hours	1031.5	
Days open during this time	Open all 77 days	98 of 120 days (no patrols on 22 days)
Staff hours	From September 15 th until the 30 th there was one shift per day with the station open for 6.5 hours. From October 1 st until November 30 th there were 2 shifts per day with the station open for 12.75 hours, except for November 11 th where there was only one shift that day.	Shifts were generally 7.5 hours per day with Ken Alderson on for 10 days including 2 travel days and off for 4 days. Dawson CO's with assistance from districts covered shifts when Ken was away when caribou were present and harvest was occurring.

Reported Porcupine Caribou harvest

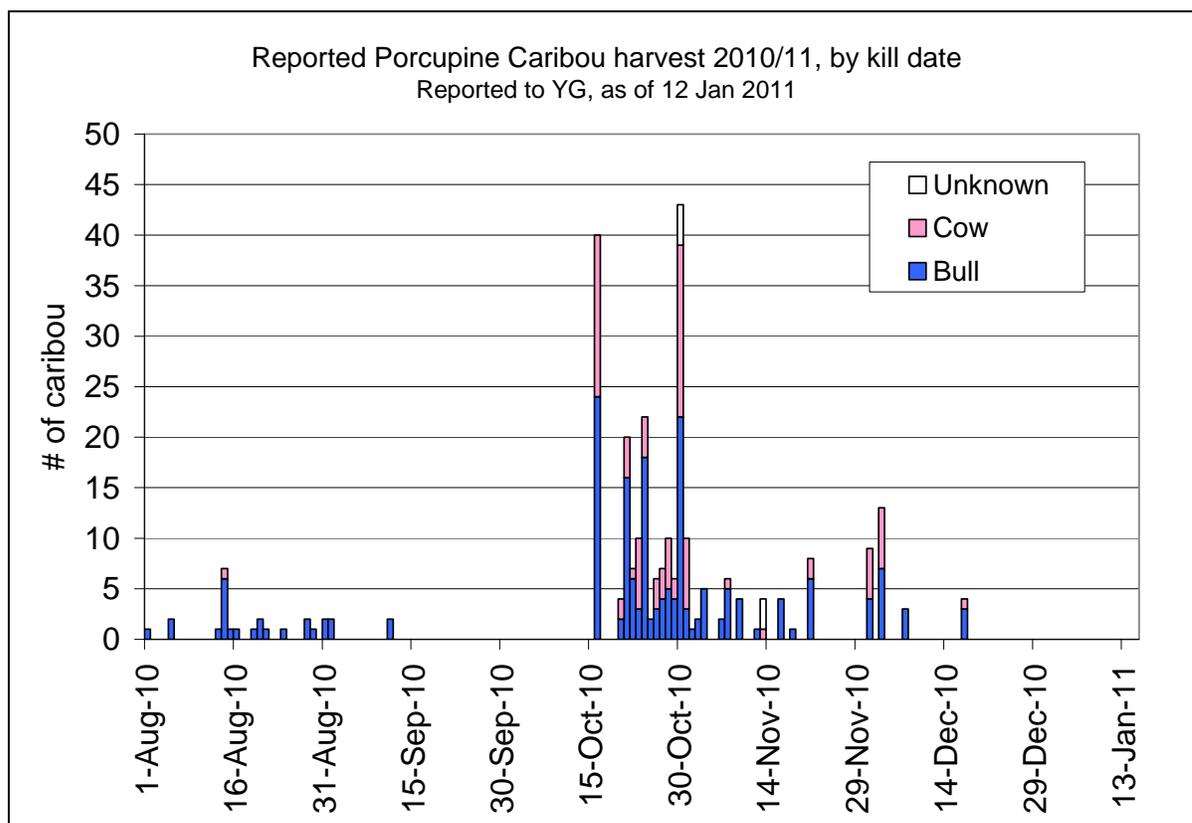
As of 12 January 2011, 281 Porcupine Caribou harvests are in the Government of Yukon database which includes data from Conservation Officer patrols, the south Dempster check station and mandatory declarations by Yukon Resident and Non-resident hunters. One of the hunted caribou was part of a youth outdoor education program. All Non-Resident hunters were special guided by Yukon Resident hunters. There was no harvest of Porcupine Caribou by Outfitters this season.

Porcupine Caribou reported harvest, Oct 2010 to 12 Jan 2011

As reported to YG

User Group	Bull	Cow	Unknown	Total
NWT Aboriginal	142	87	7	236
YT First Nation	6	1		7
YT Resident	29			29
YT Non Resident	9			9
Total	186	88	7	281

Most caribou harvests (245 caribou or 87%) were reported through the north Dempster patrols. A total of 7 caribou came through the south Dempster Check Station. The remaining 29 caribou were reported in Old Crow, Dawson City and Whitehorse. Cows and Unknown sex account for 34% of the overall reported harvest.



Discussion

Overall harvest this year is quite low compare to past years. The collared caribou indicate that once again, the majority of the herd is wintering in Alaska. The caribou that were harvested along the Dempster earlier in the fall were probably groups making summer dispersal movements, then small groups migrated close to the highway into October and November. There weren't huge numbers of caribou around Old Crow at any point. In October, 3 radio collared caribou were located on Old Crow

Flats however the satellite collar that was with that group has moved off far to the south. Reports from Old Crow indicate very few caribou available to hunters there.

Based on reports from field officers, overall hunter compliance with mandatory reporting requirements has improved since last year. Because there is an officer with enforcement authority (patrol people last year were not enforcement officers), hunters can be compelled to have their caribou inspected, especially to verify the sex of the animal. CO Alderson feels that data collected this year is close to 90 or 95% accurate whereas last year, information on the sex of the caribou was quite suspect at times.

The sex ratio of the harvest shows fewer cows were taken this year than what we think was taken in the past (probably about 2/3 of the caribou taken in spring were cows). This year, about one third of the total reported harvest so far is cows or unknown sex. The majority of the cows this year (81%) were taken during October, a month when hunters prefer not to shoot bulls because of the rut. Also, more hunters are now keeping evidence of sex attached to the caribou however much improvement can be made on this front as well.

CO Alderson has put much effort into educational messages when interacting with hunters in the field. In addition to verbally impressing upon hunters the importance of a bull only harvest and harvest reporting, he has been distributing the educational materials produced by the Porcupine Caribou Management Board (literature, pens, stickers, pins, badges etc). In addition, CO Alderson plans to work with a local hunter produce a video to demonstrate how hunters can satisfy the requirement for evidence of sex without tainting the meat in any way.

CO Alderson reports that "During the past 4-5 weeks I have seen a remarked improvement in the acceptance of myself being on the Highway, and full co-operation in the filling out of forms and disclosing the Sex of Caribou harvested" and that "improvements I have observed over the past 2 years is absolutely remarkable considering what it was like when I started 2 years ago."