

Porcupine Caribou Annual Harvest Meeting

Summary of information provided, February 7, 2012

BACKGROUND

In accordance with the Harvest Management Plan for the Porcupine Caribou Herd (HMP), the Porcupine Caribou Management Board (Board) convened the second Annual Harvest Meeting (AHM) during the second week of February 2012 in Dawson City, YT. The AHM was organized as outlined in the Terms of Reference from the Parties' Senior Officials and the Board's own Operating Procedures for the meeting.

The first day of the 3-day AHM was "to bring together stakeholders, the general public and Parties to the *Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement* (PCMA) to exchange information..." (PCMB letter of invitation to Parties and stakeholders dated 30 December 2011). The Board further requested that Parties send "any information that it should consider when assessing the status of the herd" prior to the meeting and referred invitees to Appendix 2 of the Operating Procedures for further information on submissions. The Board also requested that Parties consider and forward their views on the Dempster Highway [hunting] regulations; 500 meter corridor, no motorized vehicles and the one-week hunting closure.

This document summarizes the information provided during the 11 presentations made by various organizations and comments from participants during Day 1, the Information and Exchange Session of the AHM 2012. Copies of the full presentations and reports are available on the Annual Harvest Meeting page of the PCMB website (www.taiga.net/pcmb).

INFORMATION PROVIDED

Summary of herd biological information, Dorothy Cooley

- Presenting a summary report of biological information for the herd. For several portions of the report and presentation, updated information since the 2011 summary was not yet available.
- Population
 - o There was no census done in 2011, therefore the most recent census was in 2010 when 169,000 caribou were estimated in the herd. The next census attempt is scheduled for 2012.
 - o The revised computer population models (formerly the Caribou Calculator) have not yet been completed so no computer-generated estimate of herd size is available for the AHM this year
 - o Adult female survival has not been estimated since 2009/10 so no update is available for the AHM this year.
 - o Calf birth rates and survival are quite variable from year to year and there is no apparent pattern over time. Calf survival to one month of age was the lowest on record in 2011. The March composition count to estimate calf survival to 9 months of age has not been possible in many recent years due to overlap of the PCH with other herds on winter range.

- There is no pattern of change in the peak date of calving which we might expect if there were problems with the rut or with pregnancy.
- The survival of short yearling female caribou has not been updated since 2010.
- The survival of adult bull caribou has not been updated since 2009 and there is no intent to continue this study.
- There was no fall composition count to estimate the proportion of bulls in the herd scheduled for 2011. Researchers will conduct a count in each year a photo census is done therefore the next count will be in October 2012.
- Harvest
 - As recommended by the PCMB in 2011, Canadian Parties changed the harvest regulations for aboriginal, resident and non-resident hunters for the fall 2011 season (see full report). Note that an earlier version of the printed report incorrectly shows a Yukon Non-resident bag limit of 1 bull caribou. That should be 2 bull caribou.
 - The template form that was developed during the June 2011 workshop for user groups to collect harvest data was presented (see presentation). The Canadian Wildlife Service has contracted the development of the long term harvest database. A working version of the database should be available by 31 March 2012.
 - Although all Parties submitted harvest data to the PCMB prior to the AHM or presented their harvest data during the meeting, we were not able to calculate a total estimated harvest in Canada (see accompanying report).
 - The PCTC has submitted a data request to the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op to summarize their question “Were hunters’ needs met?” but have not received the data yet.
- Body Condition
 - The Body Condition monitoring programs in YT and NWT continue to show that hunters are rating the condition of their harvested caribou higher in recent years. Small sample sizes are still a concern for this project and hunters are urged to participate in the program to increase sample sizes.
 - The PCTC has submitted a data request to the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op to summarize caribou condition and abnormalities but have not received the data yet.
- Habitat
 - Wildland fire data from the 2011 season is not yet available for Yukon or NWT however there was a very small burn documented in the Alaska portion of the range, and several small burns were remembered to have occurred in the Yukon portion of the range. The 2004, 2005 fires were very large compared to other fires but still comprise a relatively small portion of the herd’s range.
 - Updated snow measurements were not yet available.
 - The PCTC has submitted a data request to the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op to summarize extreme weather events but have not received the data yet.

- Timing of green up was listed in the final HMP but was not summarized in this report.

Gwich'in Tribal Council, Mardy Semmler

- Presented background on the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement, including objectives, land ownership and management, harvesting rights, and the organizational structure of the Gwich'in.
- Parties need to develop a work plan for implementation:
 - Meet with parties to discuss how we will meet our objectives;
 - Establish a schedule for meeting our objectives;
 - Identify funding;
 - Consult with DGO's and RRC's;
 - Meet with Participants to discuss roles and responsibilities of the Implementation Plan and the Native User Agreement
- Partnered with ENR and GTC/TRRC, a check station range from August to October, with plans to reopen in March or April. A total of 269 caribou were reported through the station.
- There were also an Elders Campaign and Dempster Patrols.
- Observations:
 - One week voluntary closure – not being implemented – harvesters heading out as soon as caribou are spotted on Dempster – not only Gwich'in, but other users;
 - Many resident hunters from Yukon near the flats in September/October;
 - Resident hunters from NWT on Yukon side – walking around with rifles;
 - No Officer presence while on patrols – 8 patrols;
 - Use of skidoos and four wheelers on flats – leaving ruts;
 - Harvesters leaving messes behind: heads, hides, gut piles
- Challenges:
 - All harvesters not checking in and reporting harvest;
 - Dempster Highway Regulations – Harvesters don't know what is being enforced on both NWT or Yukon side;
 - Dempster Highway Corridor and the use of ATV's – not just for Dempster – should be for all of range;
 - More grizzly bears visible during harvest
- Next steps:
 - GTC to collect harvest data;
 - Native User Agreement negotiations;
 - Promote an education/communications campaign – “Report your Harvest”;
 - Promote proper harvesting techniques – take all of your harvest – leave no mess behind, etc

Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board, Amy Thompson

- Presented background to the GRRB and its role in the Gwich'in Settlement Area, and its responsibilities in the PCH HMP Implementation Plan.
- Harvest data collection
 - o GRRB administers and RRCs lead the program in communities
 - o There are two survey rounds (Nov & Jun)
 - o Active harvester lists (ungulate) are maintained.
 - o Data is collated and analysed by community
 - o Calculate response rates to estimate harvest
 - o There is a verification phase using the RRC and check station
 - o Harvester observations recorded:
 - TK observations of wildlife, habitat, environmental factors
 - Effectiveness of PCMB communications
 - o Between June 1, 2010 and May 31, 2011, 494 Porcupine Caribou harvests were reported during 368 surveys. Data was submitted to PCMB in Aug 2011.
 - o Between June 1 to Oct 31, 2011, about 400 plus Porcupine Caribou harvests were reported during 204 surveys
 - o Participation increasing but response rates low
- Comments from harvest data collections:
 - o More bulls than cows harvested
 - o Caribou in good condition
 - o Too noisy from highway
 - o If caribou not available, switch focus to moose, fish and store bought food
 - o Lots of grizzlies
 - o Harvesters report harvesting for elders and others (significant socially, culturally and economically)
 - o Some don't harvest because too expensive, no vehicle or working (no time)
 - o High interest in hunter education – want to be involved
 - o Fewer caribou seen than in previous years
 - o 'Caribou heading south earlier than before. Used to be at border in Oct/Nov, now are seen in July. Tourists report seeing them on highway. Want to know what's going on. Don't like it!' (Ft.McPherson)
 - o 'Warmer weather than in past. More rain. In 1950s Peel used to freeze in Sept'. (Tsiigehtchic)
 - o 'See strange insects'. (Ft.McPherson)
- Questions about the PCMB communications efforts:
 - o Almost 90% of the people responding in Ft. McPherson had heard about the HMP Yellow Zone, compared to 30 to 40% in the other 3 communities.
 - o Radio ads, posters, meetings and check stations were the most common sources where people heard about the HMP Yellow Zone.
- Successes:
 - o Attended the Harvest data workshop (June 2011)
 - o Have had consistent interviewers
 - o Communities are on same fiscal and harvest reporting schedule

- Staff is taking Access database training [to better use the harvest database when it's ready]
- Challenges:
 - Check station - Work with ENR to incorporate check station data into verification process.
 - Funding to continue program - Need assistance to secure long term funding
 - Low harvester participation/Response rates - Develop education strategies to promote harvester participation
- Reported harvest from Jun 01, 2010 - May 31, 2011:
 - Bulls = 480
 - Cows = 11
 - Unknown = 3
- GRRB recommendations:
 - Harvester education program - involve us we're interested
 - Make better use of social media to reach people
 - Signage on Dempster
 - Grizzly bear issue – need to find solutions
 - Regulations – need consistency across the border
 - motorized vehicle regulations – need to consult
 - Milestones – need to find ways to meet deadlines
- Recommendation on zones
 - None at this time. Did not receive report in sufficient time for Board to review and make a recommendation
 - In future, if report is provided in November the GRRB can meet in mid-January to discuss and meet the January 20th deadline.

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Roberta Joseph

- Presented background on the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and their long relationship with caribou. "The Porcupine Caribou has been and still is today a part of the environment which maintains the culture, tradition and lifestyle of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in" (see full presentation).
- By signing the HMP in 2010 Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Government agreed to a number of responsibilities for managing the harvesting activities of TH Citizens.
- TH established their Fish and Wildlife Act in 2007, providing TH with full authority to manage and administer subsistence harvest in TH Traditional Territory, along with managing harvest on TH Settlement Lands
- TH has held several communication and education initiatives in the past, such as the First Hunt, meetings with Citizens, Elders and Leaders, correspondence and the TH newsletter as well as use of the communication material developed by PCMB such as the magnets and stickers. Due to the lack of caribou in TH Traditional Territory this year, communication has not been significant.
- Harvest data collection:
 - For the past 4 years there has been very few or no Porcupine Caribou in THTT. As such, conservation by Citizens were clearly demonstrated with extremely low harvesting counts.

- For the 2010/2011 year, one bull had been harvested by a TH Youth during First Hunt. Five Citizens were interviewed out of 39 regular hunters. This data was submitted to PCMB and PCTC.
- Monitoring and enforcement:
 - For the past three years TH has been monitoring harvesting activities on the Dempster Highway
 - The Monitoring program this year focused on harvesting within TH TT and the Horseshoe area, as TH has a large R-Block in the area
 - The TH Fish and Wildlife Steward has completed the enforcement training certification
 - TH is developing harvesting regulations
- Next steps:
 - Enter into discussions with Vuntut Gwitchin Government and First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun regarding the YFN Native User Agreement
 - Up-date TH procedures and develop a smoother process to meet the deadlines
 - More communications on the “Dempster Highway Best Practices”
 - Enter into discussions with Vuntut Gwitchin and First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun regarding the Yukon First Nation Native User Agreement
- Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in continues to recommend:
 - Removal of the 500 Meter Corridor regulation
 - Removal of the One Week Closure
 - Remain in the Green Zone
 - Parties continue to develop and implement the PCHMP and Implementation Plan

Inuvialuit Game Council, Doug Esagok and Steve Baryluk

- Presented background on the authority of IGC regarding wildlife management and the composition of the Council.
- Traditional Knowledge
 - TK suggests that caribou move in and out of areas over time
 - Elders told hunters to take advantage of caribou when they are around because they will ‘go away again’
 - Older hunters not overly concerned with herd declines because they are viewed as part of a natural, long term cycling of populations and movements between different areas
 - Would like to see researchers have more confidence in TK explanations; feeling it is usually acknowledged, but generally ignored when trying to explain what is happening
- Inuvialuit confidence in research
 - Confidence of the IGC and communities has been shaken with respect to use of model predictions
 - The Caribou Calculator model predicted a decline, but the last census indicates a significant increase in the population from the previous census
 - Restrictions on aboriginal harvesting rights were implemented based on the incorrect model predictions

- Inuvialuit not in favour of the general move from actual data collection to modeling
- Inuvialuit Management of Caribou
 - Inuvialuit take sustainability of caribou very seriously. Three National Parks were established within the ISR to protect caribou calving grounds.
 - Inuvialuit have made tough decisions when necessary including full hunting closures for herd that have declined significantly.
 - Real hardships being experienced in the communities because not all the needs are being met
- Harvest Management Plan
 - IGC continues to support the Harvest Management Plan
 - Collection of harvest data has experienced some difficulties starting up (not unexpectedly)
 - Using implementation funds to support harvest data collection
 - Continuing to educate Inuvialuit beneficiaries about the HMP and encouraging harvesting of bulls when they are in the best shape
- Harvest data collection
 - Data collected in Aklavik and Inuvik. Tuktoyaktuk has not been started but has very low PCH harvest. Working with the Tuk HTC to determine how best to address.
 - Aklavik:
 - Drop-in self-reporting by harvesters at AHTC office (reporting on all harvest, not just caribou)
 - June 2010 – May 2011 – 156 people reported, 29 of whom categorized as “hunters” for Porcupine Caribou
 - 67 caribou reported harvested – 37 bulls, 2 cows, 28 unknown
 - This does not represent all harvest for Inuvialuit in Aklavik
 - Door-to-door survey underway for June-November 2011 to compare results with drop-in reporting
 - Because the herd was considered in the Yellow Zone during this time, Harvesters were trying to take bulls, and trying to take less
 - Inuvik:
 - Door-to-door surveys completed in the fall of 2010 for harvesting from July 2009 to Nov 2010
 - 49 people contacted, 47 interviewed
 - 103 caribou reported harvested during this entire period: 98 bulls, 5 cows
 - 49 caribou for 2009/10 caribou year: 45 bulls, 4 cows
 - 54 caribou for Aug-Nov 2010: 53 bulls, 1 cow
 - Check station data collected as well along Dempster Highway (additional information to assist with verification)
 - 38 Inuvialuit harvesters reported
 - 81 caribou reported harvested; 79 bulls, 2 cows
 - Only 10 harvesters reporting at Check station were also interviewed

- Of the 47 harvesters interviewed 83% had heard about the HMP, and 91% of those aware of the HMP knew what the Yellow Zone meant for harvesters
 - Still need to compare survey data to Check station data
 - Need to compare Aklavik door-to-door survey results with AHTC drop-in reported harvest
- Recommendations
 - Based on the HMP the Porcupine Caribou herd is in the Green Zone – apply management actions as per HMP
 - Harvest data collection will continue
 - Hunter education initiatives must continue, particularly in larger centers (e.g. Inuvik)
 - Check stations should remain to continue to promote the HMP and its objectives – user groups must be involved in operations
 - Voluntary sample kits [body condition monitoring] should continue to be distributed to harvesters
 - Key indicators should continue to be monitored annually
 - Photo census should be scheduled for every 3 years (similar to what is happening with NWT herds)
 - Model (including revised version and relevant data) used for population projections must be made available to all the Parties and the co-management boards in order to conduct their own analyses
 - Government monitoring of harvest must be applied equally in all areas of significant harvest activity (e.g. Dempster Hwy, Old Crow)
 - Attention needs to be paid to the issue of caribou movements between herds. Communities are not convinced that there is not significant movement between herds. If this is to be researched more thoroughly then discussions must start soon
 - Significant financial considerations – possible allocation of IFA implementation funds. There are “Philosophical” considerations e.g. more collaring would be required; is this what communities would want?
 - IGC to address outstanding HMP Implementation Plan items
 - Umbrella User Access Agreement process to be initiated
 - NWT Native User Agreement process to be initiated

Vuntut Gwitchin, Lance Nagwan

- The caribou herd is healthy, the habitat is relatively intact, and the caribou numbers seems to be fairly good. Although we operate in the Green Zone, we must remain cautious.
- Update of the PCMA is needed
- Suggest a PCMB meeting in Old Crow
- VG intention to review present allocation PCH harvest allocation,
- VG will initiate YFN Native User Agreement once leadership sorts out their situation

- PC harvest data collection, have notified the board on our collection schedule, and our attempt to reach our citizens abroad (outside our TT) for caribou harvest information. Also we need one simple template we can all work from.
- Calving grounds need protection
- We need more involvement from Alaska in the management of PCH,
- We have an Searchable Index Library for our Oral History to incorporate Traditional Knowledge,
- Improve communication on herd management and habitat with user communities
 - o Oil and Gas Activities,
 - o Research need to be communicated to the communities;
 - Interpretation of Indicators,
 - Climate change,
 - Parasites/Bovine Viral Diarrhea in the herd,
 - Status of “Dempster Caribou Disturbance Study” looking at the cumulative effects of activities on migration patterns.
- Some other community comments are;
 - o Muskox and Cougar in the caribou range,
 - o Air North’s fuel haul from Ft Macpherson during September maybe affecting migration,
 - o Continuation of Hunter/Youth Education Program, and
 - o Possible funding for hunting and cultural camp.

First Nation of NaCho Nyäk Dun, Dennis Buyck

- The Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement needs to be updated
- The [Dempster] no-hunting corridor should be removed
- Support for youth programs

Government of the Northwest Territories, Stephen Charlie

- Current NWT Resident harvest regulations:
 - o Require hunting licence, can purchase 2 bull only tags per year, Season 15 Aug to 30 April
- PCH is the only area in NWT where residents can harvest caribou
- Data based on:
 - o Licensing system record of hunters/tags sold
 - o Mail in resident survey in 3 waves of mailings (10/11 still in progress)
 - o Phone around to those not reporting through mail out to increase reporting
 - o Check station data (fall 2009, 2010, and 2011)
- For the 2010/11 season, 98 tags were sold. Only 8 tags have been reported so far. However we can conclude that 98 bulls is the maximum caribou that could have been taken by NWT Resident hunters.
- For the 2011/12 season (currently ongoing), 93 tags were sold.
- ENR still needs to work on increasing reporting rates
- Due to closures of other areas, need to continue to look at data to ensure residents from other regions to PCH range to hunt are included
- Check station

- GTC reported the check station data. Still need to compare data to harvest data collected by GRRB and IGC.
- Will continue hunter education part of check station
- Will continue monitoring in the springtime
- Will continue to run check station in collaboration with partners
- Will continue Body Condition monitoring but we need to get sample sizes up.
- Hosted a Sight-in-your-rifle event at Shingle Point in July 2011. A Yukon officer participated. 29 people took part.
- ENR plans to:
 - Continue to work with co-management partners and other Parties to implement the plan
 - Work with partners to improve harvest data collection
 - Help compare information from check station and field reporting
 - Highway signs
 - Continue hunter education work – building on messages
 - Maximize bull harvest in the fall when bulls are in best shape and reduce cow harvest
 - Report data
 - Sight in your rifle
- Key recommendations for all Parties
 - Continue to implement the HMP
 - Support harvest data collection
 - Continue to support monitoring the herd
 - Finish updating modeling tools
 - Continue communication efforts
 - Native User Agreements
 - Administrative process for PCH tag (if required)
- Key recommendations to the PCMB
 - Green zone
 - Continue to promote bull dominated harvest
 - Continue to promote the need for harvest reporting
 - Support harmonization of the regulations
 - Media on development of new modeling tools
 - Continue hunter education efforts

Government of Yukon, Kelly Milner

- PCMB recommended “Yellow Zone” management regime for 2009/10 therefore
 - Licensed hunters limited to one bull only
 - Aboriginals restricted to bulls only, but unlimited harvest
 - Mandatory reporting for all harvesters (2010 hired dedicated Dempster Highway Conservation Officer instead of Northern Check Station)
- Harvest by Yukon licensed hunters in 2010/11 was 29 by Resident and 9 by Non-resident hunters.
- In 2011/12 so far, 6 caribou were reported by Residents and 4 caribou by Non-residents.
- Recommendations following last year’s [2011] Annual Harvest Meeting

- Herd now in “Green Zone”
- Subsistence Regulations rescinded June 2011
- Licensed hunters can take two bulls
- No limit for Aboriginal harvesters
- Mandatory reporting still required
- Monitoring and enforcement
 - Support for June 2011 Harvest Reporting workshop
 - South Highway Check Station not opened because of low caribou numbers
 - Regular patrols by local conservation officers across herd range
 - Dempster Highway Conservation officer hired November 2011
- Education and outreach
 - YG/PCMB rifle sighting and hunter education programs (Whitehorse, Old Crow, Shingle Point).
 - Ongoing collaboration on communication materials with PCMB and other parties.
 - Updating highway signs for Green Zone information.
- Next steps
 - Continue to support the implementation of harvest reporting by all Parties.
 - A new Harvest Coordinator position is being developed
 - Work on development of enabling regulations that reflect content of Harvest Management Plan. Will involve all Parties to the HMP/PCMA
 - Begin discussions on a range-wide tag (orange zone only).
- Issues for discussion
 - Dempster Highway Regulations
 - Harvest data sharing agreements (among Parties)
 - Native User Agreements
 - Bears on Dempster Highway

Environment Canada, Shannon Stotyn

- EC's main task this year was to develop the long term database. EC has hired a contractor to do the work. Deadline is 31 March 2012.

Parks Canada, Chris Hunter

- Gave background on Parks Canada's involvement in Porcupine Caribou
- In the Implementation Plan, Parks Canada has an action to review the harvest data collection program. This should be discussed more [are the programs ready to review or should we delay starting this action?]
- Also, the State of the Park report on Ivvavik will be done later this year. PCA relies on partner organizations to supply caribou data for that report. Parks does ecological monitoring (eg NDVI, vegetation change) that might be useful in assessing the status of the herd.

Comments from meeting participants

- We have no caribou right now. We're lucky we have moose
- Mackenzie River ferry personnel can help record harvest data
- Concerned about grizzly bears. Caribou used to come the first week of August, now they come in July when bears are still around. It's dangerous on the highway now. Don't want to go out from the highway without a skidoo – personal safety is more important than the no-skidoo regulation.
- Need to talk about which caribou are the leaders for the one week closure. Need to consider the timing of the rut for that closure too.
- For the 500 meter corridor, it's strange you can shoot a moose by the road but not caribou.
- Non natives need to be treated the same as native [for regulations]. Get rid of the 500 meter corridor.
- Long ago, we knew when caribou were coming and when they past. It's different now. Sometimes we blame ourselves but climate change and other things too. Too much disturbance can make even mosquitos go crazy. There are all sorts of disturbance together on the caribou.
- Right now, there are not caribou nearby but that's ok, we'll get some later.
- On the Porcupine River, we knew for years if you kill a caribou a bear could come. Now on the Dempster, it's the same thing. Don't blame anyone but ourselves. We can't tell our kids that bears are no good and shoot them all.
- Community hunts are good but we have to teach kids when it's good to kill a caribou, when they're good to eat.
- Question: are the caribou at the Gorge permanent residents?
- Question: Who determines the 200 caribou to close the highway?
- Elders are not overly concerned about fewer caribou – they move off / away from time to time.
- Next census can come back sky high. We want an apology from the biologists and an explanation.
- There are lots of landslides, especially around Rat River.
- Borderlands is a good survey that's going on.
- Young hunter training is important.
- If we're ever in the Orange Zone, there should be a tag that's good in both Yukon and NWT.
- If the governments won't enforce caribou laws on Settlement Land, will they turn over the money they get to do that to the First Nations so the First Nations can enforce?