

Porcupine Caribou Management Board

Minutes of Meeting

September 4-6, 2008
Mayo, Yukon

In attendance

Members

Joe Tetlich, Chair
Billy Archie, Inuvialuit Game Council
Liz Wright, Gwich'in Tribal Council
Lorraine Peter, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation
Steven Buyck, Nacho Ny'ak Dun
Dorothy Cooley, Government of Yukon
Marsha Branigan, Government of Northwest Territories
Ian McDonald, Government of Canada

Deana Lemke, Secretariat

Regret

Steve Taylor, Tr'ondëk Hwech'in

Presenters

Dorothy Cooley, Regional Biologist, Yukon Department of Environment
Cindy Dickson and Sharon Keaton, Council of Yukon First Nations
Shawn Francis, Cumulative Effects Management Consultant

Welcome and Opening Prayer

The Chair welcomed participants to the meeting. Billy Archie offered the opening prayer.

Chief Simon Mervyn warmly welcomed PCMB members to the traditional territory of NND in Mayo. NND citizens' harvesting has decreased over the years; however, the work of the Board is much appreciated.

Brief opening remarks were made by the Chair and Board members.

Review Agenda

The Agenda was reviewed by the Board and approved with the following addition:

- Discuss approval process for the HMP

Motion to accept agenda as presented

Moved by Billy Archie

Seconded by Ian MacDonald

Carried

Review of minutes

The minutes of the June 17 and 18, 2008, Board meeting were reviewed and approved.

Motion to accept minutes as presented

Moved by Lorraine Peter

Seconded by Steve Buyck

Carried

Review of Action Items

Action items were reviewed and ongoing or outstanding items were discussed and reported on. Action items will include more information regarding how an item may have been completed or disposed of.

Chair's Update – Joe Tetlich

Chair, Joe Tetlich updated the Board on various aspects of his work with the Board.

- It is imperative that we eliminate the cow harvest if we want to benefit the herd.
- The Arctic Refuge is a priority and will be an issue during the upcoming US presidential election.
- Joe attended the Gwich'in Gathering in Old Crow in July. He made a presentation to the youth delegation. They are concerned about the protection of the caribou and how decisions now will affect future generations. Joe also made a presentation to the participants of the Gathering.
- Joe receives phone calls frequently from people concerned about the herd. There are still unhealthy hunting habits happening, wounding loss, overharvesting and cow harvest are ongoing issues. The Hunter Education package will help people understand the issues and what their rights and responsibilities are.

- There has been an increase in grizzly sightings, especially around caribou harvesting areas. This highlights the need to clean up well after hunters field dress animals.
- Joe and Deana met with Anne Snider while she was in Whitehorse two weeks ago. They discussed Board activities and INAC's support of the Board, including proposal-driven funding provided to the Board annually.
- There is a concern about lack of representation from Trondek Hwechin at the PCMB meetings.

Harvest Management Plan Update

The PCMB was updated on activities around the HMS and the work of the HMS Working Group (WG). The updated draft Harvest Management Plan (HMP) was provided to the PCMB members. The PCMB recommendations that came out of the last PCMB meeting were forwarded to the Working Group. The Working Group met and revised the draft HMP and it was distributed to the communities for discussion and input.

Marsha Branigan, Dorothy Cooley and Deana Lemke are representatives of the Working Group who are now making arrangements to travel to the user communities to present the plan and generate discussion and compile input. A presentation has been made to the Gwich'in Gathering in Old Crow.

The Board discussed the approval process for the final Harvest Management Plan. The Working Group will present their final draft of the Harvest Manage Plan to the PCMB and the signatories. The PCMB will then review it, provide approval and recommend it to the parties for implementation. The governments would then undertake their government-to-government consultations based on the recommended plan.

Administrative and Financial Report – Deana Lemke

The Secretariat, Deana Lemke, provided an administrative and financial report, as presented.

Motion to approve 2007-08 Financial Audit undertaken by Mackay and Associates, as presented.

***Moved by Billy Archie
Seconded by Steven Buyck
Carried***

Climate Change and Circumpolar Relations (CYFN) – Cindy Dickson and Sharon Keaton

Cindy Dickson and Sharon Keaton were in attendance from the Council of Yukon First Nations to present information about climate change, circumpolar relations and the Arctic Athabaskan Council.

The presenters went through a Powerpoint presentation about climate change, some of its causes and effects.

The Peary Caribou may be Canada's first extinction caused by climate-change.

The presenters spoke about changes in summer sea-ice extent and tree line, which are projected to occur by the end of this century. If temperature at the equator rises by one degree, that would result in a seven-degree increase in the polar regions.

The IPY project that CYFN is involved in is dealing with impacts of climate change on caribou and how that relates to social and other changes. The project has \$1.8 million. The three communities will get the majority of the funding. What is the newest info about climate change? How far is the tree-line moving?

A steering committee will be put together that will involve communities and key organizations. The proposal will be forwarded to the PCMB for review and potential input.

The Arctic Resilience, Culture and Caribou IPY Project will enhance resilience or ability to adapt to climate change and improve community health and wellbeing. This project will investigate social networks, traditional knowledge, and language, governance and capacity in the face of changing nature.

Climate change has been identified as a key driver of environmental, social, economic and cultural change in the north. The Circumpolar Relations office at the Council of Yukon First Nations is involved in climate change mitigation and adaptation, gathering climate change information and research and working with communities in local climate change initiatives.

The Arctic Athabaskan Council is involved in the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment. The Arctic Climate Impact Assessment was a significant undertaking that broadened the knowledge about climate change impacts experienced in northern regions, assisting southern-based policy decision-makers to become aware of serious changes from a northern perspective (information distributed).

Public Meeting

The Board held a public meeting in Mayo to provide and update on Board activities and discuss issues related to the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

A presentation on the draft Harvest Management Plan was presented by representatives of the Working Group (Marsha Branigan, Dorothy Cooley and Deana Lemke).

Cumulative Effects Assessment – Shawn Francis

Shawn Francis was invited to the meeting to discuss his involvement in the potential cumulative effects assessment project. Shawn presented information, including the following points from his slides:

- Cumulative effects are environmental and socio-economic changes that results from a land-use activity in combination with other past, present and future activities.
- While one land-use activity may have only a small impact, the combined effect of a number of activities may have a significant impact.
- Negative impacts are called “cumulative impacts”.
- No one agency is responsible for managing cumulative impacts; it is responsibility of many agencies/organizations.
- Benchmarks are needed to assess cumulative impacts
- Habitat or land-use targets/thresholds are considered some of the most practical means of establishing a framework for assessing cumulative impacts.
- A challenge to management is that review boards and governments assess and approve projects individually; however, cumulative impacts cannot be managed on a project-by-project basis.
- Cumulative Impacts can be measured by adding direct and indirect impacts together.
- It is important for the Board to have the information to consider what effect a particular project in the range of the Porcupine Caribou Herd might have on the population or the habitat.
- Cumulative impact assessment for caribou should separate natural variation from development-related change, assess impacts at the population level, incorporate uncertainty, identify sensitive, relevant monitoring indicators and make the exercise meaningful to co-management boards.

Shawn reviewed several models and approaches to cumulative effects management. He cited the example of the Bathurst Project in terms of a cumulative effects pilot project. Conservation decisions regarding the Porcupine Caribou Herd have significant social and economic consequences.

Board members spoke about how the Board is really trying to achieve its mandate under the PCMA, which is to manage the herd and its habitat. This is very challenging with limited resources and capacity.

The goal should be to ensure that any cumulative effects assessment work has to be easily understood by all stakeholders – even community members. It can't be written in a complex manner.

For the purposes of Shawn's project, the Board felt the study area should include the entire range of the Porcupine caribou, including Alaska. Much information is already out there and can be accessed.

Shawn recommended the following approach:

- Continue his participation in the Bathurst pilot project
- Refine his project objectives
- PCMB to secure partners/funding (with Shawn's assistance)
- Discuss plausible scenarios
- Begin working on habitat and footprint maps
- Wait for results of the Bathurst project before starting modeling related to the PCMB project.

Motion to approve Shawn Francis' contract, up to a maximum of \$70,000 to undertake the first three phases outlined in his Cumulative Effects Assessment project proposal. Other funding sources are to be sought from other organizations with shared goals/purposes.

Moved by Ian McDonald

Seconded by Lorraine Peter

Carried

Porcupine Caribou Herd Update – Dorothy Cooley

Dorothy Cooley updated the Board on various aspects of work with the PCH:

- Brodie Smith has now completed her STEP program with the PCMB. Department of Education funds a portion of a summer student's employment. The remainder of the funding comes from the Board, called the Johnny Charlie Scholarship.
- Brodie's work time was extended so she could work on the Dempster Dust pilot project this summer. That pilot project was partially funded by the Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust. The project involves research, development and testing of a method to measure the amount of dust along the highway at the current level of traffic. The idea is to establish a baseline to compare to increased levels of traffic in the future. The required sampling equipment was purchased but due to so much rain this summer, the testing was limited since there was no dust. Brodie is now

- finalizing her report on the method she recommends for the pilot project that is expected to take place next summer.
- The photocensus of the PCH was attempted again this summer but it was once again unsuccessful. The PC Technical Committee has been discussing other options that could potentially be used to count the herd. The PCTC feels the best method to use as an alternative is based on the calving ground method used by the GNWT. This has been modified somewhat and currently the PCTC is running scenarios based on past PCH data (calving distributions, etc.). The PCTC plan to meet again in a few weeks to discuss scenarios further. A rut count is being planned (to get bull:cow ratio before we potentially go to a bull-only harvest). Dorothy will provide information to the Board regarding the alternative census method. The Board agreed to review the information and reply by the end October.
 - CARMA funding has been approved for two body condition projects this fiscal year. There will be intensive sampling of caribou for fatness and parasites. This will be done in September out of Old Crow and in March along the Dempster Highway. There will also be a project to expand on the monitoring by hunter submissions that have been done for many years. This will be expanded to the two check stations and possibly to Aklavik hunters.
 - The Hunter Education package is still in the works of being developed. It is still anticipated that this will be completed by this fiscal year. The working group met again in Inuvik following the June PCMB meeting. There are plans to arrange the Dempster shooting workshop; however, funding is an issue this year. There have been initial discussions with GNWT about a shooting workshop at Shingle Point next summer.
 - The summer measurements for the snowmachine-vegetation study. This is the third time the vegetation has been measured. There will be one more year to do snowmachine treatments and then there will be a reassessment of the project.
 - New satellite collars are being purchased by the Arctic Refuge to replace three from caribou that died. CWS and Vuntut National Park will be purchasing conventional collars to deploy in March 2009.
 - The south Dempster check station will open when the caribou arrive. Yukon Environment has been discussing the logistics of the north check station with GNWT.
 - The rut composition count is scheduled for October.
 - The wounding loss feasibility study project will likely start in October/November.
 - Telemetry flight will soon be undertaken to keep track of any overlap between the PCH and Hart River caribou along the Dempster Highway.

Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op – Dorothy Cooley

Dorothy Cooley presented information about Arctic Borderlands. She is a director on the Arctic Borderlands board of directors. Arctic Borderlands is a community-based ecological monitoring program with a goal of bringing together science and local knowledge to understand changes in the Arctic Borderlands area with a focus on climate change, development and contaminants. Activities are focused on collecting information and reporting on trends and observations in the area of the PCH and surrounding areas.

Don Russell was contracted to analyze Arctic Borderlands interview questions related to the caribou from past years, as follows:

- How available were the caribou?
- Did you hunt? If yes, how many did you take? If no, why not?
- Did you meet your needs?
- How were the caribou's body condition?
- Were there any abnormal or unusual caribou?

Don's analysis did not include a community-by-community analysis or major statistics. He looked at all responses in a given year, regardless of which community responded. He considered seven years of data from 2000-01 to 2006-07.

"Caribou availability" observations included:

- Increasing trend in caribou availability in winter and spring.
- Caribou seem to be least available in winter
- There are implications on communities that focus on hunting in specific seasons

"Why you didn't hunt" observations included:

- Clear primary reason for not hunting is lack of caribou availability
- Bad weather more important reason in spring
- Bad weather would compound the impact of caribou not being close to communities

"Did you meet your needs" observations included:

- General increasing trend in meeting needs in both spring and fall
- Significant but weak relationship between meeting needs and caribou availability in both seasons

"Body condition" observations included:

- Dramatic decline in body condition between fall and spring
- Two years of most dramatic decline, 2001 and 2002, were both deep snow years with very late melt. In both years early calf mortality was high

- Very little difference between body condition in fall and winter in most years
- Exception is 2004-05. Biologists recorded lowest birth rate the next spring (64%), which suggests that late fall, early winter may have been harsh

“Abnormalities” observations included:

- Generally poor shape (29)
- Cysts/white spots (4)
- Sores and pus (4)
- Wounded, limping (3)
- Swollen joints/testes/glands (3)
- Bad liver (3)

Some cautions and limitations of the data included:

- Communities hunt different herds
- Questions inconsistently asked each year
- Community coverage is not consistent
- Sample size is too small to do community comparisons.

Board members discussed the findings of Don Russell’s analysis and the following points/questions were noted during the discussion:

- Results are based on interviews done – are they accurate when some communities may not be responding to caribou harvesting questions. Can the results be broken down by community/region to give a more accurate picture?
- Is there potential use of this information by Shawn Francis in CE work?

Interview questions could potentially consider:

- When you hunt caribou, do you ever hunt for others?
- Are adequate resources readily available or your hunting needs?
- How far did you have to go to get caribou?
- Was it more difficult to hunt this time as compared to the past (time commitment).
- Can the question be herd-specific?
- More questions about how healthy the caribou are, what their condition is.

Communities are being inundated with questionnaires. The right people need to be asked the caribou questions. Responses to questions need to be measurable; quantitative information is more difficult to get. Definitions of answers should be clear so they are measurable. Interviewer training is important. Perhaps a journal or calendar for the super hunters to track their harvest information would be useful.

The PCMB will be invited to the October Arctic Borderlands meeting where results of the questionnaires will be discussed. In the meantime, Dorothy will send the Board the caribou questions to review and provide input on.

Members' Concerns

The Harvest Management Plan is a priority and everyone is anxious to see it finalized by the Working Group.

There is concern about the resolutions that came out of the Dene Assembly re caribou.

Members are concerned about Trondek Hwech'in's involvement in the PCMB and the HMP.

Composition count during the calving season will be a sensitive area to some First Nation people. The work is important but you have to let the communities know about it and get an okay before that is done.

Protection of the Arctic Refuge is critical.

Censuses are key information respecting caribou populations. Consideration of alternative methods to obtaining populations is critical.

Set next meeting date and location

The next meeting will be held in Whitehorse at the end of November. Deana will e-mail members to canvass availability.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 p.m.