

Porcupine Caribou Management Board

Minutes of Meeting

December 19 and 20, 2013

Whitehorse, Yukon

In attendance

Members/Staff

Joe Tetlich, Chair
Steven Buyck, Nacho Ny'ak Dun
Jamie McLelland, Government of Yukon
Mike Gill, Government of Canada
Marsha Branigan, Government of the Northwest Territories
Charles Pokiak, Inuvialuit Game Council (Alternate)
David Frost, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation
Art Christiansen, Trondek Hwech'in
Wilbert Firth, Gwich'in Tribal Council
Roberta Joseph, Trondek Hwech'in (Alternate)
Ian McDonald, Government of Canada (Alternate; attended part of meeting)

Deana Lemke, Executive Director

Presenters

Mike Sutor, Environment Yukon
Troy Hegel, Environment Yukon
Don Russell, Cumulative Effects Project
Jason Caikoski, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Kelly Milner, Communications Consultant
Graham Van Tighem, Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Chair Joe Tetlich welcomed members to Whitehorse and called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. He offered an opening prayer.

Review Agenda

The Agenda was reviewed by the Board and approved.

Motion to accept agenda

Moved by Mike Gill

Seconded by Steven Buyck

Carried

Review Minutes and Action Items

The Minutes of the September 18 and 19, 2013 meeting were approved by the Board and the action items were reviewed and discussed.

Motion to accept Minutes of the September 18 and 19, 2013 meeting as distributed

Moved by Wilbert Firth

Seconded by Charles Pokiak

Carried

Chair's Report

Chair Joe Tetlich provided an update as follows:

- Joe has been communicating with the communities to get a sense of how the harvest went. In Fort McPherson the caribou were initially there in July but none were harvested until October. Since the ferry was open late this year it gave them more opportunity to hunt after the rut.
- In general, communities were happy with the harvest. Last year most had waited until September/October to harvest and then didn't get any caribou.
- Fort McPherson will be having a Regional RRC meeting on January 21 – 23 and Joe will hopefully attend to deal with Dempster issues.
- Joe noted that there will always be challenges with regard to hunting on the Dempster, although it is better now than 10 or 15 years ago. People are being more conservative now and considering conservation rather than taking all the caribou they can get.
- There will be a summit meeting hosted by VGFN Natural Resources in Old Crow in January which Joe intends on attending.
- Last week Joe and Deana participated in a meeting with Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board. The draft MOU was discussed. Graham Van Tighem will attend later today and provide an update about their regulation consultation process.

Administrative and Financial Report

Administrative update

Correspondence

Deana Lemke reviewed letters sent out to support Gwichin Tribal Council's Dempster highway harvest management initiative, support for listing Grizzly bears as special concern, appointment letters for members, and information on the upcoming North American Caribou Workshop taking place in Whitehorse in 2014.

The Annual Harvest Meeting 2014 invitation was sent out to Parties and stakeholders on December 6, with a response deadline of January 24, 2014.

Correspondence since the last PCMB meeting has been distributed to members by email. Copies of some correspondence are in members' meeting information binders.

PCTC Meeting

A face-to-face Porcupine Caribou Technical Committee meeting was held November 25 and 26 in Fairbanks, Alaska. Deana was not able to attend in person, but connected by phone for part of the meeting on each day. The PCTC Terms of Reference were finalized by the International Porcupine Caribou Board. A copy of the final document was provided in members' meeting information binders. PCMB is considered a "Tenured Member" (not a full member, but participating in PCTC communications, etc.). A list of PCTC action items was provided for reference.

Northern Cross Project – PCH Working Group

As a result of PCMB's and other comments via the YESAB feedback process, Northern Cross formed a Working Group that includes representatives from Northern Cross, the PCMB, Yukon First Nations (VGG, NND and TH) and the North Yukon Regional Biologist. Meetings are held to discuss the potential impacts of their oil and gas project to the PCH and its habitat in the project activity area. There have been three meetings held by conference call to date. The Working Group will meet more frequently once the project becomes more active in the new year. An update is provided in members' meeting information binders.

2014 North American Caribou Workshop

The North American Caribou Workshop will be held May 12-16, 2014 in Whitehorse, Yukon. We are hoping to submit a poster regarding the HMP. Members who are interested in attending should make this known so registration can be completed.

Dorothy Cooley was invited to do a presentation at the North American Caribou Workshop on harvest data collection under the HMP. They will look into the possibility of Joe introducing the presentation and having him provide some background on the development of the Harvest Management Strategy.

Caribou Contaminants Program Proposal

Mary Gamberg submitted a new Caribou Contaminants Program proposal. Copies are in members' meeting information binders. Generally, the Board has indicated its support for the continuation of Ms. Gamberg's work. She has noted some revisions to her proposal (since her previous proposal last year). If members have any concerns they can be noted.

Membership terms

PCMB members' terms of appointment are now up to date. A current membership list is in members' meeting information binders.

Financial update

Deana provided an administrative and financial report. The variance report for 2013-14 to date was reviewed.

Contribution Agreements 2013-14

Current funding agreements were reported on as follows:

- We are in year 1 of a three-year funding agreement with GY for \$75,000 per year.
- We are in year 3 of a four-year funding agreement with Parks Canada Agency for \$30,050 per year.
- We have a one-year funding agreement with GNWT for \$78,000.
- We have a one-year funding agreement with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada for \$55,056 (\$13,950 of which is for core funding).
- We have signed a one-year funding agreement with Environment Canada for CWS funding in the amount of \$31,000.

Draft Budget for 2014-15

The Board will need to prepare a draft budget for 2014-15. Funding priorities and allocations for the new fiscal year will need to be discussed prior to this fiscal year-end.

Financial Audit for 2013-14

The Board discussed the appointment of auditors for this year. McKay & Associates have been the auditors for many years now and Deana recommended that we continue with them.

Motion to appoint McKay & Associates as auditors for 2013-14.

Moved by Marsha Branigan

Seconded by Charles Pokiak

Carried

Harvest Management Plan Update

Deana reviewed the HMP Milestones Calendar. All parties have reported some harvest data. Deana pointed out that the public session of the Annual Harvest Meeting is scheduled for February 11, 2013 in Dawson. Rooms have been set aside at the Aurora Inn and members need to advise Deana about their attendance and confirm travel arrangements. The initial invitation letter said that

the public meeting would be at the Cultural Center but Roberta suggested it would be better at the community hall because of access to the kitchen facility. The next communication about the meeting will point out this change of venue.

The information that was sent out included the PCTC summary report. Any updates can be presented at the AHM.

It was suggested that Troy Hegel do a simplified presentation about the population model at the public meeting as it would be a good opportunity to educate the public and the utility of the model.

While Marsha pointed out that participation needs to improve, she agreed with Mike that so far the reporting is an improvement over the previous year. Regarding the harvest data Marsha noted that the sex ratio is good — female harvest is a bit higher this time, but is not an issue.

Members agreed to assist their parties with getting information from their communities regarding comments on the summary report and any additional information based on suggested outline, as well as who will be attending from the communities.

Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board (Graham VanTighem)

Graham provided information related to two proposed Dempster Highway regulation changes that the Board recommended rescinding: let the leaders pass and the 500 meter corridor. He explained that the Minister of Environment set aside both PCMB recommendations pending a public review. Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board (YFWMB) followed up with public engagement and have summarized the feedback. Written comments were submitted and input was also gathered at public meetings. Graham noted that when he talked about the changes with members of the public he referred to the fact that PCMB is recommending these, which appeared to give people a level of comfort around the validity of the request.

Usually the YFWMB want to have recommendations completed by December but that will not happen this year due to tight timelines and trying to work with PCMB.

To maintain confidentiality regarding the recommendations that have not yet been made public, non-PCMB members in attendance were asked to leave the meeting.

Graham explained that the YFWMB took the original PCMB recommendations into account, as well as the public comments. The final recommendation was to support the original PCMB recommendations and to advance both of them.

Deana noted that the PCMB only addressed the caribou in their recommendation regarding the removal of the 500 meter no-hunting corridor, but YG expanded the scope to all species except grizzlies.

Discussion arose around whether NWT First Nation or government-to-government consultation would still be required. It was pointed out that consultation had already taken place and that the situation is different especially when taking an action that does not affect subsistence harvest, as the rescinding of the two regulations would be.

Graham explained that work has been done on the draft MOU in recent months. The intention is to have an even better relationship with PCMB. Another goal is to have better communication and collaboration in order to have clarity about how the two boards will work together in the future. The overlapping mandate of both organizations needs to be clarified with a goal of working together.

Deana pointed out that a MOU will help formalize and document the relationship for future reference, and this would assist a new chair or executive director in understanding the relationship. A meeting with Dan Lindsey at YG will be set up to have him review the draft MOU and provide feedback.

Some members expressed concerns around if or how NWT communities were involved in the consultation process and that someone needs to take responsibility to do consultation on the NWT side when there is a proposed regulation change in Yukon that also affects them.

Herd Update

Government of Yukon Update

Mike Sutor provided the following update to the Board members.

- The photocensus was completed last summer. Over 120,000 animals have been counted so far, with still many more caribou to count. The final number is not yet known, but we are clearly in the HMP Green Zone. A final number is anticipated to be received in time for the AHM in February. When the final estimate is produced, it will include how many animals we think were missed (10 collars have not been found, and 10 other collars were on animals mixed in with the Central Arctic herd).
- Enhanced satellite data collection is taking place on the North Slope, which has been funded by WMAC (NS).

- A rut count was attempted this year but was not possible, partially due to the PCH mixing with the Central Arctic Herd. There was such a herd overlap that it could not be ascertained which herd was being counted.
- The majority of calving occurred in Yukon between the Firth and Babbage rivers. The herd spent the summer in the Richardson mountains.
- The Fortymile herd's location was monitored continually and it did not mix with the PCH at that time.
- Since the early 2000s a change in climate has caused a lot of snow on the Alaskan coast; therefore, the caribou have calved mostly in Yukon. Some traditional knowledge indicates that there have been times when a lot of calving took place in the eastern range but then moved back.
- The check station reported that not a lot of people were going hunting.
- Winter work being planned for March includes captures and collaring to maintain between 80 to 100 collars. A composition count will be attempted this winter.
- Prioritization of monitoring activities took place at the most recent PCTC meeting. The herd's parturition rate was considered and it was determined that this data is not as critical as it was once thought to be. The most critical factor driving the population of the herd is adult female survival. PCTC would like to get a better handle on this so will try to monitor this more rigorously.
- The PCTC acknowledged the need to update the Sensitive Habitats report. Organizations that do work in the range of the herd use this report as a reference; however, it is now 20 years old and needs to be updated. We have a lot more data now than when the report was initially published in the 1990s and it would be valuable to update it as a key resource. Mike's office will be largely responsible for updating the report, with Dorothy and Martin supporting the effort.
- Most of October 2013 was occupied with monitoring the Forty Mile herd's location. The Forty Mile herd has been in recovery since the 1970s when it was at 6,500 animals. Since then, it increased to 50,000. In the past, there used to be many tens of thousands, possibly up to 100,000 animals. There has been no licensed harvest since the 1990s and only minor other harvest. Until recently there has been very little overlap with the PCH; however, this year the Forty Mile herd moved east while the PCH moved south and a big overlap was anticipated.

Efforts were made to protect the Forty Mile herd while trying not to affect the harvest of PCH. A closure was put in effect to protect Forty Mile caribou because they moved into an area where subzones are open for harvesting of PCH. The closure was coordinated with sub-management zones and conservation officers were enforcing it. The situation was monitored on a weekly basis, including flights over the area. There was some overlap west of the highway, but not as much as was anticipated. Most of the caribou south of Windy Pass are now Forty Mile caribou and the PCH are now farther north.

- Northern Cross is undertaking a significant 3D seismic project in an area where about one-third of the time caribou are located during the winter. An aerial survey was done prior to the winter work to identify the risk of caribou being in the activity area. Telemetry and satellite data was used and there was also a visual assessment around the project area.

Some caribou have traveled through the Northern Cross project area and continued on to Horseshoe. Martin Kiensler feels that some bulls will stay around the project area. While part of the area is recovering burn area there is still good habitat and some caribou will likely stay there over winter.

One of the Northern Cross commitments is that if there are significant numbers of caribou they would shut down the project; however, no thresholds have been established about what is considered “significant.” Another commitment is that they will avoid or not work within 600 meters of caribou. They have GPS technology and they can comply if they wish. So far, they have been reasonable. We don’t want them to push hundreds of caribou out of the habitat.

GNWT Update

Marsha Branigan updated the Board on recent activities. She distributed two booklets summarizing this fall’s sight-in-your-rifle events in NWT. The Inuvik program took place September 7, 2013 and the Fort McPherson program took place on October 26, 2013.

Marsha has been working with Dorothy on the harvest database. Inuvik and Aklavik June-to-October collections are underway.

No data from the check station was available since the GTC RRC is responsible for running it. It was noted that the station had to shut down early due to heating problems.

Caribou population model (Troy Hegel)

Troy Hegel from Environment Yukon joined the meeting to make a simplified presentation to the Board regarding the caribou population model.

Troy explained the principles and uses of a population model and noted that it is good to have as an indicator, to be used in conjunction with other information in decision-making. While the new model is strictly scientific, traditional knowledge could be added to decision-making when presented at the AHM. This new model also includes a range of estimates to show uncertainty.

A contractor is currently putting together a manual explaining how to run the model.

Marsha pointed out that the previous calculator was used for something it was not designed for and purposely run with worst-case scenario data. She recommended a workshop for taking the new model to the communities to explain its utility as a decision support tool. Harvest data and how it affects the estimate is also very important information.

Cumulative Effects Update (Don Russell)

Don Russell explained that the CE model has been supplemented with some additional features. He reviewed and commented on various charts in the presentation and explained that the model incorporates effects from the natural world with climate change and development. For example: temperatures in spring, early or late fall, biomass, and insects are all variables that affect the individuals in the herd. Freezing rain and ice layers have an impact on food sources and herd movements. The model calculates all the impacts of the variables that affect the herd. This feeds into birth rates, pregnancy rates, and calf survival. In addition, if there was to be development in a particular area, this could be fed into the model.

Don indicated that the model is now ready to be used and asked the Board for direction in terms of next steps. It would be possible, for example, to apply the model to upcoming developments in the range of the herd to see what the projected effect on caribou would be.

Possible uses of the model could be to establish overall thresholds, or it could be apply it to an existing project like Northern Cross' to assess effects on the herd.

Mike Gill said we need to figure out how to make this useful and how to apply it. He suggested as a next step to present a simplified version of Don's presentation with intent and outcomes to senior officials/decision makers. Wilbert agreed that just the main players and stakeholders should be involved in the initial meeting.

Jamie pointed out that there are also other approaches in addition to what Don has been working on. For example, YG chose a range assessment framework for their work with mountain caribou. If there is to be a workshop of some kind, people may want to consider if that should be the approach.

Suggestions were made to hold a CE meeting in conjunction with the AHM or the caribou conference, but no decision was reached around dates and locations.

Hunter Education Update (Mike Suitor)

Mike Suitor explained that YG has taken over the lead on the hunter education package. Their intention was to send it to contractor to clean up and make it educational. The Conservation Officer Services branch tends to lead on hunter education. Mike has been asked to turn it over to them to conclude it. At this time there is no status update. Mike will talk to them again in the next few months to get an update. He will need to clarify its status with the Conservation Officer Services Branch. .

YG taking it over does not necessarily imply that they will also roll it out to the communities with their own staff. From their perspective the lead just changed, but the intent did not. Only who was leading the effort to complete it has changed. Martin and Mike have supported it so far and will try to help it along.

PCH Photocensus procedure (Jason Caikoski)

Jason Caikoski from Alaska Department of Fish and Game connected via telephone from Fairbanks, AK and presented information to the Board regarding the PCH photocensus procedure. Jason explained that a census based strictly on numbers counted on photographs is referred to as a minimum count. There are no measures of uncertainty built into the count. Sufficient aggregation of the herd is essential to obtain accurate estimates.

In addition, a statistical method to adjust the minimum count upward or downward, based on missing collars has been utilized. Having a sufficient number of collars in the herd is important for this. A minimum of 90 collars is required to accurately census a herd of 100,000.

When a photocensus is possible the minimum count will always be certain, but the statistical model helps increase the estimate with a measure of uncertainty for those animals that were not visually counted but are expected to exist. The photocensus procedure started in 2001. Since then only the 2010 survey was successful, with high aggregation and all collars being found resulting in a very high quality census. The 2013 census aggregations were high to moderate.

Jason related their desire to replace their old film cameras with digital equipment, and the benefits this would bring. The cost of doing this would be about \$500,000 for each of the two aircraft.

PCMB Communications Plan (Kelly Milner)

Kelly Milner was contracted by the Board to work on developing a communications plan. She spent the day working with the Board in a workshop format focused on helping the Board identify current strengths and weaknesses

related to external and internal communication, and starting to identify priority areas which the Board wants to focus its efforts on.

To introduce the discussion, Kelly highlighted key areas of responsibility as mandated in the PCMA, for example:

- Communication with native users, between native users, between native users and governments, among governments and others to assist in the coordinated management of the herd
- Encourage native users and harvesters to participate in the collection of statistics and biological information
- Gather information to carry out function and distribute it to public
- Hold public meetings
- Provide and distribute recommendations in writing

Kelly asked Board members about their current communication challenges. The following were some of the comments:

- It needs to be a two-way street. If we communicate well, replies should come back to us
- Constant transitions within First Nations make it difficult to have consistent communications/relationships
- New members know very little about PCMB and need to be educated
- Need to clarify roles around communications — responsibilities of individual board members
- Need to choose communication priorities — what is the best bang for our buck?
- Not getting feedback is deflating; need to know what to do differently

Some of the key topics the workshop covered were:

- The objectives of the PCMB (and why communication matters)
- How does the PCMB communicate now? Is it working? Why or why not?
- Who does the PCMB need to communicate with?
- What are the PCMB's main messages?
- What communication tools can the PCMB use?
- What are the PCMB's communication goals (external and internal) and how will they be achieved?
- What are the priorities?

Kelly took notes and gathered feedback and suggestions from members throughout the workshop. One topic that received significant discussion was around youth being an important audience and what could be done to address this. Some suggestions were Facebook, an activity/coloring book, presentations in schools using resource library materials, pre-session conferences with teachers, having some key messages in First Nation languages, land-based experiences similar to first hunt, and adopt a caribou/collar and name it.

Discussions were also held around reaching users in communities, promoting public participation in the collection of information, distribution of herd information, and maintaining a strong presence and an understanding of the PCMB.

A proposed change for internal communications was to make member reports a formal part of meeting agendas. Members would report on what they have done in their communities, who they talked to, what community concerns they heard, etc. Another suggestion was to have regular reviews of the Board's mandate to be conscious of priorities and how communication requirements could be met in a creative way.

Kelly committed to summarizing the discussions and presenting the Board with a proposed action plan and with quotations from potential contractors for some of the options that were discussed.

The Board agreed to look at the budget in order to prioritize some funds for furthering communications.

Closing Comments

Roberta Joseph:

- Harvesting on the Dempster has included wounding, also on TH settlement lands. Harvesters are supposed to get consent but some haven't been; disrespectful when doesn't happen. Leadership will have to meet with leaders in north to address this issue. Wounded caribou should not be left behind.
- First Hunt youth project was successful. Didn't have as many youth as normal because another activity was happening which took youth out of the community. They harvested young bulls mostly (six caribou, one of which was a rutting bull – they used all of the caribou – accountable to the elders).
- Forty-mile caribou are in their traditional wintering range for the first time in more than 50 years. The entire herd is wintering in this part of the range, which is very good news after such a long time not migrating to this area.
- Talked to Lindsay Staples about facilitating the HMS Native User Agreement discussions.

Wilbert Firth:

- Still have lots of reports of hunters using unethical hunting practices. No legislation can deal with that but wildlife officers are explaining to them what is wrong with how they are hunting.
- Midway happened for a week; youth learned gun safety.
- Working with GTC, trying to meet with the executive to get direction. Will hopefully meet with them after the holidays, prior to the AHM.

Charles Pokiak:

- We hear about unethical hunting practices often. Wildlife officers are trying the best they can. A few bad apples make the whole community look incompetent, which is not the case. These individuals have to be reported. Once the Tuk road opens, we need to be prepared for more harvest activity. Important to be respectful in other FN traditional territory.

Steve Buyck:

- Communication may be slow because I'm in a new job now.
- Saw a couple of half caribou on the Dempster, being eaten by crows.
- We harvested three young bulls end of November; one large one was a little stinky but it was okay. There will be times when some will be taking cows.
- Lots of our people didn't get moose this year so they will likely focus more on caribou.
- We tried to bring some elders and youth on the land with us but it didn't work out.
- We have a new Fish and Wildlife Officer, Matthew McHugh.

Art Christiansen:

- Astonished by census work done in Alaska. Caribou migration routes are quite treacherous in some places.

Jamie McLelland:

- Briefly involved with Board a few years ago, now returned to YG and am involved again. Thank you for patience while I am getting up to speed.

David Frost:

- Not lots of caribou around Old Crow currently. They are here and there. More cows were harvested while the rut was happening.
- An issue occurred on the side of the mountain road, a kill was left on the road.
- Northern Cross has people on the ground doing monitoring; looking to improve communication between Northern Cross and Old Crow.
- Native User Agreement representatives will likely meet in January. Erika is working on a draft terms of reference.
- Local concern was raised regarding the caribou eating out their habitat.

Marsha Branigan:

- Good to hear progress being made on Native User Agreement discussions.
- Need to figure out how to build cohesiveness in Parties' messaging. Some conflict with signs on the road recently.

- Meat wastage and wounding incidents have occurred. Some signs have been put up on our side. We are encouraging people to take responsibility to try to change others' behaviours and attitudes.

Next Meeting and Closing Prayer

The next PCMB meeting will be held in conjunction with the Annual Harvest Meeting in Dawson City, Yukon on February 10, 2014.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:15 p.m. and a closing prayer was offered by Joe Tetlich.