

# Porcupine Caribou Management Board Minutes of Meeting

October 6, 7 2014  
Aklavik, NWT

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## In attendance

### Members/Staff

Joe Tetlich, Chair (teleconference)  
Billy Storr, Inuvialuit Game Council  
Steven Buyck, Nacho Ny'ak Dun  
Marsha Branigan, Government of the Northwest Territories  
Art Christiansen, Trondek Hwech'in  
Ian McDonald, Government of Canada (Alternate)

Deana Lemke, Executive Director

### Presenters

Mike Sutor, Regional Biologist, Government of Yukon  
Scott Alexander, BBC representative (teleconference)  
Kelly Milner, communications consultant (teleconference)

### Regrets

Jamie McLelland, Government of Yukon  
Wilbert Firth, Gwich'in Tribal Council  
David Frost, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

## Welcome and Opening Prayer

Billy Storr welcomed board members and visitors to Aklavik and called the meeting to order at 11:30 a.m. Steve Buyck offered an opening prayer.

## Review Agenda

The Agenda was reviewed. Deana pointed out that due to a number of parties not being present at this meeting it may be best to defer some items for discussion at the next meeting. It was decided to review information about non-resident hunters at this meeting and discuss it again at the next meeting.

***Motion to accept agenda  
Moved by Steve Buyck  
Seconded by Marsha Branigan  
Carried***

## **Chair's Report**

Joe Tetlichy was not able to attend in person due to bad weather in Old Crow. He provided an update of recent activities via teleconference.

Joe attended the International Porcupine Caribou Board meeting in Fairbanks in September 2014 and shared information about the board's work, communication and initiatives:

- It is anticipated that the new digital aerial survey equipment will enable better survey results. The old equipment only worked well in sunny conditions — shady pictures were not suitable for counting. The new equipment will allow the best picture taking even in shady conditions.
- Due to the indication of an upward trend in the herd's population, some of the stakeholders in Alaska have begun talking about nutritional stress. Their concern is whether the range can sustain all of the caribou and what should be done if the herd grows significantly more.
- The IPCB is interested in developing a website and is exploring options. They are very impressed with the new PCMB website and may want to exploring potential to collaborate with PCMB in development of their own site.
- Potential locations for the next IPCB meeting in Canada were discussed. It was noted that if PCMB met in Inuvik in the fall of 2015, the IPCB would make it a priority to hold its meeting there around the same time to allow for an overlap.

After the IPCB meeting, Joe attended a traditional knowledge workshop in Yellowknife, which focused on how to incorporate traditional knowledge with scientific knowledge.

Some discussion arose about satellite collar location information being made public. The decision is to be made by the IPCB with input from the PCTC. Mike Sutor's office has been given direction to make several styles of maps and send these to their director for review. YG does not have an issue with doing this, but Alaska has to be comfortable with it.

## **Review Minutes and Action Items**

The Minutes of the February 10, 2014 meeting were approved by the Board.

***Motion to accept Minutes of the Feb 10, 2014 meeting as distributed***

***Moved by Marsha Branigan***

***Seconded by Steven Buyck***

***Carried***

The action items were reviewed and discussed.

## **Administrative and Financial Report**

### **Financial update**

Deana provided an administrative and financial report, including a review of the variance report. The prior year's auditor's report was provided to Board members. While there was a slight decrease in funding from AANDC this year, all funding is in place for this fiscal year.

The Board discussed the budget related to cumulative effects, HMP (native user agreements), and communication initiatives.

The file digitizing project has been completed and all files, including archive records, have been digitized. Some boxes of photographs and slides were found in the archives and could be organized and digitized pending cost and Board approval.

Further budgeting discussions will be held at the next Board meeting.

### **Administrative update**

Recent correspondence was provided in members' meeting information binders.

## **YFWMB/PCMB MOU**

The draft Memorandum of Understanding between the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board and the PCMB was provided and discussed. The YFWMB will be discussing the current draft at its next meeting.

While a few minor typos/revisions were noted, the Board was in agreement with final draft. It was noted that there will still need to be concerted effort to consult in the NWT for proposed changes in the Yukon that could affect aboriginal harvesting of PCH by NWT Gwich'in and Inuvialuit.

## **Yukon Non-Resident Hunting**

On behalf of Jamie McLelland, Mike Sutor reviewed information via a Powerpoint presentation which was provided in response to questions around non-resident hunting at the last Annual Harvest Meeting.

The presentation included charts and graphs related to the Harvest Management Plan's allocation percentages for YG, including resident, non-resident special guided, and non-resident guided licenses; outfitter concessions and quotas; actual effect of outfitter licensed harvest on the PCH; and special guided licensing. Non-Resident Hunting is minimal, according to the numbers presented. This presentation will be repeated at the next Board meeting to allow for a full discussion with all members.

## **BBC Filming Project**

BBC is planning to make a documentary about the Porcupine Caribou Herd migration. They are looking at being with the caribou for two or three trips for approximately two weeks each trip. They wish to document collaring activity and film portions of the migration with drones, and possibly with cameras added to collars. The technology they plan to use allows them to be far away from the herd with minimal disturbance to the caribou.

Mike Sutor related that BBC has been very professional, reasonable and willing to listen to input from others. BBC's proposal includes their desire to talk to community members and a request to be put in contact with key people in user communities. They are looking for feedback from the Board about support or concerns.

Scott Alexander from BBC joined the meeting by teleconference and provided an overview of the PCH migration project. BBC is very keen to work with the PCH because it is furthest caribou migration. They intend to have a cameraman follow footsteps of caribou, work with the biologists and film a collaring sequence, and document where the herd is moving to and why. They anticipate an initial work period of four weeks and a return trip later in the season during aggregation.

Scott reviewed slides in a presentation shown to the Board, which outlined the goals of the project and additional information:

- try to understand herd fluctuations and survival rate during the first three years;
- try to show what the animals experience and the challenges they face
- document three sections: collaring; spring migration (late April to May, depending on advice and weather) with cameraman on foot for two to three days, and second team tracking caribou and moving ahead of them; and aggregation;
- explain that the above is only about a half of the journey.

- use technology: deploy heart rate monitors on collars, use drones, thermal cameras (additional weight of monitors or cameras on collars would have to be within limits recommended by biologists); and
- conservation drones are very quiet, have a range of 40 to 50 km, and can be launched from the ground by throwing them into the air or by launching them from a helicopter. They can be programmed to return or to land somewhere else. In a forested area they can land using a little parachute; in an open area they land on their belly.

Scott Alexander noted that he will be coming to Yukon for an initial visit and offered to meet or correspond with anyone who has questions. Deana suggested that he meet with PCMB Chair Joe Tetlich in Whitehorse, which Scott agreed to. Perhaps they would be willing to share video footage with the Board or create a short video for conservation education purposes.

## **Herd Update**

### **Yukon update**

Mike Sutor reviewed the PCH late winter 2014 fieldwork report and highlighted the following information:

- Yukon did more detailed flying than the US Fish and Wildlife Service this year.
- More than half of the herd was distributed between Ogilvie and Old Crow. Some big groups were located in the far west of Alaska.
- Capture work was done in mid-March: a total of 37 caribou.
- When possible, animals are recaptured to assess collars and health of caribou. Most animals very found to be in very good condition.
- One GPS satellite collar was deployed in Northern Cross area. Caribou in the area were using seismic lines to travel, probably due to ice crust.
- A number of wolf kills were reported near the project area, as well as additional hunting pressure via the seismic lines.
- The herd was tracked heading toward Old Crow right around breakup. All collared animals made it across the river safely.
- Calving took place in Alaska. In spite of Yukon being open while Alaska was still snowy, the caribou went west and calved there.
- The calving survey was not possible due to bad weather; therefore, there is no pregnancy-rate data for the herd this year.
- After calving, the 1002 lands were used quite heavily by herd.
- The post-calving survey was done in mid-July and 49 calves per 100 cows were documented. This is below the usual 58 percent, but previous numbers have been as low as 41 to 44 percent.
- The herd scattered across the landscape in mid-July while approximately half stayed in the Richardson Mountains.
- At the end of August, all groups started moving west, aggregated at several points, and then headed toward Arctic Village.

- A summer student under the Jonny Charlie scholarship was not taken on this year. The potential will be considered again next year.
- Since there was very little harvest in Old Crow, body-condition monitoring has not taken place. Attempts will be made to collect samples via other monitoring programs.
- There are no check stations in place this year due to no caribou being on the Dempster Highway.

### **NWT update**

Marsha Branigan updated the Board on recent activities:

- The check station has been in operation since August, operated by the Tetlit Gwich'in RRC. There is no report from the check station available yet.
- GNWT is continuing to collect body-condition samples via the check station.
- The NWT resident harvest data report is almost complete.

### **Harvest Management Plan update**

The Annual Harvest Meeting is scheduled for February 11 and 12, 2015 in Inuvik. There have been issues with harvest data not being reported, this year being the worst ever for non-response to report by the deadlines. Only Government of Yukon and NND have reported so far. Further reminders have been sent to Parties again.

While it is not PCMB's responsibility to get the data from the Parties, community representatives have been instrumental in working with their respective communities to get the data in the past. PCMB representatives are again asked to help facilitate getting data from their communities.

GRRB and GNWT reported that they are working on their data.

Billy Storr noted that they have almost completed putting their data together. He noted that Jenny Knopp, who has been assisting with data collection, stated that some people don't want to provide information. She sent a letter to the PCMB outlining some challenges they are experiencing in their data collection process.

Ian McDonald felt that the PCMB should reply to these concerns as the answers are straightforward and the confusion between check stations and harvest reporting is understandable. The PCMB and others need to clearly communicate what we are getting from harvest surveys and check stations. Total harvest is a key piece of information for PCH management. Our goal is to get an accurate estimate of total harvest as we know the interviewers won't contact all hunters (they won't find them all, some won't want to take part). Data from harvest surveys can be used to estimate total PCH harvest as these surveys use a

sample frame (e.g. list of PCH hunters in a community) and either attempt to speak with all hunters or have a method for selecting a sample of them. Check stations only interact with hunters who decide to stop and therefore a useful total harvest can't be estimated from these data. Check stations are great for educating hunters and promoting PCH management, and their harvest data may be used to verify harvest survey data.

Janet Boxwell, who joined the meeting as an observer, noted that the GRRB is having the same issues. They have been explaining that reporting is voluntary but it's important. Dorothy Cooley had provided some bullet points that were useful; however, a letter from PCMB may be helpful.

The Board discussed the matter and determined that PCMB should assist with communication around this issue and that an informative letter could help educate and clarify misconceptions around harvest reporting. Perhaps we could develop a short one-pager to communicate why harvest reporting is important.

**Action 14:05:     *Send letter to all parties about the need to report harvest***

Deana explained that on the Yukon side there have been some discussions about Native User Agreements, as well as setting up some terms of reference for what the Yukon First Nation agreement would look like. The three First Nations would like to hire Lindsay Staples and wondered whether the Board had available funding and support. Deana requested information describing their requirements that the Board could review but has not heard back. GTC and IGC have not communicated anything about Native User Agreement discussions. Billy noted that GTC is going to the IGC meeting in December and this will be discussed.

Marsha related that the Bathurst and Bluenose East herds seem to be in decline. A meeting was held with the minister and leaders managing these herds. They decided that they need more information, so there will be two technical meetings in Yellowknife to decide on management actions. Marsha has been asked to attend and give a short presentation on the PCH Harvest Management Plan later this week.

## **PCTC Update**

Mike Sutor will have discussion with PCTC in a few weeks. There is a workplan in place to guide the work that needs to be done. The plan was recently reviewed and approved with some amendments.

The PCTC is working on several documents: the Annual Summary Report and an update to the Sensitive Habitats of the PCH booklet.

## **PCMB Academic Papers**

Mike reviewed two major papers dealing with PCH research.

(1) Gustine et al 2014 – Climate Driven Effects of Fire on Winter Habitat for Caribou in the Alaskan-Yukon Arctic contains information regarding the effects of fire on the range of the herd.

CBC used this information to make a statement indicating that the Porcupine Caribou herd could disappear in 100 years. The conclusion of the paper is that fires will increase in size and intensity. Effects of fire are most likely to impact caribou winter habitat, as lichen won't restore for 60 years and large portions of herd's range could convert to birch trees when they re-grow. The distribution of the herd would also be affected by these events.

Mike does not agree with all of the interpretations of data presented in the paper. The facts do have potential implications for the herd; however, it is hard to say whether it will cause an increase or a decrease. Based on the information, Mike feels the greatest impacts will be in forested areas around the Dempster and the Peel.

(2) Johnson and Russell 2014 – Long Term Distribution Responses of a Migratory Caribou Herd to Human Disturbance discusses how caribou respond long term to communities, winter roads, the Dempster Highway, oil and gas activities, hunting camps, and other features. By using long-term satellite collar data, the research in the study suggests that caribou initially avoided the Dempster by 30 km and that this decreased over time to 18 km. It also suggests that there is a 34 to 38 km avoidance of communities and other effects, such as seismic lines, are avoided by approximately 11 km.

Mike noted that it appears that caribou have become habituated to the Dempster and seismic lines.

## **Northern Cross project update**

Last year, PCMB submitted comments on the Northern Cross seismic program near Eagle Plains. We have experienced some challenges working with them. Northern Cross has an application before YESAB for 20 wells, redevelopment of the sump at the existing camp, construction of new winter roads, water-use for road construction and well drilling, and conversion of some winter roads to all-season roads in preparation for flow testing. Flow testing means running the wells for several years to test pressure over time. Their plan is to truck out petroleum, re-inject natural gas, and flare-off sour gas.

The conversion of winter roads to all-season is the biggest concern. There would be six new all-season access points off the Dempster Highway — a total of 80

kilometers of road. Creating these new all-season roads is the greatest impact of this new development and it will have an impact on caribou.

Board members reviewed Northern Cross' proposal and map of the area outlining well and road sites, projected traffic levels and significance of impacts. Mike Sutor pointed out that the data which refers to traffic levels is the most significant to Porcupine Caribou.

It was noted that the safety aspect of Northern Cross' previous activities has been very good, but consideration for wildlife has not been good. Discussion arose around ensuring YESAB is made aware of PCMB's previous experiences with Northern Cross via the working group, as Northern Cross is presenting their proposal only in a positive light and they make no mention of concerns related to wildlife. It was suggested that this could be done by providing copies of the minutes of the working group meetings.

The Board discussed feedback on the proposal, noting the following:

- try to have commitments tightened in review of final proposal
- provide recommendations with enforceable guidelines (e.g. avoid caribou by 600 meters)
- impacts of new roads should be carefully considered (controlling access is a challenge, LUP provides direction this, less is better)
- more details on restoration may be required
- development of a structured monitoring program
- keep in mind that more development is planned

Development of a new seismic program south of the last program area would be a greater concern because the area to the south is more in conflict with the PCH migration route.

YESAB has just made an information request to Northern Cross. Most likely the project will be out for review within one month and PCMB will then have a few weeks to respond with comments. Mike Sutor has already started on a draft technical response regarding the PCH and its habitat.

## **Communication Strategy**

Kelly Milner was unable to attend in person due to bad weather. She connected via teleconference to review progress on the Board's communication strategy.

Completed items to date include creation of consistent look and feel, creation of consistent visuals, and establishment of a social media presence. Still to be completed are the creation of templates for member's reports and repackaging of existing information for distribution.

Good feedback has been received on the Board's new website: pcmb.ca — even though the old Taiga site has only recently been pointed to new site and the new site has not yet been advertised.

The previous initiative for producing PCMB videos was discussed. Kelly explained that the Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust Fund turned down PCMB's proposal for the production of three videos. The cost for producing videos is significant; therefore, the Board could try to find funding elsewhere. Deana pointed out that this year \$15,000 has been budgeted for communication-related activities. If the Board would like to increase this, now is a good time to consider what the Board's priorities are. The budget for communications will be discussed further at the next Board meeting.

Kelly agreed to provide updated options for video production at the next meeting.

Communication activities to be worked on include:

- Maintain and update social media
- Re-package existing material (harvest reporting, respectful harvesting)
- Member-orientation package and member reporting template
- Prepare options for December (to March 2015)
  - Website revisions, satellite website, International Board
  - Video options
  - Column options
  - Respectful harvesting options
  - One page communication sheet regarding harvest data

Deana reviewed Kelly's role for ongoing communication consulting, including social media support. Since communication is a key activity of the Board, Deana requested that the Board agree that the overall activities identified in the communication plan are approved and do not have to be continually approved on an individual basis. The Board agreed for communication work on identified priorities to proceed without requiring approval for each individual initiative.

## **Government of Yukon public consultation re hydraulic fracturing**

Deana reviewed the background and activities of the Government of Yukon's Select Committee Regarding the Risks and Benefits of Hydraulic Fracturing community consultation. At the public hearings in the communities a lot of opposition to hydraulic fracturing was voiced by the public.

Joe Tetlich made a presentation at the last public hearing in Whitehorse in which he talked about PCMBs mandate to protect the PCH and its habitat. The Board discussed the Board's draft written submission, which will be finalized and submitted following this meeting.

## **Hunter education package**

A single printed color copy of the completed hunter education package was provided for review at the meeting. Since the file is so large, digital copies of the document cannot be emailed. The Board will discuss the draft further at the next Board meeting.

## **Next Meeting and Adjournment**

The next PCMB meeting will be scheduled in December in Whitehorse.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.