

Porcupine Caribou Management Board Minutes of Meeting

February 13, 2017

Mackenzie Hotel meeting room
Inuvik, NT

In attendance

Members/Staff

Joe Tetlich, Chair
Ian McDonald, Government of Canada
Alice McCulley, Trondek Hwech'in
Wilbert Firth, Gwich'in Tribal Council
Harold (Hal) Frost Jr., Vuntut Gwitchin
Billy Storr, Inuvialuit Game Council
Steven Buyck, Na-Cho Ny'ak Dun
Nicole McCutchen, Government of Yukon
Marsha Branigan, Government of the Northwest Territories
Jackie Clarke, Na Cho Ny'ak Dun (Alternate)
David Tavares, Government of Canada (Alternate)
Deana Lemke, Executive Director
Matthias Lemke, Assistant

Presenters/Guests

Mike Sutor, Environment Yukon
Rob Florkiewicz, Environment Yukon
Troy Hegel, Environment Yukon
Tom Jung, Environment Yukon
Shannon Stotyn, Canadian Wildlife Service

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Joe Tetlich opened meeting with a prayer at 2:40 p.m. and welcomed Jackie Clarke and David Tavares to their first Board meeting.

Review Agenda

The agenda was reviewed by the Board and accepted.

Motion to accept agenda
Moved by Marsha Branigan
Seconded by Billy Storr
Carried

Review Minutes

The minutes of the December 16 and 17, 2016 meeting in Tuktoyaktuk, NT were reviewed and approved by the Board.

Motion to accept minutes of the December 16 and 17, 2016 meeting as distributed

Moved by Wilbert Firth

Seconded by Steve Buyck

Carried

Deana Lemke reviewed the action item list and updated the Board on the current status of the action items.

Chair's Update

Joe Tetlichy informed the Board that a letter was sent to Justina Ray with COSEWIC about their oversight regarding PCMB's involvement in caribou management. COSEWIC will meet with wildlife management bodies in Whitehorse in April 2017, and this will be an opportunity for PCMB to be directly involved in the COSEWIC process.

Joe related that at the Conference of Management Authorities in Yellowknife, GNWT, GRRB and WMAC (NWT) all requested that PCMB be recognized as a stakeholder pertaining to the NWT species at risk legislation and process with respect to PCH-related matters.

Joe has been invited to attend an Alaska Board of Game meeting. The Alaska Board of Game would like information about the PCH Harvest Management Plan and Implementation Plan.

Administrative and Financial Report

Cumulative Effects

Executive Director Deana Lemke and Mike Sutor provided information to the Board about the content of a recent meeting of the Cumulative Effects Working Group with Don Russell regarding his computer model. The intent of the meeting was to put parameters around the application of his model and to give Don feedback about the desired uses of the model for PCMB.

Don first gave a specific presentation on the technical parts of the model. The group then worked on identifying PCMB's key goals for the use of the model but did not arrive at a conclusion. It was agreed that some of the PCTC members will try to provide direction and input to Don and the Board for moving forward with the model.

Deana also related some points from her recent telephone discussion with Karen Clark, a cumulative effects biologist from Yellowknife, who has worked with Don Russell on management of the Bathurst herd, a herd that has experienced steep declines. There has been a lot of mining activity in the range of the Bathurst herd, and no one was taking responsibility for the total cumulative activity in the range. A working group of 20 representatives from government and industry was formed to work on the creation of a range management plan. They have begun to map industrial disturbance in the range and created a discussion document that outlines tiered thresholds for development and important conservation zones such as water crossings, migration corridors, etc. Input is currently being sought on the range management plan.

Deana related that Karen Clark would be interested in sharing her experience and knowledge with the PCMB at a future meeting.

Yukon Conservation Society (YCS) Caribou Celebration

Deana updated the Board about discussions with Sebastian Jones from YCS about a proposed caribou celebration to raise awareness about the Porcupine Caribou herd. The draft agenda for the event, which is being planned for April 21 and 22 at the Beringia Center, was reviewed.

Tom Jung noted that April 22 is COSEWIC's first day in Whitehorse and would likely be the day that COSEWIC meets with wildlife management boards.

Action 17-1: Inform Sebastian Jones that the Board cannot participate in the caribou celebration event on April 22.

Financial variance report

The financial variance report was distributed and reviewed.

Summer Student

Deana informed the Board that the application to the Department of Education for STEP funding for a summer student position was approved. Resumes for the position will start being received later this month. Johnny Charlie Scholarship funding will be contributed by the Board to co-fund this position.

Herd Update

NWT update

Marsha Branigan had no herd update to report.

Yukon update

Mike Suitor stated that not much new has happened since the last PCMB meeting. Annual collar maintenance work is planned for early to mid-March and

will be based out of Old Crow. Most caribou have moved back to Alaska; therefore, Mike's office is working with partners in Alaska to do the work if need be. A parturition survey on the calving ground is planned for late May or early June this year by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

Harvest Management Plan Update

The agenda and process for the Annual Harvest Meeting (AHM) was reviewed and discussed for the benefit of new PCMB members and alternates.

Deana stated that booklet copies of the Harvest Management Plan and Implementation Plan will be available at the AHM. She said that getting harvest data from the communities has been very challenging and this will probably be brought up at the AHM. Education and awareness about the importance of harvest data should be highlighted.

When the AHM information package was sent to Parties, it also informed them that Sale, Trade, and Barter would be discussed. The COSEWIC assessment, back-casting of the population model, and the Dempster Highway harvesting rights brochures should be considered during the AHM as well.

Population back-casting

Troy Hegel provided an overview of the background of the herd estimator model and explained that it incorporates qualitative data and harvest data when available. When these are not available, estimations need to be used.

The model was used to look back in time to compare what the model would have predicted to the photo census data in 2010 and 2013. The year 2001 was used as a starting point because there was an actual count by photo census that year.

Regarding scientific input to the model, Troy explained that since 2004, there have only been only two cow-to-calf ratio surveys, and adult female survival data is not available after 2011-12. While harvest data has become more reliable over time, there is some missing data between 2001 and 2015. Therefore, long-term averages needed to be used and some assumptions needed to be made when running the model. The model predicted a slower increase than was actually observed. This was likely due to an actual increased period of adult female survival and reduced harvest as compared to the estimates used in the actual model.

Troy felt that on-the-land monitoring information (for example "there were more calves than average") would be very useful to incorporate into the model. The model could be used as a risk-assessment tool when no census data is available but when other information and data is available.

Mike Suitor related that the PCTC has discussed use of the model and agreed that it should never be used to identify a specific number, only estimated values with the range of confidence presented as well.

Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC)

Tom Jung reviewed the assessment of barren-ground caribou by COSEWIC and outlined potential options for the Porcupine caribou herd (PCH) during the recovery process. He noted that there was no specific consideration of the PCH included in COSEWIC's status assessment of barren-ground caribou (BGC) across Canada.

COSEWIC's official process starts with monitoring, followed by assessment, response, recovery, action, and then it returns to monitoring. Cooperation from wildlife management bodies is required during the monitoring, assessment, recovery and action phases. The federal minister also has a formal legal duty to consult during the response and recovery stages.

The PCH will most likely be listed along with other barren-ground herds in Canada, and a recovery strategy would be created, which would include the PCH. However, the focus of recovery efforts would be mostly toward the herds that are in trouble. Most of the management around the PCH may not change, but the legal listing will add another dimension to how the herd is managed.

Tom clarified that prohibitions associated with the *Species at Risk Act* automatically apply on federal lands once a species is listed. Additional actions are required for prohibitions to apply on non-federal lands. Harvesting rights recognized under a land claims agreement are not automatically restricted when a species is listed.

A national recovery strategy would need to be completed within two years of the legal listing if BGC are listed as threatened and it would be for barren-ground caribou in Canada as a whole, not herd specific. Recovery strategies include species requirements, population objectives, distribution objectives, critical habitat, the addressing of threats, and a schedule of studies.

Tom pointed out the difference in approaches of the recovery strategy created for northern mountain caribou and the one for boreal caribou. One model was very inclusive in terms of consultation with stakeholder groups, while the other was undertaken in a completely different manner and was much more prescriptive.

Tom drew attention to the model used for the polar bear recovery strategy. It is now three years past the deadline, but it was delayed for good reasons. Time was taken to allow for management plans of various sub-populations of polar bears to be created before the national plan is completed.

Developing a PCH management plan would take time and money, but it would be herd-specific, as it would be focused on PCH issues, threats and realities. It could also consolidate and highlight the existing PCH management framework. Completing this step in advance of a national recovery strategy for barren-ground caribou would give a stronger voice to the PCMB, territorial, First Nation and Inuvialuit governments.

Tom pointed out that if we don't take the initiative to show how we want the PCH to fit in to the national recovery strategy, we wouldn't get special consideration. To affect the national recovery strategy, significant products need to be prepared by 2019.

Marsha Branigan felt that following the polar bear model would be best when dealing with barren-ground caribou in Canada. The management needs of individual herds would feed into the overall strategy.

Shannon Stotyn concurred that the polar bear model seems like a good way to deal with a wide ranging species with varied sub-populations. Shannon also noted that Environment Canada recently formed a new caribou division, and she is not sure who would take the lead in working on a national recovery strategy.

Deana wondered whether PCMB would simply be one of the groups providing direction to the federal process, along with the other parties and stakeholders, or if PCMB should coordinate the feedback.

Tom suggested that who does what is a discussion that needs to be had, but that we should be prepared to respond if asked, or have a submission prepared before being asked. Billy Storr felt that it would be better to present our views before being asked, and to respond sooner rather than later.

Marsha suggested that PCMB take the lead on this process. She suggested that the Board put forward a recommendation to approach the recovery strategy on a herd basis, and hope that others will agree to approach it the same way.

Action 17-2: PCMB will send a letter to Parties requesting feedback on the recommendation that PCMB take a coordinating role in the national recovery strategy for barren-ground caribou, and on the recommending the approach to be used for the barren-ground caribou recovery strategy

Tom suggested that Shannon analyze and compare what we already have for PCH management tools and do a gap analysis for presentation at the next PCMB meeting.

Dempster Highway PCH harvesting rights

Rob Florkiewicz distributed copies of revised brochures with maps outlining information related to harvesting rights of the various First Nations, Inuvialuit and other hunters of PCH on the Dempster Highway.

He noted that these needed to be updated because legislation has changed and there was confusion regarding hunting rights on the Dempster Highway. The *Inuvialuit Final Agreement*, the *Yukon Wildlife Act*, and land claims also needed to be considered.

Each map now uses consistent language about who can do what, and at which locations. Rob noted that the brochures are in draft form for members to take back to their parties. Mike Sutor pointed out that the original maps, on which the new drafts are based, were developed in consultation with First Nations.

Mike Sutor presented graphics of new draft road signs created for the Dempster Highway, which were designed in response to feedback at the last two Annual Harvest Meetings. The goal of the signs is to clarify harvesting rights between KM 0 and KM 140 on the Dempster Highway, which is the Hart River herd overlap area.

Next Meeting and Closing Prayer

The next meeting was scheduled to be held in conjunction with Caribou Days in Old Crow on May 18 and 19. The meeting will begin on Thursday afternoon and include Friday. Members will attend Caribou Days on Saturday and return home on Sunday or Monday, depending on individual preference and availability.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:20 p.m.