

Porcupine Caribou Management Board Minutes of Meeting

September 26-27, 2017

Fort McPherson, Northwest Territories

In attendance

Members/Staff

Joe Tetlich, Chair
Nicole McCutchen, Government of Yukon
Ian McDonald, Government of Canada
Alice McCulley, Trondëk Hwëch'in
Phillip Kaye, Gwich'in Tribal Council
Marsha Branigan, Government of the Northwest Territories
Kirby Meister, Government of Yukon (alternate)
Deana Lemke, Executive Director
Matthias Lemke, Assistant

Presenters/Guests

Mike Sutor, Environment Yukon
Shannon Stotyn, Canadian Wildlife Service
Rosa Brown, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation
Michael Svoboda, Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Society
Don Russell, Shadow Lake Consulting

Regrets

Billy Storr, Inuvialuit Game Council
Hal Frost Jr., Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation
Steven Buyck, Nacho Ny'ak Dun

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Chair Joe Tetlich opened the meeting with a prayer at 10:15 a.m.

Larry Firth welcomed the Board to Fort McPherson and related that the Chief sends regrets for not being able to be present. Larry was asked by Tetlit Gwich'in Chief and Council to relate several Porcupine Caribou-related concerns to the Board. The primary concern is that some choose to harvest the leaders of the caribou as soon as they come close enough to access. He noted that in past this was dealt with by a voluntary hunting closure, but this has not worked

successfully. The second concern was related to the fire at Horseshoe Bend near the Dempster. Chief and Council feels that this should have been addressed sooner, before causing so much damage to caribou habitat. An additional concern was about the increasing number of grizzly bear sightings, which seems to be connected to the bears' attraction to caribou gut piles.

Larry stated that it may be necessary to use stronger language than in the past, when a voluntary closure to hunting was requested. Additionally, more education and awareness about effects on the herd may be helpful. Education of high-school students and the next generation of harvesters about not wasting meat and how to harvest ethically should be promoted and that greater monitoring is needed with more officer presence on both sides of the border. The use of ATVs has also become an issue that needs to be addressed. People are going out too early and leaving tracks on the tundra.

Larry explained that indigenous law and how to incorporate it into other laws has been a frequent topic discussed by Chief and Council during the past few months. Elders are getting frustrated and are wondering why the same issues continue each year without effective enforcement of indigenous laws.

Larry stated that the Tetlit Gwich'in want to be part of the process and campaign for protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. They feel strongly that only negative consequences will come from opening up the area to development.

Joe Tetlichy thanked Larry for his comments. Regarding the harvesting of the first-arriving caribou, Joe explained that for a time there were regulations in place to address this, but that GTC asked for the "Let the Leaders Pass" regulation to be rescinded, stating that they would prefer regulating their own people.

Joe also explained that the Board is not in a position to get politically involved regarding development of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. However, since GTC has some members on the steering committee which is connected to the campaign, this could be an avenue for GTC to be involved. Additionally, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation is receiving funding for lobbying purposes from Yukon government. GTC may be able to be included in the process by talking with Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation.

Agenda

The agenda was reviewed by the Board. The traditional knowledge presentation by Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation had to be cancelled as the presenter was not able to attend. This item was deferred to a future meeting.

A discussion about Dempster Highway area harvesting rights and the related maps produced by YG was added to the agenda.

Motion to accept agenda as amended
Moved by Billy Storr
Seconded by Ian McDonald
Carried

Review Minutes

The Minutes of the May 18 and 19, 2017 meeting were reviewed.

The Board's list of action items were reviewed by Deana Lemke. Regarding Action Item 17-5, Kirby Meister updated the Board regarding the revisions of the Dempster Highway harvesting rights information. He explained that the Department of Justice provided a legal opinion on the day prior. It still needs to be reviewed and discussed by his department and a meeting with GTC needs to be held to clarify their concerns.

The Board agreed that discussions around the Native User Agreement table will help to clarify these issues. It was also noted that when Yukon government meets with GTC about this, Nicole McCutchen and Kirby Meister will be present and able to provide input.

Kirby committed to reporting back to the Board once his department has met with GTC and has reviewed the legal opinion.

Motion to accept Minutes of meeting, as amended
Moved by Marsha Branigan
Seconded by Ian McDonald
Carried

Chair's Update

Joe Tetlich provided a summary of the Canadian Wildlife Directors Committee workshop entitled Managing Wildlife through Co-Management: A Northern Perspective using Caribou as a Model, which he attended in Iqaluit, NU at the end of July. He was asked to present information about the collaborative management aspect of the Harvest Management Plan and the Implementation Plan. Based on information shared at the Iqaluit meeting, the future for barren-ground caribou looks very bleak in other areas. Economic opportunities seem to be the priority for Nunavut and calving grounds are being opened up for development. Representatives from Labrador related their lack of influence in establishing a management plan and stated that economic opportunities outweigh management efforts for the conservation of caribou.

Joe related that the PCH had almost come to the Dempster highway at the end of July. A few harvesters were successful, but feedback from hunters indicated that caribou didn't seem to cross the highway. Some caribou were being

harvested near Aklavik as well, but the majority of the herd has now turned back and is around Arctic Village, AK.

Not many caribou were seen near Old Crow and very few hunters were able to harvest caribou. Some were harvested in mid-July at Second Mountain, and some hunters went up the Crow River and harvested a few. Others are now trying to harvest moose, because it does not look good for a caribou harvest this year.

Administrative and Financial Report

Deana Lemke reviewed the draft budget and expenditures. The current variance report was reviewed. Deana pointed out the Native User Agreement (NUA) dedicated income amounts and related carry-over from last fiscal year.

Deana explained that the scope of the NUA project has become broader as it is now trying to concurrently address range-wide access and consent. Individual NWT and Yukon agreements will be considered after the range-wide component is addressed. More meetings are now planned than were originally anticipated; therefore, the scope has been adjusted. It will require more of Lindsay Staples' work and therefore more funding. So far, there has been good engagement and interest from all Parties.

Herd Update

Government of the NWT Update

Marsha Branigan provided the following updates:

- resident hunter data is very close to being submitted
- core funding for PCMB is in place
- ABEKS was supported with \$10,000 of funding for this year
- many biological samples were received from Aklavik this winter
- the department is working on compiling and updating fire information related to the habitat range of the PCH; so far, it seems that no fires have affected the NWT portion of the range
- Marsha is currently compiling Gwich'in harvest data and will provide support to help present the information
- no check station was put in place on the Dempster Highway this year because there were no caribou present. GNWT financially supports the Tetlit RRC in running the check station when there is a caribou harvest on the Dempster

Government of Yukon

Mike Sutor provided an update on the PCH monitoring program. He displayed a map showing PCH movement since May 2017 and explained that only satellite collars are being used for monitoring now; radio collars are no longer being used.

Based on satellite data, PCH bulls have not been following the cows to the calving grounds. The trend has been for the bulls to migrate to the Richardson Mountains.

Mike explained that the PCH's calving location is deemed to be one of the most important aspects of herd management information. The precise location of calving has been tracked over many years. Currently, biologists are trying to predict where calving is taking place using satellite collar movement data. Work is taking place to prove that satellite data can indicate the calving location based on the animals' movements. Most years, calving takes place on the 1002 lands, but occasionally conditions require that the herd calves in other places.

In addition, biologists are also trying to determine how many calves have survived. Mike noted that this year's calving rate was one of the highest ever. It also seems that the cows were in good condition and that many calves survived. During the week of September 18, 2017 all satellite collars on PCH animals were located in Alaska, in the foothills around Arctic Village.

With the new digital photography equipment, it is expected that more frequent photocensus counts will take place and will be of higher quality.

A rut survey will take place in the near future, wherever the caribou happen to be. The goal will be to determine how many bulls there are, relative to the total number of animals the herd. The age and sex structure of the herd will also be surveyed. So far, not many rut counts have been successful due to technical challenges.

A recent estimate of adult female survival using satellite collar data indicates that the herd is either stable or increasing. If the current number of satellite collars on the herd can be maintained, more frequent estimates of adult female survival will be possible.

The update on the Sensitive Habitats document is still in progress. An ecological land classification on the North Slope has been completed. Range-wide lichen mapping is also being done by individuals from the universities of Montana and Idaho in collaboration with contractors from Fairbanks, AK.

Johnny Charlie Scholarship/STEP Student

Mike Suitor related that summer student Kai Breithaupt is from the Crag Lake area in southern Yukon. Kai has a strong interest in biology. Before returning to school, Kai expressed that this summer's work has made a significant impact on his future career plans. He greatly appreciated the opportunity to attend Caribou Days in Old Crow, stating that it was a very important and positive occasion for him. Mike presented a short video produced by Kai that described his summer's activities.

Mike stated that he and Martin Kienzler were very happy with Kai and his work. Mike thanked the Board for providing the Johnny Charlie scholarship funding and indicated that they would be favourable to hiring Kai again for next season. This would be possible through the STEP funding program with Yukon Department of Education.

Harvest Management Strategy

Deana Lemke stated that receipt of harvest data is behind schedule; most Parties have not submitted it yet.

Native User Agreement (NUA) discussions are moving forward. Several meetings have already been held and more are planned. The intention is to have a draft agreement for presentation at the 2018 Annual Harvest Meeting (AHM). Deana reiterated that additional funding for this project will be required and that it may be advisable to follow up with YG and GNWT regarding this.

Arctic Borderlands (ABEKS)

Via teleconference, Michael Svoboda summarized the structure and scope of work of ABEKS. He stated that they have been trying to summarize the collected data into a format that is useful for decision-making. This year, ABEKS will be conducting its work so as to coordinate with PCTC's timelines.

It was noted that in the past it has not been obvious how ABEKS information should inform the status of the herd. PCTC is not comfortable working with the data and struggles when answering questions about the data at the AHM.

Michael stated that WMAC (North Slope) has indicated they will be shifting away from supporting ABEKS. He noted that WMAC (North Slope) does not want the monitoring program to be a separate entity and stated that it would fit well with a co-management board rather than a board that has a broad ecological interest.

ABEKS would like to continue receiving support for its work and would like to explore what potential future relationships may look like in terms of funding and the use of ABEKS data for making decisions. One option is to continue as previously. Another option is to make an adjustment to the consortium of partners. A third option is to cease operation and to put the resources toward a different initiative. Michael indicated that this decision would be made by March 31.

If a partnership with an existing co-management board was developed, Michael anticipates that the management board would receive ABEKS funding and be responsible for overseeing and managing the activities. Michael asked the PCMB to give consideration to the future of ABEKS and to provide some feedback.

Billy Storr commented on the usefulness of ABEKS data versus IGC's community-based monitoring system. He pointed out that the community-based

monitoring program is focused on achieving a certain number of people being interviewed, and these do not all have to be key harvesters. Billy also pointed out that it would be beneficial to include the gathering of information from Alaska in the data-collection program.

Marsha Branigan felt that ABEKS should provide data in a format that helps end users with interpreting it. If the data was useful to PCMB, ABEKS would have a better chance of continuing operations and receiving funding.

Ian McDonald mentioned that PCMB will be focusing on traditional knowledge requirements with respect to both the species at risk assessment and AHM requirements.

Alice McCulley identified that the confidence in the various estimates is not high at times, and noted that other information is also needed for decision-making.

Billy Storr stated that ABEKS should be talking to WMAC (NWT) and WMAC (NS) and the communities about what direction to take and what to do in order to get the most support.

The Board agreed that decisions need to be made about what information collected by ABEKS is useful for decision-making, and how it should be applied.

PCH range-wide management plan

Shannon Stotyn related that the results of the gap analysis for a barren-ground caribou recovery strategy have been broken down into a list of requirements. The next step is that of prioritizing which items to focus on, since it is not possible to pursue all of them. The intention is to ask PCMB whether the Board would like to be involved in the prioritization. Alternatively, the list of requirements could be prioritized from PCTC's perspective and the list then reviewed by PCMB.

Shannon explained that the International Porcupine Caribou Board (IPCB) would normally have met in the fall, but since the United States is in the process of reviewing all boards, appointments to the IPCB are somewhat on hold. PCTC suggests moving ahead with whatever does not require the IPCB's input. It will be necessary to decide who will take the lead on the prioritized actions and get PCMB's and the Parties' input on the process and the objectives. Some action items will not primarily be a PCTC responsibility but will involve PCMB and the Parties.

Shannon related that other recovery strategies have endeavored to include traditional knowledge (TK), such as information about the species' habitat and range. She suggested that the Board look at the boreal caribou recovery strategy to see how TK was applied in it, and noted that there is no specific section for TK but that it is included throughout the document.

Nicole McCutchen noted that the Board needs tools to use when making decisions and to be able to provide consistent and clear responses regarding industrial development. In this regard, Board members agreed to move away from attempting to use cumulative effects (CE) analysis as a tool, but rather to focus on a land use model with best practices.

Mike Sutor and Shannon Stotyn agreed to work on reviewing and prioritizing the items identified by the gap analysis and to provide an update at the 2018 AHM.

Let the Leaders Pass

The Board discussed feedback received at the public meeting regarding letting the caribou leaders pass. Kirby Meister suggested that it would be wise to do an analysis about why the previous process did not work. He also recalled that during previous two-week closures, a variety of groups used to request exceptions for harvesting.

Mike Sutor stated that Gary Kofinas wrote a paper assessing why the Let the Leaders Pass regulation was not successful.

While the Board concluded to let the RRC and GRRB determine what they want to do about this matter, it was decided that a summary of pros and cons regarding the previous process should be created in the form of a fact sheet that can be shared.

ACTION 17-9: Create a fact sheet about the previous Let the Leaders Pass practice

Kirby Meister agreed to draft a fact sheet and timeline, using the archive of information that he has available. He also noted that Trondëk Hwëch'in launched a constitutional challenge against the Let the Leaders Pass regulation. It should be ascertained how they feel about the matter at this time.

Caribou Traditional Knowledge

The Board discussed incorporating traditional knowledge in annual decision-making about the status of the herd. Some members felt that there is too much focus on obtaining a population number and that greater reliance should be placed on traditional knowledge-based indicators.

Mike Sutor noted that using the information provided by ABEKS has been challenging due to the lack of narrative or interpretation of the data. It has been difficult to quantify it and incorporate it into the AHM decision-making process. He stated that his preference is to speak with hunters around Aklavik and Old Crow and obtain contextual information.

Some members felt that while ABEKS needs to improve the presentation of their data, PCMB should still support their community-based monitoring model. Others noted that previous attempts at requesting the improvement of ABEKS data were unsuccessful and that the feedback that was provided was not listened to. It was also suggested that the Board think about what caused the difficulties in analyzing the ABEKS data, and what would be a useful format for improving incorporation of the data.

Mike Sutor related that according to Lindsay Staples, TK gathering processes and standards have improved significantly since 2008. Mike suggested that PCMB hold a workshop to identify its priorities for a TK study in terms of the requirements for management of the herd. Based on similar projects, such an initiative may take as long as three years to complete.

Mike offered the following information to inform the Board of the potential scope of the project:

- Each community would need its own co-researcher
- Collaboration with First Nation and Inuvialuit governments and communities is key
- Archival searches may be required
- It is critical that community co-researchers be well-chosen
- The scope should include the entire range, including Alaska
- Resulting maps and digital data would stay with the respective communities
- Anticipated funding requirements would likely be a minimum of \$400,000

Initial seed funding could be provided by PCMB, and external funding for the core of the project could be requested from other co-management bodies and Parties once the project is well-defined.

Members agreed that there are two fields of TK that need to be developed. One is an overall body of TK to supplement the existing body of scientific knowledge. The other is annual local knowledge about what is currently happening with the herd. Both may be valuable in supplementing a management plan and the species at risk assessment. The overall TK study may be a great place to start but would not directly meet the need for ongoing annual TK and local knowledge which is required for decision-making at the AHM.

Marsha Branigan related that the interviewing software called NVIVO was used for the polar bear TK study and is now used by WMAC for all TK gathering. Interviews are transcribed, and sections were flagged and coded to particular topics for future searches by a social scientist.

Some of the knowledge gaps which TK may be able to fill are in the following areas:

- Past extent of the range of the herd
- Fluctuation of the herd
- Rate of change in the herd
- Change of migration pattern
- Impact of climate and habitat changes
- Critical areas of the herd's range
- Definition of healthy herd/animal indicators

The Board agreed that having a community member included in the TK gathering process would ensure that communities would be more receptive and supportive.

It was also noted that while caribou-specific knowledge is important, the accessibility component, in terms of hunter access, is also important because this has a significant influence on the herd.

The Board agreed to request Parties' support for scoping and refining a potential TK project with the help of a TK expert and to seek funding for it.

ACTION 17-10: Board to send a letter to Parties seeking general support for a TK project, requesting input for a potential key contact in their respective communities, and who their key TK experts would be.

Deana pointed out that having someone at the community level to promote the idea would be wise, in addition to sending a letter to Parties. She suggested sending the information to PCMB members at the same time, so they can promote the concept to their respective Parties.

North Yukon Land Use Plan guidelines update

Mike Sutor related that the requirements under the *North Yukon Land Use Plan* are being reviewed specifically as related to the work of Northern Cross, now Chance Oil and Gas. The Department of Energy, Mines and Resources and Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation both have an interest in establishing best management practices. It had been hoped that best management practices would be the outcome of Don Russell's work; however, that objective was not quite reached.

The determination of appropriate safe operating distances from caribou is one component of the best practices that need to be determined. Mike stated that he will be working with Don Russell to review data related to safe operating distances. Recommendations will be presented to the Board and PCTC for review. Consultation with Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation and Na Cho Ny'ak Dun regarding industrial development in their traditional areas also needs to be completed.

It is hoped that a document will be drafted by March 2018 which will set the standards for industrial activities in North Yukon, and that it will become the guiding document for best management practices.

Cumulative Effects Project

Don Russell provided a brief overview of his energy/protein model, including the concepts related to zones of influence, baselines around communities and roads, and the relationship of a cow's body weight in fall to its ability to get pregnant, as well as the calf survival rate.

Don and Chris Johnson examined zones of influence for the PCH a number of years ago, using previously collected data. Some of the data related to zones of influence will be reanalyzed by Mike Sutor working in collaboration with researchers from Montana, USA.

Don related that significant work related to zones of influence has been done for the Prudhoe Bay area and the highway there. It has been found that there is both a behavioral response and a movement response; however, when animals avoid an area altogether it is difficult to analyze behavioral differences.

Ian McDonald stated that the Board is shifting its focus toward the development of best management practices, rather than continuing to invest in developing a cumulative effects model. Ian clarified that developing cumulative effects scenarios based on potential future development is not something the Board is interested in pursuing at this time.

Don explained that the PCH has wide variety of habitat. When some areas are affected by adverse conditions, the herd can move to another area. Herd recovery in habitat that has been affected by fire is an area of interest and has already been studied. Don mentioned that Jill Johnson, who completed her Ph.D on burn-recovery in Yukon, is willing to give an overview of how fires affect herd recovery.

Don informed the Board that the theme of the next CircumArctic Rangifer Monitoring and Assessment network (CARMA) conference will be Recovery in a Changing Landscape, and that both ecological and social aspects of recovery will be considered at the conference. He noted that the PCH is the worldwide exception, since most herds are declining and are in bad shape. While there are initiatives underway for recovery of herds that have experienced great declines, conditions such as climate, access and mobility of harvesters, and an increase in development in the range of the herds are affecting their recovery.

Climate, fire, development, and social changes will be considered at the CARMA conference, as well as how to manage expectations around the recovery. Norway and Russia will be providing their perspectives on these topics.

VGFN NYLUP projects

Via teleconference, Rosa Brown, Lands Manager at Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, reviewed various implementation activities under the *North Yukon Land Use Plan* (NYLUP) that pertain to caribou.

The three main projects that stem from the NYLUP are focused on linear disturbance, access management in the Eagle Plains area, and overall best management practices regarding caribou.

The linear disturbance project is being led by the NYLUP Council. The council considers linear disturbance and CE indicators and has set some thresholds in this regard. The project is trying to refine some of the initial estimates. Satellite images are being used to verify measurements. Rosa hopes that recommendations will be developed that will help direct any new industrial development. Another area of study is aimed at understanding how ecological areas differ in their ability to recover after disturbance. The results from this project should be available later this year.

Rosa explained that, so far, very little results have been achieved regarding access management. A working group has been formed to focus on developing an access management plan for the Eagle Plains area. There are many concerns around managing access related to the proposed gas well project and around the proponent's ability to restrict access.

Safe operating distances also need to be developed and a determination around what constitutes significant numbers needs to be made.

Rosa stated that VGFN completed a TK report and also had a researcher that worked to inform the project. In response to a query from Marsha Branigan, Rosa agreed to share the survey used for the TK report. She explained that it was challenging to get information specifically about how caribou behaved around disturbance. The TK report was compiled from the oral history database and from a small number of interviews and reports from other areas. The TK report is available as a separate document from Don Russell's and Anne Gunn's work.

Rosa explained that the next step for Vuntut Gwitchin is to help build an agreed-upon management toolbox for the northern region and for projects that go through the Yukon Environmental Socio-Economic Assessment Board, including TK.

Mike Sutor noted that there is a strong linkage between Rosa's work and the Board's needs and that some of it can be used to help guide the Board's work.

Next Meeting and Closing Prayer

The next meeting will be held in conjunction with the 2018 AHM in February. Members will travel on February 11 and 15, 2018. The PCMB meeting will be held on Monday, February 12. The AHM will be held February 13 and 14, 2018.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 p.m.