

**Porcupine Caribou Annual Harvest Meeting  
Inuvik, Northwest Territories  
February 8, 2011**

**SUMMARY OF INFORMATION PROVIDED**

**BACKGROUND**

In accordance with the Harvest Management Plan for the Porcupine Caribou Herd (HMP), the Porcupine Caribou Management Board (Board) convened the first Annual Harvest Meeting (AHM) during the second week of February 2011 in Inuvik, NT. The AHM was organized as outlined in the Terms of Reference from the Parties' Senior Officials and the Board's own Operating Procedures for the meeting.

The first day of the three-day AHM was "to bring together stakeholders, the general public and Parties to the *Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement* (PCMA) to exchange information and discuss the current status of the herd." (PCMB letter of invitation to Parties and stakeholders dated January 10, 2011). The Board further requested that Parties send or bring "any information that it should consider when assessing the status of the herd" and referred invitees to Appendix 2 of the Operating Procedures for further information on submissions.

This document summarizes the information provided during the 10 presentations made by various organizations during Day 1, the Information and Exchange Session of the AHM 2011.

**INFORMATION PROVIDED**

**Gwich'in Tribal Council, Richard Nerysoo**

- The population [size] is good but that shouldn't distract us from the HMP.
- The discrepancy over the preliminary information released by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game on the 2010 photocensus results and the information used in recent management decisions has created animosity in the communities. We need to evaluate the models based on information we have to day to ensure the models are a reflection of what we know.
- This is an opportunity to change the relationship between communities and government, for example cooperation on check stations and development of regulations.
- We cannot undo the hard work of GTC working with TH, NND and IGC.
- GTC is working with GNWT on harvest information gathering. We recommend that Yukon Aboriginal people play a lead role on information gathering. We encourage Government of Yukon to work with senior representatives and trust that they are capable of gathering the information and making the hard decision on limiting harvest.

## Porcupine Caribou Technical Committee Biological Information, Dorothy Cooley:

- Population
  - Early indications from the July 2010 photocensus show at least 123,000 caribou in the herd, significantly more than the 2001 census results. The Alaskan agencies expect to have a final herd estimate in March 2011.
  - The Caribou Calculator is being revised and will be broken into two components: 1) a new population model that includes measures of uncertainty, which is more appropriate to use to estimate herd size; and 2) a decision-support tool that the PCMB can use to evaluate the relative effects of different harvest management regimes. These two models are expected to be ready by March 31, 2011.
  - We continue to see a pattern of lower adult female survival as we go from summer to the next spring. Overall, annual survival rates continue to be lower than rates estimate when the herd was increasing. These estimates have low statistical power because of the low number of collars. In order to detect rates as low as 3% or so, we would need to maintain somewhere around 300 collars on the herd which is not possible due to a number of reasons.
  - Calf birth rates and survival are quite variable from year to year and there is no apparent pattern over time. Over the long term, the population is more sensitive to the survival of adult females more than the survival of calves.
  - There is no pattern of change in the peak date of calving, which we might expect if there were problems with the rut or with pregnancy.
  - Between 2003 and 2010, survival of females between nine months old and three years of age (when they enter the breeding portion of the population) was very similar to adult females. This indicator has low statistical power due to the low number of collars on short yearling females.
  - Because we collar a number of adult bulls before each census attempt, we've been deploying collars on bulls for the eight years we've tried to get a census, resulting in a good number of bulls collared in the herd. Taking advantage of this, we estimated the survival of these bulls. As expected, adult bulls have a lower survival rate than adult cows. Again, this analysis has low statistical power due to the small number of collars and we do not intend to keep collaring bulls year to year.
  - In 2010, we estimated 57 bulls for every 100 cows in the herd. This is a similar ratio to the one estimated in 1980 (60 bulls:100 cows). This indicates that there are enough bulls in the herd to breed the cows. The bull ratio will be estimated in years that we do a photocensus.
- Harvest
  - Harvest regulations for Aboriginal, resident and non-resident hunters were summarized for Alaska, Yukon and NWT (see full report).
  - Although most Parties reported harvest data to the PCMB, we were not able to calculate a total estimated harvest in Canada.

- The PCTC has not yet submitted a data request to the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op to summarize their question: “Were hunters’ needs met?”.
- **Body Condition**
  - Body condition monitoring programs in Yukon and NWT show that hunters are rating the condition of their harvested caribou higher since 2002. The program changed about that time so it’s difficult to say for sure whether that result is real or related to the way the data was collected. More analysis is needed for both the Yukon and NWT datasets.
  - The PCTC did not yet request the data on caribou condition and abnormalities from the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op.
- **Habitat**
  - The PCMB will discuss how information on the human footprint within the herd’s range from the Cumulative Effects project will be incorporated into the HMP process.
  - About 14% of the herd's range has been burned by wildland fires in the past 60 years. A high number of burns, a high number of large burns (over 10,000 hectares), and a large total area burned were seen in the last decade due to the big fire years 2004, 2005 and 2007.
  - Some progress was made toward summarizing snow depth and density data from 17 know snow stations within the range. Further work needs to be done, including locating other data from Alaskan and NWT.
  - The PCTC did not yet request the data on extreme weather events from the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op.
  - Timing of green-up was listed in the final HMP but was not summarized in this report.

### **Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, Roberta Joseph**

- In the HMP, each Party has taken on a higher level of responsibility for communications, education, providing information to the PCTC and collection of harvest data, and for participating and being accountable for harvest management and actively engaging in the HMP and AHM processes.
- TH has a *Fish and Wildlife Act* which means that TH can develop regulations and non-regulatory rules for harvesting.
- TH is a self-governing First Nation. Other harvesters require consent to access Settlement Land. Managing Porcupine Caribou harvest is not new to us.
- TH has held several meetings to update citizens, elders and leaders on Porcupine Caribou matters.
- Education is a priority for TH. The annual First Hunt teaches youth understanding of respectful, traditional, modern and safe methods for harvesting food.
- For the past three years, there have been very few caribou in TH Traditional Territory therefore harvest has been very low, in the 20s.

- TH recommends the herd be managed in the Green Zone, based on the Alaskan herd size information.
- TH has worked with the local Renewable Resources office on joint monitoring of the Dempster Highway, shooting workshop, input on the check station hiring so there has been an increase in efforts to work with Government of Yukon staff.

**Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board, James Firth, Amy Thompson  
Janet Boxwell**

- Education to use caribou wisely needs to continue.
- We're fortunate here to have three caribou herds to live off of.
- Despite the 123,000 news [Alaskan preliminary information on 2010 photocensus results], continue doing what you're doing.
- It was a very good decision to put in the bulls-only harvest until we found out the herd size.
- Forest fires are a concern. Maybe we could push for caribou being considered a value at risk.
- PCMB is doing a good job; move forward and involve the people.
- GRRB is not a Party but we do have a role to play in PCH management.
- From 1995 to 2004, GRRB did a harvest study to determine Basic Needs Levels and to establish, modify or remove Total Allowable Harvest provisions.
- Renewable Resources Councils allocate their Needs Levels locally.
- Initial Gwich'in Harvest Study ran from 1995 to 2004. The current harvest study started again in 2009 by contracting RRC's to deliver the program with funding from GNWT-ENR, CIMP and GRRB.
- The RRC develops the harvester list and verifies the data.
- Next steps are to calculate harvester response rates and estimate total harvest.

**GNWT-ENR, Martin Callaghan, Stephen Charlie**

- ENR collects harvest data via mail-in surveys, with a phone check to non-reporters. The low response rate leads to increased variance and could use improving.
- At the check station, there are very few unknown caribou (due to hunters not stopping) and there is a high compliance rate for reporting at the station.
- The check station's priority is to collect harvest data but people stop and report all kinds of things such as road conditions and wildlife sightings. We hope to continue the annual check station.
- ENR ran a rifle sighting-in workshop at Shingle Point this summer. These will not continue due to legal/liability concerns.
- ENR recommends to Parties:
  - Support harvest data collection in NWT
  - continue herd monitoring, including the bull-to-cow ratio
  - finish updating the modelling tools
  - work on an administrative process for a PCH tag (if required)

- ENR recommends to PCMB:
  - harvest be managed under the Green Zone.
  - promote a bull dominated harvest.
  - promote the need for harvest data.
  - develop media to communicate development of new tools.
  - continue hunter education.
- Check station is primarily led by co-management partners (RRC's with their harvesters), which puts management in Aboriginal hands.

### **Inuvialuit Game Council, Doug Esagok**

- How much consideration has been taken related to her movements and effects on population estimates?
- Management uses too much science; why is traditional knowledge not used more?
- IGC's confidence in the population model is shaken by the new count.
- IGC has shown that it can and will make hard decisions.
- IGC continues to support the HMP and has started to collect harvest data.
- The herd is clearly in the Green Zone.
- The Yukon's interim measures are unnecessary. We await Government of Yukon's decision regarding this.

### **WMAC (NWT), Chucky Gruben**

- WMAC(NWT) supports the HMP, along with WMAC(NS).
- Communication is crucial. The difference between the model and count has damaged the credibility of the model.
- The PCTC needs to involve the co-management boards and staff. It's not enough to present summary information to us.
- Cumulative effects, human disturbance and fires are crucial information.
- There needs to be increased information flow to communities by ENR and Government of Yukon.
- Information shows we should be in the Green Zone; however, these points need to be addressed.

### **WMAC (NS), Danny C. Gordon**

- In 1947, I came to Canada and lived at Herschel Island for a couple of years. Porcupine Caribou is the only caribou I've every harvested.
- In 1951, I went hunting by Police Cabin/Coal Mine area with a 4-HP Elgin motor. We harvested five caribou of the 10,000 or so caribou there. That was the first time people went and got caribou and came home that same day.
- Hunting caribou after break up on the Yukon North Slope has never failed since 1951. Biologists don't know that caribou has been coming to Aklavik for 60 years.
- There has been calving there too in the 1960s, '70s and '80s.

## **Yukon Conservation Officer, Ken Alderson**

- I am the Conservation Officer stationed on the Dempster Highway, patrolling from Eagle Plains to the NWT border, stationed at Eagle Plains.
- Harvest data this year is much better compared to last year. Confident it is 90% to 95% accurate.
- First job priority is to ensure mandatory caribou harvest reporting requirements are met. Second is to physically check the harvest (eg male or female). Third priority is hunter education and communication (given out PCMB communication products, helped with hunter education initiatives). Fourth priority is public safety (EMR trained).
- I've learned from Fort McPherson hunters a different way of dressing caribou.
- Some resistance last year when this started, but this year, people seek me out to report their harvest. This year, I did not write any tickets for liquor, littering, firearms offences. Compliance and co-operation is way better this year.
- Our harvest numbers are different [than GNWT-ENR] numbers but remember each is only one piece of the harvest overall.
- Responding to a question: Ken did not travel to Old Crow but other officers made three patrols. There were few caribou and low hunting activity this year.
- Responding to a question: The no-hunting corridor is still in regulation but is not being enforced other than licensed Resident hunters who need to comply with a 500-meter corridor for wolves, moose, etc.
- Responding to a question: Acknowledge the concern about grizzly bears on the Dempster. Next year, hope to try adverse conditioning of bears there.

## **Inuvialuit Game Council, Steven Baryluk**

- Provided an update on harvest data collection for Inuvialuit hunters.
- Harvest data collection initiated in Inuvik. Data entry has started. Need to talk with Aklavik and Tuk yet about programs in those communities. Hope to have the entire ISR program coordinated through the Joint Secretariat.
- The HTC coordinates door-to-door interviews twice each year.
- The focus is Porcupine Caribou since most other species are under a quota/tag system. Data includes harvest date, location and sex.
- Program is coordinated with Aklavik Gwich'in to reduce double reporting.
- Funded largely by IFA Implementation Funds. Availability of funds is always an issue. If other programs are affected, we need to find other funding sources.