

Porcupine Caribou Management Board Minutes of Meeting

September 28 and 29, 2016

Ethel Lake and
Mayo, Yukon

In attendance

Members/Staff

Joe Tetlichy, Chair
Wilbert Firth, Gwich'in Tribal Council
Steven Buyck, Nacho Ny'äk Dun
Nicole McCutchen, Government of Yukon
Ian McDonald, Government of Canada
Marsha Branigan, Government of the Northwest Territories
Harold Frost Jr., Vuntut Gwitchin
Charles Pokiak, Inuvialuit Game Council
Alice McCulley, Trondek Hwech'in
Kirby Meister (Alternate), Government of Yukon
Deana Lemke, Executive Director
Matthias Lemke, Assistant

Presenters/Guests

Mike Sutor, Environment Yukon
Rob Florkiewicz, Environment Yukon
Graham VanTighem, Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board
Don Russell, Shadow Lake Environmental Consulting

Welcome and Opening Prayer

The meeting was called to order at 9:15 a.m. by Joe Tetlichy. He thanked Steven Buyck for inviting the Board to Ethel Lake in Nacho Ny'äk Dun's traditional territory. Joe then offered an opening prayer.

Review Agenda

The agenda was reviewed by the Board and accepted.

Motion to accept agenda

Moved by Stephen Buyck

Seconded by Marsha Branigan

Carried

Review Minutes

The minutes of the April 29 and 30, 2016 meeting were reviewed and approved by the Board.

Motion to accept April 29 and 30, 2016 meeting minutes as distributed

Moved by Wilbert Firth

Seconded by Nicole McCutchen

Carried

Chair's Update

Joe Tetlich provided an update on his activities since the last Board meeting. He presented information about the Harvest Management Plan (HMP) at the North American Caribou Conference held in Thunder Bay, Ontario from May 16 to 19, 2016. The main topic at the conference was caribou conservation and aboriginal involvement. Because of the collaborative work that was done on the HMP there was interest in seeing how First Nations were involved in that accomplishment. Joe also participated in a panel discussion about co-management.

Joe attended the Midway Lake music festival in NWT at the end of July. Only a few caribou arrived there and then turned around and returned to Alaska.

There is a continued need in the communities for education about good hunting practices. As observed during the harvest on the Dempster highway last fall, some hunters are still chasing caribou with skidoos and gutting animals on the highway. The Board is willing to assist with appropriate communications, but the main responsibility for addressing the concerns lies with the community organizations.

Joe and Deana will be attending a GRRB meeting in Tsiigehtchic next week to participate in a discussion regarding the guidelines for the sale, trade and barter of Porcupine caribou meat and PCH communications.

A workshop about collaborative and cooperative harvest reporting is being hosted by GNWT in Yellowknife on October 25 and 26. Joe was invited to give a presentation on the HMP. The Board has also been invited to send two additional representatives to participate. Joe will give a presentation about harvest data collection as it relates to the HMP.

Joe noted that harvest reporting is always an issue, but this year the deficiency is most obvious because of the low number of respondents reporting their harvest and the known high harvest on the Dempster last fall. The current healthy population of the herd could be a factor in people not feeling the urgency of harvest reporting.

Joe and Deana recently met with Patrick Gruben and Steven Baryluk from IGC regarding concerns from Inuvik about hunters selling caribou meat. They also discussed HMP and Native User Agreement concerns. Joe will be attending an IGC meeting in December to remind them that the Board needs the communities' assistance to manage this issue.

Administrative and Financial Report

A PCMB summer student under the Johnny Charlie scholarship program was hired this year to work with Mike Sutor. According to Mike, it was a very good and worthwhile experience. Deana explained that a new application has to be in by November if there is interest in hiring another summer student next year. Yukon Department of Education provides funding for this program.

Deana provided a communications update on behalf of Kelly Milner and reviewed information about Website updates, the cookbook, hunter information posters and the herd report card. It was also noted that positive feedback was received in response to the article, written by Kelly, interviewing Joe Tetlichy in Air North's magazine.

A link to the puppet video about Ch'igii, a baby caribou calf from the Porcupine Caribou herd, and the challenges she faces during the first year of her life, was put on the Resources and Tools page on pcmb.ca. Other minor website updates are in progress.

Ian McDonald stated that the pcmb.ca website should reflect past figures of herd size. Historical herd size is one of the most frequently asked questions by visitors. He researched and compiled historical figures and would like to see them shown on the site. There seems to be different versions of numbers, so Ian will confer with Mike Sutor and then ask to have a chart and a table put on the website so that people can see where the herd size is at now and where it was in the past.

Action 16-03: Add historical herd size information to pcmb.ca

Hunter information posters and banners and a herd report card will be worked on in October. Deana asked for any feedback or concerns about the 'No Respect' and 'Show Respect' posters to be sent to her.

The current financial variance report was reviewed and discussed.

PCMB Chair appointment process

Deana Lemke reviewed the correspondence about the PCMB Chair appointment process which was sent to all Parties and stakeholders inviting new nominations or support for Joe Tetlichy. Responses were received from all Parties strongly supporting Joe Tetlichy's re-appointment.

Motion to reappoint Joe Tetlich as Chair for another five-year term, ending September 29, 2021

Moved by Marsha Branigan

Seconded by Wilbert Firth

Carried

The Chair appointment policy was discussed.

Charles Pokiak pointed out that other boards usually have in camera discussions when the time comes for reappointment or new nominations of a chair.

The Board agreed to adding a line that states that during discussions about Chair appointments, the Chair will recuse him/herself and the Executive Director will facilitate the discussion among members.

Steven Buyck noted that he likes the current process as it puts the onus on the Parties to give input on a new Chair.

Marsha expressed that the guidelines are appropriate because they give others the opportunity to nominate a new person. It was agreed to amend the time for Parties to respond with nominations from 21 days to 90 days.

A discussion arose about who will be asked via letter from PCMB to nominate a new Chair. It was determined that the PCMA parties should be the point of contact for nominations. RRCs can provide nomination suggestions to their respective Party for consideration. Separate letters will be sent to stakeholders, asking them to advise their Parties when wishing to nominate a new person as Chair.

Action 16-04: ED to update the Chair appointment guidelines and send to members for review

Harvest Management Plan Update

Deana Lemke informed the Board that responses to this year's Annual Harvest Meeting recommendations have not yet been received from Yukon First Nations.

The Implementation Plan has been revised and sent to all Parties on July 4, 2016. No replies were requested.

An HMP Communications Working Group meeting will be held on October 3. Harvest data will be one of the main topics.

It was noted that Aklavik is doing really well with harvest reporting and according to a presentation at a recent WMAC meeting, some improvement has also happened in Inuvik, where reporting has doubled.

Deana recently initiated follow-up communications about making progress on Native User Agreements. Trondek Hwech'in, Vuntut Gwitchin, and Nacho Ny'äk Dun will soon be meeting with Lindsay Staples to design a framework and discuss how to move forward. IGC and GTC were also offered support from PCMB.

Action 16-05: Executive Director to mail hard copies of the revised Implementation Plan to all members

PCH Sale, Trade and Barter Guidelines

The Board is getting emails and letters about the sale of caribou meat in the NWT. Joe reviewed the current concerns about the definition of the terms “commercial” and “bartering” and noted that clarification is required. However, it is up to each user community to help deal with the issue.

The Board needs to know the perspectives of the various communities. Deana related that the Parties were asked by the Board, via letter including a copy of the current guidelines, what their position is regarding the guidelines. When the guidelines were originally developed, an extensive consultation was undertaken with communities and stakeholders. While no deadline was stated in the correspondence, hopefully the Board will get a reply from the Parties and stakeholders in due course.

The issue was raised in a meeting involving Joe, Deana, Steven Baryluk, and Patrick Gruben from IGC last week. They also want to undertake a discussion about the definition of “commercial”. Currently “commercial” is interpreted in various ways in the ISR.

Joe stated that some consistency among communities is important; otherwise, they could have different standards and be at odds among themselves.

Kirby Meister noted that in the Yukon *Wildlife Act*, sale and barter are considered the same under the definition of “trafficking.” Nothing in the *Wildlife Act* allows for commercial activity. Sharing is not considered trafficking. Perhaps the Board should focus on the things that are clear and make strong statements about that.

Wilbert Firth related that some hunters were seen shooting 20 caribou at a time and then selling them in Inuvik. They were told that they are being watched.

Joe Tetlichi said that it would be good if the three communities with challenges around this were to develop some strong policies that can be used as an example.

Marsha Branigan suggested that this topic be made a special agenda item at the Annual Harvest Meeting.

Action 16-06: Add a discussion around sale, trade, and barter to the 2017 AHM agenda

Strategic Framework

Deana Lemke noted that the strategic framework document was updated according to the revisions discussed at the last PCMB meeting. Members should advise Deana of any requests for further revisions.

Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board (YFWMB) Update

Graham Van Tighem updated the Board on YFWMB's recent activities.

A new grizzly bear management plan is underway. This is not a review; it is a new plan.

Deana pointed out that PCMB is interested in any communication around human/bear interactions and how the Board can help or be involved. Graham explained that these issues are very diverse across Yukon and they are not dealing specifically with one area. It was noted that bears don't seem to be a problem until there are negative interactions. Since humans are actually going into the range of the bears, the plan needs to protect the grizzlies. Getting rid of the bears is not the solution.

Nicole related that a grizzly study was completed on the Yukon North Slope. Currently, YG is waiting for WMAC(NS) and Parties to make comments on the draft report from the study, after which WMAC(NS) will present the results in Aklavik.

Action 16-07: Ensure YFWMB is advised of the date of 2017 AHM by mid-October so as to have it flagged and added to their annual YFWMB calendar

Dempster Highway PCH harvesting rights

Rob Florkiewicz commented on the new maps provided in the meeting binders which are updated versions of previously used maps outlining the various harvesting rights on the Dempster. When updating the maps, attempts were made to create clearer benchmarks along the highway for people to refer to. The revisions have been reviewed internally with YG. They still need the Justice department to review them, and general input is also being sought.

Kirby Meister pointed out that the previous maps were used often and that they have really missed using them because they were a great resource. Mike Suitor concurred that people keep asking for this information.

Rob noted that as adjustments in traditional territories or new laws or agreements come into effect, (Native User Agreements, for example) these maps will get updated. Information that is clear and certain has been and will be represented on the maps. Maps will be updated if this information changes.

Deana suggested continuing to move forward with having the documents reviewed by the Justice department as they are now. Once finalized, a joint letter from the Board and Environment Yukon can be sent to each Party, asking them to review the material and point out any issues. We can also ask for permission to use Parties' logos on the final product as a joint communication tool.

Marsha Branigan pointed out that information about PCH harvest as it relates to Hart River caribou on the southern end of Dempster needs to be added for clarity. It needs to be clear that if there are no Porcupine caribou present, there is no right to harvest Hart River caribou.

Herd Update

NWT Update

Marsha Branigan provided the following update:

- There will be no check station this year;
- Resident harvest data was just submitted to PCMB;
- Only limited body condition samples have been collected this year, as there were not many caribou on the highway; and
- An appointment for GNWT's alternate on the PCMB is in progress.

Yukon Update

Mike Suitor provided the following update:

- It has been decided that the YESAB ruling regarding Northern Cross will stay in the federal system. YESAB would have preferred for it to be in the territorial system. There is no indication of when a decision will be rendered by the Court.
- Currently there are about six PCH range maps. PCTC was asked to develop a new annual range. Alaska Department of Fish and Game was also working on this and PCTC collaborated with them. The map has now been completed. Mike hopes that Jason Caikoski will come over from Alaska and present it to the Board at a future PCMB meeting.
- Additional funding has been received, enabling the completion of the *Sensitive Habitats* report update. Funding does not include printing costs and Mike questioned whether PCMB would like to take this on.

Action 16-08: Contact IPCB to discuss the printing of the updated Sensitive Habitats booklet.

- The document *Movements and Distribution of PCH 1970-1990* will be scanned and made available as a PDF to the Board.
- A short video highlighting activities of summer student Amanda Mervyn was shown to the Board. Mike noted that Amanda was a great help and

- an enthusiastic worker, and that they would be interested in having her return as a STEP student again next summer. The Board agreed.
- Satellite collar movement maps of the 2015 fall migration were reviewed, highlighting the herd's movement through the Northern Cross project area.
 - A calving survey was successfully completed.
 - Bulls again travelled to the Richardson Mountains for most of the summer, arriving on the Yukon North Slope in May and leaving in late August
 - When attempting an aerial census this year, the team waited for insect harassment to cause the herd to aggregate tightly. They tried for two days to photograph the herd but were not able, due to poor lighting conditions. The digital equipment was not in service yet and light conditions cause significant restrictions for the old film-based equipment.
 - Following the photo census attempt, most of the herd quickly moved east to the Richardson Mountains.
 - The herd started moving west at the end of August. Currently, the herd is far west in Alaska between Arctic Village and Venetie. It should become apparent in the next few weeks whether the herd will return to Canada. It is possible that the herd could stay in Alaska as it did in 2014.
 - During August 3 to 6, 2016, a trial study of muskox and caribou interactions was completed. Peter Archie from Aklavik participated, and 30 interactions were observed. It was apparent that caribou were curious and intentionally approached muskox and then continued doing what they were doing. Caribou moved through the valley and fed in the same locations as muskox. Muskox were grazing on tall heavy sedges.
 - Body condition monitoring is planned for the future, if caribou come back to the Dempster or near Old Crow in October or early November.

Porcupine Caribou Research and Monitoring

Mike Sutor reviewed and presented segments one and three of a three-part presentation about the Porcupine Caribou research and monitoring program. The presentation was created to give interested organizations a detailed overview of the scope and nature of monitoring work, the roles and responsibilities of those doing the work, as well as a detailed segment about the pros and cons of collaring.

Highlights of Part 1 – Why we do it, who actually does it, and how it is decided:

Using maps, Mike highlighted the very useful example of how satellite-based data assisted in clearly demonstrating the concerns about PCH movement through the Northern Cross project area.

Another valuable use of historical caribou monitoring data, which has been collected over decades, was its integration into the North Yukon land use plan.

Alaska Department of Fish and Game's (ADF&G) regulatory structure has specific requirements and their main management tool is managing population size. ADF&G has the planes and specialized equipment to do much of the work required to monitor the herd. They also do collaring on YG's behalf if the caribou are in Alaska. USFWS has historically led telemetry work as they have special passports that allow them greater abilities when crossing the border for the purposes of work. Environment Yukon is primarily responsible for managing the collar program and assisting ADF&G with population surveys as needed.

The collected data is available to be used for the needs of organizations like PCMB, WMAC(NS), WMAC(NWT), GRRB, Parties to the PCMA, Alaskan agencies, communities, RRCs and HTC's. Some data is also collected for specific programs. YG uses the data to manage harvest and conservation requirements. Researchers or organizations like the BBC also avail themselves of scientific data.

The PCTC discusses and prioritizes available resources and available funding to determine annual workloads. The Annual Summary Report which is required for each Annual Harvest Meeting drives much of the workload each year.

Highlights of Part 3 – Collars: How and why we do it

Collar data assists with the gathering of information on population, calf production, adult survival, population model, land use planning and environmental assessments, habitat use and habitat selection.

Some of the collar program objectives are to document herd distribution, assess the risk to the PCH and other herds from harvest, and examine issues identified by communities, such as the effect of caribou-muskox interactions.

Collaring work is usually completed by Martin Kienzler, Kyle Russell and Mike Suitor when conducted in Yukon, and by Jason Caikoski in Alaska.

The pros and cons of VHF and satellite collars were discussed. Satellite collars provide more specific location data without having to fly. VHF collars require flying into the vicinity of collars to track them. VHF are lighter and last longer but only give us two to three locations a year. Satellite collars provide that each day. Satellite collars contribute to the study of adult female survival data because they automatically send notifications when the animal dies. Satellite collars cost more to acquire but require less flying once deployed. Satellite collars have become very light and some are now similar in weight to VHF collars.

Mike showed videos depicting a caribou capture using a helicopter and net gun, and the steps taken and data collected after a caribou is captured. Images of the impacts to the fur of caribou from wearing various collars were shown and discussed. The benefits and challenges of using collars were outlined. In the

future, a shift to an all-satellite collar program is being anticipated. The budget currently allocated for telemetry flights would have to be reallocated to the satellite collar program.

Incorporating local and traditional knowledge into the caribou data knowledge base still needs to be addressed more fully than it currently is. Mike would like to see more community involvement in body condition studies.

Once the digital photo census equipment is operational, more frequent census data should be possible, as the digital equipment allows for photography in a wider range of light conditions.

Cumulative Effects Project

Don Russell explained that he has been working on a model that calculates the effects on an animal when moving through a geographical area, taking into account disturbances, habitat quality and environmental factors to measure how the animal is affected. The model will also allow the adjustment of inputs in order to run “what if” scenarios.

There was a need to do this modelling work first in the NWT and Don now intends to apply the accumulated knowledge to the PCH.

Don reviewed the declining trends of various North American caribou herds. For example, the George River herd is now 99% smaller than it used to be, and is down to 9,000 animals.

Don explained that when herds are at their peak, they are regulated by bottom-up factors such as availability of food, disease, etc. When herds are at a low point, they are more affected by top-down factors such as predation and harvest, and are also more vulnerable to climate change and development. Generally, the rate of increase in a herd is similar to the rate of decline. A herd cannot increase forever, and it seems that something other than harvest and predation precipitates a decline.

Don pointed out that the Bathurst herd is in full decline. He showed via weather and environmental data that since 1995 there was a consistently high drought index in the range of the Bathurst herd. The highest ever recorded was in 2014. The implications of the data are that precipitation, drought, temperature, and wind have effects on a caribou herd's population. Since 1970s there are daily records available from NASA for large grids across all the ranges, which are downloaded to extrapolate an index of conditions. For the Bathurst herd there seems to be a direct relationship of temperature and precipitation to the herd's declining trend. The same pattern exists for all other herds, except for those west of the Mackenzie River.

There seems to be a relationship between the Warble Index and drought in the Bathurst range, but not in the PCH range. Increasing temperatures seem to help the PCH because there is enough water available for the vegetation. There are notable topographic differences between the ranges of these two herds. In the east there are shallow bedrock soils; in the west there are deep permafrost soils. The higher temperatures seem to have an adverse effect on bedrock-dominated soil ranges. Also, large forest fires were noted in eastern ranges while only small fires were recorded in the west.

Don described the inputs and functions of the movement model and explained the challenges of projecting the future population size of a herd when incorporating data about the herd's range, current development, and how many times animals encounter a zone of influence. All these factors affect the energy-protein model.

Don discussed scenario development and noted that the Board needs to decide what kind of scenarios related to PCH they would like to run through the model. The Board suggested taking the thresholds outlined in the *North Yukon Regional Land Use Plan* and using the model to show the potential effects of industrial development to key decision makers. Also noted was that WMAC(NS) may be interested in the impacts of an all-season road from the Dempster Highway to the Yukon North Slope.

Don pointed out that more people need to be involved in the process to gain acceptance for using this model.

Mike Suitor stated that the PCTC is concerned about cumulative effects modelling being tied to regulations, especially for NCY and the 1002 lands. The Board thought it would be best to focus on the Canadian side because of Alaskan concerns about use of the model. Several members of the PCTC are concerned with the amount of uncertainty in each component of the model and what that will mean in the final result. They are concerned that this amount of variability will mask project effects, making it difficult to identify where impacts are likely to occur, particularly if they don't cumulatively create a very large impact. The PCTC agree that we should continue to move forward with cumulative effects modelling, but there is concern about how closely it will be tied to regulatory impacts, as the modelling is largely exploratory and may not adequately capture the impacts of project components.

The Board agreed to the creation of a working group to work with Don to discuss scenario development and use of the CE model, from now until March 2017. Members of the working group will be Joe, Deana, Nicole, Steven, Marsha, Ian and Mike.

Action 16-09: Executive Director to e-mail CE Working Group members to connect Don Russell with the group and move forward with the CE project discussions.

Next Meeting and Closing

The next Board meeting will be held on December 16 and 17, 2016 in Tuktoyaktuk, NWT.

The meeting was adjourned 11:30 a.m. The Board then drove to Mayo to hold a community meeting and dinner at 1:00 p.m.