

Porcupine Caribou Management Board Minutes of Meeting

December 16 and 17, 2016

Hamlet Council Chambers
Tuktoyaktuk, NWT

In attendance

Members/Staff

Joe Tetlich, Chair
Wilbert Firth, Gwich'in Tribal Council
Ian McDonald, Government of Canada
Alice McCulley, Trondek Hwech'in
Steven Buyck, Nacho Ny'ak Dun
Nicole McCutchen, Government of Yukon (partial meeting, by phone)
Charles Pokiak, Inuvialuit Game Council, Alternate
Kirby Meister, Government of Yukon, Alternate
Deana Lemke, Executive Director
Matthias Lemke, Assistant

Presenters/Guests

Mike Sutor, Environment Yukon
Tom Jung, Environment Yukon

Regrets

Harold Frost Jr., Vuntut Gwitchin
Marsha Branigan, Government of the Northwest Territories

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Chair Joe Tetlich called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m., after which Steven Buyck offered the opening prayer. Charles Pokiak welcomed the Board to Tuktoyaktuk.

Review Agenda

The agenda was reviewed by the Board and accepted.

Motion to accept agenda
Moved by Wilbert Firth
Seconded by Steven Buyck
Carried

Review Minutes

The Minutes of the September 28 and 29, 2016 meeting were reviewed and approved by the Board.

Motion to accept Minutes of the September 28 and 29, 2016 Board meeting as distributed

Moved by Stephen Buyck

Seconded by Charles Pokiak

Carried

Action items were reviewed. Ian noted that the request for adding historical herd size information to pcmb.ca has not yet been completed.

Chair's Update

Joe Tetlich reviewed recent caribou movements. The caribou came to Old Crow during the first week of October and almost went to the NWT but then turned around and went back to Alaska. Fort McPherson, Inuvik and Tsiigehtchic were not able to harvest caribou. Aklavik started getting large amounts of caribou and some concerns were raised about hunter safety and wounding loss of caribou. The description of some harvesting practices sounded similar to what happened on the Dempster, but since it is out of the way, the activities were less visible.

Joe attended an Athabaskan leaders conference in Fairbanks in November at which he was able to connect with people from Arctic Village, Venetie, Chalkyitsik and Fort Yukon and let them know about the Harvest Management Plan. He also met with the chiefs and leaders to talk about caribou-related issues.

On November 30 and December 1, 2016, the International Porcupine Caribou Board (IPCB) held a meeting in Fairbanks, Alaska and a corresponding community meeting in Venetie. Many people there are concerned about the implications of the new leadership in the US on the protection of the 1002 lands in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The Alaska Wilderness League is lobbying in Washington to have the 1002 lands declared as a national monument.

Mike Sutor noted that Barry Smith's term is ending as the Canadian Co-chair of the IPCB and that Bruce McDonald will be appointed in his place.

Joe related that Hollis Twitchell with the US Fish and Wildlife Service would like to visit Gwich'in communities together to talk about the creation of a harvest management plan in Alaska. Hollis would like to attend Caribou Days in Old Crow in May, along with Edward Frank, who is the representative for the Gwich'in communities in Alaska.

Joe attended a recent GRRB meeting in Tsiigehtchic to discuss PCH sale, trade and barter concerns. While some have the impression that PCMB is responsible, Joe reminded them that the onus is on the communities. While PCMB understands their concerns, they need to be responsible for getting out the message about ethical hunting practices to their hunters by means of the HTC's and RRCs.

Both Joe and Deana attended a workshop about collaborative harvest reporting in Yellowknife on October 25 and 26, at which Joe gave a presentation about the Harvest Management Plan (HMP). Meetings are held once a year, as directed by the NWT *Wildlife Act*, and PCMB will be routinely invited to attend. Some communities are struggling with drastic declines in their caribou herds and do not have boards to address the issues. There was much interest expressed in the PCH HMP.

On November 18, Joe and Deana met with the northern chiefs about caribou management issues and PCMB's concerns. The expected announcement by COSEWIC was also discussed, as well as concerns about future development in the PCH range and the importance of developing Native User Agreements (NUAs).

On November 25, 2016 Arctic Borderlands had a strategic planning session in Whitehorse. Joe and Deana attended and shared their comments about the value of Arctic Borderlands survey information. They also suggested that it is important for the programs to meet the needs of their clientele, and that changing the questions often is not a good practice.

On December 15, Joe represented PCMB at an IGC meeting regarding the sale, trade and barter of caribou. The IGC will be discussing the issue further. They want stricter management controls when caribou are on the Dempster. Some also shared concerns about making satellite collar location information available.

PCH Location Information

Ian McDonald pointed out that PCH satellite location information on the website may be discontinued if the herd ceases to be in the Green zone, and Mike Suitor noted that the maps are e-mailed with a disclaimer stating that maps will be delayed or discontinued if their release results in a conservation concern for the Porcupine caribou herd.

Joe stated that people who have limited finances appreciate knowing when and where not to go hunting for caribou.

Charles Pokiak felt that the availability of satellite collar information will incent more people to go to the Dempster to hunt when the caribou are there.

Environment Yukon Award of Recognition

Joe announced that Mike Sutor and Martin Kienzler will be receiving a departmental award today. The Deputy Minister's award is given to an individual or a team who has made a significant contribution to the department's goals or values.

Nicole McCutchen read the submission which led to the award being given, noting their good work of establishing and maintaining an extensive network of partnerships and relationships in advancing caribou management.

Administrative and Financial Report

Contaminants research

Copies of Mary Gamberg's proposal for the northern contaminants program for arctic caribou for 2017-18 were distributed. Deana related that the Board will state its support for the proposal unless a member has concerns or questions. Mike Sutor stated that the Inuvik HTC has requested that the "bible" (one of the stomachs), marrow, and the tongue be added to contaminants studies. He added that Mary Gamberg is always keen to give presentations and would be happy to come to a PCMB meeting to provide a presentation. The Board agreed that it would be a good idea to invite Mary to a future meeting, possibly at Caribou Days in Old Crow.

Board Membership

The status of expiring and currently vacant board member appointments was reviewed.

Species at risk

A letter to PCMB from the Conference of Management Authorities of the Species at Risk Secretariat was distributed. PCMB has been invited to the discussion table at a meeting in January 2017 in Yellowknife, NT to discuss the status of barren-ground caribou in NWT.

Cumulative Effects project

Deana informed the Board that Don Russell has been very occupied with his work on best management practices related to caribou and that he also had an injury to deal with. The work on scenario development that the Cumulative Effects project working group was to undertake will therefore be picked up again in the new year.

Mike Sutor pointed out that the general topic of cumulative effects is not specific enough for the PCTC to focus on. He asked the Board to consider what the specific primary concerns are regarding cumulative effects and what the Board

would like to see done about these. This would assist in identifying the issues and concerns on which PCTC should provide technical advice.

Tom Jung related that ecological modellers are sometimes not the best at communicating concepts to groups and boards. For this reason, projects involving bison and grizzly bears that Tom has worked on with Doug Clark from the University of Saskatchewan, a social scientist was engaged to assist with communications.

Nicole McCutchen pointed out that critical habitat will have to be identified as a result of the COSEWIC designation.

Mike Suitor noted that there has been so much focus on harvest management that habitat management related to PCH has not received much attention since the 1980s. Plans will be made to address this in the future. Mike also explained that Don Russell is trying to understand how development might affect the herd by understanding the impact on individual caribou in terms of movement, food intake, availability of food, disturbances, and interactions.

Nicole McCutchen expressed interest in how Don's work is being applied to the Bathurst herd, as there will likely be similar challenges in applying it to the PCH. Nicole also stated that the Board needs to better understand what the issues are from the caribou management perspective. She pointed out that Karin Clark, a cumulative effects biologist with GNWT, is working with Don Russell and that it may be good to ask her to speak to the Board about cumulative effects work in NWT. The Board agreed to invite Karin Clark to an upcoming Board meeting to discuss cumulative effects.

Action 16-10: Invite Karin Clark to an upcoming Board meeting to discuss cumulative effects

Johnny Charlie Scholarship

Deana informed the Board that a new STEP application has been submitted and was approved for Yukon Department of Education funding. The Board will be able to have another student work as a wildlife technician next year under the Johnny Charlie Scholarship fund. Students can apply in January 2017.

Deana related the following communications update provided by Kelly Milner:

- Website has updated graphics, images and content. A link was added to the Ch'igii caribou video.
- Location maps are now being posted and a new movement animation is available.
- The caribou cookbook is on its final edit and 500 copies will be printed due to the better price per book at that volume. Vuntut Gwitchin is purchasing 100 of these for their own use. The Board will not be selling them but they will be used as promotional items and door prizes. They could be made

available for sale at an appropriate reseller. The finished product should be ready for the AHM in February.

- Four types of new banners have been produced with stands. These will be brought to the AHM for display.
- New “Show Respect” and “No Respect” posters have been completed, as well as a butchering guide.
- Radio spots and podcasts are being developed. Scripts are being prepared about harvest reporting and harvest practices.

A discussion arose around the popularity of caribou location maps. Since some people visit pcmb.ca specifically for viewing the maps, the Board could use pop-ups with targeted messaging to people who view location information on the website.

Deana related that a group within INAC is working with various boards and committees to update IFA funding requirements. Some groups are asking for more funding as they have had no increases since the IFA was implemented 14 years ago. Since PCMB was established under the IFA, Deana contacted the Board’s INAC representative to find out more information. Current funding for PCMB comes from Aboriginal Affairs, not through the IFA. INAC will pass on Deana’s contact information to the appropriate person.

The current status and duration of the Board’s various funding agreements was provided and the current financial variance report was reviewed.

PCMB Chair appointment process

Deana Lemke informed the Board that a letter was sent to all government Parties requesting support for Joe’s reappointment as Chair. A reply from Canada is pending. YG and GNWT have replied positively.

The updated *Appointment of PCMB Chair Guidelines* were reviewed and finalized.

Motion to accept updated Appointment of PCMB Chair guidelines

Moved by Wilbert Firth

Seconded by Charles Pokiak

Carried

Sale, Trade and Barter Guidelines

Deana Lemke distributed copies of a letter received from the Inuvik HTC regarding a concern about the sale of caribou. Joe Tetlichi commented that this concern is ongoing. The Sale, Trade and Barter Guidelines were developed in 2011 and the intent was to review them every 3 to 5 years. The Parties’ position on the guidelines was recently requested and so far no concerns have been expressed except during the meeting with IGC yesterday. IGC stated that they

will send follow-up correspondence. Joe also noted that because travel distances for harvesting are considerably varied depending on the community, the amount of compensation given in regard to trading and bartering could vary depending on the community. This would need to be something considered and decided on at the Party or community level.

Kirby Meister stated that giving away some meat is not illegal. Discretion is required when giving small amounts to non-aboriginal persons. There have been no charges regarding the sale of meat to date.

Charles Pokiak related that questions have been raised in the past about selling caribou soup at functions to raise money. This has not been approved in the past, and Charles felt it would be unwise to make any exceptions in the future.

Ian McDonald noted that the PCMA directed the Board to develop the guidelines. Since they have been created, perhaps the Board should stop focusing on the exact wording of the guidelines and look at how people are selling or trading and see if we can change their behavior via a different method. He felt that constantly trying to reword the guidelines is not the best approach for dealing with the sale, trade and barter issue.

Joe agreed that rewording the guidelines will not fix the issues. The communities need to be involved.

Deana pointed out that education is a problem if and when the Parties don't agree on how the guidelines should be applied. She read aloud the letter to Parties and stakeholders sent by PCMB on July 1, 2016. No deadline was specified for a reply, but it seems to have initiated discussions.

Ian stated that if the Board is looking for support for the guidelines we should be clear about asking for it.

Mike Sutor stated that an affirmation about the guidelines from the Parties and HTCs is important to give the Board the authority to develop education about them. It would also allow more concise messaging.

Kirby stated that the guidelines are very useful if someone was being prosecuted for selling to non-aboriginal people. They could be used in a court-case, for example.

Wilbert Firth stated that he will try to have GTC define their position. He would also like to see confirmed rules and have enforcement via a game guardian.

Harvest Management Strategy Update

Deana provided the following HMP-related update:

- To date there has been no response from NND or VG to the AHM recommendations sent out by the Board.
- The HMP communications working group met via teleconference on October 3, 2016.
- Harvest data reports from NND, VG and TH are still outstanding.

- The next AHM is scheduled for February 14 to 16 in Inuvik. The public meeting is February 14. February 15 will be for the Parties and the Board to meet in camera. Often only one day is needed, but all Parties should plan to be there for the second day just in case. An invitation letter with all relevant attachments was sent out on December 1, 2016.

Native User Agreements

Erika Tizya replied positively about supporting the idea of a facilitated NUA discussion with help from Lindsay Staples. A discussion arose around the Board's responsibilities toward the creation of Native User Agreements. The Board has an interest in NUAs because of the harvest management strategy and has tried to encourage the First Nation Parties by offering assistance. Lindsay Staples provided a cost projection for facilitating the discussion; however, the estimate was too high for the Board to fund by itself. The First Nation Parties were asked how much they would be able to contribute, and their response was \$2,000 each, for a total of \$6,000.

It was agreed that the Board would reply with an offer to have Joe Tetlich provide background historical information about the requirement to create NUAs and ensure that each First Nation has clarity on their responsibilities and requirements. The Board agreed to set aside \$10,000 of funding toward NUA development. The rationale behind the Board's contribution will be explained and suggestions about how to get additional funding could be given.

Action 16-11: Reply will be sent to Erika Tizya explaining PCMB's offer of assistance and amount of funding available for NUA discussions

Herd Update

Government of Yukon Update

Mike Sutor provided the following PCH update:

- Calving and post-calving surveys were completed.
- A population estimate almost occurred, but caribou did not aggregate sufficiently.
- Only body condition indexing was completed during fall monitoring as there were no caribou present in September. Martin Kienzler was able to get the targeted number of samples in November. Marsha Branigan is also getting samples on the NWT side.
- As there were no caribou near the Dempster Highway, the check station did not open this year.
- Capture work is planned for March 2017. Calving, post-calving, and population estimate work is planned for summer 2017.

- Most of the data for the updated Sensitive Habitats report has been compiled. The goal is to have it completed by March 2017. Contextual information, such as development in the range of the herd, will hopefully be added as well.
- The new population estimate for the Central Arctic herd is 22,630 animals. Historically, the herd was small and restricted to the North Slope. During the 1990s up to 2010, the herd grew to 70,000 animals. In 2013, there was a late spring and over one-quarter of the herd was lost. This carried over to the following year because the herd was in poor condition. In 2015, 50,000 animals were counted, but some of this number could have been PCH animals. Since then, one more bad year was experienced. Some animals do transfer to PCH, but it is uncertain how often this occurs.
- A best management practices document, which is essentially a risk assessment of development in the Eagle Plains region, created by Don Russell for the Oil and Gas Resources branch is currently being reviewed internally. The intention is to let other groups review it as well. It was created as a government-to-government collaboration between VG and Energy, Mines and Resources, based on the North Yukon Land Use Plan. A required related document is an access management plan. This will be worked on over the next several years and will deal with access in the Eagle Plains basin.

Porcupine Caribou Research and Monitoring

Mike Sutor presented segment two of a three-part presentation about the Porcupine Caribou research and monitoring program. The presentation was created to provide interested organizations a detailed overview of the scope and nature of monitoring work. Segments one and three were presented at the previous PCMB meeting.

Presentation Highlights of Part 2 - What work we actually do

Mike discussed the principles of how to get a population estimate via imagery and counting when conducting a photocensus, and showed various images of caribou aggregations. In some cases the required aggregation only lasts for a half day.

Obtaining new calf production (recruitment) and survival rate data currently forms part of the work. Collared female caribou are observed to obtain this data. The importance of continuing to collect this data is unclear, and there is a possibility it may not be continued. Calving locations are definitely tracked and the PCTC wants to ensure they continue to be able to define these locations given the importance of the range to the herd.

Mike explained that, in addition to a photocensus, adult female survival is the most important statistic as it has the greatest impact on herd size.

Other PCH work is related to:

- Harvest information

- Population Model (incorporates Traditional Knowledge if available)
- Body condition, health, and contaminants data collection
- Herd fidelity studies (using satellite collar information)
- Land use planning input and implementation of land use plans
- Habitat studies: sensitive habitats, movement patterns, route selection, and availability (Why are the caribou going where they are? Why are they not going other places?)
- Hunt Management: a lot of effort is spent on predicting challenges around harvest regarding the proximity of the Hart River herd to PCH

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

COSEWIC member Tom Jung explained that the Committee consists of 31 voting members from all over Canada and was established in 2003 under the *Species at Risk Act* to inform wildlife directors about endangered species. Members are appointed by the federal Minister of Environment. COSEWIC has several subcommittees, one of which is the Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK) subcommittee which has 13 members (including two voting members).

COSEWIC will be coming to Whitehorse for a meeting in April and will be talking to wildlife management boards.

When a COSEWIC assessment report is required, an expert is hired to draft it. The report on barren-caribou was written by Anne Gunn, Don Russell, and Kim Poole. The ATK subcommittee may have been one resource that the authors used. They also contact the provinces and territories for data. Two-month reports are sent out via Environment Canada. Environment Canada's list many not have been as complete as COSEWIC's list, which may explain why PCMB and the Beverly Qamanirjuaq board were missed.

COSEWIC assesses the status of wild species in Canada, and makes recommendations to the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada on listing a species under the federal *Species at Risk Act*.

In the process, COSEWIC:

- applies the best available science and traditional knowledge information to internationally recognized criteria to derive, by vote, the recommended status of a species
- only assesses the status of species in Canada
- assesses species on a national level after considering designatable units (DUs)
- does not consider the political or economic consequences of a species being listed
- does not do species management or recovery

- uses quantitative criteria to assess whether or not species are at risk
- ensures that thresholds are met for a species to be assessed as at risk or threatened
- experts apply the best available data to determine whether or not species meet the criteria

Tom explained that the work is meant to be transparent, so that it can be challenged and defended as well as updated with new information when appropriate. The application of criteria leads to a specific conservation status if the available data meets the thresholds. The resulting status/outcome then indicates whether or not a species is at risk, and at what relative level of endangerment.

The five-step process loop of COSEWIC was described as follows:

Assessment: Determining the conservation status of the species based on best available information and using established criteria by an independent body.

Response: Decision by ministers on what they will do in response to the status assessment.

Recovery: Legal requirements to improve the status of the species, including prohibitions, but mostly recovery planning processes.

Action: Implementation of recovery plans — can be regulatory, stewardship, or on-the-ground actions.

Monitoring: Assessing the effectiveness of recovery actions in recovering the species. This step is followed by an eventual reassessment, with possible subsequent repetition of the other steps.

Tom noted that both the Response and Recovery stages legally require the minister to consult. At this stage, boards and management organizations have opportunity for involvement. The Recovery, Action, and Monitoring stages rely on cooperation with territorial and provincial governments, boards and other management organizations.

Tom explained that COSEWIC defines a DU by stating that it must demonstrate discreteness and significance, and may be, but not necessarily, be a subspecies, ecotype, or geographic isolate. Discreteness may refer to distinctiveness in genetic characteristics or inherited traits, habitat discontinuity, or ecological isolation.

The DUs of Caribou in Canada were listed as Peary, Dolphin and Union, Barren-ground, Eastern Migratory, Newfoundland, Boreal, Northern Mountain, Central Mountain, Southern Mountain, Torngat, Gaspé, and Dawson herds, and the most recently identified Nelchina Mentasta herd.

Barren-ground caribou were assessed for the first time in November 2016. The assessment was precipitated by general concern for caribou across Canada and specific concern for the status of barren-ground caribou in light of recent rapid declines for most herds in NWT and Nunavut.

Barren-ground herds have declined by 54 percent over the past 27 years (three caribou generations). The decline rates for individual barren-ground herds were reviewed. One noteworthy example of a steep decline is the Western Arctic herd, which numbered around 490,000 animals in 2003, while a 2016 census estimated only 201,000 animals.

The key identified threats to barren-ground caribou are human disturbance, over-harvesting, predation, and pathogens. PCH is one of only 2 herds in this DU that are not declining.

Tom explained the assessment of barren-ground caribou in terms of the application of COSEWIC criteria by quoting the assessment: “BG caribou meet Endangered based on the extent of the decline; however, the numerical strength of the PCH means that they likely are not in critical condition.”

Tom also reviewed the entire wording of the COSEWIC assessment, noting that the uniqueness and significance of the PCH was incorporated into the assessment.

The following are the key requirements resulting from a legal listing of Threatened under the federal *Species at Risk Act*:

- Automatic prohibitions on federal land against harming and harassing, including harvest
- A recovery strategy will need to be completed within two years of legal listing
- Critical habitat needs to be identified and protected on federal land

Some key factors that will need to be taken into consideration are:

- Aboriginal harvest rights
- Federal vs. non-federal land
- Status of the PCH and the management regime already in place relative to all of the other barren-ground caribou herds

Tom explained that the bottom line for the PCH is that it will most likely be legally listed as Threatened along with other barren-ground caribou in Canada, but that most recovery efforts will go toward the herds that are in trouble, not the PCH. Automatic prohibitions may apply on federal lands and critical habitat may be identified and protected on federal lands. A recovery strategy will be created that includes the PCH in some way; however, much of the existing management of the PCH may not change, given the herd’s status and the management regime already in place. Based on conservation concerns, the next COSEWIC assessment will be required in five years, rather than the usual 10 years.

Planning for that will likely begin in three years. There could be opportunities to incorporate more ATK in the next assessment.

Joe wondered about international considerations and implications when listing a species. Tom explained that if the concern falls outside of Canada's borders, COSEWIC does not assess it; however, the committee would be concerned about effects on wildlife in Canada even when they are caused outside of our borders. For example, the PCH calving grounds in Alaska would be considered. A specific example of this was bird habitat in Chile which was critical to birds that spend the summer in Canada.

Joe noted that the implications of a Threatened listing mean that First Nations in Yukon could be affected. The only federal lands in the PCH range are Vuntut and Ivaavik national parks.

Tom agreed that if a national recovery strategy is completed which states that there should not be any barren-ground caribou harvest, it could make harvesting of PCH look bad. It will be important to differentiate the PCH from other herds in Canada.

Deana pointed out that when this topic starts being raised in all the user communities it will be important for PCMB members to explain that harvest is not an issue and that COSEWIC is following a national process. PCMB should affirm that it is concerned about the other herds, but that the PCH will be managed differently. The absence of traditional knowledge in the COSEWIC report is a concern. It would be reassuring to know that someone from this region is feeding into the process.

Tom responded that the Board should take advantage of COSEWIC being here in April, and to take the opportunity between now and April to build the relationship. Additional input can be provided during the accelerated timeline for the next status report, the process for which will have to start two years from now.

Deana requested that the draft letter from PCMB to COSEWIC be reviewed by the Board by the following week. The COSEWIC two-month report will be distributed by e-mail.

Kirby Meister pointed out that it would be good for the letter to mention the Board's concerns about PCH habitat so that it does not come across as overly optimistic and could be used by industry as justification to minimize the requirement for mitigations.

Next Meeting and Closing Prayer

The next Board meeting after the upcoming AHM will be scheduled for Caribou Days in Old Crow during May 2017.

Randall 'Boogie' Pokiak thanked the Board for coming to Tuktoyaktuk and for the Board's efforts and work related to wildlife management.

A closing prayer was offered by Joe Tetlich and the meeting was adjourned at 12:25 p.m.