

Porcupine Caribou Management Board Minutes of Meeting

Via Zoom

August 12, 2021

In attendance

Members/Staff

Joe Tetlich, Chair
Robert Charlie, Gwich'in Tribal Council
Alice McCulley, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in
Dawna Hope, Na-cho Nyäk Dün
Karen Clyde, Government of Yukon
Shannon Stotyn, Government of Canada
Norman Snowshoe, Government of the Northwest Territories (Alternate)

Deana Lemke, Executive Director
Matthias Lemke, Assistant

Presenters and Guests

Mike Sutor, Environment Yukon
Reanna Newsome, PCMB Summer Student
Nicole Percival, Dawson Regional Planning Commission
Jennifer Smith, Consultant

Regrets

Billy Storr, Inuvialuit Game Council
Travis Frost, Vuntut Gwitchin (Alternate)

Call to Order

Chair Joe Tetlich called the meeting to order at 12:40 p.m. and the agenda was reviewed.

***Motion to approve agenda
Moved by Alice McCulley
Seconded by Robert Charlie
Carried***

Review Minutes

The minutes of the March 5, 2021 meeting were reviewed and approved.

***Motion to approve minutes of the March 5, 2021 meeting
Moved by Robert Charlie
Seconded by Shannon Stotyn
Carried***

Chair's Update

Joe Tetlich stated that there have not been many opportunities for him to engage with the public due to COVID restrictions. The only Porcupine caribou information to note is that a small number of caribou are distributed throughout the Mackenzie Delta and the Richardson Mountains.

Administrative and Financial Update

Deana Lemke reviewed the year-to-date financial report. She pointed out the additional funding from the federal Climate Change Preparedness in the North Program (CCPNP). Expenditures to-date are low due to the Board not being able to meet in person and because some of Trailmark's work still needs to be billed. She noted that some of the project-related line items are budgetary and can be adjusted as required.

Deana noted that the Johnny Charlie scholarship expenditure and the associated STEP subsidy is for Reanna Newsome, the PCMB summer student, who has joined the meeting today.

The following additional updates were provided:

- Letters regarding the Chair appointment process and related guidelines were sent to all Parties and Stakeholders. A few questions about the process were received but no new nominations were submitted. One reply supporting Joe's reappointment was received from IGC. The Board will need to make a decision regarding Joe's reappointment by the next meeting.
- Four Parties have responded to the Harvest Management Plan recommendations: VGFN, GNWT, Canada and IGC. Respective members will follow up with their Parties regarding outstanding replies.
- Yukon harvest data was received in July but NWT has not submitted any data yet. Norman Snowshoe will follow up on this. GRRB requested an extension for harvest data reporting. They have hired a new person, Jessie Pascal, who will be taking on this responsibility.
- Peter Mather has produced several short videos that will be used on the Board's websites and the Board's social media. These will be finalized in the next few weeks.
- Design of the new pcmb.ca website is almost complete. Some minor updates and inclusion of the Conservation Plan feedback section is still being adjusted.

NWT Herd Update

Norman Snowshoe related that some caribou are starting to arrive near the border. Patrols will begin on the NWT side in the near future and the setup of a check station is being discussed.

Yukon Herd Update

Mike Sutor related that the collaring work undertaken in March went well. The work took place between Old Crow and the Driftwood River and also near Aklavik. Mike noted that the animals were in excellent physical condition. Some new video collars were deployed. The video collars are programmed to record for 10 seconds every 20 minutes and can be remotely triggered to drop off. The recorded footage assists with studying the animals' diet, behaviors and insect harassment. Some longer clips are also being recorded with the intention of using them for educational purposes and on social media.

The herd's principal calving area this season was on the Alaskan north slope, in or adjacent to the 1002 area. The pregnancy rate this calving season was average and the calf survival rate was found to be above average.

While the bulls usually move into the Richardson Mountains, Mike noted that this year about 70 percent of bulls moved into the Brooks Range north of Arctic Village. The cows moved east through Yukon all the way to NWT and are now spread out over a large area. Some animals are in the vicinity of Venetie, some are in the Brooks Range, and some are in Ivavik National Park and on the North Slope.

Lichen surveys were conducted this summer. Mike intends to communicate the results of the work to the Parties and the public. Mike also showed a sample video obtained from a camera collar as well as a short video overview about the summer's field work. He hopes to produce several more videos for educational purposes and information sharing.

Canadian Mountain Network

Mike related that \$500,000 of funding was obtained via a collaborative proposal that included PCMB's involvement. The funding will flow through PCMB and be used to fund work related to study of the summer range of the herd and ecological impacts on people who rely on the herd. Mike noted that this will be a collaborative project and that some of the project partners are also contributing considerable resources.

The scope of the project includes wildlife, vegetation, Indigenous knowledge and community-based monitoring. The intention is to build on existing processes and to work with existing organizations.

Graduate students will be hired to conduct science-related work. Funding will also be used to support an annual gathering, hire an Indigenous knowledge coordinator and graduate students, and pay for field work, equipment, and honoraria for community-member participation. The Indigenous knowledge coordinator will be the key link between communities, PCMB, government specialists and researchers.

It is likely the project will begin this winter. Mike explained that PCMB will be able to vet components of the project, provide guidance regarding the best approaches for completing the work, and assist with the administration of funds.

The goals and outcomes of this initiative are to: bring communities together with shared values and interests; build strong working relationships; create employment opportunities; improve the integration of Indigenous knowledge and Science; and gather and synthesize important knowledge for managing the herd and its habitat.

Deana stated that this work will help to build capacity and engage communities. The community-based monitoring component could potentially help meet PCMB needs and feed into other monitoring requirements.

Summer Student additional work

At the end of the work term associated with the Johnny Charlie scholarship PCMB summer student, Reanna Newsome will be hired as an employee in Mike's office. She will give a presentation about some of her work at the next PCMB meeting.

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Mike explained that the seismic program is currently on hold in order to address deficiencies, concerns that PCMB and the Parties identified, in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has recently begun developing a supplemental EIS (SEIS). The SEIS is currently in its scoping phase and BLM will accept comments until October 4. This process will not stop the leasing program from occurring because the US government is obligated by law to sell another 400,000 acres. However, the SEIS will consider potential impacts more closely and will include climate change assessments. Consequently, existing lease holders are quite concerned that the SEIS will create additional stipulations and restrictions.

Following the completion of the scoping phase, a draft SEIS will be released and a 45-day comment period will follow, after which a Record of Decision will be produced.

Dawson District Land Use Plan

Nicole Percival presented an overview about the draft Dawson District Land Use Plan to the Board. The draft plan was released on June 15 and will have a five-month engagement period. The planning commission consists of three from Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation and three from Government of Yukon.

The documents available for review are an 8-page highlights document, a 30-page summary, and the entire draft plan which is 188 pages in length. Nicole noted that sections 4 and 5 of the plan contain most of the caribou-related information.

The guiding concepts of the plan are sustainable development and stewardship. Some of the key recommendations in the plan focus on caribou, access, conservation areas, wetlands, stewardship, mineral development and exploration. The region covered by the plan has been divided into four Integrated Stewardship Areas and two Special Management Areas. The principles of cumulative disturbance used were the same as those in similar land use plans, however, the thresholds in this plan are higher.

The plan contains both recommended management strategies and a series of recommendations related to research, actions and policy. For example, one action states that the commission supports the implementation of the Porcupine Caribou herd's Harvest Management Plan and that the Parties should work collaboratively with PCMB.

A series of five workshops was recently completed in Dawson. Engagement sessions that are focussed on stakeholder groups are currently taking place. The timeframe was expanded due to the current challenges around public engagement. Online surveys are also being planned, and questions will be responded to via telephone or email. All pertinent information is available on the engagedawson.planyukon.ca website.

Nicole stated that feedback from PCMB regarding access on LMU1 would be very helpful. Additionally, information about caribou migration corridors and related knowledge would be appreciated.

In response to a question from Deana's about the cumulative effects thresholds in the plan being higher than in other similar plans, Nicole explained that there is already so much development in the region that keeping the thresholds the same as in other plans would prevent any future development. However, the commission is open to considering the thresholds in order to ensure viability of caribou. For example, additional thresholds in SMA2 could be considered.

WMAC(NS) Update

Joe Tetlich and Deana Lemke congratulated Jennifer Smith on her recent appointment as chair of WMAC (NS).

Jennifer provided an overview of the updated management plan. She explained that the public engagement period has concluded and the plan is now being reviewed by the parties. She expects that it will take several months to consolidate and integrate their feedback. The Parties are also still discussing the withdrawn area. The intention is to give it a new name and establish new opportunities for land-based activities in order to raise the profile of the area.

PCH Conservation Plan and TK Data Mobilization Project Update

Jennifer Smith provided a progress report regarding community engagement for the Conservation Plan. A letter has been sent to Parties with updated information and positive responses were received. Parties stated their willingness to work with the Board on this process. Significant progress was made on preparation and planning for community engagement meetings. Deana noted that initially it appeared that some in-person meetings would be possible, but since then the situation has changed again. It is hoped that in-person engagements will be possible in the future.

In total there will be 3 phases of providing and gathering information related to the community engagements. The initial engagement phase will describe the planning process and gather some feedback about how to best work with each community and get input on their greatest areas of concern.

Jennifer is working on information material that will be shared with communities via RRCs and HTC's. Computer kiosks will also be used to get general community input and to share information. Paper-and-pen options will also be made available in addition to digital options. To encourage community participation, all who complete the survey will be entered into a draw for several prizes. Jennifer is also hoping to get permission to use the collected feedback in reports and other communication.

Jennifer informed Board members that she is also working on a communication product for the purpose of engaging youth and school children. The same illustrator who created the cartoon about caribou for WMAC is working on this. The intention is to specifically involve kids and get their input via artwork which can be included in both the Conservation Plan and other media.

A draft of the first Conservation Plan newsletter was shared with the Board and input or feedback was requested. The newsletter will be distributed once the computers are ready to be deployed and the engagement strategy is finalized.

Jennifer then updated the Board regarding the TK data mobilization project which Trailmark is still working on. The TK mobilization project has been delayed but the expected outputs will contribute to and be integrated with the CP project.

Trailmark now has almost all of the data and they are still working through a few challenges. They have analyzed a portion of the preliminary data and produced a draft report. They will further refine this report and will then present it to the Board. This will give the Board an idea of how the TK data can be put to use.

At Jennifer's request, Board members provided input and feedback about the desired outcomes for each of the following CP related topics: the needs of the herd, the landscape that supports the herd, cooperative management, community connection, change, and knowledge about the herd.

Robert Charlie stated that the caribou have not migrated into some areas in the Richard Mountains where they used to go to previously and wondered how this could be reflected in the plan. He also noted that the plan should include recommendations about proactive communication when the caribou are migrating to where they will be accessible to harvesters. He felt it would be good to advocate leaving the caribou alone while they are migrating. Mike suggested that this could be addressed by identifying migration corridors and noting the associated threats, actions, concerns and communications.

Jennifer stated that she hopes to set up a series of smaller meetings to gather Board feedback on parts of the CP that need to be looked at in more detail.

Next Meeting and Adjournment

Meetings via Zoom will be scheduled for September 14 and October 15.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.