

Porcupine Caribou Management Board Minutes of Meeting

Via Zoom

September 14, 2021

In attendance

Members/Staff

Joe Tetlich, Chair
Robert Charlie, Gwich'in Tribal Council
Billy Storr, Inuvialuit Game Council
Dawna Hope, First Nation of Na-cho Nyäk Dün
Karen Clyde, Government of Yukon
Shannon Stotyn, Government of Canada
Norman Snowshoe, Government of the Northwest Territories (Alternate)
Kirby Meister, Government of Yukon (Alternate)

Deana Lemke, Executive Director
Matthias Lemke, Assistant

Presenters and Guests

Mike Sutor, Environment Yukon
Liz Staples, Caribou Coordinator, Vuntut Gwitchin

Regret

Ryan Peterson, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in (Alternate)
Travis Frost, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation (Alternate)

Call to Order

Chair Joe Tetlich called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m. and the agenda was reviewed.

Motion to approve agenda

Moved by Robert Charlie

Seconded by Karen Clyde

Carried

Review Minutes

The minutes of the August 12, 2021 meeting were reviewed and approved.

Motion to approve minutes of the August 12, 2021 meeting

Moved by Robert Charlie

Seconded by Shannon Stotyn

Carried

Administrative and Financial Update

Deana Lemke reviewed the updated financial variance report. She noted that some large expenditures related to the TK and CP projects have not been billed yet. In response to a question from Shannon Stotyn, Deana explained that any unused funding related to travel can be reallocated elsewhere.

The audit has been completed and will be sent out to funding agencies once it has been signed off.

NWT Herd Update

Norman Snowshoe related that the conservation officer based in Fort McPherson has been conducting road patrols. There has been very little harvesting of caribou because most of the herd is still in the western portion of the range.

GNWT is having discussions with GTC regarding setting up a check station. This will be dependent on the caribou migration and whether or not the herd returns to the area. Currently the station is not necessary.

Yukon Herd Update

Mike Sutor related that during the previous week camera collars were being retrieved. The collars drop off once biologists think caribou are in a good location and are retrieved by Mike and staff. This season, caribou movements were very scattered; therefore, the collars were distributed in a wider area.

Mike noted that very few caribou have been harvested so far because the herd has not been readily accessible. He displayed the satellite collar location map to indicate where the caribou are currently located. Most of the herd is between Arctic Village and the Dalton Highway, close to Coldfoot, Alaska. Mike stated that this is the largest number of caribou that have been observed that far west at this time of the year that he can think of.

Kirby Meister related that he had patrolled the Dempster Highway last week and had flown along the Richardson Mountains to the North Slope and to Old Crow. Very few caribou were spotted during this trip. The largest group was approximately 100 animals near Timber Creek. One family with whom Kirby spoke at Shingle Point stated that they had not seen any caribou.

Mike related that the calving survey this year yielded average results. The pregnancy rate was slightly lower than it has been in recent years but is still considered average. Caribou were not in very good condition last fall, which may be the cause of the slightly lower parturition rate this year. Calf survival to three weeks was observed as being around average as well.

PCH Conservation Plan and TK Data-Mobilization Project Update

Deana Lemke referred to the draft newsletter that was previously provided by Jennifer Smith and noted that some of the wording had been adjusted and resent to members. She asked for members to provide feedback, specifically on the comments section in which participants are being asked for their input.

Shannon Stotyn expressed that the beginning section of the newsletter was well written, easy to understand, and had a nice tone. She pointed out the differences between the feedback section in the newsletter and the supplementary PDF document that were sent out for review. She stated that she preferred the content on the PDF feedback form, specifically how the topics and issues can be rated from 1 to 5. This approach provides more information about the perceived level of importance. Shannon also stated that the section asking about any other topics that may have been missed is also valuable. She felt that it would be good to coordinate the two documents and to be clear on whether or not they will both be sent out or if they should be combined.

Karen Clyde wondered whether some of the wording (pathogens for example) is easy enough to understand for all of the potential audiences. She felt that some simplification may be advisable. Shannon concurred, stating that much of the content is easily understood, plain language but the feedback form is a bit less easy to understand.

PCMB Chair appointment

Joe Tetlichy recused himself for this discussion.

Deana Lemke referred to the information package and the guidelines regarding the Chair appointment that had been shared with members. She stated that Joe Tetlichy is willing to be reappointed and that this would be the sixth term, already having served for 26 years.

Deana related that a letter about the PCMB Chair appointment was sent to all PCMB Parties and stakeholders six months ago. After the three-month period inviting nominations, only IGC responded and advised that their council had passed a resolution to recommend the reappointment of Joe Tetlichy.

After an in-camera discussion, members agreed to recommend Joe's reappointment for five years.

***Motion to appoint Joe Tetlichy for a further five-year term as Chair
Moved by Billy Storr
Seconded by Norman Snowshoe
Carried***

Joe rejoined the meeting and Billy Storr, on behalf of the Board, advised him of the Board's unanimous support to accept him as Chair. Billy congratulated Joe and stated that he is looking forward to working together over the next five years and continuing the good working relationship with IGC and all Parties.

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge – EIS Update

Liz Staples provided the following review and update on the oil and gas leasing process in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge:

- The first lease sale was held during the final days of the Trump administration. Only half of the tracts that were offered for lease were actually bid on. The state of Alaska itself submitted the most bids along with bids from two small companies. Total proceeds were \$14 million, which was less than one percent of what was expected.
- The Biden administration took quick action and issued a moratorium order on any activities while deficiencies of the EIS process were reviewed.
- The Secretary of the Interior then issued an order suspending the leases due to finding the environmental analysis legally deficient.
- President Biden and Prime Minister Trudeau released a statement of partnership which specifically mentioned the PCH calving grounds and the herd's value to the Gwich'in people.
- A supplemental EIS (SEIS) and a new comprehensive analysis was ordered.
- The Alaska Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is currently hosting virtual public meetings.
- The initial scoping period of the SEIS ends on October 4, 2021.
- Alternatives will be developed between October and December 2021.
- Environmental consequences will be evaluated between January and May 2022.
- The comment period on the Draft SEIS will be for 45 days in July to August 2022.
- The technical working group of the Parties is still active and has been holding meetings to coordinate their responses to BLM.
- Current comments from most parties will refer to the content of their previous submissions and will request that any new scientific analyses be considered in the draft SEIS.
- BLM has noted that Canadian parties had strong representation and input in the process. For example, the comments submitted by Canadian parties regarding the overlap of some of the lease tracts and the most frequently used calving areas resulted in an adjustment to which leases were made available for bidding.

- While a second sale of leases is still required by US law, efforts are ongoing to repeal this requirement through the budget reconciliation process. No specific timelines are associated with these efforts. However, the House Committee on Natural Resources has proposed repealing the requirement for a second sale and buying back the initial leases. The outcome will likely be known near the end of 2021.
- If the original mandate is repealed, the EIS process will stop. In the meantime, interested parties and stakeholders need to continue participating in the EIS feedback process.

Federal Grizzly Bear Management Plan

Shannon Stotyn explained that the planning process for a federal grizzly bear management plan has begun and a number of workshops have already been held. While Yukon already has a conservation plan for grizzly bears and much of the existing information will be considered, there is an opportunity to include additional Indigenous Knowledge in the federal plan.

Deana Lemke noted that PCMB has had discussions regarding grizzlies and conflicts with harvesters, and questioned whether the Board should provide input during the federal feedback process.

Mike Sutor noted that grizzly bear predation is addressed to a degree in the Yukon grizzly bear conservation plan, but it has not been addressed specifically in terms of the Dempster Highway.

Billy Storr related that IGC is currently working on a grizzly bear plan in the ISR. He suggested that PCMB's involvement be discussed at their next planning meeting.

Shannon noted that IGC's new grizzly bear plan will also be incorporated in the national plan.

Mike stated that the issue of declining caribou herds and the related fact that grizzlies are predators of caribou calves has been raised as a concern in the NWT. He felt that input from concerned stakeholders in NWT may be of interest for the PCMB as we develop our Conservation Plan and provide input to the federal plan.

Shannon stated that she will look at the proposed table of contents to see whether or not any of these items have been identified for inclusion.

This topic will be included on the agenda for a future PCMB meeting.

Next Meeting and Adjournment

The next PCMB meeting will be on October 15, 2021 from 1:00-4:00 Yukon time, 2:00 to 5:00 NWT time, via Zoom.

Deana informed members that the new Minister and Deputy Minister of the Yukon Department of Environment will be in attendance at the next PCMB meeting. Additionally, Trailmark will hopefully be ready to present their preliminary data analysis.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:10 p.m.