

# Porcupine Caribou Management Board Minutes of Meeting

Tr'ondek Hewch'in Community Hall, Dawson City

February 13, 2023

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## In attendance

### Members/Staff

Joe Tetlichy, Chair  
Shannon Stotyn, Government of Canada  
Alice McCulley, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in  
Marvin Frost, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation  
Billy Storr, Inuvialuit Game Council  
Matt Clarke, Government of Yukon  
Norman Snowshoe, Government of the Northwest Territories (Alternate)  
Barry Greenland, Gwich'in Tribal Council (Interim member)  
Peter Gibson, Government of Yukon (Alternate)

Deana Lemke, Executive Director  
Matthias Lemke, Assistant

### Presenters and Guests

Mike Sutor, Environment Yukon  
Jennifer Smith, Contractor  
Mykaela Ploegman, Social Media Contractor

### Regret

Dawna Hope, First Nation of Na-cho Nyäk Dün

## Call to Order

Chair Joe Tetlichy called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m. The agenda was reviewed and approved.

***Motion to approve agenda***

***Moved by Billy Storr***

***Seconded by Norman Snowshoe***

***Carried***

## Review Minutes

The minutes of the December 5, 2022 meeting were reviewed and approved.

***Motion to approve minutes of the December 5, 2022 meeting***

***Moved by Shannon Stotyn***

***Seconded by Marvin Frost***

***Carried***

## Chair's Report

Joe Tetlichy related that PCMB was invited to participate at a Caribou Guardians Coalition workshop in January 2023. The coalition was formed in 2020 by Indigenous governments and partners to establish a network of regional caribou guardianship programs. The Bathurst Caribou herd is one of several herds that needs urgent support. Recent population estimates show that only 6,200 Bathurst caribou remain, which is significantly lower than the 2015 estimate of over 19,000 animals.

Joe stated that it seems that they are trying to establish some kind of management regime at the eleventh hour. In the meantime, there are still people harvesting. A working group was formed to discuss operational planning and what needs to be done to keep the herd from disappearing. The Caribou Guardians Coalition created a federally funded program called "Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è: Boots on the Ground" to support the monitoring of migrations and herd activities. The coalition was also aware of PCMB's work and wanted to get the perspective of our board and learn about the tools, agreements, plans, etc. that the Board has developed.

Joe expressed to them that he felt Bathurst herd should have been in the Red Zone for some time now and should have been excluded from harvesting. When the government first determined that the herd was in decline, the outfitters and user groups disagreed with harvesting restrictions. Now, however, the coalition plans to share the Red Zone message with the various user groups. The coalition wants to set up a central office, possibly in Yellowknife, that can serve as the hub for the five user groups and would be similar to a management board. Joe stressed the importance of collaborating and cooperating with government.

Shannon Stotyn pointed out that the Boots on the Ground program has a website that shows results from their field seasons. [<https://research.tlicho.ca/research/bootsontheground>]

Norman Snowshoe shared that GNWT has also had informal discussions with representatives from the Boots on the Ground program about the success of the PCH management regime and stressed to them the importance of having full buy-in from all parties to be successful.

Deana Lemke related that the members of the Wek'éezhìi Renewable Resources Board were very interested in the PCMB's work and that the e-mails received after the workshop spoke volumes about the value of Joe's participation and the experiences that he shared about the PCMB and the communities working together.

Joe went on to report on his attendance at the Caribou Summit in Fort McPherson. The summit was initially requested because of community concerns with the caribou not returning to their traditional winter range. He noted that some of the goals of the summit overlapped with the intent of the PCH Annual Harvest Meeting (AHM), but that the AHM provides actual statistics and data that informs PCMB's decisions about the appropriate management actions. When the idea of additional summits was raised, Joe cautioned that it could take away from the AHM process and could be a duplication of efforts. He felt that his comments were noted and understood.

At the conclusion of the summit, Joe felt that those in attendance had acquired a better understanding of the various projects and studies being undertaken on the Porcupine Caribou herd and about the technical information that is available.

Billy Storr, who also attended the caribou summit, felt that it was a good opportunity for people to realize the value of caribou. He stated that it was also good for educating people about how the PCMB is structured and functions so that they understand how we are all working together. Billy said that it was good to see that they are trying to maintain cultural traditions related to caribou.

Joe agreed and stated that education was a highlight at the summit. For example, several young people brought in a caribou and did a great job demonstrating how to skin it.

Shannon Stotyn related that information about the summit was shared by CBC several times a day and that it was very well covered.

Barry Greenland stated that representatives at the table need to understand and remember who they represent and then share the information with their respective communities. To assist with this, Nihtat Renewable Resource Council (RRC) is asking members to provide a written report about meetings that they attended.

Barry also explained that they are looking at restructuring the nature of RRC meetings and will be proposing a different approach. Neil Firth will be meeting with the four RRCs in late March 2023 to get their input.

## **Executive Director Report**

Deana Lemke noted the North American Caribou Workshop (NACW) is coming up in May and that if any PCMB members would like to attend to please let her know. Early bird registration ends on February 28. A PCTC meeting is being held that week as well, and the Arctic Ungulate Conference also coincides with the NACW.

Deana informed members that Trailmark has been busy with data analysis and that their costs have gone up due to the volume of work.

The status of Board membership and appointments was reviewed. Deana also reviewed the history around the process for appointing a member for Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, as it differs somewhat from what is outlined in the *Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement (PCMA)*. An administrative workaround was developed to address the PCMA's outdated reflection of the Parties' entities. Government of Yukon, officially with two assigned seats, has been voluntarily assigning one of them to Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in to ensure fair representation of Yukon First Nations. However, due to the original wording in the PCMA and staff turnover in different organizations, the process for making appointments for Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in often gets confused.

Deana noted that she spent significant effort educating new YG staff and provide background information and documentation about the aforementioned "administrative workaround." She stated that it would be ideal if this process was formalized and if it would recognize that Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in's appointments do not need to be vetted by YG. It should be Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in directly making their own appointments, without a requirement to nominate individuals and have YG make the formal appointments.

Billy Storr agreed that it would be good to have consistency in the process and that it would be ideal for everyone involved to understand the appointment processes, even those of other organizations.

### Financial Update

The financial variance report for February 2023 was reviewed and the difference between the purpose and use of core and proposal funding was explained. Deana noted that several multi-year proposals or project funding agreements are expiring, but that approval has been received to move funding forward for a further fiscal year.

Billy Storr raised the issue of honoraria rates having stayed the same for decades and that these rates no longer provide adequate compensation.

***Motion that the Board remuneration be increased to \$500 per day for Chair honoraria and \$350 per day for Board member honoraria. There will be no half-day rates. The increase is effective April 1, 2023.***

***Moved by Billy Storr***

***Seconded by Marvin Frost***

***Carried unanimously***

### **NWT Herd Update**

Norman Snowshoe related that there has been harvesting activity around Aklavik and the Dempster Highway. Some caribou are currently located in the vicinity of Husky Lakes and some hunters are going there with snowmobiles to harvest them. Conservation Officers will continue to monitor harvesting activities. To date, no concerns have arisen regarding any negative experiences.

Norman noted that GNWT provided support for the Caribou Summit in Fort McPherson. While in attendance at the summit, Norman emphasized that it is important to implement principles like not wasting meat and not over-harvesting.

Regarding harvesting near Husky Lakes, Billy Storr stated that it is encouraging to see young people going somewhere other than the Dempster Highway to hunt because that way they learn more about their country and how to travel in it.

## **Yukon Herd Update**

Mike Suitor stated that there are no significant updates since the December 2022 meeting. At least 60 caribou were harvested by licensed hunters along the Dempster Highway this winter. Reports from harvesters in communities indicate that some caribou were quite skinny in November but that some have improved their body condition since then. This is similar to what happened two years ago when caribou over-wintering in the Richardson Mountains improved their body condition over the winter.

### PCH Summer Range Project

Mike explained that the Canadian Mountain Network knowledge hub is coordinating and collaborating with various groups and individuals who are researching aspects of North Slope ecology. Vegetation and wolves are two of the main areas of study. The intention is to be able to anticipate changes that will happen due to climate change. For example, more moose are now present on the Yukon North Slope and wolves have followed them and are preying on them. Scientists want to understand what effect this will have on caribou and anticipate whether wolves will switch to caribou predation.

### Old Crow Winter Road

Joe Tetlichy raised a concern about machinery, fuel, and other industrial items left behind along the winter road to Old Crow and asked who should be enforcing environmental guidelines.

Peter Gibson stated that some stakeholders have also expressed concerns that requirements regarding environmental issues related to the winter road have not been implemented. He felt that this falls under the jurisdiction of Yukon's Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, but noted that it would indeed be a concern if there are conditions of the permit that are not being followed.

Joe related that similar issues with accountability and commitments were experienced with Chance Oil and Gas. He stated that there should be no fuel barrels or unmaintained camps left along the river and that YG should take responsibility to enforce environmental requirements. Joe commented that it would be unwise to set a precedent of overlooking negligence or delinquency.

Deana Lemke stated that an update about concerns regarding the road was requested from Vuntut Gwitchin but that they replied stating that a formal request to Chief and Council is required.

### PCMB Communications

Ideas about PCMB communication topics on social media were discussed.

The following were suggested by members:

- PCH color zones and what they mean in terms of management actions, along with references to traditional knowledge science.
- Observations brought to the AHM by the Parties.
- Tag #westernarcticouthalliance on social media posts.
- Education about various cultural approaches to harvesting and use of caribou parts to improve understanding between different user groups. New generations of harvesters are not familiar with or aware of differing yet acceptable practices and approaches.
- How to skin a caribou.

Members agreed that Facebook is a good tool to reach a younger target audience and noted that even RRC councils are now made up of members of a younger generation and need education and information.

## **Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Update**

Liz Staples joined the meeting to provide an update. She explained that she has been working on issues related to protection of the coastal plain and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. She noted that technical work regarding the Supplemental Environmental Impact Study (SEIS) and a right-of-way application into the 1002 Lands by Kaktovik Inupiat Corporation is ongoing.

Liz stated that nine of the new tracts were actually leased before the Trump administration left office. Two leases were cancelled since then, but seven are still being held by the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA). There are some indications that AIDEA may be in the process of analyzing the potential profitability of these leases in order to decide how to proceed. In 2022, both Chevron and Hilcorp exited their legacy leases which dated back to the 1980s.

Under the SEIS process, all industrial activities on the new leases have been suspended until a comprehensive analysis is completed and no activity on the leases is permitted before this process has been completed. The updated draft Environmental Impact Study is anticipated to be released in the near future. It will be an intensive process for Parties and the PCMB to review and comment on it. A 60-day comment period is anticipated. Liz pointed out that this process will be an opportunity to once again bring up the desire for consultation with affected First Nations.

In the US Senate, some efforts were made to repeal the lease process via a budget reconciliation act but this did not take place. However, the *Arctic Refuge Protection Act* has been reintroduced. The Senate now has a chance to take the next step and pass this legislation, which would permanently protect the region by designating the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as wilderness under the National Wilderness Preservation System, while also safeguarding the subsistence rights of the Arctic Indigenous peoples.

## **Environmental Assessments**

Mike Suitor provided brief background information on the following projects:

### Michelle Creek

This is a quartz project east of the Dempster Highway just north of Tombstone Territorial Park. It is the first project to fall under the Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan which has a new process to follow. The developer is required to produce a detailed report on baseline conditions and explain how any issues would be addressed.

### Brewery Creek

This project is located on the east side of the southern-most section of the Dempster Highway and lies in the southern extent of the PCH range. The Brewery Creek mine is preparing to go back into operation and comments on the project are due to YESAB on February 23, 2023 unless the deadline is extended.

It was noted that PCMB was not contacted for comment and that Deana will have to check the YESAB registry about who to raise this matter with.

### Eagle Plains (Chance Oil and Gas)

The proponent has requested to get their camp operational again but this request was declined. Therefore, the well maintenance program will make use of accommodations at the Eagle Plains Hotel. To date, nothing significant seems to be moving forward with this project.

## **Arctic Refuge Update**

Shannon Stotyn reviewed the main steps in the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) process:

- (1) Assessment;
- (2) Listing Decision;
- (3) Recovery Planning; and
- (4) Implementation.

The proposal regarding barren-ground caribou (BGC) by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) was discussed. Shannon outlined what factors the committee considered and also reminded that the Porcupine Caribou herd

was determined to be part of the same designatable unit (DU) as all other BGC in Canada.

Between 1989 and 2016, a 56-percent overall decline of BGC in Canada has occurred. The current total population is ~800,000 compared to over two million in the 1990s. The pre-listing consultation on COSEWIC's proposal to list BGC began in 2017. Consultations in Nunavut, the NWT, and Yukon were completed in 2021. While initially opposed, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board supported the listing in 2022. The final step will be for the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change to decide whether or not to recommend the listing. The timing of this decision is yet unknown.

Mike Suitor pointed out that a lot of genetic analysis work has been done since this process began and that evidence seems to indicate that Porcupine Caribou are genetically different than BGC in Canada, being more similar to caribou in Alaska. He wondered if COSEWIC would be open to reconsidering the DU for PCH.

Shannon agreed to follow up on this question.

## **PCH Conservation Plan and TK Data Mobilization Project**

Jennifer Smith provided a brief update on the status of the Conservation Plan (CP) and TK Data Mobilization projects and the community sessions that have been held to date.

The next step in the CP project is hold the final initial community engagement in Mayo, Yukon in May 2023. After this, all feedback received at the public workshops and via electronic and paper feedback forms will be compiled into themes and main topics. This input will be incorporated into the draft CP.

Additional workshops will be developed once all of the initial feedback has been compiled and analyzed. As well, a workshop session specifically to discuss the compiled feedback will be held with the PCMB in winter 2023.

When complete, the CP will be used to:

- Provide advice for environmental assessments;
- Understand caribou use of habitat over time;
- Provide measures of caribou health;
- Provide measures of caribou habitat health across the PCH range;
- Outline range-based conservation and management priorities;
- Support coordination and information exchange among communities and management authorities across the range; and
- Provide a means of “knowledge maintenance” to inform future decision-making.



Jennifer went on to explain what the necessary elements of the plan are:

- Defined thresholds for development or land use. These may be based on zones, percentages or critical habitat and be informed by climate change, levels of vulnerability and existing plans.
- Maps and descriptions of known historical use and forecasts of future use. These will be based on satellite collar data, Indigenous Knowledge, vegetation studies and climate models.
- Matrix of health indices including body condition, birth rates and contaminant and disease monitoring.
- Indices of healthy habitat for caribou across the range. These will be informed by vegetation studies, caribou diet analysis, fire and flood data, and forecasting of changes in permafrost.

Jennifer noted that there are many specific recommendations and requirements regarding the PCH in existing plans. It seems advisable to consolidate a management approach that supports and utilizes what is already recommended across the PCH range.

Some questions that were raised were:

- How will the plan guide behavior on the landscape for the benefit of the herd?
- Do we want the plan to have specific actions that parties are responsible for?
- Should it be a document that proponents are expected to analyze along with land use plans when planning a project?
- Should it be broken into a plan and implementation plan?

Jennifer stated that these concepts need to be worked out and that it would be good to have a focussed discussion with the Board about this.

Members agreed to explore setting aside a Friday during April 2023 dedicated to this discussion.

## **Next Meeting and Adjournment**

Pending the scheduling of a meeting in April 2023 to discuss Conservation Plan development, the next meeting will be held at Sheep Creek in June 2023.