

# Porcupine Caribou Management Board Minutes of Meeting

Java Connection Boardroom & Zoom

Whitehorse, Yukon

April 14, 2023

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## In attendance

### Members/Staff

Joe Tetlich, Chair  
Alice McCulley, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in  
Billy Storr, Inuvialuit Game Council  
Matt Clarke, Government of Yukon  
Norman Snowshoe, Government of the Northwest Territories (Alternate)  
Ian McDonald, Government of Canada (Alternate)  
  
Deana Lemke, Executive Director  
Matthias Lemke, Assistant

### Regrets

Marvin Frost, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation  
Dawna Hope, Na-Cho Nyäk Dun  
Robert Charlie, Gwich'in Tribal Council

### Presenters

Mike Sutor, Environment Yukon  
Jennifer Smith, Contractor  
Peter Evans, Trailmark, Contractor

## Call to Order

Chair Joe Tetlich 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 Ian McDonald***  
***Carried***

## Review Minutes

The minutes of the February 13, 2023 meeting were reviewed and approved.

***Motion to approve minutes of the February 13, 2023 meeting***

***Moved by Matt Clarke***

***Seconded by Alice McCulley***

***Carried***

## Chair's Report

Joe Tetlich reported that he participated in a convoy that took place on the winter road to Old Crow on March 7, 2023. He noted that last year the trip took 18 hours while this year, due to much better road conditions, it took only five hours. This result was attributed to leadership in Old Crow raising concerns about the quality of the road. On two occasions the convoy stopped to let caribou pass. The last large trucks left Old Crow via the winter road at the end of March.

Joe conducted a tour of the Dempster Highway to connect with hunters and observe activities from March 30 to April 3, 2023. He stated that it has been a challenging year for harvesters because of the frequent road closures due to bad weather.

In March 2023, a group snowmobile trek between Fort McPherson and Old Crow was organized. An initial group of 20 people from Fort McPherson and Inuvik left on March 15 and crossed the Richardson Mountains. A day later, a crew of seven from Yukon University joined the expedition as part of a land guardians training program.

A small group of caribou was spotted near Lapierre House but most hunting has been near the Stoney River and Rat River region. Harvesters hunting during the third week of March did not see caribou because the herd had already begun moving.

## Executive Director Report

Deana Lemke reviewed the status of Board membership and appointments.

Alice McCulley noted that there may be a delay in the confirmation of the TH alternate appointment due to a recent election and transitioning to a new council.

The Board discussed the upcoming audit and appointed M. McKay and Associates again as the auditor.

***Motion to appoint M. McKay and Associates as auditor for the 2022-23 fiscal year***

***Moved by Norman Snowshoe***

***Seconded by Billy Storr***

***Carried***

Deana informed members that the Board's YESAB Brewery Creek submission was submitted on April 13, 2023, copies of which were provided to Board members.

## **NWT Herd Update**

Norman Snowshoe related that there has been limited Porcupine Caribou harvest near Bear Creek and west of Aklavik. There has also been occasional harvest on the Dempster Highway. Patrols have been conducted on the Dempster Highway and west of Aklavik and the frequency of patrols may increase in the future.

Norman explained that the GNWT's Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Lands department have merged.

A report from GTC about the Caribou Summit is still being awaited.

## **Yukon Herd Update**

Mike Suitor related that due to challenges this season most but not all of the spring field work was completed. Caribou were below-average condition and very few calves were observed. There was too much overlap with Alaskan caribou herds for a Porcupine Caribou herd (PCH) composition count to be conducted.

Mike related that the PCTC will be meeting in conjunction with the North American Caribou Workshop in Anchorage during the week of May 8, 2023.

## **Corcel Dempster Vanadium project**

Mike Suitor provided a brief overview of a permitted class 1 project in the Rock River area on the Dempster Highway. The project includes 196 claims covering 40.96 km<sup>2</sup> and the company's interest is in extracting vanadium from shale deposits in this area. The proponent intends to establish a camp for eight persons for 31 days as well as create new temporary trails, up to 10 kilometers of cutlines, and several helicopter landing pads. Minimal diamond drilling is anticipated.

Mike noted that this area is of significance to the PCH and is also an important harvesting area.

A discussion took place about PCMB's concern regarding the lack of visibility of this project. Mike explained that his department does not usually hear about class 1 projects unless it is via a First Nation consultation process because class 1 projects are below YESAB thresholds. Mike agreed that it would be appropriate for YG to request the PCMB's input on this project.

Jeremy Brammer, Fish and Wildlife Manager for VGG, is currently checking whether this project conforms to the *North Yukon Regional Land Use Plan*. The deadline for comments by VGG and GTC is April 24, 2023.

Joe Tetlich expressed concern about this being a precedent-setting situation which should be addressed since the exploration activities would be taking place directly on a main migration route and in an important harvesting area.

A discussion took place about internal YG communications. While YESAB thresholds were not triggered, this initiative should have been flagged internally for the PCMB's consideration. Mike noted that currently there are no communication triggers to involve boards and councils but that there are triggers to involve First Nations.

Deana Lemke stated there should be a process within YG for circumstances like this and the PCMB should understand how the Board fits into the process.

Matt Clarke suggested that he and Mike speak with YG staff internally to highlight the need for Energy Mines and Resources staff to flag projects like this for the appropriate expert in Department of Environment.

Mike noted that pertinent data regarding this project was shared with VGG so that they would have information to prepare a response. He stated that GTC may be responding as well but he has not been able to connect with them to confirm.

Alice McCulley stated that she had not heard about this project but that TH does usually respond to class 1 applications and she would follow up with the appropriate individuals.

## **TK Data-Mobilization Project**

In preparation for the upcoming community verification sessions, Jennifer Smith provided a summary of the primary themes which emerged via the preliminary analysis of the GTC, Inuvialuit (WMAc NS), and VGG data, and requested the Board's feedback on topic prioritization.

Jennifer explained that TK verification sessions are planned for the week of May 22 in Old Crow, Fort McPherson, and Aklavik. Relevant organizations have been asked to identify the best participants to participate in the sessions.

Jennifer reiterated that the goal of the current discussion was to prioritize the areas of focus that are the most pertinent to the Conservation Plan (CP) and to consider whether there is a need to ask any additional questions in order to supplement the data or address any gaps. She explained that the summarized information she was presenting was based on the content of Trailmark's three reports, which are each about 100 pages in length.

Peter Evans explained that the reports were created using Trailmark's qualitative analysis method. The data was summarized in terms of the themes that the PCMB is specifically interested in, and additional themes that became apparent while analyzing the data were also included in the reports.

The community verification process will include both small group sessions and some large group sessions at community gatherings. The intention is to provide a brief overview of the entire body of data for the participants and then receive their feedback

and assistance to confirm the accuracy of the summarized information and identify gaps or new themes.

Jennifer clarified that the data-sharing agreements for the TK source data are with the PCMB; therefore, PCMB members are able to review the Trailmark reports but they should not be shared with other organizations.

Peter noted that Trailmark will be providing draft summaries of a data overview that the Board can review.

Jennifer shared and reviewed a consolidated table of the TK data contained in the three Trailmark reports, summarized into the following 22 themes:

1. Determine Sensitive and Critical Habitat Areas
2. Habitat Management and Forage Conditions
3. Climate Change
4. Impact of Disturbance on PCH
5. Cumulative Effects
6. How Predator Communities Have Changed
7. Extreme Weather Events that Impact the Herd
8. TK about Caribou Diet
9. Fire Management
10. How does Habitat/Diet affect distribution
11. Interactions with Other Species
12. Caribou Distribution and Accessibility
13. Historical Population Numbers and Fluctuations of the Herd
14. Past and Current Extent of PCH Range
15. Changes in Herd Migration Patterns
16. Hunting Access
17. Harvesting Techniques
18. Let the Leaders Pass
19. Traditional Management
20. Meshing TK with Scientific Knowledge
21. Modernize Traditional Hunting Practices
22. Education

Peter explained the process for analyzing the available TK. All transcripts are reviewed and themes are aggregated. Themes are then analyzed and relevant quotations from the transcripts are incorporated to represent the main message of topic.

Jennifer clarified that in some cases there was no TK available on a particular topic of interest to the PCMB. For example, there is no information on linear disturbance because the TK interviews did not include questions about this topic. On the other hand, a strength of combining datasets is that what is omitted by one group may be included by another.

Jennifer then reviewed a supplementary table showing how the TK Data Mobilization themes relate to the content of the CP.

Jennifer noted that a lot of content was about spiritual relationships between people and caribou, which does not directly relate to the CP but is nevertheless important and should be captured.

Deana Lemke stated that this is good to keep in mind because some of the stories could be quoted and shared in the CP.

A group discussion about prioritizing and consolidating the initial list of 22 themes took place. Ian McDonald noted that it is important to remember that there needs to be connections or links to the SARA recovery strategy so that TK can be included in the appropriate areas of the strategy. Another important goal should be to focus on aspects of habitat management — how to create a process for systematic responses to proposed development, for example.

Harvest management should be referenced in the CP. Community values and community connection to harvesting will be mentioned directly but specifics of harvest management would not be included as they can be referenced in the Harvest Management Plan.

It was noted that the steering groups working on the PCH summer-range project may also be able to assist with identifying which areas to focus on, confirming some of the reported-on TK and gathering new or additional knowledge.

Based on the foregoing discussion, Jennifer presented a prioritized list of topics summarized by themes: (1) Caribou habitat; (2) Caribou distribution; (3) Disturbance; (4) Community connection; and (5) Other. The original 22 themes were organized under the corresponding main themes, as follows:

1. Caribou Habitat
  - a. Determine Sensitive and Critical Habitat Area
  - b. Habitat Management and Forage Conditions
  - c. Climate Change
  - d. TK about Caribou Diet
  - e. Changes in Herd Migration Patterns
  
2. Caribou Distribution
  - a. Past and Current Extent of PCH Range
  - b. Extreme Weather Events that Impact the Herd
  - c. Caribou Distribution and Accessibility
  - d. Hunting Access
  - e. Fire Management
  - f. How does Habitat/Diet affect distribution

3. Disturbance
  - a. Impact of Disturbance on PCH
  - b. How Predator Communities Have Changed
4. Community Connection
  - a. Education
  - b. Harvesting Techniques
  - c. Traditional Management
  - d. Modernize Traditional Hunting Practices
  - e. Let the Leaders Pass
5. Other
  - a. Historical Population Numbers and Fluctuations of the Herd
  - b. Cumulative Effects
  - c. Meshing TK with Scientific Knowledge
  - d. Interactions with Other Species

Joe Tetlichy felt that the categories should reflect the basic terms in which community members think about caribou: harvesting, weather, habitat, and education. Alice McCulley agreed that the list ought to be concise and that there should be an openness to adding other topics dynamically, as determined by the community discussions.

Matt Clarke commented that the prioritized list is much clearer and agreed with Ian's comments about making linkages back to the goals and the audience of the SARA recovery plan. He added that the braiding of TK and scientific knowledge as they relate to the CP is important.

Peter suggested that, where appropriate, the information could be divided into descriptions of past and current conditions. That way, it would make it easier to determine whether knowledge-holders are verifying the past or the present situation/information.

## **Next Meeting and Adjournment**

Deana Lemke reminded members that the TK verification team will be travelling to Old Crow during the week of May 22 and that Joe Tetlichy will arrive prior to the rest of the team in order to attend Caribou Days. The PCMB will host a community dinner and Joe would appreciate some help to serve the dinner if any members wish to attend.

The next Board meeting will be scheduled in September at a community in NWT, specific date to be confirmed via email.