

Backgrounder

Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board Reasons for Decision Final Report, Part A

The Reasons for Decision final report, entitled *Report on a Public Hearing Held by the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board 23-24, 2016 Yellowknife, NT & Reasons for Decisions Related to a Joint Proposal for the Management of the Bathurst Pekwò (Barren-ground caribou) Herd*, is posted on the WRRB Public Registry at <http://wrrb.ca/public-information/public-registry>.

The Reasons for Decision final report addresses management actions proposed by the Tłıchǫ Government and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), Government of the Northwest Territories in their *Joint Proposal on Caribou Management Actions for the Bathurst Herd: 2016-2019*.

In order to carefully consider all the information on the record and to meet legislated timelines, the WRRB decided to prepare two separate reports for submission to the Tłıchǫ Government and ENR. This first report, Part A, addresses the proposed management actions that will require regulation changes in order for new regulations to be in place for the start of the 2016 / 2017 harvest season, as well as the proposed mobile wolf-hunter camp and wolf feasibility assessment.

Part B of the Reasons for Decision Report, to be submitted in August 2016, will address additional predator management actions, biological and environmental monitoring, and cumulative effects.

WRRB Mandate

- The WRRB has a mandate for wildlife, plants and forest management in Wek'èezhì and adheres to the principles and practices of conservation in fulfilling its duties.
- The Board shares responsibilities for managing and monitoring the Bathurst caribou herd.

2016 Proceeding for the Bathurst Caribou Herd

Joint Management Proposal

- In September 2015, ENR reported that, based on a calving ground photographic survey conducted in June 2015, the Bathurst herd had continued to decline significantly.
- Specifically, the number of breeding females had declined from an estimated 15,935 in 2012 to an estimated 8,075, a decline of about 50%. The total population estimate for the herd fell from an estimated 34,690 animals in 2013 to an estimated 19,769 animals—a decline of approximately 40% over three years and a decrease of 96% since the peak population estimated at 470,000 in 1986.
- In December 2015, the Tłıchǫ Government and ENR submitted the *Joint Proposal on Caribou Management Actions for the Bathurst Herd: 2016-2019*, which proposed new

restrictions on hunter harvest, wolf management actions and ongoing biological monitoring.

Public Hearing on the Bathurst Caribou Herd

- The WRRB considered any specific restriction of harvest or component of harvest as the establishment of a total allowable harvest (TAH). Under Section 12.3.10 of the Tłıchq Agreement, the Board is required to hold a public hearing when considering a TAH for a wildlife population that has not been subject to a TAH in the previous two years.
- After review and analysis of the joint proposal, the WRRB held a public hearing in Yellowknife, NT on February 23-24, 2016.

Conservation Concerns

- Throughout its proceeding, the Board repeatedly heard from governments, communities and members of the public on their concerns over the continued decrease of the Bathurst herd, including recognition of the rapid rate of decline.
- While the Tłıchq and other traditional users spoke of their close relationship with caribou and the land, and the loss of connection that can result with harvest limitations, it was noted that any harvesting from the Bathurst herd is currently no longer scientifically and culturally viable.
- Vital rates associated with the herd, including the cow survival rate, calf recruitment, and pregnancy rate, indicate that the herd is likely to continue to decline in the near future.
- Based on all available Aboriginal and scientific evidence, the WRRB concluded that a serious conservation concern exists for the Bathurst caribou.

WRRB Determination on TAH

- The Board believes that the Bathurst caribou herd is in crisis given the continuing decline in the breeding females, poor vital rates, impacts of environmental factors such as poor summer feeding conditions, and extensive exploration and development on the herd's annual range. The Board concluded that harvest restriction is warranted and urgently required.
- Under the Tłıchq Agreement, the Board has sole responsibility for making a final determination with respect to a TAH for Wek'èezhì (Section 12.5.5(a)(i) of the Tłıchq Agreement).
- The Board determined that a total allowable harvest of zero shall be implemented for all users of the Bathurst caribou herd within Wek'èezhì for 2016 to 2019. For further clarification, the absolute number of caribou that can be harvested from the Bathurst herd is zero.

- As the Bathurst herd is at a critical state, the WRRB requires its determination of a TAH of zero be implemented by July 1, 2016, which is the start of the 2016 / 2017 harvest season.

WRRB Recommendations

- The Board recommended that the Tłıchq Government and ENR agree on an approach to harvest zoning for implementation by July 1, 2016, and conduct compliance monitoring throughout the fall and winter harvest seasons from 2016 to 2019.
- Additionally, the WRRB recommended increased communications and public education programs, including the timely implementation of hunter education programs in Wek'èezhì.
- The Board continues to support the Community-based Wolf Harvesting Project, proposed by the Tłıchq Government and ENR as a training program in January 2016, with recommendations related to implementation and assessment.
- Due to concerns about timely completion, the WRRB also recommended that the wolf feasibility assessment set out in the proposal be led by the Board with input and support from the Tłıchq Government and ENR. The collaborative feasibility assessment would primarily be an examination of all options for wolf management, including costs, practicality and effectiveness.