



Tłı̨chǫ Government

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Government of
Northwest Territories
Gouvernement des
Territoires du Nord-Ouest

Mr. Grant Pryznyk, Chair
Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resources Board
4504 49TH AVENUE
YELLOWKNIFE NT X1A 1A7

JUL 15 2016

Dear Mr. Pryznyk:

Response to WRRB's Reasons for Decision Related to Joint Proposal for the Management of the Bathurst ʔekwǫ (Barren-ground caribou) Herd

The Tłı̨chǫ Government (TG) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) have received the Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resources Board's (WRRB) Final Report, Part A, entitled "*Report on a Public Hearing Held by the Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resources Board 6-8 April 2016, Behchokǫ, NT & Reasons for Decisions Related to a Joint Proposal for the Management of the Bluenose-East ʔekwǫ (Barren-ground caribou) Herd, Part A*". The Report was delivered to the parties on June 13, 2016.

Please find attached our joint response to the WRRB determination and recommendations included in the Final Report, Part A. We look forward to further working with the WRRB for the management of the Bathurst caribou herd.

Sincerely,

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Attachment

c. **The Honourable Bob Mcleod, Premier**

Mr. Gary Bohnet, Principal Secretary, Office of the Premier

**Ms. Shaleen Woodward, Acting/Deputy Minister
Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations**

Grand Chief Eddie Erasmus, TG

Ms. Laura Duncan, Tł̓ch̓q Executive Officer, TG

Ms. Jody Pellssey, Executive Director, WRRB

The Honourable Wally Schumann, Minister, ENR

Ms. Lucy Escalante, Executive Secretary to Minister Wally Schumann

Mr. Doug Pon, Ministerial Special Advisor to Minister Wally Schumann

Mr. Ernie Campbell, Deputy Minister, ENR

Ms. Lynda Yonge, Director of Wildlife, ENR

ATTACHMENT

WRRB Determination #1-2016 and Recommendations #1-2016, #2-2016, #3-2016, #4-2016, and #5-2016 from Decision Report on Bathurst Herd (May 26, 2016)

Determination #1-2016: The Board determines that a total allowable harvest of zero for all users of the Bathurst caribou herd within Wek'èezhìi be implemented for the 2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19 harvest seasons. For further clarification, the absolute number of caribou that can be harvested from the Bathurst herd is zero.

The Tłı̨chǫ Government (TG) and Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) accept this determination, which supports the recommendation made by TG and ENR in the Joint Management Proposal on the Bathurst herd submitted in December 2015. The Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Conservation Area Regulations were in place to support a no-harvest zone for the Bathurst herd during the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 harvest seasons, and will be updated as soon as practicable to reflect the modified method of defining the mobile zone described in our letter of June 29, 2016.

Recommendation #1-2016: The Board recommends that TG and ENR come to an agreement on whether the MCBCMZ or Wildlife Management Units Subzones is the most effective way to differentiate between caribou herds, and then implement the approach with criteria for managing any overlaps between herds, for the 2016/17, 2017/18, and 2018/19 harvest seasons.

As noted in our joint letter to the WRRB dated June 29, 2016, TG and ENR have agreed that the continued use of the MCBCMZ is the preferred approach for the 2016-17 harvesting season. The approach to defining the MCGCMZ has been modified slightly, and is described in detail in the June 29th letter.

Recommendation #2-2016: The Board recommends that TG and ENR provide weekly updates to the WRRB and the general public on aerial and ground-based surveillance of the Bathurst caribou herd throughout the fall and winter harvest seasons for the 2016/17, 2017/18, and 2018/19.

As noted in the joint letter of June 29, 2016, the GNWT is currently going through a period of severe fiscal restraint and budget reduction. ENR has stated that it is not possible for ENR to commit to weekly aerial monitoring of the Bathurst mobile zone. Regular monitoring by air and by ground patrols will occur, as they did in winters 2014-2015 and 2015-2016. TG and ENR can provide weekly updates to the WRRB on any new monitoring information about the Bathurst mobile zone.

Recommendation #3-2016: The Board recommends that TG and ENR increase public education efforts and implement ENR's recently developed Hunter Education program in all Tłı̨chǫ communities.

TG will be initiating increased public education efforts and will inform the Board on progress in this area.

In addition to a number of ongoing ENR-led hunter education programs and products such as Sight your Rifle, Bear Safety training, Pelt Handling, , fact sheets and posters, ENR in collaboration with respected hunters will be rolling out a new Hunter Education program in the fall of 2017. This curriculum was developed in collaboration with representatives from Renewable Resources Boards, Wildlife Committees, Local Harvesting Committees, and Hunting and Trapper Committees across the north. While this new hunter education program is intended to meet the requirements of resident hunters under the *Wildlife Act*, the curriculum is designed to be adaptable community-by-community to incorporate traditional and local knowledge, and can also be used with community members who have Aboriginal or treaty rights to harvest. We anticipate that the work to include localized content will begin soon after the initial rollout of the program and that adapting the curriculum for use in communities will be an ongoing process.

Recommendation #4-2016: The WRRB continues to support the implementation of the Community-based Diga Harvesting Project, as a training program only, subject to the following conditions:

- a) If the Project is to be expanded to other Tłıchq communities, a management proposal must be submitted to the WRRB for review and approval.

TG will provide a management proposal if this specific project will be expanded to other Tłıchq communities.

- b) If the Project is to be expanded in scope, prior to the submission of a management proposal to the WRRB, an index of changing wolf abundance must be available and research on habitat quality and quantity on the Bathurst herd range must be conducted;

The WRRB, ENR and TG are all members of the Wolf Feasibility Study Working Group. This group is in discussion of the possibilities and merits of a wolf abundance study.

- c) TG and ENR must inform the WRRB of the following prior to the start of the Project:
 - i. How aerial and/or ground-based disturbance to Bathurst will be prevented or minimized? How will this potential disturbance be measured, assessed, and mitigated?

Aerial disturbances will be kept at a minimum by flying at an altitude (150 m agl), which will also ensure clear visibility of the caribou. When caribou are observed, the plane will be diverted. The camp will be set up away from large concentrations of caribou to minimize disturbance. If wolf carcasses need to be removed by plane, a landing strip will be marked in areas located away from the main concentration of caribou. Our view is that that the aerial and ground patrols are essential, and disturbance can be mitigated as noted above

- ii. How will unintentional or accidental harvest of Bathurst caribou, by the Tłıchq Diga harvesters, be prevented? If a Bathurst caribou is harvested, how will TG and ENR report to the WRRB?;

The people that applied to the community-based wolf harvest pilot program are expert trappers who are concerned about the decline in caribou. We trust that that these experts will not harvest Bathurst caribou while they are trapping in the mobile zone. We will also have an ENR biologist (when available) performing wolf necropsies at the field camp set up to support the field pilot project. In the unlikely event that during the course of this program a Bathurst caribou is harvested, Tłıchq Government will inform the GNWT and the WRRB.

and,

- iii. How will the facilitation of wolf movements through the wolves' use of skidoo trails be prevented or minimized?

It is possible that wolves may use skidoo trails where the trails pack down the snow and make travelling easier for wolves. However, it is noted that in the winter range, the snow is already hard packed and wolves tend to bypass trails. Diga tracks are observed both on and off the trails. By removing the wolves that would potentially use the trails in the first place, we can solve the suggested problem. Our view is that the benefit of using snow machines to help harvesters reduce wolves on the caribou winter range outweighs the potential issue of wolves using the snow machine trails to access the caribou.

- d) TG and ENR must communicate regularly about the Project with Tłıchq communities and the WRRB. Specifically, the Board requests an update prior to start-up of the Project in December 2016 and a follow-up on the success of the Project in May 2017. As well, TG and ENR must report monthly on the Project, including numbers, age, sex and pregnancy rates of wolves harvested and location of wolf harvest, to the WRRB;

TG and ENR will communicate updates through the Barren-ground Caribou Technical Working Group on a regular basis or immediately when there is important information to share. As was the case in the Wolf feasibility Study, TG considers ENR and WRRB as partners and TG wants our partners involved in every step.

- e) The Project must be curtailed or stopped should negative impacts to the Bathurst caribou herd occur; and,

Noted. Thank you.

- f) TG and ENR must establish a threshold or criteria to evaluate the success of the program, i.e. the effectiveness of training a core set of wolf harvesters, the acceptance of the Project by Tlıcho communities, continued program implementation and reaching the target number of diga harvested.

TG and ENR will meet to establish criteria to evaluate the success of the program.

Recommendation #5-2016: The WRRB recommends TG and ENR support a collaborative feasibility assessment of options for diga management, led by the Board.

ENR and TG thank the WRRB for the board's support for a wolf management feasibility assessment for the Bathurst herd's range, and ENR would like to propose a modification to the recommendation on this initiative.

In 2015 ENR committed to conduct a collaborative feasibility assessment of wolf management options for the range of the Bathurst herd, including areas both within and outside of Wek'èezhii. Any proposed actions that arise from this assessment will require consultation with all Aboriginal governments and wildlife management authorities across the range of the Bathurst herd, and will require submission of a separate management proposal to the WRRB for their independent review and consideration. Given the scope of this work and role of various organizations, ENR initiated a collaborative process with the WRRB, TG, Yellowknives Dene First Nation (YKDFN) and the North Slave Métis Alliance (NSMA) as a forum to provide direction for completion of the feasibility assessment.

ENR initiated work on the feasibility assessment with a 2-day workshop on wolf research and management in November 2015, which included participation of TG and WRRB technical staff. A review was done of wolf management programs in other jurisdictions, including a review of the literature and discussions with agencies and individuals involved in these programs. A process to conduct the feasibility assessment has been identified, and ENR established a collaborative working group to provide input into this process. The working group includes technical staff from ENR, WRRB, TG, NSMA and YKDFN and has been meeting regularly since May 2016. ENR has committed to complete the feasibility assessment in 2016, with a target date of October 2016 for a final report. ENR supports the use of this collaborative technical working group as the forum to complete the feasibility assessment.

After discussion with ENR, while TG supports and appreciates the Board's willingness to lead the collaborative feasibility assessment, TG suggests that representatives of the parties meet as soon as possible to come to a suitable solution to avoid further delay.