



October 9, 2026

Joseph Judas, Chair
Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board
4504 49th Avenue, Yellowknife, NT X1A 1A7
jpellissey@wrrb.ca

Dear Mr. Judas:

Re: 2026 Sahtı Ekwǫ Management Proceeding - Information Request Responses

The Tłıchǫ Government and Government of the Northwest Territories Department of Environment and Climate Change are pleased to submit responses to information requests received as part of the 2026 Sahtı Ekwǫ Management Proceedings.

We thank the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board, Sahtı Renewable Resources Board, and Yellowknives Dene First Nation for submitting the information requests and look forward to further discussions about Sahtı Ekwǫ management with registered parties at the upcoming technical sessions.

Sincerely,

Tammy Steinwand-Deschambeault
Director, Culture and Lands Protection
Tłıchǫ Government

Rhona
Kindopp

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Rhona Kindopp
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Rhona Kindopp
Director, Wildlife Management Division
Environment and Climate Change
Government of the Northwest Territories

Attachment

**Cc Stephanie Behrens, Manager
 Culture and Lands Protection, Tłıchǫ Government**

**Dr. Brad Woodworth, Manager, Wildlife Research & Management
Wildlife Management Division, Environment and Climate Change, Government of the
Northwest Territories**

**Dr. Brett Elkin, Assistant Deputy Minister, Wildlife and Forest Management
Environment and Climate Change, Government of the Northwest Territories**

2026 Sahtì Ekwò Management Proceedings

Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchǫ Government Responses to Information Requests

MODELING

Information Request #1:

- i. Using the Barren-ground Caribou Cumulative Effects Assessment (CEA) model or the Integrated Population Model (IPM), evaluate how future trends in environmental variables associated with a changing climate, combined with a total allowable harvest (TAH) of 395 in Wek'èezhìı and 450 in Nunavut affects recovery of the Sahtì Ekwò herd (using sex ratio ranging from 0 – 50% cows for the Wek'èezhii TAH and 0-100% for the Nunavut TAH).

Response: The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) recognizes the importance of considering climate change alongside other factors when evaluating future trends of the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East) herd. As outlined in the rationale for Information Request (IR) #1 and summarized in the Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchǫ Government Joint Proposal on Management Actions for the Bluenose-East Barren-ground Caribou (Sahtì Ekwò) Herd 2027 – 2030 (hereafter ‘joint management proposal’; pgs. 4-5, 11-12, 41), several recent and ongoing research projects are contributing valuable knowledge about impacts of climate on northern caribou population trajectories. While a fulsome accounting for climate change in modeling and simulations for the Sahtì Ekwò herd is beyond the scope and timeframe available for this response, we note that Figures 1 and 2 in Appendix C of the joint management proposal present the findings of a harvest simulation for the Sahtì Ekwò herd using a range of herd trends and harvest sex ratios. Under an increasing herd trend, as is the current estimate for the Sahtì Ekwò herd, results from these simulations demonstrate that the current Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) of 845 (Northwest Territories [NWT] TAH of 395 caribou plus Nunavut [NU] TAH of 450 caribou) for a range of harvest sex ratios is predicted to support a continued increasing short-term (2025-2030) trend in the herd. Importantly, there is a buffer to account for additional potential short-term negative impacts of climate or other factors on the herd trend. It is also important to note that actual reported harvest in recent years has been well below the TAH. We look forward to further opportunities to discuss paths forward for the inclusion of climate in herd modeling, including at the upcoming Technical Sessions, and note that the CEA tool is available for use by all co-management partners to explore scenarios to inform decision-making.

- ii. Please describe how predicted changes in population trajectory of the Sahtì Ekwò herd based on a climate change scenario will be considered in assessing

the risk to, and managing, the recovery of the Sahtì Ekwò herd.

Response: As noted in our response to IR #1(i), GNWT recognizes the importance of considering climate change alongside other factors when evaluating future trends of the Sahtì Ekwò herd. Although the harvest simulations in Appendix C of the joint management proposal do not directly account for climate change, results demonstrate that continued recovery of the Sahtì Ekwò herd is expected under an increasing herd trend with the current TAH of 845 and proposed harvest sex ratio. Harvest simulations also considered the impact of harvest under a stable trend and declining population trend of -5%/year to assess the impact of harvest if the population trend was different than predicted by the IPM or if factors caused the herd to change trajectory and decline over the next five years. Those simulations showed the underlying population trend would largely continue under the current TAH (845) and proposed harvest sex ratio. Under a declining herd trend (-5%/year), projected herd abundance after five years of this harvest scenario would be 18,700 caribou if the full TAH was used with 50% cow harvest, compared to a projected herd abundance of 21,500 caribou if harvest was 0. GNWT looks forward to continued discussion about paths forward for the inclusion of climate in herd modeling and management, including at the upcoming Technical Sessions.

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories

Rationale for IR #1: Climate trends for the Sahtì Ekwò seasonal ranges include fewer days with freezing rain, warmer June with less snow and more plant growth degree days; higher indices for mosquitos and warble flies and warmer falls. Relationships between climate and vital rates show that June snow depth contributed to variability in annual cow mortality, while May snow depth was related to parturition¹.

Results of scenario modelling of the [NWT Cumulative Impacts Monitoring Program \(CIMP\) project #207](#), CEA of Barren-ground Caribou Herds, shows that population outcomes were sensitive to changes in cow mortality associated with climate change. In addition, [NWT CIMP project #241](#) shows that colder winters and shallow snow were associated with high overwinter mortality, while extreme summer temperatures and insect harassment reduced summer survival.

Information Request #2:

- i. Based on a review of the literature and using the Integrated Population Model (IPM) as necessary, investigate plausible scenarios and population outcomes for changes in calf survival, due to the proposed cow harvest.

Response: Studies across ungulates (bighorn sheep, moose, reindeer, white-tailed deer) comparing survival of orphaned versus non-orphaned calves have largely not detected differences in calf survival to 1 or 2 years old (Festa-Bianchet et al. 1994, Holand et al. 2012, Jolicoeur and Crete 1988, Woodson et al. 1980). Based on studies of captive and wild ungulates (Parker et al. 1990, J. Cook pers. comm.) and field studies of boreal caribou in the NWT (Cook et al. 2021), we expect that by October, caribou are likely still nursing, but calves are getting very little nutrients from milk each day at that time (with ~10% of nutrition coming from milk at 70-90 days old under good forage conditions, and perhaps less under poor forage conditions (Parker et al. 1990). We would expect a calf not to be nutritionally dependent on its mother by September. However, being with other caribou likely provides benefits other than nutrition that increase survival, including protection from predators and knowledge of feeding areas and migration routes. A calf that is solitary when its mother dies likely has reduced survival compared to a calf that is in a group with other caribou when its mother dies. In summary, calf mortality due to their mother being harvested in the fall is expected to be low.

To provide additional information about potential population outcomes from potential changes in calf survival due to the proposed cow harvest, we conducted harvest simulations for a range of cow harvest levels and orphaned cow survival rates using the simulation model adapted from Appendix C of the joint management proposal.

Herd demographic values for the harvest simulations are from the integrated population model in Appendix A of the joint management proposal, modified to have cow harvest occur during the fall season (August 1 – October 31) with half of bulls harvested in the fall and the other half harvested in January. Harvest simulations were run under the assumption the population trend was increasing at 5%/year and where fecundity (proportion of cows that gave birth on the calving ground) was 0.87 calves per cow, annual calf survival probability was 0.64, and the estimated proportion of 2+ year-old adult females with calves at the end of August when harvesting occurred was 0.70. In these models, female yearlings (1.5 years old) are excluded from the calculation of proportion of cows with calves at the end of August and it is assumed that all cow harvest is of 2+ year-old females. Note: the proportion of 2+ year-old cows assumed to have calves at the end of August (0.70) is higher than observed fall calf-cow ratios from 2015-2025 (average = 44:100; maximum = 52:100) because (i) yearlings are removed from the denominator; (ii) the calendar date is earlier (more calves are assumed to die between August 31 and the October composition survey); and (iii) this assumes mean calf survival across all months, which underestimates probable calf mortality in the first months of life. With these inputs, we then simulated the following three levels of 2+ year-old cow harvest (with the number of calves at heel, assuming 70% of 2+ year-old cows have calves at the end of August, shown in parentheses):

- 100% of allowed cow harvest = 100% of Nunavut TAH and 50% of NWT TAH = 450

- cows + 197 cows = 647 cows (450 calves at heel)
- 50% of allowed cow harvest = 50% of Nunavut TAH and 50% of NWT cow TAH = 225 cows + 93 cows = 324 cows (225 calves at heel)
- 25% allowed cow harvest = 25% of Nunavut TAH and 25% of NWT cow TAH = 113 cows + 49 cows = 162 cows (113 calves at heel)

A total harvest of 863 caribou was simulated, equal to 3% of the herd estimate and approximating the combined NU and NWT TAH of 845 caribou. Bull numbers were added in to meet the total harvest of 863 caribou (number of bulls harvested = 863 minus the number of cows harvested).

Figure 1 shows calf mortality as a function of cow harvest level and orphaned calf survival. Simulations assumed that cows with and without calves are harvested indiscriminately with 70% of harvested adult cows having a calf. Orphaned calf survival was simulated with 0% survival, 50% survival, 75% survival, and 100% survival. The number of calf mortalities ranged from 0 (scenarios where orphaned calf survival was 100% and/or cows with calves are not harvested) up to 450 under a scenario of no orphans surviving.

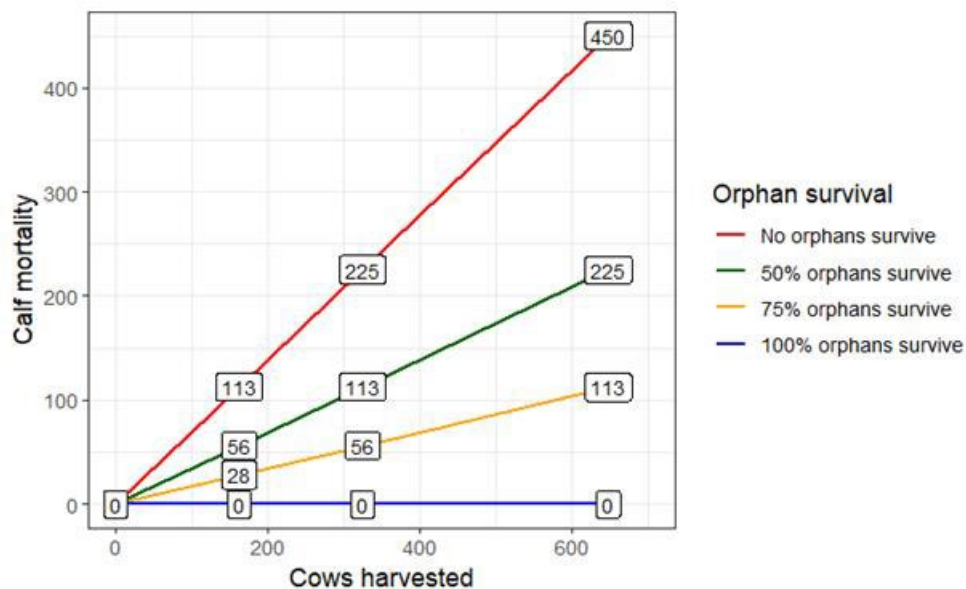


Figure 1. Calf mortality (i.e., the number of calves that die) as a function of cow harvest and orphan survival probability assuming that 70% of harvested 2+ year-old cows have a calf at the end of August.

Figure 2 illustrates herd trajectories under the various cow harvest and calf mortality scenarios. Under no calf mortality, differences in herd trajectories are due entirely to differences in cow harvest. For scenarios with calf mortality, a few patterns are evident. First, the effect of calf mortality does not impact herd size until 2027 which is when a calf would first become an adult (2 years after birth). Second, the overall effect of calf mortality is relatively minimal with the difference in mean estimated herd sizes in 2030 being 2% or less (at the same harvest level) across scenarios. For example, the difference between the estimated herd size after five years under the maximum allowable harvest of 647 cows with no calf mortality (35,400) and the

estimate where no orphans survive (34,720) is 2%.

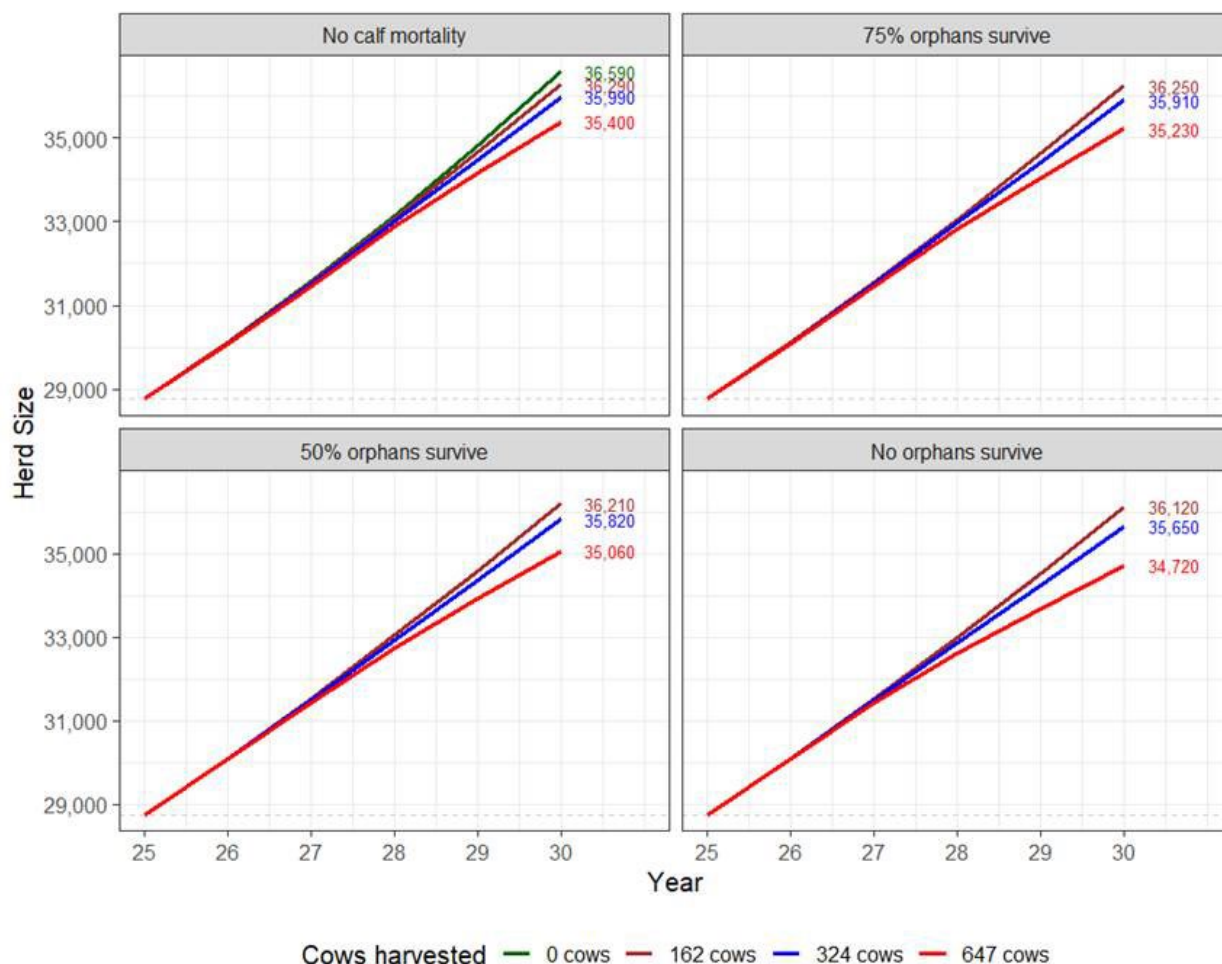


Figure 2. Herd trajectories as a function of cow harvest and calf mortality. Bull harvest for each scenario is equal to 863 minus cow harvest.

The main finding of these simulations is that the effect of potential calf mortality from orphaning on herd size will be relatively low given the likely higher survival rates of orphaned calves and likely lower actual harvest of cows. Although an annual harvest of 863 caribou was simulated, which approximates the combined NU and NWT TAH of 845 caribou, reported harvest has been much lower in recent years. The level of cow harvest simulated in Nunavut (450, 225, or 113 cows) is considered very conservative because in the last 4 years, annual harvest of cows under the Nunavut TAH has been 23-32 cows (as reported in [ACCWM Bluenose-East Action Plans](#)).

- ii. What percentage of cows will have calves during the cow harvest period, and what percentage of those calves will likely die when their cows are shot? Assume cows with or without calf have an equal chance of being shot.

Response: Under an increasing herd trend of 5%/year, approximately 70% of 2+ year-old cows will have calves at the end of August. Under stable and decreasing scenarios of herd

trend outlined in Appendix C of the joint management proposal, 57% and 40% of 2+ year-old cows would have calves at the end of August, respectively. Based on literature reviewed in our response to IR #2(i), a low percentage of orphaned calves are expected to die due to their mother being harvested in the fall. Figure 1 shows the number of calf mortalities that result under different combinations of cow harvest and orphaned calf survival.

- iii. How would you propose to monitor the incidence of calf abandonment or reduced calf survival due to abandonment including considerations such as logistical, technical, and financial feasibility?

Response: Tłıchǵ Government will continue its Ekwò Harvest Monitoring program and send out Harvest Monitors (Guardians) with fall hunting groups to collect data on sex and health of harvested caribou, along with herd composition. Among other data, this will include how many cows are harvested, what their body condition is, if a calf was seen with her, and whether she was lactating. Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è will also continue monitoring caribou on the summer habitat range and report the number of calves, yearlings and young adults.

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories

Rationale for IR #2: The Joint Management Proposal (JMP) proposes the current TAH of 395 be maintained but rather than bull only harvest, a 1:1 sex ratio harvest be implemented during the fall hunt (August 1 – October 31), thus opening up the harvest of cows in a population that is increasing at a predicted 5 % per year from 2021. While the JMP modelled possible population trajectories resulting from increased mortality of adult female ekwò, it did not consider impacts to calf survival resulting from the harvest of cows during the fall when cows may still be lactating.

Information Request #3:

- i. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the IPM in determining Sahtì Ekwò trends into the future?

Response: Integrated population models (IPMs) are a widely adopted method for modeling wildlife population dynamics. IPMs have been used to model population dynamics of barren-ground caribou in the Northwest Territories for many years (e.g., Boulanger et al. 2011, 2019, 2024, Adamczewski et al. 2019) as well as many other wildlife species worldwide (Schaub and Kery 2022). A key strength of IPMs is that they can bring together multiple datasets (i.e., calving ground surveys, composition surveys, collar-based survival, and harvest) into one cohesive modeling framework. This has the benefit of ensuring that uncertainties in input datasets are fully accounted for and reflected in demographic estimates and trends generated by the model. Bringing together different datasets that share information about common demographic processes (e.g., population trend) can also improve the precision of demographic estimates from the models. However, like with any statistical analysis, IPM outputs are only as good as the input data and information, and thus outputs should be considered alongside multiple sources of information and knowledge, where possible, when drawing conclusions or making management recommendations.

- ii. Please describe how uncertainties in data such as from annual fluctuations in adult sex ratio can be explored through IP Modeling to investigate how to select the time period for averaging adult sex ratios.

Response: IPMs utilize information from all data sources and therefore provide a tool to assess levels of variation caused by biological versus sampling variance. This can be seen when looking at model predictions versus field estimates for estimates such as survival rates which are often imprecise due to low sample sizes of collars. Comparison of IPM-based trends in indicators such as sex ratio can be compared to field estimates to better understand factors influencing longer-term trends. Sensitivity analysis is another approach to evaluating impacts of data uncertainties on vital rate estimates. This involves fitting the IPM with different input values and examining the impact on key demographic estimates of interest (e.g., population size or trend). Input values can be adjusted by including or excluding particular data points or by calculating the input values in different ways. If demographic estimates vary minimally in response to changes in the input values, then this points to robustness of the results. If demographic estimates vary widely based on differing input values, then this indicates high sensitivity to the model inputs and points to a need for further exploration and investigation. This approach was used to explore reasons for the apparent large increase in the 2023 Bluenose-East herd estimate (Boulanger et al 2024). Evidence that IPM results are sensitive to a particular parameter does not necessarily mean that the observed parameter is biased or incorrect; other evidence would be required to suggest this.

For greater clarity regarding sex ratios specifically, we note that the IPMs implemented for

the Bluenose-East calving ground report (Kelly et al. 2026) did not average adult sex ratios. Rather, each sex ratio estimate was included as a unique annual data point. Adult sex ratios from fall 2024 and fall 2025 were, however, averaged to extrapolate a herd estimate based on the observed calving ground cow estimate. This time period was selected because these surveys were close in time to the calving ground survey to inform the ratios of adult males and females in the herd. Using the average of the fall sex ratio surveys also repeated the methods used for the Bluenose-East herd since 2021.

- iii. Please summarize how other ekwò management agencies incorporate data uncertainties into their IP modelling.

Response: A jurisdictional scan of how other ekwò management agencies incorporate data uncertainties into their integrated population modeling is beyond the scope and timeframe of this response. IPMs are a widely used and well-established tool for modeling population dynamics of caribou and other wildlife in the Northwest Territories (e.g., Boulanger et al. 2011, 2019, 2024, Adamczewski et al. 2019) and worldwide (Schaub and Kery 2022). IPMs consider the precision (standard errors and associated confidence interval widths) of field estimates when fitting models, therefore taking into account uncertainty in estimates. Confidence limits on IPM estimates will be influenced by the relative precision of field estimates used for model fitting. Development and evolution of IPMs has been informed by discussions in various forums, including regular meetings of the Barren-ground Caribou Technical Working Group. GNWT and Tłchq Government look forward to further opportunities to discuss and refine population modeling approaches for Sahtì Ekwò, including at the upcoming Technical Sessions.

- iv. Please explain if and how the Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è program field observations can be used in the IPM such as by weighting factors for vital rates or environmental co-variates.

Response: Observations and knowledge generated from Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è could be incorporated into IPMs in a variety of ways, both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitatively, IPM estimates can be compared to observations and knowledge for a common demographic parameter (e.g., herd trend or calf survival) to assess the extent to which they agree and to discuss or share ideas for why they may differ. Quantitatively, vital rate or environmental covariate data collected by the program could be included directly in the IPM, either alone or in combination with data collected by other means (e.g., aerial surveys, collars, or climate models). Second, knowledge or observations about which environmental covariates have the greatest impact on one or more vital rates, can be used to inform or select which environmental covariates are included in the IPM. Thirdly, knowledge or observations about what is typical for the herd or the strength or direction of the relationship between a vital rate and environmental covariate (e.g., calf survival and winter temperatures) can inform how the model estimates that relationship from data ('informed priors'). Importantly, including any knowledge or observations from Indigenous monitoring programs into a

statistical modeling framework, IPMs or otherwise, requires careful and thoughtful discussion with the collectors and holders of those observations and knowledge about if, how, and when it is appropriate to do so.

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchǫ Government

Rationale for IR #3: The JMP states that an IPM contributes to a more complete understanding of how a herd is doing. It can do this by incorporating other “valuable” data gathered during field surveys at times other than just the abundance estimates from periodic calving ground surveys. Specifically, an IPM can provide a more informative understanding of herd dynamics.

The JMP describes how the herd estimates can fluctuate over shorter time periods and data, such as adult sex ratio, fluctuate annually necessitating the use of averaging over multiple years. The JMP does not directly address the causes of data uncertainty and it is not clear how the time period over which an indicator is averaged (number of years) is selected or assessed through the IPM.

Information Request #4:

Please explain how uncertainty regarding the recent population trend was considered in deciding to introduce the proposed fall cow harvest. In particular, please clarify the level of confidence placed in the conclusion that the herd is increasing and explain how the limitations and uncertainty associated with the available scientific and community-based monitoring information affected the level of risk considered acceptable for this new management action.

Response: A combination of scientific and community knowledge points to the Sahtì Ekwò herd undergoing a slow increasing trend in abundance since 2021, with lots of calves and with animals in good condition. The estimated population growth rate (λ) for the herd from the IPM analysis presented in Kelly et al. (2026) was 1.024 (95% credible interval: 0.925-1.102) with a 69% probability that the herd was growing for the period of June 2024-May 2025 and the 3-year geometric mean was 1.041 (95% credible interval: 1.00-1.078) with a 98% probability that the herd was growing for the period from 2022-23 to 2024-25. These IPM-based herd trend estimates are similar to the average annual trend of 1.055 (95% confidence interval: 1.006-1.108) estimated from the ratio of the 2021 and 2025 herd size estimates. Based on these calving ground survey and modeling results (Kelly et al. 2026) and community-based information, the Advisory Committee for Cooperation on Wildlife Management (ACCW) assessed the Sahtì Ekwò herd to be in the “Yellow status” for a herd of intermediate size and increasing.

To assess the level of risk to the Sahtì Ekwò herd’s continued recovery by introducing a limited fall cow harvest, harvest simulations were conducted for a range of herd trends and harvest sex ratios that are summarized in Appendix C of the joint management proposal. Under an increasing herd trend of 5%/year, as was estimated for the Sahtì Ekwò herd, these simulations demonstrate that the current combined TAH of 845 for the NWT and Nunavut for a range of sex ratios, are predicted to support a continued increasing short-term (2025-2030) trend in the herd (Figures 1-C, 2-C). To further account for uncertainty, harvest simulations also considered the impact of harvest under a stable trend and declining population trend of 5%/year to assess the impact of harvest if the population trend was different than predicted by the IPM or if factors caused the herd to change trajectory and decline over the next three years. Those simulations showed the underlying population trend would largely continue under the proposed TAH. Under a declining herd trend (5%/year), projected herd abundance after five years would be 18,700 caribou if the total TAH was used with 50% cow harvest, compared to a projected herd abundance of 21,500 caribou if harvest was 0.

Submitted by: Sahtì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchǵ Government

Rationale for IR #4: The JMP concludes, based on scientific and community-based monitoring information, that the Sahtì Ekwò herd has been slowly increasing since 2021. It also acknowledges uncertainty associated with the population estimates and demographic information

used to assess the herd's recent trend. Although the proposal provides modelling and other analyses supporting the sustainability of the proposed harvest, it is less clear how uncertainty regarding the strength and durability of the herd's increase was considered specifically in deciding to introduce a fall cow harvest with an up to 1:1 harvest sex ratio.

COLLARS

Information Request #5:

Please discuss what consideration has been given to alternative methods of measuring ekwò survival? For example, GPS ear tag transmitters have improved in reliability and function and may be a practical way to monitor individual ekwò survival while still tracking them.

Response: GNWT and Tłchq Government continue to track advancements in technology and new monitoring methods for measuring ekwò survival, and we support the use of other monitoring methods when proven approaches are available that can provide the specific information required to inform management. However, satellite collars will continue to be a core component of barren-ground caribou monitoring because they provide essential information on distribution, movements, and survival for longer time periods than is currently achievable with other techniques. GPS ear tag transmitters, while lighter weight, have a significantly shorter lifespan (i.e., < 1 year vs. multiple years) and still require that the animal be captured and handled to affix the tag. One consequence of the shorter lifespan of GPS ear tag transmitters is that more animals would need to be sampled (including capture and handling) to provide the same amount of information as is provided by satellite collars that last multiple years. For GPS ear tags relying on solar power, manufacturers have expressed concerns about the amount of sunlight and environmental temperatures in northern conditions where they have yet to be tested. Therefore, currently, satellite collars represent the best option for getting the necessary type and length of information to help inform management decisions. Use of collars, rather than ear tags, also reduces the number of animals that will undergo potential risks and stress associated with capture.

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłchq Government

Rationale for IR #5:

Collared ekwò are an integral part of ekwò management and maintaining a target of 70 collars (50 cows, 20 bulls) on the Sahti Ekwò herd is critical to obtaining reliable estimates of key parameters, survival rate being one of them. The JMP states (p. 10) that collar-based survival estimates are considered biased low due to fate uncertainty. However, it is important to also test the assumption that a collar does not adversely affect the individual's survival given that survival rates of collared ekwò are used in the IPM.

HARVEST

Information Request #6:

Please describe how the proposed fall cow harvest with an up to 1:1 harvest sex ratio will be implemented and monitored. In particular, please clarify:

Response: The proposed fall cow harvest would be implemented through the allocation and issuance of authorization cards to Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations in accordance with the allocations set out in the Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchǫ Government Joint Proposal on Management Actions for the Bluenose-East Barren-ground Caribou (Sahtı Ekwò) Herd 2027 – 2030.

- i. whether authorization cards will distinguish between cows and bulls;

Response: Authorization cards will clearly distinguish which sex may be harvested. Up to half of the authorization cards issued will be designated "bull only", while the remaining half will be designated "bull or cow until October 31; bull only as of November 1." This approach provides the opportunity for a fall cow harvest while ensuring that all harvest becomes bull-only after October 31.

- ii. whether the harvest sex ratio will apply to authorizations issued or to the actual reported harvest;

Response: Authorization cards will be issued in line with the maximum 1:1 harvest sex ratio.

- iii. whether the harvest sex ratio will apply separately to each harvester group or collectively across the region;

Response: The proposed 1:1 harvest sex ratio is applied to the entire NWT TAH of 395 and to each allocation to each Indigenous government and Indigenous organization with an allocation.

- iv. across the region;

Response: The joint management proposal was submitted to the Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resources Board. The TAH and proposed harvest sex ratio will apply to harvest within Wek'èezhìi.

- v. the period over which compliance with the harvest sex ratio will be assessed; and

Response: Compliance with the harvest sex ratio would be assessed throughout each season for the three-year period of the joint management proposal (2027-2030). Education and compliance promotion would continue to be supported by Renewable Resource Officers, community harvest monitors, and Guardian programs. These individuals play an important role in communicating

harvest requirements and ensuring harvesters understand that the fall season up to October 31 is an either-sex hunt for those holding the appropriate authorization card.

- vi. the maximum number of cows that could be authorized or harvested annually under the proposed approach.

Response: The current NWT TAH is 395 animals. Under the proposed maximum 1:1 harvest sex ratio, cow harvest could not exceed half of the total harvest. As a result, the maximum possible number of cows harvested in a year would be 197 animals. While authorization cards would include both bull-only and bull-or-cow opportunities, the 1:1 ratio functions as an upper limit on cow harvest. Actual cow harvest will likely be lower given the shorter season (fall only) for harvesting cows.

Submitted by: Sahtú Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchǵ Government

Rationale for IR #6: The JMP would permit a fall cow harvest with an up to 1:1 harvest sex ratio and states that harvest monitoring and the use of authorization cards will continue. However, it is not clear how the proposed harvest sex ratio will be administered or assessed in practice.

Information Request #7:

- i. Please detail and describe the approaches to accurately monitor the harvest (fall and winter) including considerations such as training, key data (including tracking sex ratio), whether mandatory or not, how unused cards are reallocated, data collation, data management, reporting, and reporting timelines.

Response: Multiple approaches will be undertaken to monitor harvest of Sahti Ekwò. First, Tłıchǫ Government has been conducting Ekwò Harvest Monitoring (EHM) for 6 years and has gained experience in monitoring caribou harvest during the winter, including specialized training for Ekwò Guardians and custom field books for recording data. The EHM program will be adapted for the fall, with Guardians joining the community hunting groups when they fly out to the barrenlands and recording observations of the herds and harvested individuals, including how many cows are harvested, what their body condition is, if a calf was seen with her, and whether she was lactating. The findings from this program are shared in a yearly report at the end of the harvest season (spring) to relevant management authorities and presented at various meetings. An analysis of the past 6 years of data is currently being conducted jointly with GNWT's Cumulative Impact Monitoring Program (CIMP) and will be shared with management authorities and community members. Second, GNWT will request that harvest be reported by Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations upon issuance of the authorization cards. Any reallocation of unused cards after the fall harvest will be decided by each of the Tłıchǫ Community Chiefs and the other Indigenous Governments and Indigenous organizations with a Sahti Ekwò harvest allocation. Authorization cards are not rolled over to the next harvest season. Lastly, information on harvest of Sahti Ekwò will be collected and shared as part of the Advisory Committee for Cooperation on Wildlife Management (ACCWM) Annual Herd Status Meetings.

- ii. With respect to tracking harvest numbers, please clarify if a calf dies because its mother is shot, do we count both the cow AND calf towards the number of tags used?

Response: Only the cow that is harvested will count towards the number of authorizations (tags) used.

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchǫ Government

Rationale for IR #7: The JMP explains that Tłıchǫ Government and GNWT will conduct *“enhanced harvest monitoring activities to ensure the number of cows and bulls harvested annually are accurately recorded”* (p. 38). Tłıchǫ Government commits to using Guardians during the fall hunt to monitor the harvest including the documentation of *“sex, age class, and*

location of harvested animals; monitor caribou movement and distribution along winter roads and traditional harvesting areas; record observations of caribou health and body condition; record any other wildlife observations including wolves; and record weather, snow, and ice conditions that may affect caribou movement.” And that by “... having a guardian present at the community hunts we will be able to gather more accurate harvest data” (p.40).

Information Request #8:

Please describe the adaptive management process that will apply specifically to the fall cow harvest. In particular, please clarify:

- i. when and how implementation of the fall cow harvest will be reviewed;

Response: The Joint Proposal on Management Actions for the Bluenose-East Barren-ground Caribou (Sahti Ekwò) Herd is for a three-year period from 2027-2030. Tẖchq̱ Government and GNWT will assess information collected and shared over that period, including at the ACCWM Annual Herd Status Meetings, when reviewing implementation of the fall cow harvest. Any additional or modified management actions, including those related to the fall cow harvest, would be considered in the next joint management proposal for the period after 2030.

- ii. how it will be determined whether the fall cow harvest is having an unanticipated or unacceptable effect;

Response: In the joint management proposal, GNWT and Tẖchq̱ Government propose continued scientific and Indigenous knowledge-based monitoring of herd abundance, demographics, and harvest that will provide information, such as cow survival rates, calf:cow ratios, and bull:cow ratios, to assess the overall trend and health of the herd, including potential unanticipated negative effects of the fall cow harvest.

- iii. what indicators, thresholds, or other circumstances would trigger consideration of a management response;

Response: Factors that would be weighed when considering a management response, include reported cow harvest exceeding the maximum allowed (197), rapid deterioration in trends of key herd demographic rates such as cow survival, or deterioration in the overall herd status (size and trend). Table 3 of ACCWM's *Taking Care of Caribou Plan* (ACCWM 2021) provides a summary of recommended management actions based on herd size and trend.

- iv. who will be responsible for reviewing the available scientific and community-based monitoring information and making resulting management decisions;

Response: ACCWM's Annual Herd Status Meeting provides the main forum for the sharing, collection, and review of scientific and community-based monitoring information for the Sahti Ekwò herd. Scientific and community-based monitoring information shared by GNWT, Tẖchq̱ Government, and ACCWM member organizations is compiled once per year and used to assess the status of the Sahti Ekwò herd. Management authorities including the GNWT and Tẖchq̱ Government take into consideration the ACCWM herd status and recommended management actions in the *Taking Care of Caribou Plan* (ACCWM 2021) when proposing management actions for the Sahti Ekwò herd to the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board (WRRB).

- v. what changes could be made to the fall cow harvest before the end of the three-year period, including whether the harvest sex ratio, fall season or authorization of cow harvest could be modified; and

Response: GNWT and Tłıchǵ Government propose that the fall cow harvest be in effect for the full three-year period of the joint management proposal (2027-2030). If changes are needed before the end of the three-year period, GNWT and Tłıchǵ Government would discuss options with the WRRB, including the possibility of submitting a new or amended joint management proposal for WRRB's consideration.

- vi. how conclusions and resulting management decisions will be documented and communicated before the subsequent harvest season.

Response: GNWT, Tłıchǵ Government and other Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations with Sahtı Ekwǵ harvest allocations will work collaboratively to communicate the proposed harvest sex ratio and authorization requirements to harvesters. GNWT will support communication efforts through social media and other public communications. Renewable Resource Officers, community harvest monitors, and Guardian programs will also receive information on harvest requirements to support outreach and education efforts within communities and on the land.

Submitted by: Sahtı Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchǵ Government

Rationale for IR #8: The JMP states that implementation of the fall cow harvest will be reviewed after the first year, that harvest information and management actions will be reviewed annually, and that the management approach may be reassessed if unanticipated consequences occur during the three-year period. However, the relationship among these review commitments is unclear, as is the process through which review findings could result in changes to the fall cow harvest before the end of the proposal period.

Information Request #9:

- i. Please outline in detail how the proposed changes in harvest sex ratio will be communicated to all harvesters to encourage and promote compliance.

Response: GNWT, Tłıchǵ Government and other Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations with allocations will work collaboratively to communicate the proposed harvest sex ratio and authorization requirements to harvesters. Authorization cards for a bull-or-cow fall harvest will clearly identify that they are valid until October 31. Starting on November 1, authorization cards can only be used to harvest bulls. Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations will have opportunities to communicate these requirements to harvesters when authorization cards are distributed. GNWT will support communication efforts through social media and other public communications. Community harvest monitors and Guardian programs will also receive information on the harvest requirements to support outreach and education efforts within communities and on the land. Renewable Resource Officers, harvest monitors, and Guardians will continue to play an important role in communicating harvest requirements directly to harvesters during the season. Particular emphasis will be placed on ensuring harvesters understand that the harvest is either-sex only for those holding the appropriate authorization card and only until October 31, after which all harvest is bull-only.

- ii. Detail and describe how compliance and enforcement activities will be undertaken with respect to Sahtı Ekwǵ harvest including considerations of personnel, logistics, effort and timing considering two cases:
 - a. The Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road (TCWR) is constructed and open to the harvesters; and,
 - b. The TCWR is not constructed and not open to harvesters.

Response:

- a. **The Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road (TCWR) is constructed and open to the harvesters;**

Tłıchǵ Government has been conducting an Ekwǵ Harvest Monitoring (EHM) program for 6 years along the TCWR, with a main monitoring camp at MacKay Lake. While the road is operational, Guardians are deployed to the camp on a 4-person crew on a rotating basis, typically every two weeks. At the camp, they interview Tłıchǵ hunters and provide them with resources on safety precautions, sustainable hunting practices, information about traditional use, and provide updates on the location of the Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Management Zone (MCBCMZ). Guardians also conduct patrols to monitor for wildlife and create incident reports for any wastage, poaching, wounding and overharvesting observed, with infractions reported to GNWT Renewable Resource Officers. Guardians also follow up with harvesters in the different Tłıchǵ communities to gather more information that might have been missed. Meetings are also

conducted with other monitoring programs (North Slave Métis Alliance [NSMA] and Yellowknives Dene First Nation [YKDFN]) to share information and plans. If the road TCWR is constructed the Tłıchǵ Government will continue to run the Ekwò Harvest Monitoring program in the same way they have previously.

If the TCWR is constructed and open to harvesters, GNWT will re-establish patrol stations used in previous years (Gordon Lake, Mackay Lake and Winter Road Camps (Lockhart Lake/Lac de Gras)) and maintain a consistent presence on the road throughout the period of road operations.

b. The TCWR is not constructed and not open to harvesters.

If the TCWR is not constructed, the use of the winter road corridor by harvesters will likely be limited. Monitoring and enforcement operations will be adaptable to where harvest activity occurs and rely on open communication between GNWT and the different Guardian programs on the land to constantly share new information and changes of plans.

The Tłıchǵ Government's EHM program will be adapted for the 2027 winter season with not having the TCWR. This will include monitors based in Wekweètì in the case that there is increased harvesting in that area and potentially establishing a monitoring camp in the MacKay Lake area depending on harvesting activities and opportunities. Meetings amongst the different Guardian programs and GNWT Renewable Resource Officers are being planned so that each party can share their monitoring strategies and determine the possibility of working together.

Without the TCWR in winter 2027, GNWT will adapt the location of its enforcement activities to where the harvesting activity is occurring. GNWT will set up remote patrol camps where needed along other operating winter roads (e.g., Gamètì and Wekweètì). GNWT will continue to monitor compliance with the MCBCMZ, and will use a combination of aerial, snowmobile and road-based patrols as needed. GNWT will continue to work closely with Tłıchǵ Government, YKDFN, and NSMA winter road monitoring and Guardians programs to share information about where harvesting is occurring and to monitor compliance with harvest regulations.

- iii. If not constructed, what impact do you estimate the closure of the TCWR will be on re-directing the harvest of ekwò elsewhere and how will this be managed?

Response: While closure of the TCWR may re-direct the harvest of ekwò to the Gameti and Wekweètì winter roads, the level of harvesting activity along these roads is likely to be lower than typically seen along the TCWR. This is due to the shorter period during which the Tłıchǵ winter roads are open (see Figure 1-D and Table 1-D, pages 53-54 of the joint management proposal) and because authorization cards (tags) are required to harvest caribou within hunting zones R/BC/01 and R/BC/02 which overlap with these roads. The number of tags available (395) to harvest caribou in these zones is determined by the TAH for Sahti Ekwò set out in the joint management proposal. Furthermore, the MCBCMZ may overlap with these roads during part of

the winter road season, further limiting harvest opportunities.

As outlined in the response to IR# 9(ii-b), GNWT will adapt the location of its enforcement activities to where the harvesting activity is occurring. Enforcement activities may need to be spread over a larger area than when the TCWR is open. Harvesters may still access the TCWR region via snowmobile and other means, but GNWT expects that the number of harvesters doing so will be much lower than when the TCWR is open.

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchǵ Government

Rationale for IR #9:

The JMP acknowledges the importance of continued work on communicating and increasing awareness of ekwò conservation issues, to educate harvesters on the importance of respectful harvest practices to reduce wounding loss and wastage. The JMP does not discuss in detail how the two governments will educate Indigenous harvesters on the proposed change in the Sahti Ekwò harvest sex ratio to promote compliance.

The JMP explains how GNWT will utilize existing four full-time Renewable Resource Offices in the Tłıchǵ region to ensure a lawful harvest occurs as the Gamètì and Wekweètì winter roads open and access to Sahti Ekwò becomes available. GNWT does not commit to having a full-time monitor or officer in Wekweètì to promote compliance and reduce risks of illegal harvest but rather that they will take an adaptive approach to allocating officer effort as the season progresses.

Information Request #10:

Please describe how health and body condition will be monitored during the fall and winter harvest (including the inclusion of tissue sample kits) and how this information could provide context and supporting information to further understand health and habitat observations collected during the Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è programs?

Response: The Tłchq Government's Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è and Ekwò Harvest Monitoring programs have customized field books to record information on health and body condition. The harvest field book will be adapted for the fall harvest, with changes made to include cow focused indicators such as lactation status, depth of back fat, and close association of a calf. An analysis of harvest data for the past 6 years is currently being conducted jointly with GNWT-CIMP, and a report will be produced. In the past, the Tłchq Government has worked with the University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine to provide Ekwò Guardians with sample kits to collect biological samples (including organs, muscle, bone, teeth and fecal). Tłchq Government will seek to continue this partnership into the future, along with working with GNWT's Wildlife Veterinarian.

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłchq Government

Rationale for IR #10:

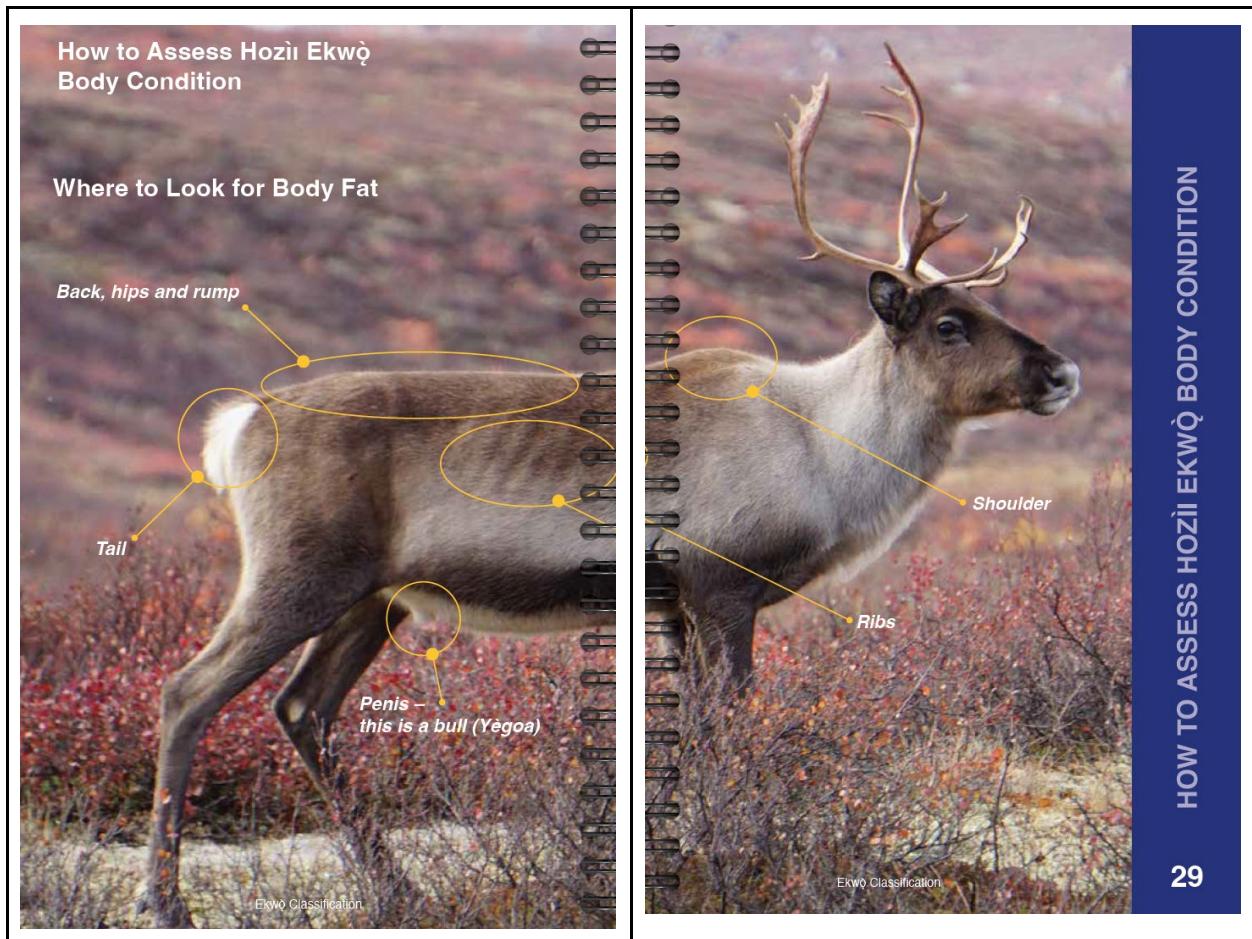
The JMP explains that recent research shows that climate change is likely to increase stressors to ekwò and that *“Warmer summer temperatures can cause thermal stress, affect vegetation (food), and increase insect activity, which causes caribou to use more energy, forage less, and nurse their calves less. Warming temperatures may also increase the impact of pathogens on caribou, by increasing insect activity and changing the development and infection rates of some pathogens.”* (p.11)

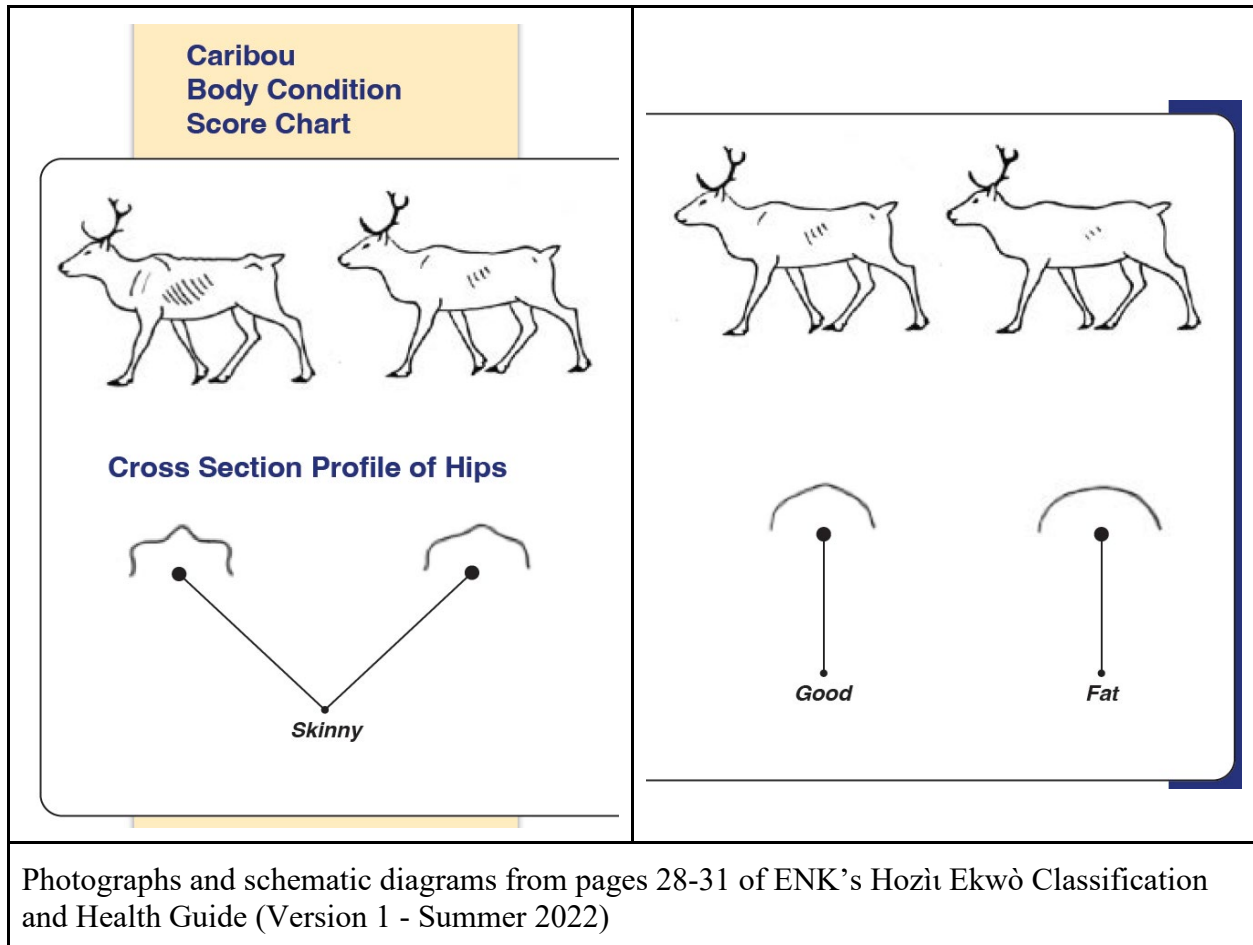
Health and condition monitoring during the fall and winter hunts will be particularly important in demonstrating whether Sahtì Ekwò are showing signs of stress and reduced condition and in turn less resilient to other stressors such as a cow harvest. Monitoring health and condition of female ekwò in the fall, for example, will record whether harvested cows are lactating as an indicator of the cow's summer condition, which can be compared with habitat conditions recorded during the Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è program.

Information Request #11:

What does ‘good conditions’ mean if not ‘fat’? How does a harvester differentiate between ‘fat’ and ‘good condition’?

Response: Good condition means that the caribou observed are healthy for the time of year they are seen. Caribou in good condition are neither fat with large rumps and hips with distended bellies, nor skinny with concave rumps and exposed ribs. For illustrative purposes, photographs and schematic diagrams from Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K’è fieldbooks are shown in the table below, which are used to help monitors and harvesters recognize qualitative differences in ekwò body condition. Although the ribs are evident and the Yègoa (young bull) in the fall photograph below does not have a rounded rump along the tail base which is characteristic of fatness in a mature bull; the Yègoa is in good condition because it is still growing and putting most of the energy and protein gained through food (that is not used for its daily needs) into its muscle and body frame. The healthy young bull had bright eyes, a clean fur coat and had a strong gait - it was in good condition.





Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Tł̥chq Government

Rationale for IR #11: Harvesters and elders can tell the difference between skinny and fat; however, while the JMP uses the terminology 'good condition', 'fat', and 'skinny', only fat is defined. TK information must be meaningful and understood by the Board, Participants, and the public if this information is to be used to make decisions regarding Sahti Ekwò herd.

Information Request #12:

- i. How has the Bluenose-East herd's Total Allowable Harvest been allocated among Indigenous groups since 2016, and what factors were used to determine those allocations?

Response: Since 2016, the allocation percentages for Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) have remained unchanged. While the TAH and total number of authorization cards available to each group has varied with the herd's population estimate, the proportional allocation among Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations has remained consistent. The allocation framework was originally developed using reported harvest information and was agreed to at a series of meetings of Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations with an allocation of Sahtì Ekwò harvest. This consensus allocation formula has continued to be used since that time, and currently includes allocations to Tłıchǫ harvesters, Sahtu harvesters, Dehcho harvesters, Inuvialuit harvesters, Northwest Territory Métis Nation harvesters, Akaitcho harvesters, and North Slave Métis Alliance harvesters.

- ii. How have changes in herd distribution, harvest accessibility, and regional harvest opportunities over the past decade been incorporated into the allocation framework?

Response: Changes in herd distribution, harvest accessibility, and regional harvest opportunities have not resulted in changes to the allocation formula over the past decade. The proportional allocation framework established through consensus among Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations has remained in place throughout this period. Management responses have instead focused on adjustments to the overall harvest levels which then changes the proportional allocation of the harvest to each Indigenous government and Indigenous organization. This approach has provided consistency and predictability for Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations while maintaining the allocation framework that was previously agreed to by management partners.

- iii. Have GNWT and the Tłıchǫ Government assessed whether current allocation proportions remain appropriate given the herd's range gradual shift away from its historical range and more toward Chief Drygeese Territory and the resulting impacts on YKDFN harvesters?

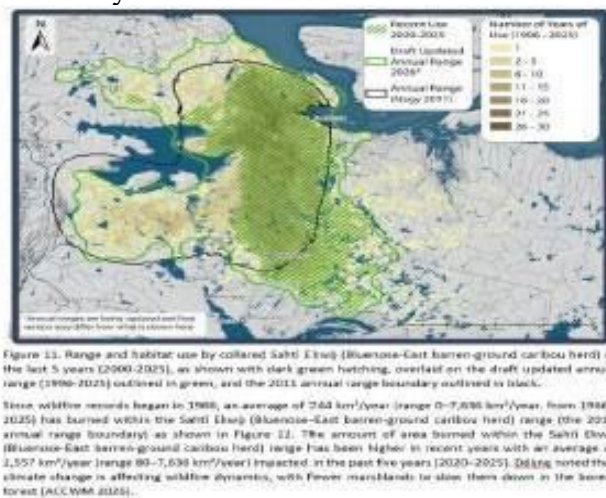
Response: GNWT and Tłıchǫ Government recognize that the distribution of the Sahtì Ekwò herd has changed over time and that these changes influence harvest accessibility. However, no changes to the allocation percentages have been considered. The current allocation reflects the consensus-based arrangement developed among Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations and has been applied consistently since its establishment. Any reconsideration of the existing allocation framework would require discussions with, and consideration by, all Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations with an allocation. As no such review has been initiated or requested through the current management process, the proposal maintains the

existing allocation framework.

Submitted by: Yellowknives Dene First Nation (YKDFN)

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłı̨chǫ Government

Rationale for IR #12: YKDFN acknowledges the significant efforts of Indigenous governments, communities, harvesters, governments, and monitoring programs across the Northwest Territories and Nunavut that have contributed to the collection and reporting of information on the Sahti Ekwǫ (Bluenose-East Barren-ground Caribou) Herd. This work provides an important foundation for collaborative management and informed decision-making. YKDFN notes that the monitoring results presented in the Joint Proposal indicate that the herd has experienced a gradual increase in abundance since 2021. YKDFN recognizes and welcome this encouraging trend. Figure 11 from the Joint Proposal illustrates both historical and recent home ranges of the Sahti Ekwǫ Herd. The map shows the 2020-2025 annual range in a dark green hatched pattern. Although not explicitly addressed in the proposal, YKDFN understands that this shift in annual distribution may have begun as early as 2016.



The map suggests that the herd's current annual range differs substantially from its historical distribution. In particular:

- The herd no longer appears to extend into the Sahtú region south of Great Bear Lake during the winter period.
- Use of areas northeast of Great Bear Lake appears limited and seasonal, likely occurring during late summer and early fall.
- Winter distribution appears to have shifted further southeast, with the leading edge of the migration extending into Chief Drygeese Territory.

These distribution changes may help explain the absence or near absence of reported harvest opportunities for Sahtú harvesters during the past three years.

The harvest information presented in Table 1 (below) in the Joint Proposal appears consistent with the observed range shift shown in Figure 11. Taken together, the data suggest that changes in herd distribution may be influencing the availability of harvesting opportunities among

regions and Indigenous rights holders.

Reported Harvest by Region	Year				
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Wek'ezhii	76 bulls	0	0	14 bulls	4 bulls
Sahtú	Not reported	88 (bulls and cows)	0 ¹	0 ¹	0 ¹
Nunavut	169 (bulls and cows)	170 (bulls and cows)	170 (bulls and cows)	174 (bulls and cows)	84 (bulls and cows) ²
Total	≥245	≥170	≥170	≥188	≥88

¹Harvest is assumed to be zero as Sahtú Ekwó have not been wintering near Déline.

²Harvest reported by KAA as of November 25, 2025. Harvest information is incomplete for 2025-26.

Finally, Table 3, p.24 in the Joint Proposal suggests a new revised allocation for TAH considering the recent increase of the bluenose-east caribou population estimate.

Harvester Group	Proposed allocation of TAH (395)	
	Proportion	TAH
Tłı̨chǫ	0.613	243
Sahtú	0.266	106
Dehcho	0.024	9
Inuvialuit	0.016	6
NWTMN	0.024	9
Akaįtcho	0.032	13
NSMA	0.024	9
Totals WRRB TAH only		395

Understanding the implications of recent distribution changes is important to ensuring that harvest allocation decisions remain fair, evidence-based, and reflective of current conditions experienced by YKDFN Indigenous harvesters across the herd's range and inside Chief Drygeese Territory.

HABITAT

Information Request #13:

Are there any specific habitat studies for ekwò proposed or underway to test whether habitat changes predicted by climate change models are occurring on the range of the Sahti Ekwò herd?

Response: GNWT and Tłıchǵ Government are not aware of proposed or ongoing ekwò habitat studies that are investigating changes in habitat predicted by climate change models on the range of the Sahti Ekwò herd. There have been few or no recent on the ground studies conducted on ekwò habitat quality and quantity in the Northwest Territories, with the exception of NWT CIMP project #187 titled “Vegetation productivity and phenology across the Bathurst caribou range” by Dr. Ryan Danby from Queen's University from 2017 to 2020. The purpose of this project was to map and analyze changes in ecosystem productivity and phenology across the entire range of the Bathurst herd, and to identify linkages between these changes and significant shifts in herd distribution and habitat use during the same time period. Results can be found in the [NWT Discovery Portal](#). More recently, a spatial projection project has been funded by NWT CIMP (#256) in 2025 titled “Forecasting potential habitat and range expansions or retractions of boreal and barren-ground caribou under changing climate, wildfire, anthropogenic disturbance, permafrost thaw, and vegetation”. Although this project is not directly testing whether changes in habitat are occurring on the Sahti Ekwò range, it aims to forecast potential barren-ground caribou range changes across the Northwest Territories in light of four major stressors (anthropogenic disturbance, climate change, wildfire, and permafrost thaw) and their cumulative effects at decadal intervals from the present to 2075. Lastly, NWT CIMP has a [Caribou Blueprint](#) for the next five-year period (2026-2030) that informs funding applicants of caribou-related cumulative impact monitoring and research priorities identified by key northern decision-makers and subject-matter experts. Individuals or organizations interested in investigating changes in habitat on the range of the Sahti Ekwò herd are encouraged to explore the Caribou Blueprint and submit a funding application to NWT CIMP.

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchǵ Government

Rationale for IR #13:

Details are presented about a seven-year plan to plant trees to restore areas affected by recent wildfires and climate change. Range quality and carrying capacity have been identified as key parameters in ekwò population dynamics. Sampling lichen biomass, for example, and measuring “shrubification” of the tundra could help provide important parameters in long-term monitoring of ekwò populations and predicting trends.

PREDATORS

Information Request #14:

Detail any proposed modifications or design changes to the diga den surveys and pup counts at active dens on the Sahti Ekwò range when applying the techniques used on the Kòk'èetì Ekwò range.

Response: GNWT would need to consider the cost, logistics and value of expanding the study area to include more of the Bluenose-East caribou (Sahti Ekwò) summer and late-summer ranges before proposing any changes or modifications to the existing diga den survey and pup count program. There is currently limited and dated historical data available for known wolf (diga) dens on the Sahti Ekwò summer range, which spans the North Slave and Sahtú regions as well as western portion of the Kitikmeot region. Conducting a wolf den survey across this large and remote area is expected to be quite expensive, logistically challenging, and potentially difficult to implement. If the number of active dens found can be anticipated to be low, it will be difficult to obtain meaningful sample sizes that would provide precise and accurate estimates of wolf abundance. Wolf dens have, however, been surveyed within a 74,400 km² area within the NWT portion of the summer range of the Bathurst (Kòk'èetì Ekwò) barren-ground caribou range from 1996-2013 and 2023-present. In some years, additional areas in Nunavut were also flown to survey eskers surrounding Contwoyto Lake. A map of the study area and flight tracks from the 2026 spring wolf den survey is provided as an example in Figure 3. The current NWT study area overlaps with portions of the annual and summer/late summer ranges of Sahti Ekwò and Beverly caribou herds. While the current study area boundary focuses on the Kòk'èetì Ekwò summer range, the goal of the den survey program is to provides an index of wolf abundance that may be of relevance to all three herds. Continuation or modification of the current den survey monitoring program is subject to review and annual appropriation of funding.

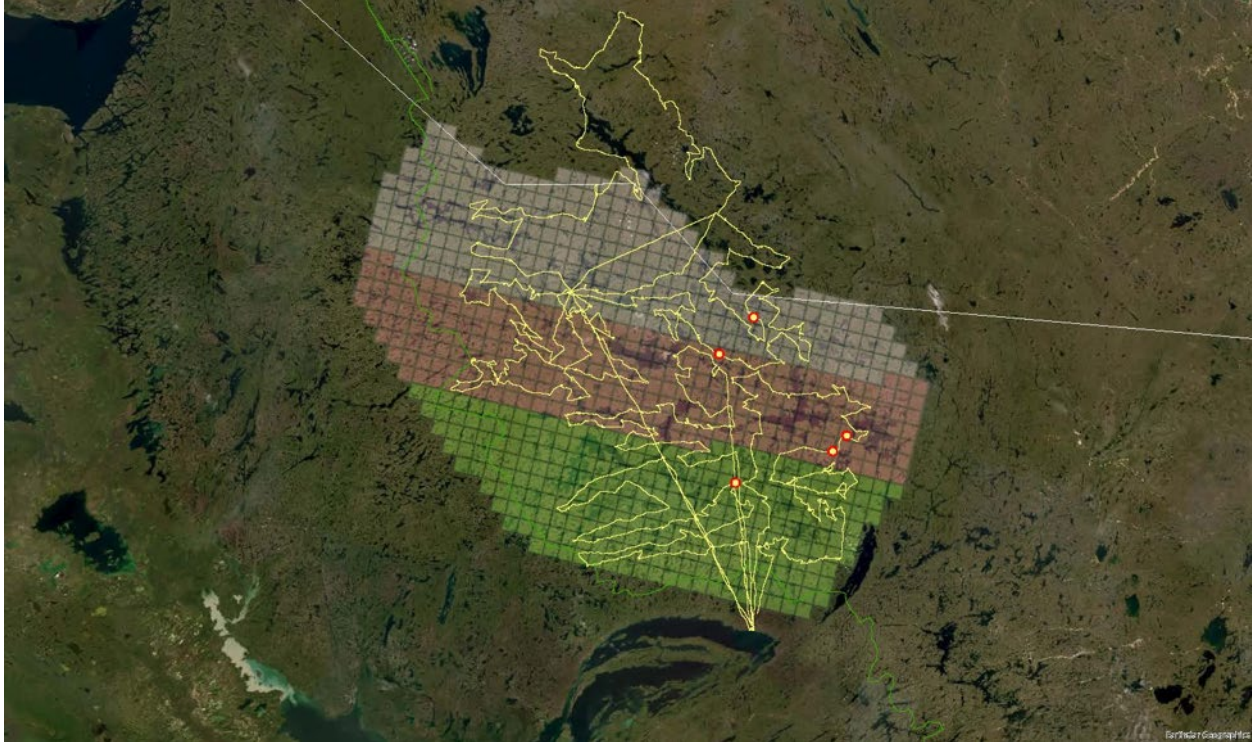


Figure 3. Wolf (diga) den survey study area (pale yellow 10x10 km squares) and flight tracks from the 2026 spring wolf den survey (yellow lines) (source: D.Cluff, unpubl.). The area is subdivided into 744 10x10 km grid cells and survey flights focus on covering esker habitat. Active dens detected in May 2026 are indicated by the red circles with yellow fill.

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories

Rationale for IR #14: The most practical method of measuring diga abundance on the tundra is likely den surveys, or a combination of den surveys and minimal counts. The JMP lists the continuation of diga den surveys and pup counts at active dens as a proxy for monitoring abundance and productivity (litter size); however, little detail about the proposed diga program and its application to the Sahtì Ekwò range has been provided.

EDUCATION

Information Request #15:

- i. Explain how Tłıchō cultural education about traditional harvest practices and people's traditional relationship with ɛkwò will decrease potential negative impacts on the Sahtı Ekwò herd?

Response: It has been 14 years since Tłıchō have harvested caribou on the barrenlands in fall; the last fall hunt took place in September 2012. Consequently, many of the younger generations growing up today have had little opportunities to travel to the ancestral fall harvesting locations to reconnect to cultural places and ɛkwò. Harvesting and maintaining connection with caribou is central for the Tłıchō cultural identity, most importantly it is a way to sustain the Tłıchō-ɛkwò relationship for today's youth, who have had little or no opportunities to experience the fall hunt and learn from elders' teachings. The fall caribou harvest is not only about hunting, it helps improve understanding of the interwoven connection that the Tłıchō culture has with ɛkwò.

Tłıchō cultural education taking place on the land during the fall harvest can help decrease negative impacts on the Sahtı Ekwò herd by increasing knowledge transfer between elders and youth of respectful harvesting practices and reinforcing the responsibilities that come with the Tłıchō relationship with ɛkwò. By being on the land with Elders and experienced harvesters, younger Tłıchō can learn how to harvest ɛkwò following cultural protocols in ways that respect ɛkwò. These protocols include understanding traditional harvesting methods such knowing the difference between a bull and cow, knowing why a bull or cow is harvested at certain times of the year, and which is best to use for hide preparation, knowing which cut of meat is used for drymeat making, and understanding why all the parts of the harvested ɛkwò is used and for what. The fall harvest and ɛkwò harvesting in a broader context helps to reinforce a cultural and geographical understanding of the Tłıchō landscape (Andrews and Buggey 2008), which includes traditional trails, sacred sites, place-based traditional stories and narratives, and heritage preservation (Andrews et al. 1998).

Cultural education also provides an opportunity to strengthen understanding that caribou are not simply an animal to be hunted for meat and hide, but that it is a keystone species for maintaining the ancient relationship between Tłıchō people and the land.

- *Our relationship with ɛkwò defines who we are. It's a foundation for our nàowo – a Tłıchō concept that encompasses our language, culture, way of life, as well as our knowledge and laws. (Zoe 2012; p. 69)*
- *People must honor the caribou when the caribou offer themselves. Disrespect in use is immoral. People must place caribou bones, hair and guts in appropriate locales, such as crevasses. Caribou want to assist Tłıchō. As elders say, caribou travel away from the tundra and to the boreal forest to give of themselves, returning to the tundra to give birth so that their young will know their own place. They travel outward along trails, helping human beings, allowing their bodies to be used, and if humans respect them, they return. If not respected, they will travel elsewhere. (Legat 2012; p. 83)*

Knowledge to maintain this relationship encourages younger harvesters to view themselves as having responsibilities to caribou, to the land and to future generations.

- *Key to becoming knowledgeable is the ability to find one's own personal truth while maintaining personal autonomy and having the ability to work cooperatively with others. Important aspects of being a responsible individual within a tightly knit group are learning both to observe while having one's own experience and sharing these occurrences while following those who are an authority in any given situation. The Tłıchǫ encourage younger people and the inexperienced to "watch" and "share what they experienced." (Legat 2012; p. 87)*

This approach of maintaining fall harvesting will emphasize respectful practices and also strengthen monitoring because people who spend time on the land are able to observe changes in caribou behaviour, and migration and share this information with other harvesters and decision-makers. In this way, cultural education supports both the continuation of Tłıchǫ harvesting practices and maintaining Tłıchǫ's responsibility to conserve the Sahtı Ekwò herd.

- ii. Given most ɛekwò wastage and wounding of ɛekwò occurs during the winter harvest, how will educating the youth during the fall harvest lead to respect and conservation of ɛekwò in the winter months?

Response: For many Tłıchǫ youth, the only opportunity to interact directly with caribou in recent years has been during the winter season driving by truck and snowmachine to harvest caribou along the winter road on Mackay Lake. The many reported instances of meat wastage and disrespectful harvesting along the road in recent winters likely reflect the limited opportunities younger harvesters have had to learn proper harvesting practices and the cultural teachings of respecting the land and caribou. As stated above, the loss of opportunities for youth to engage in the cultural practice of fall harvest also meant a loss of opportunities for intergenerational learning of traditional harvesting practices.

Providing opportunities for youth to participate in fall caribou harvests on the barrenlands provides a very different learning experience compared to hunting along the winter road. A fall harvest means that younger harvesters can take part in a slow harvest that provides the time to learn harvesting skills and traditional knowledge directly from elders. Compared to winter harvest by snowmachine, youth can have the personal experience of walking the tundra landscape, sitting and watching for hours on the hilltops, eventually harvesting a caribou by tracking it on foot. The fall harvest also provides opportunities to learn from experienced harvesters how to behave on the land, how to properly skin and butcher the animal, and how to prepare and carry the caribou bundle following Tłıchǫ traditional protocol. Compared to butchering several animals in a 40-below environment in the winter; the fall harvest allows younger harvesters to butcher an animal in a more pleasant environment with sufficient time to learn according to Tłıchǫ practices.

During the Tłıchǫ canoe trip to Deèzàati in August 2024, some youth had the experience of harvesting one bull caribou with Tłıchǫ elders, and packing the heavy caribou bundle on their back for several kilometres across the tundra landscape bringing the meat back to the camp. This

physically demanding experience allowed the youth to personally feel the value that caribou gives, and the responsibility of providing meat for the people. These personal experiences gained through cultural education during the fall harvest fosters respectful understanding of the land and caribou. When youth experience the physical effort of walking across the barrenlands, tracking and harvesting caribou, butchering and carrying the bundle to camp, they can develop an understanding of the responsibilities connected with harvesting, and encourage others to follow conservative cultural practices during future winter harvesting.

- iii. Given that hunters will need to differentiate cows from bulls, even during a 1:1 sex ratio harvest in the fall, will young Tłıchq hunters be taught how to differentiate between cows and bulls?

Response: The 14-year gap in harvesting caribou in the fall has left a generation of Tłıchq with limited opportunities to learn Tłıchq traditional knowledge about caribou, the introduction of the Ekwò Nàxoède K'è (ENK) has allowed for many Tłıchq with the opportunity to interact with caribou on the barrenlands like they historically used to. During the weeks they spend on the barrenlands during the program, many young Tłıchq have the opportunity to learn sex and age classification of caribou, including learning the different physical characteristics of cow and bull caribou. Part of the program is to find herds, and classify and count the number of bulls, cows and calves. Each summer, about 50 Tłıchq go out to our ENK camps, and during the past 11 years of the program, many young Tłıchq have learned how to distinguish between cows and bulls to be part of the caribou monitoring.

The opportunity for younger Tłıchq to hunt with older experienced hunters in fall on the barrenlands will facilitate knowledge transfer such as distinguishing between cows and bulls based on sex-specific physical characteristics, and imparting an appreciation and respect for the skills and physicality of hunting through walking long distances to track and pack caribou. The 14-year gap in fall harvesting has led to a loss in knowledge about caribou and fewer young hunters knowing sex and age classification of caribou. Restarting the cultural practice of a slower harvest based on walking provides the time to see and experience to learn how to classify caribou before harvesting caribou.

The Ekwò Nàxoède K'è program has developed a fieldbook named Hozì Ekwò Classification and Health Guide. The fieldbook was created as a tool for young Tłıchq joining the program to learn caribou age and sex classification, based on Tłıchq terminology. Tłıchq Government plans to print copies of the fieldbook and provide to the younger hunters who are part of the fall harvest to learn how to differentiate between cow and bull caribou. It will also be shared on the Tłıchq Government website and on social media once it is updated.

To minimize any potential negative effects of orphaning calves during the fall harvest, Tłıchq Government will recommend that hunters avoid shooting cows that are

accompanied by calves, especially if the pair are on their own or in a small group. The recommendation and rationale to minimize orphaned calves will be discussed with the *K'awo* (hunt boss) and Ekwò Guardian(s) - who would be in the field to monitor the fall hunt.

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Tłıchǫ Government

Rationale for IR #15: The proposal suggests that cultural education about ɬekwò during the fall hunt will lead to better conservation tactics given cultural laws associated with ɬekwò and respect for ɬekwò.

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