

## Wek'èezhì Renewable Resource Board

### Management Proposal

#### 1. Applicant Information

##### Project Title:

Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchq Government Joint Proposal on Management Actions for the Bluenose-East Barren-ground Caribou (Sahtì Ekwò) Herd 2027 - 2030

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#### 2. Management Proposal Summary

**Start Date:** July 1, 2027

**Projected End Date:** June 30, 2030

**Length:** 3 years

**Project Year:** 1 of 3

The Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) appears to be on a slow increasing trend in abundance since 2021, with lots of calves and with animals in good condition. In 2026, the Advisory Committee for Cooperation on Wildlife Management (ACCWM) assessed the status of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) as “Yellow”, representing intermediate and increasing numbers. Tłıchq Government’s Ekwò Nàxoèdee K’è caribou monitoring program and Kugluktuk Angoniatit Association (KAA) data show lots of calves and yearlings in 2024 and 2025 (KAA), with caribou in overall good or fat condition in the fall since 2022 (Tłıchq Government). Improved habitat conditions were noted in both areas of the range for 2025. Aerial surveys have shown consistently good calf survival in 2020-2025. Bull:cow ratios showed a decrease in fall 2025 from consistent, higher levels in 2020-2024. The 2025 Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) abundance estimate is about 29,000 caribou

(28,759 adult caribou; 95% CI 25,997–31,816). This is lower than the 2023 estimate but remains higher than the 2021 estimate. Collectively, the community-based and scientific observations and monitoring results are consistent with an increasing trend.

Wildfire on the winter range has increased in amount burned in recent years (2022-2025) and while there has been some human development activity on the calving, post-calving, and winter ranges, overall there are low levels of physical disturbance on the range. Harvest of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) has been managed under a TAH of 395 since 2024 in Wek'èezhìi, but actual harvest has been very low.

As both caribou and northern communities face changes in the future due to climate change and other factors, it remains important to maintain the cultural relationship between Indigenous people and caribou across barren-ground caribou ranges. Tłıchq Government and Government of the Northwest Territories' Department of Environment and Climate Change (GNWT-ECC) propose continuation and modification of key management actions for a period of three years beginning in July 2027. These management actions are proposed to decrease potential negative impacts on Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) and to support the cultural relationship between Indigenous people and caribou.

The recommended management actions include:

- maintain the current Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) of 395 caribou in Wek'èezhìi;
- establish a fall harvest season (August 1 to October 31) that permits up to a 1:1 sex ratio, and a bull-only harvest for the remainder of the year;
- continue work to understand the impact of wolves on caribou herds;
- mitigate impacts of human development and wildfire disturbance;
- provide education on harvest practices and caribou conservation; and
- continue to monitor and support collaborative research of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd).

Collectively, through these management actions and collaboration with all co-management partners throughout the herd's range, Tłıchq Government and GNWT-ECC acknowledge the central role of Indigenous communities in the stewardship of caribou, including the strengthening of intergenerational knowledge transfer, the support of sustainable and respectful harvest practices, and the advancement of the continued recovery of the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd).

**Permits:** NWT and Nunavut Wildlife Research Permits will be required to conduct monitoring recommended in this proposal.

### 3. Background of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East Barren-ground Caribou Herd) and Management Context

The Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) use habitat that extends from the Bluenose Lake area west of Kugluktuk, Nunavut, around Great Bear Lake to the east and down into Wek'èezhìi (Figure 1). This herd declined in abundance between 2010 and 2018, from an estimate of about 120,000

caribou in 2010 (Adamczewski et al. 2017) to about 20,000 caribou in 2018 (Boulanger et al. 2019). This was consistent with declines in other migratory herds during the same period. Management actions were taken to conserve the herd including implementing harvest restrictions and a five-year wolf management program to reduce predation on the herd (2020–2024). At the same time, enhanced monitoring of the herd was initiated; surveys were conducted more frequently and collar numbers were increased from 50 collars (30 cows and 20 bulls) to 70 collars (50 cows and 20 bulls). Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) has been increasing since 2021, and in response, the total allowable harvest (TAH) was increased from 193 to 395 bulls within Wek’èezhì, and the intensity of monitoring returned to the pre-2019 schedule (WRRB 2025). These management actions remain in place (WRRB Motion #1030-05-05-2026). In addition to actions within Wek’èezhì, there is currently a TAH of 450 caribou of either sex for Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) in Nunavut for the Kugluktuk Angoniatit Association (KAA) and a harvest limit of 30 caribou in the Sahtu Settlement Area, as set out in the *Belare Wile Gots’è ʔekwè’ – Caribou for All Time – A Délne Got’ine Plan of Action 2021-2023* (Délne ʔehdzo Got’ine 2021), a community-based plan developed by the Délne Renewable Resources Council.

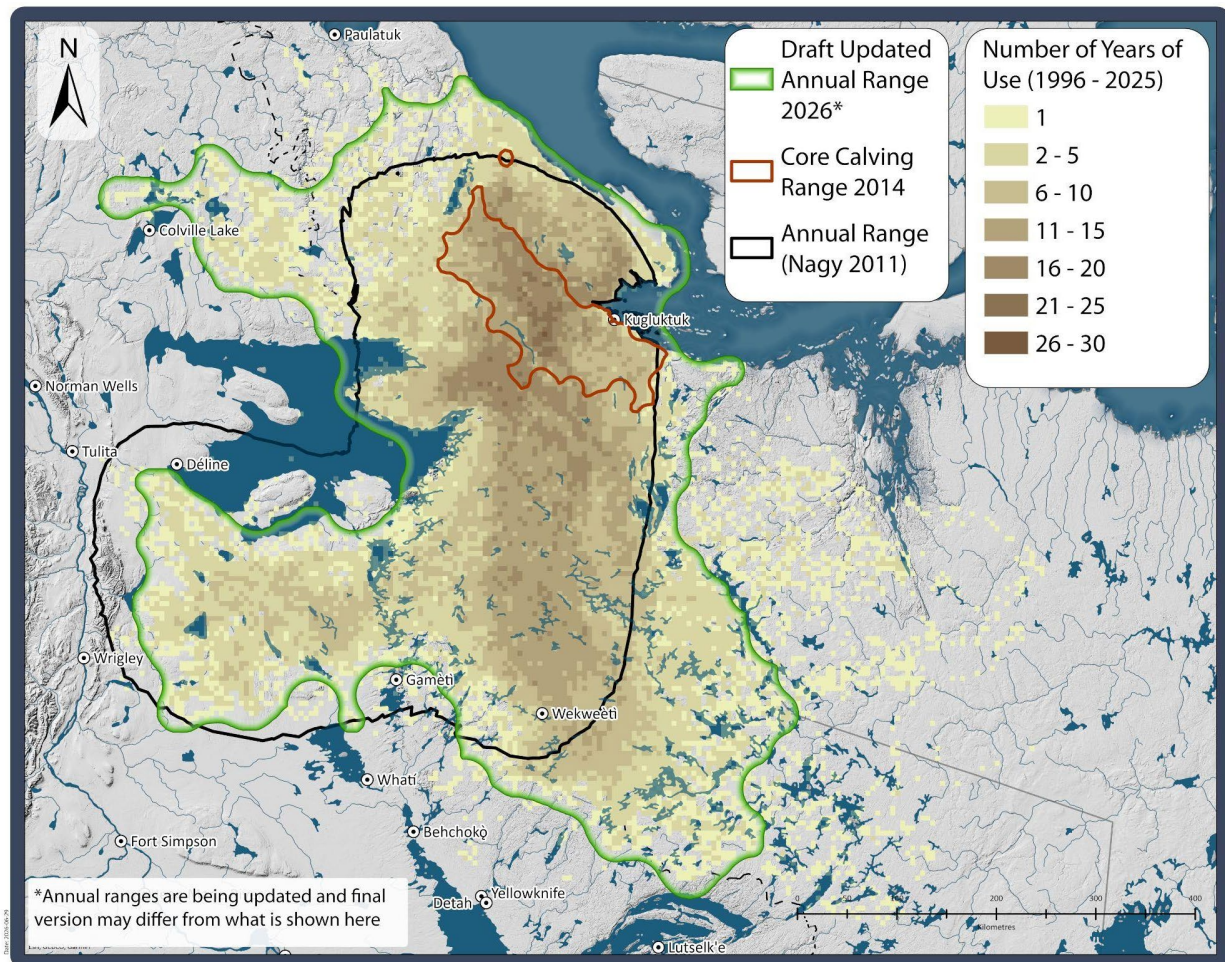


Figure 1. Annual range use by the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd). The annual range boundary from 2011 used in previous documents is shown in black. The draft updated annual range

from 1996-2025 is shown in dark green with the density of use (i.e., number of unique years of use by collared caribou) shown in the background.

### **Management Context for Sahtì Ekwò**

The Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board (WRRB)'s Reasons for Decision reports (WRRB 2016a, 2016b, 2019, 2022, 2025) provide an overview of previous proceedings from 2010, 2016, 2019, 2022 and 2024 along with the Board's determinations and recommendations for monitoring and management of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) in Wek'èezhì. Overall guidance for management and monitoring of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) is provided in the Advisory Committee for Cooperation on Wildlife Management (ACCWM)'s *Taking Care of Caribou Management Plan for the Bluenose-East, Bluenose-West, and Cape Bathurst Herds* (ACCWM 2021).

The ACCWM is established to exchange information, help develop cooperation and consensus, and make recommendations regarding wildlife and wildlife habitat issues that cross land claim and treaty boundaries. The committee consists of Chairpersons (or alternate appointees) of the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (NWT), Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board, ʔehdzo Got'ıne Gots'ę Nákedı (Sahtú Renewable Resources Board), WRRB, Kitikmeot Regional Wildlife Board, and Tuktut Nogait National Park Management Board. Under the Taking Care of Caribou Management Plan, the ACCWM determines a herd status each year based on a "traffic light" approach, and develops an annual Action Plan with herd-specific management actions based on the status of the herd.

For the 2026-2027 season, the ACCWM reviewed the information presented at its 2025 Annual Status Meeting in November 2025 and assessed the status of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) as "Yellow", representing intermediate and increasing numbers. The ACCWM decision was based on assessing community-based and scientific information from across the herd's range. Community information was provided by the KAA, whose observations are centered on the calving and summer range areas, Tłıchq Government with observations during the late summer and fall, and from Délıne, who have not observed barren-ground caribou in their area in many years but provided information on range and habitat conditions for the winter range of the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd).

As noted in the ACCWM Bluenose-East Action Plan, the KAA reported observing a lot more calves in 2024 and 2025, lots of yearlings in spring 2025, and many groups of caribou passing through Twin Lakes. KAA saw lots of bulls in 2024 and fewer in 2025, and fewer sick caribou harvested in 2025 than in 2024. Tłıchq Government observed that caribou at Deèzàatı (Point Lake) in the fall were overall fat or in good condition.

Communities also reported on Ekwò range conditions to help the ACCWM assess the status of the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd). KAA reported good vegetation conditions with a cooler summer and moderate insects in 2025, and Tłıchq Government reported that vegetation and Ekwò food, including abundant mushrooms, were overall good and of healthy quality around Deèzàatı (Point Lake) in September 2025. KAA, Tłıchq Government and Délıne all reported signs of climate change: changing insects (i.e., horseflies) in Kugluktuk; hotter and drier summers with earlier spring and later fall seasons reported by Délıne, and substantially lower water levels reported around Deèzàatı (Point Lake) by Tłıchq Government.

While the Tłıchq Government and Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) do not sit on the ACCWM, both governments support the “Yellow” category (intermediate and increasing numbers) for Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd). Although the 2025 herd estimate was lower than the 2023 herd estimate, the modelled population trend as well as other indicators collected from community-based and scientific-based information suggest the herd has been increasing since 2021. We note potential emerging issues regarding climate change, caribou health, and the need to continue to collect robust data to understand the herd trend as trends are not always linear and can also fluctuate over shorter time periods (i.e. survey results should be interpreted in the context of multiple years and alongside information from Indigenous knowledge).

Further supporting information for this trend in Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) is provided below.

### **Scientific Monitoring of Sahtì Ekwò**

Scientific-based monitoring information comes from the movements, health and survival of GPS collared caribou, and from composition and abundance surveys. It also includes caribou health information assessed from samples collected across the herd’s range.

#### **Calving Ground Fidelity**

The annual calving area used by females has shifted northward towards the Arctic coast over the past 30 years. Most female caribou in the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) have continued to show fidelity to this calving area (Figure 2). Between 1996 and 2025, 94% (447/477) of collared females in the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) with at least 2 calving seasons of data returned to this calving area (Figure 3). However, 6% of collared females used more than one calving ground with 2.7% (13/477) moving to the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) calving ground from a different calving ground and 3.6% (30/477) collared Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) females going to a different calving ground.

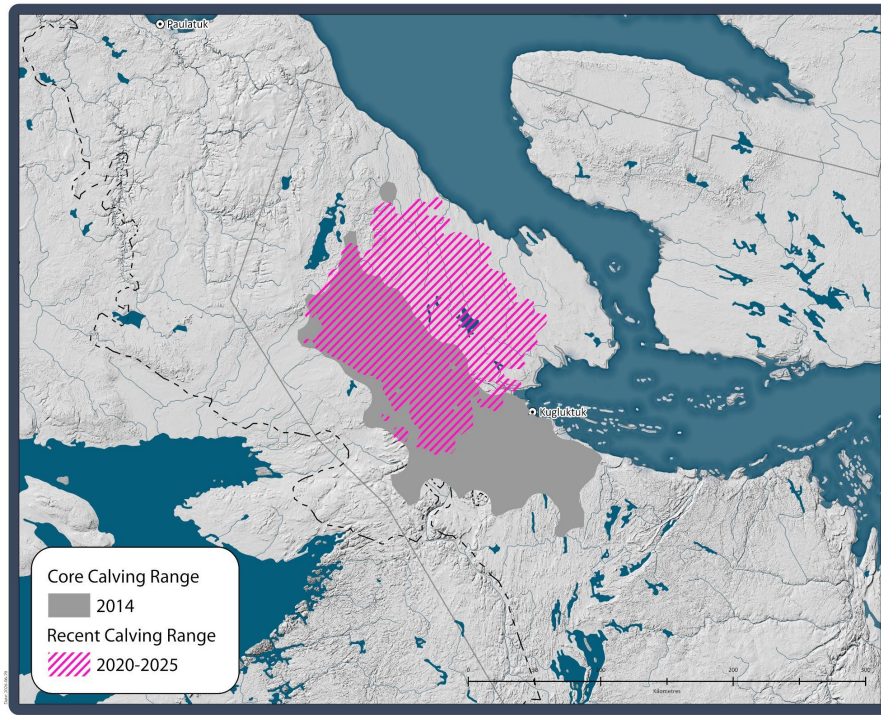


Figure 2. Calving ranges used by the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) as mapped from collar data since 2005. The grey outlines the area used by adult females during the calving season from 2005-2012 (published in 2014 but found in the NWT Species and Habitat Viewer) and the pink hatching shows areas used in the past 5 years (2020-2025).

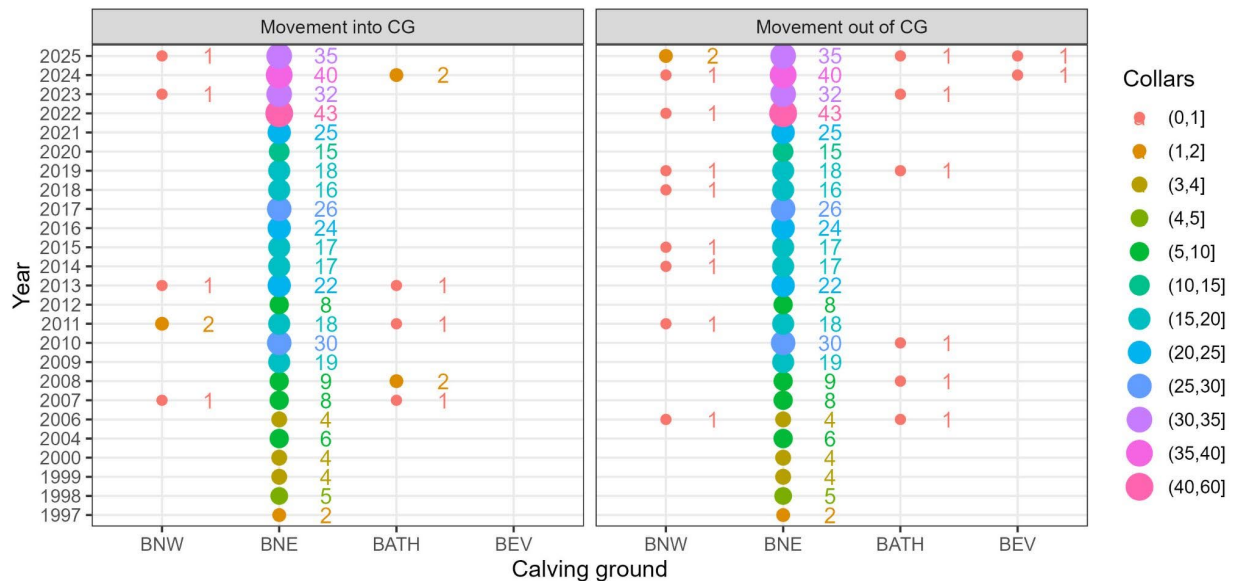


Figure 3. Frequency of collared adult female caribou returning to and moving in/out of the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) calving ground. The left panel shows how many collared adult females returned to the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) calving ground (BNE column) or moved to this calving ground after using a different calving ground the previous year (BNW = Bluenose-West; BNE = Bluenose-East; BATH = Bathurst, BEV = Beverly). The right panel shows where

caribou calved the year after calving on the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) calving ground (returning or moving to a different calving area). Only collared female caribou with 1+ years of calving season data are included.

### **Pregnancy Rates and Composition Surveys**

Pregnancy status is determined for collared cows at time of their capture in March and is based on progesterone levels in blood samples collected. Pregnancy rates of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) cows were lower in 2022 (4/10 cows tested were pregnant), and high from 2023-2025, with 24/25, 17/17, and 24/25 cows tested pregnant in 2023, 2024, and 2025, respectively (Figure 4).

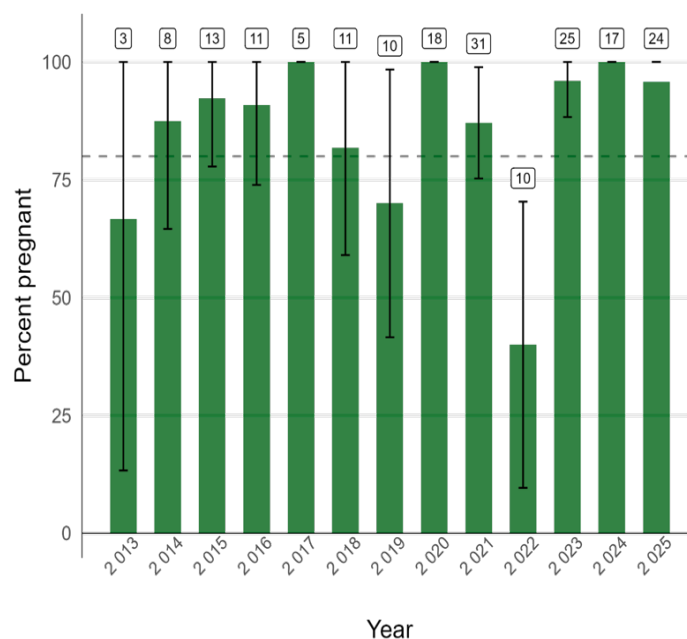


Figure 4. Trends in pregnancy rates for the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) based on progesterone levels in cows captured for collar deployment (sample size is number of cows tested each year, shown in the box above each year's data).

Composition surveys in June, in years with calving ground surveys, provide information on the proportion of breeding females to non-breeding females on the calving ground, which is related to pregnancy rates from the previous fall. The proportion of breeding females on the calving ground in 2025 was high (0.90; 95% CI 0.88-0.92; Figure 5a).

Composition surveys in the fall provide calf:cow ratios, which are an index of calf survival from calving until ~4.5 months old, and similar surveys in late winter provide an index of calf survival from calving until ~9 months old. Fall calf:cow ratios were 0.49 (95% CI 0.46–0.52) in 2024 and 0.49 (95% CI 0.45–0.52) in 2025, and have been consistently above 49 calves:100 cows in annual surveys since 2020 (Figure 5b). Late winter calf:cow ratios have been above 40 calves:100 cows since 2020, and was 0.48 (95% CI 0.46 – 0.50) in 2024 (no survey in 2025; Figure 5c). These ratios are indicative of very good calf survival during this

time period. On average, these indicators for breeding caribou and calf survival have been consistently higher from 2020 to 2025 than during the declining phase between 2010 and 2018 (Figure 5).

Fall composition surveys also provide a ratio of adult males to adult females when both sexes are together for the breeding season. Bull:cow ratios were higher (0.58–0.69) from 2020 to 2024. Bull:cow ratios were 0.62 (95% CI 0.56–0.68) in 2024 and were lower in 2025 at 0.38 (95% CI 0.33–0.43; Figure 5d). Higher bull:cow ratios were observed in the 1980s when herds were large and increasing (average ratio of 0.66 across six fall composition surveys [Gunn et al. 1997]), and lower bull:cow ratios (0.31–0.38) were observed in 2006–2009 when the Bathurst herd was declining (Nishi et al. 2014). The bull:cow ratio in 2025 suggests lower survival of bulls in 2024–2025, but these surveys should be evaluated as a trend over time as the coverage of a single survey can miss groups with more or fewer bulls (or calves); therefore, less certainty can be applied to a single year of data. To help account for this uncertainty, the mean 2024 and 2025 fall bull:cow ratio values were used to extrapolate the 2025 herd estimate.

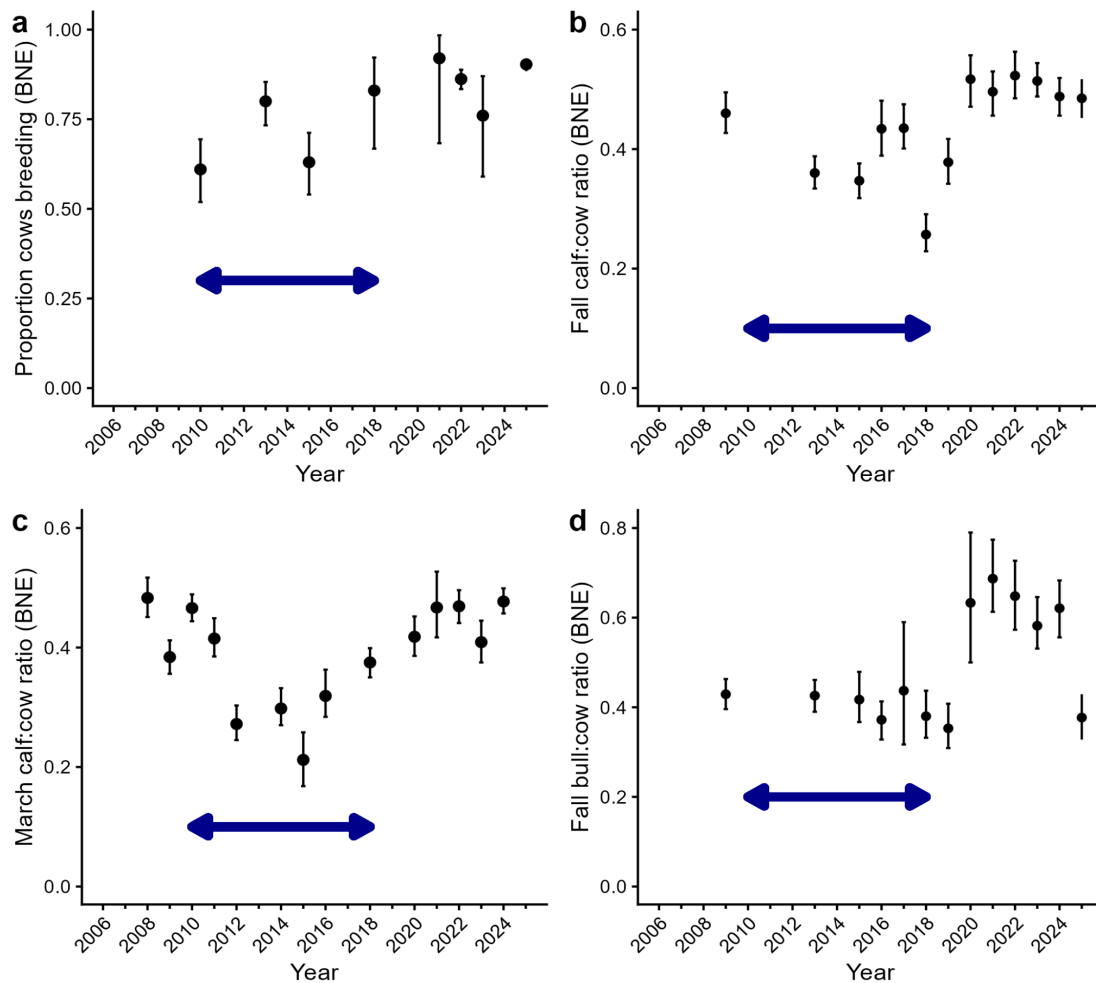


Figure 5. Trends in demographic parameters for the Sahtì Ekwè (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd): (a) proportion of females on the calving ground that are breeding vs. not breeding, based on June calving ground surveys; (b) fall calf:cow ratios as an index of summer/fall calf survival; (c) late winter calf:cow ratios as an indicator of calf survival to ~9 months old; (d) bull:cows ratios based on fall

composition surveys to determine the adult sex ratio of the herd during the rut season. The horizontal blue arrow indicates the 2010-2018 period when the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) was declining.

### **Herd Abundance Estimates**

Calving ground surveys are used to estimate the adult females in the herd. The total herd size is extrapolated using information from fall bull:cow ratios to estimate the adult males in the herd. In 2025, Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) was estimated to be about 29,000 caribou (28,759 adult caribou; 95% CI 25,997–31,816). This is lower than the herd estimate in 2023 of about 39,500 caribou, but higher than the herd estimate in 2018 (about 19,300 caribou) and 2021 (about 23,200 caribou). Trends in adult female abundance and herd abundance for the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) since 2010 are shown in Figure 6.

In the *GNWT and Tłıchq Government Joint Proposal on Management Actions for the Bluenose-East Barren-ground caribou (Sahtì Ekwò) Herd 2024-2026* (Tłıchq Government and GNWT 2024), it was noted that the demographic indicators from 2018 to 2023 pointed to healthy trends associated with an increasing herd, but a more moderate increase than the 2021 to 2023 abundance estimates was suggested. Although the overall information was very consistent with a healthy and increasing herd, the 2024 Joint Management Proposal cautioned in interpreting the true rate of increase until a further abundance estimate was available. Integrated population modeling (IPM; see section below), which integrates information from collared caribou, calving ground surveys, and composition surveys, suggests the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) has increased at a slower rate since 2021 rather than the sharp increase from 2018 to 2023 followed by a decline in 2025 (Figure 6).

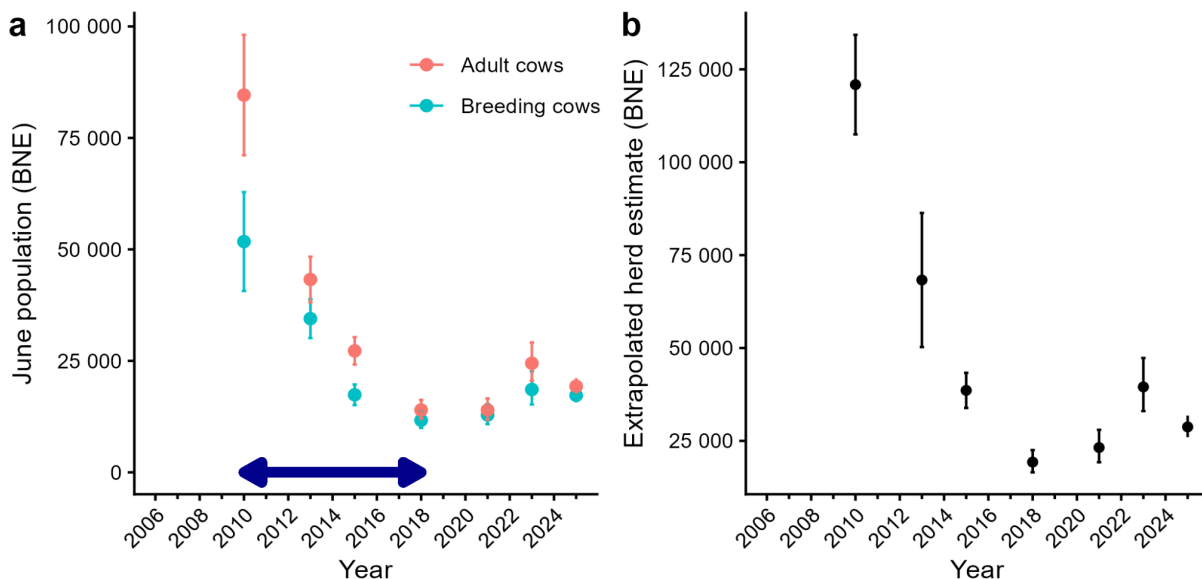


Figure 6. Trends in demographic parameters for the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd): (a) estimates of the number of adult females; (b) herd abundance estimates (i.e., total number of adult caribou).

### **Collared Adult Caribou Survival**

GPS collars provide information on the survival of collared caribou, which are used to represent the survival of cows and bulls in each herd. Annual survival rates for cows and bulls are estimated for the June-May biological year, using monthly survival rates based on the number of active collars and mortalities documented each month (Figure 7). Collar-based estimates are considered to be biased low due to fate uncertainty (e.g. if a collar becomes stationary due to collar failure but is assumed a mortality event) but can be compared to survival estimates from integrated population models (IPM) that consider collar-based survival along with other demographic data. The IPM estimate of adult cow survival for the 2024-25 caribou year was 0.84 (95% CI 0.78–0.89) compared to the collar-based estimate of 0.77 (95% CI 0.65–0.85).

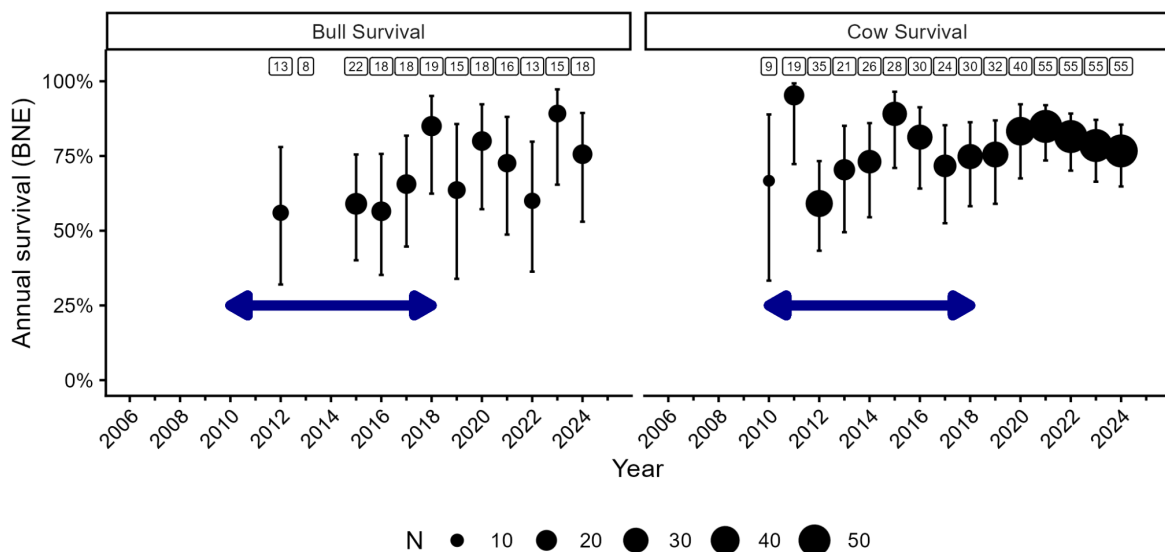


Figure 7. Collar-based survival estimates of adult (a) bulls and (b) cows in the Sahti Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd).

### **Integrated Population Modelling**

Trends in herd abundance (increasing, decreasing, or stable) can be assessed by comparing herd abundance estimates, which are primarily based on calving ground surveys to count the number of adult (2+ year old) females in the herd, with the number of bulls estimated from sex ratio surveys during the fall breeding season. However, other valuable data are gathered during field surveys at other times of year and in years without calving ground surveys, that can contribute to a more complete understanding of how a herd is doing. Integrated Population Models (IPMs) provide a way to estimate the herd trend (and other parameters, e.g., calf survival) using all these datasets, and can provide a more informative understanding of herd dynamics as a result.

The IPM for the Sahti Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) uses the demographic data (breeding and total adult female estimates on the calving ground, calf:cow ratios in the fall and late winter, bull:cow ratios in the fall, and the survival rates from collared caribou) to estimate the most likely

parameter values that would result in the observed trends across all the data. The IPM uses all the available information together, accounting for imprecise or missing data, to model population trends, which can be more informative than only considering the trend between calving ground survey abundance estimates. More information about the underlying model structure and its assumptions are detailed in Appendix A. The IPM results suggest that the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) has been increasing since 2021 (Figure 8).

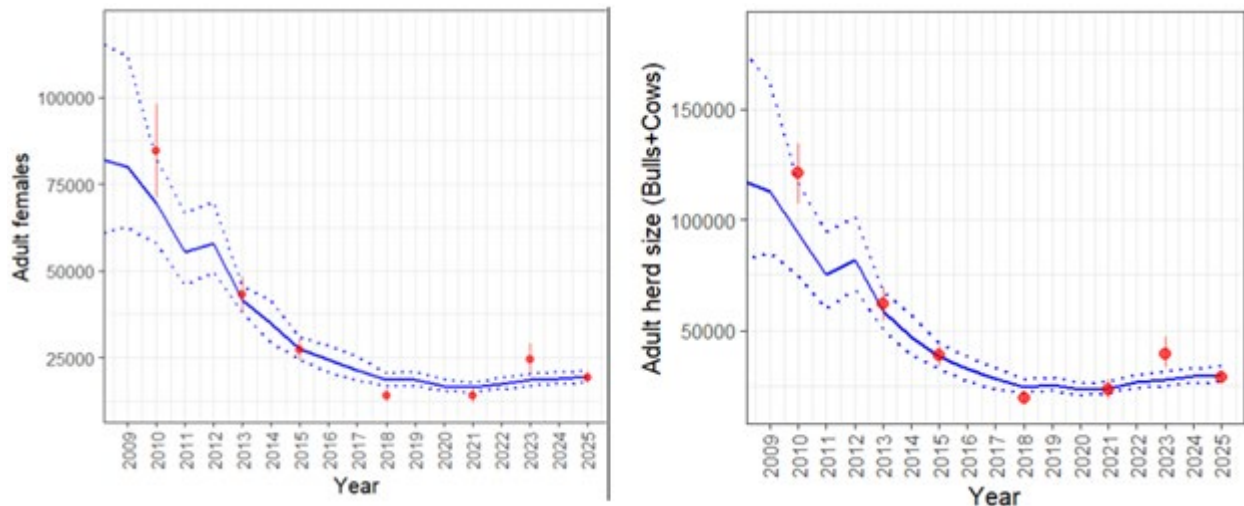


Figure 8. Estimates of the trend in (a) number of adult females and (b) total adult caribou in the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) from the IPM (blue line) compared to the survey estimates (red dots).

### **Research Into Factors that Affect Caribou Population Trends**

Recent and ongoing research into barren-ground caribou has provided insights into some potential drivers of population trends (NWT CIMP 2026). These studies have shown that climate change is likely to increase stressors to barren-ground caribou, with average warmer summer temperatures associated with reduced survival in the current season and to a lesser extent, the following year. 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. In 2023, Kugluktuk harvesters reported health abnormalities in some harvested Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd), particularly inflammation observed as fluid in the gut cavity and around joints. Similar health issues were also reported to GNWT's Department of Environment and Climate Change (ECC) across other caribou ranges where harvesters observed inflammation causing fluid surrounding organs, and threadlike roundworms in the gut cavity. These incidents were determined to be caused by infections from filarioid nematodes that are transmitted by biting insects (Thomas et al. 2025). In Scandinavia, researchers found that filarioid nematodes impact reindeer more when infected reindeer experience consecutive summers with warmer temperatures. Pathogens and infections occur in all wildlife populations, even healthy ones, and typically do not result in disease or death, although this is possible in extreme cases. Community

monitoring and collaborative research with health experts will help to monitor for emerging issues related to caribou health.

Climate change is also affecting caribou habitat by increasing growth of shrubs on the tundra (replacing lichen), the deterioration of eskers and permafrost-supported waterbodies, and changes to drought and wildfire regimes. Other factors like lower snow depth in winter and higher spring precipitation can also negatively impact caribou survival, though future trends in precipitation are more uncertain.

In general, caribou can survive sub-lethal stressors until they are able to recover or to regain body condition used to meet higher energetic demands. However, stressors can accumulate to the degree that they cause a decline in body condition and pass critical thresholds that increase their risk of mortality. Collared caribou show lower movements in the weeks prior to death, compared to movements of caribou surviving during the same time, suggesting that reduced movements result from lower body condition or other stressors or injury that make caribou more susceptible to natural mortality, including predation events.

### **Tłıchq Traditional Knowledge Monitoring of Sahtı Ekwı**

Tłıchq Government has been operating the Ekwı Nàxoèdee K'è program on Deèzàatı (Point Lake) since 2020, monitoring the Sahtı Ekwı in the fall. Below is an overview of monitoring results from 2022 to 2025.

#### **Body Condition and Health**

During fall 2022, the Sahtı Ekwı were in overall good body condition and healthy. Adult bulls and cows were described as “good and fat”. Bulls had large antlers, white neck manes, new and clean coats, and rounded rumps and backs due to thick fat layers on their backs. There were 136 bulls observed, 76% of which were fat, and the rest were in good condition. For the cows, they had straight and rounded backs due to the fat layer on their back. There were 143 cows observed, 73% were fat and the rest were in good condition. Through September, there was little to no harassment of caribou from biting insects. Additionally, no wolves were seen following or chasing the herds, and currently there were no fall hunters. Without any disturbance, the animals were eating peacefully throughout the day. An elder noted that most adult caribou showed very large bellies, and explained how this is different compared to earlier years:

*“Before (until the 2000s) when we hunt on barrenlands around Rawalpindi Lake, the caribou did not have large bellies as we see now; before people [hunters, outfitters] were bothering caribou, chasing them around, and they could not settle down to relax in one area as now. Now we see them eating and resting all day; their belly gets big.” – Tłıchq elder*

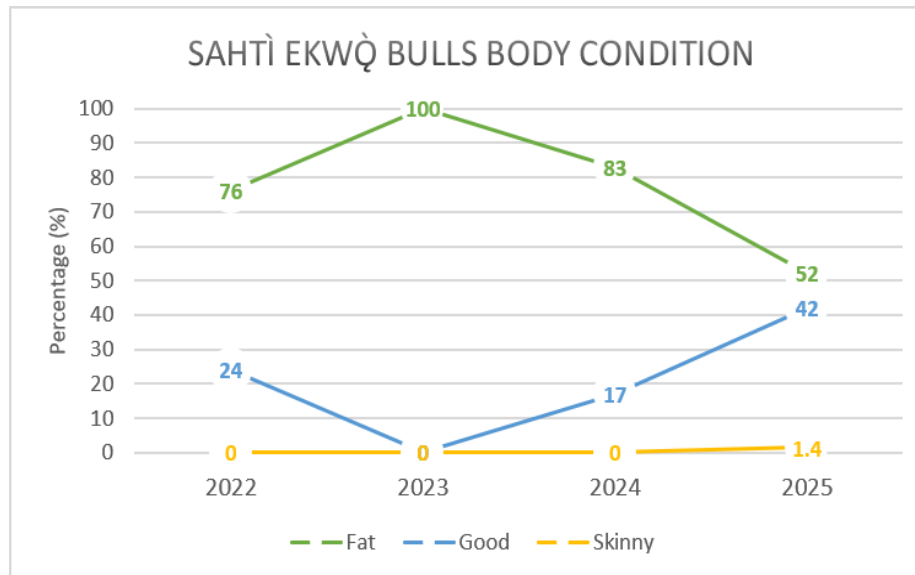
During fall 2023, all the caribou appeared healthy and in good body condition. Most cows were “fat” and described as “good”. Body condition of all the bulls (100%) were assessed as fat, and no bulls were observed as thin, whereas 89% of the cows were fat, 1 skinny cow was noted, and the rest were in good condition. A total of 16 calves were observed in 9 groups; 44% were fat and the rest were in good condition. The calves appeared healthy, and many had grown larger in body size at the end of September.

During fall 2024, the Sahtì Ekwò were in good shape, and all the adult bulls and cows were described as having good condition or fat. At the end of September, all the caribou observed were in very good condition, with straight backs indicating they had good amounts of fat stored on their backs and rumps, with no thin or skinny caribou observed. Two teams observed body conditions of 47 bulls, 34 cows, and 13 calves. Of the bulls observed, 83% were fat and the rest were in good condition. Of the cows observed, 38% were fat and the rest were in good condition. Calves showed a similar pattern as cows, with 31% considered fat and the rest in good shape.

*"When you look at their backs it's straight which is how you can tell they are fat."* – Tł̨chq elder

In September 2025, the Sahtì Ekwò were in good shape, and described as in good condition or fat. The teams at Deèzàatì (Point Lake) observed the body condition of 69 bulls, 85 cows, and 39 calves. Of the 69 bulls in 26 groups, one bull (1%) was thin, 42% were in good condition, and the rest were considered fat. Of 85 cows observed, 54% were fat and the rest were in good condition. Most calves (82%) were in good condition and the rest were considered fat.

As seen in Figure 9, the percentage of fat caribou (bulls, cows and calves) have decreased since 2023. The decrease in fat levels likely corresponds to the ongoing drought and poorer forage conditions observed during summer since 2023. Fewer caribou have been described as fat while still classified as in good body condition indicating that the animals are still overall healthy.



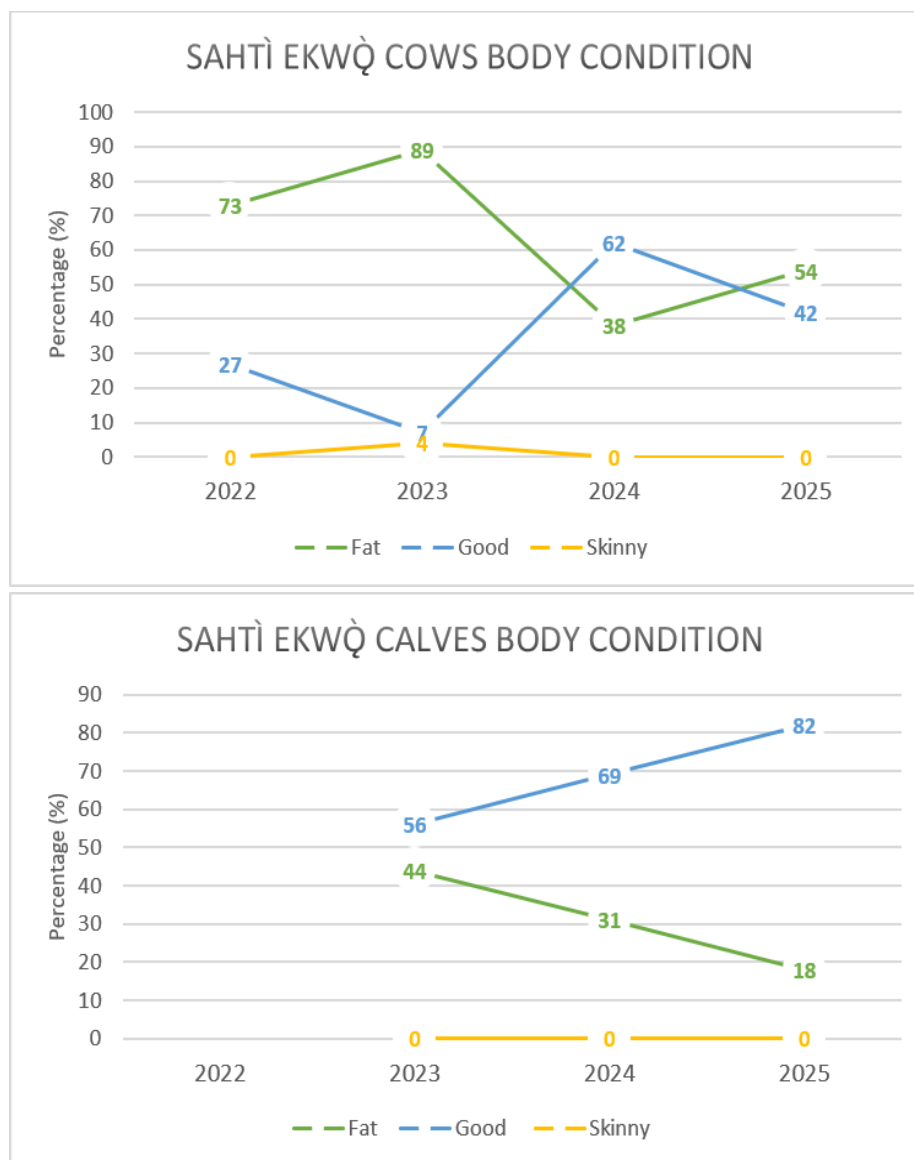


Figure 9. Body conditions of Sahtì Ekwò bulls, cows and calves from 2022 to 2025 during the Ekwò Nàxoèdee K'è (Boots on the Ground) program at Deèzàati (Point Lake) during the fall.

### **Tsia – Calves**

In September 2022, we watched 31 Sahtì Ekwò groups, counting 195 cows and 76 calves, and estimated 38.4 calves per 100 cows ( $\pm 7$  SE). The calf:cow ratio of 38.4 is considered an average ratio for fall. In September 2023, we estimated an average calf:cow ratio of 60.3 ( $\pm 10$  SE) calves per 100 cows (based on 19 caribou groups with a total of 46 cows and 28 calves). This observed calf:cow ratio in the fall suggests high calf survival from spring through summer. This also indicates that calves born in June have been growing well and are healthy. However, due to the small sample of Sahtì Ekwò groups, the observed calf:cow ratio may not be representative of the herd.

During September 2022 and 2023, all of the calves were considered healthy, with no visible injuries. Calves are usually not fat as they spend their energy to grow, however at the end of September many calves had

grown to a large body size. At times, it was challenging to differentiate between a calf and yearling; as the calf legs and body had grown, in some instances, almost as tall as their mothers, and the calf's antler had grown longer than what is considered a "normal" short antler of a calf. In late fall, the calf's belly also starts to grow as they transition from only drinking milk to eating grass and vegetation. Watching cows and calves around Deèzàatì (Point Lake), the elder pointed out that these are woza; the Tł̨chq̓ term for a cow with calf. The elder explained that when a cow with a calf is first seen, they will be the first of the larger herds. Thus, the term woza means that the whole herd is coming; the cows, calves, and everyone are following.

*"The first caribou you will see are woza; the cow and its calf...then the larger herd is coming."* –  
Tł̨chq̓ elder

In many groups, there were a high proportion of young caribou, 2-year-old caribou, both yèago (young bulls) and tsidaa (young cows). In some groups, there were a high proportion of tsidaa (young cows). The elders explained that in some of the groups there were fewer calves because of the many young caribou, not yet mature to produce offspring. Additionally, some groups with mostly bulls, had a high proportion of yèago. The elder explained that it is a good sign to see many tsidaa and yèagoa; meaning that many calves and yearlings survive overwinter and could help the population grow:

*"You can tell all caribou around here are young, because of the way they are moving. They are moving fast – bouncing & trotting."* – Tł̨chq̓ elder

In 2024, the monitoring teams at Deèzàatì (Point Lake) observed a total of 46 Sahtì Ekwò groups in August and September. In the groups, a total of 57 cows and 22 calves were observed, which resulted in an estimate of 38 calves per 100 cows ( $38.3 \pm 7.6$  SE); this ratio would be good if most calves survive the coming winter. Due to small sample size, this may not be representative of the herd. Of the few calves observed, they were in good condition and had grown large body sizes and had good antler growth.

In 2025, the monitoring teams at Deèzàatì (Point Lake) observed a total of 67 Sahtì Ekwò groups. In those groups, a total of 151 cows and 28 calves were observed, which resulted in an estimate of 18 calves per 100 cows ( $18.4 \pm 3.5$  SE). This ratio is considered to be low even if most calves survived the coming winter. During the last week of August, the calf:cow ratio was 0.54, showing a reasonable presence of calves. In September, the calf:cow ratio was low. Groups of females with only one calf with them were observed. The calves were considered healthy, with no visible injuries. Calves are not usually fat at this time of the year as they spend their energy to grow. However, at the end of September, many calves had grown larger in body size. This indicates that calves are healthy and have been growing well since they were born in June.

### **Harvest Monitoring and Management of Sahtì Ekwò**

Harvest of the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) in recent years has been managed in three settled land claim regions: Sahtú Settlement Area (by the community of Délj̨ne), Wek'èezhìi (Tł̨chq̓ Agreement), and Nunavut (by the community of Kugluktuk). WRRB's Reasons for Decision reports (WRRB 2016a, 2016b, 2019, 2022, 2025) provide an overview of previous proceedings from 2010, 2016, 2019, 2022, and 2024 along with the Board's determinations and recommendations for management of

the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) in Wek'èezhìi. Since 2018, Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) has increased, and in response, the TAH was increased from 193 to 395 bulls within Wek'èezhìi (WRRB 2025). The Government of Nunavut accepted a decision from the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) on May 28, 2024, to increase the TAH of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) from 170 to 450 of either sex for the Kugluktuk Angoniatit Association (KAA). Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) harvest in the Sahtú Settlement Area is set out in the *Belare Wile Gots'è ?ekwé – Caribou for All Time – A Déljné Got'jné Plan of Action 2021-2023* (Déljné ?ehdzo Got'jné 2021), a community-based plan developed by the Déljné Renewable Resources Council, which includes a harvest limit of 30 caribou.

Reported annual harvest of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) since 2021-22 has been summarized in Table 1. Harvest within Wek'èezhìi has remained below the TAH since 2023. The current TAH of 395 in Wek'èezhìi represented 1% of the herd estimate in 2023 (0.8–1.2% of the 95% CI range; Boulanger et al. 2024) and has been in place during the 2024/25 and 2025/26 harvest seasons (Determination #1-2024 [Sahtì Ekwò] in WRRB 2025). When combined with the Nunavut TAH of 450 caribou for Kugluktuk, the potential total harvest of 845 Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) represented 2.1% of the herd estimate in 2023 (1.8–2.6% of the 95% CI range). This relatively low level of harvest has likely had a limited population-level effect on the trend of the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) in recent years.

Table 1. Reported harvest of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) from 2021-22 to 2025-26.

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

<sup>1</sup>Harvest is assumed to be zero as Sahtì Ekwò have not been wintering near Déljné.

<sup>2</sup>Harvest reported by KAA as of November 26, 2025. Harvest information is incomplete for 2025-26.

### Predator Management on the Range of Sahtì Ekwò

In 2019, Tłı̨chq̓ Government and GNWT submitted a 5-year *Joint Management Proposal for Wolves (Dìga) on the Kòk'èetì Ekwò (Bathurst) and Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose East) Herd Winter Ranges* to the WRRB (WRRB 2021). The main goal of the Joint Management Proposal was to sufficiently reduce dìga (wolf) predation by increasing ground-based harvest of dìga (wolves) on the Kòk'èetì Ekwò (Bathurst) and Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East) barren-ground caribou herds to allow for an increase in calf and adult caribou survival that would contribute to the stabilization and recovery of both herds.

### **GNWT Enhanced Wolf Harvest Incentive Program**

In 2019, the North Slave Region Enhanced Wolf Harvest Incentive Area was established, where an enhanced wolf harvest incentive program took place in winter 2020 (pilot year which included aerial removals) and continued to winter 2024 to increase ground-based harvest of ḏiga (wolves) within the North Slave Region portion of the winter ranges of the Ḵòk'èetì Ekw̱ò (Bathurst) and Sahtì Ekw̱ò (Bluenose-East) barren-ground caribou herds. Enhanced wolf harvest incentives were \$1,200 per wolf and tag fees were rescinded across the NWT, ending after the 2023-24 harvest season.

A review and evaluation of the ḏiga (wolf) management program is currently underway by GNWT and Tłı̨cẖ Government. Following the completion of the five-year ḏiga (wolf) management program, wolf harvest incentives in the North Slave Region returned to \$200 per skinned wolf skull submitted (as of the 2024-25 harvest season). A summary of the number of wolves harvested during and one year after the enhanced harvest incentives program ended is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of wolves harvested by harvest season (01 July–30 June) between 2018 and 2025 within the North Slave Region Enhanced Wolf Harvest Incentive Area (EWHIA; 2018-2019 to 2023-2024) and one year after the EWHIA ended (2024-25). Six wolves were harvested outside the North Slave Region during this time period that received incentives, and are not included in the table. An additional 24 wolves were submitted to the ECC North Slave Region office during this time period that did not have spatial information associated with them and are not included in the table.

|                                       | Year    |         |         |         |         |         |          | Total |
|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|-------|
|                                       | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 | 2022-23 | 2023-24 | 2024-25* |       |
| <b>Wolves Harvested Inside EWHIA</b>  | 64      | 83      | 134     | 63      | 141     | 142     | 157      | 784   |
| <b>Wolves Harvested Outside EWHIA</b> | 11      | 54      | 31      | 34      | 23      | 22      | 35       | 210   |
| <b>Total</b>                          | 75      | 137     | 165     | 97      | 164     | 164     | 192      | 994   |

\*In 2024-25, there were no Enhanced incentives paid; however the number of wolves harvested within the combined area of previous year's Enhanced Harvest Incentive Area was measured for comparison.

### **Tłı̨cẖ Government Community-Based Ḏiga Harvesting Program**

The 5-year *Joint Management Proposal for Wolves (Ḏiga) on the Ḵòk'èetì Ekw̱ò (Bathurst) and Sahtì Ekw̱ò (Bluenose East) Herd Winter Ranges* sought to sufficiently reduce ḏiga predation on the Ḵòk'èetì Ekw̱ò and Sahtì Ekw̱ò herds to allow for an increase in calf and adult Ekw̱ò survival that would contribute to the stabilization and recovery of both herds. It also sought to facilitate knowledge exchange between experienced and less experienced ḏiga harvesters. The Tłı̨cẖ people have strong connections to the ḏiga and so only certain families are allowed to harvest the sacred animal, and only in culturally respectful ways.

Based on recommendations from advising Elders and the decision from Tłıchq Government's Chief Executive Council (CEC), Tłıchq Government submitted a sole management proposal to the WRRB in January 2025 to continue wolf harvesting with the goal to help caribou recovery and was approved for one year. Tłıchq Government requested to extend that proposal to June 2026 to run the program for the 2025-26 season. The community-based wolf (diga) harvesting program reflects Tłıchq Government's multi-year commitment to provide training and support for Tłıchq harvesters to participate in diga management and increase their knowledge and skills for ground-based harvest of diga. The program was set to run for 5 years, ending March 31, 2024, however the project proposal was extended to include the 2024-25 and 2025-26 winter seasons, making it seven winter harvest seasons. All diga harvested for the program are tagged and stored, and a harvester questionnaire provided by ECC is completed. Sex, weight and other characteristics were recorded, skulls were given to ECC for tooth extraction, and workshops were held to process the hides. Over the seven winter seasons, from 2019-20 until 2025-26, a total of 129 wolves were harvested (Figure 10).

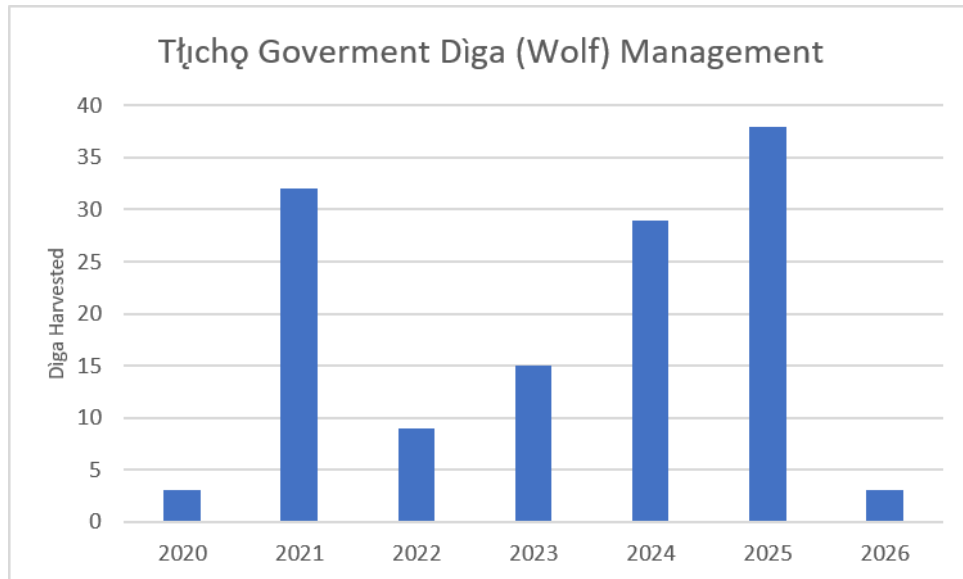


Figure 10. Number of wolves harvested each year for the Tłıchq Diga Harvesting Program.

### Habitat and Land Use of Sahtì Ekwò

In recent years, the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) has shifted their annual range use eastward. Collared Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) have not used winter range areas south of Great Bear Lake since 2016 (previously used in most winters since 2005) and have shifted to using winter habitat farther east and south (Figure 11). Délıne has noted that barren-ground caribou have not been around their community south of Great Bear Lake for many years.

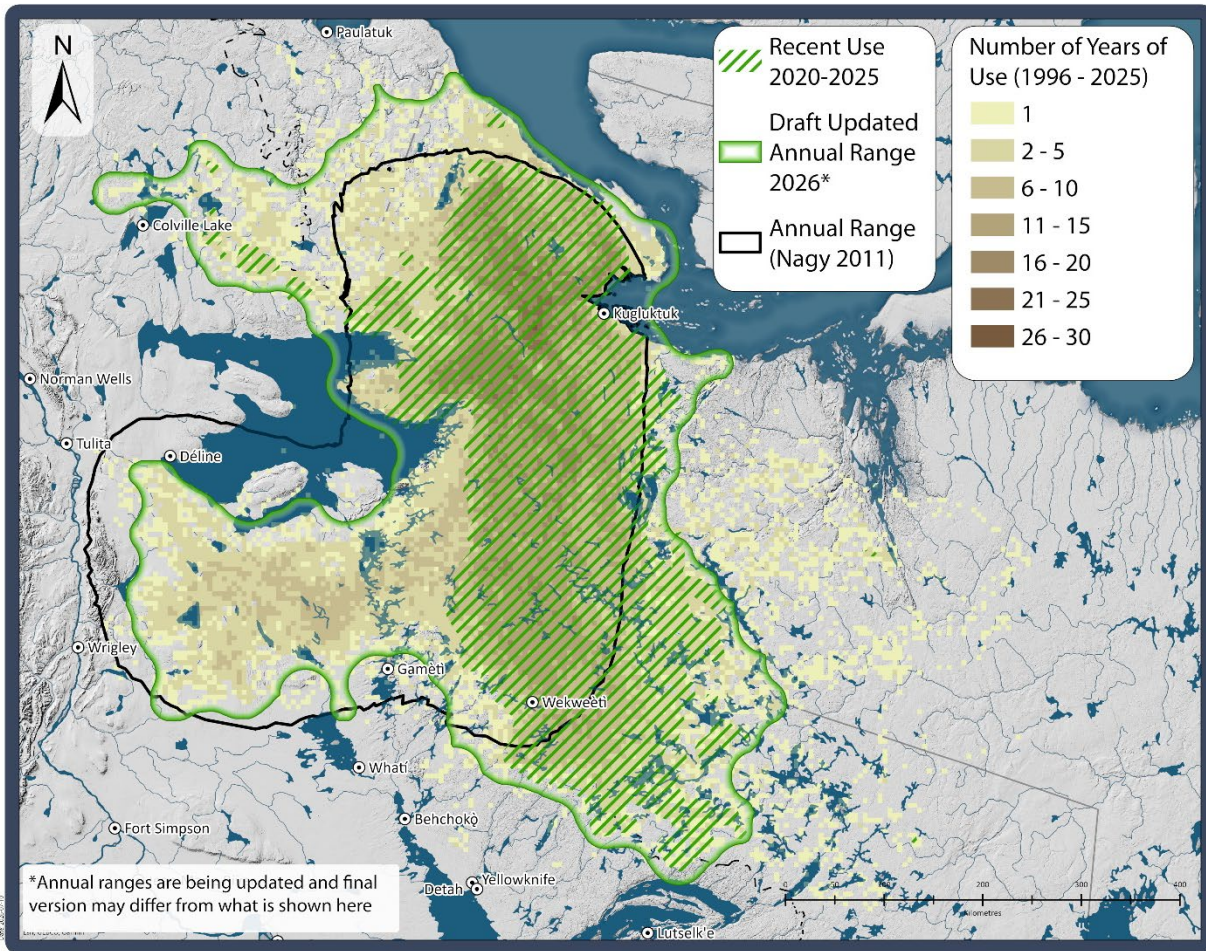


Figure 11. Range and habitat use by collared Saht'ı Ekw'ı (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) in the last 5 years (2000-2025), as shown with dark green hatching, overlaid on the draft updated annual range (1996-2025) outlined in green, and the 2011 annual range boundary outlined in black.

Since wildfire records began in 1966, an average of 744 km<sup>2</sup>/year (range 0–7,636 km<sup>2</sup>/year, from 1966–2025) has burned within the Saht'ı Ekw'ı (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) range (the 2011 annual range boundary) as shown in Figure 12. The amount of area burned within the Saht'ı Ekw'ı (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) range has been higher in recent years with an average of 2,557 km<sup>2</sup>/year (range 80–7,636 km<sup>2</sup>/year) impacted in the past five years (2020–2025). Délıne noted that climate change is affecting wildfire dynamics, with fewer marshlands to slow them down in the boreal forest (ACCWM 2026).

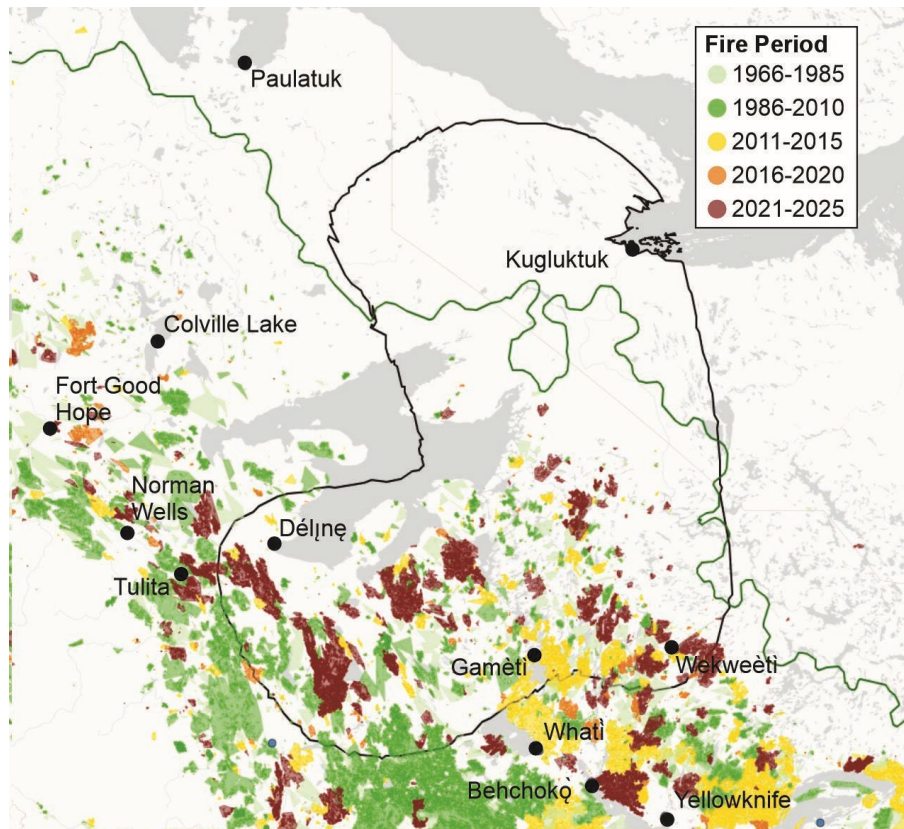


Figure 12. Wildfire history from the NWT Fire History dataset in and around the Sahtı Ekwı̄ (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) annual range boundary (1996-2009). Areas burned in the past 40 years are shown in green (1986-2010), yellow (2011-2015), orange (2016-2020), and red (2021-2025). Areas that burned between 1966 and 1985 are shown in light green.

### **Tłı̄chı̄ Monitoring of Summer Drought and Fires**

During September 2022, the caribou habitat and forage were in overall good condition at Deèzàati (Point Lake). In early September, the vegetation was generally moist and had grown well throughout the summer. By mid-September, the grasses and sedges were in average or poor condition and had turned yellow and brown in color. However, caribou were feeding on grasses in wet muskeg fields and on yellow grass by shorelines of lakes. During the last two weeks of September, the lichen (adzı̄) showed very good quality and was moist and fluffy. Caribou were feeding extensively on lichen in September, and lichen was growing in large amounts all around Deèzàati (Point Lake). In late August, we observed caribou eating mostly the leaves and branches of willows, but by mid-September, the leaves had fallen off the willows and dwarf birch, and the caribou fed exclusively on lichen. After weeks of watching caribou migrating along their trails around Deèzàati (Point Lake), Joe Zoe, an elder from Gamēti, described a sense of confidence that the caribou are “coming back” to their old trails at Deèzàati (Point Lake), and that the herds are moving south to Rawalpindi Lake and Mesa Lake; the traditional Tłı̄chı̄ caribou harvesting camps. While watching a group of caribou at Deèzàati (Point Lake), Joe Zoe explained that:

*“They are following their old trails that they used many years ago - they never forget them...they always come back.”*

*"It's looking good now, for a while they were gone, but it looks good now."*

*"We have been here for many years now watching and protecting caribou, looks like they are coming back now." – Tłıchq elder Joe Zoe*

During July and August 2023, the barrenlands started to dry up due to lack of rain. Grass meadows that should have standing water, had dried-up soil with dried brown crust. Ponds and most small creeks had dried up. Insect activity levels were low to none, due to the lack of standing water and small ponds which are important places for mosquito larvae to mature. During August, insect activity was very low; due to the heavy smoke from forest fires and dry conditions. During early August, dwarf birch showed yellow and brown leaves (when plants are supposed to be prime). In some areas, the grass growth appeared to be less than last season. The lack of rain throughout the summer resulted in decreased water levels becoming extremely low; lower than in 2022. During the third week of September, the smoke was thick on the barrenlands, and it became hard to spot caribou on the hills. Even in early October, the forest fire smoke was covering the hills; the elder stated:

*"It used to snow mid-September – now there is more smoke than snow."*

*"We don't know what that smoke and ashes means for the caribou food and what they eat." – Tłıchq elder*

The summer of 2023 was an extreme year for wildfires; with the high number of fires in the forest and on the tundra; a large area of treeline habitat by Red Rock Lake had burned in August. The elders expressed concern about the effects of smoke and ashes on caribou forage, and the impacts to the land and wildlife.

During summer 2024, the ongoing drought conditions continued. Vegetation on higher ground was drying up from the lack of rain. On dwarf birch, the leaves were turning brown in mid-August from drought conditions, when they should have been in their prime showing green color. After experiencing the dry and hot summer of 2023, elders had hoped that similar conditions would not appear during 2024 and onwards. As positive signals in the recovery of the Sahtı Ekwı had been observed starting in 2023, the prolonged dry and hot habitat conditions and large fires on their fall and winter forage habitat are not what the herd needed at this critical time in their life cycle. In addition to the recent drought, there were many landscape changes. Over the last decades, the vegetation and treeline have expanded northward and the growth of tall willows are covering the landscape at such a scale that elders had a hard time recognizing certain locations due to the overgrowth of willows. The elder stated later that the caribou will migrate further north on the barrenlands and were concerned that caribou will not move south as they used to, due to the overgrown habitat. The willow expansion is at such a large scale that the Tłıchq elder stated:

*"The barrenland is becoming smaller." – Tłıchq elder*

In fall 2025, around Deèzàatı (Point Lake), the vegetation and Ekwı food were described as overall good and healthy quality due to recent rain in September. Caribou forage quality ranged from average to good. Both berries and mushrooms were more abundant and larger this season compared to recent summers. The water levels continued to drop significantly, for the fourth year in row, as indicated by exposed rocky

shorelines. The water level decreased by an estimated 3 meters, with exposed shoreline ranging 10–20 meters in some places. The elders noted that the low water levels create rocky shorelines for the caribou to travel on. This rocky edging can potentially cause injuries for the caribou; elders noted that the caribou are at risk of getting their hooves stuck between the rocks and getting injured in the exposed rocks.

### **Human Development on Sahtì Ekwò Range**

Currently there is limited human development on the range of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd). As of 2025, the direct footprint of human disturbance is 0.022% of the range as shown in Figure 13. This disturbance footprint results from seismic lines in the boreal forest in the southwest part of the range, winter roads from Whatì to Gamètì and Wekweètì, old Denison's winter road (from Rae to Great Bear Lake), route between Délìñę and the historic Port Radium mine sites near Great Bear Lake, and mineral exploration in the Bear Geological Province (Figure 13). The region has seen very little exploration activity since the 1960s, but since 2024, there has been a significant increase in mineral exploration activity in the Bear Geological Province as a result of the Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy released by Natural Resources Canada in 2022. The Bear Geological Province includes mineral potential near the historic Port Radium mine sites (i.e., Great Bear Magmatic Zone) and near the Coppermine River south of Kugluktuk (i.e., Rae Group Sedimentary Horizon, Copper Creek Formation, and Husky Creek Formation). KAA reported high levels of helicopter-based activity around and south of Kugluktuk in 2025 (ACCWM 2026). Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) range conditions encountered outside of their mapped annual range based on 2005-2009 collar data will need to be updated once the annual ranges based on 2005-2025 collar data have been finalized.

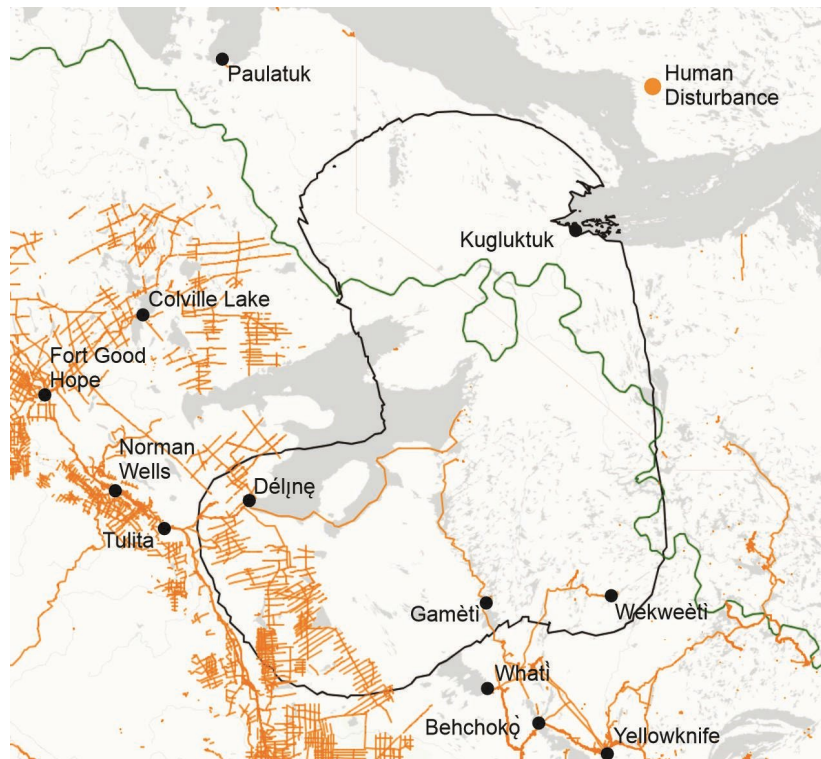


Figure 13. Human disturbance footprint as of 2025 in and around the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) annual range boundary (1996-2009).

Collaborative research (e.g. see NWT CIMP 2026) is showing that roads can negatively impact caribou by facilitating access for harvesters and predators, disturbing habitat, and disrupting and delaying movements. There are few roads in the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) range, although the winter road to Gamètì and Wekweètì provides seasonal access to harvesters who do not live in those communities. In addition, some Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) have wintered farther east in the area of the Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road in the North Slave Region.

### **Background Summary**

The Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) appears to be on a slow increasing trend in numbers since 2021 with lots of calves and with animals in good condition. Pregnancy rates since 2023 have been consistently high with good calf survival. Bull:cow ratios showed a decrease in fall 2025 from fairly consistent, higher levels in 2020-2024. There were observations of groups of caribou with lower and higher calf:cow numbers in fall 2025 at Deèzàatì (Point Lake) but this may be a result of low sample size. Wildfire on the range appears to be increasing in amount burned in recent years (2022-2025) and while noise disturbance from aircraft on the calving and post-calving ranges was noted in 2025, overall there are low levels of physical disturbance on the range. Harvest of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) has been managed under a TAH of 395 since 2024 in Wek'èezhìi, but actual harvest has been very low.

As both caribou and people face changes in the future due to climate change and other factors, it remains important to maintain the cultural relationship between people and caribou across barren-ground caribou ranges. The ability for caribou to adapt to stressors that are increasing with a changing climate may depend on the speed and magnitude of these changes, and while climate change is a global issue, there are actions that can be worked on at the local scale. This proposal outlines management actions related to harvest levels, understanding the impact of wolves on caribou herds, mitigating impacts of human development and wildfire disturbance, and education on harvest practices and caribou conservation, that Tłıchq Government and GNWT propose to decrease potential negative impacts on Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) and to support the cultural relationship between people and caribou.

### **4. Description and Rationale of Proposed Management Action**

Tłıchq Government and GNWT propose key management actions for the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd). Management actions are presented under headings consistent with the ACCWM's *Taking Care of Caribou Management Plan for the Bluenose-East, Bluenose-West, and Cape Bathurst Herds*: Harvest, Predators, Habitat and Land Use, and Education.

Proposed management actions represent a continuation, and in some cases, modification, of management actions in the GNWT and Tłıchq Government *Joint Proposal on Management Actions for the Bluenose-East ʔekwò (Barren-ground caribou) Herd 2022 – 2024* (Tłıchq Government and GNWT 2024).

## Proposed Harvest Management Actions

### Allocation of Harvest

Tłıchq Government and GNWT propose that resident, non-resident, and commercial harvest from the Sahtı Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) remain at zero and that the TAH remain at 395 caribou per year in Wek'èezhìi with no changes to the allocation of the TAH (Table 3). Tłıchq Government and GNWT propose that:

- Sahtı Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) authorization cards be required for Indigenous harvesters in RBC01 and RBC02;
- Recommend a fall season (August 1 to October 31) with up to a 1:1 harvest sex ratio; and
- Remaining season (November 1 to July 31) with bull-only harvest.

Using the herd estimate from 2025 of 28,759 (95% CI 25,997–31,816) adult caribou, the TAH of 395 caribou for NWT harvester groups in Wek'èezhìi represents 1.4% (1.2–1.5% of the 95% CI range) of the 2025 herd estimate. A proposed TAH of 395 caribou for NWT harvester groups in Wek'èezhìi combined with the Nunavut TAH of 450 for Kugluktuk equals a potential total herd harvest of 845 caribou, which represents 2.9% of the 2025 herd estimate (2.7–3.3% of the 95% CI range). The KAA has indicated that following the 2025/26 ACCWM status assessment, they do not intend to make a submission to change the Nunavut TAH of 450 caribou (*pers. Comm. Amanda Dumont 20260327*). There is no sex restriction in the Nunavut TAH. Although the TAH allocation for the Sahtı harvester group is 106 caribou, Sahtı Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) harvest is set out in the *Belare Wile Gots'è ʔekwè – Caribou for All Time – A Délıne Got'ıne Plan of Action 2021-2023* (Délıne ʔehdzo Got'ıne 2021), a community-based plan developed by the Délıne Renewable Resources Council, which includes a harvest limit of 30 caribou.

Table 3. Allocation of harvest of Sahtı Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) within the Northwest Territories by harvester group. Note that the *Belare Wile Gots'è ʔekwè – Caribou for All Time – A Délıne Got'ıne Plan of Action 2021-2023* (Délıne ʔehdzo Got'ıne 2021) includes a harvest limit of 30 Sahtı Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) for Délıne hunters in the Sahtı.

| Harvester Group      | Proposed allocation of TAH (395) |            |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|------------|
|                      | Proportion                       | TAH        |
|                      |                                  |            |
| Tłıchq               | 0.613                            | <b>243</b> |
| Sahtı                | 0.266                            | <b>106</b> |
| Dehcho               | 0.024                            | <b>9</b>   |
| Inuvialuit           | 0.016                            | <b>6</b>   |
| NWTMN                | 0.024                            | <b>9</b>   |
| Akaičho              | 0.032                            | <b>13</b>  |
| NSMA                 | 0.024                            | <b>9</b>   |
| Totals WRRB TAH only |                                  | <b>395</b> |

Tłıchq Government and GNWT recognize that changes to harvest seasons and sex restrictions will require regulation changes by GNWT. Additionally, as the proposed 1:1 harvest sex ratio is a new management

recommendation for the fall harvest season only, the GNWT and Tłıchq Government will review and assess implementation after one year through discussions with all harvester groups and the WRRB, allowing for any necessary adjustments.

### **Sahtì Ekwò Fall Harvest: Cultural Education**

Tłıchq Government considers it important to hear perspectives from elders and community members about Sahtì Ekwò, therefore Tłıchq Government convened a 2-day caribou workshop with elders and harvesters from the four Tłıchq communities on January 28-29, 2026 in Behchokò. The purpose was to discuss the herd status, options for caribou harvest, and potential other management actions for Sahtì Ekwò. Key recommendations from the workshop, that many elders emphasized, was the importance of educating the youth and younger generations, and that the people expressed a strong desire to restart the fall hunts as a place to teach the youth about Tłıchq traditional harvesting culture. For many years, Tłıchq have made the communal sacrifices of not harvesting the Kòk'èetì Ekwò and a limited harvest of the Sahtì Ekwò (Figure 14), while recognizing the necessity of making these sacrifices to recover the herds. However, the limited numbers of cards for Sahtì Ekwò and the bull-only restrictions have made fall harvest challenging and no fall hunts have taken place since 2012.

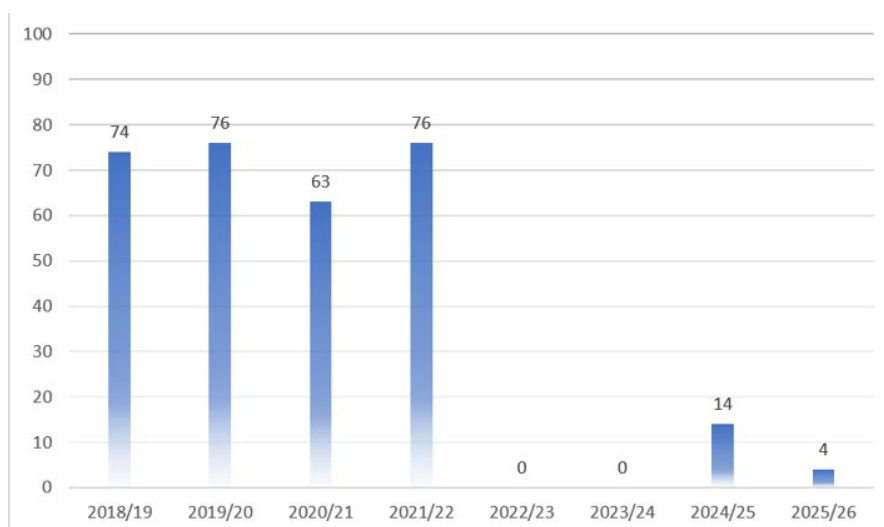


Figure 14. Harvest of Sahtì Ekwò by Tłıchq Harvesters from 2018/19 to 2025/26.

The fall harvest provides Tłıchq people, and especially youth, the opportunity to experience caribou harvesting on the barrenlands in the fall – the prime season for hides and fat bulls. Given that the last fall hunt took place on the barrenlands over 14 years ago, most Tłıchq youth growing up today have had few opportunities to travel to the ancestral harvesting locations to reconnect to cultural places and Ekwò.

In 2024, WRRB increased the total allowable harvest (TAH) to 395 animals, bulls only, for all users of the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose east caribou) herd within Wek'èezhìi. Tłıchq is allocated 61.3% of the Wek'èezhìi TAH, which is 243 caribou. The increase in available caribou authorization cards made fall harvesting possible, as each Tłıchq community have sufficient cards to complete a fall harvest. Efforts were made in fall of 2024 and again in 2025 using scouting planes to find groups of caribou herds. However, the scouts could not locate any groups with sufficient numbers of bulls. During the fall, the Sahtì Ekwò tend to be

more scattered in smaller mix-sex groups. Due to the inability to find large enough herds with bulls, the fall hunts were cancelled. The proposed management action to implement a 1:1 harvest sex ration for the fall harvest may improve the likelihood to locate herds of sufficient numbers to successfully complete the fall hunts.

At the January 2026 workshop in Behchoko, the elders spoke of the significant loss in transfer of knowledge and language as a result of the 14 years of inability to practice the fall caribou harvest. In essence, an entire generation of Tłıchq youth has grown up with few opportunities to learn the Tłıchq caribou harvesting culture and the associated cultural teachings. For many, the only opportunity to interact with caribou has been the harvest along the winter road on Mackay Lake.

*“There are youth that don’t go out on the land, they don’t see caribou, they don’t see the lakes, they don’t know the land. They don’t know how to butcher caribou. For us, we know how to save all the meat and bones and see if it’s healthy. It’s good medicine for our people. We want to save the caribou and take care of it really well. The young generation don’t know about that, we need to teach them.” – Rita Wetrade, January 28<sup>th</sup> 2026*

The cultural practice of travelling to the barrenlands to harvest caribou serves as an opportunity that maintains Tłıchq relationship with the land and animals, because “our relationship with Ekwò defines who we are. It’s a foundation for our nàowo – a Tłıchq concept that encompasses our language, culture, way of life, as well as our knowledge and laws” (Zoe 2012). The ability to continue caribou harvesting is not only about harvesting animals, but it is the knowledge and cultural practice of harvesting that creates a purpose in life and a cultural tradition carried on from our ancestors.

*“...if we do fall hunt then we can take the youth and teach them. We need to teach them about the caribou...It’s important that the youth are being taught Tłıchq knowledge and how to take care of caribou.” – Joe Zoe, January 28<sup>th</sup> 2026*

Implementing a 1:1 harvest sex ratio in the fall, could allow Tłıchq and most importantly Tłıchq youth, the opportunity to travel to the barrenlands to experience the cultural practices and teachings of harvesting the Sahtì Ekwò. The youth can learn to process the meat at the camp, make drymeat and start learning how to prepare fall hides, including the associated language and teachings. Learning these cultural practices are essential for maintaining the Tłıchq connection with caribou which is central to sustain a cultural identity for the new generation of Tłıchq growing up today. At the caribou workshop in January, youth Boris Eyakfwo stated:

*“I love being on the land. I want to continue our way of life, hunt caribou, how to study and how to take care of them...I fear for the next generation, without caribou, we are going to create a weak generation. If we don’t continue to go on the land, we are not going to be Tłıchq. Slow down winter hunting and focus on fall hunt. We can properly teach our youth. In the winter, it’s cold, we are rushing so we don’t get to learn the process fully.” – Boris Eyakfwo, January 28<sup>th</sup> 2026*

For many, the only opportunity to interact with caribou in recent years has been during the winter harvesting by truck along the winter road on Mackay Lake. Many of the reported instances of meat

wastage and disrespectful harvesting reported along the road in recent winters, likely stems from limited opportunities to learn proper harvesting practices and the cultural teachings of respecting the land and caribou. The fall hunt is a slower and more skilled harvest that provides the time and setting for the transfer of knowledge between from elders to the younger generations.

### **Traditional Knowledge of Fall Harvest**

*“It [Ekwò] lives on the great barrenlands and when it gets fall time, that's when it gets excited and they wandered back into the bush again. When the Ekwò came to Îhdaak ètì [Marian Lake, NT], the ice was still slushy when the Ekwò came. The full-grown Ekwò that arrived were really fat... I recall when I was a young man, we used to live in Behtsoko {Behchoko}. At that time the Ekwò migrates back, they come back when it just getting to warm up, that's when they're full-grown, that's when they come back.” – Tłıchq Harvester*

The summer and fall is a crucial time for the caribou to accumulate fat reserves (Mackenzie et al. 2013). They need to eat enough nutritious vegetation in order to survive the cold winter months when vegetation is less accessible. After acquiring as much fat as possible in the summer range, the caribou begin their migration south to their wintering grounds. Kàowo (mother of a large bull; a middle-aged cow who is the leader) go ahead of the herd and lead them to good feeding areas further south (Legat et al. 2001). The male calves who were born in the spring will roam around the barrenlands until the fall when they are fat and become wedziaa (small bulls), at which point the herds start moving towards the boreal forest.

In addition to the high amount of fat in the fall, hides harvested in October and November are regarded as the best (Andrews 2011). The fur on the hides is at its thickest as the winter coat is fully grown and the holes created by warble fly larvae exiting the skin in the summer have healed over. The meat is also regarded as having a strong taste in the fall.

*“Right now, yes, because when they are coming back this way they are supposed to be eaten, fall time, they are supposed to be fattened.” – Tłıchq Harvester*

Fall is an optimal time to harvest Ekwò since the calves have grown into young bulls, the Ekwò are at peak fatness, their hides are at high quality, and they are migrating south.

*“The Tłıchq traveled north in the fall during which time they met the Ekwò as they migrate south.” – Tłıchq Harvester*

Based on recommendations of Tłıchq Elders, fall hunt of Sahti Ekwò emphasize cultural teachings of Ekwò, transfer of traditional knowledge and harvesting skills including respectful harvesting practices based on accurate shooting, skinning, butchering, making and packing the bundle, meat and hide preparation following traditional protocols, with emphasis on community sharing. Tłıchq Government plans to organize community-based hunting with participation of youth and younger hunters. The ability to hunt both cows and bulls allows hunters to harvest caribou herds encountered while walking on the barrenlands, which could facilitate the education of the younger generation; a key recommendation from Tłıchq elders.

**Sahtì Ekwò Winter Harvest: Impact of the Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Management Zone**

For many Tłıchq, caribou harvesting is more than a source of food — it is a central part of cultural identity, traditional knowledge transfer, and connection to the land. Restrictions to be able to access to traditional harvesting areas can limit opportunities for Elders and experienced hunters to teach younger generations important land skills, harvesting practices, language, and cultural values associated with caribou harvesting. The Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Management Zone (MZ) can also affect food security for families who rely on caribou as a healthy and culturally important food source but cannot harvest caribou outside of the MZ. Reduced harvesting opportunities can increase use of expensive store-bought foods, which can be less nutritious and expensive in northern communities, especially isolated communities like Gamètì and Wekweètì. For some communities such as Wekweètì, harvesters may need to travel 16–20 hours by truck to legally harvest caribou outside of the mobile zone, despite caribou being present within 15–30 minutes of the community by snowmobile.

The MZ is designed to protect the Kòk'èetì Ekwò (Bathurst barren-ground caribou herd) from harvest, and in doing so, harvest of caribou from other herds that are located within the MZ is also restricted. In years with more winter overlap of the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East), a higher proportion of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East) are not available to be harvested (Figure 15). In recent years, barren-ground caribou have wintered close to Wekweètì and most of those caribou are likely from Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd), however, the MZ delineated by locations of Kòk'èetì Ekwò (Bathurst barren-ground caribou herd) has often included Wekweètì so hunters may not harvest caribou around the community (Figure 15).

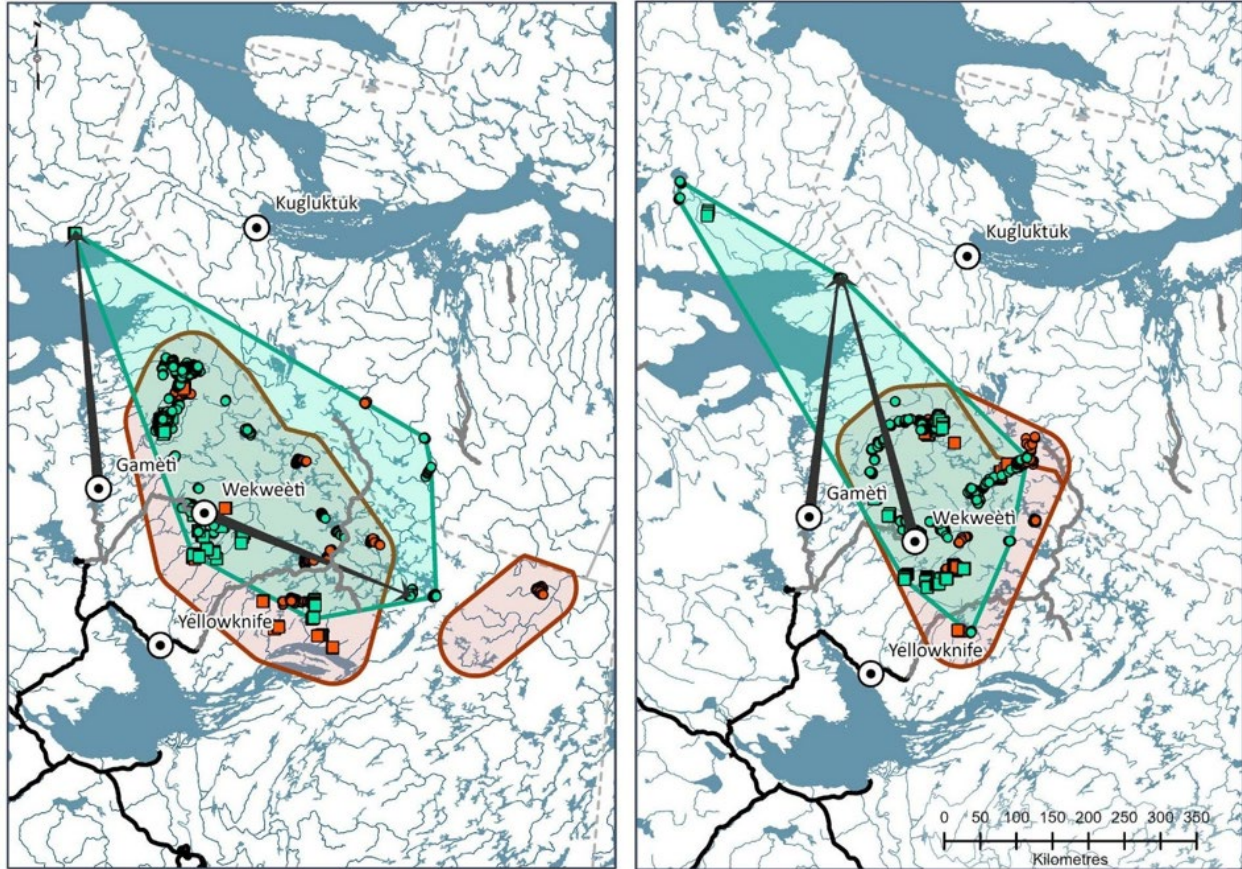


Figure 15. Weekly maps illustrate winter season overlap of the Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Management Zone (MZ) with locations of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd). The MZ is outlined in red, with locations of collared Kòk'èetì Ekwò (Bathurst barren-ground caribou herd) shown in red (circles are females, squares are males). The locations of collared Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) are shown in blue (circles are females, squares are males) during the same week with a maximum convex polygon drawn around the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) in blue. The black arrows indicate the closest collar location available for harvest. The map on the left shows the MZ period March 19 to March 26, 2024; and the map on the right shows the MZ period March 18 to March 25, 2025.

To examine the impact of the MZ on harvest opportunities of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd), we considered the distance that a hunter would have to travel from Gamètì or Wekweètì to access a collared Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) that were inside the MZ compared to a collared Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) available outside the MZ over recent seasons and years. For example, from late August to early November 2024, the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) closest to Wekweètì were not affected by the MZ, so the distance to the nearest collared Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) and the nearest collared Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) available for harvest was the same (Figure 16). However, by January 2025, Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) had moved closer to Wekweètì but those caribou were unavailable for harvesting because they were found inside the MZ. The nearest collared Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) available for

harvesting outside the MZ were consistently over 350 km away (except one weekly period where 240 km away) between January and mid-April 2026 (Figure 16).

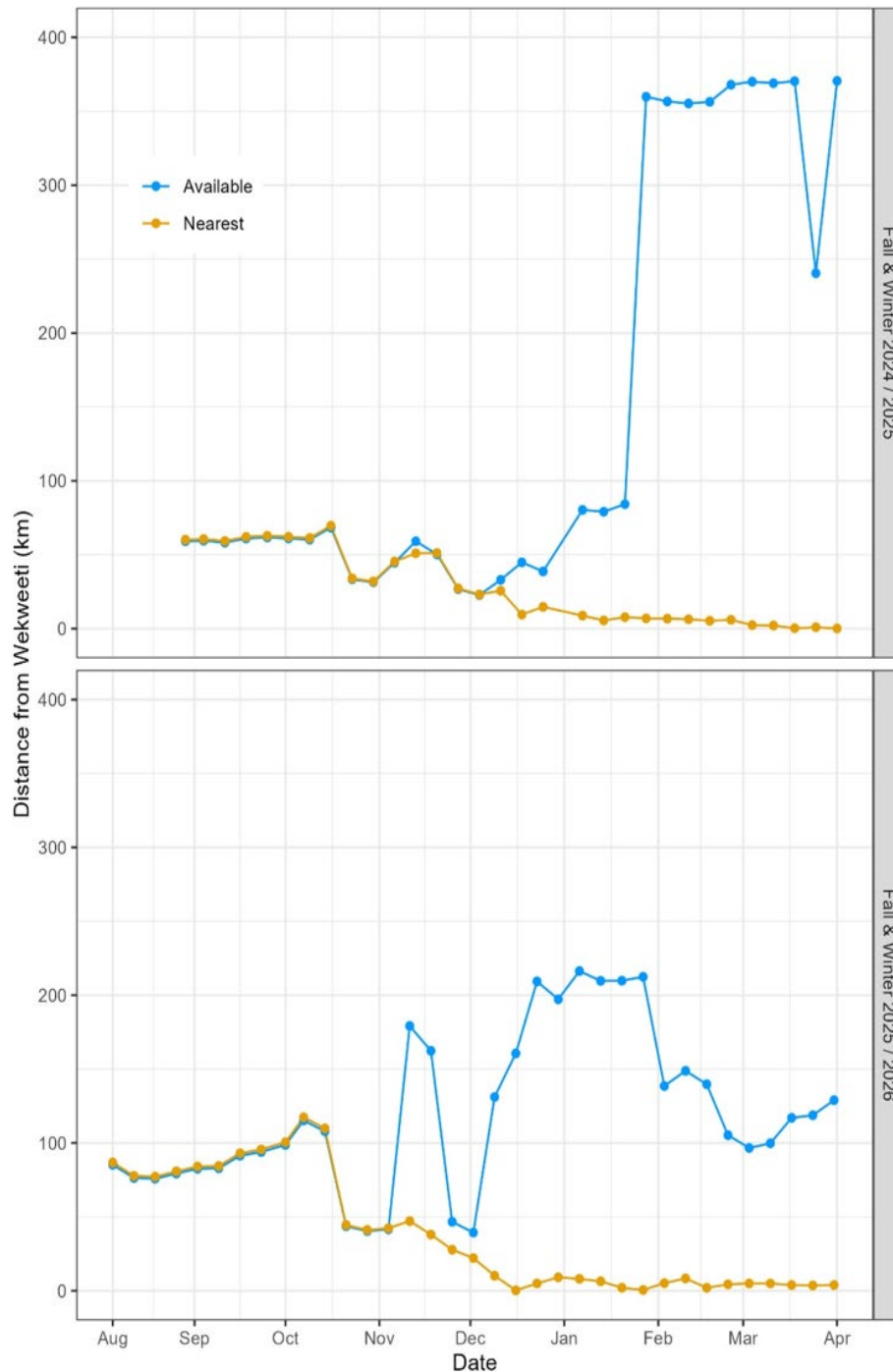


Figure 16. Distance from Wekweètì to the nearest collared Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) during each weekly period from August to April (orange dots) compared to the distance from Wekweètì to the nearest collared Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) that was outside the Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Management Zone during the same week and thus available to legally harvest (blue dots).

During the fall harvest season, there is less overlap of the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East) and Kòk'èetì Ekwò (Bathurst) barren-ground caribou herds (Figure 17), and less impact on harvesting opportunities. During the 2024 and 2025 fall harvest seasons, collared Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) were near traditional Tłı̨chǫ fall harvesting places and were outside of the MZ (Figure 17).

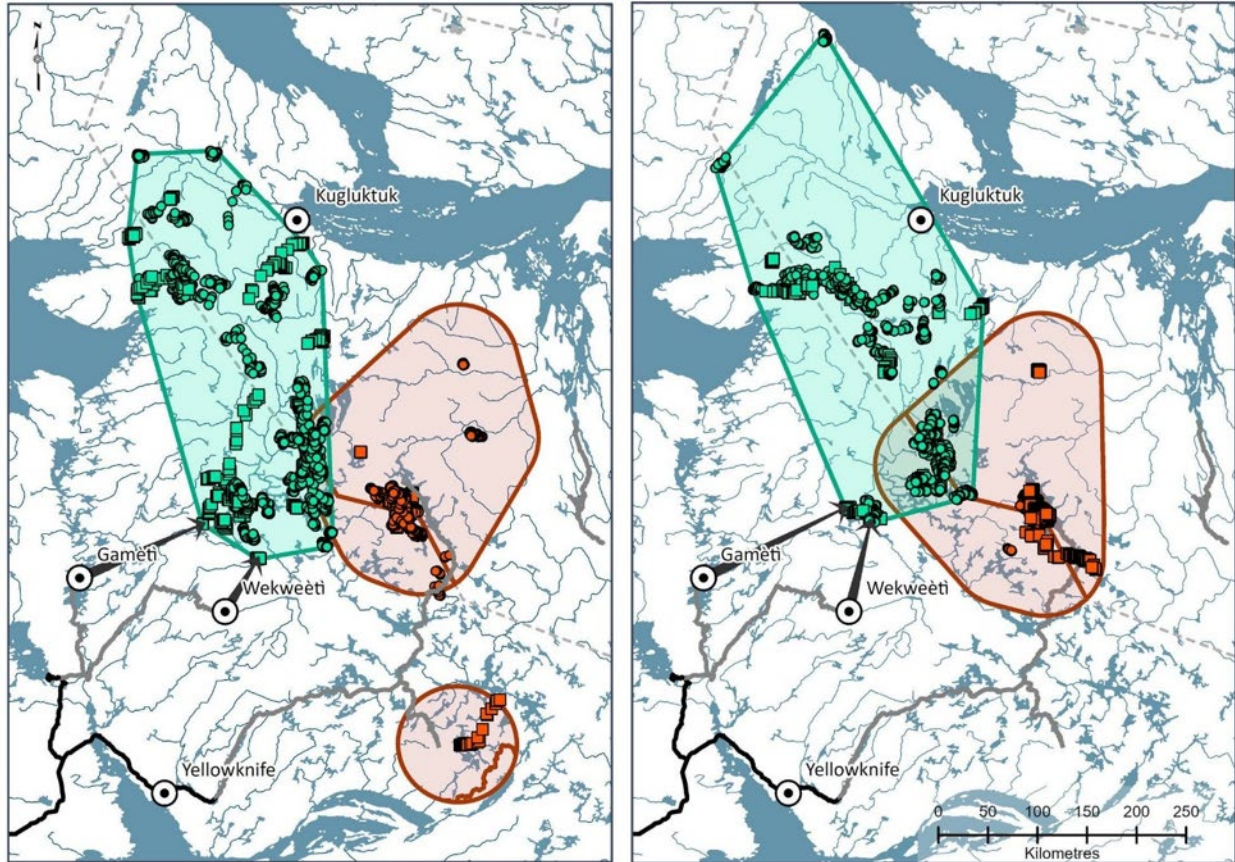


Figure 17. Weekly maps illustrate overlap of the Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Management Zone (MZ) with locations of collared Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) during the fall harvest season. The MZ is outlined in red, with locations of collared Kòk'èetì Ekwò (Bathurst barren-ground caribou herd) during the same week shown in red (circles are females, squares are males). The locations of collared Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) are shown in blue (circles are females, squares are males) during the same week with a maximum convex polygon drawn around the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) locations in blue. The black arrows indicate the closest collar location available for harvest. The map on the left shows the MZ period September 17 to September 24, 2024; and the map on the right shows the MZ period September 16 to September 23, 2025.

Appendix B provides a series of weekly maps showing the overlap of the MZ along with locations of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East) and Kòk'èetì Ekwò (Bathurst) barren-ground caribou herds in recent years, and summary graphs showing the travel required from Gamètì and Wekweètì to access caribou in different seasons and years (developed by Caslys, GNWT and Tłı̨chǫ Government).

### **Assessment of Harvest Sustainability**

Harvest sustainability was assessed by carrying out a set of harvest simulations for the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) for 2025-2030 to provide information to support discussions about harvest levels of the herd. These simulations provide suggestions of likely trends under a defined set of conditions, and the results should be interpreted in relative terms rather than absolute estimates. We considered a range of harvest levels and harvest sex ratios in Appendix C. The approximate harvest numbers associated with different sex ratios under the proposed TAH and allocation are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Current and proposed allocation of the Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) and approximate numbers of cows and bulls that would be harvested at different sex ratios of harvest if the full allocation was used by each group: 50% cows, 50% bulls; 40% cows, 60% bulls; and 20% cows, 80% bulls are considered. 100% bulls or 100% cows would equal the full allocation of TAH.

| Harvester Group      | Proposed allocation of TAH (395) |     | Example harvest numbers |           | Example harvest numbers |           | Example harvest numbers |           |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-----------|
|                      | Proportion                       | TAH | 50% cows                | 50% bulls | 40% cows                | 60% bulls | 20% cows                | 80% bulls |
| Tłìchò               | 0.613                            | 243 | 122                     | 121       | 97                      | 146       | 49                      | 194       |
| Sahtù                | 0.266                            | 106 | 53                      | 53        | 42                      | 64        | 21                      | 85        |
| Dehcho               | 0.024                            | 9   | 4                       | 5         | 4                       | 5         | 2                       | 7         |
| Inuvialuit           | 0.016                            | 6   | 3                       | 3         | 2                       | 4         | 1                       | 5         |
| NWTMN                | 0.024                            | 9   | 4                       | 5         | 4                       | 5         | 2                       | 7         |
| Akaičho              | 0.032                            | 13  | 7                       | 6         | 5                       | 8         | 3                       | 10        |
| NSMA                 | 0.024                            | 9   | 4                       | 5         | 4                       | 5         | 2                       | 7         |
| Kugluktuk (NU)       |                                  | 450 | 225                     | 225       | 180                     | 270       | 90                      | 360       |
| Totals WRRB TAH only |                                  | 395 | 197                     | 198       | 158                     | 237       | 79                      | 316       |
| Totals WRRB + GN TAH |                                  | 845 | 422                     | 423       | 338                     | 507       | 169                     | 676       |

Here we highlight main trends in the model simulation results described in more detail in Appendix C. We focus on the potential effects of a harvest of 3% of the 2025 herd estimate, which represents the full use of the proposed NWT and existing Nunavut TAH, and on the potential effects of a 100% bull harvest, 50% bull harvest, and 100% cow harvest. We looked at the impact of various harvest levels on a herd that was (a) moderately increasing (5% increase/year), as predicted in the current IPM, (b) stable, or (c) a moderate decline of 5%/year. We considered impacts over 5 years (until 2030) although the next Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) estimate is planned for 2028 with the ability to adapt management actions based on the updated herd estimate and associated information. Predicted herd sizes are rounded to the nearest 100 caribou.

The moderate rate of increase of 5%/year was consistent with a steady rate of increase in herd abundance between population surveys in 2021 and 2025 and with the predicted herd trend in the IPM. In the model of herd increasing at 5%/year, the herd would continue to increase at all levels and sex ratios of harvest considered (up to harvest of 4% of the herd estimate). With a 3% harvest rate, after 5 years the herd would increase from 28,759 caribou to between 34,800 caribou (if 100% cow harvest) to 36,500 caribou (if 100% bull harvest; Figure 17).

In these models, harvest is added to natural deaths; there is no consideration that a harvested caribou may otherwise have died of natural causes. When the underlying model herd is stable or decreasing with

no harvest, although most deaths will be due to natural causes, any additional deaths from harvest will result in a declining or further declining trend. In a more conservative scenario, in the stable herd, after 5 years a 3% harvest would result in a predicted herd size of 25,700 caribou (if 100% cow harvest) to 27,100 caribou (if 100% bull harvest; Figure 17), compared to the herd remaining approximately at the starting size of 28,759 with no harvest.

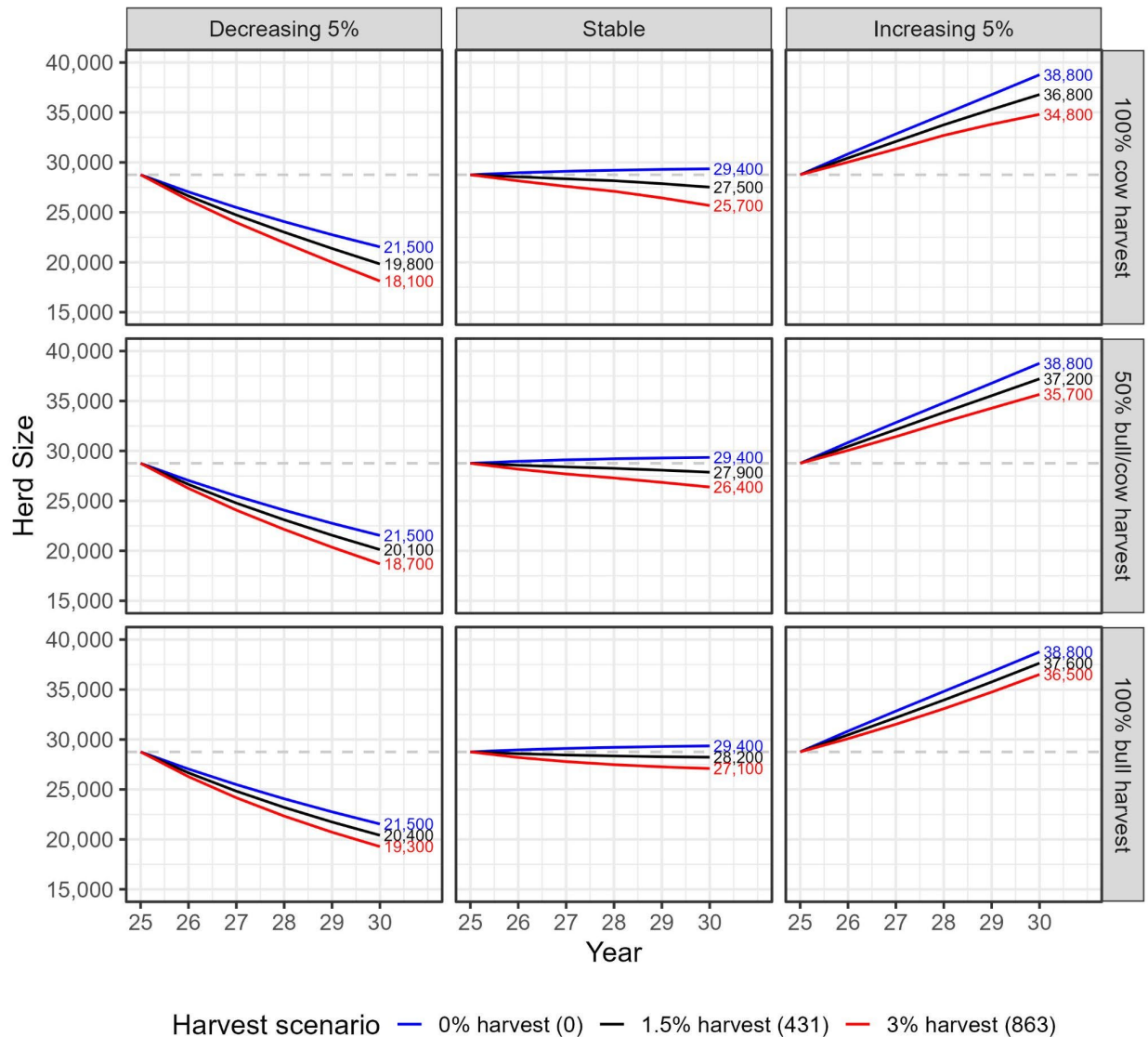


Figure 17. Projected herd trajectories for the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) from 2025 to 2030 if the underlying herd trend is decreasing at 5%/year (left column), stable (middle column), or increasing at 5%/year (right column), and an annual harvest of 0% (0 caribou, blue line), 1.5% (431 caribou, black line) or 3% (863 caribou, red line) of the total herd size is applied if that harvest is 100% cows (top row), 50% cows (middle row) or 100% bulls (bottom row). Harvest is expressed both as the percentage of the 2025 herd estimate (28,759: dashed line) and number of caribou harvested.

Because the 2025 herd estimate of 28,759 adults has fewer bulls (9,447) than cows (19,312) in the herd, harvesting an equal number of bulls or cows as a percent of the total herd size will affect the bulls more than cows in this scenario. If the herd is stable or moderately increasing, the bull:cow ratio will remain about the same or increase under levels of harvest up to 3% of the herd with any sex ratio. When there are fewer males in a declining herd, at higher (>3% of herd) levels of bull harvest, an increasing proportion of the smaller number of males would be harvested, which would lead to even lower bull:cow ratios under this scenario.

Of these harvest scenarios, the population trend that best fits all the data is the increasing trend at an average rate of 5%/year. We show harvest models for this scenario, but further consider models based on a projected stable trend and a decreasing trend to show what the predicted impact of harvest might be in these situations if the future herd trend is different than expected, or if it changes in a short time. This allows reviewers to consider potential outcomes from a conservative approach.

It is also important to note, when considering harvest models, that the model assumes that any harvest mortality is added to the natural mortality rate. However, when a herd has an underlying declining trend even with no harvest, and harvest does occur, there is likely to be some overlap of caribou that will not survive for natural reasons and caribou that are harvested.

The general results of the harvest models suggest that the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) can tolerate moderate levels of harvest with minimal impact on overall herd status. The underlying herd trend will continue to be the dominant trend, given the harvest levels considered, and will be modified slightly by harvesting.

#### **Winter Caribou Harvest and Winter Roads**

The Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road (TCWR) has been an important winter road corridor for caribou hunting in the NWT since the early 1980s (see Appendix D). It connects Yellowknife to mines in the central barrenlands and has also shaped where people hunt over the years. In the past, it mainly provided hunters access to Kòk'èetì Ekwò (Bathurst barren-ground caribou herd). More recently, after hunting restrictions were placed on the Kòk'èetì Ekwò (Bathurst barren-ground caribou herd) via the MZ, the TCWR has been used to access Beverly caribou outside of this no-harvest zone. The TCWR usually stays open for about two months each winter. As diamond mines close, the TCWR may not operate next year (2026-27). If that happens, some hunters will likely shift to the Gamètì and Wekweètì winter roads and hunt Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) under the current TAH.

#### **Proposed Predator Management Actions**

Going forward ECC will maintain incentives for skinned wolf skulls. This program allows ECC to track the location and sex of harvested wolves each year. ECC will also endeavor to continue wolf den surveys and pup counts at active dens as a proxy for monitoring wolf abundance and productivity (litter size).

#### **Tłjchq Government's Community-Based Dìga Harvesting Program**

Tłjchq Government understands the importance of continuing to run their community-based Dìga (wolf) Harvesting Program for supporting barren-ground caribou recovery as well as strengthening Indigenous

stewardship and participation in wildlife management. Many Tłıchq elders and harvesting are concerned with the amount of wolves surrounding their communities and leads them to think that there is much more following the barren-ground caribou populations and would like to see Tłıchq Government continue to run their program, so a Management Proposal will be submitted to the WRRB to continue their wolf harvesting efforts to support caribou recovery and continue to strengthen their stewardship.

### **Proposed Habitat and Land Use Management Actions**

An important part of managing impacts to caribou range use and habitat is through the environmental assessment process. GNWT and Tłıchq Government continue to lead and participate in processes in the NWT and Nunavut that may affect the Sahtı Ekwı (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) and its range. GNWT has been developing guidance documents for developers to use to identify mitigation measures to avoid and minimize direct and indirect (i.e., sensory) disturbance to barren-ground caribou and their habitat, including:

- *Implementation Framework and Operational Guidance for the Mobile Caribou Conservation Measures* (Mobile Measures; GNWT-ECC 2022a, 2022b). Mobile Measures are a flexible tool for reducing sensory disturbance to Kık'etı Ekwı (Bathurst barren-ground caribou herd) and allowing them to move, with minimal disturbance, through an area adjacent to small- and medium-sized exploration camps. Although the Mobile Measures are currently being applied on the Kık'etı Ekwı (Bathurst barren-ground caribou herd) range, this tool is still available and useful to be applied on the Sahtı Ekwı (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) range. Since 2022, GNWT-ECC has been distributing tri-weekly caribou collar maps to developers implementing Mobile Measures. The following developers are either currently implementing or have previously implemented Mobile Measures: Blue Star Gold Corp., B2Gold, North Arrow Minerals Inc., Rio Tinto, Li-FT Power Ltd., West Kitikmeot Resource Corp., and MMG Resources Inc. GNWT has also provided information to help inform developers by conducting a caribou occupancy analysis around 25 mineral exploration camps within the Centre of Habitation (COH) of Kık'etı Ekwı (Bathurst barren-ground caribou herd). The caribou occupancy analysis looked at the number of Bathurst, Bluenose-East, and Beverly caribou within 35 km of the mineral exploration camps on a weekly basis using GPS collar data from 2021-2023, as well as the average number of days of occupancy within 30 x 30 km grid cells across the 2021-2023 COH. The caribou occupancy analysis is another tool available to developers during the planning phase to identify the likelihood of their project site to interact with caribou in each season and what to expect for monitoring efforts and days of reduced activity based on the probability of caribou occurrence near the project site.
- *DRAFT Best Management Practices for Mitigating the Effects of Roads on Barren-ground Caribou in the NWT* (BMPs for Roads; GNWT-ECC 2026). The BMPs for Roads identifies road mitigation measures to be implemented by developers during the project planning, construction, operation, and closure phases of a road development. The list of road mitigation measures was generated following a review of 60 industry reports, plans, and research articles as well as through 30 Subject Matter Expert (SME) interviews. The BMPs for Roads is currently out for public engagement until July 15, 2026.

### **Preserving Our Land: Preparing for the Future Tłıchǫ Reforestation Project**

Tłıchǫ Government has secured funding to implement a reforestation project called *Preserving Our Land: Preparing for the Future*. This program offers significant environmental, cultural, economic, and social benefits for Tłıchǫ communities and the broader region. The project will plant 12 million native trees across Tłıchǫ lands over seven years, helping restore areas affected by recent wildfires and climate change. This will contribute significantly to habitat regeneration and support species at risk, with a particular focus on caribou and other species integral to the boreal ecosystem. Planting native tree species in the region will also help to restore natural flora, support local pollinators, birds and mammals and improve caribou habitat connectivity.

Caribou require vast, connected landscapes to complete their annual migrations where they rely heavily on ground and tree lichens for food. Large wildfires have destroyed much of their habitat surrounding Wekweètì, in the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd)'s wintering area. Recognizing that the majority of the barren-ground caribou habitat has been burned by wildfire around Wekweètì, the Tłıchǫ Government has extended their tree planting into areas around Wekweètì where Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) are typically seen.

The *Preserving Our Land: Preparing for the Future* project is about more than planting trees. It is about healing the land, restoring caribou habitat, creating opportunities for our people, strengthening Tłıchǫ stewardship, and ensuring future generations inherit a healthy and resilient environment. By combining Tłıchǫ knowledge with modern restoration practices, we are preparing for the future while honouring our responsibilities to the land.

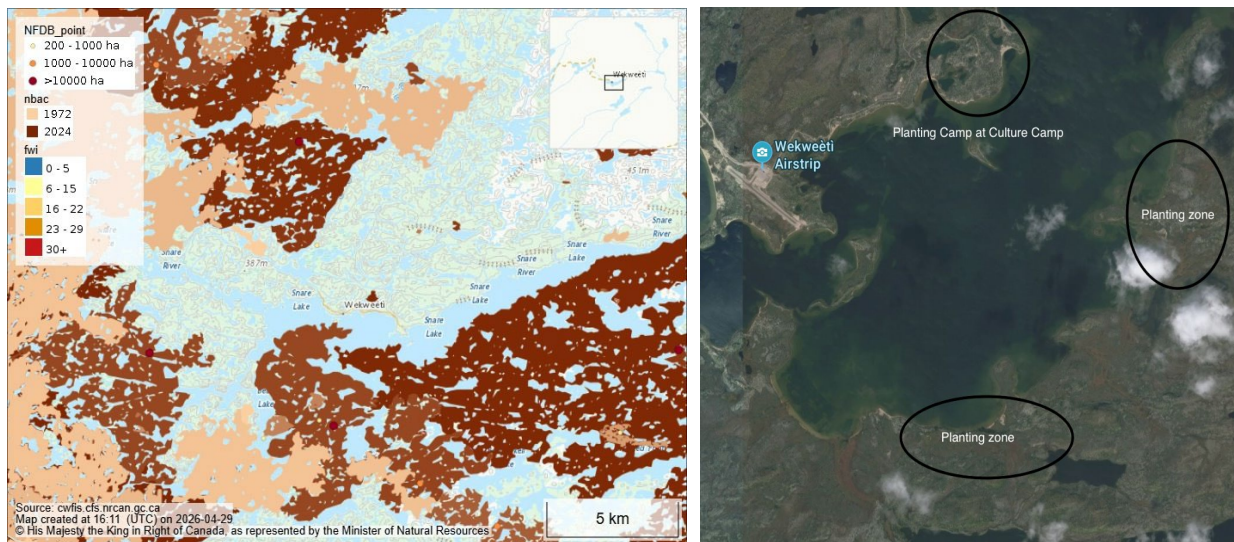


Figure 18. The map on the left shows fires from the 2024 Wekweètì Fire and planting zones planned for the 2026 planting season around Wekweètì.

Tłıchǫ Government has received direction from advising elders and harvesters to continue to push for preserving the remaining forest around Wekweètì as it is essential for maintaining healthy caribou populations. These forests provide important habitat for caribou, particularly during winter when they rely on lichens and other forage found in mature boreal ecosystems. The remaining forest also offers

shelter from harsh weather conditions, supports migration corridors, and contributes to the overall health of the watershed and ecosystem that caribou depend upon. Following the significant impacts of recent wildfires, protecting the forests that remain has become even more critical to prevent further habitat loss. Tłıchǵ Government would like to encourage that the fire management is carefully considered around Wekweètì and that the remaining forest be ranked at a higher priority on the Values at Risk scale used by managers to inform wildfire response decisions.

### **Proposed Education Management Actions**

Tłıchǵ Government and GNWT recognize that continued effort is needed to increase awareness among harvesters, communities, and the public about the status of barren-ground caribou herds, the need for conservation actions to promote recovery, and how people can contribute to conservation. As such, both governments continue to coordinate education/public awareness initiatives to improve public knowledge of Ekwò and to promote respectful hunting practices to reduce wounding and wastage.

At the caribou workshop Tłıchǵ Government held with elders on January 28-29, 2026, in Behchokò, and the Ekwò Gathering in Behchokò in May 2025, many elders and community members spoke of the importance of the caribou fall harvest to teach the younger generations. Elders consistently emphasized the importance of re-starting the cultural practice of harvesting caribou in the fall, due to the urgent need to re-teach and transfer knowledge and language to the younger generations about caribou, respectful harvesting practices, and Tłıchǵ traditional culture. In essence, restarting the fall hunting tradition transforms education into conservation.

In the last few years, Sahtì Ekwò have migrated towards Deèzàatì (Point Lake) and further south towards Tatsotì (Grenville Lake) and Ets'àitì (Rawalpindi Lake) during August and September. Possible locations for fall harvest camps can be set up at the traditional Tłıchǵ camps on Tatsotì (Grenville Lake) or Ets'àitì (Rawalpindi Lake), or possibly at Gotsokatì (Mesa Lake), depending on locations of Sahtì Ekwò during August and September in the up-coming years.

Tłıchǵ Government aims to create a focus on Tłıchǵ cultural education during the fall harvest; by sending youth along with the experienced harvesters. Tłıchǵ people have not been able to practice fall harvesting for the last 14 years, and the Tłıchǵ Government plans to use the fall hunts as a cultural learning opportunity for the generation of Tłıchǵ youth who have not participated in this important cultural tradition before.

Tłıchǵ Government has noted that the Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Management Zone has covered much of the accessible Sahtì Ekwò range for Tłıchǵ harvesters making it challenging to harvest Sahtì Ekwò. During the last 12 years, only one bull has been harvested in the fall; this bull was harvested during a Tłıchǵ canoe trip to revive the traditional canoe trail to Deèzàatì (Point Lake) in 2024 (ACCWM 2026).

Tłıchǵ Government's Ekwò Harvest Monitoring Program supports Tłıchǵ monitors to monitor the number of caribou harvested while also educating Tłıchǵ hunters on GNWT regulations, acting as a safety net for Tłıchǵ hunters, assisting Tłıchǵ hunters in butchering their harvest, and promoting and encouraging respectful harvesting. In the last two years, the program focused on implementing a respectful harvesting campaign and had developed a lot of materials in trying to grasp a broader more youthful audience such

as creating reels for social media but also relaying the messaging through radio to reach the older audience.

The GNWT will continue its Respectful Harvester Campaign which was co-developed with Indigenous Governments. It consists of social media posts, public service announcements and signage on the Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road. Future communications will include information on the need for tags in R/BC/01 and R/BC/02 and the opening of cow harvest of Sahtì Ekwò during the fall while emphasizing that bull harvest is more protective of the herd.

GNWT and Tłıchq Government continue to use social media and other formats, such as radio, to share information on respectful harvest and caribou conservation more broadly.

## **5. Monitoring and Research**

GNWT and Tłıchq Government propose continued scientific and Indigenous knowledge-based monitoring of the herd abundance, distribution, demographics and health. We also propose enhanced harvest monitoring activities to ensure the number of cows and bulls harvested annually are accurately recorded. Lastly, GNWT and Tłıchq Government will continue to be involved in and support research partnerships that study the drivers and mechanisms of population change.

### **Monitoring of Caribou**

Table 5 and 6 lists updated scientific monitoring and traditional monitoring of the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) led by GNWT and Tłıchq Government, respectively. The monitoring actions are proposed for 2027-2030 but many have been ongoing over long timeframes. The monitoring actions are briefly described below:

#### **Population Survey in 2028 and Every Three Years**

In 2019, due to the declining herd trend observed up to 2018, the calving ground survey interval changed to every 2 years, although a delay occurred in 2020 due to COVID (WRRB Recommendation #10-2019). In 2023, the herd had stabilized and was increasing. A return to the previous 3-year interval, starting in 2025, was proposed and recommended in 2024 (WRRB Recommendation #1-2024 [Sahtì Ekwò]). June composition surveys, which provide information on the proportion of breeding females in June as well as the composition of all caribou on the calving ground, are an integral part of calving ground abundance surveys.

#### **Maintain Annual Collar Numbers at 70 (50 Cows and 20 Bulls)**

Maintaining 70 collars on the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) provides more reliable annual estimates of cow survival rates, as well as higher confidence in defining the distribution of caribou throughout the year, assigning harvest to herd, and monitoring of herd fidelity to calving grounds. Maintaining collars on bulls is important because range use by bulls shows patterns that vary from those of cows.

### **Annual Fall Composition Surveys**

Fall composition surveys in the breeding season provide information on two key indicators of herd demographic health: calf:cow ratio that is an index of calf survival from birth to about 4.5 months of age, and a bull:cow ratio that is an index of bull survival rates, which can vary widely. The bull:cow ratio is an integral part of the abundance survey in years with a calving ground survey as this ratio is used to extrapolate from estimates of adult females on the calving grounds to herd size. During the fall there is generally good spatial separation of herds, allowing for herd-specific calf:cow and bull:cow ratios to be estimated. Annual fall composition surveys are recommended for the Sahti Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd).

Late winter composition surveys were conducted for many years, whereas fall composition surveys were only conducted in years before or after calving ground surveys. Late winter surveys provide an index of calf survival to about 9.5 months of age, and when combined with fall composition surveys, also provide an index of over-winter calf survival, which is typically much higher than summer calf survival. Since 2018, there have been several years with extensive winter range overlap of neighbouring herds (Bluenose-East, Bathurst, and Beverly), and estimating herd-specific late winter calf:cow ratios has been challenging, or not possible for some herds. Thus, of the fall and late-winter composition surveys, the fall surveys provide more reliable and consistent information on herd-specific estimates. Continued regular monitoring of late-winter calf:cow ratios is recommended for the Sahti Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd); however, fall surveys will take higher priority and late winter surveys will be undertaken as needed (e.g., if fall surveys are unsuccessful). Reduced funding and increased survey aircraft costs, and increased fuel costs are unable to support two barren-ground caribou composition surveys a year on a continuous basis, but late-winter composition surveys could also be considered if additional resources were available.

### **Ekwò Nàxoèdee K'è Program**

Tłıchq Government will continue to implement the Ekwò Nàxoèdee K'è program on Deèzàatì (Point Lake) to monitor the Sahti Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) in their fall range. Tłıchq Government is also working on developing an extensive Guardian Program where Guardians will be based out of each Tłıchq community. The Tłıchq Guardians Program will play a leading role in caring for the land, water and wildlife, responding to climate impacts like wildfire and drought, and helping restore caribou and other threatened animals, following Tłıchq laws, teachings, and community values. The Tłıchq Guardians will be responsible for being stewards of the land by being the boots on the ground, monitoring by observing and collecting data on the environment, wildlife and activities on Tłıchq Lands.

### **Ekwò Harvest Monitoring Program**

Tłıchq Government's Ekwò Harvest Monitoring Program supports Tłıchq monitors to monitor the number of caribou harvested while also educating Tłıchq hunters on GNWT regulations, acting as a safety net for Tłıchq hunters, assisting Tłıchq hunters in butchering their harvest, and promoting and encouraging respectful harvesting. The Ekwò Harvest Monitoring Program has mostly focused along the Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road where most harvest has occurred in recent years. Starting in winter 2024, Tłıchq Government hired a Guardian based out of Wekweètì to assist and monitor the Sahti Ekwò harvest in the

area. This guardian is in addition to the community monitor that GNWT hires in Wekweètì and will aid in the communication of new harvesting rules with respect to a fall cow harvest of Sahtì Ekwò.

Through this program we will track total harvest level by participating in the fall hunts and recording all caribou harvested while also monitoring the sex ratio of harvested caribou and ensuring that the harvest does not exceed the amount of authorization cards allocated. If there are leftover authorization cards after the fall hunt, they will be used in the winter where there will be a bull only harvest. Typically, by monitoring the Sahtì Ekwò harvest, Tłıchq Government distributes the authorization cards based on per capita of each Tłıchq community and the Chiefs of the communities decide how they will be used then the community director records the data when they are used. The community directors report their harvest to Tłıchq Government who then submits to the WRRB. By having a guardian present at the community hunts we will be able to gather more accurate harvest data.

The Tłıchq Guardians will be tasked to assist with any community hunts and will collect data using customized field books that will be created to record the number of caribou harvested by hunters; harvest information such as 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.

#### **GNWT Compliance and Enforcement Monitoring**

GNWT has four full-time Renewable Resource Officers in the Tłıchq region and will ensure that as the Gamètì and Wekweètì winter roads open and harvesting activities begin that appropriate Officer presence is allocated and adaptive to the situation as it progresses.

GNWT has previously supported a seasonal position based out of Wekweètì to help promote compliance and reduce the risk of illegal harvest. Continuation of this role, and the level of support it receives will depend on available resources and may be adjusted in response to changing harvest patterns and pressures across the region.

#### **Research on Caribou Abundance, Distribution, Demographics and Health**

Tłıchq Government and GNWT continue to support research into the underlying drivers of trends in caribou abundance, distribution, demographics, and health resulting from such factors as environmental conditions, parasites, disease, predation, and harvest along with the cumulative effects of development and a changing climate. Both governments also support Indigenous guardianship and monitoring programs that increase community involvement, first-hand monitoring of caribou, other wildlife and environmental conditions, and co-generation of knowledge. Research and monitoring projects that look into the relative importance of the different factors that influence caribou populations can help to inform and adapt targeted management and conservation actions. Initial results from some of the projects below are described in the background section of this report.

Research currently supported by Tłıchǫ Government and GNWT include:

- Cumulative Effects Assessment of Barren-ground Caribou Herds in the NWT (CIMP 207): Thom Stubbs (Headwater Strategy Group), Matt Carlson (Integral Ecology Group), John Nishi (EcoBorealis Consulting Inc.), and Mélanie Routh (Government of the Northwest Territories).
  - *A landscape change simulation model that forecasts changes from climate change and human disturbance and how barren-ground caribou might respond to these changes based on model assumptions about density dependence and how environmental or landscape factors affect caribou survival and recruitment. The project team reviewed and verified written sources of traditional knowledge to help build the model.*
- Community-defined health indicators (CIMP239): Olivia Hee, Amish Dua, Caylee Falvo, Benjamin Padilla, Fabien Mavrot, William Justus, Rachele Vade, and Susan Kutz (University of Calgary).
  - *Combining community-based health surveillance, traditional knowledge about caribou health, and western science to better understand what makes a caribou herd healthy, threats, and herd trends. The project team works closely with Kugluktuk and Tłıchǫ communities and focused on the Bluenose-East herd and data comparisons to the Dolphin and Union caribou.*
- Diversity and impacts of viruses: Frank van der Meer (University of Calgary).
  - *This project was related to CIMP239 above but focused on learning more about viruses that are present in caribou herds.*
- Contaminants, epigenetics, and genetic health: Rowan Barrett and Eric Johannessen (McGill University), and Mary Gamberg (Gamberg Consulting).
  - *Used community-harvested samples from across barren-ground caribou range and looked at genetic and epigenetic markers to look for signals of long-term health and diversity and if genes are changing due to environmental factors. Testing for contaminants included metals, industrial chemicals, and plastic additives.*
- Adult caribou survival: Eliezer Gurarie and Chloe Beaupré (State University of New York).
  - *Looked at factors that impact individual survival of over 1,400 collared barren-ground caribou across the NWT and Nunavut to help understand how survival changed across seasons, years, and caribou herds, and what environmental factors influence mortality.*
- Acoustic monitoring of disturbance: Eliezer Gurarie and Megan Perra (State University of New York).
  - *Used sound recorders and movement sensors inside a researcher-designed unit attached to caribou collars for a seasonal period to record fine-scale audio and movement data. This data allows researchers to investigate how insect harassment and human-made noise affected barren-ground caribou behaviour and calf survival. They aimed to understand how insects and noise affected caribou movements and energy use, and whether soundscape data could help find insect relief habitat or guide industry noise-management strategies.*
- Winter road caribou monitoring: Orna Phelan, Wayne Mercredi, and Shirley Coumont (North Slave Métis Alliance).

- *NSMA guardians patrol the Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road and document caribou numbers, health, harvest, predators, and disturbances, and have deployed wildlife cameras and sound recorders to document barren-ground caribou behaviour and road traffic levels. The project uses traditional knowledge and western science to develop a harvest model to estimate total caribou harvested along the road in 2025 based on caribou gut piles, and collaborates with other CIMP projects to better understand how the winter road and road traffic impacts caribou.*

In 2026-27, the Northwest Territories Cumulative Impacts Monitoring Fund (NWT CIMP) has prioritized three years of funding directed to projects that will increase our understanding of the cumulative impacts from road development on caribou, water, and fish. GNWT and Tłıchǵ Government also encourage research of caribou habitat to improve our understanding of the impact of habitat and forage quality on barren-ground caribou population trends.

Table 5. Scientific monitoring of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) by GNWT as primary lead.

| Indicator(s)                                                                             | Rationale                                                                                                                                     | Desired Trend                                                                                                                                            | Adaptive Management Options                                                                                                   | How Often                                | Notes                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Estimate of breeding cows and extrapolated herd size from calving ground photo survey | Most reliable estimate for abundance of breeding cows and total number of cows and is extrapolated to herd size based on sex ratio            | Continued increase in the herd to 2028 and thereafter                                                                                                    | Last survey in 2025 and new survey proposed for 2028, to confirm the increasing trend and re-consideration of harvest options | 3 years                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 2. Maintain up to 70 GPS collars on herd annually (50 cows, 20 bulls)                    | Collar information is key to reliable surveys, tracking seasonal movements and ranges, monitoring survival and herd fidelity                  | Additional collars are added every March/April to maintain up to 70 collars on the herd                                                                  |                                                                                                                               | Yearly                                   | Information from collared caribou is essential to monitoring and management of all barren-ground caribou herds                                                                                              |
| 3. Cow productivity; composition survey on calving ground in spring (June)               | Proportion of breeding females in June at peak of calving establishes initial productivity of adult females (a proxy for calving success)     | Proportion of breeding cows at least 80%                                                                                                                 | Low ratio indicates poor fecundity and suggests poor nutrition in previous summer; high values suggest good pregnancy rates   | In years of calving ground photo surveys | Part of calving ground photographic survey                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 4. Fall composition survey (October)                                                     | Tracks bull:cow ratio and fall calf:cow ratio<br>Fall calf:cow ratio provides an index of calf survival from birth through initial 4.5 months | Bull:cow ratio above 50:100<br>Calf:cow ratio consistently more than 40:100<br>For late winter surveys, calf:cow ratios of at least 35-40:100 on average | If bull:cow ratio is below target, consider reducing bull harvest<br>Low fall calf:cow ratios suggest poor calf survival      | Annual                                   | Fall sex ratio is needed for June calving ground survey extrapolation to herd size<br>Calf productivity and survival can vary widely year-to-year, and are affected by several variables, including weather |

|                                                                                          |                                                                                                                      |                                                                                           |                                                                                                                     |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5. Cow survival rate estimated from IPM and annual survival estimates from collared cows | Population trend highly sensitive to cow survival rate                                                               | Continuation of at least 80% if productivity (calving success) and calf fidelity are high | Sustained cow survival of at least 83- 85% desirable; if it declines and stays below 80%, decline likely            | Annual   | Collar-based survival rates can be biased low (e.g. if collars fail) and should be considered alongside modelled survival rates                                                                          |
| 6. Caribou health and condition assessment from harvested animals                        | Condition assessment provides an overall index of nutrition/ environmental conditions over time                      | High hunter condition scores (average 2.5-3.5 out of 4)                                   | Sustained poor condition suggests unfavourable environmental conditions and possibly decline                        | Annually | Work with Tłıchǫ Government and other harvesters to collect health data from harvested caribou<br>Combine with health information gathered from Kugluktuk and University of Calgary CIMP-funded projects |
| 7. Total harvest from this herd by all users groups (numbers & sex ratio)                | Accurate tracking of all harvest is essential to management and to knowing whether management actions are effective. | All harvest (numbers and sex ratio) reported accurately and within agreed-on limits.      | Re-assess recommended harvest annually (including sex ratio); if herd appears to decline, re-assess harvest limits. | Annual   | Multiple factors other than harvest may contribute to decline but harvest is one of the factors that humans can control.                                                                                 |

Table 6. Traditional monitoring of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) by Tłıchq Government as primary lead.

| Programs           | Indicators                           | Rationale/Methods                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Desired Outcome                                                                                                                                 | Timeframe                       |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è | Health (body condition and injuries) | Knowing the condition of caribou can give an indication of how well the overall herd is doing and how well they are feeding. When caribou are observed their body condition is rated as skinny, average or fat.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | More fat and average caribou seen.                                                                                                              | Annually<br>(July to September) |
|                    | Calf Abundance (Calf to Cow Ratio)   | An ekwò herd with an average adult female survival rate of 85% would need to have approximately 35 calves per 100 cows in late winter to have a stable population growth rate. Calf abundance in summer would need to be comparatively higher.                                                                                                                                                                                                               | High confidence and representative sampling of caribou herds based on ground observations. Summer ratios of at least 35-40 calves per 100 cows. |                                 |
|                    | Predator Abundance                   | Dìga, sahcho and nòg ha are the main predators of ekwò, if there are high numbers of predators when herds are declining, we know that they are feeding on ekwò and their numbers will not increase.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Low observations of predators.                                                                                                                  |                                 |
|                    | Habitat (Weather and Vegetation)     | Summer weather conditions, including trends in temperature, wind speed and precipitation, have direct and indirect influences on ekwò health and fitness for the coming months of the rut and the long winter period. Summer weather influences plant growth and forage quality, which, in turn, influences ekwò nutrition, and body condition and fitness. It is important when we are on the land to observe and assess the vegetation and caribou forage. | Rich, moist soil producing succulent, good quality lichens, grasses, shrubs and dwarf birch.                                                    |                                 |
|                    | Insect Activity                      | Biting and parasitic insects may influence ekwò foraging behavior and activity levels, which in turn may affect body condition and pregnancy rates of ekwò.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Low insect activity is desirable so that ekwò can feed well through the growing season.                                                         |                                 |

|                         |                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                              |                            |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
|                         | Industrial Infrastructure and Activity | Industrial activity can be a sensory disturbance for caribou that can negatively impact animals' ability to rest and feed properly. Industrial infrastructure may negatively impact the herds ability to migrate to seasonal feeding ground and can fragment their seasonal ranges.           | No industrial obstacles that fragment habitat, and less industrial activity causing sensory disturbance.     |                            |
| Ekwò Harvest Monitoring | Harvest Management                     | Overharvesting may contribute to the decline of many caribou herds; we want to prevent that for caribou and see them become plentiful again. It is important that harvesting is consistent with the WRRB determination for a bull-only TAH and proportional allocation to Tłıchq communities. | Compliance with WRRB determination for a TAH and proportional allocation of ekwò for Tłıchq.                 | Annually (December to May) |
|                         | Health (body condition and injuries)   | Hunters tend to target healthy, fat animals to feed their families, it is important to note if ekwò are unhealthy because it could indicate the health of the larger herd.                                                                                                                    | Hunter's observations of ekwò with rounded rumps, lots of fat, and good carcass conditions and meat quality. |                            |
|                         | Predator Abundance                     | We will work with Tłıchq hunters and monitors to help track predator observations. Monitoring the relative occurrence of predators seen by hunters and monitors while harvesting caribou helps to understand the ongoing level of predation.                                                  | Low sightings of wolves (including wolf-killed caribou) and wolverines.                                      |                            |

## **6. Alternatives to Proposed Management Action**

We considered the risks of two alternative management strategies: first, having no harvest limits on the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd), and second, continuing with a year-round bull-only harvest.

The 2026 Action Plan for the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) determined the herd to be in the “Yellow status”, which means the herd is of intermediate size and increasing. The *Taking Care of Caribou Management Plan for the Bluenose-East, Bluenose-West, and Cape Bathurst Herds* (ACCWM 2021) recommendations for harvest under this herd status is a balanced approach that assists in herd recovery including the consideration of easing limits on subsistence harvest. A full release of the current TAH of 395 bulls to a scenario of no harvest restrictions is not consistent with this status and carries a risk level that is unsubstantiated at this time given the modest herd size and growth rate. If harvest was unrestricted there would be a risk that the herd does not continue to increase in size or even lead to a decrease.

This risk would be heightened if the Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road is not opened in winter 2026/27 and the some of the harvest observed there (3000+ animals) is diverted to Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) off the Wekweèti winter road (see Appendix D). While the Beverly herd is currently estimated at 152,000 and could sustain that higher level of harvest, the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) at 29,000 animals could not at this time.

Keeping the TAH as a bull-only harvest is an option that presents risks as well. These risks include the cultural loss of fall harvesting practices and skewing the bull:cow ratio which has shown low values in the most recent year. Because groups in the fall have been seen to be small to moderate size of mixed sexes, planning a fall harvest around a bull only harvest could be challenging, given often low numbers of bulls in a single group. Harvesting cows instead of bulls can have a greater impact on population abundance (Appendix C), however, the potential impact would be minimized given that a restricted harvest with a TAH of 395 in Wek’èezhìi is being considered. Limiting cow harvest to the fall season means that caribou will need to be accessed via traditional means (e.g. canoe trip) or ground-based with aircraft support (cost prohibitive at large scale) which provide logistical constraints on the level of harvest during any one trip. Cows will not be permitted to be harvested during the winter when snow and winter roads provide much easier access via vehicles and snowmobiles.

GNWT and Tłıchq Government are proposing the actions for 3 years and associated monitoring of harvest levels, sex ratio of the harvest, bull:cow ratios, calf:cow ratios and population size. If results over the three-year timeframe show unanticipated consequences, the actions will be reassessed and revised at that time.

## **7. Consultation**

This section lists key meetings where the GNWT and Tłıchq Government presented on the results of Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) calving ground surveys and other monitoring programs. Discussion and participant comments at these meetings have shaped the joint management proposal.

- GNWT sent a letter via email to Indigenous Governments and Indigenous Organizations on the 2025 barren-ground caribou survey results in November 2025. The letter offered presentations upon request.
- On November 12-13, 2025, GNWT presented results of the June 2025 calving ground survey of the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) at the annual Section 15 meeting (required under the NWT *Wildlife Act*) of NWT organizations responsible for wildlife management (in person/virtual) held in Yellowknife. Meeting notes are available upon request.
- On November 18-19, 2025, GNWT presented results of the June 2025 calving ground survey and other monitoring results for the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) at the ACCWM's Annual Herd Status meeting, in Yellowknife. This meeting was attended by representatives from NWT and Nunavut, including Kugluktuk, and all the boards making up the ACCWM. An updated Action Plan for the herd with updated herd status was finalized in February 2026.
- On February 4-5, 2026, GNWT presented results of the June 2025 calving ground survey of the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) at the Bathurst Caribou Advisory Committee Annual Status Meeting held in Yellowknife.
- In January 2026, Tłıchq Government and GNWT conducted a community tour of all four Tłıchq communities and Yellowknife where results of the Ekwò Nàxoèdee K'è program, the Tłıchq wolf harvest program and the June 2025 calving ground survey were presented.
- On January 28-29, 2026, Tłıchq Government facilitated a workshop with Tłıchq elders and harvesters to discuss the GNWT Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) survey results and implications for harvest management. Workshop participants recommended moving forward in the coming years with a focus on educating the younger generations in respectful traditional harvesting practices, and re-start the fall harvest.
- Concurrent with this submission, GNWT has distributed the Joint Management Proposal to other Indigenous Government and Indigenous Organizations for comment and feedback. Presentations will be made to those governments and organizations upon request.

In addition:

- Tłıchq Government, GNWT, and WRRB met regularly (monthly and at times weekly) in the fall and winter 2025-2026 to discuss status and management of the Bluenose-East, Bathurst and Beverly caribou herds. These 3 groups comprise the Barren-Ground Caribou Technical Working Group (BGCTWG), which has been meeting since 2010. Tłıchq Government and GNWT will continue to work collaboratively through the BGCTWG.
- Tłıchq Government and GNWT staff have had meetings approximately monthly from 2024 to present to discuss wildlife issues. These meetings included discussions in late 2025 and early 2026 concerning an updated joint management proposal for the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd).

## 8. Communications Plan

Tłıchq Government and GNWT will communicate contents of the joint management proposal through a variety of methods. Tłıchq communities will be informed of the proposal through social media, the Ekwò Harvest Monitoring Program, and other means outlined in Section 4 (Education). Tłıchq Government and GNWT will also prepare a plain language summary of the joint management proposal to accompany the full proposal. Both governments will continue to participate and present on Sahtı Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) monitoring and management at annual and sub-annual NWT *Wildlife Act* Section 15 meetings, ACCWM Annual Herd Status meetings, WRRB Board meetings, and other opportunities that arise.

## 9. Relevant Background Supporting Documentation

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## **10. Time Period Requested**

Management actions proposed here would apply from July 1, 2027 until June 30, 2030 with the results of the next calving ground photo survey of the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) expected in 2028. Tłıchq Government and GNWT suggest that management actions, including harvest management and other actions, be reviewed annually or whenever key additional information is available according to the BGCTWG Adaptive Management Framework (e.g., additional survey information or recommendations from ACCWM or boards).

## **11. Other Relevant Information**

**Appendix A. Integrated Population Model Analysis of the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East Barren-Ground Caribou Herd)**

**Appendix B. Spatial Analyses and Mapping to Evaluate the Impact of the Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Management Zone**

**Appendix C. Summary of the Likely Consequences of Various Harvest Levels for the Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East Barren-Ground Caribou Herd) 2025-2030**

See Appendices A through C attached at the end of the proposal.

#### **Appendix D. Impact of Winter Roads on Caribou Harvest**

The Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road (TCWR) was first constructed in 1982 and its purpose was to supply the Lupin Gold Mine at Contwoyto Lake in Nunavut. In 2000, construction of the TCWR was taken over by a Joint Venture between the Ekati and Diavik Diamond Mines to supply materials for construction of the two mines. In 2008, the De Beers Group became the third partner in the TCWR Joint Venture Project. With closure of De Beers Snap Lake Diamond Mine in 2015, Diavik Diamond Mine in 2026, and estimated closure timelines for the Ekati and Gahcho Kué Diamond Mines at 2029 and 2030, respectively, there is uncertainty on how long the TCWR will be operational in the future.

Operational life of the TCWR has implications for changing winter hunting access and caribou harvest patterns. The TCWR has been a key winter access corridor for people from across the NWT to harvest caribou on the central barren lands since it became operational. Indeed, even prior to initial construction of the TCWR, the winter road from Yellowknife to Gordon Lake facilitated caribou harvest. For example, Jingfors and Gray (1983; p. 15) stated that in *“early 1980 large numbers of caribou wintered in the Gordon Lake area and as a result, an estimated 2,000 caribou were harvested by hunters who gained access by the winter road”* (Donihee and Gray 1982).

The TCWR facilitated harvest of barren-ground caribou – mostly the Bathurst herd – from the late 1980s through the early 2000s (Ziemann 2007, Adamczewski et al. 2020). Over the past 33 years, the TCWR has generally been open from January 31<sup>st</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup> with a median duration of 60 days and a range of 43 to 80 days. Following implementation of the Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Management Zone in 2015, harvesters started to access Beverly caribou on the TCWR in areas where the TCWR did not overlap with the Mobile Zone. Timing of winter road operational patterns on the central barrens since 2011 are illustrated in Figure 1D and Table 1D. Closure of the TCWR will result in loss of ~2 months of winter hunting access. Thus, if the TCWR is not operational in winter 2026/27, then it is likely that more harvesters will use the Gamètì or Wekweètì winter roads to access Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) under the current TAH instead of harvesting caribou accessible on the TCWR. The Gamètì and Wekweètì winter roads have generally been open from mid to early March through to mid April for periods of about 58 and 38 days, respectively (Figure 1-D, Table 1-D). Harvest may occur when caribou distribution overlaps those winter road corridors. For example, in winters 2007/08 and 2008/09, hunters were interviewed at check stations on the Gamètì and Wekweètì winter roads resulting in total reported caribou harvests of 1,690 and 2,712 caribou, respectively, with more than half being cows (B. Croft and T. J. Rabesca, ENR, unpublished data, cited in Adamczewski et al. 2020; p. 68).

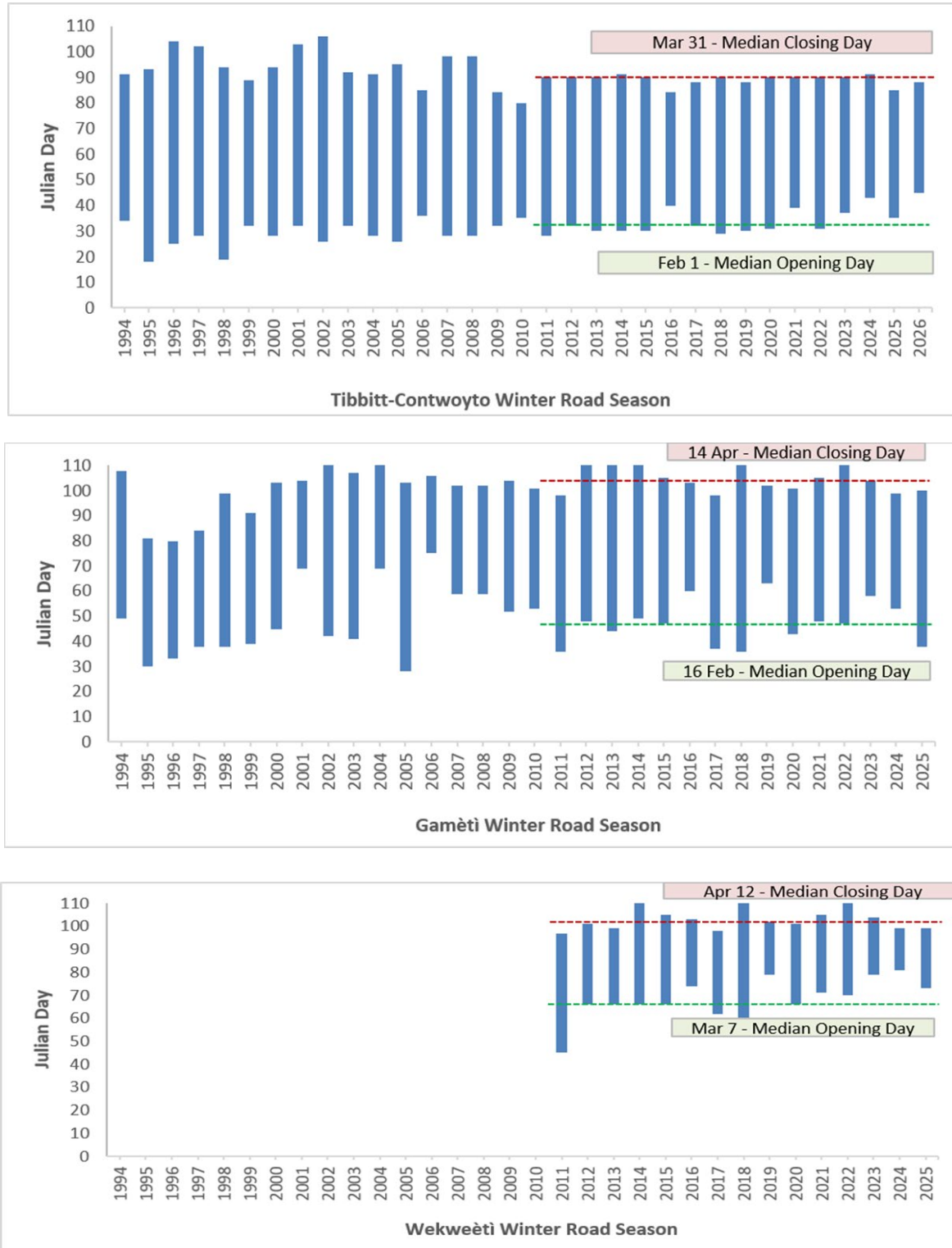


Figure 1-D. Opening and closing dates for the Tibbit to Contwoyto Winter Road (TCWR), Gamètì Winter Road, and Wekweètì Winter Road from 1994 to 2026. Data sources: GNWT Department of Infrastructure and TCWR Joint Venture Website ([jvtcwinterroad.ca](http://jvtcwinterroad.ca)).

Table 1-D. Median number of days that key winter roads have been operational from 2011 to 2026. Data for all winter roads were summarized since 2011, which is when the Wekweètì winter road became readily accessible. Data source: GNWT Department of Infrastructure.

| <b>Number of Days Open</b> | <b>Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road</b> | <b>Gamètì Winter Road</b> | <b>Wekweètì Winter Road</b> |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Median                     | 58                                      | 58                        | 35                          |
| Minimum                    | 43                                      | 31                        | 18                          |
| Maximum                    | 62                                      | 78                        | 61                          |

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