



BATHURST CARIBOU MANAGEMENT PLAN

WHAT WE HEARD SUMMARY

July | 2021



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English

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French

Kīspin ki nitawih̄tīn ē nīhīyawihk ōma ācimōwin, tipwāsinān.

Cree

Tłıchq̄ yatı k'èè. Dı wegodi newq̄ dè, gots'ō gonede.

Tłıchq̄

ʔerih̄t'is Dēne Sų́nė yatı t'a huts'elkēr xa beyáyatı theᓯᓯ ᓯat'e, nuwe ts'ēn yóttı.

Chipewyan

Edı gondı dehgáh got'je zhatıé k'éé edat'éh enahddhę nıde naxets'é edahí.

South Slavey

K'áhshó got'jne xədə k'é hederı ʔedjht'é yerııwę nıde dúle.

North Slavey

Jii gwandak izhii ginjik vat'atr'ijáhch'uu zhit yınohthan jı', diıts'at ginohkhii.

Gwich'in

Uvanittuaq ilitchurisukupku Inuvialuktun, ququaqłuta.

Inuvialuktun

Ć^bđ< n n^{sb}Δ^c ʌ r l j Δ r^c Δ ɔ^b n ɔ^c ɛ^{sb} ɣ l ɔ n^b, ɔ^c ɛ^c n^a ɔ^c ɔ^{sb} ɛ^c r^a ɛ^{sb} ɔ n^c.

Inuktitut

Hapkua titiqqat pijumagupkit Inuinnaqtun, uvaptinnut hivajarlutit.

Inuinnaqtun

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Engagement Context

The Draft Bathurst Caribou Management Plan (BCMP) was developed over a four-year period by the Bathurst Caribou Advisory Committee (BCAC) after its establishment in 2017. The Bathurst Caribou Management Plan provides a management framework and recommendations for the recovery and sustainable management of the Bathurst herd across the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Saskatchewan. The Plan reflects the diverse interests of governments (Indigenous, territorial, provincial, and federal), communities, and stakeholders across the herd's range.

In recent years, the Bathurst herd has exhibited a significant downward trend as compared with other barren-ground caribou herds. To support the herd's recovery, the relationship between people and caribou in the North must be mended. This Plan is not about "managing" caribou; it's about understanding and regulating human actions such that the Bathurst herd may return to self-sufficient population levels across its natural range. The BCMP is intended to provide guidance for the recovery and sustainable long-term management of the Bathurst herd. As the latest iteration of ongoing efforts to care for Bathurst caribou and their habitat, the plan provides a coordinated, collaborative approach to management of the herd that can be applied across jurisdictions.

The last phases of Plan development occurred during the 2020-21 global Covid-19 pandemic, which impacted how public engagement activities on the Plan could be carried out.

Typically, community engagement would be carried out in-person with presentations to inform community members about the structure and content of the plan, answer any questions, and document feedback and insight from members of the public. In April and May 2021, the Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT), with support from BCAC members of the relevant community prepared and delivered virtual presentations to community members, Indigenous governments and organizations (IGOs), and community Chief and Councils. Some IGOs elected to undertake an independent review of the Plan and provide written feedback, however most engagement was undertaken with ENR staff and the community's BCAC representative present to provide clarification and insight into the Plan's content, structure, and process of development. In addition, the Plan was posted to the GNWT website for review and comment via email by the general public.

Understandably, virtual community engagement sessions were less effective than in-person meetings. The BCAC received fewer substantive comments on the structure or content of the Plan during these meetings, and GNWT received only a handful of email submissions. The BCAC recognizes this as a shortcoming of the finalized Plan, and will search for opportunities for further engagement as the Plan is implemented on the ground. Accordingly, the BCAC may recommend initiating a review of the Plan earlier than the 5-10 year schedule suggested in the Plan itself (see the Draft Management Plan) S. 5 – Implementation).

General Perspectives

Throughout the period of public engagement, community members across the Bathurst range expressed a deep concern for the well-being of the Bathurst herd. Many have witnessed the decline of barren-ground caribou in the past decades, and keenly feel the associated cultural, spiritual, ecological, and economic impacts of lost caribou harvest opportunity. Many Indigenous communities and governments across the range have voluntarily implemented zero-harvest regulations across their territories, in addition to GNWT and GN's Total Annual Harvest recommendations of zero animals.

Throughout public engagement for the BCMP, community members, and particularly Indigenous peoples, spoke to the pain of losing the caribou harvest. They shared fears for the livelihoods of future generations and the continuation of their traditions as young Indigenous people are unable to get out on the land to hunt caribou.

Members of the public also expressed widespread concern regarding the potential impacts of ongoing mineral exploration and development on the Bathurst range for the herd. The disruption of migration patterns from landscape and sensory disturbance was a particular concern for many. Connections were also drawn between development on the Bathurst range and the need to transition toward a more sustainable, circular economy. Guidance on land use and resource development decisions with respect to managing and minimizing impacts to caribou is provided in the Bathurst Caribou Range Plan, a companion document to the BCMP. The Range Plan has a suite of habitat management recommendations for the Bathurst herd to ensure its important areas are conserved, migratory pathways are maintained, and disturbance levels are kept within defined thresholds.

There was also some criticism over the advisory nature of the Plan. Some community members were skeptical of how it could be ensured that the Plan will be adopted in full by all relevant management authorities across the Bathurst range. In the NWT, the Plan will be submitted to the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) for review and recommendations. It will also be reviewed by the GNWT's Executive Council. These approval processes will ensure the Plan is implemented to the extent possible in the NWT. The BCAC has also considered submitting the Plan to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) with support from Government of Nunavut to provide similar commitment to implementation in that jurisdiction. The BCAC, which is composed of members of communities, governments, and management authorities across the range, will continue to meet to discuss the implementation of the BCMP and make recommendations regarding the management of human actions to allow the herd to recover and sustain itself.

Plan Structure

There was no substantive feedback on the structure of the Plan or the framework of the Bathurst Management Wheel, including the population thresholds and other indicators used to determine herd status.

There was no substantive feedback on the Guiding Principles of the BCMP, which were developed by the BCAC to guide reflections and discussions throughout the development and implementation of the Plan.

There was also little substantive feedback on the Adaptive Management Framework which will guide the implementation of the Plan over the coming years. There was some skepticism that an “adaptive management” framework would allow for too much development on the range. However, it should be noted that one of the BCMP’s Guiding Principles is the Precautionary Principle, stating that “In the face of uncertainty regarding the impacts of stressors such as future land use, industrial development, climate change, where there are threats of serious or irreparable damage, knowledge gaps or uncertainty will not be a reason for postponing reasonable conservation measures” (Draft BCMP, 2021, p.6).

Plan Content

Harvest Management

There was no substantive feedback on the population thresholds for different harvest levels among user groups (Indigenous peoples, residents, outfitting/commercial operations).

Community members expressed concern for the level of illegal harvest, and the confiscation of meat during investigations under the *Wildlife Act*. They also wanted to better understand what happens to caribou meat when it is confiscated, and whether there are additional approaches that can encourage increased compliance and respectful harvesting practices.

Community members raised a range of specific suggestions related to the Harvest Management Recommendations in the Plan. These included:

- Recommending the maintenance of a “Bull only” harvest at all herd status levels (i.e., harvesting cows, calves, or pregnant cows should never be permitted).
- Recommending that outfitting and commercial hunting operations should never be brought back for barren-ground caribou in the North.
- Recommending that the Plan prohibit all harvest from ice roads at all herd status levels. It should be noted that the BCAC discussed the issue of harvest from ice roads during the development of the Plan; it was recognized that ice roads provide access for elders and other Indigenous peoples who might not otherwise be able to participate in the caribou harvest.

The BCAC recognizes that there are times during changes in population size and trend, such as now, when an emphasis on bull harvest is important to protect the breeding females, while harvest of

females can occur in times when the herd is at high numbers with high productivity. It was noted that at times only female caribou are available seasonally to some communities, and cow harvest may be appropriate depending on the status level of the herd if conducted according to Indigenous values and knowledge.

The BCAC recognizes that outfitted and commercial harvest opportunities can be appropriate uses of the Bathurst caribou herd at particular times in the herd population cycle. The Plan would allow for this type of harvest to be considered at “Medium and Increasing” and “High” herd status levels.

In response to recent concerns regarding issues of safety and disrespectful hunting practices on the Tibbett to Contwoyto winter road, discussions among GNWT and Indigenous governments and organizations have been initiated.

Habitat & Disturbance

Community members shared significant concern over the cumulative impacts of mining, exploration, roads, and other disturbances (including sensory disturbance) on the landscape for Bathurst caribou populations. Mineral exploration in particular was raised as a concern due to the sensory disturbance from helicopter surveys and other human activity including exploration activities.

The Slave Geological Province Corridor is a development project that raised widespread concern throughout the engagement period. Many community members feel that the project will further affect the Bathurst herd’s habitat and range, negatively impacting the herd by impeding migration patterns and increasing cumulative land and sensory disturbance across the range.

Overall, public engagement revealed that some people felt the BCMP did not include sufficient discussion of the impacts of development and disturbance on the Bathurst range.

It should be noted that the BCMP integrates with the Bathurst Caribou Range Plan, which reflects extensive effort by federal, territorial and Indigenous governments and organizations in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Saskatchewan, as well as industry and non-government organizations, to characterize and address issues related to cumulative land disturbance on the Bathurst range. The Range Plan has a goal of ensuring that the Bathurst herd’s annual range is in a resilient landscape condition. The Range Plan describes a suite of habitat management recommendations for the Bathurst herd to ensure its important areas are conserved, migratory pathways are maintained, and disturbance levels are kept within defined thresholds. These recommendations form the basis of the Management Plan’s recommendations related to habitat and disturbance, and should be used together to help guide decision making collectively. As described in the BCMP, the Range Plan is currently being implemented in a phased manner by the GNWT and its co-management partners.

During the development of the Range Plan, impacts of the SGP corridor project were considered. The SGP falls within the “Enhanced” management response of the Range Plan’s Cumulative Land Disturbance Framework, which requires a higher level of mitigation with respect to routing, timing

of construction and dust and traffic management. It will also require a higher ratio of habitat offsets and/or other compensatory mechanisms. The BCMP recommends that Range Plan habitat management recommendations be reconsidered at “Low and Decreasing” and “Critical Low” phases of the herd cycle such that more intensive habitat management approaches might be undertaken.

Predator Management

Community members recognized that increased predation is only one factor contributing to the decline of Bathurst caribou across the range. However, they noted that predator management is an area where community members can take action for caribou, which also provides benefits for the community in getting hunters back out on the land.

Public engagement for the BCMP revealed widespread support for the continuation and potential expansion of community-based predator management programs and incentives. Many of those who provided feedback on the Plan had participated in predator management in some way, and saw firsthand the benefits of hunting wolves for caribou and for the community.

Community members noted the drawbacks of a previous wolf poisoning program from the 1950s-60s, which killed wolves, but also impacted other animals such as foxes. It was clarified that such a program would not be recommended or supported. The BCMP does not prescribe specific approaches to predator management, but does promote community-based predator management programs as one of a range of potential approaches.

The Plan suggests predator management actions should be considered at times when the herd is in the “Low and Decreasing” and “Critical Low” phases of its population cycle.

Research & Monitoring

There was little substantive feedback on the recommended actions for the Research & Monitoring section of the Plan. Some community members expressed concern about the impacts of monitoring on the health and well-being of the Bathurst herd. In particular, there was concern over the impact of collaring on caribou, as well as the disturbance caused by helicopters flying overhead for population surveys.

Decisions related to appropriate monitoring methods are made in collaboration with co-management partners and carefully weigh the benefits of the information against the potential impacts to caribou. Technological innovation allows opportunities for continual assessment and improvements in such methods. The use of satellite collars to monitor caribou is regulated through the issuance of Wildlife Research Permits, Wildlife Care Committee authorizations and the application of Standard Operating Procedures to ensure that any impacts are minimized to the extent possible.

Communication & Education

There was some discussion in community engagement events about the impacts of overharvesting, and the need to address this issue through education. Beyond that, there was no substantive feedback on the Communication & Education recommendations in the Plan.

Key Direction from BCAC

The BCAC gathered to review the feedback received throughout the public engagement period. Their key direction was to search for opportunities for further engagement throughout the early stages of implementing the Plan. For example, the first Annual Review on Bathurst Caribou will provide an opportunity to bring together a broader cross-section of community members and knowledge holders for deeper discussions about the Bathurst herd and the Management Plan. The BCAC may also recommend initiating a formal review of the Plan prior to the 5-10 years recommended within the Plan, if this early engagement results in recommendations for substantive changes to the structure or content of the Plan.

Next Steps

Following the public engagement period, the Draft Management Plan will be revised and reviewed again by the BCAC. It will then be finalized and brought to the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board for review in September of 2021. The GNWT will also submit the plan to the Government of Nunavut for their consideration.

Nunavut organizations that sit on the BCAC recommended submitting the Plan to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) for approval so that it can be implemented in Nunavut as well. Under the NWMB process, management plans can be submitted for review and approval by federal or territorial governments, Regional Wildlife Organizations, Hunters and Trappers Organizations, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc, non-governmental organizations and the general public. The GNWT will share the plan with the Government of Nunavut for them to determine next steps for approving and implementing the plan in Nunavut

References

Government of the Northwest Territories. 2019. *Bathurst Caribou Range Plan*. Environment and Natural Resources, Government of the Northwest Territories, Yellowknife, NT. 86 + iii pp.

Government of the Northwest Territories. 2021. *Draft Bathurst Caribou Management Plan*. Environment and Natural Resources, Government of the Northwest Territories, Yellowknife, NT. 62 + iv pp.