

Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resource Board (WRRB) Management Proposal

1. Applicant Information	
Project Title: Government of the Northwest Territories Proposal: Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Conservation Area	
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2. Management Proposal Summary	
Start Date: Jan. 20, 2015	Projected End Date: June 2015
Length: Until end of 2014/15 harvest season (June 2015)	Project Year: 1
Based on June 2014 reconnaissance survey results and other monitoring, the Bathurst herd appears to have declined substantially in numbers since 2012. Satellite collar locations indicate most of the herd is wintering in a relatively limited area in the North Slave region in 2014-2015. As a precautionary measure, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) is proposing to establish a mobile conservation zone around the area where the Bathurst caribou are wintering, where harvest would not be permitted. ENR has had meetings with key Aboriginal governments on this proposed zone and there is overall support for this approach. ENR is seeking approval from the Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resource Board (WRRB) for regulation changes that would establish this mobile zone and allow for enforcement of harvest restrictions within the zone.	
Please list all permits required to conduct proposal. Approval of the WRRB is requested for the establishment of the Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Conservation Area (MCBCCA) in wildlife regulations and to enable enforcement of the MCBCCA, if needed.	
3. Background (Provide information on the affected wildlife species and management issue)	
A. Bathurst caribou status in 2014 Calving photo-surveys of the Bathurst herd resulted in extrapolated population estimates of about 32,000 in 2009 and 35,000 in 2012, indicating a stable trend after rapid decline in 2006-2009. Greatly reduced harvest in 2010 and improved calf recruitment in 2008-2011 likely contributed substantially to the stabilizing trend. A calving reconnaissance survey in June 2014 suggested numbers of caribou on the calving ground have declined substantially from 2012. ENR acknowledges reconnaissance surveys are not very precise but in recent years	

reconnaissance surveys of the Bathurst calving grounds reliably tracked the trend from calving photo-surveys 2006-2009 (rapid decline) and 2009-2012 (stable). The June 2014 reconnaissance survey results suggest a decline in caribou on the calving ground of about 75 percent in 2012-2014.

Calf:cow ratios in late-winter or fall 2012, 2013 and 2014 (calves born 2011, 2012 and 2013) were lower than in the previous three years and below 30:100, suggesting a natural declining trend. A fall calf:cow ratio of 24:100 in October 2014 (calves born in 2014) indicates relatively poor recruitment has continued in 2014. Demographic analysis indicates the herd likely has had a low natural cow survival rate in recent years. Combined with reduced recruitment, the herd would likely have a natural declining trend (i.e. with no harvest).

Reported harvest of this herd has averaged 200-300/year in R/BC/02 and R/BC/03 since 2010. In some winters (2012 and, particularly, 2013), Bathurst caribou (based on collars) have wintered outside these two zones in RBC01 to the west and significant harvest of Bathurst caribou may have occurred there (estimated annual harvest of 2500-3000 caribou in R/BC/01 and S/BC/03, mostly Bluenose-East). Bathurst caribou have also sometimes wintered in the east (U/BC/01) and some harvest may have occurred there in those winters (see Fig. 1).

A helicopter-based fall composition survey in October 2014 showed that 11 of the 14 Bathurst collared cows were in a relatively small area. This area was flown intensively and a total of 3,000 caribou were seen. By November 2014, all 14 collared Bathurst cows had grouped together in a limited area. Further reconnaissance surveys by fixed-wing aircraft in November, December and January 2014-2015 were flown in this area. The composition and reconnaissance surveys were not designed to estimate herd size but the results suggest the June 2014 survey results reflected a true decline and that the herd has declined substantially since 2012.

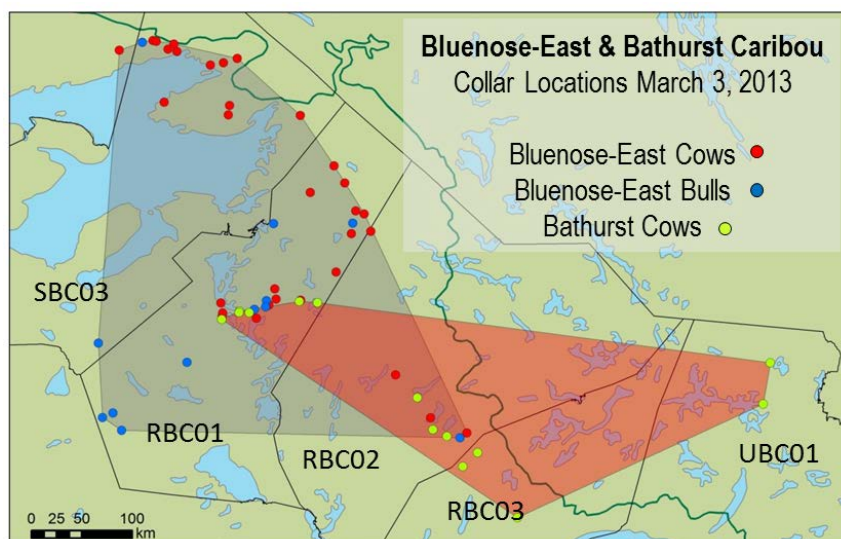


Fig. 1. Map showing locations of 44 Bluenose-East collared caribou (cows and bulls) and 14 Bathurst collared caribou on March 3, 2013. Harvest of caribou was limited to 300/year in R/BC/02 and R/BC/03 since 2010 but not limited in R/BC/01 or S/BC/03.

In view of the Bathurst monitoring results and surveys indicating continued and substantial decline occurring in the Bluenose-East herd, ENR convened meetings of Aboriginal leaders and co-management boards on August 27, November 7 and November 28, 2014 to review information about the Bathurst and Bluenose-East caribou herds and to discuss management actions for the conservation of the two herds. Technical meetings were also held October 7-8 and October 22-23 to review information and develop management options. Further meetings and correspondence in November and December 2014 and January 2015 with Aboriginal governments and boards have included discussions on the concept of a MCBCCA centered on locations of Bathurst collared caribou and refined using further information on the herd (e.g. several fixed-wing aircraft reconnaissance surveys October 2014 to January 2015). With overall support from several Aboriginal governments, ENR is seeking to establish the MCBCCA for the remainder of the winter 2014-2015 harvest season. The approach will be reviewed and re-assessed in fall 2015 as new information, including planned June photo-surveys of the Bathurst and Bluenose-East caribou herds, becomes available.

B. Joint management proposal (TG-ENR) 2014

Joint management proposals focused on the Bathurst caribou herd were submitted to WRRB by the Tłıchǵ government (TG) and ENR in November 2009, May 2010 and June 2014. The June 2014 proposal has been on hold since the June 2014 reconnaissance survey of the Bathurst calving ground, as ENR felt monitoring pointed to a serious decline in the Bathurst herd during 2012-2014, and thus the harvest management actions to date needed to be re-evaluated. ENR would like to update the joint management proposal of June 2014 in collaboration with TG and remains committed to following through on the WRRB process and the monitoring and management actions in the joint management proposal.

C. Other management programs for Bathurst caribou

The Tłıchǵ Agreement has a requirement for the WRRB, TG, GNWT and Canada to develop an overall long-term management planning process for the Bathurst herd. This process is to be developed with those that have jurisdiction over any part of the Bathurst range. ENR remains committed to continued collaboration with the WRRB and other partners to develop this comprehensive management process. Once complete, this should provide direction on management of harvest and other factors affecting the Bathurst herd.

Work to develop a range plan for the Bathurst herd was initiated by ENR in 2013, in recognition of the importance of habitat conservation and of the scale of current and proposed development on the Bathurst herd's annual range. The range plan will provide specific guidance on how to monitor, assess and manage cumulative effects of human disturbance on the historic range of the Bathurst herd. This plan is being developed through a multi-partner collaborative process that will eventually need to be included under the comprehensive process required by the Tłıchǵ Agreement. Range planning for the Bathurst herd is continuing in 2015.

D. Management of Bluenose-East caribou

The focus of this proposal is a mobile conservation area for the Bathurst caribou herd. In correspondence with the Advisory Committee on Cooperation for Wildlife Management (ACCWM), ENR was asked to keep management for the two herds separate and to build management actions for the Bluenose-East herd around the ACCWM November 2014 management plan for the Cape Bathurst, Bluenose-West and Bluenose-East herds and ACCWM recommendations in letters from November and December 2014. ENR is committed to using the ACCWM management plan and ACCWM recommendations on Bluenose-East (BE) harvest to shape management for the BE herd. Details on management actions

proposed for the BE herd will be described elsewhere. However, the MCBCCA would affect harvest of BE caribou in the sense that greater harvest opportunities would be available in zones R/BC/02 and R/BC/03, which to this point have been closed except for a limited Bathurst harvest of up to 300 caribou.

4. Description of Proposed Management Action

- Describe the proposed management action, including implementation, location and Tłıchǫ Citizen involvement.
- What are the desired outcomes of the proposed management action?
- What, if any, outcomes may be incidental to the management action?
- What monitoring, if any, will be conducted to assess the effectiveness of the management action?

The management action proposed is a Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Conservation Area (Fig. 2) that is based on Bathurst collared caribou locations along with additional information from surveys. The mobile zone would be updated weekly based on the most recent collar locations and surveys. Updates on the location of the MCBCCA would be provided weekly to Aboriginal governments and boards.

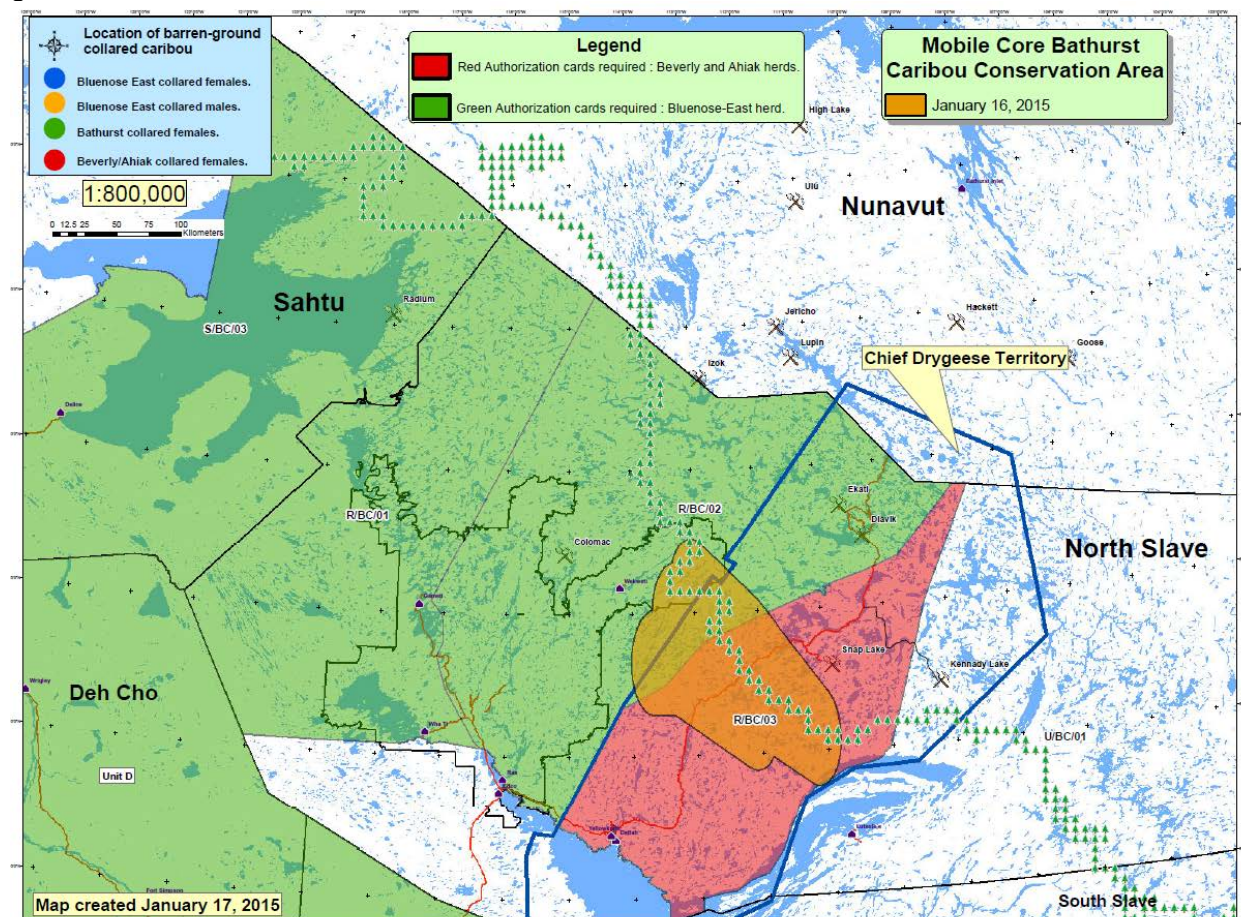


Fig. 2. An example of the proposed Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Conservation Area (orange) centered on collared caribou locations.

Within the MCBCCA (orange), no caribou harvest would be permitted. A limited number of Bathurst caribou bulls (up to a maximum of 15) may be considered for ceremonial purposes for Aboriginal governments with traditional harvesting rights for the Bathurst herd, by proposal.

In the remaining portions of zones R/BC/02 and R/BC/03 (to this point closed except for a limited Bathurst harvest target of up to 300 caribou with 80 percent bulls), caribou harvest would require authorizations. In the east (red), harvest outside the MCBCCA would be primarily from the Beverly and Ahiak herds and authorizations would be administered by Aboriginal governments or boards. In the west (green), harvest outside the MCBCCA would be primarily from the Bluenose-East herd. Authorizations would also be required and administered by Aboriginal governments or boards. Harvest limits for BE caribou are still under discussion with the ACCWM and allocation among user groups remains to be determined.

The purpose of the MCBCCA is to protect the remaining core of the Bathurst herd from further harvest, as a precautionary measure for the remainder 2014-2015 winter season. ENR believes the Bathurst herd may number less than 15,000 caribou and has a declining trend. This management approach will be re-visited after a planned June 2015 calving photo survey, in collaboration with co-management partners.

An incidental outcome of this proposed action is that caribou harvesting opportunities are increased spatially to the east and west of the MCBCCA), and conservation of Bathurst caribou is more tightly focused on the herd's wintering grounds (as defined by collared caribou). Winter distribution of the Bathurst herd has varied widely 2010-2014 and Bathurst caribou have sometimes wintered to the west and east of R/BC/02 and R/BC/03.

Monitoring of the MCBCCA will be carried out by periodic (at times weekly) reconnaissance flights to map the distribution of caribou in the vicinity of the Bathurst collared caribou. The zone boundaries will be updated on a weekly basis using the most recent collar locations and any other relevant information (e.g. surveys). Communication with Tłıchǫ, YKDFN and other Aboriginal governments will occur regularly (weekly) to review the most recent information and location of the zone.

5. Consultation

Describe any consultation undertaken in preparation of the management proposal and the results of such consultation.

ENR convened meetings of Aboriginal leaders and co-management boards on August 27, November 7 and November 28, 2014 to review information about the Bathurst and Bluenose-East caribou herds and to discuss management actions for the conservation of the two herds. Technical meetings were also held October 7-8 and October 22-23 to review information and develop management options. Participants included all Aboriginal governments that have management authority or have harvested either or both herds, and boards with management authority for one or both herds. Representatives for the Nunavut government, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, and regional Kitikmeot wildlife organizations were also invited and represented at these meetings. Agreement was reached in principle by November 28 on several actions for monitoring and management of the two herds, but agreement was not achieved on harvest management for either herd.

Since the November 28, 2014 meeting, ENR has consulted with representatives of the Tłıchǫ government, the YKDFN, the North Slave Métis Alliance (NSMA), the NWT Métis Nation

(NWTMN), and Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation (LKDFN) through face to face meetings in December 2014 and January 2015. The main focus of these meetings has been to seek agreement on harvest management for the two herds. The concept of a MCBCCA was described in letters to the Tłıchǫ government sent December 12, to other Aboriginal chiefs in letters sent December 16 and in a GNWT press release issued on December 19. The approach was discussed with Aboriginal governments in meetings in December 2014 and January 2015. To date there appears to be good overall support for this approach. ENR will engage in further consultation with Aboriginal communities in January 2015.

6. Communications Plan

Describe the management proposal's communications activities and how the Tłıchǫ communities will be informed of the proposal and its results.

Through meetings with the TG, YKDFN and other Aboriginal governments in December 2014 and January 2015, there was agreement that ENR would meet regularly, and at times weekly, with representatives of Aboriginal governments to provide updates on the location of the MCBCCA, to exchange information on observations of caribou and other wildlife and to review management actions. Areas of emphasis through meetings and community monitors will be public education about responsible harvesting, the status of the caribou herds and the management actions being taken to address caribou declines. ENR will collaborate with Tłıchǫ and other communities to assist in communities taking a lead role in public awareness and public education about the status and management of caribou.

7. Relevant Background Supporting Documentation

List or attached separately to the submission all background supporting documentation, including key references, inspection/incident reports and annual project summary reports.

The following reports are among a larger number of document supplied to participants of technical meetings on the Bathurst and Bluenose-East caribou herd in October 2014. A more complete list can be supplied if requested.

GNWT ENR. 2014. Overview: monitoring of Bathurst and Bluenose-East caribou herds, September 2014. (unpublished report, GNWT ENR).

Boulanger, J. and J. Adamczewski. 2014. A general approach to harvest modeling for caribou herds in the NWT – draft recommendations report. (unpublished report, GNWT ENR).

Boulanger, J., B. Croft, and J. Adamczewski. 2014. An estimate of breeding females and analyses of demographics for the Bathurst herd of barren-ground caribou: 2012 calving ground photographic survey. GNWT ENR, Yellowknife, NT File Report No. 142.

GNWT ENR. 2014. Harvest recommendations for barren-ground caribou based on herd risk status: a rule of thumb approach. (unpublished report, GNWT ENR).

8. Time Period Requested

Identify the time period requested for the Board to review and make a determination or provide recommendations on your management proposal.

The proposal is intended for the remainder of the winter harvest season for caribou, i.e. until June 2015. The proposed approach would be reviewed with co-management partners in the fall of 2015 for possible revision or extension, depending on the success of the approach and

in consideration of additional information on the herd's status.

ENR is requesting that the WRRB review this proposal on an urgent basis by January 22 so regulations can be put into place for the remainder of the winter caribou harvest season.

9. Other Relevant Information

If required, this space is provided for inclusion of any other relevant project information that was not captured in other sections.

10. Contact Information

Contact the WRRB office today to discuss your management proposal, to answer your questions, to receive general guidance or to submit your completed management proposal.

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