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Barrenground Caribou Update

In June 2012, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) undertook a photo survey of the Bathurst Caribou calving grounds. From that survey, conducted under ideal conditions, Environment and Natural Resources estimates a total of approximately 16,000 breeding females on the calving grounds, compared to 16,600 in 2009. This information, along with composition data on the sex ratio collected during October 2012, places the total herd estimate at approximately 35,000, up slightly from the 32,000 estimate in 2009.

While this is a slight increase, the overall size of this herd remains very low, particularly when compared to historical data. Perhaps most concerning is the fact that the number of breeding females in this herd has not increased. In addition, calf survival appears to be low. Without breeding females and adequate calf survival, this herd could decline further.

The current harvest restrictions in place on this herd in the Wek'èezhii area are set to expire on March 31, 2013. In advance of that, ENR hopes to work in partnership with Aboriginal governments, co-management partners and other stakeholders on the development of updated harvest recommendations that can be submitted to the Wek'èezhii Renewable Resources Board (WRRB). In the meantime, restrictions currently in place on this herd must remain unchanged for the 2012/13 harvest season.

As in the past, ENR will continue to support an unrestricted Aboriginal harvest on herds adjacent to the Bathurst (Beverly/Ahiak and Bluenose-East). At present, ENR is awaiting 2011 survey information from the Government of Nunavut on the Beverly/Ahiak herd.

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In addition, ENR hopes to begin working, once again in consultation with our partners, on the development of a Harvest Management Plan for the Bluenose East herd. That proposal, once finalized, will be delivered to both the Wek'èezhii and Sahtu Renewable Resources Boards. It is our hope that this proposal would not only see a continuation of an unrestricted Aboriginal harvest, but could also see the establishment of a limited resident harvest on this herd.

We recognize that the continued restrictions placed upon the Bathurst herd will create hardship for many harvesters in the NWT. We hope that working together with our partners and increasing access to adjacent herds will provide us with some temporary relief and give this important herd an opportunity to recover.



J. Michael Miltenberger
Minister

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