



## Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

2015 -2018 Communications Strategy

May 2015

### Purpose:

Goal 3 in the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board's Strategic Business Plan is that "communities, governments, partners and members of the public are aware of and understand the role of the Board, its decisions and practices." The purpose of this strategy is to provide a framework to guide communications focused on creating awareness of the role of the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) as a public board in the co-management of wildlife and wildlife habitat. The strategy will be reviewed and updated every three years as needed.

### Communications Vision:

Audiences will value the WRRB as a trusted co-management partner and authority for Wek'èezhì's wildlife and wildlife habitat.

### Communications Goals (Defining Success)

Acceptance of the WRRB as legitimate, credible and valuable is critical if the WRRB is to fulfill its mandate. Communications can demonstrate progress and success in achieving the WRRB's organizational goals over the next three years. Specific communications goals include the following:

1. Communities, governments, partners and members of the public are well informed about how the Board operates and how it is guided by the best available information from Tłıchq, community and scientific knowledge.
2. Plain language tools are in place to inform and educate communities, partners and the public about the Board's role and activities.
3. The Board collaborates closely with the Tłıchq communities, government agencies, and the public in wildlife management to best serve the residents of Wek'èezhì, as well as its wildlife and its habitat.

### Communications Objectives:

Communications will be conducted in phases with specific objectives and work plans for each phase.

## Environmental Analysis:

### Internal Environment

#### *The Tłıchq Agreement and the WRRB*

The WRRB was created under the guidance of the Tłıchq Agreement as the primary instrument of wildlife and wildlife habitat management in Wek'èezhìi (12.1.2). Communicating the link between the Tłıchq Agreement and the WRRB is important for several reasons, including:

1. Flowing from the provisions of the Tłıchq Agreement, the WRRB is a co-management structure with membership shared equally by appointees of the Tłıchq Government and the Governments of Canada and the Northwest Territories (GNWT). This arrangement allows for a diversity of knowledge and perspectives, and balanced decision-making. The Board is an independent body and does not represent any government, but represents all resource users in Wek'èezhìi and therefore must act in the public interest (12.1.1).
2. Along with the rights to harvest renewable resources throughout their traditional land use area, are Tłıchq rights, abilities, and responsibilities to actively participate in the management and stewardship of renewable resources in Wek'èezhìi.
3. The objective of Chapter 12 is to “recognize the importance of wildlife and its habitat to the Tłıchq First Nation well-being, way of life and land-based economy” (12.1.1). Conservation is an important principle in the Tłıchq Agreement. If there is an urgent need to protect wildlife or habitat, then conservation measures must come first.
4. The Agreement outlines the basis on which the Board makes its recommendations and decisions (12.1.5), its decision-making authority (12.5.5, 12.5.6) and the process the Board must follow in making its determinations (12.5.9-12.5.13). Clarifying the Board’s role in determining management actions and explaining WRRB recommendations on specific matters are important considerations.

#### *Organizational Background*

The Board works in a complex operating environment. There are many levels of government and other authorities that the Board works with and depends on in ensuring its recommendations are followed once they are adopted. Additionally, the Board participates on several working groups and committees.

Communicating the Board’s mandate can be challenging – faced with ongoing staff turnover in government and other partner organizations and further compounded by large organizational changes, such as devolution. However, communications can facilitate mutually respectful relationships.

## WRRB Research Projects

The WRRB is engaged in collaborative research projects to address existing traditional knowledge and science gaps regarding key wildlife species and current wildlife habitat, forests and plant issues in Wek'èezhìi. The Board is committed to seeking out both Tł̓chq̓ knowledge and scientific information, to working with communities, and to working in collaboration with its partners. Communications will showcase this commitment and publicize the Board's involvement in various projects.

As natural and human-caused disturbances increase pressures in Wek'èezhìi, ongoing research and analysis will be required to understand the impacts of disturbance on wildlife and wildlife habitat. The impacts of disturbances are increasingly being felt, and there is widespread concern over the population declines observed in barren-ground caribou herds. The severe forest fire season in the summer of 2014 and the recent low water levels and drought conditions are other "top-of-mind" issue. The WRRB's communication activities will also increase as the Board continues to play a role in keeping audiences informed on research objectives and outcomes.

## *External Environment*

### *Caribou Management*

Ekwò (Barren-ground caribou) management is a particularly sensitive issue because Aboriginal peoples, including the Tł̓chq̓ and NWT residents have relied on caribou for subsistence. Others, including big game outfitters, have relied on caribou for their livelihood. The decline of the Bathurst caribou herd in recent years has been the most pressing wildlife management concern in Wek'èezhìi.

More recently, population declines have also been observed in the Bluenose-East caribou herd. The Advisory Committee for Cooperation on Wildlife Management (ACCWM) submitted a management plan for the Cape Bathurst, Bluenose-West and Bluenose-East caribou herds to GNWT and other governments in November, 2014. The management plan, "*Taking Care of Caribou*", identifies when certain actions should be taken for defined population level thresholds. The ACCWM is currently working on an Action Plan for the Bluenose-East caribou herd, based on both science and traditional knowledge, and including input from communities.

Tq̓dzì (Boreal caribou) are also an important harvested wildlife species in Wek'èezhìi. Little traditional knowledge or scientific research have been conducted and documented on tq̓dzì in Wek'èezhìi. Recently, the WRRB has initiated research projects to begin addressing existing information gaps for management planning purposes. Currently, the WRRB has a traditional knowledge researcher collecting additional information on tq̓dzì from elders in Whatì, including response to fire and use of winter habitats and islands.

It will be important to provide timely updates on the status of these caribou herds and research and monitoring activities associated with them to our audiences.

### *Other Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat Issues*

Wildlife management plans (bison, caribou, others), predator management, species at risk management, forest fire management, and the impacts of development on wildlife and wildlife habitat, for example—are also top of mind issues.

### **Audiences:**

The WRRB acts in the public interest to manage wildlife and wildlife habitat in Wek'èezhì. Primary audiences include Wek'èezhì communities and NWT residents with an interest in Wek'èezhì 's renewable resources.

1. Wek'èezhì Residents
  - Harvesters
  - Youth
  - Elders
2. NWT Residents
  - Within Wek'èezhì
  - Outside Wek'èezhì (Yellowknife)

### Wek'èezhì Communities Profile:

In all four communities, the majority of residents –90% or more--speak the Tłıchq language as a first language (NWT Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Tłıchq / Aboriginal people are the largest population group in each community. Non-Aboriginal residents make up 2.8% of the population in Wekweètì ; 5.4% in Gamètì (NWT Bureau of Statistics, 2011); 2.3% in Whatì (NWT Bureau of Statistics, 2012); and 6.1% in Behchokò (NWT Bureau of Statistics, 2012), with Behchokò having the largest number of Non-Aboriginal residents (of a total population of 2,174 people, 132 are Non-Aboriginal). In all communities, youth (0-24 years) are a significant sector of the population, with 25-44 year-olds as another large subset. For example, children and youth (up to age 24) make up almost 50% of the population of Behchokò (2012) and 25-44 year-olds make up over 30%. Approximately 40% or more of homes have Internet access (2008).

Many Tłıchq maintain a traditional lifestyle, and the economy in the communities is largely based on trapping, fishing and hunting. More than 70% of households consume country foods (half or more of diet). Harvesters are an important target group. In all communities, more than 50% hunted and fished, or trapped.

3. Government
  - Tłıchq Government
  - Government of Canada

- Government of the Northwest Territories
4. Aboriginal groups bordering Wek'èezhì
    - Sahtú, Dehcho, Yellowknives Dene First Nation, Akaitcho, Métis, Nunavut
  5. Other Management Boards
    - Wildlife Management Boards
    - Land and Water Boards
    - Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board
  6. Other Stakeholders
    - Non-Government Organizations
    - Outfitters
    - Industry

### Tactics:

Tactics are the communications tools, methods and approaches used to deliver the key communications messages found in Appendix 1. Communications will take a proactive approach, through direct contact with audiences and through other channels. Regular communication will occur to provide updates and share information. Content of messages will focus on delivering basic information—what the WRRB is, how it works, and how it represents the public’s interest. If these messages are conveyed clearly, they will set the stage for productive relationships built on trust. Open information exchange and dialogue are essential to building credibility and trust, and encouraging good will and collaboration in seeking solutions together.

Communication activities will be coordinated with milestone events, including any WRRB decisions, and with activities related to WRRB projects, including publishing of project results. Wherever possible, Tłıchq language will be incorporated into all activities. Opportunities for collaboration with other partners will be sought. Communications tactics will be selected from the following according to objective, WRRB activity, audience and resources:

- Continue online presence through website and social media.
- Continue to seek increased opportunities for public / community engagement (Strategy B, WRRB Strategic Business Plan 2015 – 2018).
- Develop and/or revise, as necessary, communication tools for public engagement, including radio, posters and other visual media.
- Develop and/or revise, as necessary, plain language written materials including an E-newsletter, brochures, fact sheets, and posters.

- Produce an annual WRRB Calendar to highlight WRRB roles & responsibilities, research & monitoring activities, and wildlife & wildlife habitat, forests and plants in Wek'eezhii.
- Provide Board support by implementing a Board Orientation Kit and carrying out training for Board members as required.
- Develop timely processes to keep communities informed about Board recommendations and decisions following Board meetings, and on other developments.
- Enhance use of Tłıchq language in WRRB documents through use of Tłıchq words for place names and wildlife, tree and plant species.
- Maximize positive media coverage by being responsive to media inquiries and making information accessible. Media provides an opportunity to reach our audiences and get our messages out, to correct misinformation, and to publicize WRRB activities.

#### Evaluation (Evaluating Success):

Evaluation mechanisms include

- tracking community engagements (number and participation)
- media monitoring (measuring quantity and quality of media coverage)
- tracking the distribution of communications materials (number)
- assessing the performance of the WRRB Facebook page (assessing audience size and engagement)
- tracking newsletter engagement (number of opens or forwards per issue, and number of new subscribers)

#### Key Communications Messages:

The following are core key messages about the WRRB's mandate and decision-making process. There will also be a need to develop ongoing issue-specific key messages from time to time.

#### What is the Wek'eezhii Renewable Resources Board?

- The Tłıchq Agreement identifies a shared management area known as Wek'eezhii. This area includes Tłıchq lands as well as public lands.
- The Wek'eezhii Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) was established by the Tłıchq Agreement as the main body responsible for the management of wildlife and wildlife habitat throughout Wek'eezhii.
- The WRRB is also responsible for protected areas within Wek'eezhii. Working with other management partners, the Board gathers information to protect places that are especially

important to wildlife or people, such as calving grounds for caribou, nesting grounds for birds, and significant places where people fish or hunt.

- The WRRB is a co-management board. Half of its members are selected by the Tłıchq Government with the other half selected by the Government of Canada and by the Government of the Northwest Territories. Board members elect an additional person to serve as Chair.
- Board members are chosen for their knowledge of wildlife and their understanding of the Tłıcho way of life. Together, they bring a balance of experience, knowledge and perspectives to the table when they consider wildlife management issues.
- The WRRB is a management authority that is independent of government and makes decisions on behalf of the public.
- The WRRB has a responsibility to be objective and must consider the interests of everyone who depends on the well-being of Wek'èezhì's wildlife, plants, and forests when it makes decisions.
- We all have a role to play to protect wildlife, plants and forests. The WRRB welcomes comments and input from everyone.

#### How the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board Works

- The WRRB works closely with the Parties to the Tłıchq Agreement –the Tłıchq Government, the Government of Canada and the Government of the Northwest Territories—to conserve and manage wildlife and wildlife habitat in Wek'èezhì.
- The Board also works closely with Wek'èezhì residents to seek their input and involvement in management planning.
- Co-management and working together will help ensure that everyone has the opportunity to respect and enjoy this valuable resource for generations to come. We can use each other's strengths to find solutions and move forward.
- The Board does its work by overseeing and guiding the management of wildlife and wildlife habitat in Wek'èezhì to ensure that its animals, birds, fish, plants, forests and protected areas are being managed wisely.
- The WRRB provides direction and advice to governments. The Board influences management decisions by reviewing all proposals that may affect Wek'èezhì's wildlife or its habitat and making recommendations or determinations to the Parties.
- Whenever the Board is considering limiting harvest, it may hold a public hearing. A public hearing allows the Board to better understand and respond to public concerns, or to inform people about decisions.
- The Board may also decide to hold public hearings if it thinks they would be beneficial to its decision-making on any other matter.

- The WRRB strives to make decisions that balance the needs of wildlife with the needs of people.
- The WRRB combines the knowledge and insights of resource users, communities, wildlife managers, scientists, experts, and the public to have a good understanding of issues and to make informed and balanced decisions.
- The Board considers all available knowledge and relevant information in making its recommendations. Tłıchq knowledge is an important source of information on wildlife and habitat. Tłıchq knowledge may come from many sources, including people who hunt, fish, or live closely with the land. Scientific knowledge offers the benefits of technology and specialized knowledge in areas such as ecology and statistics. Local knowledge, including information from other resource users, and expert opinion are also important sources of information for the Board.
- The WRRB collects both traditional knowledge and western scientific information in its research. Each system of knowledge offers valuable information and together create a more complete picture. Together, the two ways of knowing encourage decision-making that is “strong like two people”.
- The WRRB also makes its decisions on an ecosystem basis. This means that the Board must consider how wildlife species are connected with one another and with their environment – and that if any one thing changes, it can affect other parts of the ecosystem.
- The conservation of animals, birds, fish, plants and forests is an important principle in the Tłıchq Agreement –and guides the WRRB in its work.
- Under the Tłıchq Agreement, the Board has a responsibility to act to avoid any serious harm to wildlife or wildlife habitat. It is guided by the “precautionary principle”. This says that if there is strong evidence to suggest that wildlife or wildlife habitat is at risk, there is a duty to take action to prevent harm –even when all the evidence about the situation is not in. That is, when in doubt, it’s best to err on the side of caution and take steps to protect wildlife or habitat. Sometimes, if we wait for conclusive proof, damage may be irreversible.
- If there is a need to conserve any species, the Tłıchq Agreement says that the Board has the power to set a limit for harvesting any wildlife species (except for fish) in Wek’èezhì. If the Board decides that limiting harvest is necessary, then government must put the limit into effect.

## Aboriginal Rights and Limiting Harvest

- Tłıchq Citizens and other Aboriginal people with harvesting rights in Wek’èezhì have a constitutionally protected right to harvest renewable resources throughout their traditional land use area. The Tłıchq Agreement also recognizes the importance of wildlife and wildlife habitat to Tłıchq well-being and way of life. Managing wisely so that those natural resources remain healthy and plentiful will help keep this way of life intact and strong.

- If there is an urgent need to protect wildlife or habitat, then conservation measures must come first. However, if that happens and harvesting is limited, Aboriginal harvesters must be given priority above all other users [12.6.5 (b) (i)]
- If there is a decision to limit harvest, non-commercial harvesting is given priority over commercial harvesting, and NWT residents are given priority over non-residents of the Northwest Territories (12.6.5).
- In order of priority, harvest is allocated to
  - Tłıchq and other Aboriginal people with harvesting rights in Wek'èezhì
  - Resident non-commercial harvesters
  - Non-resident harvesters
  - Commercial harvesters.