

Responses to Wek'èzhii Renewable Resources Board letter to Tłıchq Government and GNWT Environment & Natural Resources on Bathurst/Kqk'èeti caribou management proposal

1. *With the heavy mixing of the Kqk'èeti and Beverly Ekwò herds, the Board requests information about the overall trends of the Beverly herd in Wek'èzhii as it relates to the Kqk'èeti herd.*

Scientific monitoring of the Beverly barren-ground caribou herd is shared between the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and the Government of Nunavut (GN). The GN has taken the lead on population surveys (the last in June 2018) while the GNWT maintains satellite collars on the herd and carries out composition surveys to monitor calf recruitment. In the report on the 2018 Beverly survey, the GN provided an estimate of 103,372 caribou (SE 5,109), a revised estimate for 2011 of 136,608 (SE 6,603), and an estimated annual rate of decline of 4-5%. Late-winter composition surveys of this herd have been less frequent than for the Bathurst and Bluenose-East herds, however the calf:cow ratios between 2008 and 2021 have generally been between 40 and 50 calves:100 cows (Figure 1) and the last 3 ratios in 2017, 2020, 2021 were above 40:100. These results suggest very good calf recruitment in recent years.

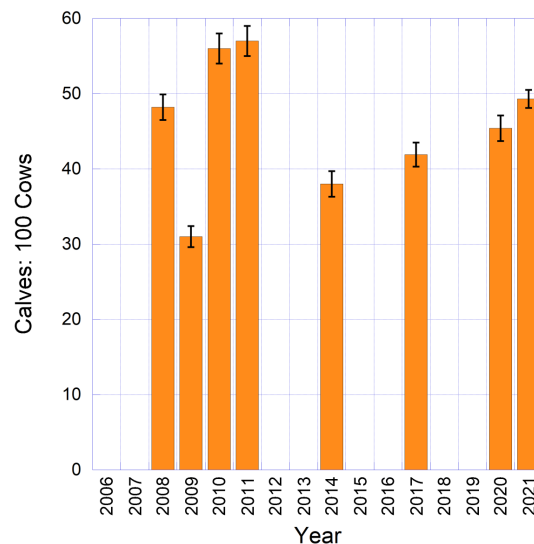


Figure 1. Calf:cow ratios estimated for the Beverly caribou herd in late winter (usually March) 2008-2021.

2. *Please clarify whether a population estimate will occur in 2022 and in 2023 for the Kqk'èeti Ekwò herd. Additionally, please clarify when the next population estimate will occur for the Beverly herd.*

As described in the joint management proposals, the next population estimates for the Bathurst and Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herds will be derived from calving ground photographic surveys scheduled for June 2023.

In addition, given the small size and continued decline of the Bathurst herd and apparent emigration of collared Bathurst cows to the Beverly herd in recent years, the GNWT is developing plans for survey coverage of the Bathurst calving ground in June 2022. This will include a helicopter-based composition survey on the calving grounds, combined with systematic reconnaissance coverage of the calving area, as defined by collared Bathurst female caribou, by helicopter and a small fixed-wing aircraft. This would provide detailed composition and spatial definition of relative abundance of caribou on the Bathurst calving ground.

For June 2022, GNWT plans to include a contingency of aerial photography over the Bathurst calving ground if distribution of breeding females from the systematic reconnaissance and movements of collared cows indicate that a reliable estimate of Bathurst caribou is feasible. If a high proportion of Bathurst caribou can be defined spatially and separate from the Beverly herd, then the GNWT will conduct a calving-ground photo survey of the core area of highest density calving caribou and lower density surrounding blocks. Combined with the composition data, this would allow for a new estimate of breeding and adult females in the Bathurst herd.

The aerial photography would only be carried out if there was clear separation of Bathurst and Beverly caribou. In June 2021, Bathurst and Beverly caribou were mixed east of Bathurst Inlet and as a result determining relative abundance of the 2 herds in that area was not possible. If Bathurst and Beverly collared caribou are strongly mixed, a reliable estimate of Bathurst-only breeding and adult females would not be feasible. Under these conditions, aerial photos would not be attempted in June 2022 for the Bathurst herd.

GNWT will continue to discuss aspects of survey design, methods, and logistics for these June surveys with the Barren-ground Caribou Technical Working Group and communicate more broadly with other Indigenous Government and Organizations .

Discussion with the GN biologist Mitch Campbell indicates that the GN is planning for a calving ground photo survey of the Qamanirjuaq herd in June 2022 and a calving ground survey of the Beverly herd in June 2023.

*3. To assist with communications and understanding, please develop and share in each Tłı̄chq̄ community a plain-language summary and/or poster of the joint management proposal.*

The Tłı̄chq̄ Government and GNWT Department of Environment & Natural Resources will develop a plain-language summary and a poster as requested.