

Presentation to the
Wek'eezhii Renewable Resources Board
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One Outfitter' Perspective

Peterson's Point Lake Lodge

Presenter: Amanda Peterson, co-owner
Peterson's Point Lake Lodge

Thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation to the Wek'eezhii Renewable Resources Board on behalf of Peterson's Point Lake Lodge. My name is Amanda Peterson, and I am one of three owners of Peterson's Point Lake Lodge. The other two owners are my mother Margaret Peterson and my brother Chad Peterson

Like everyone in this room we are concerned about caribou populations in the Northwest Territories. We rely on caribou for our livelihood.

And like everyone else in this room we want to see sustainable caribou herds in the Northwest Territories for the use and benefit of all northerners.

Several years ago I made a presentation to this board on behalf of the Northwest Territories Barren Ground Caribou Outfitters Association. At that time I discussed the positive contributions of outfitters to the NWT economy and the tourism industry. I talked about how we were always ready to share our knowledge of the herd with scientists, how we were prepared to assist with specific research requirements, and how we shared the meat we harvested with aboriginal communities.

And I emphasized that all northerners including caribou outfitters want the wise management and use of our caribou herds.

At that time I reported that the total harvest of outfitters averaged 810 caribou a year for the years 1999 to 2006. By 2009, the annual caribou harvest of all outfitters was reduced to 223, or less than half of all the tags available to outfitters.

Of the animals harvested, it is quite likely that some were from herds other than the Bathurst Herd, since caribou continue to do what they have been doing for thousands of years: move to areas with better food sources, fewer threats from predators insects and favourable weather conditions.

As sport hunting outfitters we have been doing our part to sustain the NWT caribou population. We accepted a reduction of caribou tags and substantially reduced our overall annual harvests.

We ensured that our hunters target only mature bulls, so cows can continue to populate the herds. We co-operated with biologists and provided data and samples for use in ongoing research.

Despite our best efforts to sustain the caribou, and our immediate adherence to the tag reduction order issued in 2007, all outfitters, including Peterson's Point Lake Lodge find ourselves in a position where our livelihood may be taken away from us, our businesses closed, possibly never to be reopened, our NWT tourism industry weakened and our futures insecure to say the least.

Today all of us could be impacted by the apparent reduction in caribou populations. And to some extent, the situation is a result of the Government of the Northwest Territories' failure to act on proposed caribou management plans.

In December 2006 the GNWT proposed management action plans for the Bathurst caribou herd which included establishing compulsory reporting of harvest for all caribou hunters, eliminating the commercial sale of caribou meat, reducing commercial tags available for outfitting and establishing a no hunting corridor on winter roads.

Only one of these action plans was implemented: reducing the tags available to outfitters -- who in fact harvest the fewest number of caribou in the Northwest Territories.

This begs the question, “what reasonable impact did reducing the outfitters tags from 1300 tags to 750 tags have on the caribou when no other groups made concessions on their harvests?”

During the three-year period from December 2006 to December 2009 the Government of the Northwest Territories implemented no other action plans. Three years of dithering and skirting around issues have not assisted the Bathurst caribou herd to recover, according to the most recent statistics. Only the outfitters, likely the lowest users of the herd, took action, reducing their harvests in 2007, 2008 and 2009.

This outfitter reduction was notable, NOT for herd recovery, but for our efforts to repackage our hunts from two tag hunts to one-tag hunts, in order to sustain our businesses.

With the acceptance of the tag reduction to a maximum of 75 caribou tags per licensed outfitter, Environment and Natural Resources officials guaranteed outfitters that we would have the same number of tags for 2010 as we had in 2009: 75 for each outfitter.

One of the concerns we have looming before us is this management proposal. It would eliminate our industry, dramatically decrease our income, and will no doubt lead to lodge closures and in some cases bankruptcies.

Today, as one of many presenters at these hearings, I am representing Peterson's Point Lake Lodge, and in the limited time available, I would like to address the following:

1. Demonstrate the respect and concern Peterson's Point Lake Lodge has for the caribou herds in the Northwest Territories.
2. Outline what we see as some of the issue to be addressed before this board makes a final decision on its action plan
3. Comment on the Proposed Management Actions outlined in the joint proposal on caribou management

4. Offer some additional actions for going forward with a plan that could meet the diverse needs of the various users of the Bathurst and other caribou herds and ensure their sustainability

Peterson's Point Lake Lodge

In 1984 Jim Peterson, my father, began working towards his lifelong dream of building, owning and operating a lodge. He selected Point Lake as the location for his lodge, since Point Lake is located in the midst of the caribou migration route that extends roughly from their calving grounds near the Arctic Coast to the treeline where they overwinter. Jim noted that thousands of caribou pass through the Point Lake area each season.

Point Lake, on the Coppermine River system, is approximately 70 miles long, and our lodge is the only lodge on the lake. We are at the far edge of the area defined as the Wek'eezhii Co-Management Lands.

Apart from our guests and visiting biologists, the only other people we see on the lake each summer are a few paddlers who choose to start their Coppermine River trip at the south end of the lake or at one of the more southerly lakes on the system.

From one canoeist on the Coppermine River we obtained these photos taken last summer. The photographer reported that it took nearly 10 hours for thousands of caribou to cross the river at a location north of Point Lake.

The Point Lake area is outside the hunting range usually used by the people in the nearest TliCho community of Wekweeti, and we have never seen aboriginal hunters in the Point Lake area.

Peterson's Point Lake Lodge started as a collection of domed tents that were used only a few weeks a year. Our savings and any profits from our lodge business were regularly reinvested in the lodge, which was improved gradually over the years, to its current status as a comfortable central lodge with guest cabins and sauna. Today the lodge continues to be

owned and operated by our family, who has lived in the Northwest Territories for 30 years.

The lodge operates for about 10 weeks each summer, with the four-week caribou season attracting the majority of our clients. We can accommodate up to 10 guests at one time, and during the past 25 years, we have contributed millions of dollars to the economy of the Northwest Territories in wages, purchases of goods and services including transportation, and in the payment of fees and taxes.

Our operation survives mainly on hunting.

Although we also offer fishing, the entire high-end fishing market has declined in the past five or six years, leaving us more dependent on hunting for our income.

In the winter of 2007 when the government's concerns about the Bathurst herd were presented to us, we, like other outfitters, agreed to a reduced number of caribou tags. We also advised the government that we needed at least two years notice for any additional reduction in tags, since caribou hunts are booked at least two years prior to the actual hunt.

And in a meeting on December 12, 2008, ENR officials confirmed that outfitters would have 750 tags for the 2009 and 2010 seasons. Based on this conversation, we maintained our bookings for 2010, but advised anyone booking hunts after 2010 that we could take tentative bookings only.

Also, at the encouragement of, and with some support from the territorial government, we started a product diversification program, offering photography and cuisine packages at our lodge. However, we reminded the government that it took nearly 30 years to build a profitable hunting business, and that it would also take decades to build an eco-tourism or wilderness adventure business.

As you may know, my father Jim Peterson passed away two years ago, but the family business is continuing and offers high quality, fair chase hunts to fewer than 50 sportsmen each year. Our hunters shoot only mature bulls (no cows) and all are experienced hunters, expert shots and deeply interested in the wildlife resources of the Northwest Territories.

Each year, we report all kills to the government and submit all required forms re the disposition of all caribou meat. We also assist by providing harvested caribou samples such as internal organs and jaws/teeth as requested, and make observations of numbers of caribou sighted by our guides, when they are on the land.

In the fall of 2009 we did not notice a reduction in the number of caribou in the Point Lake area. The thousands of animals we saw migrate through our area last year were similar to the numbers of caribou we saw 10 to 15 years ago. The caribou appeared healthy, three quarters of the cows had calves and bulls had a good layer of fat. Bugs were not significant and predator populations, mainly wolves and grizzlies, appeared to be normal.

Since it is impossible to identify which herd a caribou came from without DNA testing, we assumed that the caribou in our area might include animals from both the Bathurst and the Bluenose herds. And we have heard that the Bluenose herd is moving south into the ranges of other caribou herds.

Issues to be Considered by this Board

We share a number of concerns with our fellow outfitters and with others making presentations to this panel. Likely one of the main concerns is the possible declining numbers of caribou in the Bathurst herd. More specifically we are concerned about what happened to 150,000 caribou in the past six years.

According to government statistics the Bathurst herd has declined from 186,000 animals in 2003 to 31,900 animals in 2009. This is a drop of 154,100 animals in six years, or almost 26,000 animals per year.... although it appears the decline has escalated much more in the past few years.

At the same time, we know that there is no known disease within the herd. We also know that calving has been relatively successful over this same six-year period, that mining is not perceived as a threat to caribou and that predators have not been a major problem.

Interestingly, throughout the 2006 to 2009 period, when we received feedback on ENR composition surveys, they

indicated to us that the composition of the herd looked favourable and that the herd was stabilizing. How do biologists account for this population discrepancy, which moved quickly from “stabilizing” to rapid declines?

Another question that still needs to be answered is what happened to 154,000 caribou, and where did they go?

During the previously mentioned six year period, sports hunter and resident hunter harvests (non GHL holders) probably used an average of 1,000 to 1,200 caribou tags per year for a total of 6,000 to 7,000 tags over a six-year period.

Harvests by aboriginal hunters are not known, but are estimated roughly at between 7,500 and 12,000 per year. This would add up to another 45,000 to 72,000 caribou over the six-year period.

Without considering other caribou deaths (accidents, old age, predators, drowning)....which could be offset by births, the Bathurst Herd should still be 100,000 strong. But statistics say this is incorrect.

Since the math seems to be a problem, we think there may well be some other pressure on the herd, that may be unknown, unrecorded or undisclosed by the biologists. Some that are whispered about, but are never discussed openly are excessive hunting along the ice roads, where animals are trucked away by the dozens. The road access to this herd has made it extremely accessible to all hunters from across the NWT.

Have there been increased sales of caribou meat...legal or illegal? Has caribou “poaching” become an epidemic here?

Have weather, insects, air quality, global warming had a measurable impact on caribou numbers?

In addressing caribou numbers, we think that the scientists should also address, in more detail, the **reasons** for the possible decline in caribou populations.

Proposed Management Action Plan

I'd like to comment now on some of the issues and actions in the Proposed Management Action Plan

There are many initiatives or actions that we support and I would like to point out that it is difficult to speak exclusively of the Bathurst caribou herd when discussing the issues, since migration routes are shared with other herds and appear to change over the years. According to recent scientific data there appears to be declines in herds adjacent to the Bathurst herd. Personally I see the health of all caribou (and the people who use them) as an integrated network, where policies and actions must make sense for all.

One overarching concern we have is the different approaches ENR has to different users of the caribou herds.

As my father Jim Peterson requested for years, I would like to again encourage the GNWT to work together with ALL groups that are concerned about caribou. I would also request that outfitters be recognized as a source of knowledge for caribou.

Our family and staff have been observing caribou for approximately 30 years, and we feel that if this knowledge were combined with traditional and scientific knowledge, we could be working together to build a bridge that has a solid foundation – instead of experiencing the situation that is happening now.

So the first point I would like to make is that I would like to see the outfitters as active participants in the discussion and management of caribou, especially at this critical time.

Comments on Action Plan

Since I don't have time today to comment on every action listed in the proposed Action Plan, I would like to zero in on some of the actions that we would like to see implemented

1. Elimination of all commercial meat tags
2. More regulations re caribou hunting from the ice roads, as well as limits to caribou that can be taken from ice roads.

Establish and enforce a 2 km wide no-hunting zone on all roads, with no hunting allowed from winter/ice roads

Continue winter road check stations, and conduct frequent patrols during fall and winter in the Wek'eezhii.

3. Initiate mandatory reporting of all caribou harvests and develop and deliver hunter education programs.
4. Add more staff in the enforcement and hunter education areas.
5. Limit or eliminate the number of cows that can be taken by anyone each season from the Bathurst, Bluenose or Ahiak herds. For the short term enforce a bull harvest only. Scientific data suggests that “a large increase in adult survival and productivity is needed to ensure recovery.” One cow and her offspring can increase a herd size by about 25 animals during that cow’s lifetime
6. Eliminate the harvest of females for scientific research purposes.
7. Regulate the harvest of bulls through a tag allocation system. To avoid overharvesting use a limited tag draw system for resident hunters, similar to those used for Bison.
8. Expand the hunting regulations to different zones that enforce a mandatory 12 hour wait after flying into an area for caribou
9. Keep outfitter tags at the current level and support an industry that provides a traditional way of life for a number of aboriginal guides, contributes meat to communities and guides the development of ethical hunting practices.
10. If caribou are being impacted by predators consider a bounty on wolves and issue grizzly bear hunting tags.

11. Require mandatory reporting of all caribou harvests.
Sport hunting outfitters have been reporting harvests for years, and to assess future populations we need accurate harvest numbers.

Other Suggestions

We would also like to provide some additional suggestions for consideration by this board.

1. Until more data is available, rather than eliminating outfitted caribou sport hunts, encourage outfitters to sell single caribou hunts until population surveys indicate the herd has stabilized.
2. Expand the caribou management program immediately. This is the wrong time for the government to decrease funding for caribou research as discussed in the Legislative Assembly in early February. All herd users need statistics for neighbouring herds in addition to the Bathurst herd, to see if there is any growth in other herds as the Bathurst herd declines.
3. Conduct all caribou population surveys at one time so there is a clear picture of all caribou in the NWT and Nunavut. Also include outfitters as active participants in the management of caribou and as contributors to caribou management action plans
4. Implement the many monitoring actions outlined in the Proposed Actions document, (calf survival, pregnancy rates, etc,) but do it now rather than waiting until 2012
5. Since caribou are such an important resource, consider expanding caribou research, through joint ventures with independent, academic, research organizations such as universities, who can access federal research funds.
6. Create distinct caribou hunting seasons that apply to all users. Just as there are seasons for fish species at risk, or for other mammals such as muskox or polar bear, why not set seasons for caribou. For example the

August 15 – Sept 30 season that regulates caribou sport hunting, plus a period in the winter.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like the record to note that we are very concerned about the caribou. They are our livelihood and it would take years for us to change the focus of our tourist operation.

Following the recommendation to eliminate the outfitting industry will not solve the present situation. In fact we think it could exacerbate the problem in some of the following ways

- time consuming and costly legal challenges
- illegal hunting that could make criminals out of honest people
- additional pressure on other herds, as people go further afield in search of caribou
- need for extra funding for staff and equipment to enforce the new regulations.

Rather, here are the actions we would like the board to consider in making its final decision:

1. Allow us to honour our bookings for 2010, which will require the caribou tags that we were promised.
2. Support and consider the future of the outfitting industry by allowing us to continue to offer hunts, noting the positive benefits that our industry provides
3. Provide timely and better data re caribou populations
4. Involve all of us in the planning and decision making re the caribou.
5. Use our knowledge to build your knowledge base of the caribou populations in the Northwest Territories

6. Join with NWT caribou outfitters on a high profile caribou conservation program – *Caribou Forever* – which raises awareness of our great herds of caribou, sets a higher value for the herds, and ensures they are sustainable.

On the other hand, if the recommendation to eliminate the outfitter tags for the next three years are implemented:

1. We would request compensation from the appropriate authorities for the 2010 season, since we were promised in 2008 that we would have tags and we were led to believe that there would be no further reductions to outfitter tags. Without compensation we can't afford to go through the years needed to build another business
2. Caribou outfitters (and most are residents of the North including us) may have to leave the North. If we can't operate our business and we can't sell it, we lose our livelihood and we can't afford the costs of living in the north. If outfitters leave, this not only adds to the NWT population decline and reduces the per capita allocation to the GNWT budget but also removes millions of dollars from the annual GDP of the territory and weakens the entire tourism industry.

The North has been our home for over 30 years, and we want to stay.

We trust that this board will take our situation into consideration, when developing its final position on caribou sport hunting in the Northwest Territories.

Just before I finish here, I would like to voice a personal observation from this hearing process.

We may disagree over the herd names, sizes, survey methodology and results, but if you look around, you will recognize that we are not separated by different points of

view. Instead we are deeply connected by one common concern.... the caribou.

Considering the current situation including the proposed Management Action Plans before the WRRB and the emergency measures imposed by the Government of the Northwest Territories, I think we can all recognize that we have diverse needs in relation to caribou.

But the common emotion that can be seen in each of us is FEAR

Fear of losing our control, our rights, our business, our jobs, our livelihood, our traditional food, our culture, our style of life.

Fear of losing the caribou.

We are all facing uncertain circumstances. Yet all of us are people that depend on the sustainability of Northwest Territories caribou herds.

The deliberations you, the Wek'eezhii Renewable Resources Board, have ahead of you are very serious.

May you make the right decisions for our future, your future and the future of one of our greatest resources. Caribou

Thank You

Approximately 3,500 words