



Tłıchǫ Government

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Leaving Ekwo Alone – for the Sahtı Ekwo (Bluenose east caribou)

WRRB Question #2) Explain the importance of refugia for ɛkwǫ currently, from the perspective of the Tłıchǫ senior elders. The Board understands that senior elders have always said ɛkwǫ need to be left alone when the numbers are low and they retreat into an area of safety. How do the proposed management actions reflect this Tłıchǫ Knowledge?

The concept of Centre of Habitation can be translated to ekwo use of a ‘refugia’, or core refuge area that ekwo use “when the numbers are low and they retreat into an area of safety”. The Bathurst Caribou Range Plan (BCRP) defined The Centre of Habitation for the Kokèti herd as “a core use or refuge area that includes important habitats and migration paths, which a caribou population occupies and uses when it is at low numbers in its natural cycle”.

In conversation with Dr. John B. Zoe, the current core area that the herd use during recent years of low numbers was described as the “heart of the body”. When population is low, the herd only use a core area, much similar to an ailing person whose blood only flow through its core parts of the body; the heart, lungs and brain. Similarly, the ekwo herd contract to its core refuge area of its range during low numbers. When numbers increase, the herd will start to use larger parts of its historic range, similarly to how blood start to flow to outer limbs, such as legs, feet, arms and hands – when a person becomes well.

The joint management proposal recommends actions on (1) harvest restrictions, (2) habitat stewardship, and (3) harvest of other wildlife species; management actions which incorporates Tłıchǫ elders’ perspectives about leaving ekwo alone.

1. Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) and Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Conservation Area

The Tłıchǫ Government and GNWT propose that Indigenous harvest of the Sahtı ekwo in Wek’èezhìi continue as the Total Allowable Harvest determined by the WRRB in 2019 of 193 bulls/year (Determination #1-2019). This conservative rate of harvest would be consistent with a management emphasis on herd recovery. Resident, non-resident and commercial harvest from this herd should remain at 0. The 76 bull-only authorization cards for Tłıchǫ allows harvesters to continue cultural practice on the land and will be allocated among the communities.

The Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Conservation Area (MCBCCA) is implemented as the means for managing the TAH of zero for the Kokèti ekwo. The MCBCCA is based on locations of collared Kokèti caribou with a buffer of 20-60 km. The no-hunting zone aims to leave the ekwo alone within its core use area in winter, while facilitating the alternative harvest of other caribou herds (Beverly herd) outside of the no-hunting zone. The overlap of the

Sahtı ekwo and Kokèti ekwo during winter months effectively makes that portion of the Sahtı ekwo herd off limits for harvesters.

2. Habitat and Land Use

Accompanying habitat management strategies are needed for ekwo to be left alone, and maintain the land in a healthy condition so that habitat may continue to support survival and future growth of the herd over the long term. An important part of managing impacts to caribou range use and habitat is through the environmental assessment and land use planning processes. The GNWT and Tłıchq Government continue to participate in processes in the NWT and Nunavut that may affect the Sahtı ekwo and its range (e.g. review of the 2021 Draft Nunavut Land Use Plan).

Wildlife and Fuels Management

Fire in the forested, winter range of the Sahtı ekwo can impact herd movements and access to key wintering areas. The Tłıchq Government has worked with elders and harvesters to identify key unburned areas of winter habitat and has provided these locations to the ENR Forest Management Division to be considered as values-at-risk in fire management decisions. As fire management operations in summer allow, these areas may be prioritized for actioning fires to help maintain important winter habitat for the Sahtı ekwo.

Mobile Caribou Conservation Measures

In addition to identifying fixed conservation areas, GNWT has developed a Framework document, Operational Guidance and conducted a desktop pilot exercise for the implementation of Mobile Caribou Conservation Measures within the Centre of Habitation. Mobile Measures are a flexible tool for reducing disturbance of caribou and allowing them to move through an area adjacent to small and medium sized exploration camps. GNWT is working with an industry partner to identify opportunities to test the on-site implementation of Mobile Measures at an exploration camp in 2022.

Protection of Key Caribou Habitat

Consistent with WRRB Recommendation #6-2019, the Tłıchq Government has conducted significant work with elders and harvesters to identify and select important seasonal habitat and key landscape features that are important to caribou and would benefit from conservation. The Tłıchq Government will continue to work with elders and harvesters to document areas and prioritize them for conservation. The GNWT hosted a series of workshops in 2021 to support this collaborative work and while the workshops focus on the Kokèti ekwo range, there is extensive overlap of the Sahtı ekwo range with the Kokèti ekwo fall and winter ranges. As the workshop series continues into 2022, the GNWT in partnership with Indigenous Governments and Organizations continue to look at options for identifying, prioritizing and legally protecting key caribou habitat as per WRRB Recommendation #7-2019.

3. Support for harvest of other wildlife and on-the-land activities

The Tłıchq Government and GNWT recognize that focusing harvest on other species (eg., moose, fish, and bison) and other caribou herds will reduce pressure on the Kokèti ekwo and Sahtı ekwo herds. The Tłıchq Government will continue working on developing programs that promote alternative harvest such as the Tłıchq Dqtaàts'eedi program where fish is provided to the community members. The Tłıchq Government has also provided fuel subsidies to assist people to go out moose hunting. These programs have provided Tłıchq citizens with other subsistent sources to provide for their families in hopes of reducing caribou harvest. As reduced caribou harvesting have serious implications for Tłıchq and other Indigenous communities, and have negative impacts on the continuity of Tłıchq culture, language and way of life, the long-term aim of the Tłıchq Dqtaàts'eedi program is continuation of projects that teach TK of the land and caribou by bringing elders, youth and community members together on the land. Such activities are important for the practice of the hunting culture, and maintaining cultural identity and continuity as a hunting people, ultimately, to condition people with skills and knowledge of the land, for when ekwo return.

