



February 13, 2023

Hon. Shane Thompson, Minister  
Environment and Natural Resources  
Government of the Northwest Territories  
P.O. Box 1320  
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9  
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*Via Email*  
*Shane\_Thompson@gov.nt.ca*

**Re: Wildlife Research Permit application – Biological Monitoring of the Bathurst, Bluenose-East, and Beverly Caribou Herds**

Dear Minister Thompson:

As per section 12.5.1 of the Tłı̨chǝ Agreement, the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) considers the Wildlife Research Permit (WRP) application for monitoring activities on *Kǝk'èetì Ekwǝ* (Bathurst caribou), *Sahtì Ekwǝ* (Bluenose-East caribou), and Beverly Ekwǝ Herds as a management proposal.

The WRRB understands the management proposal, submitted by Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), to include the following monitoring actions for May 1, 2023 to April 30, 2024:

- Continued use of satellite collars to monitor the movement and distribution of migrating *zekwǝ* (barren-ground caribou).
- Deploy and maintain up to 70 collars each on the *Kǝk'èetì* and *Sahtì Ekwǝ* herds (50 on cows and 20 on bulls), and up to 50 collars on the Beverly herd (30 on cows and 20 on bulls).
- Deployment of collars involves:
  - Net-gunning capture by helicopter (no immobilization drugs will be used);
  - A hired professional capture crew;
  - Handling of caribou to fasten collars;
  - No measurements taken except for blood, hair, and fecal samples to assess pregnancy status and for other testing and possible genetic studies; and,
  - Shooting or pithing an animal if it is critically injured.
- Conduct composition surveys in:
  - June to estimate the proportion of cows, bulls, yearlings, newborn calves, and breeding females;
  - October to assess bull:cow ratios; and,
  - March/April (late winter) to provide a measure of calf survival and an index of recruitment.
- Conduct a reconnaissance and photo survey for the *Sahtì Ekwǝ* herd in June.
- Conduct a reconnaissance survey for the *Kǝk'èetì Ekwǝ* in June to monitor herd switching and support the Beverly survey.

The WRRB has taken a Level 1 review, as outlined in the Board's Rule for Management Proposals, and made the following decision (Motion #854-08-02-2023):

- To approve the 1) Continued deployment and maintenance of satellite collars on Kòk'èti, Sahti, and Beverly Ekwò herds; 2) composition surveys in June, October, and March/April; and 3) reconnaissance and photo survey for Sahti Ekwò in June.
- To disapprove the reconnaissance survey for the Kòk'èti Ekwò in June.

Using the precautionary principle, the Board does not believe that the scientific data gained from the proposed Kòk'èti Ekwò reconnaissance survey is enough to outweigh the disturbance it causes. In 2019, the WRRB agreed with ENR and recommended that reconnaissance surveys not be undertaken in years without a calving ground photo survey. Further, Tìchq Elders have said that ðekwò should be left alone in times of low population. Annually, the Kòk'èti, Sahti, and Beverly Ekwò herds are subjected to a significant amount of ground level and aerial disturbances. The Board recommends that a disturbance matrix be developed and included in the next ðekwò joint management proposals to be submitted to the WRRB. It is essential that the matrix be a cumulative picture of all disturbances that impact on ðekwò, including but not limited to aerial wildlife surveys for all species, aerial exploration surveys, winter road use by haul trucks and harvesters, and wildlife harvest camps. The matrix must consider not only the types of disturbance but also the frequency of the disturbance.

The WRRB also reiterates previous recommendations made in 2019 and 2022 to have GNWT and the Government of Nunavut conduct calving ground surveys for the Kòk'èti, Sahti, and Beverly Ekwò herds at the same time, in the same year. It was understood by the WRRB, due to the 2022 Kòk'èti Ekwò calving ground survey conducted by GNWT as well as logistical and financial constraints, all three calving ground surveys will not be completed in 2023. Despite assurances by ENR that these surveys do not need to be flown in the same year, the Board believes there is value in having the photo surveys occur all at once. The information gathered allows for a full picture of ðekwò on the landscape, which in turn provides consistent messaging to the public.

The WRRB requests that upon completion of each monitoring action an update be provided to the Board. Additionally, the Board requests an annual summary of the upcoming field season and to be contacted if there is any opportunity for Board or staff involvement in your work.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call our office.

Sincerely,



Joseph Judas  
Chair

Cc Grand Chief Jackson Lafferty  
Tìchq Government

Tammy Steinwand-Deschambeault, Director  
Culture and Lands Protection, Tìchq Government

Dr. Erin Kelly, Deputy Minister  
Environment and Natural Resources

Heather Sayine-Crawford, Director, Wildlife  
Environment and Natural Resources