



February 8, 2019

Hon. Robert C. McLeod, Minister  
Environment and Natural Resources  
Government of the Northwest Territories  
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**Re: Information Request Round No.1 – Bluenose-East Caribou Herd Joint Management Proposal**

Dear Minister McLeod & Grand Chief Mackenzie:

On January 14, 2019, the Tłı̄chọ Government (TG) and Department of Environment & Natural Resources (ENR), Government of Northwest Territories submitted the “*Joint Proposal on Management Actions for the Bluenose-East ƛekwò (Barren-ground caribou) Herd: 2019 – 2021*” to the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board (WRRB), outlining proposed management actions for the *Sahtì Ekwò* (Bluenose-East caribou) herd in Wek'èezhì. The Board opened the 2019 Bluenose-East Caribou Herd Proceeding on February 4, 2019.

Following review of the sahtì ekwò joint management proposal by the Board and its advisors, the WRRB has prepared and attached a list of information requests for both TG and ENR's response. **Responses must be received by no later than 5:00 p.m. on February 18, 2019.**

If you have any questions, please contact our office at (867) 873-5740 or [jpellissey@wrrb.ca](mailto:jpellissey@wrrb.ca).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph Judas", written in a cursive style.

Joseph Judas  
Chair

Attachment

Cc Dr. Joe Dragon, Deputy Minister, ENR-GNWT  
Rita Mueller, Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, ENR-GNWT  
Bruno Croft, Superintendent, North Slave Region, ENR-GNWT  
Laura Duncan, Tłıchǫ Executive Officer, TG  
Tammy Steinwand-Deschambeault, Director, Culture and Lands Protection, TG  
Michael Birlea, Manager, Culture and Lands Protection, TG

## **Bluenose-East Caribou Herd Joint Management Proposal Information Requests Round No.1**

### **Science-related Information Requests; IRs #1-9:**

**Information Request #1:** Please provide information on the distribution of collared animals in the survey strata during the June 2018 survey of ‘known Bluenose-East’ collars (animals who calved on the *Sahtì Ekwò* (Bluenose-East caribou) calving ground in years prior, including unassigned collars and collared animals from neighbouring herds).

Parties Responsible: Environment and Natural Resources

Rationale for IR #1: The Board needs more information on the June 2018 population survey, including whether all the cow collars were within the aerial survey strata. This will help the Board assess the reliability of the 2018 herd estimate.

**Information Request # 2:** i) Please provide the updated estimates of average rate of adult survival for the period 2015-2018 (information which the proposal indicated was forthcoming) and specify whether the estimate was calculated using a computer model based on herd size, pregnancy rate and calf survival or otherwise; and, ii) Please provide a table giving the annual numbers of collars, annual rate of collar loss and the month when the collar loss occurred.

Parties Responsible: Environment and Natural Resources

Rationale for IR #2: The Board cannot interpret the trend in herd size without current information on its underlying vital rates. The proposal gave the 2013-2015 average survival as 71% but with no indication of how variable it is on an annual basis. Using the model generated estimates of survival does not detail the seasons with higher or lower survival. For those two reasons, the Board needs to know the annual and seasonal collar loss as an indicator of survival.

**Information Request #3:** Please provide a table with the annual fall and late winter calf:cow ratios to provide estimates of calf survival through summer and winter.

Parties Responsible: Environment and Natural Resources

Rationale IR #3: It will be useful to the Board to know if calf survival varies between summer and winter as background to make management decisions and monitoring recommendations.

**Information Request #4:** Please provide a table giving the sample size for collared cows, the number of pregnancies since 2010, and the mean and standard error for parturient cows recorded during calving ground surveys since 2010.

Parties Responsible: Environment and Natural Resources

Rationale IR #4: The proposal gives the 2018 pregnancy rates based on collared cows and information gathered during the calving ground surveys. The proposal states that “*pregnancy rates have been healthy for this herd in the last few years*” but it would be useful for the Board to see more detailed information especially on how the pregnancy rates have varied and if there are any trends. It would also be useful if ENR commented on how representative collared cows are of pregnancy rates.

**Information Request #5:** Please provide a summary (with maps) of the sahtì ekwò winter distribution relative to likely harvesting efforts (proximity to communities) since 2010.

**Parties Responsible:** Environment and Natural Resources

**Rationale IR #5:** The Board notes the abrupt reduction in harvest levels based on the preliminary harvest levels of 2016/17 and 2017/2018 compared to earlier years. The Board notes ENR's possible explanation and would need to see how the winter distribution has changed relative to communities and to the Bathurst herd.

**Information Request #6:** Please provide the range of model estimates for adult survival that together with a harvest level of 300 bulls would be required to halt the herd's decline.

**Parties Responsible:** Environment and Natural Resources

**Rationale IR #6:** ENR recommends a total harvest of 300 bulls/year. However, ENR's modeling shows the reduction will not halt the decline and the herd will be reduced by half in 2021 (based on ENR's modeling with 71% adult survival and average 'calf survival'). The Board needs more information to consider the effect of the recommended harvest level.

**Information Request #7:** Model sahtì ekwò, Bathurst and Beverly populations to 2029 (the next 10 years), assuming rates of decline and of herd switching seen in 2018 continue for the Bathurst, and herd switching begins for the sahtì ekwò herd when they reach a population of approximately 8,200.

**Parties Responsible:** Environment and Natural Resources

**Rationale IR #7:** The Board is concerned that if the sahtì ekwò continues to decline and overlaps with neighboring herds during the winter, that cows may start to migrate to other calving grounds making monitoring trends in herd size more difficult.

**Information Request #8:** It is unclear how sahtì ekwò caribou harvest will be managed in the Sahtú. How will harvest be managed and monitored, in the Sahtú starting July 1, 2019? How has this changed since 2016?

**Parties Responsible:** Environment and Natural Resources

**Rationale IR #8:** Sahtì ekwò spend much of their time in the Sahtú, and while there, are not under the jurisdiction of WRRB harvest determinations. Knowing how sahtì ekwò caribou harvest will be managed in a neighbouring region will help provide context to management proposals in Wek'èezhìi.

**Information Request #9:** Please provide a table or text reporting on the health of harvested caribou (if any were sampled).

**Parties Responsible:** Environment and Natural Resources

**Rationale IR #9:** The Board would like to know the condition of harvested caribou, if available. This information can help assess the health of the herd.

## **Tłıchǵ Knowledge-related Information Requests (IRs); IRs #10-15:**

**Information Request #10:** i) What goal(s) does the Tłıchǵ Government have to maintain, and rebuild, if necessary, their relationship with caribou; and ii) How does the Tłıchǵ Government intend to implement these goals?

Parties Responsible: Tłıchǵ Government

Rationale IR #10: In the proposal, the short-term goals of management actions are to “*slow the herd’s decline and promote recovery*”. The long-term goal is to “*enable sustainable caribou harvesting that addresses Indigenous community needs levels across this herd’s range*”. The proposal does not reflect both Indigenous and ‘western’ conservation perspectives.

During the 2016 sahtı ekwǵ hearing, in academic literature, and in Tłıchǵ reports on caribou laws, the Tłıchǵ people state the importance of their relationship with caribou. Evidence of the Indigenous conservation perspectives is plentiful. Reports document Tłıchǵ people following their traditional laws when on the land.

**Information Request #11:** i) Why do GNWT harvesting rules and guidelines, including limits and enforcement, not include Indigenous/Tłıchǵ laws; and, ii) How could following Indigenous/Tłıchǵ laws make a difference to harvesting behavior, including wastage and wounding of animals?

Parties Responsible: Environment and Natural Resources and Tłıchǵ Government

Rationale IR #11: Research associated with Indigenous environmental knowledge, self-governance, and land management shows that Dene, Métis, and Inuit have traditional laws to manage human hunting practices to sustain their land with various populations, including caribou.

From the harvesters’ and elders’ perspective, one of the most important factors contributing to the caribou decline is human behaviour and disrespect. TK research shows that Dene, Métis, and Inuit want their TK and laws to be used and respected in association with all wildlife.

**Information Request #12:** i) Define ‘important’ habitat for sahtı ekwǵ; ii) How will the sahtı ekwǵ range be protected from fragmentation; and iii) Provide available maps showing time of forest fire activity and development on the sahtı ekwǵ range.

Parties Responsible: Environment and Natural Resources and Tłıchǵ Government

Rationale IR #12: The proposal states that protection of ‘important’ habitat will be undertaken as a management action. Indigenous research shows that identifying and protecting a few ‘important’ habitat-types is insufficient to maintain healthy caribou; caribou need good, unfragmented habitat throughout their range.

**Information Request #13:** i) Provide available evidence of human development or disturbance on the sahtı ekwǵ range and how it has impacted barren-ground caribou habitat; ii) Provide available evidence on the impacts of climate change on the sahtı ekwǵ range; iii) Provide an evaluation of how cumulative impacts from climate change and human development have affected the sahtı ekwǵ range; iv) Provide an assessment of the ability of the sahtı ekwǵ herd and their range to absorb any

impacts from additional human development and climate change; and v) Will ENR and TG set limits to human development on the sahtì ekwò range as a management strategy to help protect caribou and their habitat? If not, why not?

Parties Responsible: Environment and Natural Resources and Tłıchǵ Government

Rationale IR #13: The proposal states “... overall there has been limited development on the *Bluenose-East range*”. Indigenous research across Canada shows that habitat loss and degradation from human development are the main cause of many wildlife population declines, including caribou. Indigenous knowledge research shows that climate change has significant impacts on caribou habitat, especially from the massive and intense fires that have occurred since the mid-90s.

According to Indigenous research from ‘Climate Change and Health Adaptation’, the combination of rapid climate change and human development will probably have negative impacts on barren-ground caribou and their habitat. The proposal does not state how the combination of climate change and development has impacted the sahtì ekwò herd and their habitat.

**Information Request #14:** i) What actions can be taken to eliminate the use of loud, fast skidoos when harvesting caribou; and ii) What actions can be taken to eliminate flying over the calving grounds when caribou are the most vulnerable?

Parties Responsible: Environment and Natural Resources and Tłıchǵ Government

Rational IR #14: Indigenous literature across Canada and Tłıchǵ knowledge reports show that caribou are stressed by loud noises. Low flying planes and skidoos are the most often mentioned.

**Information Request #15:** Why does the proposal not include a comprehensive monitoring program and plan, based on harvesters and elders, as outlined in various traditional knowledge reports?

Parties Responsible: Environment and Natural Resources and Tłıchǵ Government

Rationale IR #15: Academic articles and TK reports based on extensive research tell how Dene walk and watch the land (monitor), including caribou. People share information with each other and with other communities. They note and share information on the state of the habitat as well as the health of the caribou.

Traditional knowledge research has repeatedly called for an ongoing monitoring program that focuses on those who know the character of caribou—harvesters and elders—and those who can learn from those who know—the youth.

The Boots on the Ground program is a step in the right direction, with some limitations. To date, it has covered only a small area relative to the barren-ground caribou range and only for part of the year. It does not reflect the monitoring that Tłıchǵ elders have consistently said is necessary—for all the active harvesters who know the land now, as well as the stories, to watch the winter habitat in the summer and the health of caribou and their range all year round.