

January 8, 2024

Tammy Steinwand-Deschambeault, Director
Culture and Lands Protection
Tłıchǫ Government
Email: Tammy.Steinwand@tlicho.ca

Bruno Croft, Superintendent
Environment and Climate Change
Government of the Northwest Territories
Email: Bruno_Croft@gov.nt.ca

Via Email
Tammy.Steinwand@tlicho.ca
Bruno_Croft@gov.nt.ca

Re: Request to Extend Joint Management Proposal for Kòk'èeti (Bathurst) Ekwò Herd

Dear Ms. Steinwand-Deschambeault & Mr. Croft:

As per section 12.5.1 of the Tłıchǫ Agreement, the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) considered the above-mentioned extension request from July 1, 2024 to July 1, 2025, submitted by the Tłıchǫ Government (TG) and the Government of the Northwest Territories, (GNWT) on December 1, 2023. The short-term goals of the existing joint management proposal will continue to be to halt the Kòk'èeti Ekwò herd's decline and promote recovery while working towards the longer-term goal of enabling a sustainable caribou harvest that addresses Indigenous communities' needs across the Kòk'èeti herd's range.

Based on the WRRB's Rule for Management Proposals, the WRRB determined it should undertake a Level 1 review as only an extension was requested. The joint management proposal extension request was posted to the WRRB's website on the Management Proposals page from December 1-11, 2023. No formal comments were submitted by the public. During their recent December 2023 meeting, the Board noted that, despite conducting a reconnaissance and subsequent calving ground survey in June 2022 for the Kòk'èeti Ekwò herd, no new monitoring information was provided, and there were no changes to the accepted recommendations from 2019 and 2022, nor were there any new proposed management and monitoring actions. Following a lengthy deliberation, the Board agreed to approve the request to extend the Kòk'èeti Ekwò joint management proposal for one year (WRRB Motion #889-15-12-2023).

As such, the existing management and monitoring actions from the WRRB's 2019 Bathurst Caribou Proceeding are expected to continue and be implemented until July 1, 2025:

- *Harvest Management* – The total allowable harvest and harvest management actions remain unchanged, including continued growth and implementation of the Tłıchǫ Ekwò Harvest Monitoring Program.
- *Predator Management* – Predator management actions remain unchanged.
- *Habitat & Land Use* – Implementation of the Bathurst Caribou Range Plan is ongoing.
- *Education* – Education initiatives are ongoing.

.../Page 2

While most of the *Monitoring & Research* management actions from the WRRB's 2019 Bathurst Caribou Proceeding remain unchanged, TG and the GNWT have proposed the addition of a calving ground survey of the Kòk'èeti Ekwò herd in June 2024. The Board understands that TG and GNWT believe they are unable to provide a new joint management proposal until December 2024 without a more recent population estimate.

While the Board does recognize that they accepted closer monitoring of the Kòk'èeti Ekwò herd, including population survey intervals of two years and annual June, October, and March composition surveys in their 2019 recommendations, the WRRB has become increasingly concerned about continued disturbance to and lack of recovery of the herd. The Board recognizes that there are trade-offs in monitoring and detecting trends while also being mindful that Tìchq elders have stated that ðekwò should be left alone. In a June 10, 2022 response from the GNWT, it was noted that several steps would be taken to minimize disturbance during the composition, reconnaissance, and calving ground surveys in early June 2022 to address the Tìchq elder's concerns. To date, there has been no evidence provided to the Board to suggest these steps were taken in 2022 nor sufficient rationale provided to suggest that the proposed 2024 calving ground survey is necessary. As such, the WRRB is unable to support a reconnaissance or calving ground survey for the Kòk'èeti Ekwò herd in June 2024.

WRRB Recommendation #1-2023 (Kòk'èeti Ekwò) – TG and GNWT will not conduct a reconnaissance survey nor calving ground survey in June 2024.

Additionally, the WRRB notes that its 2022 recommendations related to emigration (#1-2022 Kòk'èeti Ekwò) and a technical workshop to discuss technical monitoring questions, including monitoring survey design in herd overlap areas and calving ground survey frequency and design (#3-2022 Kòk'èeti Ekwò) have yet to be implemented. To fulfill these recommendations, the WRRB plans to undertake an external technical review of Kòk'èeti Ekwò herd management, including an assessment of ðekwò emigration as well as ðekwò herd surveys, frequencies, and methodologies to determine which are most necessary to inform wildlife management. Further, the external technical review will focus on the WRRB's past recommendations, determinations, and process to determine their effectiveness and benefit to wildlife. This information will help shape and inform future Board recommendations overall. Upon completion of the external review, the WRRB will host a technical session with the Barren-ground Caribou Technical Working Group to examine the results.

The WRRB requests that a new joint management proposal be submitted by TG and GNWT for review in December 2024 using existing information available. The Board reminds TG and GNWT that public understanding about the reasons for the Kòk'èeti Ekwò population declines and the factors affecting the declines, including emigration, and the need for ðekwò management actions is imperative given the relationship between Tìchq communities and ðekwò. The Board reiterates its 2022 recommendation for TG and GNWT to develop a plain language summary of the joint management proposal and calving ground survey using the July 2022 calving ground survey report and the December 2024 joint management proposal.

The WRRB looks forward to continuing conversations with TG and GNWT and collaborating on implementation of the Kòk'èeti Ekwò management and monitoring actions. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call our office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph Judas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joseph" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Judas".

Joseph Judas
Chair

Cc Michael Birlea, Manager, Lands Protection & Renewable Resources
Culture and Lands Protection, Tłıchǫ Government

Heather Sayine-Crawford, Director, Wildlife Management Division
Environment and Climate Change, Government of the Northwest Territories