

September 18, 2026

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Via Email
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Re: Information Request – 2026 Sahtı Ekwò Management Proceeding

Dear Ms. Steinwand-Deschambeault and Ms. Sayine-Crawford:

On July 17, 2026, Environment & Climate Change (ECC), Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and Tłıchǫ Government (TG) submitted a joint management proposal, entitled “*Joint Proposal on Management Actions for the Bluenose-East Barren-ground Caribou (Sahtı Ekwò) Herd 2027-2030*” (“the Proposal”) to the WRRB, outlining proposed management actions for Sahtı Ekwò in Wek'èezhìi. Following an initial assessment of the Proposal, the WRRB determined that a **Level 2 review** is appropriate, as per its Rule for Management Proposals. The Board opened the 2026 Sahtı Ekwò Management Proceeding on August 27, 2026.

Following review of the Sahtı Ekwò joint management proposal by the Board and all Participants, the WRRB has prepared and attached a list of information requests for both TG and GNWT's response. **Responses must be received by no later than 5:00 p.m. on October 9, 2026.**

Additionally, in preparation for the upcoming Science and Traditional Knowledge Technical Sessions, scheduled for October 20-21, 2026 and October 27-28, 2026, respectively, the WRRB has attached topics of discussion in advance to ensure sufficient preparation time.

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

Sincerely,



Joseph Judas
Chair

Attachment

Cc Stephanie Behrens, Manager
 Culture and Lands Protection, Tłıchǫ Government

Dr. Brett Elkin, Assistant Deputy Minister, Director, Wildlife and Forest Management
Environment and Climate Change, Government of the Northwest Territories

Round No. 1 Information Requests

MODELING

Information Request #1:

- i. Using the Barren-ground Caribou Cumulative Effects Assessment (CEA) model or the Integrated Population Model (IPM), evaluate how future trends in environmental variables associated with a changing climate, combined with a total allowable harvest (TAH) of 395 in Wek'èezhìi and 450 in Nunavut affects recovery of the Sahti Ekwò herd (using sex ratio ranging from 0 – 50% cows for the Wek'èezhìi TAH and 0-100% for the Nunavut TAH).
- ii. Please describe how predicted changes in population trajectory of the Sahti Ekwò herd based on a climate change scenario will be considered in assessing the risk to, and managing, the recovery of the Sahti Ekwò herd.

Submitted by: Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories

Rationale for IR #1:

Climate trends for the Sahti Ekwò seasonal ranges include fewer days with freezing rain, warmer June with less snow and more plant growth degree days; higher indices for mosquitos and warble flies and warmer falls. Relationships between climate and vital rates show that June snow depth contributed to variability in annual cow mortality, while May snow depth was related to parturition¹.

Results of scenario modelling of the [NWT Cumulative Impacts Monitoring Program \(CIMP\) project #207](#), CEA of Barren-ground Caribou Herds, shows that population outcomes were sensitive to changes in cow mortality associated with climate change. In addition, [NWT CIMP project #241](#) shows that colder winters and shallow snow were associated with high overwinter mortality, while extreme summer temperatures and insect harassment reduced summer survival.

Information Request #2:

- i. Based on a review of the literature and using the Integrated Population Model (IPM) as necessary, investigate plausible scenarios and population outcomes for changes in calf survival, due to the proposed cow harvest.
- ii. What percentage of cows will have calves during the cow harvest period, and what percentage of those calves will likely die when their cows are shot? Assume cows with or without calf have an equal chance of being shot.

¹ Russell, D., R. White, and A. Gunn. 2024b. Understanding Productivity of North American Migratory Tundra Caribou (Rangifer tarandus): Role of vital rates and climate. Government of Northwest Territories, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada. Manuscript Report 312, 55p.

- iii. How would you propose to monitor the incidence of calf abandonment or reduced calf survival due to abandonment including considerations such as logistical, technical, and financial feasibility?

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories

Rationale for IR #2:

The Joint Management Proposal (JMP) proposes the current TAH of 395 be maintained but rather than bull only harvest, a 1:1 sex ratio harvest be implemented during the fall hunt (August 1 – October 31), thus opening up the harvest of cows in a population that is increasing at a predicted 5 % per year from 2021. While the JMP modelled possible population trajectories resulting from increased mortality of adult female ekwò, it did not consider impacts to calf survival resulting from the harvest of cows during the fall when cows may still be lactating.

Information Request #3:

- i. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the IPM in determining Sahti Ekwò trends into the future?
- ii. Please describe how uncertainties in data such as from annual fluctuations in adult sex ratio can be explored through IP Modeling to investigate how to select the time period for averaging adult sex ratios.
- iii. Please summarize how other ekwò management agencies incorporate data uncertainties into their IP modelling.
- iv. Please explain if and how the Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è program field observations can be used in the IPM such as by weighting factors for vital rates or environmental co-variates.

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchq Government

Rationale for IR #3:

The JMP states that an IPM contributes to a more complete understanding of how a herd is doing. It can do this by incorporating other “valuable” data gathered during field surveys at times other than just the abundance estimates from periodic calving ground surveys. Specifically, an IPM can provide a more informative understanding of herd dynamics.

The JMP describes how the herd estimates can fluctuate over shorter time periods and data, such as adult sex ratio, fluctuate annually necessitating the use of averaging over multiple years. The JMP does not directly address the causes of data uncertainty and it is not clear how the time period over which an indicator is averaged (number of years) is selected or assessed through the IPM.

Information Request #4:

Please explain how uncertainty regarding the recent population trend was considered in deciding to introduce the proposed fall cow harvest. In particular, please clarify the level of confidence placed in the conclusion that the herd is increasing and explain how the limitations and uncertainty associated with the available scientific and community-based monitoring information affected the level of risk considered acceptable for this new management action.

Submitted by: Sahtú Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchq Government

Rationale for IR #4:

The JMP concludes, based on scientific and community-based monitoring information, that the Sahti Ekwò herd has been slowly increasing since 2021. It also acknowledges uncertainty associated with the population estimates and demographic information used to assess the herd's recent trend. Although the proposal provides modelling and other analyses supporting the sustainability of the proposed harvest, it is less clear how uncertainty regarding the strength and durability of the herd's increase was considered specifically in deciding to introduce a fall cow harvest with an up to 1:1 harvest sex ratio.

COLLARS

Information Request #5:

Please discuss what consideration has been given to alternative methods of measuring ekwò survival? For example, GPS ear tag transmitters have improved in reliability and function and may be a practical way to monitor individual ekwò survival while still tracking them.

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchq Government

Rationale for IR #5:

Collared ekwò are an integral part of ekwò management and maintaining a target of 70 collars (50 cows, 20 bulls) on the Sahti Ekwò herd is critical to obtaining reliable estimates of key parameters, survival rate being one of them. The JMP states (p. 10) that collar-based survival estimates are considered biased low due to fate uncertainty. However, it is important to also test the assumption that a collar does not adversely affect the individual's survival given that survival rates of collared ekwò are used in the IPM.

HARVEST

Information Request #6:

Please describe how the proposed fall cow harvest with an up to 1:1 harvest sex ratio will be implemented and monitored. In particular, please clarify:

- i. whether authorization cards will distinguish between cows and bulls;
- ii. whether the harvest sex ratio will apply to authorizations issued or to the actual reported harvest;
- iii. whether the harvest sex ratio will apply separately to each harvester group or collectively
- iv. across the region;
- v. the period over which compliance with the harvest sex ratio will be assessed; and
- vi. the maximum number of cows that could be authorized or harvested annually under the proposed approach.

Submitted by: Sahtú Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchq Government

Rationale for IR #6:

The JMP would permit a fall cow harvest with an up to 1:1 harvest sex ratio and states that harvest monitoring and the use of authorization cards will continue. However, it is not clear how the proposed harvest sex ratio will be administered or assessed in practice.

Information Request #7:

- i. Please detail and describe the approaches to accurately monitor the harvest (fall and winter) including considerations such as training, key data (including tracking sex ratio), whether mandatory or not, how unused cards are reallocated, data collation, data management, reporting, and reporting timelines.
- ii. With respect to tracking harvest numbers, please clarify if a calf dies because its mother is shot, do we count both the cow AND calf towards the number of tags used?

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchq Government

Rationale for IR #7:

The JMP explains that Tłıchq Government and GNWT will conduct “*enhanced harvest monitoring activities to ensure the number of cows and bulls harvested annually are accurately recorded*” (p. 38). Tłıchq Government commits to using Guardians during the fall hunt to monitor the harvest including the documentation of “*sex, age class, and location of harvested animals; monitor caribou movement and distribution along winter roads and traditional harvesting areas; record observations of caribou health and body condition; record any other wildlife observations including wolves; and record weather, snow, and ice conditions that may affect caribou movement.*” And that by “*... having a guardian present at the community hunts we will be able to gather more accurate harvest data*” (p.40).

Information Request #8:

Please describe the adaptive management process that will apply specifically to the fall cow harvest. In particular, please clarify:

- i. when and how implementation of the fall cow harvest will be reviewed;
- ii. how it will be determined whether the fall cow harvest is having an unanticipated or unacceptable effect;
- iii. what indicators, thresholds, or other circumstances would trigger consideration of a management response;
- iv. who will be responsible for reviewing the available scientific and community-based monitoring information and making resulting management decisions;
- v. what changes could be made to the fall cow harvest before the end of the three-year period, including whether the harvest sex ratio, fall season or authorization of cow harvest could be modified; and
- vi. how conclusions and resulting management decisions will be documented and communicated before the subsequent harvest season.

Submitted by: Sahtú Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchǵ Government

Rationale for IR #8:

The JMP states that implementation of the fall cow harvest will be reviewed after the first year, that harvest information and management actions will be reviewed annually, and that the management approach may be reassessed if unanticipated consequences occur during the three-year period. However, the relationship among these review commitments is unclear, as is the process through which review findings could result in changes to the fall cow harvest before the end of the proposal period.

Information Request #9:

- i. Please outline in detail how the proposed changes in harvest sex ratio will be communicated to all harvesters to encourage and promote compliance.
- ii. Detail and describe how compliance and enforcement activities will be undertaken with respect to Sahti Ekwò harvest including considerations of personnel, logistics, effort and timing considering two cases:
 - a. The Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road (TCWR) is constructed and open to the harvesters; and,
 - b. The TCWR is not constructed and not open to harvesters.
- iii. If not constructed, what impact do you estimate the closure of the TCWR will be on re-directing the harvest of ekwò elsewhere and how will this be managed?

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchǵ Government

Rationale for IR #9:

The JMP acknowledges the importance of continued work on communicating and increasing awareness of ekwò conservation issues, to educate harvesters on the importance of respectful

harvest practices to reduce wounding loss and wastage. The JMP does not discuss in detail how the two governments will educate Indigenous harvesters on the proposed change in the Sahti Ekwò harvest sex ratio to promote compliance.

The JMP explains how GNWT will utilize existing four full-time Renewable Resource Offices in the Tłchq region to ensure a lawful harvest occurs as the Gamèti and Wekweèti winter roads open and access to Sahti Ekwò becomes available. GNWT does not commit to having a full-time monitor or officer in Wekweèti to promote compliance and reduce risks of illegal harvest but rather that they will take an adaptive approach to allocating officer effort as the season progresses.

Information Request #10:

Please describe how health and body condition will be monitored during the fall and winter harvest (including the inclusion of tissue sample kits) and how this information could provide context and supporting information to further understand health and habitat observations collected during the Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è programs?

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłchq Government

Rationale for IR #10:

The JMP explains that recent research shows that climate change is likely to increase stressors to ekwò and that “*Warmer summer temperatures can cause thermal stress, affect vegetation (food), and increase insect activity, which causes caribou to use more energy, forage less, and nurse their calves less. Warming temperatures may also increase the impact of pathogens on caribou, by increasing insect activity and changing the development and infection rates of some pathogens.*” (p.11)

Health and condition monitoring during the fall and winter hunts will be particularly important in demonstrating whether Sahti Ekwò are showing signs of stress and reduced condition and in turn less resilient to other stressors such as a cow harvest. Monitoring health and condition of female ekwò in the fall, for example, will record whether harvested cows are lactating as an indicator of the cow's summer condition, which can be compared with habitat conditions recorded during the Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è program.

Information Request 11:

What does ‘good conditions’ mean if not ‘fat’? How does a harvester differentiate between ‘fat’ and ‘good condition’?

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Tłchq Government

Rationale for IR #11:

Harvesters and elders can tell the difference between skinny and fat; however, while the JMP uses the terminology 'good condition', 'fat', and 'skinny', only fat is defined. TK information must be meaningful and understood by the Board, Participants, and the public if this information is to be used to make decisions regarding Sahti Ekwò herd.

Information Request 12:

- i. How has the Bluenose-East herd's Total Allowable Harvest been allocated among Indigenous groups since 2016, and what factors were used to determine those allocations?
- ii. How have changes in herd distribution, harvest accessibility, and regional harvest opportunities over the past decade been incorporated into the allocation framework?
- iii. Have GNWT and the Tłıchq Government assessed whether current allocation proportions remain appropriate given the herd's range gradual shift away from its historical range and more toward Chief Drygeese Territory and the resulting impacts on YKDFN harvesters?

Submitted by: Yellowknives Dene First Nation (YKDFN)

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchq Government

Rationale for IR #12:

YKDFN acknowledges the significant efforts of Indigenous governments, communities, harvesters, governments, and monitoring programs across the Northwest Territories and Nunavut that have contributed to the collection and reporting of information on the Sahti Ekwò (Bluenose-East Barren-ground Caribou) Herd. This work provides an important foundation for collaborative management and informed decision-making. YKDFN notes that the monitoring results presented in the Joint Proposal indicate that the herd has experienced a gradual increase in abundance since 2021. YKDFN recognizes and welcome this encouraging trend.

Figure 11 from the Joint Proposal illustrates both historical and recent home ranges of the Sahti Ekwò Herd. The map shows the 2020-2025 annual range in a dark green hatched pattern. Although not explicitly addressed in the proposal, YKDFN understands that this shift in annual distribution may have begun as early as 2016.



Figure 11. Range and habitat use by collared Sahti Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) in the last 5 years (2020-2025), as shown with dark green hatching, overlaid on the draft updated annual range (1960-2025) outlined in green, and the 2015 annual range boundary outlined in black.

Since wildlife records began in 1968, an average of 2,638 km²/year (range 0-7,336 km²/year, from 1968-2025) has been burned within the Sahti Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) range (the 2015 annual range boundary) as shown in Figure 12. The amount of area burned within the Sahti Ekwò (Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herd) range has been higher in recent years with an average of 2,557 km²/year (range 89-7,639 km²/year) impacted in the past five years (2020-2025). DGE noted that climate change is affecting wildfire dynamics, with fewer marshlands to slow them down in the boreal forest (AICWM 2026).

The map suggests that the herd's current annual range differs substantially from its historical distribution. In particular:

- The herd no longer appears to extend into the Sahtú region south of Great Bear Lake during the winter period.
- Use of areas northeast of Great Bear Lake appears limited and seasonal, likely occurring during late summer and early fall.
- Winter distribution appears to have shifted further southeast, with the leading edge of the migration extending into Chief Drygeese Territory.

These distribution changes may help explain the absence or near absence of reported harvest opportunities for Sahtú harvesters during the past three years.

The harvest information presented in Table 1 (below) in the Joint Proposal appears consistent with the observed range shift shown in Figure 11. Taken together, the data suggest that changes in herd distribution may be influencing the availability of harvesting opportunities among regions and Indigenous rights holders.

Reported Harvest by Region	Year				
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
<u>Wek'èezhì</u>	76 bulls	0	0	14 bulls	4 bulls
<u>Sahtú</u>	Not reported	88 (bulls and cows)	0 ¹	0 ¹	0 ¹
Nunavut	169 (bulls and cows)	170 (bulls and cows)	170 (bulls and cows)	174 (bulls and cows)	84 (bulls and cows) ²
Total	≥245	≥170	≥170	≥188	≥88

¹Harvest is assumed to be zero as Sahti Ekwò have not been wintering near Déline.

²Harvest reported by KAA as of November 26, 2025. Harvest information is incomplete for 2025-26.

Finally, Table 3, p.24 in the Joint Proposal suggests a new revised allocation for TAH considering the recent increase of the bluenose-east caribou population estimate.

Harvester Group	Proposed allocation of TAH (395)	
	Proportion	TAH
<u>Tłı̨chɔ</u>	0.613	243
<u>Sahtú</u>	0.266	106
<u>Denecho</u>	0.024	9
<u>Inuvialuit</u>	0.016	6
<u>NWTMN</u>	0.024	9
<u>Akaįtcho</u>	0.032	13
<u>NSMA</u>	0.024	9
Totals WRRB TAH only		395

Understanding the implications of recent distribution changes is important to ensuring that harvest allocation decisions remain fair, evidence-based, and reflective of current conditions experienced by YKDFN Indigenous harvesters across the herd's range and inside Chief Drygeese Territory.

HABITAT

Information Request #13:

Are there any specific habitat studies for ekwò proposed or underway to test whether habitat changes predicted by climate change models are occurring on the range of the Sahti Ekwò herd?

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories and Tłıchō Government

Rationale for IR #13:

Details are presented about a seven-year plan to plant trees to restore areas affected by recent wildfires and climate change. Range quality and carrying capacity have been identified as key parameters in ekwò population dynamics. Sampling lichen biomass, for example, and measuring “shrubification” of the tundra could help provide important parameters in long-term monitoring of ekwò populations and predicting trends.

PREDATORS

Information Request #14:

Detail any proposed modifications or design changes to the diga den surveys and pup counts at active dens on the Sahti Ekwò range when applying the techniques used on the Kòk'ètì Ekwò range.

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Government of the Northwest Territories

Rationale for IR #14:

The most practical method of measuring diga abundance on the tundra is likely den surveys, or a combination of den surveys and minimal counts. The JMP lists the continuation of diga den surveys and pup counts at active dens as a proxy for monitoring abundance and productivity (litter size); however, little detail about the proposed diga program and its application to the Sahti Ekwò range has been provided.

EDUCATION

Information Request #15:

- i. Explain how Tłıchō cultural education about traditional harvest practices and people's traditional relationship with ɛkwò will decrease potential negative impacts on the Sahti Ekwò herd?
- ii. Given most ɛkwò wastage and wounding of ɛkwò occurs during the winter harvest, how will educating the youth during the fall harvest lead to respect and conservation of ɛkwò in the winter months?

- iii. Given that hunters will need to differentiate cows from bulls, even during a 1:1 sex ratio harvest in the fall, will young Tłchq hunters be taught how to differentiate between cows and bulls?

Submitted by: Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board

Parties Responsible: Tłchq Government

Rationale for IR #15:

The proposal suggests that cultural education about ʔekwò during the fall hunt will lead to better conservation tactics given cultural laws associated with ʔekwò and respect for ʔekwò.

Technical Session (Science) Topics

1. **Day 1 – Integrated Population Model:**

- a) Evaluate and discuss the accuracy, precision, strengths, and weaknesses of the calving ground survey population estimates of 2018, 2021, 2023 and 2025 for the Sahti Ekwò herd. Considering the precision of other herd demographic indicators (including the recently measured bull:cow ratio, Fall 2026) and using the IPM as needed, fully substantiate the interpretation of an increasing herd trend including the plausibility of other trends.
- b) The Joint Proposal describes that because the IPM (model) uses all available data and accounts for missing or imprecise data, it is better than estimating the trend from calving ground estimates. However, the IPM cannot correct for any inaccuracy (bias) in the data.
 - i. Potentially there is bias in the collar-based estimates of adult mortality.
 - ii. Potentially, there is bias in the adult sex ratio.
 - iii. The pregnancy rate based on collared females does not take into account the change in age structure typical of a recovering herd.

2. **Day 2 – Monitoring**

- a) Evaluate and discuss the accuracy and precision of the demographic indicators i.e., bull:cow ratio, calf:cow ratio, adult survival and strengths and weakness of methods, including consideration of alternatives.
- b) The JMP's monitoring identifies late winter calf:cow ratios as a lower priority because of the annually variable overlap with neighboring herds. The need for monitoring over-winter calf survival and thus recruitment is increasing as the annual variability in winter snow conditions is increasing during climate warming and potentially can reduce herd resilience. The current unprecedented ENSO (El Nino) will likely impact the Arctic Oscillation which, in turn, impacts winter snow conditions ([NWT CIMP project #133](#)).
- c) Trend in herd abundance and recovery: The JMP comments that “[herd] trends are not always linear and can also fluctuate over shorter time periods (i.e. survey results should be interpreted in the context of multiple years and alongside information from Indigenous knowledge”. However, the JMP does not provide more information on what is meant by linear and fluctuations in the context of recovery for the Sahti Ekwò herd. Options for determining herd trend based on the trade-off between frequency of herd estimates and fiscal constraints relative to the risk of assuming the herd is recovering when, if in fact, it is not.

Technical Session (Tùchọ Knowledge)
Suggested topics

1. What was fall cow harvest like traditionally? How was harvesting cows with calves in the fall handled?
2. How were calves protected during the fall migration when cows started to migrate in the past?