

HUNTING PORCUPINE CARIBOU IN THE YUKON



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The Porcupine Caribou Herd

Porcupine Caribou facts for hunters

All caribou belong to the same species, *Rangifer tarandus*. In North America, there are five subspecies of caribou, divided into two broad groupings – Woodland and Barren-ground Caribou. Porcupine Caribou are Barren-ground Caribou, belonging to the subspecies *Rangifer tarandus granti*, or Grant's Caribou. Smaller than Woodland Caribou, Barren-ground Caribou are famous for their long-distance migrations between winter and summer ranges. They congregate, or group together, in spring and summer to calve and then disperse in winter. Woodland Caribou, on the other hand, scatter into small groups to calve and come back together on their winter ranges.

Caribou are the only members of the deer family where both males and females grow antlers. Male caribou (bulls) start growing antlers in March and have a complete set by the breeding season (rut) in October. Mature bulls and non-pregnant females (cows) shed their antlers after the rut. Young, non-breeding bulls and pregnant cows keep their antlers until spring, but begin growing new antlers almost immediately after shedding the old ones.



Hunter's tip: The presence of antlers alone cannot tell you whether the caribou is male or female. Are these bulls, cows, or both?

Caribou rely heavily on their keen sense of smell; sight and sound are less important for assessing danger. If a caribou hasn't identified something as dangerous, it will often move closer to investigate. People who are downwind of caribou have been able to lure curious animals closer by making odd movements and postures.

Hunter's tip: Although caribou sometimes seem unconcerned by people who do not pose an immediate threat to them, the animals are actually being disturbed, wasting valuable energy.

Apart from humans, wolves are the top predators of most caribou herds. In winter, wolves hunt in packs, ready to pursue and kill caribou that fall behind or are careless. Caribou usually respond to wolf attacks by running. Where there is natural cover, such as boulder-strewn terrain, ravines, and forest, the caribou scatter to confuse the wolves. On frozen lakes and in large forest openings, they bunch together to find safety in numbers. Caribou use the same techniques to escape human hunters.

Hunter's tip: If their usual methods of escape do not work, caribou learn very quickly and adapt, perhaps by running sooner after they spot a hunter or avoiding areas where there are many hunters.

The mating season or rut for Porcupine Caribou usually occurs in mid-October. Mature bulls grow thick white manes, their necks swell much larger than normal, and they become restless and aggressive. They eat very little and begin to emit strong odours. During the rut, bulls compete in sparring matches to win the right to breed. By the end of the rut, bull caribou are exhausted, thin, and vulnerable to predation.

Hunter's tip: During and right after the rut, the meat of caribou bulls is tough and strong-tasting. Some hunters say the bulls taste fine as soon as they start to eat again, while others say the bulls do not taste good for a month or so after the rut. To avoid strong-tasting meat, select small, non-breeding bulls for harvest in October.

Snow machines, automobiles, and aircraft that chase caribou or frighten them into running long distances can cause a problem called "stress syndrome." Violent exertion causes chemicals to build up in muscles faster than blood can remove them. This can kill the caribou hours, days, or even weeks later. Panicked caribou can also injure themselves in other ways.

Hunter's tip: Chasing caribou can kill them long after they escape. Hunt with respect.

About 86 percent of adult caribou cows give birth each spring, but a quarter of the calves die within their first month. By the following March, about a third of the cows still have calves with them. Cows that lost their calves early are generally in better condition and are more likely to bear another calf. Herd dynamics and growth rates are strongly affected by calf and adult cow survival, and a decrease of 2 or 3 percent can cause a gradual reduction in herd size.

Hunter's tip: All cows are important. While subsistence hunters are allowed to hunt cows, the Porcupine Caribou Management Board strongly urges all hunters to avoid shooting cow caribou so that as many calves as possible are born each year.

The winter range of the Porcupine Caribou overlaps the winter range of the small Hart River Herd of Woodland Caribou in the Ogilvie, Blackstone, and Hart River areas. Harvest of the Hart River Herd is probably near or above what can be taken safely. When the two herds mix along the Dempster Highway, managers are concerned that a large number of Hart River Caribou may be taken under the more liberal hunting regulations for Porcupine Caribou.

Hunter's tip: See the Regulations section in this manual for information about how wildlife managers handle problems arising from the overlap of the two herds.



Provided by the Porcupine Caribou Technical Committee

Who hunts the Porcupine Caribou Herd, and when?

Porcupine Caribou hunters generally fall into five main categories: Yukon native, Yukon non-native, Northwest Territories native, Alaska native, and Alaska sport hunters. The vast majority of caribou are taken by native hunters, who rely heavily on the Porcupine Caribou. Hunting by each of these groups falls under different sets of agreements or legislation, which can be very confusing for hunters. See the *Know the Rules* section of this manual for details.

Winter

Most Porcupine Caribou winter below treeline in the Richardson and Ogilvie mountains. From November to March, they move slowly through their wintering range in the boreal forest. After feeding among the trees, caribou move out into the open to rest and ruminate, usually on frozen lakes, meadows, or hilltops where visibility is good. Since their only defence is running away, caribou must see their predators in time to escape. Usually they run off after catching the scent of a predator.

Seasonal harvest: Hunters from the Mackenzie delta and southern Yukon often find caribou along the Dempster Highway from October to March or April. When the caribou winter near Arctic Village, Alaska, sport and subsistence hunters have access to them.



Spring and calving

Sometime in April, with pregnant cows leading the way, the caribou begin moving northward to traditional calving grounds on the coastal plain and adjacent foothills of Ivavik National Park

and Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. By calving time, tens of thousands of pregnant females are scattered across the foothills bordering the coastal plain. Most cows give birth in early June to a single calf, which can stand and walk within hours of birth. Almost half of the calves die during their first year, most taken by wolves, grizzly bears, and golden eagles, and a few dying from pneumonia, drowning, or abandonment.

Seasonal harvest: People from Old Crow hunt caribou as they cross the Porcupine River on their migration north, as long as the river is safe for travel.



Summer

After calving time, bulls and cows not bearing young catch up with the cows and their calves on the coastal plain, where mosquitoes and flies have emerged to begin their summer-long harassment. During times of severe harassment, the caribou form large aggregations – sometimes one or two huge groups of 70,000 to 80,000 individuals each – and move across the tundra in search of cool, windswept areas that provide relief from insects. They keep moving throughout the summer, escaping insect harassment or searching for high-quality food.

Seasonal harvest: There is a small harvest in summer along the Alaskan coast. In Canada, Mackenzie Delta hunters can harvest caribou along the Yukon's north coast or in the Richardson Mountains. Sometimes, caribou come close to Arctic Village and Old Crow and may even show up along the Dempster Highway in the Richardson Mountains and Eagle Plains area.



Fall

In fall, the caribou return to the boreal forest. As the rut approaches, the mature bulls' necks swell to twice their normal size, and they stop eating almost completely. Through the rut, they spar with each other to establish dominance and earn the right to breed. At times, the contests lead to injury or even death. Survivors head into winter in poor physical condition with most of their fat reserves depleted. However, their job is done: the embryos growing within the cows have been sired by the largest and fittest of the herd's bulls.

Seasonal harvest: The herd traditionally crosses the Porcupine River sometime from late August to early October. To the Vuntut Gwitchin people of Old Crow, this is an important time for caribou hunting, with the animals in prime condition and their hides free of warble fly holes.



Porcupine Caribou, hunting, and wildlife viewing

Many hunters and others enjoy watching and photographing wildlife, and these interests can exist side by side with hunting. Respect everyone's interest in the herd and other local wildlife. Here are a few tips to help you enjoy these opportunities more.

- Out of respect for others, don't harvest wildlife that people are actively viewing.
- Never approach a wild animal. Let the animal approach you.
- Use binoculars, spotting scopes, and telephoto lenses to get a better look or photograph without scaring the animal away.
- Stay on the road. This will help keep the caribou within viewing distance.
- Let them cross! Do not move into or stop your vehicle in the path of caribou attempting to cross the highway.
- Leave your pets at home or in the car. The sight of a pet animal could cause the caribou to leave, along with your opportunity to watch them.



Management of the Porcupine Caribou Herd

Many different people are interested in the Porcupine Caribou Herd for many different reasons. Therefore, it has been agreed that users of the herd should work together to manage it. By keeping an eye on the herd, studying it, and managing the activities of people and their use of caribou, wildlife managers can make sure that the population stays strong into the future. Our understanding of the herd comes from both scientific and traditional knowledge. Using this knowledge, managers make rules about how the caribou can be hunted and by whom, asking hunters to do things in a certain way.

Management of the Porcupine Caribou Herd is a cooperative process involving many different groups. As a hunter, you can do your part by making your voice heard about management decisions and by following the rules and requests that come from First Nations and Territorial governments.

The Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement and the Porcupine Caribou Management Board

The Canadian Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement (PCMA) came into effect on October 26, 1985, and the international agreement between Canada and the United States was signed in 1987. The PCMA was the starting point for cooperatively managing the herd. It created the Porcupine Caribou Management Board (PCMB), a group of individuals who meet regularly to talk about the herd and make decisions about its management. PCMB members include representatives from First Nations, the Canadian government, and the Territorial governments.

Harvest Management Plan for the Porcupine Caribou Herd in Canada (2010)

In 2007, the PCMB started a process to create a cooperative harvest management plan for the herd. The plan was finalized in 2010. The goal of the harvest management plan (HMP) is to “try to conserve the Porcupine Caribou Herd by adjusting the number and sex of caribou we harvest based on the changes in the herd size and population trend.”

The chart below comes from the Harvest Management Plan and summarizes how basic regulations about caribou harvest will change as the population gets bigger or smaller.

Key harvest management actions in the different colour zones

Herd size	Licensed hunters	Aboriginal hunters
GREEN ZONE more than 115,000 animals	Up to two animals each Mandatory bulls only All hunters required to report	No harvest limit Cows and bulls may be taken All hunters required to report
YELLOW ZONE	One animal each	No harvest limit

80,000 – 115,000 animals	Mandatory bulls only All hunters required to report	Voluntary bulls only with a commitment to strive for 100% bulls harvest All hunters required to report
ORANGE ZONE	Harvest limit through permit Mandatory bulls only All hunters required to report	Harvest limit through subsistence allocation Mandatory bulls only All hunters required to report
45,000 – 80,000 animals	Mandatory bulls only All hunters required to report	All hunters required to report
RED ZONE	No harvesting	Extremely limited harvesting All hunters required to report
Up to 45,000 animals		

Each February, the PCMB meets to review all available scientific, local, and traditional knowledge about the current status of the herd, as well as recent harvest information from everyone who uses the herd. The PCMB will then decide which colour zone the herd is in and will recommend management actions for the next fall’s hunting season.

The Harvest Management Plan and the Implementation Plan are available for download from the PCMB website at www.taiga.net/pcmb

Collared caribou

Radio and satellite collars are used to locate and monitor the movements of the Porcupine Caribou Herd during various times of the year. Collared wildlife is protected from hunting, so if you see a collared caribou, do not shoot it. The information gained from collared caribou is important for managing the herd. If you shoot a collared animal accidentally, it is not illegal as long as you return the collar to Environment Yukon.



When you see a collared caribou, note the collar colour and number and report the sighting to your local biologist. The biologist will be interested in the information and will be happy to tell you what is known about that animal.

If you accidentally shoot a collared caribou, please return the collar to your nearest Environment Yukon office, along with information on when and where the kill occurred. No reward is offered for returning the collar.

Doing Things the Right Way – Hunting Ethics

People have different ideas about what is right and what is wrong when it comes to hunting, but most agree on some basic ideas.

Think of how your behaviour and activities may affect wildlife, others, and the future of hunting.

If hunting of the Porcupine Caribou Herd is to continue long into the future, hunters must act responsibly. A responsible hunter is a **respectful** hunter. Without respect, restrictions become tighter, conflict increases, the herd gets smaller, and public support for hunting disappears.

Respect

A good hunter hunts with **respect**:

- **Respect for others:**
 - Respect the beliefs and activities of non-hunters and other land/resource users.
 - If someone is already hunting in the area when you arrive, move on to a different spot.
 - Get permission to hunt in an area if you need to (e.g., on Settlement A Land).
- **Respect for yourself:**
 - Keep safety in mind at all times.
 - Hope for the best weather and road conditions, but prepare for the worst.
 - Don't drink alcohol or use drugs when hunting.
 - Know basic survival and first aid techniques.
- **Respect for wildlife:**
 - Use a gun and ammunition that can kill a caribou quickly and cleanly.
 - Practise shooting so you can kill the animal instead of wounding it.
 - If you wound a caribou, do everything you can to track it down and kill it.
 - Learn where the heart and lungs are on a caribou and aim to make a good shot to that area.
 - Sight in your gun, learn to judge how far away your target is, and know how far you can shoot accurately.
 - Take only the number of caribou that you need, and use all of the meat you get.
 - Take good care of your meat so it doesn't get dirty or spoiled.
- **Respect for the land:**
 - Take all of your garbage off of the land when you leave.
 - Only use your snowmobile when there is enough snow on the ground.
- **Respect for the law and wildlife management:**

- Follow any laws that apply to you and any requests from the Porcupine Caribou Management Board.
- Harvest bulls – more cows will keep the herd strong.
- Cooperate with Conservation Officers and Renewable Resource Officers.
- Report any mistakes you make while hunting.
- Report your kills at the reporting stations, to a Conservation Officer or Renewable Resource Officer or to your First Nation government.



Local and Traditional Knowledge

It is important to recognize that people have been harvesting caribou for thousands of years, and that different communities and cultures have different practices and ideas about hunting caribou. Learn about the traditional knowledge surrounding caribou in your community, and show respect for those traditions.



Firearms and Ammunition

Firearms safety

The PCMB recommends that all hunters take the Canadian Firearms Safety Course (CFSC) and get a Possession and Acquisition Licence (PAL). This is the licence you need to own or buy a gun and to buy ammunition. Firearms licensing is completely separate from hunting licensing. Contact your local Conservation Officer or the RCMP to find out how to take the course you need to get your firearms licence.

Any time you handle a firearm – pick it up, put it away, hand it to someone, receive it from someone, load or unload it – you should follow **ACTS** and **PROVE** and make sure it's safe.

*The vital four **ACTS** of firearm safety*

Assume the firearm is loaded.

- Every gun you ever pick up or see should be treated as if it is loaded.

Control muzzle direction.

- Point the gun in the safest direction ALL THE TIME.
- Make sure people near you always point their guns in a safe direction.

Trigger finger off the trigger and out of the trigger guard until you are ready to shoot.

- If you trip or stumble with your finger on the trigger, the gun is more likely to go off.
- If you bump the gun against something with your finger on the trigger, it is more likely to go off.

See that it is unloaded. **PROVE** it safe.

PROVE it safe

- **P**oint the firearm in the safest available direction.
- **R**emove all ammunition.
 - Open and close the action to unload any ammunition.
- **O**bserve the chamber.
 - Look and feel inside the chamber to make sure it is empty.
- **V**erify the feeding path.
 - Is the path between the magazine and the chamber clear?
 - Is the magazine empty? Can you see the follower?
- **E**xamine the bore.
 - Once you have followed all of the steps, and you are sure there is no ammunition in the gun, look inside the barrel to make sure that there is no rust, moisture, oil,

or anything blocking it (ice, snow, mud, etc.) that could make the gun dangerous to shoot.

Firearms safety during the hunt

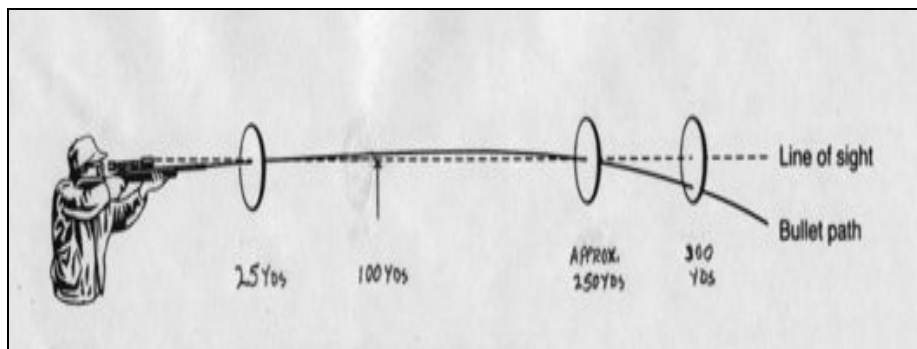
- Keep your gun unloaded in your vehicle or on your snowmobile.
- Do not load ammunition into the chamber until you are ready to shoot. Carry the gun with the chamber empty.
- Put black electrician's tape over the muzzle to keep snow and other material from plugging the barrel. You can shoot right through the tape without affecting your shot. A plastic bag can also work.
- Make sure your gun is clean and free of oil for a cold-weather hunt. The oil gets stiff in the cold and can make the gun unable to shoot if the action freezes.

Do not take your cold gun into a warm place. It will get covered with moisture from condensation, which causes rust and may freeze the action if not cleaned off properly. If you need to take your gun inside, make sure that it is completely dry before taking it back outside. Make sure that you also dry out your gun case.

Gun and cartridge choice

A bullet **ALWAYS** begins to drop as soon as it leaves the barrel of a gun due to the gravitational pull towards the centre of the earth. Therefore, to get the bullet to hit dead on the shooter's line of sight (i.e., hit the bull's eye), it must be made to travel in an arc. For a firearm to be sighted in at a particular distance, the bullet actually crosses the line of sight twice.

For example, with a centre-fire rifle sighted in to hit the bull's eye at 250 yards, the bullet crosses the line of sight on an upward trajectory at about 25 yards and then crosses the line of sight at the 250-yard mark on its way back down (see figure below). The bullet will be at its highest at the midpoint of its trajectory – 1 to 3 inches high depending on the calibre and bullet load.



No gun shoots “flat”, but some shoot “flatter” than others. Another way to say this is that all bullets drop, but bullets drop more quickly if their velocity (speed) is slower. Calibres such as

the 30-30 Winchester, 32 Special, 300 Savage, or 45-70 travel much slower than other calibres. This means the bullet loses elevation (drops) faster. To strike a target at longer distances, the rifle must be pointed higher. This may make it more difficult to hit a distant target, and the slower-travelling bullets may not have enough energy to kill a caribou quickly.

While it is a common rifle cartridge, the 30-30 Winchester is not recommended for caribou hunting near the Dempster Highway or in any other open country.

The 30-30 was designed as a bush gun, most useful at less than 100 yards. It is highly inefficient at long distances in the kind of open country encountered along the Dempster Highway. The round-nosed, slower-moving 30-30 Winchester bullet has to be aimed much higher to hit the target at 150 yards. Also, because it is not aerodynamic, it loses speed faster than more aerodynamic cartridges with pointed tips and boat-tail bases, and it loses energy faster. This energy (or killing power) is one factor in determining the depth or penetration when reaching the target. Slower bullets result in poor penetration at long distances. Using them can result in more wounded caribou.

Better choices for caribou hunting in open country include the 25-06, 270 Winchester, 280 Remington, 7mm Rem Mag, 303 British, 30-06 Springfield, any of the 300 Magnums and similar cartridges shooting bullets in 120 to 180 grains. The bullets from these cartridges travel faster and can cover greater distances in a shorter period of time. They deliver more energy to their intended target at longer distances, and it is easier to make an accurate shot with them. All of them will kill a well-hit caribou a lot farther away than will a 30-30 Winchester.

Some cartridges to compare

<i>30-30 Winchester</i>	<i>Slow, with a flat or round-nosed bullet</i>
<i>30-06 Springfield</i>	<i>Faster with pointed bullet</i>
<i>300 Magnum</i>	<i>Even faster with pointed bullet</i>

Ammunition

Use good-quality ammunition for hunting. Standard ammunition, while excellent for target practice, is usually loaded with bullets that may not kill an animal as cleanly as those found in premium ammunition. Partition, bonded, or expanding all-copper bullets will retain their mass

and carry their energy better, create larger wound channels and heavier bleeding, and result in a quicker, more humane kill.

Choose one of the lighter-weight bullets in your calibre choice (e.g., 150 grain in 30-06). Heavier-weight bullets, such as the 180 or 200 grain, can create extensive damage if muscle tissue is struck. This damage will not necessarily result in the death of the animal, but in a serious wound that will cause the animal to suffer for days before succumbing to complications, such as blood poisoning or starvation.

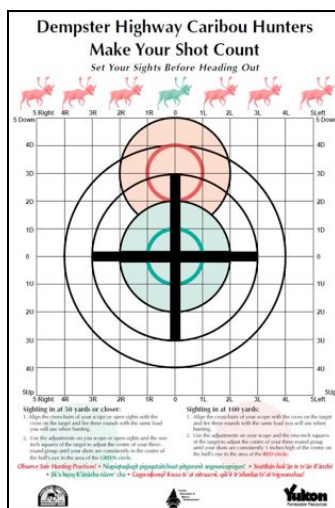
Sighting in

Just because a rifle has sights on the barrel or a scope does not mean it will hit the target. The sights or scope must be adjusted so that the bullet hits where the sights are aimed. The shooter must also be able to hold the gun steady enough to keep the sights lined up properly and on target, and the target must be within both the firearm’s range and at a distance that you know you can shoot accurately.

Sight in your rifle with standard ammunition, and then PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE. The more you practise, the more confident a shot you will be when hunting. When it comes time for the hunt, sight in with the premium ammunition you will be using. Different ammunition and different bullets shoot differently out of the same gun.

The key to accurate shooting and quick, clean kills is PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE.

Targets developed by the PCMB are widely available to help with sighting in. Contact your local Conservation Officer or Renewable Resource Officer or the PCMB.



Tips for sighting in a rifle

1. Choose a safe location with an adequate backstop to stop your fired bullet. A good example is a hill or sand pile directly behind your target stand/holder.
2. Measure 25 yards from your intended shooting position and set up a target. Tape or staple a target onto a cardboard box or piece of scrap plywood.
3. Sight in with exactly the same ammunition you will use to hunt. Different bullet weights, bullet designs, and manufacturers will make the bullets hit in different places on the target.
4. When first sighting in a gun, shoot from the most stable position possible. Use a gun rest to keep the gun steady. Shoot from a bench while seated, lie down, kneel, or use a shooting stick.
5. Fire three shots, aiming for the bull's eye (centre of the target). Adjust the sights/scope until your bullets are within an inch of each other (size of a loonie) in the centre of the target.
6. You are now sighted in to be 2 inches to 3 inches high at 100 yards and adequate for a 300-yard target. Confirm the sighting by shooting at a target at 100 yards. (Note that the elevation of the bullet strike may vary depending on the firearm and calibre being used.)
7. With any of the faster cartridges (25.06, 270, 280, 7mm Mag, 30-06, 303 British, etc.), you can aim directly at the chest of the caribou as far away as 230 to 276 yards and hit within three inches of where you aim. You do not need to hold over (aim high) for any shot out to that distance.
8. Practise with standard ammunition to keep costs down. Practice is the secret to good, accurate shooting. Practise lying down, sitting, kneeling, and resting or leaning on the snow machine or ATV seat.



Know the Rules and your Responsibilities

If we want to be able to hunt the Porcupine Caribou Herd in the future, we have to understand that rules are sometimes needed to help manage the population. Rules also help keep you and other people on the land safe, and to show respect for the caribou. Remember that there are many users of Porcupine Caribou. Some rules apply differently, depending on which user group you belong to. In the Yukon, there are two types of harvesters of the Porcupine Caribou: native harvesters and all other harvesters. The rights and limitations for each group are distinctly different, but the groups do have some common limitations.

Rules and recommendations that apply to all hunters

- In order to hunt on First Nation Settlement Lands, you must have written permission from the affected First Nation. You cannot get permission to hunt on Settlement Lands that occur in an overlap of First Nation Traditional Territories.
- In accordance with the Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement, no commercial harvest of Porcupine Caribou is allowed in Canada.
- Trade and barter of meat is limited to natives in User Communities in accordance with their final land claim agreements. Trade and barter of meat by Yukon Resident hunters is not permitted.
- Sale, trade, and barter of non-edible caribou by-products might be allowed, but a permit must be obtained. This includes parts from a legally harvested caribou or parts found in the field. Contact your local Conservation Officer or Renewable Resource Officer.
- It is strongly recommended, but not required, that all hunters wear blaze orange.
- The PCMB requests that **all** hunters hunt bulls only.
- The PCMB may set an annual allowable harvest of Porcupine Caribou in Canada and determine First Nation user community allocations of the allowable harvest.
- From time to time, the PCMB makes recommendations for changes in regulations regarding conservation, public safety, and protection of sensitive habitat. If and when implemented, these regulations apply to all users.
- You are required to hunt and use a firearm in a safe manner. In the Yukon, unsafe hunting includes:
 - hunting with an unsafe firearm;
 - hunting while impaired by alcohol or drugs;
 - discharging a firearm in the dark;
 - shooting on, down, or across the travelled portion of a road normally used by the public;
 - hunting within one kilometre of a residence;
 - having a firearm with ammunition in the chamber while inside a vehicle; and

- shooting a firearm from a vehicle. (In the regulations, “vehicle” includes snowmobiles and ATVs but does not include boats.)
- You are required to make a reasonable effort to kill a caribou you have wounded.
- If you kill a caribou, you must make a reasonable effort to retrieve it.
- If you have possession of a caribou, you cannot allow the meat to be wasted. “Wasted meat” includes meat that is abandoned, becomes spoiled or destroyed, used for bait, or is left in the field without being properly dressed and cared for to prevent scavenging or spoilage.
- If you wish to hunt other game animals, you must do so under the provisions of your applicable land claim agreements or under the general hunting regulations of the jurisdiction you are resident in.
- It is unlawful to discharge a firearm in or near a campground.

NOTE: Federal firearms registration and licensing is completely separate from hunting licences and rights. You need to have a PAL in order to use a firearm. There is only one situation where firearm licensing affects hunting enforcement: if your firearm is seized as part of an investigation into a wildlife violation, you cannot get it back if you are not licensed.

Overlap with Hart River Caribou

When Porcupine Caribou migrate to the farthest southern portion of their Yukon winter range, they overlap with woodland caribou of the Hart River Caribou Herd. The Hart River Herd is much smaller than the Porcupine Herd and, like other woodland herds in the Yukon, has a bag limit of one bull between August 1 and October 31 for licensed hunters. The season for Porcupine Caribou is open from August 1 to January 31 over the Yukon portion of their range and currently allows for two bulls per licensed hunter. To protect the Hart River Herd, in years when the Porcupine Caribou do not migrate into the overlap area, caribou hunting closes November 1 in those Game Management Subzones. When the Porcupine Caribou do show up in the overlap area, the season is extended until the end of January.

First Nations Settlement Lands

Along the Dempster Highway, there are four Category A land selections that are the private property of the Vuntut Gwitchin and Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nations. These blocks are located as follows:

- Vuntut Gwitchin land: from Km 357 to the Eagle River Bridge (Km 377.8), on the west side of the highway.
- Vuntut Gwitchin land: from Km 246 to 299 on the east side of the highway.
- Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in land: from Km 246 to 285 on the west side of the highway.
- Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in land: around Chapman Lake at Km 116 on the west side of the highway.

There is a specified right of access for the purposes of hunting and fishing on undeveloped Category B lands. This right does not extend to Category A lands. Any person can travel across undeveloped Category A lands to hunt or fish outside those lands. However, all persons must obtain consent from the affected First Nation to stay upon and hunt and fish on Category A lands. This holds regardless of whether the lands are designated developed or undeveloped.

Hunters can contact the affected First Nations to obtain permission to hunt these lands. The consent must be issued in writing from the First Nation Chief and Council or Administration. Verbal permission from a citizen of the First Nation IS NOT consent.

When accessing and using settlement land you must NOT:

- damage the land or structures;
- commit acts of mischief; or
- interfere with the use and enjoyment of the land by the First Nation.

Snow Machines and other Motor Vehicles

Licensed hunters are subject to snow machine regulations along the Dempster Highway. In addition they are subject to section 20 of the Wildlife Act, which states:

- *A person shall not use a vehicle to chase, drive, flush, exhaust or fatigue wildlife for the purpose of hunting or to assist another person hunting.*
- *A “vehicle” includes snow machine, ATV and aircraft but does not include boat.*

First Nation harvesters have defined rights that allow for modern means and methods, and they must conduct themselves in a respectful manner. This should include avoiding chasing or herding caribou. Caribou that have been run hard lose precious energy. In turn, this can affect the animal's general health. In the case of cows, it can also affect the strength and health of their calves.



Snow machines should be used to carry the hunters to within walking distance of the caribou. Once in position, hunters should stalk the animals on foot. After the kill, the snow machines can be used to haul field-dressed animals back to the road. Snow machines should only be used to pursue caribou when a caribou is wounded and the hunter is making an effort to kill it.

The *Dempster Highway Development Area* includes the land for eight kilometers on either side of the Dempster Highway from Km 68 north to the NWT border. No off-road vehicles other than snow machines are permitted in the development area, except along designated access/egress routes. This rule applies to anyone using the land recreationally (not hunting) and to licensed hunters. Subsistence hunters are reminded to use ATVs respectfully, and that the land in the Development Area is sensitive to impact from these vehicles.

Reporting infractions

Assist with the conservation of the herd and help Conservation Officers and Renewable Resource Officers do their job. If you see or know about someone who has done something against the law, you can call the numbers below:

- In the Yukon, call the “Turn in Poachers and Polluters” line at 1-800-661-0525.
- In the NWT, call the “Report a Poacher” line at 1-866-POACHER (762-2437).
- You can remain anonymous on these calls. The lines are available 24 hours a day. If your information leads to a charge being laid, you can be considered for a monetary reward.
- Remember to write down details about what you see – descriptions of people and vehicles, licence plate numbers, date, time, exact location, and any other details you can think of.
- You can also use this number if you’ve made a mistake. Mistakes happen, and it is best to report them rather than try to cover them up.



Harvest reporting and check stations

The Government of Yukon has operated a check station at the south end of the Dempster Highway since 1985. The main purpose of the station is to intercept southbound hunters returning home after their hunt during the peak of the fall hunting season.

The Government of the Northwest Territories has operated a check station on the NWT side of the border since 2009. The NWT check station shuts down once the ferries stop operating on the Peel and Mackenzie rivers.

During the 2009-2010 hunting season, after the NWT station shut down, the Government of Yukon established a check station at the north end of the Dempster Highway to intercept hunters from the Northwest Territories. For the 2010-2011 season, the Yukon’s north-end mobile check station was replaced by Yukon Conservation Officer patrols. The officers were based at the Eagle Plains Hotel



Yukon Government check station at the south end of the Dempster Highway

and patrolled the highway as necessary.

As of 2010, under the Harvest Management Plan, Yukon and NWT First Nations and the Inuvialuit have all implemented their own harvest data collection systems.



Government of Northwest Territories check station operating at the Peel River Crossing

The number and sex of caribou harvested are vitally important for the management of the Porcupine Caribou Herd

Hunting Safely – Using Common Sense

Having a good hunting trip also means taking care of yourself and coming home safely.

Driving and camping

- Stop and park your vehicle in safe spots along the road. Remember that, after the ice bridges on the Mackenzie delta are open, you share the road with large semi trucks that cannot stop quickly.
- Drive safely. Caribou can be on the road at any time, especially early in the season. Reducing your traveling speed can help reduce the risk of hitting caribou on the road.
- Camp in safe spots. Environment Yukon leaves the gates of Dempster campgrounds open so that hunters can use the sites. Please do not abuse the opportunity. The campgrounds are not maintained in the winter, so bring your own firewood and toilet paper. When you camp in other places, be sure your vehicle can be parked safely off the road, especially at night. Avoid cutting trees within the campground for firewood or branches to line your tent. This will help maintain an unspoiled environment for others to enjoy. Also remember that cutting down trees for firewood or bedding is strictly prohibited in Tombstone Territorial Park.
- Do not process your harvest in a campground. The sight and smell are not a good welcome to travellers next spring. They also bring scavenging animals close to other campers.

Be aware of your surroundings and who is around

- During a hunt, it is possible to become overly focused on the caribou you intend to shoot, to the point of not noticing other people in the area.
- Before you pull the trigger, be sure there is nobody on the other side of the caribou, who may be endangered by your shots.
- Be aware that bullets can travel a very long way in open areas of the Dempster Highway.
- Be aware that snow machines can move into your line of fire very quickly.

Wear blaze orange or other bright colours when hunting so that other hunters can see you. Caribou don't see colours the same way we do, so don't worry about spooking them with your bright clothing.

ATTENTION HUNTERS!

*Can you see the
hunters in this photo?*



*How
about
now?*

BE SEEN & BE SAFE



- ④ You are strongly encouraged to wear **Blaze Orange** while hunting along the Dempster Highway to lower the chance of being accidentally shot.
- ④ You can borrow a **Blaze Orange vest**, courtesy of the PCMB, at the YG Dempster Hunter Check Station, km 0 of the Dempster Highway and the NWT Wildlife Check Station at the north end (watch for signs).



YG Dempster Hunter Check Station
HOURS VARY

NWT Wildlife Check Station
HOURS VARY

Winter safety for Dempster Caribou hunters

A hunt along the Dempster Highway usually occurs during the winter. Hunters can expect extremely cold temperatures and short daylight hours. Some areas on the Dempster are subjected to high winds. Fresh or windblown snow can erase a hunter's back-trail in a very short time. When hunting on the vast open areas of the Dempster where the caribou are often encountered, it is easy to become disoriented, especially in waning light.

Snow machines allow hunters to get great distances away from the highway in a short period of time. If the snow machine were to break down or get stuck, hunters could find themselves a lot farther from the highway than they are able or prepared to walk back.

Some suggestions to keep safe

- Hunt with a friend.
- If hunting alone, tell someone where you are going and when you will be back, and then stick to your plan.
- Agree on a time limit for when you should be considered "in trouble."
- Leave a note on the windshield of your vehicle, indicating which direction you went.
- Wear blaze orange to increase your visibility.
- Ensure that your snow machine is running properly before heading out.
- Leave early in the day to make best use of daylight hours.
- Carry cold-weather gear, matches, and a flashlight or headlamp with you when away from your vehicle.
- While it is legal to shoot wildlife until one hour after sunset, stop hunting if you don't think that you can deal properly with your caribou and get back to the highway before it gets too cold or dark.

Dempster hunters need to be mentally and physically prepared for extreme conditions in a remote area.

Taking Your Shot

Issues around ethics and wounding loss have long been associated with the Porcupine Caribou Herd. This section addresses humane and ethical harvest, selection of bulls for the sustainability of the herd, and preferred target areas.

Caribou selection – bulls versus cows

It is important for caribou hunters to learn the difference between bulls and cows. Although there are a number of clues as to the sex of the animal, the only definite proof is the vulva patch on a female and the penis sheath or scrotum on a male.

In order to help keep the herd strong, the Porcupine Caribou Management Board asks that hunters not take cows. For licensed hunters, this may be the rule. Survival of female caribou is very important to the herd's ability to stay strong in numbers.



Unlike most other antlered animals, both male and female caribou can have antlers. Typically the caribou with the biggest antlers are bulls, but smaller antlered caribou can be either bulls or cows. Know the difference!

Remember that a large bull may not be a good choice on an October hunt because the meat is often smelly and strong-tasting during the rut. It may be wise to hunt well before or after the rut. If you are hunting during the rut, plan to take small bulls that are not breeding

If you are interested in tanning the hide, be aware that long-time hunters say that darker bulls have better hides for tanning. Darker hides tend to be those where the hair is not so thick, as found on caribou in late summer before the animals put on their winter coat.

Methods of sexing caribou		
Method	Reliability	Why
Antler size	not good	A caribou with big antlers relative to body size is probably a mature bull. Caribou with small antlers relative to body size may be a cow or immature bull. Antlers on small or immature bulls can be of similar size as cows. Mature bulls usually lose antlers first after the rut in early winter. Most cow caribou have antlers from June until the following spring, dropping their antlers before calving. Young bulls can drop their antlers in early winter, or may keep them until the spring, just like cows. But, some cows don't have antlers at all.
Antlers and Seasons	not good	Both bulls and cows can have white necks. Can be mistaken for an udder on cows. By fall and winter, even late summer calves are not always sticking close to their moms.
White mane	not good	The penis sheath is fairly distinct and can usually be seen from the side. Wait for the animal to turn broadside to confirm sex.
Testicles on bull	not good	The vulva patch on a female is small but distinct. You may need to wait for a caribou to let its tail to see it though!
Presence (or absence) of a call	not good	
Penis Sheath on bull	Best method	
Vulva patch on female	Best method	

How far away is the caribou?

It is not easy to judge distances in the open space of the tundra, so it is important for hunters to become good at range estimation in open areas. Choose a flat-shooting rifle and use good quality bullets that retain their speed and energy for longer distances. Know the capabilities of your rifle, and become comfortable hitting targets at various distances before you go hunting.

Practise judging distances before you hunt!

One good way to practise range estimation is to measure the length of your walking stride. When you are out hunting, or anytime you are walking, pace off 100, 200, or 300 strides from a landmark, stopping to turn back to look at the distance as you go. You can also use a range finder to judge distances accurately and train yourself to recognize how far away your target is.

Shoot to kill, not wound

Show respect for the animals that feed your family and community. Caribou that are shot but not recovered are referred to as “wounding loss.” Wounding loss is estimated to be as high as 25 percent of harvest. **This means that for every three caribou shot at and killed by hunters, one shot caribou drags its wounded carcass off and dies to be eaten by scavengers.**



Animals must not be chased or harassed. It is illegal, AND the animal gets stressed and heated up, which can affect the quality and flavour of the meat. Your chance of getting a caribou with a clean shot increases if the caribou is not spooked. Try to get into shooting position without the caribou seeing you. Walk, snowshoe, or ski instead of using your snow machine.

Do not shoot at a group of animals. Pick one caribou that is separate from the rest, with no others on the far side of it. Bullets will pass through even large-bodied caribou, so wounding a second animal can happen easily if it is behind the one you are shooting at. Every year, caribou are wounded or hunters shoot too many caribou because they didn't take the time to single out an animal away from the herd and shoot it until it was dead before taking aim at another. Some caribou are wounded and then get away or are not noticed by the hunter.

“Herd-shooting” or “flock-shooting” is an unacceptable and disrespectful technique practised by some caribou hunters.

The hunter shoots many times into a group of caribou rather than at one individual and then rounds up as many dead or wounded as they can find. Some caribou are inevitably wasted.

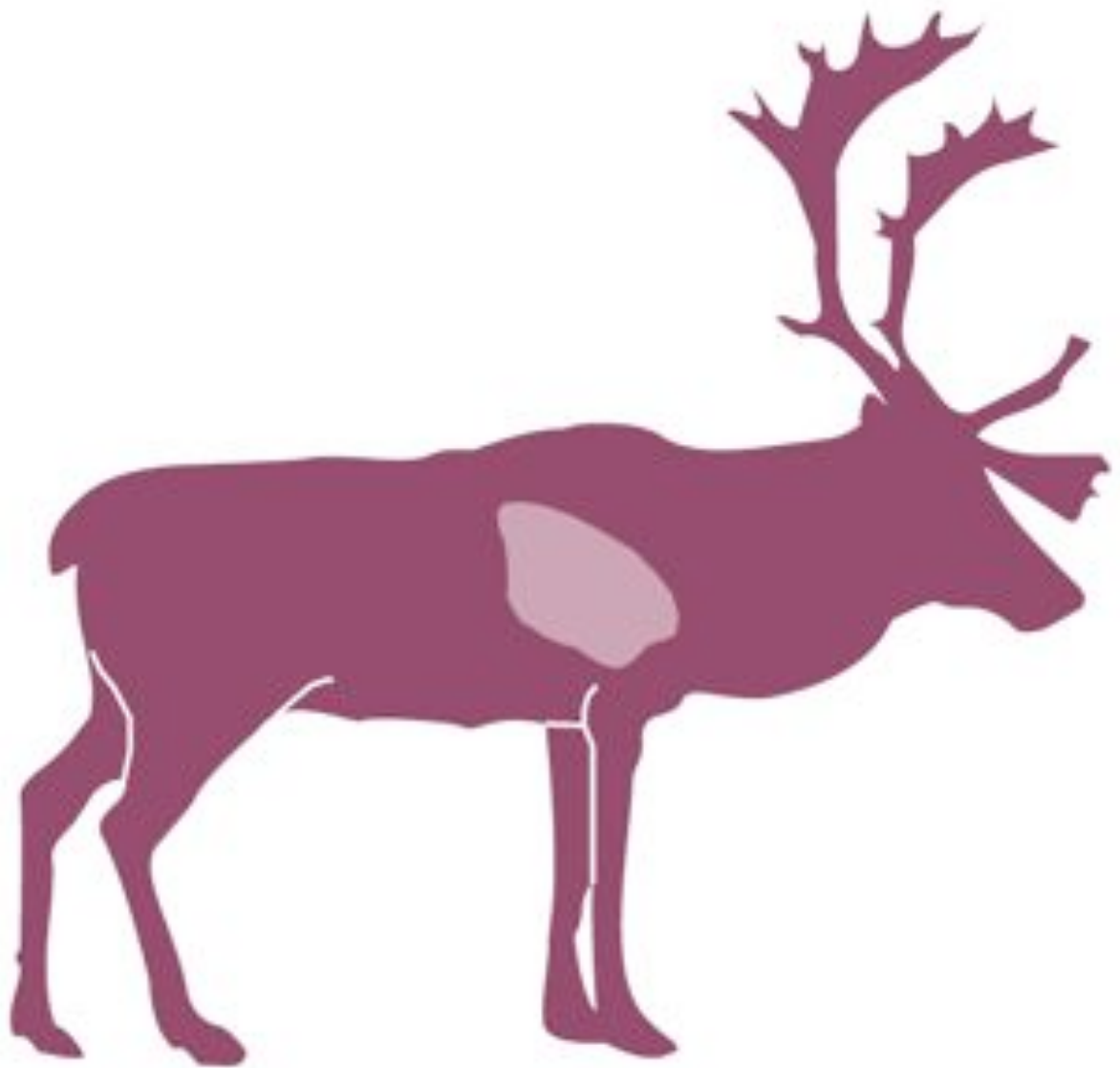
Shot placement

A shot is best made when the caribou is broadside to the hunter or facing slightly away. Placing the bullet into the heart/lung area slightly behind the front shoulder will kill the animal quickly. If the bullet exits, the animal will probably leave a visible blood trail. A heart/lung shot minimizes loss of meat if the bullet enters and exits through the ribs, just behind front leg. **Neck and head shots are not recommended, as these areas are more difficult targets to hit, and they result in more wounded caribou than heart and lung shots.**

In order to be accurate, the shooter must be steady. Do not shoot from the standing position, as it produces the lowest level of accuracy. Sit down or kneel, or rest the gun against your snow machine.

A wounded animal should be shot again immediately to kill it. This prevents the animal from wandering off and dying elsewhere, where it is wasted. It also minimizes suffering. Meat flavour can be tainted by the animal going into shock *after* being wounded. A quick death means better meat.

The brain of a caribou is about the size of your fist. It is a difficult target to hit and is protected by bone and antler. Head shots should be taken only from very close range as a final killing shot.



Vital target area on a caribou adapted from *The Perfect Shot North America: Shot Placement for North American Big Game* by Craig Boddington (Safari Club Press, 2003).

After the Shot

Once the shot is taken, the real work begins! Planning for and thinking about how you are going to cut up, move, and care for the caribou you harvest is just as important as the work you do leading up to your shot. Being prepared shows respect for the caribou and can result in more, better-quality meat.

If you've hit the caribou well in the heart and lung area, it should die quickly. Approach the animal from behind and make sure that it is dead by touching the eye with a stick or the muzzle of your rifle. If the animal blinks, it is still alive, and you should put a final killing shot into it.

Field Dressing

- Trim any bloodshot meat away from the area where the animal was hit. You shouldn't have to trim much if you've hit the animal in the rib area behind the front shoulder.
- You must be prepared to field-dress the caribou at the time you pull the trigger. Even at -40C, the meat on the caribou can spoil before it freezes hard, if not gutted. Caribou hair is an amazing insulator.
 - Gut the animal **as soon as possible** to avoid spoilage, especially if it was shot to the rear of the ribs (in the guts). Wipe the inside of the body cavity with paper towels (bring them out with you) to clean off any gut contents or blood.
 - Gut the animal **carefully** to avoid contamination by spilling bladder, stomach, or bowel contents on the meat.
 - Gut the animal **away from the highway** to avoid gut piles in plain view.
- Carry extra mitts, so that if yours get blood-soaked and wet, you can keep your hands warm on the way back to your vehicle.
- Wear thin gloves or glove liners while doing the knife work. This makes a big difference in keeping fingers functioning.
- You may choose to skin the animal right after the kill. If you don't, you should realize that the hide will freeze onto the carcass. In only a few hours, the whole thing will be frozen stiff. This not a big problem for transportation and storage purposes – it doesn't hurt the meat – but, once home, you will need access to a place where you can hang the animal up, thaw it out, and skin it.
- Porcupine Caribou have a number of diseases and parasites that are a natural part of their lives. If you see something in a caribou that concerns you, contact your local Environment office.
- All of these things must be thought through ahead of time. **BE PREPARED.**

Parasites, bacteria, and abnormalities in Porcupine Caribou

Most parasites and abnormalities that you will see in Porcupine Caribou do not affect the meat and are not dangerous to people. However, some diseases that caribou get can also make people sick, especially if the meat is not cooked well. We are monitoring some of the parasites and abnormalities in Porcupine Caribou to understand caribou health better. You can help by contacting either of these numbers to report any abnormalities you see in your caribou.

Yukon: 1-867-667-8663

NWT: 1-867-873-7761

Tips for preventing meat spoilage and protecting yourself

1. Shoot to kill, and skin and field-dress your caribou as soon as you can.
2. Butcher the carcass in the cleanest area possible, and keep the carcass clean and free of mud, plant material, and any contamination from intestines or droppings.
3. Keep your knives clean, and wash them in clean water and soap often during butchering.
4. Wash your hands with soap and water before and after handling the caribou and before smoking, drinking, or eating.
5. If you cut yourself while butchering, wash the injury well and protect it with a bandage before returning to butchering.
6. Cook all meat to at least 77°C before eating to be sure it is safe. Freezing, drying, or smoking may not kill all bacteria, parasites, or viruses.
7. Stay away from sick or dead animals, and contact a Conservation Officer if you find a dead animal on the land.

See Appendix B for more info on things you might come across when hunting and field dressing caribou.

Bear safety for caribou hunters



There has been an increase in the number of conflicts between bears and caribou hunters in recent years – particularly along the Dempster Highway in the area between the Arctic Circle and the NWT border. Bears are most commonly seen in August and September.

Hunters need to be aware that the presence of meat and carcasses can increase the risk of bear encounters. Many bears are becoming habituated to hunters and are very quick to show up at a kill site. As well as practising general bear safety, caribou hunters need to take some added precautions when hunting in bear country.

At the kill site

- Stay alert while field-dressing your animal. Look around and listen.
- Keep a firearm within easy reach.
- Take all the meat out in one trip if possible, or return to the site as quickly as possible.
- Separate the meat from the gut pile if you must leave meat at the site. Shuttle all the meat towards your point of departure so that you never have to return to the area of the gut pile.
- Leave your odour on or near the meat. Urinate around it or leave your shirt or jacket.
- Mark the kill site with lots of surveyor's tape, tied so it flaps in the breeze. Don't litter – remember to remove the tape when you leave the site.

The Yukon is Bear Country

Be Bear Aware

Returning to the kill site

- Carry at least one rifle in your group when returning to the kill site.
- Approach the site from higher ground if possible to give yourself a long-distance view.
- Make noise as you approach the site.
- Approach from upwind if possible.
- If a bear is present, noise and gunshots may scare it away. Remember you are not permitted to shoot a bear strictly to protect your meat.



If you encounter a bear

- Group together, if there are other people present.
- Speak calmly, but firmly, to the bear.
- If the bear is stationary, back away slowly, but DON'T RUN. Leave the area. If you must abandon the meat, report the incident to a Conservation Officer.
- If the bear stays focused on you and keeps coming as you back away, try standing your ground, raising your arms, and calling out in a calm voice.
- Shoot the bear only as a last resort, and report it to a Conservation Officer as soon as possible.

Meat Care

- Meat care starts with how you hunt. An animal that is calm and dies quickly will give you better quality meat.
- The meat should always be kept as cool, clean, and dry as possible.
- Your skimmer or truck box should be clean of gas, oil, garbage, or sawdust. Lay a tarp down to put the meat on and keep it clean.

- Once the meat has cooled off, you can cover it with another tarp to keep it clean and dry during transportation.
- Different people preserve their meat in different ways:
 - Wrapping it in plastic and then wrapping it again in butcher's paper before freezing it in a deep freezer will keep meat in good shape for a number of years.
 - Make dry meat or jerky.
 - Can it in jars using the proper pressure-canning process. Make sure you do this the right way. You can get very sick if you don't follow the proper procedures.
- No matter how you choose to preserve your meat, it will always taste better if it has been kept **Cool, Clean, and Dry**.
- **Use all of the meat.** Take all of the meat from any harvested animal; don't let it spoil or feed it to dogs.

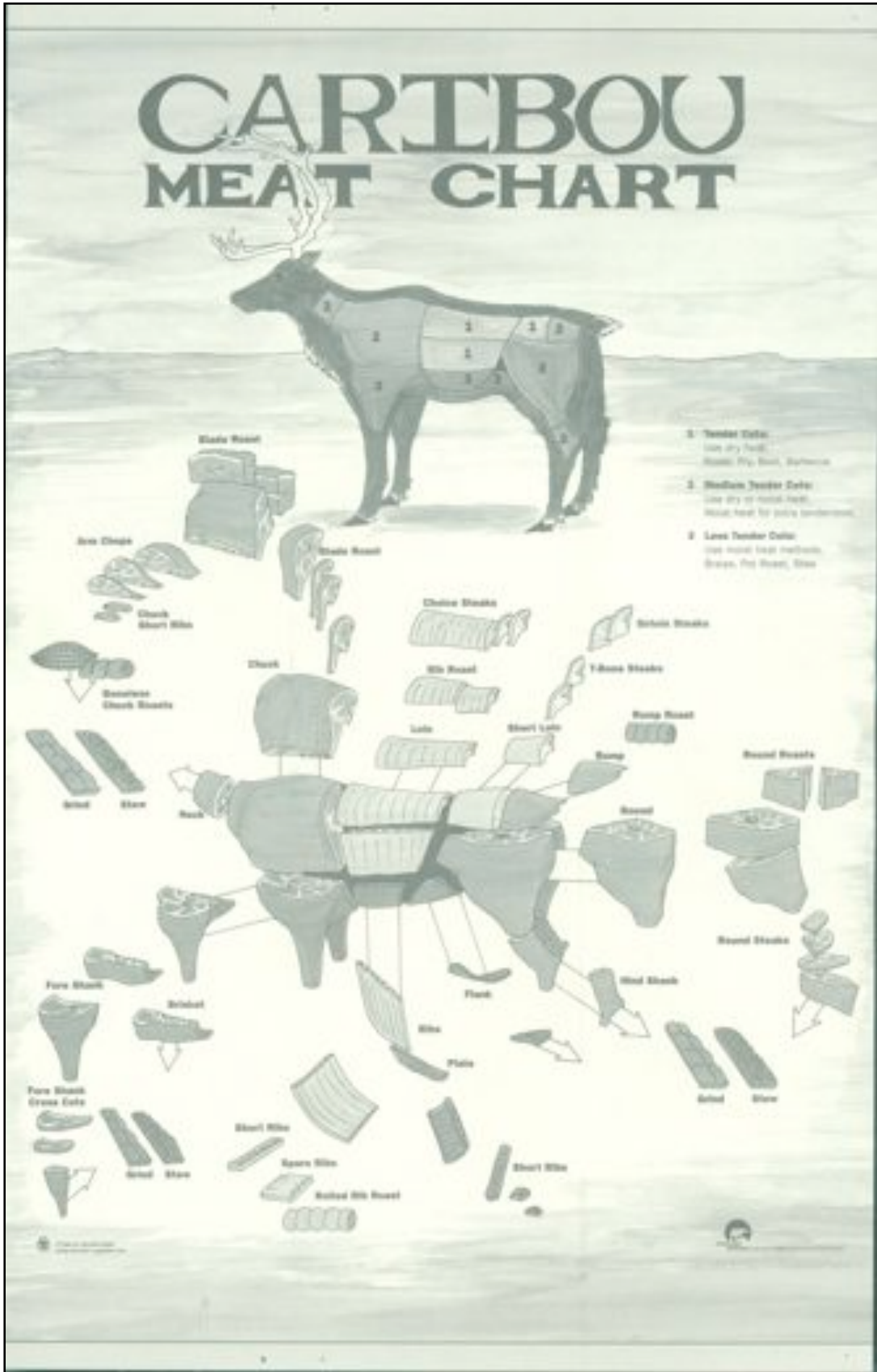
Wasting Meat

Is illegal

Shows disrespect for the animal and yourself

Wastes all of your work, time, and money

CARTBOU MEAT CHART



Appendix A: Contacts

FIRST NATION OF NA-CHO NYAK DUN

Box 220

Mayo, YT

Y0B 1M0

Phone: (867) 996-2265

Fax: (867) 996-2267

Email:

GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Environment and Natural Resources

Box 1320

Yellowknife, NT

X1A 2L9

Phone: (867) 920-8064

Fax: (867) 873-0293

Email:

GOVERNMENT OF YUKON

Department of Environment

Box 2703

Whitehorse, YT

Y1A 2C6

Phone: 867-667-5221

Toll free (in Yukon): 1-800-661-0408 ext.
5652

Fax: 867-393-7197

Email: environment.yukon@gov.yk.ca

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES REPORT A POACHER LINE:

Toll free 24 hours a day:

1-866-762-2437

PORCUPINE CARIBOU MANAGEMENT BOARD

Box 31723

Whitehorse, YT Y1A 6L3

Phone: (867) 633-4780

Fax: (867) 393-3904

E-mail: pcmb@taiga.net

TR'ONDĚK HWĚCH'IN

PO Box 599

Dawson City, YT

Y0B 1G0

Phone: (867) 993- 7100

Toll free (in Yukon): 1-877-993-3400

Email:

VUNTUT GWITCHIN FIRST NATION

P.O. Box 94

Old Crow, YT

Canada, Y0B 1N0

Phone: (867) 966-3261

Fax: (867) 966-3800

Email:

YUKON TURN IN POACHERS AND POLLUTERS LINE

Toll free 24 hours a day:

1-800-661-0525