

Porcupine Caribou Management Board Minutes of Meeting

Dawson City, Yukon

February 13, 2020

In attendance

Members/Staff

Joe Tetlich, Chair
Lila Voudrach, Government of the Northwest Territories
Jackie Clarke, First Nation of Na-cho Nyäk Dün
Kirby Meister, Government of Yukon (Alternate)
Alice McCulley, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in
Ian McDonald, Government of Canada
Billy Storr, Inuvialuit Game Council
Sarah Jerome, Gwich'in Tribal Council
Karen Clyde, Government of Yukon
Deana Lemke, Executive Director
Matthias Lemke, Assistant

Regret

Harold Frost, Jr., Vuntut Gwitchin

Presenters

Mike Sutor, Environment Yukon
Shannon Stotyn, Canadian Wildlife Service
Jennifer Smith, Consultant

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Chair Joe Tetlich called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and an opening prayer was offered by Sarah Jerome. Joe introduced Jennifer Smith who would be leading the working session regarding development of a conservation plan for the Porcupine Caribou herd.

PCH Conservation Plan

Jennifer Smith introduced the discussion by reminding members that a recovery plan would need to be created within two years if and when barren-ground caribou (BGC) are formally listed as threatened under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA).

At this time it is not certain whether the national recovery plan for BGC would be based on a national format or on regional plans.

PCMB will proceed with coordinating the creation of a conservation plan (CP) that will be both SARA-compliant and meet the specific needs of PCMB and user communities.

Jennifer explained that the intent of the following discussion would be to begin scoping the CP document and to draft a table of contents (TOC). She asked members to assist with the following:

- Determine the purpose of the CP
- Provide direction on the scope of the CP
- Give feedback on which items should be included in the TOC
- Suggest timelines and workflow considerations for coordinating the CP and Traditional Knowledge (TK) projects
- Provide guidance on involving communities in the consultation process

A discussion took place regarding the need to have the final plan signed by Parties to ensure commitment and support, as well as the implication that this would have on future adjustments and updates to the plan. It was agreed that it would be wise to divide the CP into at least two segments. One would be a permanent component and provide the guiding principles of the plan while the other would focus on implementation and be subject to updates and adjustments from time to time without requiring new approvals or signatures.

Billy Storr noted that the Parties have already agreed to support PCMB's leading of the creation of the CP. It is acknowledged that the plan is being sponsored by PCMB and that appropriate consultations will take place. PCMB should be able to adjust the plan to meet the Board's requirements without needing all the signatories to validate future updates.

Jennifer reviewed aspects of the plans that were created for the Dolphin and Union, Cape Bathurst, Bluenose East and West, and George River caribou herds. Some plans used a vulnerability matrix to assess the status of a herd while others seemed to follow the SARA template and used the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) threat calculator process. Jen noted that while threats specific to the PCH will need to be documented it is not necessary to use the IUCN calculator. However, being aware of its contents may provide some guidance.

PCMB members offered the following input regarding development of the CP:

- Including TK and science information in separate columns is a good idea because it will be easier to demonstrate how community input has been heard and reflected.

- The CP needs to be built to meet PCMB's needs and must be unique to the PCH. We already have many processes in place within the Harvest Management Plan and Implementation Plan that do not need to be changed.
- The expectations within the CP need to be in harmony with the PCMA, land claim agreements, and existing plans such as the *North Yukon Regional Land Use Plan*.
- The CP needs to reflect that the Parties represent different stakeholder groups. It would be good to include color pictures and quotes from various sources, some in native languages, to represent the voice of each community.
- It would be ideal if the CP could serve as the foundation for future comments that PCMB may make regarding industrial development proposals in the range of the PCH. The CP should also identify critical habitat, outline overall habitat management goals, and provide contextual information.

The Board discussed the development of the contents of the CP and outlined a number of principles that should be considered, including:

- The consultation process should not be prescriptive. A short draft of a basic TOC should be used to guide discussions.
- Input should be garnered via community workshops that actively engage participants by means of smaller breakout groups and use of flipcharts.
- A PCMB member should be present at each community workshop.
- The initial consultation should be held during the early stages of CP development. The consultation should be well-organized and explain the process so that participants are not confused or frustrated.

TK Project Update

Kelly Milner connected by telephone to review the specific aspects of TK that PCMB is hoping to obtain via this project: changes in habitat and types of food; changes in herd range and movements; and changes in local herd management (per community). It is hoped that this information will become available by using Trailmark to analyze all of the digital TK data currently held by PCH user communities.

Kelly stated that data-sharing protocol agreements are either complete or close to being finalized. The next steps in the TK project are the uploading of the remaining data, performing an initial analysis of the ingested data, and then reviewing results with the Board and the Parties. This review is anticipated to take place during fall 2020.

Once the analysis is completed, each community needs to be consulted to verify the results. The consultation process will include education on how the data will be used, how ownership will be respected, as well as some technical Trailmark training. This will most likely take place during the second round of community consultations related to the CP project. Currently the expectation is that TK data will be available to inform the CP after April 2021 but before December 2021. It was agreed that the CP and TK consultations will need to be coordinated well as both projects move forward over the next several years.

Communication Project

The Board viewed two short educational videos which were first presented in early 2019 and have since had several revisions and corrections. A number of additional deficiencies were noted and will be forwarded to Kelly Milner for resolution.

Dempster hunting brochures

Kirby Meister related that concerns were raised by GTC regarding the content of the Dempster hunting brochures. Two of the three main concerns have been addressed. However, several inaccuracies in wording were also recently noted as a result of recent Yukon government policy changes. The wording on the brochures still need to be adjusted to reflect these changes.

Review Minutes and Action Items

The minutes of the September 26 and 27, 2019 PCMB meeting were reviewed and approved.

***Motion to approve minutes of September 26 and 27, 2019 PCMB meeting
Moved by Karen Clyde
Seconded by Billy Storr
Carried***

Administrative and Financial Report

Deana Lemke reviewed the list of action items and provided an overview of the year-to-date financial report. The budget was updated to reflect additional funding for the TK project.

Herd Update

Government of Yukon Update

Mike Sutor provided the following update:

- Substantial harvest of PCH took place this year. The Dempster check station was operational for five weeks and many harvesters stopped in from both directions.
- The collaring program is scheduled to start in mid-March and will be based out of Old Crow, Yukon. It will be comprised of the usual deployment of about 50 collars in addition to a number of camera collars.
- The US Geological Survey received funding of \$500,000 over four years for a project to understand how caribou use the land, how nutrition changes on the land, and what this will mean under future climate scenarios. The goal is to better understand what caribou will require in the future. A series of flights will be dispatched to sample caribou feces this summer and vegetation will be analyzed at a later time.
- The Yukon North Slope is being analyzed in terms of habitat and forage to produce detailed vegetation maps. Analyses have been done on how caribou have used summer habitat in the past and this historical location and movement data will be overlaid on vegetation maps.
- Working with VGFN on determining safe operating distances related to industrial disturbance and safe operating distances will be resumed. The work was temporarily put on hold when the department had to focus exclusively on producing a response to the EIS for oil and gas development in the 1002 area.
- Katie Orndahl has published an update on her work studying and sampling lichen biomass on the North Slope, in the Richardson Mountains, and along the Dempster Highway.

GNWT Update

Lila Voudrach provided the following update:

- Sight-in-your-rifle (SIYR) programs began in October 2019. Two of the programs were held in Fort McPherson and Tsiigehtchic. Positive feedback was received and the communities asked for additional programs in the future. One GRRB member from Fort McPherson personally praised the SIYR program and recommended that it be held more often. He related that he had recently harvested 10 caribou with 10 shots, illustrating that his accuracy had significantly improved as a result of the program. For 2020, the intent is to hold programs in Aklavik, Inuvik, and two other Inuvialuit communities.
- Caribou were reported crossing the Dempster Highway in November 2019. Harvesters crossed the Peel River at their own risk while Conservation Officers were not permitted to cross because the road was not officially open. The crossing was opened to light traffic on November 25. Officers were encouraged to stop and talk to hunters and try to collect samples. As a result,

31 samples were collected from Fort McPherson. Several additional samples were received from Aklavik and Inuvik.

- Several reports of wastage of caribou along the highway needed to be investigated. One whole caribou was found abandoned approximately 1.5 km from the highway. No suspects were found and the investigation is still ongoing. RRCs were reminded to report meat wastage immediately to expedite investigations.
- Schools have expressed interest in hunting and trapping programs and have asked for officers to come to schools to speak to kids and work with them. Arrangements are underway to get officers involved.
- It is hoped that an informative program about hunting grizzly bears will stimulate interest in harvesting bears in the GSA. Positive results were seen after running such a program in Paulatuk. The program also includes talking to kids in school about safety in bear country.

Chair's Update

Joe Tetlichy related that when caribou arrived on the Dempster Highway during the middle of July 2019, the community of Fort McPherson recommended a voluntary no-harvest policy until August or September. The recommendation was complied with by harvesters from Fort McPherson; however, harvesters from other communities did harvest and this caused frustration.

At a recent RRC meeting a number of concerns were raised about outfitters entering the NWT with horses to pursue caribou.

A winter road between Eagle Plains and Old Crow seemed to be rushed through an approval process. While requirements specified that wildlife monitors would accompany the snow cats, a trapper reported not seeing any monitors.

Deana Lemke related that she had requested an extension on comments regarding the winter road but was advised that the deadline was firm. Deana was told that Vuntut Gwichin citizens had been consulted and that the process was handled via YESAA and that PCMB could provide specific feedback about particular concerns.

Next Meeting and Adjournment

The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for June 10 and 11, 2020 in Fort McPherson, NT.

The meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m. and Joe Tetlichy offered a closing prayer.