

Porcupine Caribou Management Board Minutes of Meeting

Via Zoom

June 24, 2020

In attendance

Members/Staff

Joe Tetlich, Chair
Robert Charlie, Gwich'in Tribal Council
Billy Storr, Inuvialuit Game Council
Steven Buyck, First Nation of Na-cho Nyäk Dün
Alice McCulley, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in
Harold Frost Jr., Vuntut Gwitch'in First Nation
Karen Clyde, Government of Yukon
Shannon Stotyn, Government of Canada
Lila Voudrach, Government of the Northwest Territories
Norman Snowshoe, Government of the Northwest Territories (Alternate)
Kirby Meister, Government of Yukon (Alternate)
Deana Lemke, Executive Director
Matthias Lemke, Assistant

Presenters and Guests

Mike Sutor, Environment Yukon
Jennifer Smith, Consultant

Call to Order

Chair Joe Tetlich called the meeting to order at 12:40 p.m.

Motion to approve agenda
Moved by Robert Charlie
Seconded by Lila Voudrach
Carried

Review Minutes

The minutes of the February 13, 2020 meeting were reviewed and approved.

Motion to approve minutes of the February 13, 2020 meeting
Moved by Alice McCulley
Seconded by Shannon Stotyn
Carried

Chair's Update

Joe Tetlichy related that during four personal trips on the Dempster Highway he consistently saw caribou between the NWT border and Arctic Circle. Most of these were crossing the highway between Rock River and the Yukon/NWT border and were primarily cows and calves. Young bulls also started moving through the area at the end of April 2020.

Joe noted that the weather in April was unusually inconsistent and that a number of other harvesters expressed concern about the weather and the weather-related driving conditions. He pointed out that it was unusual to see so many caribou moving west from the east side of the Dempster Highway. These animals had apparently wintered east of the highway.

Two community hunts were organized by Fort McPherson and one by Aklavik. Significant harvesting took place between the border and Rock River. Initially the harvest consisted primarily of cows but many bulls were also harvested later. Joe observed a number of young families harvesting together. He noted that gut piles are still an issue, as is hunter safety and concerns about wounding loss. He stated that communication and education about acceptable hunting practices need to continue and community leaders should be encouraged to set a good example.

Joe reported that Old Crow harvesters were successfully harvesting caribou all winter. Usually Old Crow also sees caribou after the ice breaks up, but this did not happen this year. It appeared that most caribou crossed closer to the Bell River area. However, the community's needs were met because of the continued access to caribou.

Joe noted that communication related to the winter road to Old Crow has not been ideal. PCMB had been told that if caribou were encountered the vehicles would be stopped, but this did not actually happen. He felt that there is room for improvement with the YESAB process.

While in Old Crow, Joe met with Chief and Council regarding the TK project and the Conservation Strategy. Due to the current constraints around community consultations due to COVID-19 pandemic safety precautions, community leaders do not anticipate being able to make much progress on initiatives that require public input.

Kirby Meister added that once Government of Yukon imposed workplace restrictions due to the pandemic, Conservation Officers were no longer authorized to do patrols. Therefore, no COs were on the Dempster Highway during the spring harvest.

Billy Storr stated that quite a few hunters reported seeing little cysts in caribou meat harvested this spring. He also related that after the ice breaks up caribou are usually accessible for harvest around Coney Lake and along the coast, but this year this was not the case.

Administrative and Financial Update

Deana Lemke reviewed and reported on the previous fiscal year's final financial statements. She explained that the Board's opening surplus for the current fiscal period was \$57,000.

A draft budget and a year-to-date financial report were distributed along with the previous year's unaudited financial statements. Deana noted that the Board's work planning and budgeting are being affected due to the pandemic restrictions; therefore, the budget will need to be updated and adjusted as required.

Confirmation was received that a funding proposal for the Conservation Plan project was approved under the federal Climate Change Preparedness in the North program (CCPN). The funding agreement with CCPN is being updated and adjusted to reflect the changes in the TK and CP project schedule resulting from the impacts of COVID-19 and has therefore not been signed yet.

***Motion to appoint Mckay & Associates as auditor for 2019-20 fiscal year
Moved by Billy Storr
Seconded by Alice McCulley
Carried***

Communications Update

Deana Lemke provided the following communications-related updates:

- The animation and the video being produced by Kelly Milner at Shot in the Dark Productions are still awaiting final revisions. Kelly has been unavailable to provide an update.
- Website updates for pcmb.ca and thelastgreatherd.com are progressing. The website budget amount will be increased accordingly for the current fiscal year.
- A letter was received from IGC regarding rescinding of the previous motion related to concerns regarding the caribou collaring program. IGC wishes to review and assess the entire collaring program and identify pros and cons vs other methods of tracking caribou.
- Replies to the Board's Annual Harvest Meeting recommendations have received replies from some of the Parties; others are still outstanding.
- No harvest data has been received from YG or GNWT yet. Reports from the other parties are not due until July 15, 2020. This year, the harvest was significant so receiving all of the data will be especially important.

- Meetings and discussions have taken place with Trailmark to explore the relationship and connection between the TK data-mobilization project and the Conservation Plan.
- Communities were consulted to see how they want to move forward with consultation during COVID-19 restrictions and how they want to be engaged. While cross-border travel will likely not be possible, most RRCs, HTC's and other stakeholders were positive about moving forward and appreciated that PCMB connected with them. Some communities are open to PCMB representatives coming while others do not want any visitors for the time-being until the pandemic concerns were eased.
- The data-sharing agreement for Inuvialuit data still needs to be signed. There has been a delay with this because it is not clear whether WMAC(NS) or IGC holds the authority over the data.
- Trailmark is still going through Vuntut Gwitchin data. There is a large amount of data and they are trying focus on ingesting the data that specifically pertains to PCMB's request.

PCH Herd Update

Northwest Territories

Lila Voudrach explained that she has been the only person in the office for some time because other officers were redeployed to public health duties in April.

Monitoring patrols were conducted mostly on the northern section of the Dempster Highway. Many harvesters were active and much effort went into distributing CHAP funding to HTC's and RRC's.

Most Conservation Officers are now back to their regular duties. Offices remain closed to the public, however, and citizens need to book appointments if they want to meeting with an officer in person.

Boat patrols are being planned. Officers will stop at camps to check on wildlife problems like bears breaking into camps.

Yukon

Mike Sutor provided an overview of PCH satellite collar distribution and movement maps as well as calving distribution maps. Calving took place primarily in the 1002 area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge during the end of May and early June. The pregnancy rate appeared to be a bit lower than average. Post-calving surveys are currently underway.

Mike also provided the following additional updates:

- A camera collar deployment was undertaken. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game would not have been able to do the work due to

- pandemic-related challenges, but Government of Yukon crews performed more than the usual amount of the work and completed the deployment.
- Not many caribou moved past Old Crow this season because only a few had wintered south of Old Crow. Some caribou wintered to the east while other parts of the herd moved up the Richardson Mountains as they did in the 1990s and early 2000s.
 - A number of small groups of PCH were seen in the Peel River basin area during boreal caribou-related work.
 - A photocensus was planned for this year; however, the weather has been too cold and caribou have not aggregated due to mosquito harassment. The census will likely not be possible until the first week of July, if the animals do not disperse before that.
 - Some camera-collar data has been analyzed and it successfully shows calving locations.
 - Diet information will be gathered from camera-collar video footage. Biologists want to see how nutrition is changing across the landscape to will try to predict where caribou will forage in the future. This work will contribute to the North Slope habitat modelling work and may help explain why caribou are changing their movements.
 - Chance Oil and Gas is attempting to proceed with a large program in the Eagle Plains region. The company is working with Environmental Dynamics Inc. (EDI) and have made a data request to the PCTC regarding PCH winter habitat.

PCH Conservation Plan (CP) Update

Jennifer Smith updated the Board on progress regarding the Porcupine Caribou Conservation Plan project. She thanked members for their participation at the February 2020 meeting during which they provided feedback and input via a queue-card exercise.

Jennifer noted that the importance of PCH habitat continues to be highlighted as a priority since currently no overall plan for PCH habitat exists. Jennifer asked members to consider whether the CP should actually be referred to as a habitat plan. Members have felt that it was more of a management plan than a specific habitat plan.

Robert Charlie stated that the potential impacts of climate change should be referenced in the CP along with threats from oil and gas development.

Jennifer explained that we want to make reference to the Harvest Management Plan, the Native User Agreement, PCTC's work, and the Annual Harvest Meetings. The CP should not duplicate these, but where there are concerns about conservation and habitat these need to be identified and addressed.

Several Board members thanked Jennifer for her excellent work of capturing and summarizing their input and for planning a thorough community engagement. They also emphasized that doing a good job of community consultation and engagement will be very important as development of the CP progresses.

Jennifer stated that since the Board is comfortable with the approach as presented, she will start to develop some of the communication materials and tools for their review and comments.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will likely be arranged via Zoom since cross-border travel will likely not be permitted until the pandemic is better contained. Deana will contact members to canvass availability for next dates.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 p.m.