

# Porcupine Caribou Management Board Minutes of Meeting

Whitehorse, Yukon and via Zoom

December 5, 2022

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## In attendance

### Members/Staff

Joe Tetlich, Chair  
Marvin Frost, Vuntut Gwitchin  
Shannon Stotyn, Government of Canada  
Matt Clarke, Government of Yukon  
Billy Storr, Inuvialuit Game Council  
Dawna Hope, Na-cho Nyäk Dün  
Alice McCulley, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in  
Norman Snowshoe, Government of the Northwest Territories (Alternate)  
  
Deana Lemke, Executive Director  
Matthias Lemke, Assistant

### Regret

Robert Charlie, Gwich'in Tribal Council

### Presenters and Guests

Mike Sutor, Environment Yukon  
Jennifer Smith, Contractor

## Call to Order and Agenda Review

Chair Joe Tetlich called the meeting to order at 9:25 p.m. The agenda was reviewed and approved.

***Motion to approve agenda  
Moved by Marvin Frost  
Seconded by Shannon Stotyn  
Carried***

## Review Minutes

The minutes of the September 7, 2022 meeting were reviewed and approved.

***Motion to approve minutes of the September 7, 2022 meeting  
Moved by Shannon Stotyn  
Seconded by Norman Snowshoe  
Carried***

## Chair Report

Joe Tetlich reviewed the recent movements of the Porcupine Caribou herd (PCH). He stated that initially it appeared that the majority of the herd was going to move westward, but in mid-September the caribou turned and eventually migrated past Old Crow. Joe said that, prior to the caribou arriving in Old Crow, he reminded community members via the radio to be safe and respectful when harvesting, taking only what is needed. He also urged harvesters to sight in their rifles and not to shoot into groups of caribou. Toques and high-visibility vests were sent to Old Crow to assist with harvester safety.

Joe related that another group of caribou moved over the mountains near Stony Creek toward Fort McPherson. As the ferry was shut down when caribou arrived, there was very little harvesting and some caribou even crossed the Dempster Highway in early November.

Marvin Frost stated that more younger hunters are participating in harvesting. These younger harvesters have their own skidoos and go hunting without taking a more experienced person along. He felt that they should have an older person with them to educate them.

Joe mentioned that a winter road to Old Crow is being constructed again this year. Last year, a number of concerns were raised about garbage, fuel, and bunkhouses left along the road. VGFN is producing a report about this. He suggested that PCMB request a copy of the report and follow up regarding any concerns. Since there will be significant numbers of caribou near Old Crow this winter, Joe requested Board approval to patrol the road this year. The Board approved.

Mike Sutor stated that Natural Resources Officers are the ones to talk to about concerns regarding the road, with Jeff Schuyler being the lead enforcement person in Dawson. Additionally, Brian Bell is the new lands manager who provides authorizations from VGFN.

Joe related that he has been invited to talk about caribou management at a meeting in Dettah, NWT on January 10 to 12, 2023.

Regarding the International Porcupine Caribou Management Board, Shannon Stotyn related that no upcoming meetings have been planned, that three membership vacancies have not been filled, and that there seems to be no rush to appoint those members.

# Executive Director Report

## Administration

Deana Lemke reviewed the status of Board membership terms and noted that Robert Charlie-Tetlichy will be GTC's interim representative until a new member is appointed. The new alternate member for IGC is Dang-Dang Gruben.

Deana stated that the North American Caribou Workshop is being held in Anchorage, Alaska May 8-12, 2023 and asked any members who are interested in attending to let her know. Mike Suitor and Shannon Stotyn noted that it may be an opportune time to combine this with a PCTC meeting.

Deana informed members that the Sheep Creek camp is booked for a PCMB on-the-land meeting June 16-20, 2023.

A letter has been received regarding the Caribou Summit in Fort McPherson inviting Joe to attend and also stating that there will be limited capacity for additional participants. Deana suggested changing the Board's previous plan by no longer trying to align a PCMB meeting with the Caribou Summit.

Joe stated that GTC apparently would like there to be an annual summit to bring people together to talk about caribou. He noted that this would be an overlap and possible duplication of the mandate of the Annual Harvest Meeting (AHM). Members felt that, although the initiative is well-intentioned, it would be preferable if GTC and other Parties supported the AHM structure that is already in place.

Deana stated that it would be good to raise the Parties' awareness about the Native User Agreement (NUA) as a foundation for discussing issues at the summit.

Members suggested that Joe attend the meeting, that he take the opportunity to explain PCMB's role, and that a letter be written to the planning committee regarding Joe's attendance as well as information about the intent of the AHM and NUA.

Deana requested Board approval for training regarding facilitated leadership from University of Victoria; the Board agreed to support this initiative.

## Finance

Deana reviewed the Board's financial variance report. She noted that GNWT agreed that PCMB could carry over \$20,000 of last year's unspent funds to the current fiscal year, which was very helpful. On the other hand, Government of Yukon requested assurance that none of their funding was carried forward. Deana provided confirmation that the carry-over was GNWT funding and not YG funding.

Deana stated that she hopes to have a proposal regarding honoraria rates and administrative support costs for consideration at a future meeting.

## **NWT Herd Update**

Norman Snowshoe related that harvesting of Porcupine Caribou took place around Aklavik and Fort McPherson in November. One of the department's officers reported that there was not much snow in the Aklavik area and that it was challenging to access the caribou; however, he monitored the harvest. The harvest for Fort McPherson was estimated at 40 caribou. Since officers from GNWT could not cross the ice bridge, they communicated and collaborated with officers from Yukon Government to monitor harvest north of the border. Norman related that the GNWT assisted the Tetlit RRC with a monitoring program. A check station was not set up and only few harvest numbers have been reported so far. Hopefully more will be reported soon.

## **Yukon Herd Update**

Mike Suitor related that, while some Conservation Officers did undertake patrols, harvesting began too late this year to make a check station on the Dempster Highway worthwhile. Some licensed hunters hunted on the Dempster Highway and experienced varied results.

Sampling kits have been sent to Old Crow to take advantage of the harvest there. Mike also went out with some harvesters in Aklavik and obtained some samples. The general trend indicates that the caribou are quite lean, with little back fat.

Mike reviewed recent herd movements via satellite collar maps. He noted that herd movements were significantly slower this year and therefore harder to predict. The group of bulls that have usually been in the Richardson Mountains for many years have moved to the larger mountains in the Brooks Range north of Arctic Village.

In response to a question from Norman Snowshoe regarding herd population and the Board's advocacy of a bull-only harvest, Mike stated that there would be nothing wrong with harvesting cows at this point. He noted that the carrying capacity of the range is a very difficult thing to define and it may not apply to a far-ranging herd like the PCH.

## **Dempster Hunting Brochures**

The process for updating the Dempster Highway harvesting rights brochures was reviewed. A legal review was conducted by YG and TH and there have been numerous adjustments in recent years. Various revisions based on community feedback took significant time; however it was felt that adequate consultation has now taken place and it was recommended that the brochures be shared with

Parties in a way that indicates finality. Matt Clarke offered to assist with suggested wording for a letter to be sent along with the final brochures.

## **Harvest Management Strategy**

Deana Lemke informed members that a letter has been sent to Parties as a follow-up to last year's AHM. The letter included reminders about action items and work to be done prior to the 2023 AHM. The letter and reminders were reviewed with the Board.

Deana suggested convening a separate meeting to review the Implementation Plan if concerns about this are raised at the AHM. Collection of harvest data continues to be a concern and this matter needs to continue to be highlighted to the Parties. It was noted, however, that every user group seems to have put considerable effort into collecting harvest data and that it seems that the matter is being taken seriously.

Mike related that some data is still forthcoming from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game before the 2022 Annual Summary Report can be finalized by the PCTC. These metrics are required for final calculations and estimates.

Deana reminded members that the AHM will take place on Tuesday and Wednesday of the week of February 13, 2023 and that attendees are also coming to collaborate and contribute to the PCH Knowledge Hub on Wednesday and Thursday.

## **Porcupine Caribou Knowledge Hub Project**

Mike Suitor explained that the PCH Knowledge Hub consists of three steering groups. The focus of each group is vegetation, wildlife, and Indigenous Knowledge. Deana Lemke is part of the Indigenous Knowledge group, Mike Suitor is with the wildlife group, and Trevor Lantz is with the vegetation group. He expressed that all of the groups consist of high-caliber, very engaged individuals.

The Knowledge Hub was initiated over a year ago and is focused on understanding the effects of climate change on the herd, its habitat, and the people who depend on the herd. An area of interest includes the vegetation that supports moose and how the presence of moose will affect caribou and wolf populations. The hub is supported by a partnership that includes a number of stakeholder agencies, universities, and local organizations. Some of the key partners are PCMB, WMAC(NS), YG and the University of Victoria.

The intent is not to duplicate or recreate existing efforts to study the herd and its ecology, but to leverage existing initiatives within the PCH summer range. Existing management plans and their priorities will be considered and awareness of how various organizations' and groups' priorities relate to each other will be recognized and respected.

Several attempts have been made to hire an Indigenous Knowledge coordinator. This position has been adjusted to be a 0.2 position, supplementing a 0.8 Engagement Coordinator position with WMAC(NS), to the equivalent of a full-time position. The incumbent (Jessi Pascal) will be primarily focussed on administrative work and assisting with meeting and gathering coordination.

## **SARA Barren-ground Caribou Listing**

Shannon Stotyn reviewed that during 2017 to 2021, Canada conducted pre-listing consultations regarding a potential “threatened” listing of barren-ground caribou (BGC) in Canada. Initially, all groups in the NWT supported listing BGC while there was no support from groups in Nunavut.

While the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) initially voted not to approve the listing, Canada’s minister did not accept their rejection of the listing and asked the NWMB to revisit their decision. Their concerns were regarding international attention on the harvesting of BGC, that hunting regulations would change, and that no Indigenous Knowledge informed the decision to list, among others. The NWMB revisited their decision and now supports the listing, albeit with several recommendations regarding harvest.

From Environment Canada’s perspective, the listing will likely be recommended. The minister will then decide whether to approve the recommendation, after which it would be referred to the Governor in Council. If BGC are listed as threatened, available funding for identification and protection of critical habitat will be positively affected.

The recovery plan will most likely be an overarching plan which will take into account local management plans.

Jennifer Smith explained that PCMB has been very conscious of the concepts that have to be included in a recovery strategy and has been asking communities for input about these and anything else that should be included in the Conservation Plan (CP). She noted that, with the PCH being so different from the other herds, it is hard to imagine that this would not be recognized in the recovery plan approach for this herd.

Jennifer stated that the next phase of the CP project is to consolidate the various elements of the plan and to begin creating the first draft. Positive feedback has been received about PCMB being on the right path and that we should keep going on this approach.

Mike Sutor pointed out that there has been a lot of preparatory work related to Traditional Knowledge and that the draft plan will likely come together quickly.

Jennifer explained that documented updated information about critical habitat is a significant dependency of the CP. We are also still waiting for completion of the Trailmark process. Once this is done, we can take the information back to the communities for feedback and input.

## **PCH Conservation Plan and TK Data-Mobilization Project**

Jennifer Smith related that work on finalizing plans for community engagements has taken place over the past few months. Mayo and Whitehorse will be the final communities to be consulted, while Dawson City's engagement is planned for next week.

In addition to public meetings, our team met with RRCs and HTC in communities to provide information and gather feedback. While a number of kiosk PCs have been successfully deployed, we have had some challenges setting them up in some communities. Once all the PCs are deployed, the plan is to promote the prize draws for participation in the survey. The information can be updated remotely for future versions of the plan.

All digital TK data has now been ingested by Trailmark. The GTC data has been analyzed and a draft report has been produced. We are now working on coordinating engagement sessions to do the community and TK-holder verification. Similar engagements will be held with other communities once their data has been analyzed and reported on.

Deana Lemke added that we may consider coordinating the various community sessions in one trip to ensure efficiency, due to the effort and cost required to have Trailmark's team travel north. She related that this project will help set up the communities to continue building on the database for future use. While PCMB's interest is in very specific areas, VGG has a separate agreement with Trailmark for researchers to use their data for other projects.

Jennifer noted that the individual user groups will also have the ability to share data among themselves.

## **Dawson Land Use Plan**

Mike Sutor explained that previously input to the draft Dawson Land Use Plan (DLUP) was being sought by the DLUP Commission. That input was consolidated and reflected in the draft plan and the request for feedback at this time is from Yukon Government and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in about the recommended DLUP. Mike suggested that PCMB should reiterate the feedback that was previously provided and point out what aspects of the recommended plan PCMB supports or appreciates, and to identify any remaining concerns. The deadline for comment is December 20, 2022.

Mike reviewed the Board's previous comments and explained how they had been reflected in the plan. He also pointed out that PCMB had requested that future modifications to winter roads would be considered to be amendments and not variances but the plan does not seem to address this at all.

Mike felt that the statement of intent in the recommended plan is very good and the approach to cumulative effects is based on measurable thresholds and a value-based approach related to caribou, which is one of the most valued resources that is being managed in this plan.

Finally, Mike noted that PCMB's initial letter of comment supported the existing Dempster Highway management approach while recommending that it be updated. He noted, however, that the plan does not commit to a review of the Dempster regulations because that is beyond the scope of the plan.

Alice McCulley, herself a member of the DLUP Commission, noted that they were directed not to include anything in the plan that is not already supported by existing legislation or is not achievable under current legislation.

It was noted that the plan lists various stakeholder parties and the PCMB should ask to be added to this list.

## **Next Meeting and Adjournment**

It was suggested that at the next meeting Alice McCulley report on the TK work she has been involved in for Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in.

Billy Storr reported that the muskox cooking workshop in Aklavik went very well, with 40 people attending the workshop and 110 people attending the feast. He related that Chef Francis demonstrated various ways to cook muskox and many people tried it for the first time.

The next PCMB meeting will be planned for February 13, 2023, the day prior to the AHM.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:55 p.m.