

# Porcupine Caribou Management Board Minutes of Meeting

Java Connection Boardroom, Whitehorse, Yukon and Zoom

September 7, 2022

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## In attendance

### Members/Staff

Joe Tetlich, Chair  
Marvin Frost, Vuntut Gwitchin  
Ian McDonald, Government of Canada (Alternate)  
Robert Charlie, Gwich'in Tribal Council  
Alice McCulley, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in  
Dawna Hope, Na-cho Nyäk Dün  
Peter Gibson, Government of Yukon (Alternate)  
Norman Snowshoe, Government of the Northwest Territories (Alternate)  
Jeffery Peter, Vuntut Gwitchin (Alternate)  
Jimmy Kalinek, Inuvialuit Game Council (Alternate)

Deana Lemke, Executive Director  
Matthias Lemke, Assistant

### Presenters

Mike Sutor, Environment Yukon  
Jennifer Smith, Contractor  
Patrick Gibeau, Contractor  
Dave King, Trailmark  
Amanda Degray, Trailmark

## Call to Order and Agenda Review

Chair Joe Tetlich called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m. and welcomed new members including Marvin Frost and Peter Gibson.

The agenda was reviewed and approved.

***Motion to approve agenda  
Moved by Alice McCulley  
Seconded by Robert Charlie  
Carried***

## Review Minutes

The minutes of the February 7, 2022 Board meeting were reviewed as presented.

***Motion to approve minutes of the February 7, 2022 meeting***

***Moved by Norman Snowshoe***

***Seconded by Ian McDonald***

***Carried***

## Chair's Report

Joe Tetlich shared information about the series of public meetings that were held in Mackenzie Delta communities in June. The public engagement team included Jennifer Smith, Mike Sutor, Matthias Lemke, Emma TomTom (summer student), and Deana Lemke (virtual). Robert Charlie also attended meetings, as available. Joe attended and chaired meetings in Tuktoyaktuk, Aklavik, Inuvik, Fort McPherson and Tsiigehtchic. The purpose of the community tour was to share information about the Conservation Plan and Traditional Knowledge Data Mobilization projects and gather feedback from the communities. The Fort McPherson meeting was the largest, with over 50 participants who asked questions about the herd and provided significant caribou-related feedback. In general, all communities were primarily concerned about changes in the herd's migration route.

Joe related that a request was made by Fort McPherson elders for people not to hunt the caribou "leaders" near the Yukon/NWT border in August. Some of the elders were trying to educate people about not bothering the caribou in hopes of encouraging the herd to return to the headwaters of the Road River, Trail River, Caribou River, and Peel River.

Joe stated that the Gwich'in Tribal Council met in March and discussed protecting the Porcupine Caribou. This was discussed further at the Gwich'in Gathering which was held in Old Crow in July. The gathering involved five days of meetings and discussions among community members and visitors from Fort Yukon, Venetie, and Arctic Village. The concept of protecting the Porcupine Caribou herd was discussed. In order to support the concept of holding a "caribou summit", a panel was struck to begin planning a summit meeting. The panel will be meeting every two weeks. Deana Lemke is a participant on the planning committee.

Joe toured the Dempster Highway during the Midway Lake festival at the end of July and the beginning of August. He noted that there was a lot of communication from the RRC and elders in Fort McPherson asking harvesters not to bother the caribou. A few people did harvest because they had not heard about the no hunting request.

## **NWT Herd Update**

Norman Snowshoe related that he assisted the Tetlit Gwich'in with their efforts to implement the voluntary hunting closure and to implement a monitoring program. As a result, harvesting of the Porcupine Caribou herd (PCH) was very minimal. Norman felt that the campaign went very well and that it would be a good idea to follow the same approach in coming years.

Harvesting around Aklavik was very minimal. Any harvesting that did take place was in Yukon, in the Shingle Point region.

## **Yukon Herd Update**

Mike Sutor displayed maps of the Porcupine Caribou herd's distribution since last winter. Similar to recent years, the herd moved far west during the winter. The majority of herd wintered in the Hodzana Hills in Alaska where there is little snow due to high winds. A significant portion of the herd also wintered in the Brooks Range while some smaller groups stayed north of the Richardson Mountains. A group of bulls remained in the Richardson Mountains, which has been their typical behavior for recent years.

Peak calving in 2022 took place at June 4, which was a little earlier than usual. The pregnancy rate for cows was found to be somewhat lower than average. Weather conditions and smoke made it difficult to monitor calving as well as calf survival and prevented the photocensus from being conducted.

The gathering of science and traditional knowledge about the summer range of the herd is continuing. How vegetation and the associated nutrition is changing over time is the main focus of vegetation studies.

Moose and wolf populations are also being studied and monitored because their ecology will affect the PCH. Twenty-four satellite collars were deployed on moose on the North Slope and the upper Bell River. Five collars were deployed on wolves to enable monitoring and study of their behavior.

Patrick Gibeau, a PHD student working with Mike Sutor, explained that as the climate warms the North Slope, tundra will slowly turn into taiga. Already more willows are growing there and moose are moving farther north. It is anticipated that the wolf population will also increase. Patrick's current studies are focused on understanding how borealization will change wolf/ungulate dynamics as well as how an increase in moose on the Yukon North Slope will affect wolf behavior.

Patrick reported his findings to-date. Based on wolf biologist Bob Hayes' studies, tundra wolves are generally classified as "caribou eaters" while taiga wolves are "moose eaters". The current wolf collaring program found that tundra wolves tend to move a lot more and have a home range of approximately 8,000 km<sup>2</sup> while

taiga wolves' territory is more localized at 700 km<sup>2</sup>. This is similar to what Bob Hayes noted about wolf home ranges and movements in the 1980s. However, wolf behavior is changing from what Bob Hayes had observed. Wolves now seem to be killing more moose farther north than before.

Patrick noted that it is very difficult and expensive to get an estimate of the number of wolves; therefore, studies are being focused on achievable goals such as studying pack structures. The current approximation is that there are about eight wolves in one pack.

Jimmy Kalinek related that pack sizes will vary from year to year. He anticipated that we will see more wolves because of the current abundance of food. He noted that he has observed the same pack three or four times every winter as it moves around a large portion of the Mackenzie Delta.

Mike explained that the next step in the North Slope monitoring project is to set up wildlife- and vegetation-related steering groups via funding from the Canadian Mountain Network (CMN). A two-day gathering with community members and steering groups is being planned. Initially it was hoped that the gathering could be held on the land near one of the communities, but this has been challenging. The goal now is to hold the meeting in Whitehorse or Inuvik in January 2023. Attendees will include some WMAC North Slope members, hopefully most of the PCMB, and Mike Sutor, Patrick Gibeau and other scientists from Victoria and Montreal.

PCMB's summer student working with Mike Sutor is Emma TomTom who is from Selkirk First Nation and grew up in Dawson City. She assisted in Mike's office over the summer and participated in the community tour in June. Deana Lemke noted that funding for Emma's position was provided by PCMB via the Johnny Charlie scholarship, supplemented by Government of Yukon Department of Education's STEP program and supported by funding from CMN because some of Emma's work was CMN related.

## **Administrative Update**

Deana Lemke related that the PCMB was asked to participate in planning a Gwich'in caribou summit meeting and that she will be representing the Board. The summit will likely be held in Fort McPherson in December, but dates are not confirmed. Attendance of all of the PCMB members was requested. The intention is to focus on ethical and traditional harvesting as well commitments to ensure a sustainable future for the herd. Gwich'in knowledge and storytelling will also be a component of the gathering. The next meeting of the planning group will be during the week of September 12, 2022. Deana welcomed any input or suggestions from members. She noted that some of the topics that are shared with the Conservation Plan and the Native User Agreement could be highlighted at the summit.

Deana shared the following administrative updates and comments:

- The community engagement tour in June was a success and a worthwhile effort. Having Joe and Billy, as well as Robert Charlie (as available) accompany the group was invaluable.
- Adding a review of the Board's communication plan to the agenda for the next meeting would be advisable, with the goal of updating the plan and the key communication goals.
- A PCMB Instagram page has been created to enhance the Board's social media presence. Mykaela Ploegman has been working with Deana to develop and update it regularly. Deana, Matt, and Mykaela will be meeting with Aasman to get additional social media training and input. Positive feedback about an increased social media presence has already been received.
- Membership terms were reviewed and it was noted that there were issues scheduling meetings over the past few months as a result of quorum issues. It is important for all the positions to get filled, including alternate members.
- Joe and Deana have been invited to participate on a panel discussing collaborative management at the North American Caribou Workshop in Anchorage on May 8 to 12, 2023. Deana suggested that members flag those dates if they are interested in attending.

#### On-the-land meeting in 2023

Deana informed members that an opportunity has arisen for the Board to meet at Sheep Creek from June 16 to 20, 2023. This would include accommodations and meals on location. All members agreed to proceed with planning this meeting.

#### Honoraria rates

Deana provided an update on the honoraria review requested by the Board. She has reached out to different boards and committees regarding honoraria rates. It has been many years since the rates have changed and indications are that PCMB's current rates are not in line with what others are paying nor with annual the cost-of-living increases.

It is not possible to arbitrarily increase the daily honoraria rate. Even if the daily rate was changed, the Board would still have to work within the existing overall budget or the total budget and funding would have to be increased. It is not an ideal time to make a case for this due to COVID-related under expenditures. Deana will gather more information for discussion at the next meeting.

## Financial Update

The status of the Board's contribution agreements was reviewed and the budget and variance report was discussed. Deana noted that due to deadlines associated with some of the larger funding agreements, significant funds need to be expended this fiscal year.

Deana requested that members provide certain personal information that is required for the auditor to submit the Board's charity return. Additionally, members were asked to provide a short biography for future use on the Board's social media and website.

## **Dempster Highway caribou hunt**

Joe Tetlichy related that during the Delta community tour and during the Midway Lake festival many comments were made about the caribou not returning to their traditional winter range. It was noted that when caribou do come close to the Dempster Highway, many trucks are seen on the highway while people are hunting. Concerned community members want to do anything possible to help the caribou move south across the Dempster Highway again; therefore, they encouraged everyone to leave the caribou alone this fall.

A few caribou were taken by people from the Delta area and by licensed hunters, which caused some tension. Some of those harvesters, when approached, stated they did not know about the voluntary no-harvesting request. This raised awareness of the need to communicate more thoroughly in the future.

New PCMB member Peter Gibson (YG) introduced himself. Peter has been a Conservation Officer for Government of Yukon since 2009. He previously served in Whitehorse, Faro, and Ross River and moved to Dawson City in 2016. He noted that there is only one other Conservation Officer north of Carmacks.

Peter explained that as long as he has been working in Dawson City, each year a group of Porcupine Caribou bulls have moved into the Richardson Mountains close to Yukon-NWT border and these have been harvested by all user groups. So far this year, 10 Porcupine Caribou have been harvested by licensed hunters.

During the second week of August this year, Peter patrolled the Dempster Highway, focussing on the area close to the border. He reported meeting a few citizens from Inuvik and Fort McPherson who were hunting caribou and were happy with their harvest. Scattered groups of caribou were visible on the hills away from the highway.

Peter noted that there seemed to be some misunderstandings which resulted in conflict among the user groups. Some licensed hunters felt that they were being harassed. Some continued to hunt while others abandoned their hunt and departed. One individual who abandoned his hunt related that he had seen

people in the back of his truck and someone had written “let the leaders pass” in the dirt next to his truck.

Joe explained that there is a misconception that these caribou are the “leaders”. In fact, they are a group of caribou that spent the summer in the James Creek and border areas. Some in Fort McPherson thought that those were the leaders and didn’t want to bother them. Joe felt that more education might be needed when caribou are near the highway. Now that those caribou have moved away without crossing the Dempster Highway, it seems that people will not hesitate to take the opportunity to harvest the next time that caribou are close.

Jimmy Kalinek stated that, while traditional management practices like “letting the leaders pass” should be respected, people don’t really know who the leaders are. From watching the caribou migrate, it appears that the big cows actually may be the leaders. Some think that the leaders must be the big bulls, but sometimes it is not like that. Not all community members understand the concept of “letting the leaders pass”. There is also a fine line telling people not to hunt at certain times, because they might miss the opportunity to harvest altogether. Education is important and there should not be any sort of harassment.

Norman expressed that he was concerned about the tone of the discussion sounding like a justification for harvesting caribou during the requested no-harvesting period. He stated that when he approached a couple of licensed harvesters and explained what the Tetlit Gwich’in were trying to do, their response was that the season is open and they were still going to hunt. Since the Government of the Northwest Territories supports the initiative of the Tetlit Gwich’in, Norman thought that it might be advisable to reconsider the hunting season for Porcupine Caribou.

Joe stated that the PCMB needs to walk a fine line because the Board represents the voice of all Parties. We can ask others to try to abide by a community’s wishes but we are not enforcers and the hunters were not breaking the law.

Mike offered to produce some historical information about caribou movements in the Yukon-NWT border area based on satellite collar data since 2013. The bulls have been coming to this area each summer to forage. In 2013, as many as 20,000 bulls were observed, and in 2017 there were as many as 13,000 bulls. They usually move to this area around mid-June and stay until the end of August before moving northwest to follow the rest of the herd.

***ACTION: Mike Suitor to prepare historical information about caribou movements in the Yukon-NWT border area based on satellite collar data since 2013, to be presented at a future meeting.***

## **PCH Conservation Plan Update**

Jennifer Smith reviewed the timeline for the community engagement portion of the Conservation Plan project. The current end date is the 2023-24 fiscal year.

Jennifer related that the community meetings in June were three hours long and in some cases even went overtime because people had a lot of good questions and feedback. The meetings included presentations about the Traditional Knowledge and Conservation Plan (CP) projects followed by breakout groups using flipcharts and sticky notes to gather feedback. Great feedback and comments were received. Some questions and concerns were related to issues addressed in the Harvest Management Plan and the Native User Agreement, highlighting the need for more communication about the content of these agreements.

The communities would like to continue being engaged via workshops to give ongoing feedback as the plan progresses.

The next steps are to categorize and analyze the feedback gathered and to prepare for the second community feedback session. Mayo, Dawson, and Whitehorse still require initial community meetings.

Jennifer pointed out that the PCMB website has a dedicated page focussed on the CP and a newsletter is also available for download and printing. A contractor has been engaged to work with youth groups to produce caribou drawings depicting youth's values about caribou. These will be compiled into a comic or cartoon.

## **Traditional Knowledge Data-Mobilization Project Update**

Dave King provided an overview of Trailmark Systems' services and the work they have been doing for the PCMB and the Parties for the past several years. He stated that it is an honour to be entrusted with the privilege of working with and analyzing the Porcupine Caribou-related traditional knowledge (TK) data. This project will help keep that TK alive and enable others to study and understand it.

Dave reviewed the process of data ingestion, coding, analysis, and verification. He related that, earlier in the project, a sample analysis was performed to demonstrate the process and results of analyzing data and the outputs that can be produced. Based on the positive review of the sample analysis, Trailmark is now continuing to analyze and code the remaining ingested data.

The main themes of the data analysis are: caribou distribution and range; traditional management practices; population fluctuations; changes in migration patterns; access to harvesting; and harvesting techniques.



Amanda Degray described the process for analyzing the data. This involves grouping of extracted text excerpts that are associated with a particular code, reading and analyzing the content of the text groupings, and identifying and describing sub-themes.

Robert Charlie expressed appreciation for Trailmark's presentation. Stating that the TK data originates with older generations, he questioned how the verification can happen given that the current generation's experiences are quite different.

Jennifer concurred that it may not be possible to verify all portions of the data, but it does provide a historical record. She stated that when analyzing the information we will need to be conscious of which time period is being referenced.

Deana Lemke stated that to code or analyze the data accurately, someone may need to assist with providing context before any assumptions or conclusions are made. Dave pointed out that it is not Trailmark's place to draw conclusions but only to highlight observations for discussion and verification.

Norman Snowshoe commended Dave and Amanda for their presentation and work and asked whether traditional place names could be added to the maps in the reports. Dave and Amanda agreed that they have access to the traditional names and that these can be imported into the maps.

Alice McCulley informed the Board that Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in is in the process of hiring an engagement coordinator who will also work at obtaining permission from TK holders to share their information with the PCMB and Trailmark.

## **Harvest Management Strategy**

Deana Lemke noted that as the Harvest Management Plan and the Implementation Plan were being developed, that several tasks were deferred to the Native User Agreement (NUA) development process, the key items dealing with the total allowable harvest allocation, harvest sharing, and harvesting access. In order to move forward with this process, the PCMB provided logistical and financial support so that Lindsay Staples could facilitate meetings of the Parties to draft, complete, and sign a NUA.

The NUA provided for the establishment of Native User Commission which would further develop a native user access and consent agreement.

In keeping with the PCMB's practice of offering support to the Parties for development of various parts of the strategy and agreements, Deana suggested that the PCMB again take the initiative to offer to work with the Parties to make progress on the access and consent agreement that was anticipated through the NUA. She suggested reminding the Parties about what has already been established and agreed to and what still needs to be completed.

Dawna Hope stated that she represented Na-cho Nyäk Dün at the NUA table and that it would be timely to bring this to the Parties' attention again. She supports starting with a letter to inform and remind the Parties of where we are at in the Harvest Management Strategy process and the NUA.

Alice McCulley stated that Karlie Knight was not involved in the NUA process and agreed that it would be good to send a letter. She noted that capacity at Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in is quite strained at the moment and it is possible that PCMB may not get an adequate response in a timely manner. Alice would be willing to highlight this issue if it is deemed a priority by the Board.

Robert Charlie agreed with the suggestion of sending a letter to follow up on the creation of a Native User Commission to address the outstanding concerns.

Jimmy Kalinek replied that he had not heard about these matters but that he will bring it up to his Party.

Peter Gibson and Mike Sutor noted that it would be good to communicate with Government of Yukon because of their interest in moving forward with the agreement between Yukon First Nations and the Government of Yukon.

Deana stated that these matters continue to be mentioned at each Annual Harvest Meeting (AHM). She agreed to draft a letter that can also be copied to the territorial and federal governments.

Deana reminded members that the next AHM will be held in Inuvik on February 14 and 15, 2023, likely at Ingamo Hall. Responses to the recommendations made at last year's AHM have been received from all Parties except Na-cho Nyäk Dün, Inuvialuit Game Council, and Gwich'in Tribal Council. Reminders have been sent out to these Parties.

## **Next Meeting and Adjournment**

The next meeting will be planned for December — dates to be confirmed once the Caribou Summit date is confirmed.

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