

Porcupine Caribou Management Board Minutes of Meeting

Via Zoom

February 7, 2022

In attendance

Members/Staff

Joe Tetlich, Chair
Robert Charlie, Gwich'in Tribal Council
Shannon Stotyn, Government of Canada
Alice McCulley, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in
Billy Storr, Inuvialuit Game Council
Jeffrey Peter, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation (Alternate)
Norman Snowshoe, Government of the Northwest Territories (Alternate)
Kirby Meister, Government of Yukon (Alternate)

Deana Lemke, Executive Director
Matthias Lemke, Assistant

Regret

Dawna Hope, Na-cho Nyäk Dün

Presenter

Mike Suitor, Environment Yukon

Call to Order

Chair Joe Tetlich called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. and welcomed new Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation alternate member, Jeffrey Peter. The agenda was reviewed and approved.

Motion to approve agenda
Moved by Robert Charlie
Seconded by Norman Snowshoe
Carried

Review Minutes

The minutes of the October 15, 2021 Board meeting were reviewed and approved.

Motion to approve minutes of the October 15, 2021 Board meeting
Moved by Alice McCulley
Seconded by Shannon Stotyn
Carried

Chair's Update

Joe Tetlichy related that there are currently not many Porcupine Caribou located in Canada. A small group broke away from the main herd and moved to the area north of Old Crow in October, resulting in a small caribou harvest in Old Crow.

At present there are no signs of caribou along the Dempster Highway. While a few caribou were harvested near the NWT border earlier this year, no significant harvesting activities have taken place since then.

A winter road is being constructed to allow trucks to bring building materials to Old Crow. Joe noted that as many as 60 truckloads of supplies will be delivered to Old Crow beginning the following week until April. He stated that Pelly Construction in collaboration with VGFN are responsible for constructing, maintaining, and decommissioning the winter road.

Joe explained that use of the road will be regulated but that citizens of Old Crow will be allowed to benefit from using the road. He stated that he planned to join a convoy in order to deliver a vehicle to Old Crow. He will also be monitoring for caribou and taking pictures. Last year a number of citizens were upset by the equipment, fuel, and garbage left along the snowcat road; therefore, it will be a good opportunity to observe and monitor the activities.

Regarding public access, Kirby Meister noted that the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources issued the permit for the road and that, while the permit holder is responsible for road safety, the public cannot be charged for using the road. It will open in mid-February and permits expire at midnight on March 31.

Executive Director Update

Deana Lemke suggested that since in-person meetings will likely not be possible for some time yet, the Board could meet virtually on a more regular basis. She requested a meeting prior to March 31 and suggested meeting every couple of months in the future to focus on the Conservation Plan and Traditional Knowledge projects.

The series of social media and website videos produced by Peter Mather were discussed. Board members approved the videos and provided positive feedback.

The financial variance report was reviewed and discussed. Deana explained the difference between core and proposal funding and provided updates on project expenditures. Both the core budget and proposal funds are quite underspent due to COVID-19 travel and gathering limitations. A concerted effort will be made to ensure that no funds will lapse. Some funds may be carried forward into the next fiscal year.

Deana noted that one of PCMB's key activities is communication and that it would be helpful to have a dedicated resource to assist with this. She suggested that some funding be allocated specifically toward a communications person who could take the lead in managing the Board's social media presence.

Shannon Stotyn agreed that it is a good idea to hire someone with a specialized communications-related skillset. Alice McCulley likewise agreed and stated that it would be good for that person to develop a strategic social media plan. Billy Storr felt that the expectations for this role should be defined and someone should be hired on a project or contract basis. Norman Snowshoe also stated that a greater focus on communications is a good idea and suggested mentoring younger people to assist with this.

Mike Suitor noted that WMAC-NS developed an overall communications strategy and then had a student develop materials which were utilized. He also stated that the communications priority-setting exercise led by Kelly Milner in 2015 was very helpful and that it would be good to update this.

The status of the Board's various funding agreements was reviewed.

Motion to appoint M. McKay and Associates as auditor for the 2021-22 fiscal period.

Moved by Billy Storr

Seconded by Robert Charlie

Carried

The appointment terms of PCMB members were reviewed. Several vacancies still exist and a number of terms are about to end, which could cause quorum issues. Deana noted that it is important for alternate members to also be engaged and apprised of current issues.

Herd Update – NWT

Norman Snowshoe explained that there has been no change since the last update. There has been very little hunting and patrols on the Dempster Highway have not been necessary. Social media is monitored to take note of any harvesting-related activities.

Herd Update – Yukon

Mike Suitor stated that not many caribou have been accessible to Yukon harvesters and that no check station was needed this year.

PCH Project Update

Mike Sutor provided an overview of several PCH-related projects.

Canadian Mountain Network

The Ecological Change and Livelihoods in the Porcupine Caribou Summer Range project, funded by the Canadian Mountain Network, is being co-lead by the PCMB and the University of Victoria. This project will coordinate the work of various partner organizations working on complementary goals. The focus of the project is to understand what climate change will mean for the herd, its habitat, and the people who depend on it.

The PCMB is providing guidance regarding caribou habitat and assisting with administering funding for various project components. The main themes of the project are wildlife, vegetation, and indigenous knowledge. An indigenous knowledge coordinator will be hired to assist with this project. Individuals and groups who contribute to the project will be paid honoraria. The intention is to hire community members for various aspects of the project as well.

Caribou Research

A caribou diet analysis was undertaken from June 1 to July 15. Camera collars were retrieved in September and the captured video is now being classified into activity, diet, insect harassment, calving, and calf survival categories. The video footage is being used to supplement physical diet analyses. It is hoped that video collar information can also be used to study calving and calf survival.

Wolf and Moose Work

Wolf- and moose-related work will be taking place primarily in VGFN traditional territory and in the ISR, pending a meeting with the Aklavik HTC to agree on the approach and methods that will be used. A master's student is engaged to assist with this project. Fuel is already being staged to support aerial studies.

Vegetation Work

Mike related that Dr. Isla Myers-Smith has received additional funds to for holding a meeting with stakeholders regarding vegetation studies on Herschel Island and the North Slope. She is hoping to have a gathering on the land to bring together community members and researchers to discuss the approach.

Mike concluded his summary by asking Board members what they need from him in order to be involved and to provide input and advice on these projects. He stated that he would like to do a good job of involving the PCMB and would like to know if members prefer short briefings or significant updates and whether they would like to get updates from other partners. In response, members stated that they would be happy with short briefings and periodic updates.

Mike noted that if the PCMB would like to receive information that is similar to what Arctic Borderlands previously provided, it may be possible that the Canadian Mountain Network could support a sustainable way to collect information that would support the PCMB in making good management decisions.

EDI PCH analysis for Chance Oil and Gas

Mike related that EDI is conducting a PCH impact analysis for the Chance Oil and Gas project, focusing on habitat and the zones of influence of disturbance. The Chance Oil and Gas proposal is similar to that of the previous project.

PCH satellite location data was requested by the proponent but the PCTC requested more details about how the data would be used. The PCTC also provided guidance on the approach to analyzing caribou response to disturbance.

Annual Harvest Meeting

The agenda and process for the AHM was reviewed. Due to challenges with receiving acknowledgements and communication from Parties regarding their participation in the AHM, it was noted that it would be helpful for Board members to play a greater role to ensure their Parties' involvement.

Robert Charlie stated that engaging and educating Parties regarding the AHM might be a good task for a communications person.

Board Member updates

Kirby Meister informed members that Karen Clyde is no longer YG's representative on the PCMB. He is currently the alternate member but he will be retiring in April this year and a new member and alternate member will need to be appointed.

Alice McCulley related that she will be hosting a caribou-related community meeting via Zoom later this evening, and that she would share any noteworthy feedback at a future PCMB meeting. Jennifer Smith and Deana Lemke will provide an update on the Conservation Plan and Traditional Knowledge projects at the TH community meeting.

Joe Tetlichy stated that if COVID concerns can be appropriately addressed he would be willing to do his annual visit to the Mackenzie delta communities to talk with the public in the user communities about the PCH.

Norman Snowshoe questioned whether a concern about the carrying capacity of the PCH range is valid and wondered at what point the size of the herd might become a concern.

Mike Sutor explained that there is no easy answer for questions around nutritional stress but that it is possible that the upcoming habitat studies may shed light on it. The concept is very difficult to measure and it is often not understood until a herd starts to decline. The PCH range is so large that the herd's use of habitat can vary, which makes this concept difficult to measure and study.

Next Meeting and Adjournment

The Annual Harvest meeting will take place on February 8 and 9. The next PCMB meeting will be arranged by email, based on members' availability.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:10 p.m.