

Porcupine Caribou Management Board Minutes of Meeting

Inuvik Community Corporation Community Hall
Inuvik, NT and via Zoom

September 17-18, 2023

In attendance

Members/Staff

Joe Tetlich, Chair
Alice McCulley, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in
Barry Greenland, Gwich'in Tribal Council
Matt Clarke, Government of Yukon
Jeffrey Peter, Vuntut Gwitchin (Alternate)
Dang-Dang Gruben, Inuvialuit Game Council (Alternate)
Ian McDonald, Government of Canada (Alternate)

Deana Lemke, Executive Director
Matthias Lemke, Assistant

Regrets

Norman Snowshoe, Government of the Northwest Territories (Alternate)
First Nation of Na-cho Nyäk Dün (member seats currently vacant)

Presenters

Mike Sutor, Environment Yukon
Jennifer Smith, Project Manager
Jessi Pascal, PCH Knowledge Hub
Liz Staples, Vuntut Gwitchin
Will Hein, PCH Knowledge Hub Project

Call to Order

Chair Joe Tetlich called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. and offered an opening prayer. Members were welcomed to the meeting, including the new alternate member representing the Inuvialuit Game Council, Dang-Dang Gruben.

The agenda was reviewed and approved.

Motion to approve agenda
Moved by Matt Clarke
Seconded by Ian McDonald
Carried

Review Minutes

The minutes of the April 14, 2023 meeting were reviewed and approved.

Motion to approve minutes of the April 14, 2023 meeting

Moved by Alice McCulley

Seconded by Ian McDonald

Carried

Chair's Report

Joe Tetlichy related that he receives frequent requests for information about where the caribou are, even though that information is available on pcmb.ca. He stated that he always tries to provide some direction to harvesters because of the cost of fuel. Joe noted that during July 2023 some bull caribou were spotted on the Dempster Highway near the NWT border. He felt that this was a small group of bulls that regularly stays in that area until August. Currently some of the herd is scattered north of Crow Flats and the majority is near Arctic Village and even farther west. Joe stated that in the Old Crow area caribou have not been seen along the river in the fall for five years now, which is not how it used to be.

Joe related that along with Deana Lemke, Mike Sutor, Alice McCulley, and Shannon Stotyn, he attended the North American Caribou Workshop in Anchorage, Alaska during the first week of May 2023. The overall messages that he took away from the program were that climate change is a reality and that many things are changing. Inupiat representatives related that 40 communities in Alaska need to be relocated because of land erosion. Attendees at the conference also stated that migration routes are changing for caribou herds in Alaska. Joe and Deana participated as part of a panel that included representatives from the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board, the Bathurst Caribou Advisory Committee, the Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission, the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group, the Bristol Bay Regional Advisory Council, and the Wekeezhii Renewable Resources Board. The theme of the panel discussion was Caribou Crossing: Collaborative Caribou Stewardship in a Changing Arctic. There were about 700 people in attendance at the conference which had several sessions running concurrently at times to accommodate a variety of interests in topics.

Joe attended a community engagement meeting in Old Crow when Chance Oil and Gas met with Vuntut Gwitchin citizens. He participated as a member of the public and recommended that Chance make a point of meeting with the PCMB to provide an overview of the project and receive input. This was acknowledged and Joe anticipates that the Board will receive a meeting request in the near future.

Administrative and Financial Report

The financial variance report was reviewed. Deana Lemke noted that there is some flexibility in this year's budget and the previous year's carry-over of approximately \$78,000. Discussions are ongoing with Peter Mather about potential projects, and

some of the available funds could be used for Peter's work. Joe and Deana recently met with Peter and would like to include him as a partner in some of the Board's communications work. Members will be kept apprised of any developments. Deana stated that other potential ideas could also be considered and asked members to bring forward any suggestions.

Deana related that Board membership has been a concern. Letters have been sent to several Parties asking that effort be put into making sure that both a member and an alternate member are appointed by each Party. She stated that the current meeting was at risk on not being able to proceed due to potential quorum issues.

Alice McCulley advised that Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Chief and Council approved the nomination for Darcy McDiarmid as alternate member.

Deana explained that the audit of the PCMB's previous year's financials is taking longer than usual this year. She will let the Board know once it has been completed.

An update was provided to members regarding a planned enhancement to the PCMB website: pcmb.ca. Aasman has been asked to assist with improving the map section on the Satellite Collars page by adding a timeline of historical location maps. The archive of historical maps is being provided to the developer by Martin Kienzler.

Ian McDonald noted that there is a discrepancy between information about the rut period for caribou in Environment Yukon's hunting regulations summary and what is indicated on pcmb.ca. Mike Suitor pointed out that Environment Yukon's information likely applies to mountain caribou which rut earlier than the Porcupine Caribou herd (PCH). An adjustment will be made on pcmb.ca noting the difference in the PCH and mountain caribou's rut periods.

Deana asked members to please follow PCMB's social media feeds, if they are not doing so already, and to promote the feeds to others. She noted that awareness of the PCMB's Instagram account is increasing and that, while Facebook still seems to be the preferred social media platform in the communities, Instagram is gaining popularity. Mykaela Ploegman has been doing a good job with the layout and design of posts on the Instagram account.

Deana stated that a Canadian Mountain Network (CMN) conference is being held in Parksville, BC on Vancouver Island at the end of September. CMN is the primary funder for the PCH Knowledge Hub summer range project. Joe, Mike, and Deana will be attending to represent the PCMB. Jennifer Smith and Jessi Pascal will also be attending the conference, representing both the PCH Knowledge Hub and WMAC North Slope.

Porcupine Caribou Herd Update

Mike Sutor related that much effort has been put into studying vegetation and nutrition in the summer range of the herd. Four separate sampling sessions were conducted in Canada, and based on the data collected, vegetation across the range will be analyzed using satellite imagery. Six different species of vegetation were sampled based on observations of video-collar recordings. It was found that the favorite food for the PCH during the summer is a small species of willow.

Insect harassment and weather-related information as it pertains to the PCH is also being collected. Will Hein is measuring actual numbers of various insects and how weather affects their presence and abundance. The goal is to get individuals from northern communities involved to continue the monitoring insects in the future.

Mike presented and reviewed recent PCH movements via satellite-collar location maps. He explained that calving took place in the 1002 region of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, in the area that has been most frequently used by the herd in the past. During post-calving the herd aggregated very well and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game were able to photograph large groups of cows and calves. The bulls did not aggregate, however, and therefore a complete population estimate will not be able to be completed. A minimum count can be calculated, which will give an indication of the herd's current size.

Mike noted that bull behavior has changed. This season, only two out of 25 collared bulls moved to the Richardson Mountains. In the past 15 years, this ratio was much different as most bulls had spent the summer in the Richardsons. The current trend indicates that the bulls are now preferring to move to the Brooks Range.

The majority of the herd moved west to Alaska in late August, which is somewhat later than usual. The bulk of the herd was located in the area around Arctic Village in early September.

Some harvesters in Aklavik reported harvesting caribou, which were in excellent condition, along the coast. On the other hand, a limited number of caribou harvested in Alaska reportedly had no fat at all, which was concerning.

Mike displayed a map of Yukon showing the areas that were burned this year. He noted that the largest burn was near Old Crow flats, but that caribou generally do not winter there. He stated that in general the fires this season did not seem to significantly impact the herd's major winter ranges. Since the herd has many other options for habitat and forage compared to other herds, fires do not have as much of an impact on the PCH as on other Canadian barren-ground herds. He also related that the herd actually moved toward several fires when they were still burning, indicating that fires did not appear to influence movements. Caribou conducted similar movements this year as they have over the last number of years and two collared cows actually moved through the flats and very close to some of the larger burns that were occurring at the time.

Porcupine Caribou Technical Committee

Mike Suitor explained that the Porcupine Caribou Technical Committee (PCTC) held an in-person meeting in Anchorage, Alaska in conjunction with the North American Caribou Workshop, which was the first in-person PCTC meeting since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mike also informed members that a recent court challenge regarding the access to caribou-related data was decided in the PCTC's favor. While some data needs to remain restricted, the PCTC continues to discuss how caribou-related scientific data can be appropriately shared with the public via social media.

The PCTC's next major tasks will be reviewing the recently released Environmental Impacts Statement for oil and gas development in the 1002 area as well as preparing to understand the anticipated eventual decline in the PCH and what factors will affect the herd during the decline. It may be possible to run several intensive studies for a five-year period. The PCTC will need to decide when to begin these studies. Currently, calf survival and recruitment metrics are not adequately understood to fully study population dynamics relative to the population trend. These topics will be discussed further this winter.

Chance Oil and Gas Eagle Plains Project

Joe Tetlichy related that he attended a public meeting with Chance Oil and Gas, at which he stated that the PCMB should be consulted. The project is predicted to last for 10 years, from 2025 to 2035. So far, it appears that no proposal for the project has been released.

Mike Suitor stated that they are proposing a substantial seismic program, up to 30 wells and extended flow testing, and there will not be any hydraulic fracturing. He reviewed that when commenting on the last proposal, the Board expressed concerns around all-season road construction. His current understanding is that Chance intends to rely more on winter roads and carefully sequence the use of these roads. The proposal to YESAB is expected by December this year and will be reviewed by the YESAB executive office which means that it will be a more thorough review than via the Dawson regional office.

Members acknowledged that previously it was challenging to establish a working relationship with Chance. It was noted that this time YESAB indicated that the PCMB will be included, so hopefully the interactions and communication will improve.

Dawson Land Use Plan

Deana Lemke related that the PCMB received an email from new senior Dawson land use planner introducing herself and stating that she would like to meet with the PCMB and know what the Board's two most important interests or concerns are related to the plan.

Mike Suitor noted that the recommended plan is being reviewed by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Government of Yukon. These parties will advise the planning commission if they wish to make any adjustments. The public will also get an opportunity to review the final recommended plan.

Mike recounted that the PCMB was quite pleased with the recommended plan and that in the Board's submission cumulative effects thresholds were raised as a concern for certain areas. The Board also provided feedback about roads departing the Dempster, requesting that any changes be considered a variance and not an amendment, in order to increase the rigor and scrutiny related to changes.

Ian McDonald suggested that the Board re-state the comments that were previously provided, and Matt Clarke suggested mentioning the Board's concerns around the disruption of PCH migration.

Members discussed separating feedback and concerns into two categories:

1. Ecological function (habitat, migration, cumulative effect thresholds, designations and thresholds); and
2. Disturbance (Dempster Highway sub-regional planning, winter road construction, harvest).

Conservation Plan and TK Data-Mobilization Project

Jennifer Smith began her update by noting that the federal listing of barren-ground caribou in Canada is expected soon, but that there has been no update to-date.

Jennifer updated members that initial community and stakeholder engagements for the Conservation Plan project have been completed, with Mayo and Whitehorse engagements to be completed in the future. A second round of surveys and community engagements will be undertaken in the future and computer information stations will be updated accordingly. The Inuvik information station is currently not active and needs to be promoted.

Jennifer reviewed the status of the Traditional Knowledge Data-Mobilization project. Reports have been generated by Trailmark on the ingested data and provided to the Parties and to the PCMB. The Old Crow report was reviewed with representatives from the community at a May TK verification session. The session planned for Fort McPherson in May needed to be cancelled due to flooding and the session in Aklavik needed to be postponed due to weather impeding the team's travel. This week, TK verification sessions will be held with the communities of Aklavik and Fort McPherson. Peter Evans and Amanda Degray from Trailmark will present a summary of the report and ask community representatives to comment on whether the key messages of the ingested TK were accurately understood. Feedback will be recorded and integrated into the final report.

Following the verification sessions, the next steps will be to identify any information gaps and then integrating the final outcomes into the draft Conservation Plan.

Key topics for review relate to documented TK regarding changes in habitat, types of food for caribou, changes in herd range and movements, and changes in local herd management.

Jennifer explained that the process of including the results of the TK reports will continue to be an iterative process in determining how the information will be included in the Conservation Plan. There seems to be good TK information in the key areas that are to be included, but how it will be merged into the Conservation Plan is not yet clear.

Porcupine Caribou Herd Knowledge Hub

Mike Sutor explained that many organizations are either already doing research related to climate change and ecological change, while others are interested in doing research. The goal of the Canadian Mountain Network (CMN) was to coordinate research efforts, foster communication between groups, and support knowledge-sharing. This approach also provided an umbrella for funding of various initiatives. Alongside TK, studies are being undertaken by Patrick Gibeau and Will Hein as a part of this effort.

A second meeting of PCH Knowledge Hub participants is being planned for in conjunction with the 2023 Annual Harvest Meeting in Inuvik. It is hoped that notice will be received that an additional five years of funding will be forthcoming. These funds would continue to support community participation, group meetings, and scientific work of university students. However, should funding not be secured, this will be the final year of the project.

Mike explained that Patrick Gibeau's work is focusing on predation on the PCH. Bob Hayes was the last primary wolf researcher on this topic. The new study is aimed at learning whether wolf behavior has changed since then. Bob Hayes identified two different wolf types: regional wolves which primarily preyed on moose and migratory wolves that followed caribou and they did not generally prey on moose. Bob found that the pups of wolves which preyed on caribou generally had a poor survival rate, while wolves that preyed on moose experienced more successful pup survival.

So far, 21 wolves have been collared so that research can be conducted on movements, pack size, pup survival, and diet. Mike presented an animated map of wolf movements based on collar information. He explained that potential kill sites can be identified based on algorithms that are run using satellite location information. To date, about half of the sites that were investigated were confirmed as kill sites via site visits.

Studies have confirmed that more moose are now being killed in the Richardson Mountains and on the North Slope than during Bob Hayes' study period and the moose populations have been steadily increasing.

In response to several questions about muskox, Mike offered to provide a full update on muskox information at a future meeting.

PCH Knowledge Hub project coordinator update (Jessi Pascal)

Jessi Pascal related that she has conducted several community engagements since March during which she asked communities how they want to be informed and involved. Most respondents mentioned that they prefer being informed via radio.

Jessi shared information about a radio show proposal that she is drafting. It will be regionally specific to harvester communities. Jessi envisions utilizing questionnaires, trivia contests with prizes that will be played between various radio programs to get harvesters, elders and youths to contribute their thoughts about northern themes.

Jessi also stated that she will be visiting schools and talking to youths. She explained that she is also part of a youth working group that may be included in next year's Yukon North Slope conference next year.

Research Update (Will Hein)

Mike introduced Will Hein, a masters student from McGill University who is focusing on studying insect harassment on the PCH. It was anticipated that the warming climate would cause more insect harassment. While satellite-camera collar information indicates that caribou do respond to insect harassment, very little information is available on this topic, which is why Will is gathering additional data.

Will presented information on the work he has been conducting on insect harassment and its effect on the PCH. The insects he is focusing his studies on are the nasal bot fly, the warble fly, and the mosquito. Will noted that Don Russell's index of temperature and wind speed is at present the only tool for measuring insect harassment.

Camera collars have helped to study caribou's behavioral reactions to insects. Climate change is expected to increase insect harassment on the PCH. Based on the recent studies, Will noted that insect harassment might be a reason for increases in caribou movements and that behavioral and energetic reactions are ways to measure responses to insects. He explained that the methods he is using to measure insect abundance are baited malaise traps and sweep netting, using CO₂ to simulate the presence of caribou.

Weather conditions are also recorded during the collection process. Will related that Dandrea Greenland and Edwin Gordon were hired to assist with sampling and studies and that including community members in conducting studies has worked very well. Data gathered by the current studies will be used to inform indices relating to caribou behavior and energetics.

Barry Greenland asked whether these studies could be shared with schools so that students can learn this information. Mike replied that plans are underway to use satellite-camera footage for the school program which will include some data about insect harassment.

Jessi Pascal also explained that part of her initiative is to go to schools to interact with kids and see how they may be encouraged to pursue careers in the environmental field.

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Supplemental EIS

Liz Staples reviewed the historical background of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process to date. She reminded members that the first lease sale took place on December 22, 2021 but was not successful, selling only nine out of 22 tracts and raising less than 1% of the projected revenue. While US President Biden's administration cancelled the remaining leases after having determined that the process was flawed and unlawful, a second lease sale is still a legislative requirement and must take place before December 22, 2024. The new draft EIS was recently released and comments are being accepted until October 23, 2023.

Liz will let the PCMB know how Vuntut Gwitchin (VG) intends to participate in the public meetings that are scheduled as part of the EIS process. She stated that VG will be looking for opportunities to collaborate with PCMA Parties on a response to the Supplemental EIS.

Liz noted that the Alaska Wilderness League and other organizations will be driving a public campaign to incent people to comment and express concerns about development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. So far, corporate support has been expressed by 29 banks and 20 insurance companies that have stated they will not support business activities in the Arctic Refuge.

Regarding legislation in the US, Liz explained that both the House and the Senate have introduced legislation to protect the Arctic Refuge but it is not anticipated that it will be passed into law during this administration due to the current composition of the US government.

In addition to the above, the Kaktovik Inupiat Corporation has applied for a 20-year right-of-way through the coastal plain to connect the community of Kaktovik with the snow- and ice-road system in the area west of the refuge. The purpose is to facilitate moving a permanent school and other building modules into Kaktovik and for trucking fuel into the community to allow vehicle traffic to and from the community.

Mike Suitor reminded members that the PCMB previously submitted comments to the Alaska Bureau of Land Management requesting that a number of deficiencies in the previous EIS be addressed. One of these deficiencies was regarding the apparent misapplication of the 2,000-acre threshold referred to in the federal tax law. The

previous EIS excluded some development features and disturbances from the 2,000-acre allotment, effectively causing disturbance in an area greater than 2,000 acres.

The PCMB had also pointed out that there was no reasonable range of development alternatives to choose from, that greenhouse gases and effects from climate change were not considered, and that impacts on subsistence harvest in Canada were not adequately acknowledged.

Mike explained that the EIS process is now starting over, with public feedback being requested on a new Supplemental EIS that has incorporated changes to address the previously mentioned deficiencies. For example, almost all developmental impacts are now included in the 2,000-acre limit.

The updated Alternative B is a high-development scenario. While it respects the 2,000-acre footprint, seismic work could occur throughout the entire area. The areas most frequently used by caribou for calving would be subject to timing limitations.

The previous Alternative D1 has been adjusted and is now the new Alternative C. This alternative specifies that a lower total disturbance of 1,464 acres and seismic activity would only be allowed on leases that are sold. In the new Alternative C, those regions most frequently used by caribou for calving would not be available for lease.

The updated Alternative D is the most restrictive, with large portions of the program area not being available for development. Areas designated as “no surface occupancy” could only be accessed via horizontal drilling from adjacent leases, and seismic activity would only be allowed on leased areas.

Mike highlighted that Table 2-1 of the Supplemental EIS summarizes lease availability and lease stipulations. Lease Stipulation 7 is PCH-related and restricts vehicle types and traffic during the May 20 to June 20 period. Lease Stipulation 8 is intended to address the post-calving period of June 11 to 30. Required Operating Procedure 23 is designed to minimize disruption of caribou movements and subsistence use and Required Operating Procedure 34 addresses limitations on aircraft operations due to the presence of caribou. Central processing facilities are very loud and the number of these facilities was decreased in the more conservative alternatives.

Mike pointed out that the implementation of some of the operating procedures have significant implications on PCTC resources.

Liz stated that collaborating at a technical level would be very valuable. She will try to find out which aspects of the Supplemental EIS are going to be the most important to focus on and what language would be best in order to make the greatest impact.

The pending deadline regarding the next lease sale, the coming election, and the desire to complete the process under the Biden administration were acknowledged.

Mike stated that it is possible to request adjustments to the alternatives presented or to key components of the alternatives — for example, requesting that certain stipulations be applied under additional circumstances or requesting changes in certain boundaries.

Mike felt that overall BLM has addressed most of the deficiencies that were identified via the feedback provided to the initial EIS.

While the communities of Arctic Village and Venetie were more involved in this most recent Supplemental EIS process, Liz stated that other Alaskan Gwich'in communities were also invited to participate but apparently none of them had held meetings yet. She noted that Gwich'in Council International is less involved in the current process and is relying more on the Gwich'in Steering Committee.

It was noted that the lack of engagement of Canadian stakeholders is still a shared concern. Liz related that a letter from the Chief of Vuntut Gwitchin, once again requesting consultation with Canadian subsistence users of the herd, will be drafted and circulated.

Mike related that there have been some discussions about how the public engagement process in Canada would take place. BLM stated that they may be able to hold public meetings, but that government-to-government consultations would not be possible.

Ian McDonald noted that, while the PCMB pointed out key deficiencies of the EIS in the previous submission to BLM, the Board did not select an alternative. He felt that the PCMB should definitely restate the Board's position and that it would be good to collaborate with the other Parties and it would be beneficial to be able to review other Parties' responses as was done during the development of the previous EIS submissions.

Liz stated that Vuntut Gwitchin will be focusing on the most protective alternative and reiterating previous statements about the importance of the calving grounds.

Matt Clarke expressed the concern that PCMB's response might be ignored if the Board requests that no development in the 1002 area is preferred and if no alternative is recommended in the Board's reply. He stated that the fact that the previous comments and concerns are reflected in the new Supplemental EIS shows that the feedback process is working and that the Board should put forward a recommendation that includes the most restrictive alternative.

Alice McCulley stated that her efforts will be focused on working with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Chief and Council on a response to the Supplemental EIS and that she will therefore not be readily available to assist with drafting a response from the PCMB.

Mike informed that new scientific research with specific data regarding the effects of spacing between pipelines and roads will be available in time to be referenced in responses to the Supplemental EIS.

Communications Strategy

The PCMB's previous Communication Strategy outlined the four primary goals for external and internal communication and the methods and tools to be used to further these goals. The strategy also outlined the Board's immediate to long-term priorities related to communication.

Members reviewed the previously identified activities and actions that supported the primary goals related to external communications and discussed which of these are still relevant and new activities and actions that should be added.

Ideas and suggestions were flip-charted and later prioritized via weighted feedback by all members. The immediate to long-term priorities for external communications will be updated in a new draft Communication Strategy. Internal communication priorities will be discussed in a similar fashion at a future meeting.

A discussion arose around PCMB communications related to a decline in the herd's population and how this information might be communicated to the public. The concept of designing different messages at the beginning of decline, during the decline, and after the population stabilizes was discussed. It was noted that the timing of messages will be very important so as to maintain credibility and balance.

Next Meeting

Matt Clarke stated that the PCMB has a collective responsibility to reduce greenhouse gases. Therefore, he suggested that a virtual meeting be included in the rotation of PCMB's regular meetings to decrease the Board's footprint respecting travel-related greenhouse gas emissions. He referenced a phrase from *Our Clean Future: A Yukon strategy for climate change, energy and a green economy* which recommends using technology to move ideas, not people. Ian McDonald and Jeffrey Peter supported this suggestion and recommended that the Board purchase a Meeting Owl or similar videoconferencing technology to facilitate better quality virtual meetings.

It was suggested that Deana poll members via e-mail regarding their availability for a mid-December meeting.

Closing Prayer and Adjournment

Barry Greenland offered a closing prayer. The meeting was adjourned at 3:35 p.m.