

**2010 Tâichô Government and Government of Northwest Territories  
Revised Joint Proposal on Caribou Management Actions in Wek'èezhii:  
closing comments for the Wek'èezhii Renewable Resource Board**

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30 July 2010

The way forward for recovery of the Bathurst and neighboring caribou herds in Wek'èezhii lies in people working together in the spirit of respect and responsibility. The revised Joint Proposal accepts this and offers a pathway to halting the caribou declines over the next 2 years. The Tâichô Government's and Government of Northwest Territories submitted their Joint Proposal on Caribou Management Actions to the Wek'èezhii Renewable Resource Board in December 2009. That proposal was revised during TG-GNWT meetings following the public hearings adjourned in March 2010. WRRB requested that I attend those meetings as an observer on behalf of the Board.

In these, my closing comments to the Wek'èezhii Renewable Resource Board, I will summarize the extent to which the revised proposal answers the questions that I raised in my intervention during the March 2010 hearings. I have also identified some further questions that arise from the revised proposal. I had questioned about how likely was the recovery of the Bathurst herd when recovery was to be based on an almost unilateral imposition of hunting restrictions on the aboriginal harvest. I had queried the lack of a collaborative approach and the lack of alternative actions to increase cow survival. I had outlined the need for adaptive management - the logical sequence from objectives and actions using monitoring as feedback on the success or failure of actions.

Foremost among the strengths of the revised Joint Proposal is that it was written collaboratively in the context of adaptive co-management and it is applied to the Bluenose East and Ahiak herds as well as the Bathurst herd. The age-old relationship between caribou and people which has allowed people to acquire knowledge and rules about living with changes in caribou abundance is clearly integrated into the revised proposal. There is now collaborative agreement on actions 4 and 5 which stringently restricts aboriginal harvest of both female and male caribou. Those actions will use a rules-based approach (Table 5 and Appendix 1) based on historic and contemporary rules. Actions 1-3 restricting residents, guide/outfitter hunts for non-residents and commercial harvesters are the same as the original proposal. The likelihood of success is enhanced through additional proposed action to increase caribou survival as the revised Joint Proposal's actions for recovery now include wolf management.

The revised proposal is strengthened through its structure: principles, goals leading to objectives, management actions and monitoring as feedback on the efficiency of the actions. The actions listed in the recovery plan are likely to be effective in meeting the proposal's herd specific goals (to halt the declines and minimize further risk of decline).

The monitoring actions listed in the original proposal are re-worked into an annual cycle now listed as Action 6 and based on adaptive management. The list (Table 4) includes collaborative monitoring to describe the direct effects of actions (such as restricting hunting or removing wolves). The list also includes monitoring the response of the caribou herd to the recovery action(s) such as annual trend in calving ground densities. Trends in breeding cows depend on condition and health; pregnancy rates, calf survival and adult sex ratio which will also be monitored. Table 4 does not, however, include monitoring environmental influences such as insect abundance, plant greening and winter conditions which establishes the context for the success of management actions.

It is a strength of the revised proposal that it no longer relies on a census in 2012 to assess feedback on management actions but instead is based on tracking trends at an annual scale. A significant feature is the proposed May, August and December reviews of monitoring information. It is also commendable that the revised proposal now includes an implementation plan with flowcharts showing how government and community structures will work together.

However, despite the strengths of the revised proposal, it leaves questions unanswered. For example, questions remain about whether the proposed harvest restrictions are a Total Allowable Harvest. The arguments posed in the Executive Summary (#6) are not followed up or amplified in the body of the proposal to explain how it distinguishes a 'target' (restricted harvest) from a TAH or the implications. Text in Sections 5 and 7 acknowledges the role of WRRB and also that 'observers' from WRRB will be part of the technical working group (Section 8.1). The text does not specify how the final implementation plan (for the 2-year plan) relates to a comprehensive proposal (Tâichô Final Agreement Section 12.11.2).

The revised proposal is long on text and short on detail. For example, in Section 9.2 on cumulative effects and landscape planning has no specifics for short-term monitoring or how longer-term planning will be initiated – this is especially obvious for calving ground protection despite the frequency with which stakeholders have identified the importance of protecting calving grounds.

The collaborative approach grounded in adaptive co-management raises practical questions. The approach will be hungry in the use of time and money. While the revised joint proposal mentions the need for a detailed implementation plan, it does not mention a safety net such as inter-jurisdictional agreements to ensure the adequacy of people's time and funding commitments over the short and longer-term. Additionally, given the extent of the sacrifices that people are being asked to make about their dependence on caribou, it is essential to be able to assure them that the success of their efforts is being monitored. For example, the Caribou Community Committees will require funding to monitor the land and the relationship between the Tâichô and the caribou. The triannual monitoring meetings and preparation for them, for example, are a significant use of staff time. Given the extent of collaboration, allocation of resources and sharing of information including data management are issues yet to be resolved or even acknowledged. Timely and equitable access to data have been identified as a problem elsewhere in co-management and so it would be prudent for the revised proposal to address it.

The question of access to data was also an issue that interveners raised during the public hearings. The revised proposal has little to say about the diverse views of stakeholders yet for planning to be collaborative, it has to be inclusive. For example, landscape planning without other land managers and users including, for example, the mining industry will have limited support.

Another question is that the revised proposal does not acknowledge how to prepare for and manage expectations on the resumption of hunting. For example, the revised proposal refers to the 'suspension' of commercial, outfitter and resident hunting with the implication of resumption for those categories of hunting. But the proposal does not mention experience elsewhere, for example, the Fortymile caribou herd is that recovery takes time (decades) and goes in fits and starts. The resumption of hunting was slow. The experience from fisheries is that resumption of fishing is often problematic<sup>1</sup>. " More troublesome is the reality that closed fisheries tend to be reopened at the first sign of population increase, rather than after the attainment of some target level for recovery."

The revised proposal does not clearly acknowledge uncertainty for halting the decline. The message that the probability of recovery is about the same as the probability of a decline is buried in Appendix 3. However, that modeling may under-estimate the probability of recovery if it does not factor in the reduced death rate for cow (assuming a decline in wolf predation). The objective for the Bathurst raises some technical issues (which could have usefully been detailed in an Appendix). The objective is "a stable trend" in the number of breeding cows on the calving ground (2010-12). Measuring the trend could start with June 2009 which would increase sample size. Statistical stability could be the consequence of a low rate of decline or increase or no change (stability). Discrimination between those three will influence management actions and will depend on criteria established for the other monitoring indicators including environmental trends as well as the skewed age distribution. Additionally, I doubt setting levels for calf:cow ratios is appropriate as an objective because the ratio is more dependent on environmental variables than management actions.

In summary, the revised proposal answers questions raised during my intervention about a collaborative approach to adaptive co-management. The proposal now includes Tâichô knowledge, values and rules. An innovative approach for community-based committees, which was suggestion from an intervener, strengthens the revised proposal. Key issues for implementation are not included such as resumption of harvesting, how a more inclusive approach can be attained and practicalities such as information access and flow; funding and inter-jurisdictional agreements. However the progress made toward collaborative planning is huge and a testimony to the patience of WRRB in accepting the adjournment that led to the two governments revising the proposal.

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<sup>1</sup> Hutchings, J. A. and J. D. Reynolds. 2004. Marine Fish Population Collapses: Consequences for Recovery and Extinction Risk. *BioScience* 54: 297-309.

