

## Submission

Sahtu Renewable Resources Board  
to the  
Wek'eezhi Renewable Resources Board Public Hearing  
on the  
Bathurst Caribou Management Plan  
January 2010

### **Introduction**

Caribou remain an extremely important natural resource for the communities of the Sahtu Region. The Sahtu Harvest Study, conducted between 1997 and 2002, indicated that our communities harvest barren-ground caribou from three main herds, namely the Bluenose West (BNW), the Bluenose East (BNE), and the Bathurst herds (BA). In addition, boreal woodland and boreal mountain caribou remain important in the harvest for some Sahtu communities.

In 2007, when faced with a major conservation issue concerning the BNW herd, similar to that facing the Wek'eezhi Renewable Resource Board (WRRB) and the BA herd today, the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board (SRRB) conducted a public hearing. A number of surveys of the herd conducted by the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) indicated that BNW herd had declined significantly and urgent management actions were required. In its report on the public hearing, the SRRB made a number of recommendations to the GNWT that placed clear limitations on the harvest of the BNW herd by Sahtu communities including the setting of a Total Allowable Harvest and the closure of other types of harvest. Implementation of these recommendations has been achieved cooperatively with our Inuvialuit and Gwich'in partners in the management BNW herd. The SRRB also provided recommendations to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) concerning development on the range of the BNW herd and its potential impact on caribou habitat, in particular the issuance of third party rights on the land (e.g., prospecting permits, petroleum leases).

The purpose of this submission to the WRRB is to:

- 1) to emphasize the role that the SRRB has in the management of transboundary wildlife populations, as described in the Sahtu Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement (SDMCLCA).
- 2) to underscore the importance of the BNE caribou herd to the Sahtu Region.

- 3) to underscore the direct and indirect effects the outcomes of this hearing and proposed management actions on the BA herd may have on the BNE caribou herd and the Sahtu residents who depend on it.

### **SRRB Mandate**

The SRRB was created in 1993 through the SDMLCLCA. Section 13.8.1 (a) states that “ The Renewable Resources Board shall be established to be the main instrument of wildlife management in the settlement area and that the Board will act in the public interest”. Section 13.8.32 of the SDMLCLCA also states “Government may consult the Board on any matter which will likely impact on wildlife or wildlife habitat in the settlement area and shall seek the timely advice of the Board on..... (g) plans for cooperative management and research relating to species and populations not wholly within the settlement area”. The SRRB believes there is solid evidence based on years of caribou telemetry conducted by the GNWT as well as the knowledge held by the Sahtu Dene and Métis that the ranges of both the BNE and BA caribou herds straddle the boundary between the Sahtu and Tlicho Regions (Figures 1 and 2), The SRRB contends, therefore, that it has a clear role to play and should be consulted by the WRRB and government respecting any proposed management actions for both the BNE and BA caribou herds.

In carrying out its mandate, the SRRB has worked closely with our communities and elders to collect and store a large amount of traditional knowledge on caribou, some of which has been posted on the WRRB public registry as part of this public hearing. The SRRB believes, therefore, that it holds considerable information of direct relevance to the present caribou management challenges in both the Sahtu and Tlicho Regions.

### **The Bluenose East Caribou Herd**

The BNE herd ranges from the arctic coast in the summer to south and east of Great Bear Lake in the winter. During its annual movements, the herd incorporates three jurisdictions.....Sahtu, Tlicho, and Nunavut, although the majority of the year is spent in the Sahtu Region. The last survey in 2006 estimated 66,700 caribou. This was a substantial decline from the estimate in 2000 of 119,600. The BNE herd partially overlaps with the BNW herd on the summer range and partially with the BA herd on winter range (Figures 1 and 2). The community of Deline in the Sahtu Region harvests caribou each winter on and around Great Bear Lake. In some years caribou come close to Deline and it is very likely these are strictly from the BNE herd. However, in other winters the caribou are located on the northeast side of Great Bear Lake and some distance to the south and east of Great Bear Lake (e.g., Hottah Lake area), but they are still accessible to Deline hunters.

Data from the Sahtu Harvest Study (1997-2002) indicate that Deline hunters harvested an average of 1100 caribou per year. In some years the harvest occurred relatively close to Deline. Considering the overlap between the BNW and BA herds in that area, it is quite probable that in years when the caribou were not close to Deline the harvest consists of both BNW and BA caribou. Although the ratio is unknown, the evidence from caribou radio tracked by the GNWT would suggest the majority of these would be from the BNE herd. During these same winters, however, Tlicho hunters also harvest caribou from the same general area and it is also quite probable these are from both the BNE and BA herds with the majority being BNE caribou.

In addition, the community of Kugluktuk in Nunavut harvests caribou from the BNE herd each year. Although harvest statistics are not available, the SRRB has been advised by the GN that this harvest is approximately 1000 caribou annually.

### **Bluenose East Issues and Concerns**

The SRRB believes the limited surveys of the BNE herd and the precipitous declines of all other barren-ground caribou herds in the NWT and elsewhere suggest that the BNE herd too has declined over the last decade. SRRB has previously recommended to the GNWT, in cooperation with the Government of Nunavut (GN), that they attempt a full census of the Bluenose East Herd again in 2010. We continue to support this.

Recently, on the basis of what it believes to be an immediate conservation concern, the GNWT has imposed “interim emergency measures” in the form of an ‘all users’ ban on the hunting of barren-ground caribou in a large area north of Great Slave Lake. While this management action was not identified in the Proposal that is the subject of this public hearing, the SRRB feels that this ban has the strong possibility of shifting hunting pressure westward resulting in increased hunting pressure on the BNE herd. Owing to the unknown population status of the BNE herd the SRRB is concerned about additional harvest pressure on the BNE herd at this time. If, in fact, additional evidence indicates a decline in the BNE herd, harvesting by all users will need to be carefully scrutinized by all management authorities, just as it has with other caribou herds in the NWT. The SRRB intends to meet its obligations and take a leading role in any processes required for the identification and advancing of management actions necessary for ensuring the long term viability of the BNE herd.

The SRRB is concerned about GNWT plans to organize and underwrite the costs of hunts enabling Tlicho communities to access caribou outside the restricted area imposed by the GNWT in January 2010. We see this as directly affecting the BNE herd when they are on their winter range between Great Bear Lake and Gameti (Figures 1 and 2). Considering the likelihood that the BNE herd has

declined, the SRRB wishes to know how the size of the harvest would be determined and by who? Furthermore, if the intent of the GNWT is to stop any further harvest of the BA herd by means of the closure, and considering the overlap between the two herds on their winter ranges (Figures 1 and 2), the SRRB wishes to know how the GNWT could guarantee no harvesting of BA caribou in these community harvests.

## **Conclusions**

- 1) As the main body responsible for the management of wildlife in the Sahtu Region, and considering the shared nature of the BNE and BA herds between the Sahtu and Tlicho Regions, the SRRB needs to be directly involved in the management of these caribou herds including consultation on any proposed management actions.
- 2) In the interests of ensuring a coordinated approach to the management of the BNE and BA herds, the SRRB and WRRB need to foster a close working relationship and maintain regular communications and exchange of information.

## **Recommendations**

The SRRB wishes to make the following recommendations:

- 1) Obtaining a reliable population estimate of the BNE herd should be the highest management priority for this herd. All reasonable effort should be made to survey the BNE herd in 2010 using the most appropriate techniques as determined through the consensus of the appropriate management authorities, including the SRRB. The survey should be a cooperative approach between the GNWT, the GN, and the SRRB. The SRRB is willing to direct resources, financial or otherwise, towards this survey.
- 2) Another management priority should be obtaining key demographic data on the BNE herd including early and late calf survival, recruitment, and adult sex ratio.
- 3) Management actions related to any future harvest limitations on the BNE and BA herds should be enforced, if necessary, by the GNWT in a consistent and transparent manner.
- 4) The Government of Canada (INAC), GNWT, GN, WRRB, and SRRB should continue to work to develop protection measures for the calving grounds of the BNE and BA caribou herds.

- 5) It is crucial that for any present and future harvest regime for both the BNE and BA herds that reliable community caribou harvest data be obtained. The SRRB recommends that harvest data surveys should be a cooperative endeavour between all the relevant management agencies and Boards. The SRRB is willing to devote resources to updating harvest data from communities dependent on primarily the BNE herd.
  
- 6) If community harvests subsidized by the GNWT are going to continue west of the closure area north of Great Slave Lake, the SRRB recommends the Total Allowable Harvest be based on a very conservative estimate of the population size of the BNE herd determined by applying the observed BA herd rate of decline to the last reliable population estimate for the BNE herd in 2006.