



Tłıchǫ Government

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July 30, 2010

Wek'èezhii Renewable Resources Board
102A, 4504 49th Ave
Yellowknife
X1A 1A7

Attention: Grant Pryznyk, Interim Chair

Dear Mr. Pryznyk:

I am writing to provide the board with an overview of the presentation that the Tłıchǫ Government will make during the reconvened public hearing regarding the *Revised Joint Proposal on Caribou Management Actions in Wek'èezhii* on August 5-6, 2010 in Behchokò, NT.

The Tłıchǫ Government has the utmost respect for the due process and important role that the Wek'èezhii Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) has to play in these hearings and all other wildlife management issues in the Wek'èezhii area. We would like to express our appreciation for granting our request for an adjournment in March. We recognize that this request has led to a more lengthy time period within which to make decisions on this very important issue - an issue that is important for both Aboriginal and non Aboriginal peoples alike in the North. We do feel that the additional time has allowed the Tłıchǫ Government to work together with ENR-GNWT in respectful cooperation and in the true intent of co-management as intended in the Tłıchǫ Agreement.

The two parties have confirmed management actions 1,2 and 3 – cessation of all hunting by residents, guide/outfitter hunts for non-residents and commercial harvesters. On Management actions 4 and 5 pertaining to Aboriginal harvest, the parties have now come to agreement in the revised proposal, and we have also added an important management action regarding predator management.

One of the major changes that this revised plan has is it's acknowledgement of the crucial role that the Bathurst caribou play in Tłıchǫ language, culture and way of life – which is why it is imperative that we take tangible action to ensure the herd has a chance to recover. The revised proposal also begins to formulate a community based implementation plan.

The Tłıchǵo Government's presentation will be given by the Grand Chief, John B Zoe and Eddie Erasmus. The Tłıchǵo Government will be asking the Board to accept and recommend implementation of the revised joint management proposal, because:

The Tłıchǵo Government is convinced that the population of the Bathurst Caribou Herd has declined very steeply. The exact numbers are not the issue at hand and we are not in a position to ignore or deny the information that we have before us. We have enough information now to know that it is our responsibility, as a government and as stewards of the land to exercise the precautionary principle when it comes to the management of this species, so crucial to our language, culture and way of life.

The Tłıchǵo government, the Tłıchǵo citizens, ENR-GNWT and any other individuals or businesses in the NWT cannot afford to make a 'bad' decision right now. A bad decision would be to do nothing, and to continue to hunt caribou as we have in the past – both Aboriginal and non Aboriginal alike. If we are to continue hunting at these rates, the already declining caribou population will continue to disappear at an even faster rate. The consequences of this would not only impact the Tłıchǵo and other aboriginal people of today but for generations to come. The more animals we hunt now, the harder and longer it will take for the population to recover and the greater impact it will have on our people - this is a risk that we are not willing to take. The survival of the herd makes it necessary to reduce Aboriginal hunting to the levels in the amended joint management plan.

The Tłıchǵo Government sees this as a way to protect Tłıchǵo treaty rights to hunt and their intimate relationship to the caribou, for present and future generations.

The Tłıchǵo Government and Tlıcho communities, elders and harvesters will participate fully in all parts of the revised joint management plan in order to implement it effectively. This participation will include the development of a community based monitoring program where community members will participate in data collection, data sharing and discussion of findings – what they mean and their importance.

Adaptive co-management is the approach that will be used in the future management of the Bathurst Herd. This approach combines learning and adapting to changing circumstances and uncertain conditions which is implemented in the context of shared power and responsibility between governments, resource users and resource-based communities. This will ensure that we practice shared learning and are paying attention to any indicators that may show themselves along the way, and respond to them in an efficient and effective manner.

Education is another key part of the revised proposal. Education of both our own traditional knowledge, respect and laws associated with the caribou, the science behind the caribou decline and health education will all be a part of implementation. Following in the knowledge of Chief Jimmy Bruno, we must be 'strong like two people' and have respect and knowledge of both our own Traditional Knowledge, which is the basis of who we are as Tłıchǵo people as well as respect and knowledge of western science and understanding.

The plan will be implemented jointly by the Tłı̨chǫ Government and ENR-GNWT, on a co-management and partnership basis. This is required by and consistent with the Tlı̨cho Agreement.

The Tłı̨chǫ communities have lived with caribou shortages in earlier times, surviving and maintaining their way of life in those circumstances by reducing hunting pressure on caribou and increasing the harvest of fish and other animals. The Tłı̨chǫ Government knows that we can do that again now, to ensure that the Bathurst herd can recover and grow back to healthy and sustainable population levels.

The proposed predator control measures are a good addition to the plan - and will support recovery of the herd while also supporting our people to practice their traditional activities of trapping.

The revised joint management plan calls for hunting targets rather than Total Allowable Harvests. This is not simply semantics but a crucial part of the implementation and success of this plan. By encouraging Tłı̨chǫ communities to willingly participate in the implementation of the plan, and because a target based approach is consistent with the fact that population information for caribou herds can never be exact, the use of hunting targets will ensure the Tłı̨chǫ people - the harvesters most dependant upon the Bathurst herd - will participate and limit their harvest to ensure the herd an opportunity to stabilize and recover.

The hunting targets that the Tłı̨chǫ Government and ENR-GNWT have agreed to is 300 caribou \pm 10% in total from this herd, with at least 80% of this harvest being bulls. Allocation of this harvest will require further discussion between TG, ENR-GNWT, and other Aboriginal groups. This target of 300 is meant to be for the Bathurst herd in its entirety, not only within Wek'èezhii. The Tłı̨chǫ Government and ENR-GNWT recognize that this number will be shared with other aboriginal groups who are not necessarily within the Wek'èezhii boundary.

In addition, we must emphasize that 300 animals are not the only caribou that the Aboriginal groups will have access to. In the Tłı̨chǫ region, Wekweètì will be given first priority of the Bathurst animals as they have limited access to other herds. Our other communities – Gametì, Whatì and Behchokǫ will still have access to the Bluenose East caribou, however restraint must be exercised in order to ensure that we do not export a problem of over hunting to the Bluenose East herd.

This revised proposal is largely about the short term stabilization of the caribou herd, but the Tłı̨chǫ Government also wants to ensure that the long term planning has not been set aside. We fully intend to follow through with the development of landscape management strategies for the caribou herds and also consider cumulative effects.

The Tłı̨chǫ Government and ENR-GNWT have come a long way since the adjournment of the hearing in March, 2010. Perhaps further than we had come in the last 3 years. This being the main point to take away from the revised Joint Plan - that we have moved forward – in a cooperative and collaborative manner. We have listened and learned from the 3 day hearing in March to each and every stakeholder as well the WRRB's expert witness – taking this all into consideration in this new proposal.

We recognize that the submission of this proposal and this hearing is only the first step in the stabilization and recovery of the Bathurst caribou herd. The real work is yet to come but the Board and all stakeholders – Aboriginal and non Aboriginal can be assured that the Tł̨ch̨ Government is committed and determined to work with our own people and ENR-GNWT to implement this plan for the sake of the caribou in and of their own right but also for the future of Tł̨ch̨ Language, culture and way of life.

In Tł̨ch̨ Unity,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Eddie Erasmus', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Eddie Erasmus,
Lands Protection Director