

CARIBOU HERD STATUS IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES FACT SHEET

Porcupine Caribou Herd

Status: Estimated to be 123,000 in 2001; has been declining slowly since 1989.

Management: Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) sits on the Porcupine Caribou Management Board (PCMB), which is implementing the Porcupine Caribou Management Plan and is currently reviewing a draft Harvest Management Strategy.

This herd calves in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in Alaska and winters in the north Yukon and Northwest Territories (NWT).

Recent efforts to obtain an estimate of population size using post-calving photo surveys in July have been unsuccessful, including 2008. A calving ground photo survey is planned for this herd in 2009. A workshop on modeling the herd's population trend with various hunter harvest management options was held in Inuvik in October 2007.

Approximately 100 caribou are collared in this herd.

Next Steps:

Conduct population survey in 2009. Composition surveys to assess survival of calves are carried out annually in late March or early April.

Cape Bathurst/Tuktoyaktuk Peninsula Caribou Herd

Status: Estimated to be 1,800 on Cape Bathurst and 3,100 on Tuktoyaktuk Peninsula in 2006 (an unknown portion of which are Reindeer). Recruitment in spring 2007 was low, but good in spring 2008 (41 calves: 100 cows for Tuk Peninsula, 49 calves: 100 cows for Cape Bathurst), consistent with other NWT herds. Calf production in June 2007 was low on Cape Bathurst but higher on Tuktoyaktuk Peninsula.

Management: A Management Plan was prepared in 1998. Implementation of the Plan includes monitoring movements, calving distribution and calf survival.

A post calving photo census of the Cape Bathurst herd was last conducted in July 2006 and another will be conducted in 2009.

Calving distribution was documented in June 2007 and June 2008. Calving distribution was similar to surveys conducted between 2002 and 2005.

ENR has implemented management recommendations from the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (WMAC) (NWT) and the Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board (GRRB) including creation of a new barren-ground caribou management area covering the major portion of the range, and closure of all hunting within the new area.

Hunting by Inuvialuit Beneficiaries is still permitted on Tuktoyaktuk Peninsula where caribou are found along with feral reindeer except from April 15 to June 15 to allow the Cape Bathurst caribou to migrate through that area undisturbed.

Next Steps:

Major deployment of collars (March 2009) for post calving photo census (July 2009)

Update management plan for Cape Bathurst herd (2008 and 2009).

Bluenose-West Caribou Herd

Status: Estimated to be 18,000 in 2006; has declined by approximately 82 percent from 98,900 in 1987. Recruitment in spring 2008 was better than in recent years (41 calves:100 cows), consistent with results in other herds. Calf production in June 2007 and 2008 was good.

Management: A Management Plan was prepared in 1998. Implementation of the Plan includes monitoring seasonal movements, calving distribution and calf survival. This plan is being updated with co-management boards.

A post calving photo census was conducted in July 2005 and 2006 and another is planned for July 2009.

Calving distribution was documented in June 2007 and June 2008. Calving distribution was similar to surveys conducted between 2002 and 2005.

ENR implemented management recommendations from WMAC (NWT), GRRB and the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board (SRRB) including closure of all commercial, non-resident alien, non-resident and resident harvesting within the respective settlement areas.

WMAC (NWT) and GRRB identified a target total allowable harvest of 720 caribou/year.

The SRRB conducted public hearings on setting a total allowable harvest (TAH) for Sahtu Beneficiaries on November 21-23, 2007 in Fort Good Hope. The SRRB has recommended a total annual allowable harvest of 4%, with the harvest primarily focused on bulls (80%), and recommended that harvest management be reviewed after the 2009 population survey.

Next Steps:

ENR Inuvik region has initiated process with co-management boards to update Bluenose West and East management plans (2008).

Major deployment of collars (March 2009) for post calving photo census (July 2009).

Bluenose-East Caribou Herd

Status: Estimated to be 65,100 in 2006; has declined by approximately 36 percent from 104,000 in 2000. Recruitment in spring 2008 was good (48 calves:100 cows), similar to other NWT herds. Calf production in June 2007 was also good.

Management: A Management Plan is being updated with co-management boards. ENR has continued to work with Nunavut to monitor movements, calving distribution and calf survival.

A post calving photo census was conducted in July 2006 and another is planned for 2009.

Calving distribution was documented in June 2007 and 2008. Calving ground distribution surveys of the type done in June 2007 have not been carried out previously for this herd. However, the June 2007 calving ground of the Bluenose East herd is consistent with historical mapped information showing calving caribou in this herd, west of Kugluktuk and east of Bluenose Lake, in the Rae and Richardson River drainages.

ENR has implemented SRRB recommendations on management actions necessary to address the decline including closure of all commercial, non-resident alien, non-resident and resident harvesting in the Sahtu.

Information on the status of the Bluenose-East herd has also been provided to the Wek'èezhii Renewable Resources Board (WRRB).

A meeting was held in June 2008 in Iqaluit of the Bluenose Herds Caribou Management Committee to begin process to update management plans.

Next Steps:

The process to update Bluenose-West and East management plans will continue (2009).

Establish two new caribou management zones in Sahtu to separate range of two herds (Bluenose-

West and Bluenose-East).

Major deployment of collars (March 2009) for census (July 2009)

Work with the Tâîchô Government on developing a management proposal for barren-ground caribou within Wek'eezhii including the Bluenose-East and Bathurst caribou herds (2008).

Bathurst Caribou Herd

Status: Estimated to be 128,000 in 2006. The herd has declined by approximately 63 percent from 350,000 in 1996. Recruitment in spring 2008 was good (50 calves: 100 cows). Calf production in June 2007 and June 2008 was good. Adult male:female sex ratio was low in the fall of 2006 and lower in 2007 (31 bulls:100 cows).

Management:

The Bathurst Caribou Management Planning Committee completed the Management Plan for the herd in November 2004. The Plan recommends implementation of a comprehensive monitoring program and coordination of multi-party research, monitoring and management programs. ENR North Slave Region is working with the Government of Nunavut and other organizations on implementing aspects of these monitoring programs.

A calving ground census was conducted in 2006 and will be repeated in 2009. Calving distribution was mapped in June 2007 and June 2008 and was similar to that documented during the 2006 calving ground census.

While recent surveys have shown that productivity and recruitment have increased, it will take a couple years before these young animals begin to breed.

Workshops on Bathurst caribou management have been held in February 2006 and November 2006. The WRRB recommended that ENR not implement the management actions proposed to the WRRB in December 2006. A joint proposal for management actions between ENR and Tâîchô Government is being prepared.

ENR hosted a workshop on cumulative effects assessment and barren ground caribou, with the focus on the Bathurst range, in February 2008, with good attendance from co-management boards and aboriginal governments in the NWT.

Assessment of aboriginal caribou harvest was carried out via check-stations on winter roads and interviews with hunters in winter 2008.

Next Steps:

Develop comprehensive proposal for management of barren-ground caribou in Wek'eezhii (2008).

Document aboriginal harvest – communities and winter roads (Winter 2008).

Hold workshop on Bathurst Caribou Management Plan (February 2009).

Conduct photographic calving ground survey to determine number of breeding females (June 2009).

Beverly Caribou Herd

Status: Estimated at 276,000 in 1994. The low density of calving caribou and the limited extent of calving precluded conducting a planned calving ground photo-census in June 2007.

Management: The Beverly/Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board (BQCMB) released a 2005-2012 Management Plan, which calls for monitoring seasonal movements and population trends.

Calving distribution of the Beverly caribou herd in June 2007 and 2008 was very limited in extent and caribou densities were very low compared to previous surveys. Extra flying was carried out to make sure that no outlying groups of Beverly caribou were missed.

The June 2007 survey results suggest the Beverly herd has declined to very low levels and reduced

numbers of the remaining Beverly caribou may have partially abandoned the use of their traditional calving area.

The lack of data collected on the Beverly herd since the mid 1990's may preclude conclusively determining the cause of the observed change.

High harvests have been observed in southeast NWT and northern Saskatchewan over the past decade. The actual numbers harvested and the herd from which the harvest came is not known.

Twenty collars were deployed in March 2006, but due to overlap of the Ahiak and Beverly herds on winter range, only six Beverly cows were collared; the remaining collared cows were from the Ahiak herd except for one collared Qamanirjuaq cow.

Because winter collaring was not targeting Beverly animals, in collaboration with the BQCMB and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) Nunavut region, ENR deployed 17 collars on the Beverly herd in July to improve the ability to track herd movements. Six cows died (likely predation) between July and October 2007.

30 additional collars were deployed in March 2008 in the Ahiak/Beverly range and as expected most were on the Ahiak caribou calving ground in June 2008.

Next Steps:

Initiate community-based monitoring programs (Winter 2009).

Qamanirjuaq Caribou Herd

Status: Estimated at 496,000 in 1994. The calving distribution was documented in 2007. The extent of calving and calving distribution indicate that substantial numbers of caribou were calving in the area. A calving-ground census was carried out in June 2008 by Nunavut biologists and results will be released in early 2009. This herd is not harvested by NWT residents.

Management: The BQCMB has released a 2005-2012 Management Plan, which calls for monitoring seasonal movements and population trends. The BQCMB released a paper in September 2004 that calls for increased protection of important ranges and particularly calving grounds.

Next Steps:

Monitor herd movements (Government of Nunavut)

Based on survey results, BQCMB will develop Action Plans

Ahiak Caribou Herd

Status: Estimated at roughly 200,000 in 1996. Current status unknown, but has likely been stable or increased since 1996. ENR conducted systematic reconnaissance surveys of the calving ground in June 2006, 2007, and 2008 to determine distribution of calving caribou. A spring composition survey was carried out in March 2008 and the calf:cow ratio of 46 calves:100 cows was good; consistent with other NWT herds.

Management: No management planning has occurred for this transboundary herd. In the past, ENR maintained a low number of collared cows to monitor seasonal movements as this herd is harvested lightly by NWT residents. Ten satellite collars were deployed in March 2005, to allow for continued monitoring of movements for up to four years. 30 additional collars were deployed in April 2008.

About 10 additional collars were deployed by Nunavut.

Obtaining an accurate estimate of the size of the Ahiak herd will be difficult due to the remote nature of its range, weather conditions and the herd's large calving ground. The collars will need to be satellite collars due to the remote location of the calving and post calving areas. The additional collars should assist in understanding this herd's movements.

Next Steps:

Conduct fall composition survey (October 2008).

Initiate community-based monitoring programs (winter 2009).

Work with the Governments of Nunavut and Saskatchewan to identify additional monitoring and research programs necessary to improve the understanding of the Ahiak herd and interactions with adjacent herds.

Dolphin and Union Caribou Herd

Status: Estimated at 27,000 in 1997. Nunavut will release a new estimate in early 2009.

Management: This herd is harvested by Holman residents and moves between Nunavut on the mainland and Victoria Island. ENR is no longer monitoring the movements of this herd. Nunavut surveyed the herd in fall of 2007.

Next Steps:

A management plan needs to be developed in cooperation with Nunavut stakeholders. The federal Minister of the Environment has recommended the listing of Dolphin and Union Caribou as "Special Concern" under the federal Species at Risk Act (SARA).

Peary Caribou

Status: Appear to be stable on Banks Island; estimated at 1,000 in 2005; unknown on the western High Arctic Islands.

Management: A draft management plan was prepared in 1998 that has been used to guide monitoring and management. Discussions are underway with the WMAC (NWT) on recovery options and approaches.

The federal Minister of the Environment recommended that Peary Caribou be listed as "Endangered" under SARA.

Next Steps:

Once listed, a National Recovery Strategy will be required within three years. Discussions are underway with Environment Canada and Government of Nunavut on approaches to preparing the Recovery Strategy.

Update estimate on High Arctic Islands

(Boreal) Woodland Caribou

Status: Population status overall in NWT appears to be stable. However, productivity in the Cameron Hills and Dehcho areas is low, due to predation.

Management: Studies are underway across the range of Boreal caribou in the NWT to monitor distribution, population boundaries, habitat use, adult female survival and calf recruitment.

The Boreal population of woodland caribou is listed as "Threatened" species under SARA.

ENR participates in developing the draft National Recovery Strategy.

Consultations on an NWT Action Plan for Boreal Caribou Conservation were started in the fall of 2005.

Next Steps:

Revise the NWT Action Plan based on comments received in fall 2008.

Mountain Caribou

Status: Most herds appear to be stable, but there are hunter-harvest issues in road-accessible ranges.

Management:

Most northern mountain herds are found in the Yukon and northern BC. The more remote herds in these jurisdictions are considered stable although some are poorly monitored, while some accessible herds are declining and require careful management. The generally stable status of these herds is most likely due to the hitherto low level of industrial development in their ranges, as more southerly herds of this type have declined with intensive development much as boreal woodland caribou have. The northern mountain herds found in the NWT in the Mackenzie Mountains are generally remote and have not been as well-studied as those in the Yukon. GNWT biologists continue to work with Yukon Environment biologists and Parks Canada biologists on radio-collar studies and surveys of caribou in the Nahanni range. Limited satellite radio-collar studies and fall composition surveys of the little-known Redstone caribou in the central Mackenzie Mountains have been carried out by GNWT biologists.

The northern mountain population of woodland caribou is listed as "Special Concern" under the federal SARA.

ENR biologists are working with archaeologist Tom Andrews in a multi-disciplinary study of ancient snow-patches and associated caribou dung in the O'Grady Lakes area near the NWT-Yukon border in the Mackenzie Mountains. Previous similar work in Yukon has revealed interesting information dating back 4000-5000 years.

Next Steps:

ENR is participating in a multi-jurisdiction process for northern mountain caribou (which includes a steering committee and a technical working group) to develop a management plan as required under the federal SARA.

30 satellite radio-collars were placed on South Nahanni caribou in fall 2008, along with fall composition counts of Coal River and South Nahanni caribou. Yukon Environment is the lead on this work but GNWT, Parks Canada and CPAWS-NWT are cost-sharing the work.

Under the Protected Areas Strategy, the Tulita District Land Corporation is working to establish three protected areas along Keele, Mountain and Ravensthoat rivers in the Mackenzie Mountains as National