



Board Meeting Minutes

Date: 11-12 February 2025

Location: WRRB Boardroom, Yellowknife, NT

Board Members:

Joseph Judas (Chair)
Janelle Nitsiza (Tłıchǫ Appointee)
Eddie Chocolate (Tłıchǫ Appointee)
Tom Lafferty (Tłıchǫ Appointee)
Stu Niven (Federal Appointee)
Suzanne Carrière (GNWT Appointee) – Zoom
Steve Matthews (GNWT Appointee) – Zoom
Isabelle Duclos (Federal Appointee) – Zoom, Feb 11

Staff:

Laura Meinert
Mary Drake
Amanda Weltman
Jody Pellissey

Interpreters:

James Rabesca
Peter Huskey
Sammy – PIDO

Regrets:

Travis Washie (Tłıchǫ Appointee)

Guests:

Mike Gravel, ECC
Lawrence Lewis, ECC
Jocelyn Zoe, TG
Abbey Wilson, ECC
Karin Clark, ECC

Call to Order: 9:08 a.m.

Opening Prayer: Joseph Judas

1.0 Agenda and Previous Minutes

1.1 Approval of Agenda

Motion #965-11-02-2025 *To approve the 11-12 February 2025 agenda as presented*

Moved: Tom Lafferty
Second: Stu Niven

Motion Approved

1.2 Approval of Minutes

17-18 December 2024

Motion #966-11-02-2025 *To approve the 17-18 December 2024 minutes as presented*

Moved: Janelle Nitsiza
Second: Stu Niven

Motion Approved

1.3 Review of Action Items

Tabled for review by the Board Members.

2.0 Business

2.1 Review of 2024 Wolf Management Program Report, Abbey Wilson & Karin Clark, ECC

PowerPoint Presentation, entitled “*Wolf Management Program, January – October 2024 Annual Update*”, tabled

Discussions included: objective #3 was defined at the beginning of the program with input from the feasibility assessment, likely changes over the life of the program; objective #5, will there be a spike in production, any thought of collecting samples longer to answer the impact of program? Samples will be collected (skulls only), but also want a population that is not as heavily harvested, funding and capacity issue; elders are our scientists, highly respect and honor them for what they tell us about the land and environment, wolf takes a lot of caribou for their own food, wanting to have rebound of caribou again, dad said if out hunting don't harass wolves, don't think it is only wolf, also grizzly bear and wolverines, appreciate point about bringing in science and TK, hoping to do so when answering the objectives; suggestion to produce some plain language reports for consultations with communities; program review, suggest to carry on some monitoring as there is speculation what will happen in next couple of years from science and TK, experiment is finished but actually the experiment should continue as wolves are now adapting to less hunting, continue using cameras at den sites; put out cameras at den sites in September, minimal disturbance, don't touch or move anything, do not spend much time at the dens, want to leave the cameras up for 10-15 years (low cost), wolves can still abandon a site even with minimal disturbance how much disturbance, cameras have captured wolves, caribou, wolverine, grizzly bear, muskox, analysis will provide counts; animals have destroyed cameras, grizzly bear, not all cameras have armor or angle bar, plans to improve set up in the future, only interact with the cameras once a year; suggestion to hire a consultant to do an external review of the program, follow up program is necessary.

2.2 Review & Approval of Tłıchq Government Management Proposal – Wolf Harvesting Program

TG wishes to establish a community-based dıga harvest training program at an on-the-land camp where the focus is harvesting dıga while facilitating knowledge exchange between experienced and less experienced dıga harvesters. The overall goal of the program will be to continue Tłıchq efforts to reduce dıga numbers sufficiently to enable an increase in survival rates of both calf and adult ekwō and continue contributing to the recovery of the ekwō herds.

The program will run from January 1, 2025 to January 1, 2026, with harvesting starting mid-February to April 2025 at Wekweétı and MacKay Lake. Harvesting techniques will include shooting with a rifle and/or setting up snares and traps. Dıga will be skinned either on-site or in Behchokō, where experienced harvesters

will teach skinning techniques to others. Options for culturally appropriate disposal or repurposing of carcasses, such as using them for bait, will be explored.

Discussion included: is this a management proposal for wolf removal or a cultural activity, CEC wanted this submitted as a management proposal; message from elders to regrow caribou populations by harvesting wolves, can't just stop program, rely on harvesters in communities, one less predator to kill a caribou, packs of twenty are hunting the herd, harvest wolves for necessity or safety, feel that caribou will benefit from the program; snares not humane, use gun to harvest wolves, not supposed to travel with wolf and caribou together, use plastic bags for the wolves, wrap them; ensure good data collection with samples (skulls) and transfer of knowledge; don't think there is a financial benefit to harvesters this year (no incentive); request that TG report on effectiveness of the program (did they meet their core objectives), ensure data collection is comparable to previous wolf management program.

Motion #970-12-02-2025 *To approve the Tłıchǵ Government Management Proposal, entitled "Wolf Harvesting Program", as presented*

Moved: Tom Lafferty
Second: Isabelle Duclos

Motion Approved

ACTION #690-12-02-2025 (ED): To write letter to Tłıchǵ Government to approve the Management Proposal, entitled "*Wolf Harvesting Program*".

2.3 Review & Approval of Wildlife Research Permit Application – Audiologgers for Monitoring Fine-scale Caribou Behaviour

On February 5, 2025, the State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF) submitted a Wildlife Research Permit application to obtain vital information on the behavior, health, survival and reproduction of Kòk'èetì, Sahtì, and Beverly Ekwò herds by attaching lightweight audiologgers on ʔekwò collars deployed by GNWT. The audiologger data will allow one to describe how much time ʔekwò spend resting, eating, vocalizing, etc., including mother-calf communications, and if that changes when they are exposed to disturbances like insect harassment or traffic.

The objectives of the program, occurring from March 1, 2025 to August 31, 2025 are to: 1) Build time budgets of ʔekwò activity; 2) Understand impacts of noise harassment on ʔekwò; 3) Obtain data on calving and mother-calf communication, and 4) Study insect harassment. Audiologgers will be small (175g, 4.5x7x7.9 cm) devices containing motion sensors, audio recorder, drop-off device, and GPS/VHF transmitters. The audiologgers will drop off at a predetermined time. Twenty audiologgers will drop-off in late April to capture interactions with roads and mines, and twenty audiologgers will drop late in August to capture calving and post-calving. This project is dependent on GNWT-ECC deployment of collars

on Ɂekwò, which is permitted under a separate Wildlife Research Permit and NWT Wildlife Care Committee approval

Discussions included: are audiloggers able record the weather? Recordings collected can hear caribou digging in the snow; possible to use for wolves?; record during the fall/rut? Only from March to August; collected audiloggers from pilot study? 22 put out and did not collect any, trouble with batteries due to temperature but now have military grade lithium batteries.

Motion #967-11-02-2025 *To approve the Wildlife Research Permit Application, entitled “Audiologgers for Monitoring Fine-scale Caribou Behaviour”, as presented*

Moved: Tom Lafferty
Second: Janelle Nitsiza

Motion Approved

ACTION #687-11-02-2025 (ED): To write letter to SUNY-ESF to approve the Wildlife Research Permit Application, entitled “Audiologgers for Monitoring Fine-scale Caribou Behaviour”.

2.4 Update on NWT Wood Bison Progress Report

Under the *Species at Risk (NWT) Act*, a progress report is required every five years, or sooner, to report on the actions undertaken to implement a management plan or recovery strategy, and on the progress made toward meeting its objectives. Wood bison are listed as a threatened species under the NWT and federal *Species at Risk Acts*. Wood bison are scheduled for reassessment by the NWT Species at Risk Committee in 2026.

The Progress Report on the Recovery of Wood Bison (*Bison bison athabasca*) in the Northwest Territories is a report on progress towards the recovery of wood bison in the NWT from 2020 to 2024. It describes the actions taken by co-management partners to implement the *Recovery Strategy for Wood Bison (Bison bison athabasca) in the Northwest Territories* and meets the legislative requirement for a progress report under the *Species at Risk (NWT) Act*. Management partners will continue to use this strategy to help assign priorities and allocate resources for wood bison conservation and recovery. The recovery strategy will be reviewed again in five years and progress on its implementation (2025–2029) will be reported in 2030.

2.5 Update on Progress on Implementation Actions: Barren-ground Caribou, Amphibians, Boreal Caribou, Bats

Summary of 2024 implementation activities for boreal caribou, bats, barren-ground caribou, and amphibians were reviewed with the Board.

2.6 Update on Wek'èezhì Forest Management Plan

In November 2021, a Working Group was formed including staff from WRRB, TG, and GNWT Forest Management. The Working Group has written a draft Wek'èezhì Forest Management Plan that covers topics such as landscape dynamics, species at risk, forest data, Tłıchq traditional forest uses, timber harvest and the comments brought up at the community consultation sessions completed in October 2022. A list of directions has also been included in the plan to guide how the plan will be used over the next five years.

On November 12-15, 2024, the Working Group did another round of engagement in all Tłıchq communities to collect feedback on the draft, and to conduct mapping exercises to learn where community members harvest wood. None of the communities expressed concerns about there not being enough wood to harvest. Behchokò did raise concerns over lack of enforcement along the highway, and in Whatì, there was a suggestion to create educational materials on community harvesting areas that can include other zoning information such as hunting zones. Information gathered during the community consultation sessions will be incorporated into the final draft of the Wek'èezhì Forest Management Plan. Once completed, the final draft will come to the Board as a management proposal.

Discussions included: reforestation included in WFMP? WFMP does speak to forest renewal, talks about fires and regeneration, three directions, 1) collect seeds, 2) assist with advising where to replant, 3) monitor regeneration, recent community engagements focused more on areas that have burned and where people go to harvest wood rather than replanting; section about mushroom harvest? Not specifically, sections for forest vegetation inventory and traditional forest use, speak to following protocols for mushroom harvest, Tłıchq Citizens may be included in commercial harvest of mushrooms? Definition of forest in the plan? WFMP heavily focused on trees and wood harvesting, pushing to include all other resources (mushrooms, berries, etc).

2.7 Party Updates

a) Environment & Climate Change, GNWT, Forest Management Division, Mike Gravel & Lawrence Lewis

PowerPoint Presentations entitled, *"Fire Management Overview, February 2025"* and *"North Slave Region WRRB Engagement 2025"*, tabled

Fire Management Overview

Discussions included: Protecting what is important including green space that is left, Fire Smart program to teach people what they can do to protect property and community, need to do more to share with communities to get meaningful comments, programs available that offer harvester assistance, i.e., relocate trap line, rebuild cabins, not full replacement, but can help; No policy with respect to ownership, if see cabin then take measures as best as can to protect property, crew in helicopter don't know who owns what, something to look at in the future people legally allowed to be on the land, indigenous rights holder, or someone who should have lease? looking at properties that have not done anything to protect their property or investment vs owner that has put in effort to protect

property?; action every fire at some point? Assess every single fire and determine what action is required, e.g., monitor only, fight entire fire, fight one side of fire that is near a VAR and let the rest go, initially go out and fly over area then use satellite information to assess daily; due to weather/climate changes, has assessing fires changed? Action more fires earlier in the season (May/June) due to drought, 2023 there was so much fire so unable to keep up, therefore policy the past few years to initial attack earlier in the season; fire management have input into GNWT road app? No input into the app, do use weather information to make decisions, highways makes decisions about highways, evacuation decisions are made by community and MACA but use fire management information, can request roads to be closed for safety reasons, highway staff travel road to monitor and determine if a road should be closed; fires burning deeper is that true? Where happening? Fires burning deep in the ground, mostly in the south slave, 12+ fires in the early spring, earlier notice with community governments so aware what doing with a fire, meet with indigenous leaders before the fire season and what to expect, weekly updates with idea of what fires may be a problem; smoke still learning, fire fighters work in smoke, what effect is that having on their health? Better tools and protective equipment, community level have been recommending that communities invest in air filters, access to fresh air buildings to get out of the smoke esp. for elders and people with breathing problems.

North Slave Region Update

Discussions included: No over winter fires but fire started in February and then popped up again in May, seasons are getting longer, earlier starts and longer to end, speak with communities to determine who stays behind to work, invite elders to meetings so better understanding of what will happen in event of fire close to community, what to focus on protecting, available equipment in town; Earlier spring and later fall, enough resources to have fire crews for entire time? Starting crews earlier in the past few years, starting May 5 in 2025, funding from federal government to extend crews, if see need, will ask to extend crews, recognize that things are changing in the forest and the environment; Issuing wood cutter permits? What to do and what not to do? See people parked on corners, taking up too much room, not looking when turning around, etc., Forest Management Plan has a section on best practices, talk to infrastructure as no control over who parks on the road, looking at access roads but who to pay for it?

Document, entitled “*ECC Wildlife Management Division Headquarters Update*”, tabled

Tabled for review by the Board Members.

b) Tłıchq Government, Jocelyn Zoe & Janelle Nitsiza

PowerPoint Presentation entitled, “*Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è- Tłıchq Caribou Monitoring*”, tabled

Discussions included: any consultation with outfitters at MacKay Lake and Lac de Gras?; in 2025: plan for winter camp at MacKay Lake (20 days total) and three summer camps, launching Future Guardians Program to teach youth about respectful harvesting, the barrenlands, and stories of the ancestors, planning a

caribou conference for May 5-9, 2025; reasons for caribou “piling up” on the west side of the highway, traffic and the berms, when road closes due to weather the caribou move a lot, steady flow of traffic during the day and night, increased hunters, SUNY-ESF work looking at caribou and roads, noted that snowbanks can be pretty high and should be kept graded to help caribou movement; ENK observations are limited to on the ground only and some areas are difficult to access during the summer, winter using skidoo so not as limited in accessing area.

3.0 Financial

3.1 Review & Approval of 2025/2026 Budget & Work Plan

Discussions included: deferred revenue as of 31 March 2024, \$910,613; 10-year funding cycle ends 31 March 2027, required to return any surplus, follow up with CIRNAC regarding new funding method.

Motion #968-11-02-2025 *To approve the 2025/2026 budget and work plan as presented*

Moved: Tom Lafferty
Second: Steve Matthews

Motion Approved

ACTION #688-11-02-2025 (ED): To send 2025/2026 budget and work plan to CIRNAC.

ACTION #693-12-02-2025(ED): To follow up with CIRNAC regarding future funding agreements after 31 March 2027.

3.2 Review & Approval of Financial Statements as of 31 January 2025

Motion #969-11-02-2025 *To approve the financial statement as of 31 January 2025 as presented*

Moved: Suzanne Carrière
Second: Steve Matthews

Motion Approved

4.0 Operations

4.1 Review of ERM External Review

ERM completed the final report as of January 2025. The report was shared with WRRB technical advisors, TG, and ECC-GNWT. Following review with the Board, the report will be added to the WRRB’s website. Overall, ERM concluded that the Board and Parties have increased dialogue and collaboration and strengthened relationships since the first joint management proposal process (2010), increasingly consider traditional knowledge alongside scientific

knowledge, and make sound proposals and determinations and recommendations for Bathurst caribou management and monitoring. ERM identified improvements that the Board and Parties can make to support continuous improvement of the current process and the management and monitoring actions to further strengthen Bathurst caribou management and monitoring.

Discussions included: third party reviews are informative/valuable, some of the recommendations may delete the ability of the Board to be independent, third party may not understand the mechanics as well as the Board, develop a qualitative assessment response, prioritizing the list of improvements provided.

ACTION #689-11-02-2025 (ED): To develop qualitative assessment response with prioritization and bring to Board at May 2025 meeting.

4.2 Review & Approval of 2025-2030 Strategic Plan

The WRRB held a two-day workshop session facilitated by PlanIt North in October 9-10, 2024 to complete the work required to revise the Strategic Plan and Communications Strategy for 2025-2030. Overall, the changes suggested to the Strategic Plan focused on the current operating environment, goals, and activities sections. There was a clear interest in engaging with topics broadly related to the WRRB's mandate (such as fire suppression policies), as well as a desire to think proactively or anticipate coming priority areas. More discussion is required to better understand how the WRRB mandate impacts the scope of activities the group can engage in.

It is noteworthy that the current framing of the goals and activities suggests that they will never be complete, but that the actions taken to meet them will shift from one version of the plan to the next. This infers that the Strategic Plan is unlikely to require successive updates in future but could instead serve as a visual communications tool for partners and communities. It was suggested that an annual action planning exercise to identify the specific ways Board members and staff will enact the activities in the Strategic Plan from year to year would be beneficial.

Motion #974-12-02-2025 *To approve the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan as presented*

Moved: Eddie Chocolate
Second: Tom Lafferty

Motion Approved

ACTION #691-12-02-2025 (ED): To post 2025-2030 Strategic Plan to WRRB website.

4.3 Review & Approval of 2025-2026 Communications Strategy

The WRRB held a two-day workshop session facilitated by PlanIt North in October 9-10, 2024 to complete the work required to revise the Strategic Plan and Communications Strategy for 2025-2030.

The process for updating the Communications Plan focused on answering three key questions: 1) Who does the WRRB communicate information to? 2) What kinds of information does the WRRB communicate? and 3) What types of tools work best for communicating these types of information? During the discussion, the group worked to identify different suitable tool types (i.e., digital or web-based tools and traditional or non-web-based tools) for each audience, which can serve as a starting point for a communications decision tree, where the type of information needing to be shared can be combined with the desired audience(s) to lead to suitable communication tool choices.

Motion #975-12-02-2025 *To approve the 2025-2030 Communications Strategy as presented*

Moved: Isabelle Duclos
Second: Janelle Nitsiza

Motion Approved

ACTION #692-12-02-2025 (ED): To post 2025-2030 Communications Strategy to WRRB website.

4.4 In-camera Session

Motion #971-12-02-2025 To go in camera at 1:18 p,

Moved: Steve Matthews
Second: Stu Niven

Motion Approved

Motion #972-12-02-2025 *To come out of camera at 1:30 pm*

Moved: Steve Matthews
Second: Stu Niven

Motion Approved

Motion #973-12-02-2025 *To approve Jody Pellissey's request for pay out of 21 days of annual leave*

Moved: Steven Matthews
Second: Stu Niven

Motion Approved

5.0 Information Items

5.1 Working Group Table

Tabled for review by the Board Members.

5.2 Permit Tracking Table

Tabled for review by the Board Members.

5.3 Communications Update

Focused on the ongoing projects discussed during the December 2024 board meeting and exploring meaningful ways to connect with the Tłıchq communities. As a part of the Certificate program with Royal Roads University, it is planned to visit the Whatì or Behchokò school, with WRRB biologists, to present on wildlife and wildlife habitats, aligning with the school's current curriculum during the visits. Work ongoing to complete the 2025 Winter newsletter and continue weekly sharing on Facebook (increase in followers from 757 to 765).

Discussions included: provide information to Tłıchq students and communities about different programs that are supporting wildlife conservation work.

6.0 Other Items

6.1 Round Table

Board Members thanked one another, interpreters, PIDO, and staff for a good meeting. Members appreciate learning from and sharing with one another, a diverse group that works together on behalf of caribou and other animals that don't have a voice. It is important to keep the Tłıchq language and share positive messages with the youth about how Tłıchq used to live, respect and take care of animals, and stay strong in their traditional ways. There is a need talk to people when go into the communities and to train the youth as they will be the ones sitting at the tables in the future.

6.2 Next Meeting

The next meeting dates are:

- May 27-28, 2025, Wekweètì
- August 26-27, 2025, Behchokò

Closing Prayer: Joseph Judas

Adjournment: 2:28 p.m. (Motion #976-12-02-2025)

Minutes Approved:

ORIGINALS SIGNED

August 26, 2025

Chairperson

Date