



Board Meeting Minutes

Date: 7-8 February 2023

Location: WRRB Boardroom, Denendeh Manor, Yellowknife, NT

Board Members:

Steve Matthews (GNWT Appointee) – Zoom
Travis Washie (Tłıchq Appointee)
Isabelle Duclos (Federal Appointee)
Stu Niven (Federal Appointee)
Janelle Nitsiza (Tłıchq Appointee)
Eddie Chocolate (Tłıchq Appointee)

Interpreters/PIDO:

Violet Mackenzie
James Rabesca
Indio (Pido)

Staff:

Aimee Guile
Laura Meinert
Simon Whitehouse
Jody Pellssey

Regrets:

Joseph Judas (Chair)

Guests:

Suzanne Carrière
Abbey Wilson, ENR
Karin Clark, ENR
Petter Jacobsen, TG
Lydia Rabesca, TG
John Nishi, TG (Zoom)

Appoint Chairperson

Motion #851-07-02-2023

To appoint Suzanne Carrière as Chair for the 7-8 February 2023 meeting

Moved:

Janelle Nitsiza

Second:

Stu Niven

Motion Approved

Call to Order: 9:19 a.m.

Opening Prayer: Janelle Nitsiza

Roundtable Introductions

1.0 Agenda and Previous Minutes

1.1 Approval of Agenda

Motion #852-07-02-2023

To approve the 7-8 February 2023 agenda as presented

Moved:

Steve Matthews

Second:

Janelle Nitsiza

Motion Approved

1.2 Approval of Minutes

13-14 December 2022

Motion #853-07-02-2023 *To approve the 13-14 December 2022 minutes as presentedg*

Moved:

Janelle Nitsiza

Second:

Steve Matthews

Motion Approved

1.3 Review of Action Items

Outstanding action items list was tabled and reviewed.

2.0 Business

2.1 Update on ACCWM Proposed Caribou Statuses – Bluenose-East, Bluenose-West, and Cape Bathurst Caribou Herds

The ACCWM met on November 15-17, 2022 in Inuvik and via Zoom video conferencing for the 7th Annual Status Meeting to discuss community-based monitoring and scientific information for the Cape Bathurst, Bluenose-West and Sahtì Ekwò (Bluenose-East) caribou herds. Based on the information provided, the ACCWM proposed the following statuses for each herd: Cape Bathurst herd is in the YELLOW zone, the Bluenose-West herd is in the ORANGE zone and the Sahtì Ekwò herd is in the YELLOW zone. The WRRB supported the proposed statuses during its December 2022 board meeting.

Each Member Board was required to get approval for the proposed statuses within 30 days. By January 10, 2023, the Member Boards reached a consensus on the statuses for each of the three herds. As such, the 2023 Action Plan Table reports for each herd were submitted to governments (GNWT, GN, TG, and NWMB) on February 6, 2023. The Annual Status Meeting Summary Report is being finalized and will be shared with governments upon completion.

2.2 2020 Wolf Management Program – Annual Report, Abbey Wilson and Karin Clark

PowerPoint Presentation, entitled “*Wolf Management Program – WRRB, Feb 7, 2023*”, tabled

Board Members and staff questions:

- 19 wolves harvested by outfitters: outfitters operate on the barrens, first year that outfitters recorded during this program, high number of wolves near Yellowknife would be dump wolves.
- Collaring wolves with helicopters, tracking same wolves?: in previous years, collaring done at same time as caribou collaring, with caribou first priority; in 2023, there will be dedicated wolf and caribou collaring teams.

- Any of the research funding dependent?: funded projects include collaring in the barrens and Inuvik, diet work, den surveys, annual wolf movement patterns and spatial distribution of potential wolf-caribou interactions; health work dependent on graduate students willing to do the work; CIMP/POLAR application submitted to develop landscape of predation risk, WRRB provided letters of support.
- What indicators using to determine whether too few or too many wolves have been harvested? If have wolves that don't have fidelity to one specific herd of caribou, how does this impact on the program?: look at caribou abundance, calf:cow ratios, survival rates, and other indicators to show if caribou are recovering; look at three metrics to determine if wolf harvest is sufficient 1) number of wolves removed, 2) effort data, and 3) wolf health, the number of wolves removed is hard to interpret as uncertain of how many wolves in the first place, the effort data is showing a declining trend as harvesters are having to travel further to get wolves, the health data shows wolves are declining; plan to compare the wolf metrics and caribou data at the end of the program though difficult to know what biological impact having on herds that are overlapped; harvesters from Kugluktuk are convinced that their wolf harvest has impacted the BNE caribou, lots of calves (twins), healthy caribou.
- Will the development of landscape of predation risk project helpful in answering the impact of wolf removal? Study genetics to determine if different subspecies or ecotypes of wolves, which may help to understand behaviour of the wolves and subspecies: three main species (tundra, taiga, arctic), Inuvik wolves are much further north and not restricted to den sites at the treeline, Inuvik wolves white, here they are grey, having a better understanding about the full range is important.
- What is Nunavut doing about wolves? Camera study on calving grounds, analysis will determine general predator abundance though there are more grizzly bear than wolves, 100 images of wolves, 2000 images of grizzly bears, 40000 images of caribou; investigating grizzly bear predation rates on caribou, GN contemplating increasing harvest incentives which may impact harvesting in NWT.

2.3 Review of Bathurst Caribou Advisory Committee's Proposed Bathurst Caribou Status

In January 2023, the BCAC held its annual status meeting over three days to discuss the 2023 Kòk'èeti Ekwò (Bathurst caribou) herd status. Science and Traditional Knowledge were shared by the GNWT, Indigenous governments and organizations, hunter and trapper organization, and management boards.

The group determined that the herd status should remain at a Critical Low as described in the Bathurst Caribou Management Plan. A Bathurst Caribou 2023 Action Plan will now be drafted and will be presented to the Board at a future meeting for review and approval.

2.4 Review of Bluenose-East and Bathurst Caribou Population Surveys

The Wildlife Research Permit Application, entitled "*Monitoring of Kòk'èeti, Sahti, and Beverly Ekwò May 01, 2023 – April 30, 2024*", requests support for the

following monitoring actions: 1) Continued use of satellite collars to monitor the movement and distribution of migrating ɬekwò. ENR plans to deploy and maintain up to 70 collars each on the Kòk'èetì and Sahti Ekwò herds (50 on cows and 20 on bulls). ENR plans to deploy and maintain up to 50 collars on the Beverly herd (30 on cows and 20 on bulls); 2) Composition surveys in October to assess bull:cow ratios, in late winter (March/April) to provide a measure of calf survival at 9-10 months, and in June to estimate breeding females which is a way to understand pregnancy rate; and, 3) For Sahti ekwò, the last calving photo survey was in 2021, and the next photo survey is planned for June 2023; this would be a 2-year interval. For Kòk'èetì ekwò, a calving ground photo survey is not planned for 2023, however a reconnaissance survey with regularly spaced flight lines is planned for June 2023. This reconnaissance survey will be used to monitor herd switching and support the Beverly survey.

ENR was not confident in the result of the 2021 Kòk'èetì Ekwò calving ground survey due to the potential overlap with the neighbouring Beverly herd. Therefore, they proposed another calving ground survey for Kòk'èetì Ekwò in 2022 should there be separation between the two herds. The WRRB recommended that a 2022 survey not be undertaken given that it would be unlikely to detect a trend and that Tłıchǝ Elders have said that ɬekwò should be left alone in times of low population. TG and ENR rejected this recommendation and did conduct a 2022 Kòk'èetì Ekwò calving ground survey.

It was understood by the WRRB that in 2023 a calving ground survey would be conducted by the GNWT for the Kòk'èetì and Sahti Ekwò herds, as well as the Beverly herd by Government of Nunavut. GNWT has indicated that, due to logistical and financial implications, they will not complete both calving ground surveys this year. In 2019, WRRB agreed with ENR, and recommended that reconnaissance surveys not be undertaken in years without a calving ground photo survey.

Board Members noted the need to keep in mind how each year's application will impact future years, synchrony and disturbance on the calving ground; concern that scientific perspective is the need to collect more data even though surveys will not change anything, need to think of caribou perspective; recognize that GNWT is operating under financial/logistical/personnel constraints while adaptively managing; noted there is no consistency from year to year, look forward to having calving ground surveys conducted in the same year in the future; noted the lack of rationale provided in the application, need to reduce disturbance to caribou (aerial and ground based), operate using the precautionary principle.

Response to GNWT should be written to the Minister of ENR, speak to the WRP application as well as bigger picture, reiterate previous recommendations, recommend that a disturbance matrix be developed and included in the future joint management proposal for Bathurst and Bluenose-East caribou herds (should include all kinds of disturbance, cumulative picture), recommend that a gap analysis be conducted, look forward to getting back on track with surveys in same years.

Motion #854-08-02-2023 To approve the Wildlife Research Permit

Application, entitled “Biological Monitoring of the Bathurst, Bluenose-East, and Beverly Caribou Herds”, as follows: 1) Continued deployment and maintenance of satellite collars on Kòk’èetì, Sahti, and Beverly Ekwò herds; 2) composition surveys in June, October, and March/April; and 3) reconnaissance and photo survey for Sahti Ekwò in June and to disapprove the reconnaissance survey for the Kòk’èetì Ekwò in June.

Moved:
Second:

Janelle Nitsiza
Stu Niven

Motion Approved

ACTION #622-08-02-2023 (ED): To write letter to Minister of ENR to respond to Wildlife Research Permit Application, entitled “Biological Monitoring of the Bathurst, Bluenose-East, and Beverly Caribou Herds”.

2.5 Update on Caribou Guardian Coalition

On January 9-12, 2023, the CGC completed a final planning workshop to establish a secretariat and prepare for implementation. The Coalition is made up of Indigenous governments from the NWT, Nunavut, and Saskatchewan, and is dedicated to supporting local and regional guardian programs throughout the range of the Bathurst caribou. The WRRB is an observer to the process and currently provides support by managing the funding agreements.

Members of the CGC have approved a declaration that affirms that they are caribou people, caribou guardians, and they are taking strong action because they care for caribou. Coalition members propose that a caribou summit take place this spring where decision-makers, elders, harvesters, and youth meet. Through the summit, they hope to achieve drastic and concrete measures for the wellbeing and the rebound of the Bathurst herd; they hope that leaders will influence decisions around activities in a manner that gives priority to the caribou and their habitat.

2.6 Update on Caribou Habitat Conservation Workshops

Bathurst Caribou Range Plan Recommendation 3: Using appropriate legislative tools, define the level of protection within an area specified around priority water crossings and land bridges as identified through TK and/or community direction. The legislative tools should allow for boundary adjustments when TK, science and other land users identify changes in caribou distribution and range use. The caribou habitat conservation project was initiated in January 2021 to implement this recommendation.

On January 26, 2023, the project team met to update each other on progress that has been made to identify areas of important Ɂekwò habitat that should be protected and agree on a path forward. Moving forward, the BCAC has drafted a two-year workplan that will be included in a funding proposal to be submitted to

the Government of Canada (ECCC). If successful, the BCAC would receive funding to further advance work on the conservation of key habitat areas for Ɂekwò in the Northwest Territories. The two-year workplan includes regional workshops, community/ Indigenous Government and Indigenous Organizations led information gathering, and leadership check.

Board Members asked whether this project is related to the delineation of critical habitat. It was noted that the delineation of critical habitat is conducted through the federal *Species at Risk Act*, and this work is not done through the lens of identifying critical habitat rather providing long term protection through conservation areas.

2.7 Update on the NWT Board Forum

The 26th NWT Board Forum was held on January 31 – February 1, 2023 in Yellowknife. To ensure a focused discussion, presentations and breakout sessions were designed around the theme of “Reconnecting and Renewing the NWT Board Forum Network”. Updates from Boards since 2019, introduction of the Intergovernmental Council and how regulatory and legislative are co-developed, update about the 2020 Environmental Audit, review of the Cumulative Impact Monitoring Program and recent MVRMA Climate Change workshop, overview of the GNWT and Canada Ministerial Decision Phase, and discussions about communications, regulatory coordination, and process harmonization were topics discussed during the two days. The Forum also addressed long standing action items regarding honorarium, board appointments, and implementation funding by drafting a letter to forward to Prime Minister Trudeau.

The next NWT Board Forum will tentatively be co-hosted by the Inuvialuit and Gwich'in boards in Inuvik.

2.8 Party Updates

a) Tłıchǵo Government

Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è Program, Petter Jacobsen, Lydiah Rabesca, Janelle Nitsiza, John Nishi (Zoom)

PowerPoint Presentation, entitled “*Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è – Tłıchǵo Caribou Monitoring*”, tabled

Board Members asked about archeological sites and the Ekàti camp to be built in 2023. TG to share the caribou classification and health guide that has recently been developed.

b) Environment & Natural Resources, GNWT

i) Climate Change Discussion Document & NWT Biodiversity Monitoring Program: Gamèti, Brad Woodworth and Karin Clark

PowerPoint Presentations, entitled “*Wildlife Conservation and Management in the Northwest Territories in a Changing Climate*” and “*Northwest Territories Biodiversity Monitoring Program: Gamèti*”, tabled

ENR to share the 2023 NWT Climate Change Strategic Framework: 2019-2023 Action Plan. Board Members noted that Yellowknife may be a refugia if the temperature remains constant at 3C in the future, possible positive and negative consequences to climate change, increasing number of invasive species in the North, surveillance programs, such as iNaturalist, will support management of invasive species.

ii) Wildlife Research Permit application – Monitoring of Kòk’èetì, Sahtì, and Beverly Ekwò, Jan Adamczewski and Karin Clark

Board Members and staff questions:

- What information will get from a reconnaissance survey? When conducting a calving ground survey the assumption is one herd; in 2021, Bathurst was calving on the west side of Bathurst Inlet and there were a significant number of caribou on east side of Inlet as well, too many caribou to be just Bathurst, had to be Beverly caribou too, six out of 34 Bathurst collars were on east side of Inlet, concern about emigration and losing Bathurst caribou to the Beverly herd; in 2022, concern about even greater movement to east, decision to fly reconnaissance survey to determine where caribou are as well as abundance and where calving is occurring, collars can only tell us so much, found that almost no caribou on east side of Inlet; in 2023, reconnaissance survey will give basic abundance and distribution, clear sense of what is going on.
- Intent in 2024 to do Bathurst photo survey? Yes, reliable estimate in 2021 and 2022, surveys take a lot of time and money, emigration seems to be a bigger threat to herd than mortalities.
- What would disturbance level to caribou be for reconnaissance survey v full survey? Any survey there is potential for disturbance, caribou more responsive to helicopter than fixed wing; photo survey plane flown high and only for a short time so caribou likely unaware; fixed wing reconnaissance, caribou remain laying down when flying overhead (400 ft above ground, not very loud, less noise than helicopter, two planes for 1.5 days only); helicopter used on calving ground refined method, hovering above ground to do classification from more of a distance.
- Pros and cons of having Bathurst and Bluenose-East caribou surveys on alternate years? At 2007 Caribou Summit, recommendations to conduct as many surveys in the same year due to concern about movement between herds, this is no longer a concern; western herds are surveyed every three herds; Beverly survey to be conducted by GN in 2023, last estimate in 2018, 103K estimate, good number of calves; survey interval is gauged based on herd estimate, no less than 3 years and no more than 5-6 years for surveys (Heard and Boulanger)
- Still hear in communities that caribou have moved somewhere else, could use collars for messaging about emigration instead of doing surveys every year? 96-99% fidelity to calving ground, Beverly estimate will not be able to tell you if Bathurst has moved due to size disparity.

- If all of the Bathurst collars are west of Bathurst Inlet and nothing east of Inlet, would reconnaissance survey still be conducted? Collars will not tell you everything but the survey might fill in the blanks.
- How far west/east does the survey go? In June 2018, GNWT flew Bathurst and Bluenose-East calving ground survey and GN flew Beverly survey, set up survey so that coverage was pretty much all the way across the three herd ranges; Beverly calves a bit later (mid-June) than Bathurst so will set up the same way this year, Bathurst has been a fluid situation over time of calving at the Inlet (west to east to west).
- Will GN fly a recon survey right up to edge of Bathurst? In 2018, flew north-south lines, looking at trails in the snow, were able to tell where a separation existed (east-west); GN did not fly in 2021, but GNWT flew pretty far east looking for separation point between herds and never found it, in 2022, separation point was east of the Inlet, low number of caribou on the east side.
- What foresee for surveys for Bathurst and Bluenose-East in 2024 and 2025, including Nunavut? Do not put so much value in doing the surveys at the same time anymore, Bluenose-East all indicators have been pretty good, including from Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è Program, could back off and go back to 3 years, possibly reduce 3 composition surveys to 2 (remove June); Bathurst will be based on outcome of this reconnaissance survey, monitoring would be more intensive until have more positive results, determine on herd specific basis.
- When do we leave the caribou alone like the elders have told us? The June composition survey could be stopped, level of disturbance is not that high, have heard that message from elders, if herd gets better, then it might be time to back off on survey coverage.
- Survey timeline, Bathurst in 2024, no surveys in 2025, Bathurst and Bluenose-East in 2026? Depended on budgets, priorities, new minister, likely will change over time; another set of management proposals will be submitted before next set of monitoring decisions.

3.0 Financial

3.1 Review & Approval of 2023-2024 Budget & Work Plan

Motion #855-08-02-2023 *To approve the 2023-2024 budget and work plan as presented*

Moved:

Steve Matthews

Second:

Isabelle Duclos

Motion Approved

ACTION #623-08-02-2023 (ED): To submit to CIRNAC the 2023-2024 Budget & Work Plan.

3.2 Review & Approval of Financial Statements as of 31 December 2022

Motion #856-08-02-2023 *To approve the financial statement as of 31 December 2022 as presented*

Moved:
Second:

Stu Niven
Travis Washie

Motion Approved

4.0 Operations

4.1 WRRB Strategic Plan and Communications Plan Revisions

The WRRB underwent a strategic planning exercise in October 2018 and approved its *2019-2024 Strategic Plan* in early 2019. In addition to the strategic plan, the Board developed and approved its current *2019-2024 Communications Strategy* in March 2019.

The Board will need to undergo a review of its Strategic Plan and Communications Strategy for the next five-year period, 2025-2029. Staff will set up a workshop with an independent consultant to be held in conjunction with the fall 2023 meeting.

Board Members recommend hosting the fall meeting and workshop during a Board retreat (three to four days).

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

Reviewed and discussed with Board Members. Board Members really enjoyed the 2023 calendar. Suggestions for themes for the 2024 calendar: “togetherness post covid”, “strong like two people”, species togetherness, family gathering.

6.0 Other Items

6.1 Round Table

Board Members thanked one another, interpreters, sound engineer, and staff for a good meeting. Members note that some situations are a lot to manage with all the information, but believe together they are making the right decisions for the wildlife and people. Members appreciate sitting at the table and feeling heard during discussions. Cautiously optimistic that the caribou may be recovering. Members hope Joseph gets well and can come back soon.

6.2 Next Meeting

The next meeting is for May 24-25, 2023, combined in-person (Behchokò) and Zoom meeting.

Closing Prayer: Janelle Nitsiza

Adjournment: 12:13 p.m. (Motion #857-08-02-2023)

Minutes Approved:

ORIGINAL SIGNED

May 24, 2023

Chairperson

Date