

March 13, 2020

Hon. Shane Thompson, Minister
Environment and Natural Resources
Government of the Northwest Territories
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Via Email
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Grand Chief George Mackenzie
Tłıchq Government
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Re: 2020 Dìga Joint Management Proposal – Revised WRRB Procedure

Dear Minister Thompson & Grand Chief Mackenzie:

The Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) developed, and on February 6, 2019, submitted a predator management proposal to the Department of Environment & Natural Resources, Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and Tłıchq Government (TG). The WRRB requested that predator management begin by May 2019 in order to promote the recovery of the *Kqk'èetì ekwò* (Bathurst caribou) and *Sahtì ekwò* (Bluenose-East caribou) herds as well as to ensure the potential for a future harvest. Your Governments responded to the Board on March 7, 2019 with a commitment to develop a predator management proposal but declined immediate action on the WRRB proposal. The Board followed up on the recommendations approved by your Governments on December 18, 2019 requesting a *Dìga* (wolf) management proposal from GNWT and TG.

On January 31, 2020, the WRRB received a joint management proposal from TG and GNWT (“the Proposal”). The Proposal entitled “*Joint Proposal on Management Actions for Wolves (dìga) on the Bathurst and Bluenose-East Barren-ground Caribou (zekwò) Herd Winter Ranges: 2020 – 2025*”, outlines proposed management actions for *dìga* in Wek'èezhì, including aerial shooting. The WRRB reviewed the Proposal at its February 2020 meeting and informed TG and the GNWT on February 21, 2020 that a Level 2 proceeding would be initiated. The Board set out a Work Plan intended to address deficiencies in the Proposal as well as ensure reasonable public opportunities to participate in the proceeding. Such a proceeding could not be completed until late Spring 2020.

The WRRB decision made it clear that the Governments' delay in preparing and submitting the Proposal would effectively mean that no relief by way of predator control could be provided to the *kqk'èetì* and *sahtì ekwò* herds in the 2020 harvest season. In the WRRB's opinion this was a most unfortunate outcome for *zekwò* herds which are, in the words of ENR staff “*in a precarious position*”.

On February 28, 2020, TG and GNWT officials met with the WRRB Executive Director and Legal Counsel to discuss concerns about the Board's decision to conduct a Level 2 proceeding. Based on TG and GNWT's interpretation of the WRRB's February 6, 2019 letter, these officials advised that they had expected that the WRRB would undertake a Level 1 review of the five-year joint management Proposal.

The proposed d̄iga management plan for 2020 is to conduct ground-based harvesting of d̄iga until March 15. If the proposed target of 100 d̄iga is not reached by that date, then aerial shooting will commence. The WRRB is informed that the k̄ok'èet̄i and saht̄i ekw̄o herds are sufficiently separated on their winter ranges and that this limited overlap provides optimal conditions for aerial shooting. Additionally, the Board was told that few d̄iga have been harvested to this point through the ground-based harvesting programs. Based on these facts, the WRRB was requested to reconsider its decision with respect to the Level 2 proceeding.

In response to this request, the WRRB held an emergency Board meeting on March 9, 2020 to reconsider the procedures set out to address the TG and GNWT's Proposal. The Board is committed to early action to improve the outlook for ʔekw̄o populations. The WRRB now understands that TG and GNWT may have an ideal opportunity to make a difference for k̄ok'èet̄i and saht̄i ekw̄o herds.

Although the timing of the Proposal placed the Board in a difficult position, the WRRB also is acutely aware of the urgency of the ʔekw̄o situation and the opportunity that has been identified to provide relief to the herds by conducting d̄iga management actions this year.

In light of all these considerations, the WRRB has decided to amend the procedures set out for review of the Proposal. The Board will now conduct the review of the proposed 2020 wolf management actions as a Level 1 review. The Board will not proceed immediately with the Level 2 review of the proposed d̄iga management actions for the 2021-2025 period. Given the deficiencies in the Proposal, the Board is returning that wildlife management proposal to your Governments and requests that the Proposal (now to address 2021-2025 d̄iga management actions) be resubmitted no later than August 21, 2020 for a Level 2 review. This revised Proposal should also include "lesson learned" from the implementation of the 2020 management actions.

In this way, on March 9, 2020, the Board reviewed the 2020 d̄iga management actions as a pilot project only. Such a pilot project only warrants Level 1 review. As such, the WRRB approved the 2020 d̄iga management actions as proposed in the Proposal (Motion #701-09-03-2020).

Attached is a comprehensive revised work plan, which identifies the scope and anticipated timelines of the Board's proceedings. The revised joint management proposal for 2021-2025 d̄iga management actions is to be submitted by August 21, 2020 with the addition of a plain language summary, technical report and lessons learned assessment. The public comment period will remain open until October 13, 2020. Please note that, on or before September 21, 2020, the Board will review this work plan and make a determination as to whether a public hearing will be required to ensure sufficient consultation.

Finally, the Board suggests that it is clear that communication in advance of the submission of wildlife management proposals needs to be improved. Future submissions of wildlife management proposals should not leave the WRRB in a position where it must choose the best of two bad options. The Board encourages early and frequent communication amongst our respective staffs with respect

to both proposed wildlife management actions and process and timelines. The Barren-ground Caribou Technical Working Group is an ideal vehicle for these discussions.

Please note that these documents will be added to the public registry: <https://www.wrrb.ca/public-information/public-registry>. If there are any questions, please contact our office at (867) 873-5740 or jpellissey@wrrb.ca.

Sincerely,



Joseph Judas
Chair

Attachment

Cc Dr. Erin Kelly, Deputy Minister, ENR-GNWT
Brett Elkin, A/Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, ENR-GNWT
Rob Gau, A/Director, Wildlife Division, ENR, GNWT
Bruno Croft, Superintendent, North Slave Region, ENR-GNWT
Laura Duncan, Tłchq Executive Officer, TG
Tammy Steinwand-Deschambeault, Director, Culture and Lands Protection, TG
Michael Birlea, Manager, Culture and Lands Protection, TG