

1) **Project Title:** Wolf Harvesting Program

2) **Contact Persons: Organization Names: Addresses: Phone/Fax Numbers: Email addresses:**

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3) **Management Proposal Summary: provide a summary description of your management proposal (350 words or less).**

Start Date: January 1, 2025

Projected End Date: January 1, 2026

Duration: 1 year

Summary Description:

The Tłıchq Government (TG) and the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) implemented a joint management proposal for enhanced wolf (diga) management actions to support recovery of the Bathurst and Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou (ekwò) herds from 2021-2024 (wolf management program); that joint management proposal expired March 31, 2024. The proposal outlined a range of existing and enhanced wolf (diga) management actions to support recovery of these herds, and builds upon lessons learned from the 2020 Wolf (Diga) Management Pilot Program. One of those management actions included a community-based diga harvest training program where the Tłıchq Government applied a on-the-land based camp where the focus was harvesting diga while facilitating knowledge exchange between experienced and less experienced diga harvesters. Based off past and current data relating to the caribou (ekwò) herds and considering diga stewardship practices that Tłıchq have sustained since time immemorial, Tłıchq Government and its Chiefs Executive Council has concluded that wolf removal through the community-based wolf (diga) harvest should be implemented through the term of this proposal in order to continue contributing to the recovery of the caribou (ekwò) herds. Caribou harvest restrictions and wolf (diga) reduction are the two management actions most likely to influence the direct mortality of Bathurst caribou (ekwò), which has declined to a critical status. Actions to reduce the number of wolves on the winter ranges of the Bathurst and Bluenose-East herds, combined with ongoing caribou (ekwò) harvest restrictions, is predicted to improve caribou (ekwò) survival and promote population recovery for both herds.

Informed by research done by Tłıchq Government and through Tłıchq Knowledge and traditional diga stewardship practices, Tłıchq Government expects to acquire information over the term of this proposal

which will help it implement this management action and any potential management actions concerning dīga in the future.

Cultural Significance of Dīga (Wolf) Stewardship

The relationship between the Tłıchq̓ people, caribou (*ekwò*), and wolves (*dīga*) is deeply rooted in traditional knowledge and practices that have been passed down through generations. Dīga stewardship, a practice sustained since time immemorial, reflects the Tłıchq̓ worldview of balance and respect within the natural world. Historically, the Tłıchq̓ have engaged in activities of maintaining ecological stewardship, including managing the interactions between predators and prey to ensure the health and survival of caribou herds, a keystone species essential to cultural and physical sustenance. Dīga stewardship is deeply rooted in preserving the interconnection of the land, animals, and people. These cultural activities are based on skills developed since time immemorial, including tracking, understanding animal behaviour, and sharing knowledge between generations. The practice of land stewardship reinforces cultural identity and fosters intergenerational knowledge transfer, providing opportunities for elders and experienced stewards to teach younger community members to maintain the traditions that connect the Tłıchq̓ people to our land.

Continuing Traditional Dīga Practices

For the upcoming winter season, the Tłıchq̓ Government will continue its community-based dīga stewardship activities, focusing on the Wekweeti and Mackay Lake areas. These efforts align with the cultural importance of maintaining the balance between dīga and *ekwò*, ensuring that caribou herds can thrive for future generations. As part of this initiative:

- A team of 2-3 hunters will be based in Wekweeti and will begin in mid-February, applying traditional tracking methods to identify dīga activity. Hunting efforts will mainly be done through day trips by skidoo from the community but if not successful, a camp will be set up near high dīga-activity areas to focus efforts in places such as at Roundrock Lake.
 - The Wekweeti crews will continue their efforts if harvesting is successful, if after 7-10 days and they are not successful we will discontinue the efforts in the Wekweeti area.
- Teams will go to Mackay Lake and will utilize traditional knowledge to monitor wolf movements near caribou kill sites, starting in early March.
 - The Mackay Lake crew will consist of 3–4 Tłıchq̓ community members and will spend 7–10 days on the land, incorporating traditional hunting techniques.
 - If hunting efforts are successful, we will send out another crew who will be out for another 7-10 days.
 - The hunters will be lodged at the True North Safaris Lodge.
- Harvesting techniques being used will include shooting with a rifle or setting up snares and traps; depending on which technique is more successful. In Wekweeti, snares and traps might be used in conjunction with tracking and shooting the wolves.

Wolves will be skinned either on-site or in Behchoko, where experienced harvesters will teach skinning techniques to others, preserving cultural skills. Additionally, options for culturally appropriate disposal or repurposing of carcasses, such as using them for bait, will be explored. Updates will be provided to

the WRRB staff at the Barrenground Caribou Technical Working Group meetings as well as in a presentation at the May meeting to the Board.

Strengthening Cultural and Ecological Connections

The winter distribution of the Bathurst herd, its blending with adjacent herds, and the vulnerability of the Bluenose-East herd underscore the importance of continuing these efforts. Through ḏiga stewardship, the Tł̱icẖ Government is upholding a tradition that not only supports the recovery of barren-ground caribou herds but also reinforces cultural practices and community well-being. By covering key areas like Wekweeti and Roundrock Lake, the Tł̱icẖ Government ensures that its people remain deeply connected to the land and its rhythms, fostering resilience for both the environment and its stewards.

4) Background (Provide information on the affected wildlife species and management issue)

The Bathurst and Bluenose-East caribou (ekw̱) herds have both declined significantly in recent years and the situation for both herds is dire. The decline of the Bathurst herd was first documented in 1996 when the population was estimated at 349,000 animals, down from 472,000 in 1986. The decline of the Bluenose-East herd was first documented in 2013 when it was estimated at 68,000 animals, down from 121,000 in 2010. In 2018, the herd's population was estimated at 19,300 animals and in 2021, it was 23,200. There has been harvest restrictions put in place for both herds and the wolf management program in 2020-2024. The most recent survey for the Bluenose East herd was in 2023 and showed an increase in the herd to a total number of 39,525, which points to the herd starting to stabilize and showing positive signs of recovery from previous lows. There have been many positive indicators observed through the GNWT surveys as well as the Ekw̱ Nàxoède K'è program and combined with the wolf management program, we would like to attribute all factors in helping with the increase of the Bluenose East herd. This proposal presents a coordinated approach to wolf (ḏiga) management actions aimed at reducing wolf (ḏiga) predation on caribou (ekw̱). Reducing wolf (ḏiga) predation in combination with ongoing harvest management is anticipated to have a positive influence on survival rates of caribou (ekw̱) in the Bathurst and Bluenose-East herds.

Previous joint management proposals for the Bathurst herd submitted by the Tł̱icẖ Government and the GNWT resulted in the WRRB holding public hearings in 2010 and again in 2016. Public hearings were also held to address management proposals for the Bluenose-East herd in 2016 and 2019. During the 2016 and 2019 public hearings, through consultation conducted January 21-23, 2019, and more recent engagements (GNWT, GN and Indigenous leaders meeting, February 2020; Tł̱icẖ community engagement February 2020) the WRRB, the GNWT and Tł̱icẖ Government heard concern from community members that wolves are continuing to put pressure on barren-ground caribou (ekw̱) populations.

The WRRB expressed at the public hearings for the Bluenose-East herd in April 2019 that the 20% rate of annual decline for the Bathurst and Bluenose-East herds is so serious that waiting any longer to implement predator management would make recovery of the herds even more difficult. Wolves on the range of the Bathurst and Bluenose-East herds are migratory and their diet relies heavily on barren-ground caribou (ekw̱). This is different than wolves in the boreal forest that are territorial and prey on multiple species in an area. It has been shown that wolves associated with barren-ground caribou (ekw̱) herds can, on average, take 23 to 29 caribou (ekw̱) per year.

Goal and Objectives

The overall goal of this proposal is to continue our efforts through winter 2024/25 in reducing wolf (diga) numbers sufficiently to enable an increase in survival rates of both calf and adult caribou (ekwò) promoting stabilization and recovery of these herds. Recent population surveys suggest that wolf removal actions taken to date may have been effective and Tłıchq Government believes that as part of the stewardship relationship with diga, the effort to reduce wolf (diga) numbers should continue. We aim to achieve the goal by supporting and organizing Tłıchq hunter-effort of diga across the main late winter distribution of the Bathurst and Bluenose East caribou herds in the areas north of Wekweeti and Mackay Lake. Our main objective is to establish two diga hunting camps, with at least two hunt teams of 2-4 people over 7-10 days. By maintaining this base level of hunting effort we aim to improve the skills and capacity of Tłıchq diga-hunters, and remove a similar number of wolves as achieved in previous years.

Table 1. Table showing the amount of diga harvested for each year of the Diga Harvesting Program as well as the number of hunters that participated, the amount of field days and days spent hunting and distance travelled by the hunters.

	# of Field Days	# of Hunters	Days Spent Hunting	Distance Travelled	Harvested Diga
Year 1 – 2019/20	49	19	37	4484	3
Year 2 – 2020/21	66	15	49	3839	32
Year 3 – 2021/22	31	12	21	3951	9
Year 4 – 2022/23	29	9	19	3778	15
Year 5 – 2023/24	17	8	17	5856.2	29

5) Consultation and Community Outreach

The wolf management program has run with the collaboration and input of community members from all Tłıchq communities and this collaboration will continue to happen as with many of the programs that the Tłıchq Government implements. We held a meeting with harvesters and elders in December 2024 to discuss how we will move forward with this program.

6) Relevant Background Supporting Documentation

GNWT, & TG. (2020). *2020 Wolf (Diga) Management Pilot Program Technical Report*.

GNWT, & TG. (2021-2024). *Joint Proposal on Management Actions for Wolves (Diga) on the Bathurst and Bluenose-East Barren-Ground Caribou (Ekwo) Herd Winter Ranges*.

7) **Timeline**

Harvesting will occur starting mid-February to April 2025.