



Monday, November 21, 2011

Honourable Terry French
Minister of Environment and Conservation
P.O. Box 8700
4th Floor, West Block
Confederation Building
St. John's, NL, A1B 4J6

Re: George River Caribou Herd Recommendations

Dear Minister French,

In the absence of a co-management board specific to the George River Caribou Herd (GRCH), please find attached the Torngat Wildlife and Plants Co-Management Board's 2011-12 harvest management recommendations.

We acknowledge that we share decision-making powers with partners in Quebec, Nunavik, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nunatsiavut through federal and provincial legislation, and Aboriginal rights reflected in comprehensive land claims agreements or otherwise affirmed. The many and disparate user-groups heavily reliant on a common resource speaks to a need for a co-management board, despite the inherent challenges and complexities.

We therefore humbly submit our range-wide recommendations. The decision to recommend a TAH was a very difficult one for our board. There is a genuine conservation concern about this resource and we take some comfort in knowing that the topic is now at the forefront of people's minds and last season the Province implemented significant measures. We are confident that this season we will take further steps toward conserving the herd and an adaptive management approach at this time is the best option.

We look forward to hearing from you as you consider our recommendations and we are confident that further steps will be taken.

Sincerely,

Bruce Roberts
Chairperson



Torngat Wildlife & Plants Co-Management Board
Memorandum to the Minister of Environment and Conservation
Caribou Co-Management
(November 21, 2011)

Issue: Management of the George River Caribou Herd

Recommendations:

Pursuant to Sections 12.9.1 (b) and 12.9.2 of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement, the Torngat Wildlife and Plants Co-Management Board (TWPCB) submits the following recommendations respecting the management of the George River Caribou Herd (GRCH):

Primary:

- Establish a Total Allowable Harvest of 2000 George River Caribou for the 2011-12 harvest season.

Secondary:

- Establish a co-management board specific to the GRCH
- Develop a comprehensive harvest management strategy
- Investigate implications of a selective harvest for adult females, adult males, or a combination of both
- Consider options for predator control
- Do not publicise collar locations
- Do not issue commercial harvesting licences
- Enhance enforcement
- Develop a stewardship and education strategy
- No change to season dates

We look forward to your timely reply, as we continue to work together for the George River Caribou Herd and the people who depend on it.

1.0 Case History and Context

- The TWPCB is the creation of the three negotiating parties to the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement and established under the Agreement in Part 12.8 of Chapter 12, with its roles, responsibilities and powers outlined in Part 12.9. For greater clarity, and ease of reference, the Board is empowered to recommend to the

Minister, conservation and management measures for wildlife, plants and habitat in the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area (12.9.1b).

- The Board is the primary body making recommendations on the timely collection, analysis, and sharing of data and information relevant to Inuit rights and the conservation and sustainable utilization of wildlife (12.9.1e).
- Evidence from various sources indicates that the GRCH is declining, and has been declining since the late 1980's or early 1990's (unpublished census results, 2010; Bergerud et al., 2008; Couturier et al., 2004; Boudreau et al., 2003; Crête et al, 1994). Past declines (to a low of approximately 15,000 in the 1950's) have been variously attributed to overhunting, range overutilization, predation, disease, parasites, emigration, climate fluctuations, fires, or some combination (Sharma et al., 2009; Bergerud et al., 2008; Messier et al., 1988; Bergerud, 1967). Whatever the cause, the herd has declined to an estimated 70 000 based on a July 2010 photo census, and appears to be trending downwards as current modelling conducted after the 2011 Fall Classifications now predict there are 50 000; any harvest pressure in this context is likely additive, and merits a careful consideration of the wants and needs of users and the herd itself.

2.0 Primary Recommendation: Total Allowable Harvest

- *Establish a Total Allowable Harvest of 2000 George River Caribou for the 2011-12 harvest season.* The TWPCB recommends that the responsible Ministers in Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec establish a Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) of 2000 caribou for the 2011-2012 harvest season. This number is based on a percentage of 4% of the Fall 2011 population estimate of 50,000 caribou, as presented and communicated by the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Environment and Conservation. The recommendation is based primarily on the 2010 census results, the 2010 and 2011 Fall classifications, Aboriginal traditional knowledge, and experiential knowledge. A harvest percentage of 5% is commonly used in other game management strategies; therefore a percentage of 4% would be more conservative and precautionary. The process of setting and allocating a TAH would be better accomplished through a George River Caribou Co-Management Board, however Section 12.9.1 b) i) provides the TWPCB with the power and responsibility to recommend a TAH, which would then trigger an Inuit Domestic Harvest Level (IDHL).

3.0 Secondary Recommendations

- *Establish a co-management board specific to the GRCH.* Consistent with resource management theory, and the management of large migratory caribou herds in Alaska, the western Canadian Arctic, and the central Canadian arctic, it is the will of the Board that the GRCH be co-managed to safeguard comprehensive claims, ensure the sustainability of the herd and the regional economies it supports, and mitigate resource conflicts and related impacts on development.
- Co-management arrangements have been initiated by governments and by Aboriginal groups to facilitate development, mitigate the impacts of development, maximize benefits of development, pursue political autonomy, safeguard comprehensive claims, address long-standing conflicts, avoid litigation, and to address resource depletion. Several of these drivers are relevant to the GRCH caribou system. Co-management of the GRCH is envisioned as a crisis-based policy response to resource depletion. It will safeguard comprehensive claims negotiations and industrial developments, and will serve as a means to resolve longstanding conflicts between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interests without resorting to litigation.
- In 1991 the Porcupine Caribou Management Board unanimously resolved to urge the Governments of Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, and Canada to establish a joint management regime for the George River Caribou Herd. The resolution, which is attached as Appendix A, recognizes: 1) an apparent decline in the George River Herd; 2) the importance of the George River Herd to the Aboriginal people of Quebec and Labrador; 3) that the Labrador Inuit Association had been advocating unsuccessfully for the establishment of a joint management regime for ten years; 4) that Wildlife Policy for Canada encourages Governments to establish cooperative wildlife management programs, and; 5) that eight wildlife co-management boards were at that time operating effectively across northern Canada from the Yukon to Quebec.
- The Joint Review Panel for the Lower Churchill Hydroelectric Generation Project recommends that “the provinces of Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador, Environment Canada and all interested Aboriginal communities initiate a dedicated range-wide joint management program for the George River caribou herd, and through this program cooperatively carry out a comprehensive cumulative effects assessment of the impact of human activities on the herd to be updated periodically as required”.
- The goal, as with all governance models, is to increase efficiency, reduce costs, and improve outcomes. In this case, all of the recommendations listed below and labelled ‘secondary’ would be more effective and more easily accomplished through

a co-management institution that links managers and resource users across regions. Given its special importance as an umbrella recommendation that will enable all others, the TWPCB will be following up as to the structure, function, roles and responsibilities of a George River Caribou Co-Management Board.

- *Develop a comprehensive harvest management strategy.* The responsible Ministers and co-management partners should develop a comprehensive harvest management strategy. Current harvest restrictions have not been linked with recovery targets, which has compromised community buy-in. The harvest management strategy should identify and link indicators of population health and abundance with harvest pressure – ie., it should link observations with targets and actions (see the Porcupine Caribou Management Board Final Harvest Plan, 2010).
- *Investigate implications of a selective harvest for adult females, adult males, or a combination of both.* A typical management response to a declining caribou population is to have a selective harvest of adult males only. Given that the GRCH has a decreasing number of large adult males, this management option may not be suitable. It is recommended that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador utilize models to determine the suitability of an adult male-only harvest, an adult female-only harvest or a combination of both.
- *Consider options for predator control.* The responsible Ministers, co-management partners, and other affected parties as identified should consider the merits of a predator control program. This should not be construed as a TWPCB recommendation for predator control – but is a recommendation to identify and evaluate predator control options based on cost, effectiveness, and social tolerance. Predator control options should be assessed in consultation with co-management partners and affected users – a process which would be enabled by the establishment of a George River Caribou Co-Management Board.
- *Do not publicise collar locations.* Since the 1980's caribou have been fitted with radio and/or satellite telemetry collars to track their movements. Collar locations have been published by the provincial governments of Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec, and hunters are using this spatial information to plan and execute hunts, thus greatly increasing success rates and total harvest pressure. The practice of releasing collar locations has been suspended in Newfoundland and Labrador but information is still available through Quebec's Ministry of Natural Resources and Wildlife. As a result, the Newfoundland and Labrador suspension has been largely ineffective in decreasing harvest pressure. The Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Environment and Conservation should encourage Quebec's Ministry



of Natural Resources and Wildlife to suspend the current practice of publicly releasing collar locations.

- *Do not issue commercial harvesting licences.* There should be no commercial harvest. Any conservation strategy implemented should recognize and reaffirm the rights of Aboriginal hunters. The importance of caribou to Aboriginal livelihood strategies and food-security should continue to take precedent over commercial interests.
- No outfitter licences should be issued. This recommendation further recognizes the primacy of public over private interests. Again, harvesting that restricts local access but allows for non-local and commercial access will undermine social capital.
- *Enhance enforcement.* The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador should maintain enforcement capacity at current levels and should consider any potential means of increasing capacity. The Department of Environment and Conservation and the Nunatsiavut Government should explore opportunities to increase capacity to monitor and enforce through cooperation between Nunatsiavut Conservation Officers, and those of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in a culturally appropriate manner that creates an atmosphere of mutual respect between hunters and conservation officers (as per Part 12.3.20).
- *Develop a stewardship and education strategy.* All affected parties should develop a comprehensive stewardship and education strategy to communicate key messages.
- *No change to season dates.* Season dates should remain the same. As a migratory herd, the GRCH is accessible to different communities at different times of the year. Altering the season would arbitrarily deny access to whole regions, and allow access to others. Further to this point, the TWPCB recommends that next years decision on whether there should be a season or not should be delayed until after the fall classification and this information is available to stakeholders. If this recommendation is acceptable, it would be advantageous to communicate this as early as possible to the public.

4.0 Consultations, Meetings, and Continuing Research

- The TWPCB and the Torngat Wildlife, Plants and Fisheries Secretariat attended a Migratory Caribou Workshop in Montreal in January of 2010.
- Representatives from the Secretariat and the Board attended planning meetings for the GRCH census on April 19, 2009 in Labrador City and May 27, 2010 in St. John's.



- The Secretariat participated in the aerial census of the GRCH conducted in July of 2010, and is contributing to data compilation, analysis and interpretation on an on-going basis.
- The Secretariat led a user-based exploratory reconnaissance of the Torngat Mountain Herd in the winter of 2009/10 to delineate the northern range of the GRCH.
- The TWPCB and the Secretariat were represented at the 13th North American Caribou Workshop in Winnipeg in October of 2010.
- In November-December 2011 the Torngat Secretariat attended Nunatsiavut Government led caribou consultations in all five communities in Nunatsiavut, and two in Upper Lake Melville.
- On June 2, 2011, the TWPCB and the Secretariat participated in a George River Caribou Workshop lead by the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Environment and Conservation.
- The TWPCB and the Secretariat were represented at the 2011 Arctic Ungulate Conference in Yellowknife in August of 2011.
- On November 2, 2011, the TWPCB and the Secretariat participated in a follow-up George River Caribou Workshop lead by the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Environment and Conservation.
- From November 6, 2011 to November 14, 2011, the TWPCB and the Secretariat participated in the George River Caribou Consultations led by the Nunatsiavut Government throughout the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area and Upper Lake Melville.
- The recommendations outlined herein are a culmination of two years of consultation and research, some of which is highlighted above, and were developed and approved in this form by consensus of the TWPCB at Board meetings held September 15-16, 2011 in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, and November 17, 2011 via teleconference.



- The Torngat Wildlife and Plants Co-Management Board is partnering with the Hunting Fishing and Trapping Coordinating Committee in Quebec to develop a 2012 George River Caribou workshop. The workshop will be an opportunity for users from Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador to meet to discuss current knowledge of abundance and herd health, and possible management and policy responses – it may be considered another step in the thirty-year push for meaningful co-management.

Prepared by: Torngat Wildlife, Plants and Fisheries Secretariat

Approved by: _____ Chairperson

Approved by: _____ Executive Director



Appendix A

Resolution of the Porcupine Caribou Management Board Concerning the Conservation and Management of the George River Herd through Creation of a Joint Management Board

RESOLUTION

Concerning the conservation and management of the George River Herd through creation of a joint management board.

Passed unanimously May 22, 1991

- Whereas** the George River Caribou Herd is feared to be in decline and is of critical importance as a shared resource for the Aboriginal People of Quebec and Labrador, and
- Whereas** the Labrador Inuit Association has been trying unsuccessfully to get a joint management arrangement for the George River Caribou Herd over the past ten years, and
- Whereas** the Wildlife Policy for Canada, adopted in September 1990, states that, "Governments should undertake to establish cooperative wildlife management programs with aboriginal peoples for the purposes of wildlife conservation" and
- Whereas** the Wildlife Policy further states that, "Governments should involve aboriginal peoples in planning and implementing coordinated wildlife research, management and enforcement," and
- Whereas** at least eight wildlife co-management boards are presently functioning effectively from the Yukon across northern Canada to Quebec, and
- Whereas** two of these boards, the Porcupine Caribou Management Board and the Beverly-Kaminuriak Caribou Management Board have greatly improved the coordinated management of the Porcupine, Beverly and Kaminuriak Caribou herds.
- Now therefore be it resolved** that the Governments of Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec and Canada be urged to establish a joint management regime for the George River Caribou Herd, and
- Further be it resolved** that appropriate native cultures be accorded equal representation with governments in the joint management of the George River Herd, and
- Further be it resolved** that the parties be urged to consult with the existing caribou management boards plus the territorial and federal governments during preparation of a joint management agreement for the George River Herd.

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