

**STATUS OF BARREN-GROUND CARIBOU HERDS  
IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**

Mr. Speaker, caribou herds in the Northwest Territories (NWT) and across the circumpolar Arctic are declining. A recent global survey by researchers at the University of Alberta found that 34 of 43 herds being monitored worldwide are in decline.

Barren-ground caribou herds in the Northwest Territories are experiencing the same downward trend. Recent surveys and trend information show declines in almost all these herds.

The Porcupine caribou herd, which we share with the Yukon and Alaska, has dropped from a high of 178-thousand in 1989 to 123-thousand animals in 2001. Biologists who study this herd have not been able to do a population survey since 2001 for weather-related reasons, but indicators and recent monitoring efforts show that the decline in this herd is continuing.

The only bright spots in the surveys completed this year were the Cape Bathurst and Bluenose West herds. After post calving surveys of both herds this July, the Cape Bathurst has remained stable at 18-hundred animals while the Bluenose West herd has remained stable at just under 18-thousand animals. This can be attributed in large part to harvesting restrictions put in place by recommendations of the Co-management Boards in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region and the Gwich'in and Sahtu Regions. In the Cape Bathurst range, there has been no harvesting allowed since 2007, and in the Bluenose-West range, commercial and resident hunting was closed and recommended harvest for Aboriginal hunters was a maximum 4% harvest with at least 80% bulls.

Unfortunately, the post calving survey of the Bluenose East herd could not be conducted due to poor weather. Like the post-calving survey used for the Porcupine

herd, this survey depends on the caribou bunching up in tight groups in response to insects, and suitable for photography. If the weather is cool or wet and windy, the caribou don't group up enough for photos.

Mr. Speaker, the most dramatic declines in the last 3 years was seen in the Bathurst and Beverly caribou herds. In 1994, survey results indicated that the Beverly population was estimated at 276,000. Systematic reconnaissance surveys on the Beverly calving ground in 2007, 2008 and 2009 indicate that the Beverly herd has all but disappeared. Limited collar information suggests that some of the last Beverly cows have shifted to the range of the much larger Ahiak herd. The Bathurst herd has dropped from a little over 100,000 animals in 2006 to 32-thousand this summer.

Because the Bathurst herd is so important to NWT communities, tough management actions will be required to give the herd a chance to recover.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources is working with the Tlicho Government to develop a joint proposal on recovery options for the Bathurst herd that will go to the Wek'eezhii Renewable Resources Board. This joint proposal and a technical report are expected to be submitted to the Board at the end of October. We have also held a number of information-sharing workshops and there have been meetings in all the communities that value the Bathurst herd. The Tłı́chô are holding their own workshops and meetings as well.

I anticipate the Board will hold a public hearing on the proposal in December. During November, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources will be consulting with other Aboriginal governments, harvesters and stakeholders on the recovery options in the joint proposal since the Wek'eezhii Renewable Resources Board management is restricted to the Tlicho region.

The GNWT is responsible to all communities and Aboriginal governments that hunt the Bathurst herd, such as the Akaitcho communities, the Metis Nation and other communities south of Great Slave Lake.

It has been very encouraging to hear the Chief of the Yellowknives Dene Edward Sangris speaking out about canceling a fall hunt of the Bathurst herd this year. They are not waiting for our management proposal. When we announced the Bathurst survey results a few weeks ago, all the Tłı̄ch̄ô Chiefs and Dene Nation Chief Bill Erasmus were there and pledged to work with us on making difficult decisions for the sake of future generations.

All partners involved in the management of this herd want to have management actions agreed to and ready to be implemented by the end of December before the winter hunting season starts. As we have seen from the Cape Bathurst and Blue-nose West herd, tough measures are making a difference in helping the herds stabilize and hopefully in the next couple of year start gradually increasing.

There is no easy answer to the problem of declining herds. We can only deal with those impacts we have direct control over and hunting and access to herds are the main ones we can control.

Mr. Speaker, some people may believe the Ahiak herd is immune to this decline or even has increased. Unfortunately, this is not the case. On-going reconnaissance surveys of the herd's calving grounds indicate a substantial but declining herd. Additional data on caribou condition and pregnancy rate indicate that this herd is not doing well. We are currently planning the first calving ground survey of this herd with the Government of Nunavut. The area is remote and the calving ground is large and has chronically bad weather, so the survey will be challenging.

We are developing another five-year barren-ground caribou management strategy to cover 2011 to 2015.

This Strategy and future management actions to conserve our herds will be developed with our co-management partners and Aboriginal governments over the coming winter.

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