



Walking With Our Sisters remembers missing women



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Workshop to address caribou hunting limits, harvesting

Deline understands need for stewardship in Bluenose East herd conservation

by Andrew Livingstone
Northern News Services
Deline/Fort Franklin

Raising awareness and educating residents about what it means to be stewards of the land is the goal of a three-day caribou workshop scheduled to take place in Deline later this month.

The workshop grew out of a late-2014 meeting with Environment and Natural Resources Minister Michael Miltenberger when the territorial government was consulting aboriginal groups about hunting limits on the Bluenose East and Bathurst caribou herds.

"We realized that we weren't going to be able to involve all the interested people in the Sahtu region in the discussion with the minister," said Deborah Simmons, director of the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board. "There was a strong interest being expressed from the communities in understanding the issues and being involved in regional decision making processes."

A 2013 population survey of the Bluenose-East herd indicated it had declined to about 68,000 animals from the more than 100,000 animals estimated during a 2010 survey. A June 2014 reconnaissance survey of the Bluenose-East calving grounds suggested the herd has continued to decline by about 30 per cent.



photo courtesy of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Deline First Nation is hosting a three-day workshop Jan. 27 to 29 to discuss caribou knowledge, stewardship and monitoring. Community leadership has decided to take an active role in solving the current caribou decline because Deline residents consider themselves stewards within the area where the Bluenose-East herd travels, says Deborah Simmons, director of the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board.

Simmons said the board is interested in initiating dialogue about people's relationship with caribou and the animal's well-being within their habitat as they travel.

"Our approach will be bio-cultural, including in a balanced way, both the social, cultural and ecological aspects of caribou issues," she said. "We will take a positive approach in emphasizing the role of the communities in developing that management perspective."

Along with interested parties from the region, Inuvialuit representatives are also expected to attend the work-

shop and the Tlicho have been invited to attend.

The three-day meeting will focus on three core issues: the common ground in knowledge about caribou based on scientific and traditional knowledge perspectives; management scenarios and action plans; and harvesting.

The Deline First Nation and the Deline Renewable Resources Council have taken a strong lead in facilitating the dialogue, said Simmons, because the community considers itself the stewards within the area where the herd travels. Simmons said the com-

munity has taken a pro-active approach to educate residents, particularly younger generations who are joining the hunt, about their relationship with caribou.

"They consider it to be more of a responsibility than ever to maintain the law that governs their relationships with the caribou, the laws of respectful behavior," said Simmons. "They understand that wastage is a major issue for the community for ensuring that younger generations are well-informed and all parts of the caribou are brought back to the community and used."

To that end, the community has put in place measures to closely monitor harvesting, as well as a mentorship program for younger hunters to learn proper harvesting. A summer hide tanning project was also successfully piloted this past summer, said Simmons.

The question of conservation

Caribou conservation has been a particularly controversial issue in the territory for over a half-decade.

Since an outright ban was placed on the harvesting of Bathurst caribou in late 2009,

aboriginal groups have been at odds with the territorial government over how to proceed with protecting caribou for future generations. However, Simmons said that divisive relationship has changed in recent years for some aboriginal groups.

"It is becoming clear how important people's knowledge is and leadership is in caribou stewardship," she said. "It's going to be difficult for conservation measures to have the positive impact intended if there isn't strong ownership from the communities."

Hunting of the Bluenose-East herd is governed by a voluntary number of about 2,800 animals set in 2010. However, a late December press release from the GNWT stated that an overall target of 2,500, including 1,500 for NWT harvesters, would be more reasonable until consensus can be reached on conservation measures moving forward.

This harvest number is lower than the number recommended by the Advisory Committee for Cooperation on Wildlife Management (ACWM) of 2,800 animals, including approximately 1,800 for NWT harvesters.

The government stated it will monitor the herd closely and if indications of decline continue, more stringent limitations could be placed on harvesting.

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What my grandfather taught me

Deline resident Walter Bezha talks Dene tradition and wildlife management

by **Miranda Scotland**
Northern News Services
Deline/Fort Franklin

Walter Bezha has spent the past 40 years trying to understand the teachings of his grandfather.

At 61 years old, Bezha – who has previously spelled his last name as Bayha – says he's beginning to make progress.

"One of the things the elders tell me, and my grandfather as well, is it's very disrespectful to talk about the animal too much. Today I understand what they're talking about."

Bezha will be among hunters and residents attending the Sahtu caribou and harvesting workshop in Deline Jan. 27 to 29.

And although caribou population declines are bound to be a hot topic, it isn't the animals themselves that need to be discussed, according to Bezha.

"It has nothing to do with the caribou. They take care of themselves. It's us as people that we need to talk about."

Traditionally, Dene leaders provided direction on what, where and how to hunt, said Bezha. Today, chiefs are focused on other responsibilities, which has left a major gap in leadership out on the land, he said.

"There are so many hunters today and you need somebody out there saying, 'This is the way we're going to hunt,'" he said, adding people need to be encouraged to follow the hunting cycle and not just



WALTER BEZHA

eat certain animals, such as caribou.

"If leadership in April said, 'We're going to be getting into spring hunts for beaver, muskrats and getting ready for the migratory birds and that's what we're going to support in terms of harvesting and that's what we're going to be eating,' then I think it would happen."

There are plenty of wolves stalking caribou in the area that could be harvested, said Bezha. Also, despite an abundance of muskox in the Sahtu, there are always tags leftover at the end of the year.

However, it will take more than encouraging hunters to go for those animals to turn things around.

"We have to re-teach our young people. We even have to re-teach them how to cook (animals), what parts to take. All of that knowledge has to go back."

Although Bezha has formal education in forestry and wildlife management, along with decades of experience in the renewable resource sector,

he doesn't let that knowledge overshadow the lessons from his grandfather.

Dene tradition has to be stressed, he said.

"I spent a lot of time trying to understand what being Dene is all about and a big part is spirituality.

"I used to think I could separate that from my daily life or from the meetings that we have.

"Well, 20, 30 years later I'm sitting here and I say no, you can't separate that. That has to be part of your meetings as well – thanking the creator, giving an (oath) at the beginning of the meeting to be truthful and to be honest and to be straightforward.

"It's very important if you're going to make good decisions and honest decisions."

In hunting, there must be respect for the animal, said Bezha. Caribou parts shouldn't be sitting in the dump. Save the bones and pieces that weren't eaten and "return it to the land" or give it to the dog, he said.

Bezha said he hopes the upcoming workshop will act as a forum for hunters to share stories and best practices like their ancestors once did.

"I want people to listen and if they don't agree with something tell me, tell us so we can change and make it better. Not say, 'No, I don't believe in that' and leave it at that.

"It's very important for people to say, 'This is the way we do it. This is the way my grandfather taught me.' Tell us, share!"



photo courtesy of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Traditionally, Dene chiefs provided leadership on the land. Today, too much of their time is tied up in politics, says Deline elder Walter Bezha, leaving a gap in leadership out on the land.

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NNSL WEB POLL

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Addressing the high cost of living



Do you think NWT sand should be used for fracking? Have your say at www.nns.com/nwtnewsnorth. Poll results will be published in next Monday's *News/North*.

WORD quest

Congratulations to John R. Quitte, who won last week's Word Quest with 'potato'

Word Quest continues with:
Vitoh gwichùudhat

Hint: We are "over it"

The official languages of the Northwest Territories are Cree, Chipewyan, Inuvialuktun, Inuktitut, Inuinnaqtun, Tlicho, North Slavey, South Slavey, Gwich'in, English and French. That's a total of 11 language groups for the two territories.

Test your language skills!

If you know what language the Word Quest word is in and what it means, you may win a prize from *News/North*. A winner for this week's Word Quest will be drawn from all the correct answers received.

Answers should give the meaning of the word and the language that it is in. Please include your name, address and telephone number.

Send your entries to: Word Quest, Northern News Services Ltd., Box 2820, Yellowknife, NT X1A 2R1 or fax us at (867) 873-8507.

Northern News Services acknowledges the assistance of the language commissioner of Nunavut and the Teaching & Learning/Aboriginal Language Centres of the NWT.

MEMORY test

1. How many Fort Smith Housing Authority employees may go on strike soon?
2. What year did Justin Trudeau visit Alert with his father, Pierre Elliot Trudeau?
3. How many volunteers will be needed for Yellowknife's bid to host the Canada Winter Games?
4. When will NWT's new minimum wage hike kick in? How much will it be?

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Courtesy of Gwichya Gwich'in

TSIIGHTCHIC GWICH'IN LEADERS SWORN IN

Recently elected councillors John Norbert, left, John Firth, and president-elect Grace Blake, are sworn in to the Gwichya Gwich'in Tribal Council in Tsiighehtchic by RCMP Sgt. Grant Thom of the Fort McPherson Detachment, along with councillor Maureen Clark on Jan. 9 at a community gathering.