

Preparation Workshop for the 2024 Tłegóhtł Public Listening Session on Climate Change and Wildfire

November 7 - 9, 2023

Community Hall, Norman Wells (Tuesday, November 7th)

Legion, Norman Wells (November 8, 9)

This session brought together Land Users and ʔehdzo Got'Inę representatives from each of the five Sahtú communities to prepare for the 2024 Public Listening Session (PLS). A list of delegates is provided as Appendix A of this document.

The central question for the 2024 PLS is:

“What should people’s role be in addressing the impacts of climate change and wildfires on caribou?”

The objectives for the workshop were to:

- Understand the process: Ensure that ʔehdzo Got'Inę delegates from each community have a clear understanding of the 2024 Tłegóhtł PLS;
- Gain an understanding of the central question: Share knowledge about the question; and
- Develop Leadership: Develop confidence to exercise strong leadership and make effective presentations, discuss and brainstorm synergies among PLS and other processes, prepare for the PLS.

Over three days, delegates from all five Sahtú communities came together to discuss wildfires and climate change and their impacts on caribou. These discussions laid the foundation for the delegates to return to their communities to gather information on these topics in preparation for the PLS in February 2024. Supporting the communities’ rights to harvest and steward caribou as they see fit was an underlying theme for all discussions.

Key Action Items and Dates (From the Workshop)

- The SRRB will be releasing the first round of information requests on **November 8th, 2023.**

- Community delegates will receive a summary documenting discussions from community break out sessions.
 - Community delegates will be asked to respond to the questions (and/or ask questions of other parties including the GNWT) and are reminded the responses will be made public on the PLS registry. The deadline for responses is **December 8th, 2023**. [Upon request, deadline was extended to December 12th, 2023].
 - The next PLS session will be held in **Norman Well, February 20 – 22nd, 2024**. The SRRB has funding support available to support participation in this process. Contribution agreements have been sent to each community.
 - Community delegates will need to have a position prepared and are encouraged to prepare a presentation to deliver at the Public Listening Session in February.
 - Communities are encouraged to develop Hı́dó gogha sénégot's'ı́rá (Plans for the Future – PFF) (like the ones made in Colville Lake and Délı́ne) — Please contact the SRRB for support.
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Summary for Day 1, Tuesday, November 7th

Opening Prayer: Chief Frank Andrew

Opening Remarks: Leon Andrew

Margaret McDonald and Melanie Harding welcomed everyone to Norman Wells.

Christine Wenman facilitated a round of introductions and opened the session with an overview of the agenda. The hope is that by the end of the three days, each community is well on the way to having documented the answers to the information requests. Each community will have a support person at the table who will document what is being said and turn those notes into a summary document. There will be a parallel process during these discussions to have Youth working together in a caucus to share their views, too.

What is the PLS process?

Melanie Harding started the workshop by delivering a presentation on the PLS process.

There will be 5 PLSs in total, with this year's theme being climate change and wildfire.

In 2019, in response to conservation concerns, the SRRB decided to take the PLS approach to learn about the best ways to conserve caribou.¹

Each PLS is technically one hearing on a ‘hot topic’ in caribou conservation, but the overarching question, and the answer we are trying to find through all the PLSs is: “What are effective ways to conserve caribou?”

Why do this (PLS)?

The Board felt the PLS was a good way to implement the land claim and support communities’ rights to participate in decision making.

After each PLS, a report is written that is sent to the Minister, who reviews it and provides feedback on decisions, then sends it back. The report is then finalized and released so that it will direct our future work and provide direction to all our partners that is based on the communities’ views.

Why caribou?

Caribou are important to people, and they are connected to all living things on the land. We also recognize we can’t cover everything but felt that answering this question about caribou would contribute to conservation more broadly.

At the end of all five PLSs, all of the work that has been done will come together to guide the SRRB’s future work and provide direction for our partners and ideally leverage funding.

“We have heard again and again that the top-down approach to conservation doesn’t work in the Sahtú.”

What does the PLS process involve?

Anyone who wants to participate in a PLS registers for the process. The SRRB then confirms registration with everyone. All RRCs have registered this year. It’s similar to a conventional hearing in this way, and it just means that all parties are recognized and are able to be an official partner in the hearing (PLS). It’s up to each party what kind of evidence they want to submit in support of their position.

Then, we start preparing. We have a regional workshop (what we’re doing now). Soon, the Board will be putting out the first information requests, which are questions related to wildfires and climate change, followed by community workshops - there will be opportunities for each

¹ In this document, we use the term ‘caribou’ when we are talking about all ʔədə/ʔekwé/Nódele, and Tqdzi.

group to host workshops in their communities to share/hear these views and prepare responses to information requests.

Information Requests

There will be two information requests in this PLS process, one will be issued in a few days. It will be questions for community members to think and reflect on. Questions like, what changes are you seeing on the land? The PLS will then happen in February, and partners will be welcome to prepare a presentation to share the results of their information gathering process with everyone. It's so important that everyone puts forward all this information so that the Board can use this and amplify these voices as much as possible at the decision-making table.

The Five PLSs

Each PLS has a different focus, but together, they will all answer the overarching question: "What is the most effective way to conserve caribou?"

- The first PLS was in Colville Lake, before Covid started. The focus question was on harvest and harvest regulations. We talked a lot about Total Allowable Harvest (TAH), community conservation plans, residency requirements, alternative measures, etc. The Board made 8 decisions and 18 recommendations based on these discussions.
- The second PLS was hosted by Délı̨ne but was hybrid with many people joining virtually (on-line). It asked the question: "What should people's role be in maintaining healthy relationships with caribou and other animals?" There was lots of talk of Díga and culling practices, etc., but this meeting was less contentious than the Colville Lake one.
- This is the third PLS that we're working on now. We're trying to understand what the impact of climate change and wildfires are on caribou.

The next two PLSs will be held by Rádeyǫ̀łkóé (Fort Good Hope) and Tulit'a. These last two will ask: "How can knowledge and planning support caribou conservation?" and, "How can people and caribou live well together?"

Discussion

During the presentation, there was a spirited discussion on the value of the PLS process for changing decision-making powers. Commenters noted that the existing process (where the

Board provides decisions and recommendations based on hearing evidence to the Minister, who then accepts or rejects it) goes against the spirit of Land Claims².

Margaret noted that “People like John T’seleie and Frank Kenny are the evidence I want to see: it’s from the people of the Sahtú, for the people of the Sahtú. I remember my dad trapping beaver. We never trapped out the area and we always moved into a new place - that’s how we did it. It makes me sad that we have to go through all these processes just to qualify.”

“People get tired of lip service. Talk is cheap. You guys are always saying that we’re the experts, but when it comes to making decisions, they’re not treated like the experts they are. They’re told, yeah, what you say is important, but it’s not important enough to change anything because we don’t agree with you. People get tired of repeating themselves.”

There was additional conversation on the value of the judicial appeal – if the Minister rejects the decisions made at the hearing, it is possible to appeal in a judicial process so that the courts have the final say.

A final discussion topic surrounded the use of Traditional Knowledge for the PLS and concerns how that is being used. This is an opportunity to make sure Traditional Knowledge informs what decisions are made here, but yes, we have an obligation to use this knowledge responsibly and respectfully.

Following this presentation, those delegates who had been part of previous PLSs shared reflections on the process. Three questions to guide the discussion:

- What worked well for you during previous PLS sessions? What would you like to see happen differently?
- For those who have participated in PLS before, what advice do you have for those who haven’t participated before? What should they know?
- What was the value of the previous PLS for your community?

When discussing the strengths of the PLS process, and opportunities for improvement, there were a number of observations:

- There is sometimes a lack of continuity – having different people involved in each PLS can make it hard to share knowledge from one PLS to the next.

² When we refer to Land Claims, we are referring to the Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement, 1993.

- Youth participation is very important. More workshops are needed to involve and encourage youth.
- Land based training and knowledge stories are important components.
- The PLS and the preparation workshops are useful opportunities to learn from other communities.

Potential impacts of climate warming induced wildfire changes on caribou

After lunch, we saw a presentation by Jenn Baltzer, Wilfrid Laurier, and Canada Research Chair in Forests and Global Change. Jenn's group has been working in the NWT to understand the impacts of wildfire and she spoke to the impacts of the 2014 fire. Fires are an important part of boreal systems, as a source of regeneration, but, high latitudes are warming quickly, and these climate changes are changing the way fire acts across the landscape. The temperatures in 2023 were the highest temperatures on record since 1850. These hot, dry conditions promote widespread and severe burning. We saw similar conditions in 2014, and 2023 was even worse.

After 2014, Jenn's team talked to many people about the impacts on forests and wildlife from the fire and had these four main questions:

- Will the forests return?
- What are the impacts on wildlife, especially caribou?
- How long does it take for caribou habitat to recover?
- Can that recovery process be accelerated?

The team then set up a bunch of sites to try and answer these questions.

1. *Will the forests return to the way they were before? Will the same plant and tree community grow back after a fire?*

So far, they have seen that since 2014, black spruce has lost dominance in 40% of sites in the Dehcho, shifting towards aspen and jack pine. A similar shift, though less strong (30% of sites) happened in Akaitcho and Tlicho regions and shifted towards paper birch. Their team thinks that some of these changes are driven by how deep the fires burn, really changing the soil composition, or how frequently the areas burn again (the fire return interval is short).

2. *What do these changes mean for caribou habitat?*

These (see above) shifting sites are less likely to host lichen, which caribou need for forage. These changes may also make those sites more appealing to potential competitors, like moose, or their shared predators.

3. How long does it take for caribou habitat to recover?

The team looked at the length of time it took for caribou lichen to recover. Caribou lichen starts to regrow between 0 and 29 years after fire but doesn't become abundant until about 71 years later. They concluded it takes at least 50 years for lichen to return to the point caribou will graze it successfully. This result varied across the NWT and recovery was slower in the Sahtú.

4. Can that recovery process (for caribou lichen) be accelerated?

Their team found that caribou avoid burned areas for about as long as it takes for lichen to recover. They tried seeding lichen to see if they could accelerate that growth. They experimented with seeding different densities in post-burn areas. They don't have full results yet but can confirm that unless the environment is really wet, the seeded lichens are staying put. It will be interesting to see these results further down the road.

Jenn's group is also working with remote sensing data to try and develop maps of lichen biomass - they need to 'teach' the satellites how to read this type of landscape and then they'll be able to develop these maps.

Discussion

Questions during and after the presentation asked about lichen recovery and the resulting impacts on caribou behaviour. Frank Andrew wondered why lichen grows faster in the south of the NWT, and we discussed how even in the south of the NWT, growing conditions are little better. Jenn thinks that we could expect that growth rate to increase in the Sahtú as global temperatures rise, but that would likely mean that we would see more fires too.

Johnny McDonald asked whether the ʔədə/ʔekwé/Nódele are safer because the calving grounds are mostly on the coast? Will ʔədə/ʔekwé/Nódele stay in those areas instead of coming south to feed? Jenn suggested that for those ʔədə/ʔekwé/Nódele that migrate, if their summer habitat has good resources and their winter habitat doesn't anymore, then they may either stay or find new winter habitat. We've heard from Elders that they'll do this sometimes. For tǫdzi, who are in the forest year-round, they don't have the same variation in habitat, so there will be different impacts for them.

Lisa McDonald asked if it would make a difference with continuous and discontinuous permafrost? Also, would altitude impact these results, e.g., in the high alpine? Jenn thought that what we've seen so far suggests that altitude sites would likely have results like the high-latitude locations, i.e., they will see slower recovery in lichen. For the continuous vs.

discontinuous permafrost, it's something they're hoping to learn, but they don't have firm results yet.

There was a question from Floyd Kakfwi asking whether muskox compete with moose and caribou? The response indicated there are probably similar considerations between muskox and moose relative to caribou, e.g., whether they would support a higher wolf population, but Jenn can't speak to that question. Kevin Chan spoke up to suggest that there's not much overlap between muskox and caribou habitats and diets. They're looking at this more closely in the Sahtú, using information from past collaring studies. They should have a better idea by the end of the year. They are noticing that there are a lot more moose in barren ground areas.

Joe Bernarde offered some additional thoughts about how muskox, caribou, and moose all use freshly burned areas where the grasses are growing. He also suggested hunters could participate in processes like Jen described (the regrowth of lichen), which would be better than doing it by helicopter.

To end the day, we broke out into community groups again, to share knowledge about climate change. A summary of those discussions will be made available to each community.

Summary for Day 2, Wednesday, November 8th

Opening Prayer: Margaret McDonald

Opening Remarks: Leon Andrew provided opening remarks, speaking about the way harvesters practiced conservation in the past, only taking what was needed. These (PLS) sessions started because the communities wanted to count the caribou for themselves (to know what was going on). This meat is our livelihood and our means of survival – how will we survive if we're giving our tags to non-residents? We need to speak as one and work together to solve this ourselves.

Christine Wenman briefly went over the results of yesterday's discussions, and the plan for today's agenda. She noted that these workshops are a good opportunity for knowledge sharing among communities too.

Before launching into the day's agenda, the group discussed several topics, including issues surrounding harvest regulations and tag allocation and how these processes conflict with Traditional Knowledge. There was also some discussion about supporting communities to develop community conservation plans (and there was clarification that to date, communities

have chosen to not include a TAH as part of their community plans). Melanie Harding commented that if every community prepares a community plan, then this will demonstrate that the Sahtú is united in stewarding caribou in a different way. “The Colville and Délı̨nę plans have a lot to teach us about what needs to go into a plan, and we have learned more since then about what needs to go into a plan to ensure the Minister needs to approve it.”

The group then spent time discussing the best pathway forward to getting to the end goal: self determination in caribou stewardship. Dave Taneton spoke to the recent court decision on the Colville Lake case, noting that it was rejected because it didn’t include TAH. So, if the end goal is to end the TAH and do things differently, we will need to consider the legal process and discuss it with lawyers.

“We are not animals; we can’t be controlled by others...Government does not like us to be free to live our way. They don’t like it.” - Participant

The group then discussed the different caribou herds across the Sahtú and the relevance of Guardian programs to this discussion. Participants pointed out that if monitoring is to be a source of livelihood and the connection to stewardship, then communities need to develop and support these programs. Steph Yuill spoke about how Guardian programs have worked in different places in Canada and the North, noting that there are lots of opportunities and lots of options to develop Guardians programs right now.

Following a conversation about TAH and how TAH numbers are set, Margaret pointed out that most people, including workshop participants, lack specific information about this kind of work: “We’re talking about TAH and quotas, why don’t we know about that?”

After the break, Lisa McDonald spoke about the value of meetings like this. “All the hard work we have done in the past, all the work we are doing, are we going to be able to get what we want in the end?” Lisa said that we are the land keepers, we need to inform ourselves. She feels that’s where we can make change if we work together on it.

Lisa also discussed the need for better communication. “These questions that they (the SRRB) ask us are to make sure we have information to go to the hearing with. We need these things in order for us to make the change. If that means more meetings and more workshops and more legal advice, then so be it.”

Hjdó gogha sénégots'wá (Planning for the Future)

Before Melanie started her presentation, Leon Andrew spoke to the title of the project 'Hjdó gogha sénégots'wá' and why it is meaningful. Melanie followed by exploring the parts of the Land Claims that relate to decision making around wildlife management and habitat, specifically, Chapter 13.

She clarified that the issue of the Minister having final say has come up several times regarding the validity of this process relative to Land Claims. The SRRB can only do what's in the Land Claim, relative to their mandate, and in the Land Claim the Minister has final authority.

Melanie said one of the ways the SRRB is amplifying community voices is through the community conservation plans. She also clarified the Minister accepted the SRRB's PFF Policy which promotes PFF as a more desirable alternative to a TAH, noting the plan must be finished and approved before this change. In the judicial review that came up, the Colville Plan was not finalized, and so it wasn't yet approved by the Board. If the plan is finished and those small changes made, that result may change.

Melanie then spoke to the SRRB Strategic Plan, through which the Board has adopted Hjdó gogha sénégots'wá as the foundation of wildlife stewardship in the Sahtú. A lot of this work started before 2016, when there was concern about the Bluenose herds and Déljñę created the caribou plan. Then, Tulit'a, Norman Wells, and Ross River developed the Trails of the Mountain Caribou Plan in 2017 as part of Nio Nę P'ęne. Colville Lake developed their caribou plan in 2020 and that became part of the PLS. Together, these processes show that this work has been going on for a long time and needs to be supported.

SRRB Policy statement for Hjdó gogha sénégots'wá:

Hjdó gogha sénégots'wá is a community-based, rights-compliant, governance framework that reflects and respects local Dene and Métis knowledges, customs, and practices.

Hjdó gogha sénégots'wá is a viable conservation approach that is community-led and a more effective and rights-based approach than harvest limits.

What We Heard at the PLS in Déljñę

The Déljñę PLS discussions provided some initial feedback on the Hjdó gogha sénégots'wá process:

- There is widespread support for Hjdó gogha sénégots'wá,
- Communities need financial and technical support to engage,

- SRRB has not yet provided good enough explanation and guidance and explain more about Hıdó gogha sénégots'ıá and the policy guiding it.

“You (communities) already know what you’re doing and what you want to do. This Hıdó gogha sénégots'ıá process is about deciding what to share about those priorities with the government. So much of what will be in the plans is what you’re already doing: how you regulate your harvest, your Guardians and monitoring programs. It’s about writing it down in a way the government and others can understand.”

What’s in the (Community Conservation) Plan?

There are four main pieces of a community conservation plan:

- Story of the Plan: How and why did we do this?
- Story of the land and animals: How are things now?
- Vision and Goals: How do we want things to be in the future?
- Pathways to get there: How do we get to these goals?

PFF Approval/Review process:

Once plans are drafted, there is a review process to follow to finalize the plans. The steps look like this:

- Make the plan (as above)
- Submit the plan to the SRRB (SRRB can help develop the plan too, if you want help). They can do a preliminary review with you.
- Review by co-management partners and the public (usually happens in a hearing). Ideally, at this point all neighbouring communities and partners will be aware of the plan and up to date. E.g., the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation supports TAH in their region and didn’t support the Colville Lake plan. It would ideally be good to have similar difficult conversations before the hearing and submission process when we can.
- SRRB review and approval.
- Minister accept/reject/vary.

There was a brief side discussion on the need for lawyers to support each RRC in the development of their plan.

Lisa McDonald spoke again of the need for the RRCs to take the initiative to package this information and share it with their communities to start getting the job done. Within that process, and within the Land Claims, it’s the land corporations and the districts that have authority over the land, so she reminded everyone to ensure that all relevant parties and partners are part of the plan development process.

Chief Frank Andrew followed these comments with thoughts about the rejection of the Colville Lake proposal. “Even doing the work, we still have to convince partners and the Minister that this is what we should do. We need to be careful about what we’re doing. These are our rights we’re working with.”

Christine reminded everyone that the information we discuss in community groups will be collected into a report for each RRC to bring back to the community to move forward with their information requests. We then broke into our community groups to share knowledge about wildfires.

After the community group discussion, we came back together to report back on discussions. The results of these discussions will be made available to each community in a summary report.

Subsequent discussion continued the theme of the changes seen on the land.

“We have youth who have no idea what’s going on and we have to teach them – (our culture) to the children. But we have no money. The white people might have money and you can help us.” John McDonald

Joe Bernard spoke about connecting the knowledge of the Elders to the youth:

“The Elders predicted that this was going to happen. They told us: you think about the river, how deep it is, but one day you are going to walk across with your rubbers. One day there will be no water. The Elders, when they make a prediction, they are right. They know the land; they know how they live on the land...It is really good that they are bringing young people to the meeting. Johnny used to tell us to bring 3-4 youth to every meeting.”

Sheena Snow spoke about the changes she has seen on the land in her lifetime.

“Every year when I was young, things used to happen in a certain way (it was predictable). In the past few years, everything is different. We used to get only one or two thunderstorms, but now we get a lot more. The thunderstorms are really close to the community. It’s right above our houses. Climate change, we all have seen that it is so different compared to when we were children... It’s just not good. We feel for the animals.”

Christine ended the day by reviewing the plan for tomorrow’s agenda. This includes going over the community responses submitted within the last PLS so workshop participants can see how their community participated last time, and start thinking about how they want to participate in this PLS.

Closing prayer provided by Chief Frank Andrew

Summary for Day 3, Thursday, November 9th

Opening Prayer: Leon Andrew

Opening Remarks: Ethel Blondin-Andrew spoke of the need to ensure that youth are a strong focus of the work we're doing together and how much they need this to happen. She spoke passionately about the recent losses in Fort McPherson.

Ron Pierrot followed these remarks to speak about the changes seen on the land and shared the role his own father had played in helping him understand them.

Christine Wenman went over the agenda for the day, and introduced Gillian Donald, who was presenting Colin MacDonald's work. Colin had put together a literature review of the western science available on the questions we've been discussing.

The effects of climate change and wildfire on caribou in the Sahtú: The western science perspective

Gillian confirmed that the document (the review) she's presenting will go on the public registry for everyone to see. It is a summary of the western science on climate change and wildfires.

Colin has created a toolbox that communities can use for conservation planning. They summarize scientific observations about:

- Causes of climate change
- Climate change and caribou
- Wildfires and caribou

Causes of Climate Change

Gillian talked about the greenhouse effect and how industrial activity has led to the bulk of climate change impacts. She shared some graphs that showed how global temperatures have risen along with the increases in greenhouse gas emissions. Right now, global temperatures have risen by over 1°C and international agreements are in place to try to keep temperatures from rising over 1.5°C. This is because we will see major changes and impacts around the world if global changes rise beyond this point – some of which we're already seeing, like increased frequency and severity of storms, flooding and drought cycles, wildfires, and more.

In the North, the climate is warming faster than it is elsewhere. The GNWT has developed a Climate Action plan to try to support mitigation and adaptation to these changes in the territory.

Margaret McDonald initiated a quick side conversation about precipitation, wondering why, when there is so much snow, we still end up with such dry soils? Stephanie Yuill replied that since spring now warms quickly and snow melts quickly, a lot of snow now evaporates instead of melting into the soil. There are other factors too, but this is a big driver, and this trend is slowly increasing in the North. Frederick Andrew noted that Elders have talked about this and other changes for a long time.

Climate Change Impacts to Caribou

In the tool kit, there is a list of resources available to document much of the research that has taken place in the North on numerous topics. Gillian went over what impacts these changes might have on caribou.

- Warming temperatures may impact caribou behaviour (they may change calving, rutting periods, for e.g.),
- Melting permafrost may impact caribou migration: e.g., they may have to adjust routes,
- Variable weather patterns may impact caribou calving: may impacts calves' ability to survive because of more extreme conditions,
- Less snow and earlier melt may impact caribou resting places: they may not be able to rest to avoid insects,
- Variable season conditions like earlier thaw, later freeze-up, more spring storms may impact caribou behaviour and habitat, e.g., migration may be delayed, habitat conditions may change.

Wildfires and Caribou

Wildfires are common in the boreal and play an important role in renewing and rejuvenating forests. In the NWT, the number of fires vary a lot, but their frequency and severity appear to be increasing – there is a large increase in the amount of land burned by fires. Most of them are started by lightning.

Wildfires can have a significant impact on caribou habitat. In the NWT, caribou usually avoid burned areas and seek out other food resources. Exceptions include some boreal caribou using unburned patches within a burned forest for calving because they can see incoming predators better.

Gillian spoke briefly on the lichen issue that Jenn spoke about earlier: lichen exists mostly in older, unburned forests, so caribou will seek those areas out. With more burning and more new plants and trees becoming established after fires (instead of black spruce), we may see fewer caribou. We may also see white-tailed deer becoming established in the area as they seek better habitat further north.

There was some additional side discussion about holdover fires (also sometimes called zombie fires) still burning in the Sahtú: is there a way to know which fires are continuing to smolder and which ones are more likely to come back in the spring? Gillian will suggest to Colin that we find a way to keep this information continually updated and added to the toolkit. Steph let everyone know that GNWT was contacted and agreed to update the fire map today, so we will check back in later.

After a break, Christine took us through the next steps for the PLS process. Soon, the SRRB will release their information requests. It might look similar to the questions we have looked at this week, and since the scribes have been taking notes on the conversations, each community will have a report to start off with.

Information Request Process

The way that process works, parties can answer the questions, but can also ask other parties the same questions, e.g., community members, other communities, other organizations. SRRB staff are available to help at any point in this process. Christine reminded us that these questions and answers to the SRRB will be on a public registry, so everyone can see them. The Tlicho government, the Dene Nation, the GNWT, and all the other Sahtú communities are registered Parties. So, this could be an opportunity to ask the GNWT questions.

Lisa McDonald spoke about some of the questions that RRCs could consider asking the GNWT, including “Why does the ECC/GNWT use back burning methods when they don’t have the means to put it out if things don’t go as planned?”. This question related to some valuable structures and cabins lost over the summer. Other potential questions she suggested include “Why doesn’t the Climate Change Strategy refer to RRCs and co-management boards?”, and, “Is there a way to use the \$5K payment for lost structures to contribute to a fund that will prevent their loss, since their value is not measurable?”.

A side discussion took place, where Joe Bernard noted that during the fire response this summer, cabins along the highway were moved and need to be moved back so they can act as emergency cabins. Additional comments included concerns about how long it takes personnel

to respond to fire emergencies, and the contents of fire retardant. A GNWT employee provided a phone number for the office to talk to the Sahtú fire base with any questions people might have: 867-444-0679.

Leon Andrew suggested that in addition to the GNWT, we should be inviting the other registered participants (the Dene Nation and Tlicho region) to attend meetings like this also. Melanie clarified, when Margaret asked, that the Dene Nation and Tlicho Government applied as parties to the process, which was open to everyone. That is why they're on the list.

Melanie spoke a little to the rules for public hearings. The Board can allow any parties to issue information requests to any other parties in the process, e.g., an RRC can issue an information request to the GNWT. The Board will then issue those information requests and provide a deadline for providing that information. This can happen at any time in the process – it doesn't have to be part of the Board's information request. If those information requests aren't met to the party's satisfaction, that question can also become part of the hearing. When Johnny asked, Melanie clarified that questions do need to be about something within the realm of the Board's mandate, like conservation, wildlife, etc. Since so many things are connected, it is rare for a question not to be approved.

Conversation then shifted to talk about water.

"We all live by the water, that is our life." Leon Andrew

Frank Andrew spoke about the changes to the waterways since dams started being built. "Cities are getting overpopulated and using too much power, so more and bigger dams get built. We need to do something about this. This affects our water, our fish. How can we act to save something for the future?" He also spoke to prophecies and predictions from Elders, saying that one day, the rivers would dry out.

Ethel and John McDonald spoke to the impact of dams even farther down the watershed, not only on water flows, but on food security too.

"The only thing that stops progress is fear, and there's nothing to be afraid of."

Ethel Blondin-Andrew

After lunch (and a lovely song and dance!), we split into community working groups. We discussed what each community would like to do from here to prepare for next steps in the community. We were guided by the following questions:

- Who do you want to work with?

- Who do you want to talk to?
- How will you accomplish this, and on what timeline?

Each table received a print-out of what their community delegation had prepared for their last PLS. The results of this discussion will be included in the report for each community.

Christine reminded us that there is a support budget for each RRC (\$50k) to help prepare for this process. It can be used to host workshops, hire legal counsel, etc. The costs for the hearing itself will be covered by the SRRB, including catering, a charter, and interpreters. However, costs related to each community's delegation will need to be within the community's budget – this includes any *other* meals travel, and incidentals. For the PLS in February, there will be multiple interpreters for multiple dialects so everyone can listen in their own language.

Before splitting into discussion groups, there was a question about honoraria: why are the amounts different for different people? What will the rates be for the PLS? Melanie asked that if anyone received less than others for an honoraria to please see her so she can look into it – everyone should be receiving the same amount.

As to the amount of honoraria the SRRB provides, the amount is set by the Canadian government and is the same for all boards across Canada. The SRRB can't set the amount and must comply with it in order to receive their funding. They have noted that the amount is too low, and they have asked for change repeatedly, but it hasn't happened yet. Some communities who have the budget will do a top-up, but that's up to different communities. Michael Henning (SRRB) mentioned that he'd had a meeting with their federal counterparts the week before and received the same response: that they're working on it.

Fire Management in the Sahtú

Upon request, Shawn Maxwell Manager of Forests (ECC) in the Sahtú Region joined the workshop for some discussions surrounding wildfire and forest management. There was a spirited discussion around the responsibilities of forest management as well as the process for rebuilding cabins lost to the fire. Shawn indicated that the process for rebuilding the cabins and funding those lost has begun, but he doesn't have control over those decisions. Joe Bernard thanked Shawn for the responses, and further suggested it would be good to create some opportunities for him to bring some youth out onto the land.

Additionally, questions were asked about fire retardant. Shawn noted that he doesn't know the exact chemical compounds, but that while it's not toxic, it can have some local impacts over

time but will wash away with water. Lisa McDonald spoke about the research she has done on fire retardant and said that she has some major concerns, particularly surrounding the water bodies and buffer zones near conservation and harvest areas. Studies have shown that fire retardant can have impacts on waterways and can be toxic to fish and other aquatic organisms.

Shawn agreed that there are some risks to waterways, but it is one of the only methods they have for fighting fire and it's used as a last resort. They try to keep its use to land only. Shawn also responded to Lisa's question about back burning and making sure that there are enough personnel to avoid it getting out of control. He agreed that they do their best and monitor things closely to try to avoid any problems, but winds and fire are tricky and sometimes it doesn't go as well as could be hoped. Shawn also talked about a program called 'Sparks' where people can report risk to valued components online. He says it's a similar process to registering a cabin, you just fill out a form. Anytime someone adds their value, cabin, etc., it gets added to the system as something needing to be protected. He's not certain whether that list is public.

Kevin Chan (ECC, biologist) will follow up on some questions related to the tick load on moose, which is reported to be increasing dramatically. He suggested the meat is still edible but should not be fed raw to dogs. He also welcomes anyone to contact him with questions about any parasites they may see.

Kevin also spoke to a question about the presence of bird flu. He says there may be a case or two in the South Slave, but that any cases of unusual deaths found in the Sahtú that were analyzed were found to be related to other causes. Frank Andrew responded that harvesters are reporting ducks and geese in unusual conditions and with unhealthy organs/blue intestines. Could they be wrong in thinking this is bird flu then? Kevin will confer with some colleagues and report back on this issue.

Jonathan Yakeleya spoke to the need for monitoring of mountain caribou so that we can gather a current baseline and stop arguing over numbers in time for the next generation. Kevin agreed this was important, but responded that there are several challenges, including the terrain and the difficulty in finding them in the landscape. He also noted that mountain caribou are not a huge priority for the GNWT. There was subsequent discussion on this issue: speakers agreed that these caribou are highly important and funding is needed to study them. Margaret McDonald said: "As long as Indigenous peoples aren't included in the conversation; you guys are going to continue making the same mistakes in your decisions. People are talking, but you aren't listening."

Kevin offered a clarification that he agrees that mountain caribou are important and thinks that even in the absence of funding there are still ways we could work together to develop baseline studies like Jonathan mentioned. He went over some of the possible metrics that could be used. ECC understands collaring to be the best way to count caribou but in absence of that, observation studies are useful. Right now, ECC uses observation data submitted by outfitters – outfitting companies report the number of sightings and the time spent on the land. Community monitors and/or harvesters can do the same and collect this data over time.

We closed the workshop after this rich discussion with final remarks by Leon Andrew. “The weather is changing, the climate is changing, and forest fires. This is our home. We really need to work on it...This is where we’re going to be, with the caribou and the land... We care about that.” Leon thanked everyone for coming, saying that it is good when we get together and talk together. It’s the best way and the best medicine.

Following these remarks, he offered a prayer and then initiated a drum prayer song to close the workshop in a good way.

Máhsı Cho to all for attending and sharing so generously of their time and knowledge.

Appendix A. List of Workshop Participants

Community Participants

| | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Tulít'a</i> | Adele Etchinelle George Wrigley | Frederick Andrew Joe Bernarde | Frank Andrew |
| <i>Fort Good Hope</i> | Floyd Kakfwi Frank T'Seleie Sr | Ronal Pierrot | Taylor (TJ) Kaskamin |
| <i>Colville Lake</i> | Sheena Snow | Marilyn Kochon | |
| <i>Déljñę</i> | Roxia Kenny Russell Kenny | Chris Yukon Dave Taneton | Fred Kenny |
| <i>Norman Wells</i> | Lisa McDonald Margaret McDonald | Jaryd McDonald Johnny McDonald | Jasmine Plummer |

Other Participants/ Guests and Presenters

Kevin Chan, ECC
Shawn Maxwell, ECC
Jennifer Baltzer, Wilfrid Laurier University

SRRB Participants and resource people

Dora Duncan, Interpreter
Sarah Cleary, Interpreter
Michael Henning (Executive Director)
Melanie Harding (SRRB staff member)
Stephanie Yuill (SRRB staff member)
Christine Wenman (facilitator)
Tanya Gerber (graphic recorder and facilitation support)
Shannon Bower (co-facilitation and note-taking, joined virtually)
Gillian Donald (presentation and support, joined virtually)