

For Immediate Release

Final Bluenose East ʔekwé (Caribou) Hearing Decision: Sahtú Renewable Resources Board reaffirms support for community conservation approach



October 31, 2016 – Tulita, NWT – The ʔehdzo Got'Inę Gots'ę Nákedı (Sahtú Renewable Resources Board, or SRRB) has released its final decisions in a response to the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) regarding conservation plans for Bluenose East ʔekwé (caribou) in the Sahtú Region.

In its final set of decisions sent to the Minister on October 26, 2016, the SRRB thanks the Minister for the territorial government's ground-breaking acceptance of a community conservation model for caribou management. However, the SRRB rejects aspects of the Minister's response that are incompatible with acceptance of the community conservation planning approach. The Board affirms its original findings supporting the *Belare wıle Gots'ę ʔekwé – Caribou for All Time* plan put forward by DélInę.

"The Board maintains its belief that a conservation approach based only on harvest numbers does not respect the multifaceted and carefully constructed management approach put forward in the DélInę plan," says SRRB Special Advisor and former Vice Chair Paul Latour. "To be successful, solutions for caribou conservation in the Sahtú Region need to come from the Sahtú communities themselves."

In his decision on September 26, 2016, ENR Minister Robert C. McLeod expressed support, in principle, for the community conservation model proposed by DélInę and accepted by the SRRB, but requested changes that would impose a Total Allowable Harvest of 129 and a five-animal limit on tsída gha máhsı ts'Inıwe (ceremonial harvest of females) for the entire Sahtú Settlement area, while maintaining a zero tsída (female) harvest limit in the hunting regulations.

That request was based on the Wek'èezhıı Renewable Resources Board's Hearing Report that the Total Allowable Harvest for Bluenose East ʔekwé should be reduced to 750, 200 less than the 950 recommended by ENR in its submission to the SRRB's hearing.

"The Minister's recognition of the principles of community self regulation is historic and important," Latour says. "But this means that community planning needs to be respected and supported, even when the approach differs from other regions. The Board is opposed to imposition of an externally determined Total Allowable Harvest approach that disregards evidence about what will work best within the Sahtú Region to protect the caribou."

While the SRRB supports the conservation actions proposed by co-management partners in adjacent regions, no evidence to support a Sahtú harvest of 129 animals was presented to the SRRB during the public hearing on Bluenose East ʔekwé. There was also no request or justification provided for an overall herd harvest of 750 rather than 950.

The SRRB expresses concern that it would not be appropriate for a reduced harvest to be imposed on the Sahtú communities without a proper consultation process and evidence to justify this change. Moreover, the SRRB reconfirms its earlier decision that, based on evidence presented at the Sahtú hearings, conditions do not exist to impose the Total Allowable Harvest.

Similarly, the SRRB's final decisions maintain that no new evidence was provided by the Minister to support a harvesting limit of five tsída (females) as opposed to the threshold of 20% determined by the Board. The SRRB has reviewed the Minister's response and decided not to accept this limit on tsída gha máhsı ts'Inıwe (ceremonial harvest of females). The SRRB recommends a change in the

regulations that recognizes tsída gha máhsı ts'ıñıwe and prevents criminalization of those who harvest tsída for ceremonial purposes.

“The Board’s key concern here is about making sure that decisions are based on the evidence presented in the hearings,” says Latour. “We do not support modifying the conservation approach that is at the heart of the Délıne plan, given the lack of evidence to support this change, and the likely impacts of imposing a Total Allowable Harvest approach instead.”

The SRRB’s final decisions emphasize the importance of inter-regional user dialogue in protecting the herd and providing the institutional space for the Délıne community conservation plan to be piloted. The Board recommends to ENR that the best conservation approach is to bring together user groups from the Sahtú and Tıchq regions to discuss how to coordinate annual conservation efforts.

The final decisions also affirm the wide variety of research and policy initiatives needed on issues such as land use planning, climate change mitigation, forestry and wildfire management that are also key to protecting ıekwé habitat.

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Background

In July, the SRRB released a final report on its public hearings regarding the management of the declining Bluenose East ıekwé (caribou) herd. The SRRB’s hearing report, *ıekwé hé Dene Ts’ııı - Sustaining Relationships*, accepted the principle that community conservation planning offers the best chance of successfully protecting Bluenose East ıekwé in the Sahtú region. The SRRB also accepted a detailed ıekwé conservation plan presented by the community of Délıne, the main harvester of that herd in the region. Both consideration of the community plan and its formal acceptance were historic firsts in Canada.

In September, the Minister responded to the SRRB’s hearing report by accepting many of the SRRB’s decisions and recommendations and requesting the SRRB to change some others. Notably, the Minister accepted in principle the community conservation planning model supported by the SRRB, while still requesting a Total Allowable Harvest be imposed.

As outlined within the Sahtú Dene and Metis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement, the Minister will have 30 days from October 26, 2016 to review the SRRB’s decisions and make his final decision. The Minister may accept, vary, or set aside and replace the SRRB’s final decisions, but is required to provide written reasons. The Minister may consider information not before the Board and matters of public interest not considered by the Board.