



MAY 20 2016

Mr. Michael Neyelle  
Chair  
Sahtú Renewable Resources Board  
PO BOX 134  
TULÍT'A NT XOE OKO

Dear Mr. Neyelle:

**Final Written Submissions to the 2016 Bluenose-East Caribou Herd Proceedings**

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) would like to submit to the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board (SSRB) the attached final written submission to the 2016 Bluenose-East Caribou Herd Proceeding.

We look forward to the SRRB's decision and recommendations on this matter.

Sincerely,

Ernie Campbell  
Deputy Minister  
Environment and Natural Resources

**Attachments**

- c. The Honourable Wally Schumann, Minister, ENR  
Mr. Gary Bohnet, Principal Secretary, Premiers Office  
Mr. Martin Goldney, Deputy Minister, Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations  
Mr. Fred Mandeville, A/Assistant Deputy Minister, ENR  
Mr. Roger Fraser, A/Regional Superintendent, North Slave, ENR  
Mr. Jeff Walker, Superintendent, Sahtú Region, ENR, GNWT  
Ms. Lynda Yonge, Director, Wildlife, ENR, GNWT  
Ms. Deborah Simmons, Executive Director, SRRB

**Government of the Northwest Territories  
Environment and Natural Resources  
Final Written Submission to the SRRB's 2016 Bluenose-East Caribou Herd  
Proceeding**

The following is the final submission of the Government of the Northwest Territories, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) for the 2016 Bluenose-East Caribou Herd Proceeding, following the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) public hearing held in Délįne March 1-3, 2016.

**Background:**

ENR submitted its *Proposal on Management Actions for Bluenose-East Caribou 2016-2019* to the SRRB on December 15, 2015. This document outlined proposed management actions for the Bluenose-East caribou herd in the Sahtú Settlement Area, including the establishment of a Total Allowable Harvest, after results of the June 2015 calving ground photographic survey showed the Bluenose-East herd had declined by nearly half since 2013.

A very similar proposal for the Bluenose-East caribou herd was submitted at the same time to the Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) by the Tłı̄chǝ (TG) and ENR, and the WRRB held a hearing on this proposal April 6-8, 2016. The two boards had earlier signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that outlined cooperation on this caribou management issue.

**The Sahtú Renewable Resources Board:**

The Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement (“the Agreement”) includes specific provisions regarding wildlife harvesting management which are set out in Chapter 13 of the Agreement.

Section 13.8.1 of the Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement (“the Agreement”) creates the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board (“SRRB”) as the main instrument of wildlife management. The Agreement mandates that the SRRB is to act in the public interest.

Section 13.8.1(c) contains a broad statement of principle on how wildlife is to be managed;

“Wildlife shall be managed in the settlement area in accordance with this agreement including its objectives.”

The objectives with respect to wildlife harvesting and management are set out in section 13.1.1 which states:

This chapter has the following objectives:

- a. to protect for the future the right of participants to gather, hunt, trap and fish throughout the settlement area at all seasons of the year;
- b. to conserve and protect wildlife and wildlife habitat and to apply conservation principles and practices through planning and management;
- c. to provide participants with certain exclusive, preferential and other harvesting rights and economic opportunities related to wildlife;
- d. to respect the harvesting and wildlife management customs and practices of the participants and provide for their ongoing needs for wildlife;
- e. to involve participants in a direct and meaningful manner in the planning and management of wildlife and wildlife habitat;
- f. to integrate planning and management of wildlife and wildlife habitat with the planning and management of all types of land and water use in order to protect wildlife and wildlife habitat;
- g. to ensure that traditional harvesting by other aboriginal peoples who have harvested in the settlement area can be accommodated in this agreement; and
- h. to deal fairly and equitably with persons who hunt, trap, fish or conduct commercial wildlife activities in the settlement area and who are not participants.

These objectives create a framework for the SRRB to consider the *Government of the Northwest Territories Proposal on Management Actions for Bluenose-East Caribou 2016-2019*, and the evidence before it arising from the Information Request process and the March 1-3, 2016 hearing, and to make its recommendations with respect to management of the Bluenose Caribou Herd.

### **Limitation of the Harvest**

In particular, Section 13.5 of the Agreement vests the SRRB with the authority to limit the quantity of harvest.

Section 13.5.2 sets out what is required to establish a total allowable harvest:

The Board may, in accordance with this chapter, establish, modify or remove total allowable harvest levels from time to time in the settlement area but shall establish or modify such levels only if required for conservation and to the extent necessary to achieve conservation. Unless a total allowable harvest is established, the quantity of the harvest by participants may not be limited.

For the reasons set out below, it is submitted that the evidence before the SRRB demonstrates that there is a need for conservation. It is further submitted that the

proposal to limit the annual harvest of the herd to a total of 950 bulls (2.5% of the total herd) meets the threshold of being a limit which is only so much as is necessary to achieve conservation. ENR further submits that the necessity criteria does not go so far as to require that all other means of conservation have been attempted before the SRRB can set a TAH. Rather, in making recommendations, the SRRB needs to consider the need for conservation within the context of the overall objectives of chapter 13 of the Agreement which includes the obligation to protect the BNE for the future and to apply conservation principles through planning and management. As noted by Justice Miller in *R. v. Guimond*, (citing *R. v. Sparrow & Delgamuukw v. R.*):

“Conservation and resource management is a compelling and substantial reason to interfere with an aboriginal treaty right. Moreover, it is not necessary or appropriate to wait for a crisis to arise before taking action. The ability to manage a resource that is healthy is as important a legislative objective as conserving or managing a resource in a crisis.”

*[2001 CanLII 16343 (MBPC) at paragraph 173.]*

### **The Need for Conservation: Status of the Bluenose-East herd**

In 2014, a calving ground reconnaissance survey suggested that the Bluenose-East herd had declined dramatically since the calving ground survey in 2013.

A calving ground photographic survey in June 2015 confirmed that the total number of breeding cows had declined from an estimated  $34,472 \pm 4,363$  (95% Confidence Interval) in 2013 to an estimate of  $17,396 \pm 4,616$  in 2015, a decline of about 50%, between 2013 and 2015. The total population estimate fell from  $68,295 \pm 18,041$  in 2013 to  $38,592 \pm 4,733$  in 2015 – a decline of approximately 43% over two years. In 2010 the herd was estimated at more than 100,000 adult caribou. The rate of decline in the Bluenose-East herd 2013-2015 is similar to the Bathurst herd’s most rapid decline 2006-2009 when it declined from more than 100,000 to about 32,000 in just 3 years.

The 2015 survey also suggested that 36% of the cows in the Bluenose-East herd were non-breeders, which suggests the pregnancy rate in winter 2014–2015 was likely about 64%, well below the 80% normally seen in a healthy herd.

Other recent vital rates for the Bluenose-East herd have also been poor. The cow survival rate between 2013 and 2015 is estimated to have been 71%, below the 80 – 85% associated with a stable herd. Calf recruitment in the last 3 years (2014-2016) has averaged 28 calves: 100 cows, well below the 30 – 40 calves: 100 cows generally associated with stable herds.

Taken together, these vital rates are consistent with a rapid rate of decline. Unless these vital rates improve substantially, the herd is likely to decline further in the next few years and recovery is uncertain given low productivity over the past few years.

## **Main elements of the Joint Bluenose-East Caribou Management Proposal**

Given the results of the 2015 calving ground photographic census and the serious state of decline of the Bluenose-East herd, the ENR's management proposal includes a number of conservation-based management actions which are focused on trying to help reverse the Bluenose-East herd's decline and promote an increase in the number of breeding females in the herd. All of these actions would be undertaken between November 2016 and November 2019. The next population estimate for the Bluenose-East herd is expected in June 2018, and a new management proposal may be needed thereafter. Management actions will be evaluated annually and may need to be adapted as new information becomes available.

The proposal has three main components:

### **1. Hunter Harvest**

Hunter harvest is one of the few factors directly affecting caribou mortality rates that can be controlled. It is unlikely that harvest is one of the main drivers of the overall caribou cycles or long-term fluctuations in caribou numbers; these cycles or fluctuations have occurred with or without substantial hunter harvest. However, harvest can become a significant contributor to decline in a herd if the harvest is large relative to herd size, if it is largely made up of breeding cows, and if the herd has an underlying declining natural trend. With the Bluenose-East herd's currently reduced and rapidly declining population size, harvest should be conservative so that it does not contribute to further decline.

To help slow the decline of the Bluenose-East herd and to promote its recovery, ENR recommends limiting harvest of Bluenose-East caribou to a Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) of 950 caribou herd-wide, with all harvest to be bulls and focused on younger, smaller bulls. The proposed TAH of 950 supports protection of the herd while still allowing for an Aboriginal subsistence harvest, and is consistent with the requirement in Section 13.5 of the Agreement to impose a limit only to the extent necessary for conservation. This recommendation will continue to be reviewed annually with co-management partners and revised if appropriate, based on any new information, an approach also consistent with the provisions of the Agreement and with the concept of co-management. This harvest is approximately 2.5% of the estimated herd size in 2015. This recommendation is also consistent with the 2014 management plan for this herd of a TAH accepted by the Advisory Committee for Cooperation on Wildlife Management (ACCWM) where the herd is of intermediate size (20,000-60,000) and declining. If the herd's current rate of decline continues,

the herd is likely to be in the red phase (low numbers, below 20,000) by 2018, when the next population survey is planned.

Until an allocation formula accepted by all user groups becomes available, the allocation proposed for the harvest in the Northwest Territories is 611 caribou (Tłı̄chǫ 373, Sahtú 163, Dehcho 15, Inuvialuit 8, NWT Métis Nation [NWTMN] 14, Akaitcho 20, and North Slave Métis Alliance [NSMA] 17). While ENR has no jurisdiction in Nunavut, the suggested allocation for Nunavut in the joint proposal is 339 and is consistent with the submission by the Government of Nunavut to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board.<sup>1</sup> A public hearing of the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) to consider a TAH for Bluenose-East caribou in Nunavut is scheduled for June 16 and 17, 2016.

Additional effort will be put into promoting respect for caribou, including hunter education on sound hunting practices, including limiting wounding losses and eliminating wastage, promoting reliable harvest reporting, and increased public education on the status and management of caribou herds.

## **2. Predator Management**

Predators are the other factor directly affecting caribou mortality rates that can be managed to some extent. Previous efforts to increase the annual harvest of wolves on barren-ground caribou winter ranges in the NWT through incentives to wolf hunters and trappers have had limited success since 2010. ENR has recently revised its incentives to wolf harvesters to include three options. All harvesters, including resident hunters, are able to access an enhanced fur incentive program for wolf pelts. This program allows harvesters to bring an intact wolf, a wolf pelt prepared to traditional standards, or a Genuine Mackenzie Valley Fur Program wolf pelt to the ENR offices to receive between \$200 and \$800.

We have repeatedly heard about the importance of involving communities in a meaningful way to develop an approach to predator management that is respectful, ethical, and effective. TG and ENR have proposed a collaborative community-based wolf harvesting pilot project for Tłı̄chǫ communities based on recommendations from Tłı̄chǫ elders. Selected Tłı̄chǫ citizens will be trained by experts (an expert in wolf hunting and trapping, a taxidermy/skinning expert, and a Tłı̄chǫ elder) in field techniques for hunting/trapping wolves, skinning, and fur preparation. Mobile wolf-hunter camps will be established in early or late winter, with the initial objective of removing wolves from the Bathurst caribou range. If this project is successful, it could be expanded to other communities and to the Bluenose-East caribou winter range. ENR will also work with other interested co-management partners to promote increased wolf harvest in the Bluenose-East range.

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<sup>1</sup> Submission to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board by the Government of Nunavut attached as Schedule "A" to this submission.

In addition, ENR, with the TG, will lead a collaborative review of wolf monitoring methods in the NWT and carry out a feasibility assessment of wolf management options to increase caribou survival rates. While we recognize the urgency of taking whatever action can be taken to help the recovery of the Bluenose-East herd, it is also important to ensure that any wolf management actions are well thought out and effective, and can be monitored and measured.

### **3. Monitoring**

Biological monitoring of the Bluenose-East herd proposed for 2016-2019 would continue and enhance the current program of surveys and satellite radio-collars. Monitoring would include:

1. Annual reconnaissance surveys over the calving ground to provide an index of the numbers of cows on the calving ground.
2. A new calving photo survey to estimate the numbers of breeding females and overall herd size, planned for June 2018. Consideration could be given to moving this survey a year earlier as part of adaptive management.
3. Composition surveys carried out every 3 years during the calving ground surveys to provide an estimate of the proportion of cows that were breeders that year.
4. Fall composition surveys planned for every 2-3 years; these allow us to track the bull: cow ratio, and provide an index of calf survival to 4 months of age.
5. An annual composition survey in late winter to provide a calf: cow ratio and an estimate of calf recruitment through the first year.
6. Condition assessment of harvested caribou to give us an idea of the shape caribou are in from year to year.
7. An updated estimate of cow survival rate every year that a calving photo survey occurs, using collared caribou data in combination with other demographic information about the herd and using a population model.
8. Complete and accurate harvest reporting from all harvesters and communities.
9. Maintaining 50 GPS satellite collars on the herd (30 on cows and 20 on bulls), with annual additions to replace collars that reach the end of their batteries and or collars that are on caribou that die.
10. Annual wolf harvest by all hunters and trappers will be monitored, along with information about the effort expended by hunters and trappers.

Increased monitoring of the herd (e.g. annual fall composition surveys, annual composition surveys on the calving grounds, annual assessments of pregnancy rate from fecal collections on the late-winter range, and annual assessments of

environmental indicators that may affect caribou condition and feeding conditions) will be considered if resources are available.

ENR also supports research that increases understanding of drivers of change in caribou abundance, and supports increased community-based monitoring by monitors from the Bluenose-East caribou range.

The monitoring described should allow us to track the herd's trend and key variables between now and 2018, when the next calving photo survey is planned.

Given the herd's low numbers and declining trend, ENR suggests that an annual review also occur, so that updated information can be considered and management actions can be re-evaluated. The annual review would include SRRB, WRRB, and consultation with Aboriginal governments and organizations that have an interest in the Bluenose-East herd.

### **What we heard during the public hearing**

During the SRRB Bluenose-East Caribou Public Hearings of March 1-3, 2016 and the WRRB Hearings on the same proposal April 6-8, 2016, ENR heard a number of concerns from the public, interveners, board members, staff, and technical experts with respect to the management proposal and other factors affecting the herd. Some of the key points are highlighted below.

### **Importance of maintaining caribou harvest for Aboriginal cultures**

- Caribou are an important source of food for many Aboriginal people in the Northwest Territories, and a highly valued social and cultural resource. Restrictions on caribou harvesting opportunities would affect the people who are most dependent on country food, and least likely to be able to earn income from the wage economy. They also restrict the ability of people to engage in traditional activities that allow Traditional Knowledge to be passed on from one generation to the next.

ENR recognizes that limiting the harvest on the Bluenose-East herd will cause hardship to some communities. During the public hearings, elders and others spoke about the importance of caribou, not only as a source of food but also as an important means of keeping culture and language alive. These are important values and we all need to work together to find ways to protect culture and language while allowing the Bluenose-East herd to recover. While the proposed annual harvest of 950 animals from a herd with a rapidly declining natural trend does increase the likelihood of further decline to a limited extent, it also maintains some caribou harvesting opportunities for Sahtú and other traditional users and communities.

ENR has committed to helping accommodate Aboriginal governments and organizations that need to shift their harvest to other herds and other species, keeping in mind that those sources of food must also be protected from excess harvest pressure.

The GNWT has also recognized the importance of food security for NWT residents. In its tabled document outlining the Priorities of the 18th Legislative Assembly, the GNWT committed to lowering the cost-of-living by improving food security and encouraging local food production, traditional harvesting, and effective co-management of caribou herds and other wildlife.

### **Leadership in caribou conservation from Délı̄ne**

ENR would like to recognize the leadership shown by the community of Délı̄ne in developing a community-based caribou conservation plan for the Bluenose-East herd. This plan includes a harvest limit that fits within the overall proposed harvest limit of 950 caribou herd-wide and the proposed allocation among Aboriginal user groups in the NWT and Nunavut, and an emphasis on harvest of younger, smaller bulls consistent with the ACCWM plan and ENR's management proposal. The plan was built around Traditional Knowledge and has an emphasis on harvesting, monitoring and community-based management that is consistent with traditional ways passed on by elders. ENR recognizes the reservations expressed by Sahtú hearing participants about harvest quotas and looks forward to working with Délı̄ne and other Sahtú communities on flexible harvest management that achieves overall conservation goals while respecting community concerns and consistency with traditional ways.

### **Caribou Collars**

ENR has listened to concerns expressed by community people about the use of satellite collars on caribou, and has taken proactive steps to address these concerns. ENR is not aware of any other tool or method that could be used to reliably monitor movement and distribution of barren-ground caribou for management purposes at the scale of the annual home range.

ENR regularly monitors new developments in available approaches and techniques to obtain key information needed to monitor and manage caribou, including advances in fecal monitoring and remote sensing techniques. ENR has embraced a number of new non-invasive techniques that have been demonstrated to be able to answer some specific questions, like fecal hormone sampling to determine pregnancy status.

ENR has strived to ensure that all collaring done on caribou is done with the highest standards of care and respect, using best available practices. Oversight is provided through the NWT Wildlife Care Committee, mandatory Standard Operating Procedures, and strict monitoring.

In response to community concerns and advances in collar technology, ENR has been very active in reducing the size and weight of radio-collars used on caribou. ENR has requested the manufacturing company focus on developing smaller and lighter collars. Just a few years ago, ENR was deploying standard sized collars that weighed 1100 g. In the spring of 2015, the Department put out lighter collars weighing 800 g. Moving forward in the spring of 2016, the plan is to start using the next generation of collars which will weigh 600 g, almost half the weight of the collars used only 5 years ago.

ENR will continue to listen to communities, use collars only when critical to effectively monitor and manage caribou herds, use best practices for the safe handling of wildlife, and conduct collaring in the most respectful manner possible.

*SRRB Information Request Round 1, Question 8(a)-(c)*

### **Predator management**

- During the public hearings, concerns were raised about whether limitations on Aboriginal harvest would on their own be sufficient to increase caribou survival rates. Some people who spoke at the public hearing pointed out that reduction of predators, primarily wolves, was one of the few “management levers” that might have a substantial effect on caribou survival.
- There was also support for full and meaningful involvement of communities in considering and developing an approach to wolf management. The importance of communities being part of the solution, and the importance of working together in a respectful and ethical way, were emphasized.

While ENR recognizes the urgency of the Bluenose-East caribou situation and the desire to move quickly to address predation pressure by wolves, ENR also recognizes the need to do it properly, involve Aboriginal governments and organizations in the development and implementation of any wolf management programs, and make sure the mistakes of the past are not repeated.

ENR will be leading a collaborative technical feasibility assessment of possible wolf management actions that could be considered. The wolf feasibility study is scheduled to be completed by the end of the 2016 calendar year. Until then, ENR fully supports smaller scale community-based projects to increase wolf harvest. The TG pilot project to train wolf hunters/trappers to harvest wolves on the Bathurst

winter range will allow communities to learn as they go and develop an effective way to increase wolf harvest. This approach builds on traditional skills and supports the traditional economy, and is mindful of harvesting wolves in ways that are consistent with cultural traditions. Implementation of an effective program requires the building of capacity, which in turn requires training and knowledge transfer. ENR encourages other communities, including those in the Sahtú region, to consider similar community-based wolf programs, and will work with interested communities to help implement them.

### **Development and maintaining healthy habitat**

- During the public hearing there were a number of questions about development and what was being done to protect important habitats for the BNE herd.

The management proposal deals specifically with actions to be taken between 2016 and 2019 to try to help the Bluenose-East herd recover, and to promote an increase in the number of breeding females in the herd. However, the management proposal is only one component in the overall management context for Bluenose-East caribou. The ACCWM plan *Taking Care of Caribou* recognizes the importance of maintaining healthy habitats for the BNE herd.

There are currently no active mines on the BNE range in NWT or Nunavut, although there has been mineral exploration activity on the BNE calving grounds in Nunavut. ENR participates in all environmental assessment (EA) processes in the NWT, and those EAs in Nunavut for developments that may affect trans-boundary caribou herds like the Bluenose-East. TG has also participated in EA processes for projects that may affect the herd's range. GNWT, the Government of Nunavut (GN), and other parties expressed opposition to mineral exploration activities by Tundra Copper on the BNE herd's calving grounds in Nunavut.

ENR has also participated in recent (2015-2016) meetings in Nunavut held by the Nunavut Land Use Planning Commission and the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board focused on caribou habitat protection. At those meetings ENR has opposed all development on all barren-ground caribou calving grounds. Land use planning processes in the NWT (e.g. Sahtú Land Use Plan) can also provide opportunities to protect caribou habitat. As an example, the Edaííla (Caribou Point) area protects caribou range that is often used for more than half the year by BNE caribou.

### **Co-management through community outreach, education and involvement**

- Throughout the public hearing, the importance of working together and involving communities in a meaningful way in caribou management issues was heard.
- ENR knows Aboriginal governments and organizations want to be involved in helping to address the Bluenose-East caribou decline.

ENR welcomes all Aboriginal governments and organizations to work cooperatively towards solutions for the Bluenose-East herd. It is only by working together that management actions can be effective. All parties bring something to the table, and by working together and sharing information in an open and respectful way, stronger decisions can be made to help the Bluenose-East caribou long-term.

### **Sahtú Needs Level**

If the SRRB recommends a TAH, then section 13.5.3 mandates that the Board allocate for the participants a portion or all of the total allowable harvest. The Board has evidence before it of past usage as well as evidence of the elders and communities which address the factors that are to be considered as set out in section 13.5.5 of the Agreement. As reflected in the information responses, there are a significant number of factors that have been taken into consideration in putting forward the proposed allocations, including but not limited to recent harvest data, the fact some users did not harvest in some years and the overall need for an equitable distribution for all users of the BNE herd.

As noted above, the Management Proposal contains a herd-wide allocation. The Proposal delineates an allocation based on the herd, recognizing its annual range crosses the jurisdictional boundaries established through land claim and self-government agreements, as well as the asserted territories of several groups with unsettled claims. ENR submits that consideration of the herd as a whole provides the best opportunity to create effective management recommendations. Such an approach is consistent with the stated goals of the SRRB and the WRRB to engage in a cooperative approach to public hearings, which are to increase consistency of trans-boundary conservation measures and ensure management of the Bluenose-East caribou herd is as effective as possible. ENR is of the view that the “herd-wide” allocation provided in the presentations represents a reasonable allocation under the circumstances the herd is facing.

Should the SRRB determine that it is necessary to conduct further hearings to determine a Sahtu Needs Level, then it is submitted that the SRRB should make recommendations which will provide guidance for the 2016-2017 harvest season while it undertakes any further consultation inquiry or hearings.

## **Conclusion**

The current status of the Bluenose-East herd is of serious concern. Timely conservation-based management actions are needed to help the Bluenose-East herd recover so that it can once again provide sustainable harvests that meet the needs of traditional users and communities. ENR's management proposal to the SRRB, and the similar joint management proposal to the WRRB, are intended to help the Bluenose-East herd recover with actions that are required for conservation and which restrict the exercise of Aboriginal rights to the least extent possible while still addressing the need for conservation. ENR looks forward to the SRRB's decisions and recommendations.



Schedule A to the Final Submission of the GNWT, Department of ENR

SUBMISSION TO THE

NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD

FOR

Information:

Decision: **X**

**Issue:** Recommendation to address the decline of the Bluenose East caribou herd.

## **Background**

- The Bluenose East caribou herd is a shared herd harvested by hunters in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.
- A harvest monitoring program suggests approximately 3,500 caribou were harvested in 2009 -2010. Subsistence harvest in Nunavut accounted for between 1000–1500 caribou annually, which represents 36% of the overall harvest. There is no commercial or sport harvest on this herd in Nunavut.
- The June 2014 reconnaissance survey suggests that Bluenose East caribou (one year or older) on the calving ground have further declined by approximately 30% between 2013 and 2014. This is higher than the estimated annual rate of decline of 16.4% (CL= 7-29%) between the 2010 and 2013 surveys.
- In the past, the calving ground reconnaissance surveys have been a reliable index of abundance in tracking population trend when compared to full population assessments and trend based on aerial photo-surveys conducted every 3 years.
- In December 2014, the Government of Northwest Territories implemented an interim harvest restriction of 1,800 caribou for the 2014-2015 winter harvest season.
- The Bluenose East Caribou herd has shown a declining trend since 2000, with a continuous decline from 2010 to 2015. During this period, the herd declined from 123,000 to 38,500 caribou (2015).

## **Current Status**

- The Bluenose East Caribou herd decline is believed to be the result of natural cyclical fluctuation. It is not known if or to what extent harvesting or other human activities like mineral exploration and development may be contributing to the decline.
- Ongoing discussions on short and long term management actions are being held with various Nunavut wildlife management organizations, the public and First Nations governments in NWT, and the GNWT.

### **Schedule A to the Final Submission of the GNWT, Department of ENR**

- The June 2015 aerial photo-plane survey results confirm the herd has continued to decline, with a total population estimate of 38,592 caribou. This is a significant decline from the 2013 population estimate of 68,000 caribou and represents a 21% annual rate of decline.
- Additional observations show conditions indicative of a declining herd: there is a below normal adult female survival rate (0.7) and calf cow ratio (0.2).
- In June 2015, the total preliminary estimate of breeding females is 17,396, which is considerably below the 2013 estimate.
- On January 14-15, 2015, DOE conducted consultations with the Kugluktuk HTO to set a TAH. In the interim, and until new scientific and Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit information became available, a TAH of 1000 Bluenose East caribou was recommended.
- According to the "Taking Care of Caribou" Management plan, accepted by the KRWB, the ACWM on December 18 2015 assessed the herd in the orange zone based on the 2015 population estimate and trend indicators. To minimize harvest risk, a recommended harvest rate for a herd in orange is 2.5%. Assuming there are approximately 38,500 caribou, this represents an overall sustainable harvest of 950 caribou, where the applied historical harvest allocation (36%) results in a TAH of 340 for Nunavut.
- The Kugluktuk HTO has already implemented the following voluntary management actions:
  - No organized community caribou hunts
  - HTO does not support sale/ purchase of caribou under the country food distribution program
  - HTO supports shift in harvest to alternate species like muskoxen
  - No sport or commercial harvest of Bluenose East caribou in Nunavut
  - Increase in educational and public awareness programs by HTO and DOE
- DOE has engaged with and continues to work closely with the affected community and respective co-management partners (NTI, HTOs, KRWB) and the NWT on management actions needed to address the Bluenose East caribou decline.

### **Consultations:**

- Co-management consultations on the decline and conservation concern occurred:
  - September 9, 2014 - Kugluktuk HTO board meeting
  - September 22, 2014 - Kugluktuk community information and consultations
  - October 9-10, 2014 - Technical Meeting 1, GN and NTI participation
  - October 15-18, 2014 - KWRB AGM meeting
  - October 22-23, 2014 - Technical Meeting 2, GN participation
  - October 31, 2014 - Kugluktuk HTO board meeting
- Consultations with the Kugluktuk HTO to specifically discuss a recommended TAH of 1,000 occurred on February 11, 2015. While there was recognition of

## **Schedule A to the Final Submission of the GNWT, Department of ENR**

conservation concerns and the need for harvest limitations, there was no consensus on the proposed TAH of 1000.

- From March 2 to 6, 2015 a caribou educational week was hosted by the HTO with presentations by DOE in Kugluktuk to educate the community about the Bluenose East caribou decline.
- On January 14-15, 2016, following the Nunavut Wildlife Management Process, the HTO of Cambridge Bay, Kugluktuk, Bathurst and Bay Chimo, KRWB, and NTI were consulted on a GN-recommended revised Total Allowable Harvest of 340 caribou.
- Although the new status of the herd was agreed upon, no consensus on the TAH was reached.
- To help the recovery of the herd, all the HTOs were consistent in recommending incentives to increase harvest of predators (mainly wolf) and protection of the calving ground.
- During the January 20, 2016 Bluenose-East Allocation Meeting, the HTO of Kugluktuk recommended an allocation of 35% instead of 36% to allow for a minimal 2% harvest for each of the five small communities of NWT.

## **Recommendations**

- That the NWMB establish a Nunavut TAH of 340 male caribou for the Bluenose East Herd.