



February 17, 2021

Camilla Tutcho, Chair
Sahtú Renewable Resources Board
Box 134
Tulít'a, NT X0E 0K0
Email: info@srrb.nt.ca

Via Email
info@srrb.nt.ca

Re: Public Listening on *Tìch'ádú hé Gots'edi* (Living with Wildlife) – Predators and Competitors, Déłıne, NT

Dear Mrs. Tutcho:

The following written submission and supporting documents are submitted on behalf of the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board (WRRB), to be considered during the ʔehdzo Got'ıne Gots'é Nákedı (Sahtú Renewable Resources Board – SRRB) public listening on *Tìch'ádú hé Gots'edi* (Living with Wildlife) – Predators and Competitors. The WRRB understands that the SRRB has recently postponed the scheduled April 19-23, 2021 public listening in Déłıne, NT to a later date.

The WRRB has a mandate for wildlife, plant, and forest management in Wek'èezhì and adheres to the principles and practices of conservation in fulfilling its duties. The Board shares responsibility for managing and monitoring ʔekwò (barren-ground caribou) herds and *Dìga* (wolves) in Wek'èezhì. The Board's written submission and supporting documents provide the SRRB with additional information about the involvement of the WRRB in management of *dìga*.

2020 *Dìga* Management Proceeding

Since 2006, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) have reported on the significant declines in the *Kòk'èetì Ekwò* (Bathurst caribou) and *Sahtì Ekwò* (Bluenose-East caribou) herds and identified the requirement for management actions. In Board proceedings during 2010, 2016, and 2019, the WRRB made decisions about harvest, including total allowable harvests for both herds, and recommendations to urge government actions to halt both the *Kòk'èetì* and *Sahtì ekwò* herds' declines.

However, restrictions on harvest have not been enough despite the hardships borne by harvesters. As such, the WRRB has also made recommendations to increase ʔekwò survival and offset natural hardships for ʔekwò by increasing *dìga* harvesting, conducting a feasibility assessment for *dìga* management, proposing *dìga* control, and supporting habitat conservation and monitoring.

On January 31, 2020, GNWT and the Tìchò Government (TG) submitted the “*Joint Proposal on Management Actions for Wolves (dìga) on the Bathurst and Bluenose-East Barren-ground Caribou (ʔekwò) Herd Winter Ranges: 2020 – 2025*” to the WRRB. Following initial assessment, the WRRB undertook a Level 2 management proposal review. However, to address concerns identified by GNWT and TG, following internal Board discussions in March 2020, the WRRB made the decision

to amend its procedure for the review of the 2020 diga management actions as proposed in the diga joint management proposal to a Level 1 review and to treat the 2020 diga management actions as a pilot project only. Further, the Board requested that TG and GNWT resubmit the diga management actions proposed for 2021-2025 in the Proposal for a Level 2 review with the inclusion of lessons learned from the implementation of the 2020 management actions in August 2020.

On August 25, 2020, GNWT and TG submitted a revised joint management proposal, entitled “*Revised Joint Proposal on Management Actions for Wolves (diga) on the Bathurst and Bluenose-East Barren-ground Caribou (ækwò) Herd Winter Ranges: 2021 – 2024*”, as well as a technical report with lessons learned from the implementation of the 2020 Pilot Project and a plain-language summary. On September 4, 2020, the WRRB gave notice that following an initial assessment of the Revised Proposal, the Board determined that a Level 2 review was appropriate, as per its Rule for Management Proposals. The Board conducted its proceeding and closed the record on October 23, 2020. The Board submitted its final Diga Reasons for Decision Report on January 8, 2021 to the GNWT and TG.

The WRRB concluded, based on current evidence, that a serious conservation concern for both the Kòk'èetì and Sahtì ekwò herds exists and, as such, increased management and monitoring actions are warranted. In addition to harvest limitations and reducing disturbance to the ækwò herds and their habitat, additional management and monitoring actions that focus on reducing predation, specifically diga, are required to support the recovery of the Kòk'èetì and Sahtì ekwò herds.

In its Reasons for Decision Report, the WRRB urged GNWT and TG to proceed with the ground-based harvest as proposed with the addition of harvesters supports, including ækwò and diga distribution information, gas caching, and/or bait stations as per the *Wolf Technical Feasibility Assessment: Options for Managing Diga on the Range of the Bathurst Barren-ground Caribou Herd* (2017). The WRRB recommended that GNWT and TG should not continue aerial removals of diga on the Kòk'èetì and Sahtì ekwò herd ranges; instead, more resources should be put towards ground-based harvest.

To better understand diga on the ranges of the Kòk'èetì and Sahtì ekwò herds, the WRRB recommended monitoring diga den occupancy through aerial surveys and remote cameras, continuing the diga collaring program using a statistically robust design to measure diga movements, and conducting Tìchq Knowledge research studies through storytelling and on-the-land collections that document observations of diga and ækwò relationship as well as the changes in diga behaviours.

Additionally, the WRRB recommended GNWT and TG develop annual monitoring protocols for efficiency, effectiveness, and humaneness to ensure the diga management and monitoring program is comprehensively evaluated, and to present to the Board annually on the diga program.

Therefore, for the SRRB's consideration, the WRRB submits the following supporting documents:

- *Reasons for Decisions Related to a Joint Proposal for Diga (Wolf) Management in Wek'èezhù*
- *Wolf Technical Feasibility Assessment – Options for managing wolves on the range of the Bathurst barren-ground caribou herd*

Conclusion

The future of the Kòk'èetì and Sahtì ekwò herds is uncertain. The WRRB is of the opinion that the need to implement effective management and monitoring actions is critical. In addition to harvest limitations and reducing disturbance to the ʔekwò herds and their habitat, additional management and monitoring actions that focus on reducing predation, specifically dìga, are unfortunately necessary to support the recovery of the Kòk'èetì and Sahtì ekwò herds.

The Board's decisions in its Reasons for Decision Report were structured to provide the greatest benefit to ʔekwò while recognizing that dìga are an essential part of the ecosystem. Collaborative and adaptive management is essential to ensure a future for the Kòk'èetì and Sahtì ekwò herds.

The WRRB looks forward to continuing a collaborative relationship with the SRRB regarding ʔekwò and dìga management. If you have any questions, please contact the office at (867) 873-5740 or jpellissey@wrrb.ca.

Sincerely,



Joseph Judas
Chair

Attachments

Cc Deborah Simmons, Executive Director
ʔehdzo Got'ìne Gots'è Nákedì (Sahtú Renewable Resources Board)

Hon. Shane Thompson, Minister
Environment & Natural Resources, GNWT

Erin Kelly, Deputy Minister
Environment & Natural Resources, GNWT

Heather Sayine-Crawford, A/Director of Wildlife
Environment & Natural Resources, GNWT

Grand Chief George Mackenzie
Tìchqò Government

Laura Duncan, Tìchqò Executive Officer
Tìchqò Government

Tammy Steinwand-Deschambeault, Director
Department of Culture and Lands Protection, Tìchqò Government