



SUBMISSION TO THE

NUNAVUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT BOARD

FOR

Information: X

Decision:

Issue: Updating co-management partners on the new population estimate for the Dolphin and Union caribou herd.

Background

- The Dolphin and Union caribou herd (DU) is a genetically unique and small herd (historically 20,000 to 40,000 animals) that is harvested by hunters from several Kitikmeot communities and communities within the northeastern Northwest Territories.
- In 2018 the DU population was estimated at 4,105 (95% CI = 2,931 - 5,759). These results indicate a decline of 88% from the 1997 estimate of 34,558 (95% CI = 30,275 – 38,841).
- After modifying the survey design which included stakeholders' recommendations, historical data, collar locations, and local knowledge to expand the study area, the results of the 2020 survey estimated 3,815 (95% CI = 2,930 – 4,966, CV= 13%) caribou, which was consistent with the declines detected by the 2018 survey.
- In December 2020, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) reviewed the interim decision to implement a Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) of 42 caribou for the DU caribou herd. The board made a decision to increase the TAH to 105 caribou and the Government of Nunavut put this into regulation.
- To support recovery of caribou herds, the Government of Nunavut has implemented predator management measures including conducting research on grizzly bears and offering a wolf harvest incentive. Linked to declines of the DU herd, the wolf harvest incentive in the DU range is \$900 per sample set (versus the standard \$500 in other areas).
- DU caribou were collared in April 2021 (36 females) and March 2024 (35 females). Stakeholders were involved in the planning process, and a Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO) representative was present for every capture in both years.

Current Status

- The current DU population is below 8,000 individuals, which is 20% of historic population high. As a result, the current management strategy has been to limit harvest to focus on population recovery.
- A new aerial abundance survey was completed from October 23 to November 2, 2023. The survey planning included input from relevant stakeholders and used a similar

design to the one used in 2020. HTO-selected community members participated as survey observers.

- Results from the 2023 survey produced an estimate of 5,229 (95% CI = 3,985 – 6,473, CV= 12%) for Victoria Island and mainland. This new estimate is still below 8,000 caribou, however, there was no indication that the population is still declining.
- The Government of Nunavut (GN) has engaged with and continues to work closely with the affected communities, co-management partners and Government of the Northwest Territories on management actions and monitoring of the DU herd.

Consultations:

- Face-to-face consultations were held with HTOs in Cambridge Bay (February 14, 2025), Kugluktuk (February 17, 2025), and with the Kitikmeot Wildlife Regional Board (KRWB) (February 28, 2025). Attempts were made to consult with Burnside and Umingmaktok HTOs, but were not successful. A summary from the consultations was provided via email to the Burnside and Umingmaktok HTOs asking for a written submission. We have not received any formal feedback as a result of our emailed communications as of March 28, 2025. We are currently attempting to arrange consultations however at the request of the HTOs, the meetings will be after the submission deadline.

Recommendation:

- Based on the current population estimate, all available scientific information, and Traditional Knowledge/*Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit*, the Government of Nunavut is not proposing any changes to the current TAH of 105.