

Southampton Island Caribou HTO Consultation Report 2019

January 27th , 2019

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Executive Summary

The Government of Nunavut, Department of Environment (DOE) Kivalliq Research Division traveled to the community of Coral Harbour on Southampton Island (SHI) to meet face to face with the Hunters and Trappers Organizations (HTOs). During this meeting we provided updates on the SHI Caribou survey in 2017, and addressed other issues concerning caribou, as raised by the HTO, and addressed questions regarding wildlife issues raised by the HTO members. Presentations with summary results of recent surveys and prevalence of Brucellosis were given by Mitch Campbell Kivalliq Regional Biologist, assisted by Keenan Lindell Kivalliq Wildlife Technician. This year we were grateful to have David Lee Wildlife Biologist for Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) join us for these consultations. His expertise on wildlife and the Nunavut Agreement was welcome and positive, and It was clear that the HTOs also appreciated his questions and knowledge.

HTO members were encouraged to ask any questions they may have on the subjects discussed. Additionally, we had questions of our own with regards to the members opinions and expertise on the current status and general health of caribou on the island. We aimed to create a casual yet professional atmosphere, where everyone would be comfortable speaking, for it is our goal not only to give, but to gain information as well from the HTO members who are amongst the most knowledgeable of wildlife issues within their hunting areas. We worked to generate a conversation between people rather than a one-sided presentation. This format seems to be successful and is beneficial for both parties where it creates trust and promotes communication and collaboration.

Preface

This report represents the Department of Environment's best efforts to accurately capture all of the information that was shared during the meetings with the Hunters and Trappers Organization of Coral Harbour. Keenan Lindell recorded audio of the meetings in order to ensure quality minutes, audio was deleted afterwards at the request of the HTO.

The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Environment, or the Government of Nunavut.

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1.0 Report Purpose and Structure

This report is intended to collate and summarize comments, questions, concerns and suggestions provided by the HTO in response to presentations given by Mitch Campbell Kivalliq Regional Wildlife Biologist with the Government of Nunavut. The Coral Harbour HTO was consulted on January 27th 2019.

2.0 Purpose of Tour

The presentations given were to discuss the newest information regarding the SHI caribou herd and to gain hunter knowledge of the overall health and numbers. Summary findings of the SHI caribou herd abundance estimate, population trend, Brucellosis prevalence and trend, survey transects flown as well as an update of mainland Kivalliq caribou herds and the potential for both immigration onto the Island or emigration off of the Island to Mainland range. The members were asked, whether they agreed with the information provided and the estimates generated. Members were asked of their observations over the last two or more years and how that may help inform on the research results being presented. Furthermore, all HTO members were asked if they would be interested in seeing and potentially participating in an Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit study of caribou to further incorporate IQ alongside science, into the wildlife research and management process.

2.1 Format of Meetings

The meeting was held in the evening at the HTO Office and ran just over 2 hours. Mitch Campbell gave a power point presentation via projector in English while Keenan provided translation when needed. The atmosphere was relaxed and interactive with the presentation lasting about one hour and forty five minutes with questions being taking whenever they came up.

3.0 Coral Harbour Meeting Summary

Date: January 27th, 2019

Representatives:

- GN-DOE, Kivalliq Regional Biologist: Mitch Campbell
- GN-DOE, Kivalliq Wildlife Technician: Keenan Lindell
- NTI, Wildlife Biologist: David Lee
- Naujaat HTO Board members
 - Chair Person, Moses Nakoolak
 - Vice Chair, Darcy Kakoolak
 - Manager, Natasha Ottokie
 - Member, Danny Pee
 - Member, Ayowna Emiktowt
 - Member, Lucassie Nakoolak
 - Member, Joe Saviakjuk

Duration:

2.10 Hrs.

Overview of Comments and questions:

The main topic of concern was Brucellosis. The community wanted to know what the prevalence levels are, how caribou contract the bacteria, how to tell if a caribou has it and if it can be eaten. A hunter was diagnosed with brucellosis in December 2018. Members mentioned that hunters are still shooting caribou with Brucellosis but a lot less than in previous years suggesting it's on the decline. Yet, hunters are catching caribou with lots of fat even in January. All members were disappointed and concerned that the SHI survey may not be funded this fiscal year. The HTO has lowered the TAH to 1000 voluntarily based on the results of the 2017 survey, but hunters stated there was a large die off of caribou in January 2018 because of freezing rain creating very thick ice. The HTO chair believes Wolf collaring is a great idea. Members are aware of online sales being a concern in the rest of the region but feel they are managing the hunters and not much meat is leaving Coral even though there is a demand. Certain members do not like the idea of collaring any animals; these same members are very enthusiastic about an IQ study.

4.0 Coral Harbour HTO Meeting Minutes:



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Meeting notes

Function: Kivalliq Research Consultations: Coral Harbour

Subject: Southampton Island caribou research and research results update & Regional research updates.

Location: Coral Harbour

Date: January 27th, 2019 **Time:** 6:50 – 9:00

Duration: 2.10 Hrs

In Attendance

Name	Affiliation/Title
Mitch Campbell	GN Wildlife Biologist
Keenan Lindell	GN Wildlife Technician
David Lee	NTI Wildlife Biologist
Moses Nakoolak	Coral Harbour HTO Chair Person
Darcy Nakoolak	Coral Harbour HTO Vice Chair
Natasha Ottokie	Coral Harbour HTO Manager
Ayowna Emiktowt	Coral Harbour HTO Member
Danny Pee	Coral Harbour HTO Member

Lucassie Nakoolak	Coral Harbour HTO Member
Joe Saviakjuk	Coral Harbour HTO Member

Note Taker: Keenan Lindell

*** Keenan Lindell recorded audio of the meetings in order to ensure quality minutes, audio was deleted afterwards as agreed with the HTOs and would not be used for any other purpose. ***

Meeting Minutes

Opened with a prayer 6:50

Introductions 6:52

Mitch Campbell Presentation Kivalliq Research Consultations 7:00 – 8:45

Qamanirjuaq Caribou Update

Beverly Caribou Herd update

SHI Caribou 2017 Survey Update

- Showing a map where caribou were being sited from the aerial survey in 2005 vs 2017.
- In 2017 caribou in the same areas but a lot lower density.
- Explaining benefits of double observer co-operative method.
- 4 dedicated observers, 2 recorders.
 - More accurate estimate.
 - Miss fewer caribou with cooperative method.
 - Can calculate how many caribou are missed by both observers then add them to estimate up to 5% - 10% in some cases.
 - More community observers trained which means more community participation, capacity, and feedback.
 - Brucellosis Incidence & Pregnancy Rates 1966 – 2014 graph.
 - Tracking results through the years, from 1966 to 1999 no signs of Brucellosis. We started seeing the first cased in 2000 than it just exploded across the island.
 - The prevalence is now dropping based on hunter observations.
 - It would be good to know what hunters are seeing this harvesting season.

MC – it would be great to get the HTOs perspective on the current health and status of the SHI caribou population.

MN – I haven't herd really anything about Brucellosis in a while. I don't know about the others. I think they are pretty healthy right now. Even this time of year now they have about this much fat now. (About 2 inches I think)

MC – Wow that's great news. So the range seems to be in good shape. So right now my opinion is that I would not want to come in and do a harvest to access health, when the herd is low and the people have a greater need of tags. We want that whole harvest to go to the people. What we want to try start up again this year is the sample program; see if we can get that rolling. Pay hunters to take blood samples from their harvests and send them out for testing and monitor the brucellosis prevalence that way. I want to mention too that the HTO was the first to notice the outbreak and then we sampled for it. So we didn't find it, you folks saw it so we sampled it and found out what it was. Also it was the HTO who noticed the drop in prevalence so your HTO is very strong in providing us with IQ which has been way ahead of the science, which has been critical in the management of this herd. So let's keep that relationship going and stay in contact.

Feel free to contact us anytime you want, especially if you think something is wrong with the herd. And something else I just want to make clear, you probably already know this but brucellosis is what we believed played a major role in the decline in your caribou not subsistence hunting where the meat remained on the Island to feed Coral Harbour families. Even with the commercial harvest if you work out the numbers combining the subsistence harvest with the commercial harvest before the outbreak, it was not enough caribou to bring the population down. So we have been clear to mention that when the numbers were high it was not only hunting that brought it down, it was the disease plus a combination of other factors of which hunting was only one.

- SHI Herd Trend Graph – Herd was down in the 80's to around 5,400 but rose to 30,000 in 1997.
- 30,000 caribou for the island was not sustainable, without hunting the population crash would have been more severe.
- We hit a low point around 2013 to 7,200 but then we had a recovery. HTO said that caribou went onto the island from the main land and that they are seeing more calves. We did a genetic test on the caribou and that showed that the current SHI caribou had recently been heavily influenced by mainland caribou.
- Slight drop in 2017 to 8,300 but we figure the sweet spot is around 15,000.
- If the herd reaches an estimated 15,000 caribou, we can start discussing the removal of the TAH and NQL.
- If we are successful with adjusting the TAH to address the current declining status we are hopeful that the herd won't drop much further and eventually bounce back.

LN – I want to make sure that we are being understood. It's not just from the lack of food it is from the ice condition as well. We had freezing rain in January so that killed off many of the caribou.

JS – Someone shot a Brucellosis caribou last week.

MC – Okay, so you are still seeing them out there?

JS – Yes sometimes, but not as many as we've seen in the past.

MC- The mainland populations have brucellosis as well. It's a disease that's in all the herds. We think what happened is the caribou came from Coats Island where there is no disease that we know of. They were introduced onto Southampton Island and they either mixed with a mainland caribou or the disease was in the soil. Anyways they caught brucellosis but they didn't have any immunity to it, that is why we believe it had such a large impact. We are hoping that these Coats Island caribou mixed with mainland and built immunity so there will a lower prevalence of the disease over time.

AE – I have a question can fat caribou have brucellosis too?

MC- Yes they can.

FE – How can we tell?

MC – It's tricky, the problem with testing of Brucellosis is that it can't tell you whether the animal has had it or has it now, so whether its active or not. We know very little about the disease in caribou. If you find a caribou with swollen joints or a male with large testicles this is a sign of it.

AE - Can we cook the meat to get rid of it? The young people I think have been wasting meat because they are scared that they have brucellosis.

MC – Yes if you cook it thoroughly, it will kill the bacteria and be safe to eat. If you find a caribou with swollen joints or enlarged testicles, my advice would be to leave it. If it were up to me I would not risk it. We have a pamphlet to give people info on brucellosis at the wildlife office.

AE – How are they getting the disease?

MC- It is from fetal fluids that can be ingested or contaminate open any sores. If there are no cuts on the animal it won't get it, same with humans. If a hunter is cutting up a caribou with brucellosis, they could contract the disease if they have any cuts or scratches that allows the bacteria into the bloodstream.

DL – She brings up a good point because a lot of hunters are leaving caribou, many animals will scavenge from it then they can spread it to other animals. So someone was asking if they should bring it back to town to test or maybe incinerate?

MC – I would suggest that if a caribou is suspected of Brucellosis that you should not bring it close to town.

AE – Inuit never really heard of these kinds of things, we always ate caribou frozen and raw not worried about disease. Now we are scared to eat raw meat.

MC – Yes it is a bit scary. If you're not sure, cook it and you will be fine. I should mention too that if a caribou does get brucellosis it can get over the disease. It runs through their system, I'm not sure how long it stays in their body but it does get out eventually if it survives. So a caribou that had brucellosis you can safely hunt like two years later.

?? - My brother was diagnosed with brucellosis just last month.

MC – Okay very good to know, I think we need to start doing some screening. We won't expect to see it disappear right away it takes some years to lower the prevalence in a population though there is so little known we can't say how long.

DL – It's also difficult to tell the symptoms because they are just like a cold.

FE – How many percent of the caribou have brucellosis?

MC – In 2006 it was about 50% I think over time it is going down because caribou build immunity to it. When it first the herds immunity to it was low that's why we believe it spread so fast.

DL – All caribou herds have brucellosis but at like 2% or 3% because most have immunity to it.

MC – The good news is that people know about it and it can be eradicated from your body (Cured). The problem is when Brucellosis is not diagnosed for some time it will damage the body over years which can cause a lot of longer term effects/damage but if it's caught in time you can be completely cured of it and it's gone. Now that the health care system is aware of it they are keeping an eye out for it. I always tell people, if you think you were exposed to a diseased caribou, and if you're feeling sick after that exposure, you should ask for a blood test. If it comes back negative, go back a couple months later and get another one because it is a very slow growing bacterium.

AE – Thank you.

Proposed Programs

IQ Studies on Caribou

- GN has a pot of money to fund IQ studies on caribou.
- Administered but not run by GN, it can be run the way HTOs want it run and by who they want.
- Rankin has started with Isra and Warren.
- GN just needs a deliverable, some IQ knowledge to use along with Science won't be owned by GN.

LN – I can finally say good idea.

MC – It would be great to have this IQ collected and it is so valuable, it's tough for us because we are biologists and that's what we know, and there is so much IQ out there that is equally beneficial to our programs as the science. Science is only a part of the big picture. We also realize we are not the people to coordinate and control this we just want to fund it and include the knowledge in future management of caribou.

SHI Caribou Survey

- This has been a priority to survey this population every 2 years at least until recovery.
- 2017 survey showed a decrease since 2015.
- We are concerned if we do not survey in a 2 year rotation, we might get into a situation where we harvest too many caribou and tags will have to be lowered again.
- I have heard that your HTO have changed the TAH to 4 per household and that was your HTO that took care of that. What I suggest is that you send in a request to our department and NWMB to make the TAH change official to 1000.
- We can help out with a letter if needed.
- It's great you did it on your own but if someone were to challenge it that's where it can get tricky.
- We submitted to do this survey this year unfortunately it was declined not because it's not supported but because it was not a funding priority with all the other wildlife issues the DOE has to deal with.
- Rescheduled for May 2020
- We are still fighting to get money for it to go this May but right now we have not had any luck.

DN – Would it help if there was a support letter for this?

MC – Yes that would be helpful especially to mention that it is in the management plan to survey every two years and that you are concerned for your caribou getting dangerously low.

DN – Especially because in 2017, you did that survey, and the caribou were had a big die off that year after the survey.

MC – That is very important information to add to your letter and further reason to reassess the population. Also getting KWB to send a letter as well would be helpful.

MN – As you said we as the HTO are reducing the tags given out to 1,000 as we think the herd has declined since 2017 because of all the icing that occurred since the 2017 survey. We still need the GN to help lower the TAH so we don't overharvest the herd.

MC- That's really proactive of your HTO and we will be sure and put the request to lower the TAH in as soon as possible but will need your HTO to send a letter indicating this to the GN and NWMB.

DP – We had rain in January (it was like +2), and it started raining, 5 inches of ice on top of the snow. Caribou can't eat when ice is that thick.

DL – The TAH that you are recommending is based on the population estimate of the 2017. So it does not reflect the current population and what the community is saying about the die off in 2017, because you don't have that information.

MC – Exactly.

DL – So this is a really strong case for the HTO to tell the GN to not following through with the management plan. This is one of the only populations with a TAH and the community is doing there end of it by managing and following the TAH but the GN is not following through and providing the information you need to manage the population.

MC – We will keep lobbying to try and get the funding but we need all the help we can get. We are always ready to come in and survey.

AE – When you were surveying, were there any spots you noticed where there were dead caribou?

MC – Not in the 2017 survey maybe one or 2 kill sites but that's it, it seemed to be ok during the period of survey.

AE – Did you also survey Coats Island?

MC – Yes, but the caribou also appeared to decrease on Coats Island. There are roughly about 800 caribou on Coats Island last we counted in 2017.

MN – We were hearing from hunters that they were seeing caribou on the north side.

MC – We will try to also survey Coats Island during the next survey if time and funding permit.

MN – You surveyed White Island?

MC – Yes we surveyed White Island as well.

KL – There wasn't many.

MC – No, White Island hasn't had many caribou on it for quite some time now.

AE – So Coats Island is at 800?

MN – Approximately, Yes.

AE - Why did they die? Sickness?

MN – Too much snow and ice I think.

MC – Yeah there seemed to be a die off. Prince Charles Island had a similar die off in the same year.

KL – That was ice too right?

MC – Yes and they got hit hard by that and deep snow.

AE – Is it due to climate change?

MC – It could be partly related, but for the smaller islands they do that because there is so much open water you get a lot of icing and the caribou there tend to go up and down in abundance.

DP – Did you do the survey on Baffin Island and what are the numbers?

MC – We did a survey there in 2014 and numbers showed about 5,500 for the whole island of which about 1,700 were on Prince Charles Island. We haven't been in there to survey since.

The information we have gotten so far is telling us that it is staying about the same though some areas in south Baffin seem to be slightly increasing though we can't confirm at this time.

MN – Last time I spoke to my brother in law who lives in Cape Dorset, and there they seem to be seeing more caribou.

MC – In the Kimmirut area, people are reporting more caribou. We were in there in the spring for composition and it was easier to find caribou which could be an indication of the same. Kimmirut HTO said that will be the first area that caribou will come back because that is a rough area and it is hard for hunters to get into that area. I think we are a few years yet before a positive recovery.

AE – They have been really taking the caribou here and they have been trying to tell their young hunters to be careful about the caribou. They are really conscious about the caribou and leading HTO on this issue.

MC – We use Coral Harbor a lot to explain how it works and how things should be done because you have had that history.

AE – There is demand from Baffin for caribou because of the fat and the income provided, but because of Calm Air, HTO, and Wildlife officer, they have been able to reduce the sales from this area.

Meeting adjourned 9 pm