

HTO Consultations on muskox distribution and abundance, Muskox Management Units MX-08

April 2019



Department of Environment, Government of Nunavut Iqaluit, Nunavut

Executive Summary

Government of Nunavut, Department of Environment (DOE) representatives conducted a consultation with the Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO) of Taloyoak and the community members of Taloyoak on April 23, 2019. The primary purpose of these consultations was to better inform the HTO and community members of the results of the 2017 abundance estimate of MX-08 and discuss the management recommendations that they would like to see implemented. The consultation was also a way to receive and collect additional local and traditional knowledge insights.

The Taloyoak HTO agrees with the survey results, which show that muskox numbers in the management unit have increased considerably. The current Total Allowable Harvest is 66 tags, or a harvest rate of 1.8% of the current population estimate of 3,469 animals. This level of muskox population growth is of concern for the community members and harvesters. The harvesters would like to increase the present quota to keep muskox numbers lower to allow the preservation of caribou, and their habitat, around the community. The DOE suggested an increase of the harvest rate to 6%, which constitutes an increase from 66 to 218 tags. The Taloyoak HTO and the community members support an increase, but they would like to see a higher percentage harvest rate as they consider 218 tags to be too low. DOE supports the request for a higher Total Allowable Harvest (TAH) and has offered to work closely with the HTO and community to bring the number of tags to 275 (a harvest rate of 7.5%).

This report attempts to summarize the comments made by HTO board members and the public during these meetings.

Preface

This report represents the Department of Environment's best efforts to accurately capture all of the information that was shared during consultation meetings with the Hunter and Trapper Organization and the public.

The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Environment, Nunavut 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 raised during a consultation held with the Taloyoak HTO and public on April 23, 2019 about the results of the muskox distribution and abundance survey of the muskox management unit MX-08, and management recommendations. The summary and notes herein reflect only what was shared during these meetings.

2.0 Purpose of Consultations

The primary purpose of the meetings organized and led by DOE was to engage the HTO and the public in an ongoing dialogue on the survey results of the muskox management unit MX-08 and solicit feedback on the latest survey report, gather additional local knowledge, and discuss future management recommendations. The results from the 2017 population survey were communicated during the meeting.

2.1 Format of Meetings

The meetings were held during the evenings and were 1 to 2 hours in length. Meetings were facilitated and lead by the Regional Biologist and the Regional Wildlife Manager, who were also the primary presenters. The local Conservation Officer was present as an observer. The presentation format was informal and HTO Board members and the public were invited to ask questions or raise concerns and recommendations. It was an open dialogue.

3.0 HTO and Public Consultation Summary

The objectives of the meeting were made clear to the HTO and the report was provided to them prior to the meeting. By doing so, the HTO Board members were already familiar with the information and could be engaged in a more meaningful way. In the eastern side of Kitikmeot Region, the muskox are not valued in the same way as for more western communities. Muskoxen are seen as a threat to the displacement of caribou, the community's preferred country food, and therefore it is felt that muskox numbers should be kept relatively low to preserve the caribou calving ground on the Boothia Peninsula.

3.1.1 Taloyoak HTO Consultation Summary - 2019

Issues: Muskox distribution and abundance in muskox management unit MX-08, Boothia Peninsula, August 2017. The number of muskoxen in this management unit is increasing considerably.

Date: April 23, 2019

Representatives:

DOE: Lisa-Marie Leclerc and Kevin Methuen, David Anavilok

HTO: Joe Ashevak (Chair), George Aklah, Kovalak Kootok, Tommy Aiyout, Jayko Neeveacheak, Bruce Takolik, John Lyall.

Summary of the Discussion:

During the presentation (Appendix 1), HTO members made comments and asked questions to ensure an understanding of the research methodology and results. The HTO members supported the survey results as they are consistent with their observations on the land.

The HTO members gave additional information on where muskox could be moving into the area from. Since in the 1980s, there were no muskox on the Boothia Peninsula, it was stipulated that the muskox was coming from Prince of Wales and Somerset Island. However, today, it seems that they are coming from other directions, such as west and the south of the Peninsula. It was also discussed that the Boothia Peninsula muskox might start to interbreed with the mainland muskox.

For the HTO members, this increase of muskox is very concerning, as normally, an increase of muskox is associated with a decline in caribou. Local knowledge mentions that the muskox displaces caribou if they are too abundant. The HTO sees that the muskox are now overpopulated in the area and they need to be kept under control. In addition, they would like to conduct a caribou survey to make sure that the Boothia Peninsula herd is still healthy in number, as other herds of caribou are known to be declining in the western Kitikmeot region.

Concerning the harvest rate, the tags are currently being filled. This year, all the tags were assigned, and the community is currently looking to access more tags. The HTOs would like an increase in the TAH, higher than what the DOE originally recommended (a TAH to 218). The HTO would like to keep the TAH system, but have a harvest rate of 7 to 8%.

Recommendation to the GN:

The GN and HTO of Taloyoak recommend an increase of the TAH to 7-8% in order to better control the increase of muskox on the Boothia Peninsula.

3.1.2 Taloyoak Public Consultation Summary - 2019

Issues: Muskox distribution and abundance in muskox management unit MX-08, Boothia Peninsula, August 2017. The number of muskox in this management unit is increasing considerably.

Date: April 23, 2019

Representatives:

DOE: Lisa-Marie Leclerc and Kevin Methuen, David Anavilok

HTO: Joe Ashevak

Summary of the Discussion:

During the presentation (Appendix 1), people present made comments and asked questions to ensure an understanding of the research methodology and results. The community members supported the survey results as this is consistent with their observations on the land.

Two community members would like to see mostly an open harvest on the muskox, 90% or no TAH. They feel strongly that a suggested TAH of 218 is not adequate. A higher harvesting rate will be needed to keep the muskox growth under control, so caribou can prevail on the landscape. It was also emphasized that there is a limited amount of tags, and this is a problem for accessing tags. There is a problem with hunters using cheap and small ammunitions, as well as leaving harvested skinny caribou on the land, as Baffin Island people ask for top quality fat caribou. These concerns were brought forward since these actions contribute to meat wastage. There is a need to continue working together to address these problems.

However, some community members expressed that they do not have a TAH for the caribou and that causes problems. The younger generation does not follow old traditional rules and are prone to overharvest. Muskox are a lot of work to clean and skin, and some people might just leave most of the meat and carcasses behind. Another community member proposed a future increase to 270 tags, which appears to be a good compromise.

This year, all the tags were assigned, and the community is currently looking to access more tags. The public would like seek an increase in the TAH. However, the public has a different view as to either remove the TAH or have a higher TAH than what is currently proposed.

Recommendation to the GN:

The community members of Taloyoak recommended an increase of the TAH, but do not see a suggested increase in TAH to 6% (218 tags) as sufficient. While some community members would like the TAH system to be removed, others would like to keep it to avoid overharvesting. Some community members recommended a TAH of 270, which could balance the position of different people in the community.

4.0 Conclusion- Next Steps

The DOE will finalize the muskox report with the additional comments provided during the meeting and distribute it to the co-management partners. Since 2017, population survey results have been discussed at the Kitikmeot Regional Wildlife Board Annual Meeting in 2018 and now with the HTOs, public, and other co-management partners. Key information on the increase of the muskox number in the muskox management unit MX-08 has been communicated. In addition, recommendations to the NWMB would be made to increase the current TAH. This position is supported by the Taloyoak HTO (Appendix 2).

5.0 Muskox Management Units MX-08 estimate results and management recommendations minutes

HTO consultation

Date: 23 April 2019 @ 7:00PM MT to 9:00PM MT

Subject: HTO Muskox Meeting, MX-08

HTO Comments:

- Ahiak herd not wintering near Taloyoak anymore
- HTO Chair: we want big meeting on caribou
- there is confusion about Ahiak and Boothia herd
- HTO Chair: big jump in Muskox numbers are natural cycle
- we worry about numbers growing and fewer caribou
- Muskox are coming from all directions
- September around Taloyoak good time to survey caribou
- Pretty good caribou numbers on Boothia Peninsula
- Calving grounds scattered all over Boothia Peninsula
- HTO Chair: caribou are changing their migration timing, patterns
- We are very concerned about future caribou declines
- HTO Chair: we want higher than 6% of population estimate (for muskox tags)
- We want meat plant for Muskox in the community
- Lots of caribou wastage; they leave skinny ones dead on the land, keep fat ones only to sell to Baffin

Public consultation

Date: 23 April 2019 @ 7:00PM MT to 9:00PM MT

Subject: HTO Muskox Meeting, MX-08

DOE Presentation:

- With the collaboration of with the community member, we went and surveyed Boothia Peninsula to know how much muskox they were. So MX/08, which is the Boothia Peninsula, the last population estimate was in 2006, where 1100 was counted with 158 adult muskox on transect. As you know, the community of Taloyoak is very concerned with muskox/caribou interaction and there was a lot of observation, apparently, since 2006, the muskox numbers were increasing. So we did a survey from August 5th to 13th, 2017. On that survey, we counted 702 adults on the transect. So 41% of the group that we've seen, which are all those little black dots, were a small group from 2 to 7 per group and the larger group was 19. So we know that muskox groups could be way larger during the winter, as they seem to aggregate. So those small numbers in the group might just be seasonal. The calf to adult ratio was 14%, which is really good for muskox, so they're doing good. One of the big difference between the 2006 survey and 2017 survey is how far the muskox are progressing south of Boothia Peninsula. The survey area stops here. So that doesn't mean there's no muskox here either. They might be there, we just didn't survey that part. So from that survey in the square in MX/08. The muskox number was actually 3649 muskox. That's a very big increase from the last survey. When we fly the survey, we count the muskox and write them down, we also look for predators and also caribou. This figure here on the black dot show the caribou and the red triangle, the diamond, that's the polar bears and the 2 red dot are actually the wolves that we saw.
- Based on this increase, we're suggesting at this time, keeping the rate of harvest the same at 6%. This would see a change in the TAH, from 66 to 218 tags. This is just our suggestion but the real reason we're here is to get your input which is very valuable to many changes in the TAH.

Q&A Session:

Community member:

- The Boothia Peninsula never had muskox before but they used to be at Prince of Wales Island. I am wondering if there's still muskox at Prince of Wales Island?

DOE:

- It seems that the muskox we're seeing now (Boothia Peninsula) is coming from Prince of Wales Island and Somerset Island. There's still muskox on Prince of Wales Island and Somerset Island, some of them might have migrated and multiplied in Boothia Peninsula.

Community Member:

- Did you survey the amount muskox in Prince of Wales Island?

DOE:

- Yes it was done in 2016-2017. So we did survey Prince of Wales Island and Somerset Island in 2016-2017.

Community Member:

- I thought there was a decline in caribou.

DOE:

- No, we saw caribou during the transect but we were not counting them, we don't know when it's the best time to count caribou so we're going to work with the HTO and come back to the community and have more meetings to know if the caribou are doing well or not but we don't know

Community Member:

- As a hunter, I believe, even if you don't count them, I want to go (hunting). Following the migration, they get more and get less and as a hunter I know they migrate.
- In the past, they used to hear from elders that some animals come and some years they're not here and some years they're abundant. It was the old saying from the elders that they'd be plenty in some years and some years they're not all out there. (IQ Knowledge).
- Once the HTO's management objective, are all the dates being filled? My hunting and personal view on this, I believe you 218 tags are open for this year?

DOE:

- Hopefully it'll start in July, first we're discussing the number, it is going to be an increase? We're suggesting 218, it might be more. Hopefully that increased TAH will take place in July.

Community member:

- At 218 personally a joke to me. For the many years of asking, community members stressing. And you're saying there's about 1200 muskox and that our elders are speaking about the muskox and caribou interacting with each other is a very big concern. I suggest you open 90% of the tags that you have for muskox. There's only limited tags right now and we all know within our community that we are first to get muskox tags before we can go out (hunting). There are a few more muskox tags repeatedly going to the HTO office and there's no tags available. So that's just adding on to the problem having the tag system program with our muskox. And the other thing on the caribou and muskox, we really need to work together. There are instance, there are things happening within our community. The caribou hunting season starting in August. That's when the caribou starts passing through here. One of our number one problem is the human activity and what I mean by human activity, the stores are selling full metal jackets, the specific rifle I don't know exactly what it is but you can order a rifle for 80\$ on eBay. Can't define that specific rifle that's cheap and cheap ammunition and there will be a whole bunch of caribou. It's not just caribou, they're wounding all kinds of other animals and no caliber rifles that's number two. Number 3, people from Baffin island are asking for top quality fat caribou and experience hunters are going out and hunting these caribou and if they don't catch a fat caribou they're leaving it there so that's number three problem. These are the areas that we need to get rid of or do something about. Thank you.

DOE:

- I just wanted to say first and foremost thank you very much for voicing those concerns, we take those concerns very seriously and we really appreciate the ethical harvesting and people not wasting meat, so in regards to that, we'll make sure that we're increasing patrols to those areas to crack down on wastage of meat and people using illegal ammunition as well. That's something we can do from the enforcement side, so thank you.

Community member:

- That's another thing to think about, I'm always here to help with the snow patrols, yes, but there's only a handful of people doing illegal activity. If you check with Canadian North and First-air waybills. You'll easily find out where those that are selling for money, for quick cash, or on facebook sell/swap. Those are the areas where you should be looking foremost.

DOE:

- Just to follow up on the 6%, 90%, clearly what I'm hearing is 66 tags is not working out, there's a more need for muskox in the community and I think we can accommodate that, what would be the number that would satisfy the need in the community?

Community member:

- I would like to see non tag harvest for muskox with no tags, and more young hunters can catch how they could in any season, all winter and spring. If there's no tags, it would be better, open to everyone
- Most harvesters try catch what they need and he thinks all hunters would do the same, most do and he just likes to see an increase on what they are allowed to catch.
- There was mention about the use of rifles and calibers too weak for animals but big animals they only debone animals and 223. Is the right caliber for caribou but the lower 22's shouldn't be used for big animals.
- Thank you like I said earlier, open 90% of the tags of your (Can't understand what he is saying). We're really fine about the muskox here, one of our elders speak those muskox here. And we know they are migrating here and there's too many, they're out numbering the food most importance to caribou. Like I said, open 90% of tags that we purposed, 218 is a joke to me. That's not just gonna cut it.
- When you hunt caribou, you have a tag, so we can hunt, that's what we want. That's a problem these days because we got no tags. Some younger people tend to over hunt and leave some out on the land. If we have a tag on muskox, this might become another problem, like over harvesting. From my knowledge, muskox is longer to work to skin and clean than caribou. If younger people over hunt too many in one day, they might not be able to clean them off. We gotta think about this one too, we gotta keep our animals healthy. If we have tags, that's okay with me. The tags are not enough now, muskox multiplied more and we can ask for more tags but I think it's better to have a tag system, just to say how many harvested in one year.
- Me personally I suggest 270 tags.

DOE:

- I'd just like to thank everybody for coming tonight and providing your input. It's very valuable to the management process, so thank you very much. We'll work with your local HTO and hopefully have some updated numbers for July, for the next hunting season. Personally it was my pleasure to come to your community for the first and meeting you all, and look forward to coming here for future.
- In conclusion, I'm really happy for the feedback that we had tonight, muskox are doing well, but maybe too well for the community, we need to keep them in balance and we need to also take into consideration the community need so we'll take all your feedback and there was a HTO member that was also here tonight so they hear you too and by working together I'm sure that we can find a solution that works best for everybody

Appendix I

PowerPoint Presentation 2019

Here below the presentation:

Muskox distribution and abundance
Muskox Management Unit, MX08,
Boothia Peninsula

Taloyoak HTO

Lisa-Marie Leclerc
 Government of Nunavut
 Department of Environment

June, 2019

Survey Area

- MX-08, last estimate in 2006 was 1,100 muskoxen, with 158 adults on transect.
- Concerns, muskox-caribou interaction.

Monitoring

- Survey completed in August 05 to August 13, 2017
- 702 adults counted on transect.
- 41% of the group were small groups of 2 to 7 adults.
- The calves to adults ratio was 14%.

Group Size	Number of Muskoxen
0-1	~10
2-7	~40
8-14	~10
15-21	~5
22-28	~2
29-35	~1

MX08- population estimate

There is an increase
 in muskox number with an estimate of
 3,649 ± 316 SE

Year	Estimate number of muskox
1985	~0
1995	554
2005	1,058
2017	3,649

Predators

Figure 7: Locations where Polar Bears and Wolves were observed in the Muskox Management Unit MX08 in relation to caribou distribution.

Managements- Discussion

What is the HTO's management objective?

Are all tags being filled?

What is the community need?

Appendix 2

Email of Support from Taloyoak Hunters and Trappers Organization

Smith, Caryn

From: Jimmy Oleekatalik <taloyoak@krwb.ca>
Sent: April 29, 2019 6:50 PM
To: Leclerc, Lisa-Marie
Cc: England, Kate; Methuen, Kevin; Smith, Caryn
Subject: RE: MX08 consultation- accomodation

Hi Lisa,

The Board is in agreement with the 275 for musk-ox tags. If you need more information please let me know.

Best regards,
Jimmy Oleekatalik,
Manager, SBHTA

-----Original Message-----

From: Leclerc, Lisa-Marie <LLeclerc@GOV.NU.CA>
Sent: Monday, April 29, 2019 1:59 PM
To: Jimmy Oleekatalik <taloyoak@krwb.ca>
Cc: England, Kate <KEngland@GOV.NU.CA>; Methuen, Kevin <kmethuen@GOV.NU.CA>; Smith, Caryn <CSmith@GOV.NU.CA>
Subject: MX08 consultation- accomodation

Hi Jimmy,

The Government of Nunavut, Department of Environment, discussed on the possibility to accommodate the recommendation of the HTO in having an increase of the harvesting rate of the muskox population MX08 of more than 6%.

With the comments of the HTO and the community members, we can support an additional increase with a recommendation of 7.5% / 275 animals as this seems reasonable by way of being: aligned with the HTO proposition, community comments, population increase, meeting increased demand for tags, while also reducing risk of meat wastage/wounding animals which is a current problem with the caribou.

Please let me know if the board support this recommendation.

All the best,

Lisa