

*Interested in Caribou? This is only one of a series of stories and articles on caribou that will be in the next edition of CARC's Journal, Northern Perspectives. The hard copy of the journal will be printed and distributed at the end of March. If you're interested in receiving a copy, you may wish to consider making a contribution to CARC, to help us produce more materials like this.*

## Top Twenty Policy Steps for Dealing with Dwindling Caribou

The disappearing caribou in the Northwest Territories (NWT) have people anxious – very anxious. Some herds have declined by thousands, some by hundreds of thousands over the past twenty years. Everywhere in the central Arctic, the trend seems to be the same – fewer caribou. This is not just a matter of concern for people living in that region, especially indigenous people. It is a matter of real hardship, economic, cultural, social and spiritual. The lives of the indigenous peoples of the region have been bound up with caribou for thousands of years. Some believe that in every human heart is a little of the caribou heart, and in every caribou, a little of the human heart.

This is not the first time the caribou have declined. Indigenous peoples' stories and scientific evidence both suggest that caribou herds here hit a low about every thirty years. This is thought to be linked to the effect of climate and caribou populations on lichens, the plants that are the main winter food of the caribou. But things have changed in the Northwest Territories over the past thirty years. There are more people, and more roads. There is new technology being used to help hunters, including tracking of radio-collared caribou that has been posted on the Internet. There are new mines on the barrens, with more planned. Perhaps most importantly, the climate is changing, that changes snow conditions, forest fires, and plant growth.



In January 2007, the Government of the Northwest Territories brought together about 170 delegates in Inuvik, near the Arctic coast of the Northwest Territories, for a 'Caribou Summit', the first gathering of its kind. The indigenous delegates met for two-and-a-half days, together with a few experts, and representatives of other sections of society, including a delegate from CARC. The delegates discussed, listened, and put together strategies that they hope will assist the recovery of the caribou of the caribou herds, and also limit human hardships. These strategies have now gone to the Government of the Northwest Territories,

in the hope that they, together with other northern governments and the Canadian Government, can find ways to put them into action.



Altogether, 58 different strategies were identified under four different headings. Delegates then went through a process to pick out their priorities. Below are the top twenty (some have been slightly reworded to help them make sense to people who were not there):

### **Managing Human Impacts**

1. Protect calving grounds in the NWT and Nunavut [some of the NWT caribou herds calve in the next-door territory of Nunavut]
2. Reduce all harvest levels
3. Start mandatory reporting of all harvest [in the past, the indigenous harvest particularly has been poorly reported]
4. Cut all [non-indigenous] resident, outfitting [commercial sport hunting], and commercial [meat sale] harvest
5. Teach people about their hunting rights and responsibilities under land claim agreements and the Canadian constitution.

### **Addressing Hardships**

1. Develop local and regional codes of conduct for caribou harvesting [drawing on traditional hunting practices]
2. Hold regional harvester workshops [to give people the latest information about the caribou, and about new codes or regulations]
3. Use DeneKede [an NWT indigenous school curriculum] to teach about traditional laws
4. Use outfitters camps as a base to teach youth about hunting
5. Educate people about other traditional foods, that may have fallen out of use, and that may replace caribou to some extent in their diet.

## **Information for Management**

1. Bring traditional [indigenous] knowledge into decision making
2. Do all caribou population surveys at one time [so that there is a clear picture across the territories of population trends and levels]
3. Determine impact of insects, climate change, and human activity in determining caribou behaviour
4. Create a central database containing information on all NWT caribou herds
5. Determine the impact of predators on present caribou numbers

## **Engaging Partners**

1. Bring youth into hunters and trappers committee meetings, wildlife management board meetings, and wildlife conferences
2. Develop a management plan for each caribou herd that includes management actions for different herd population levels
3. Ask elders to help teach youth, and people from outside the NWT, about how to hunt caribou, and how to handle meat to ensure there is no wastage.
4. Don't make decisions without partners
5. Hold aboriginal [indigenous] conference on caribou