

Ground-breaking Co-management in the Split Lake Resource Management Area of Manitoba, Canada

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Abstract: Settlement in June 1992, of the Northern Flood Agreement between Manitoba, Canada, Manitoba Hydro and the Split Lake Cree First Nation resulted in the establishment of the Split Lake Resource Management Board (SLRMB) which is comprised of community representatives and government appointees. The responsibilities of the SLRMB include: developing annual programs and budgets, conducting wildlife population and habitat assessments, developing land and resource plans, monitoring resource use, and reviewing land use and management proposals. The Board's mandate extends to management of all natural resources including several distinct caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) populations which frequent the Split Lake Resource Management Area (RMA). After one year of operation, the SLRMB has several accomplishments. Its success is attributable in part, to the Board's effective mix of Split Lake Cree First Nation and government of Manitoba appointees. A good communication strategy has also been crucial for increasing understanding about the board, delivering essential resource management messages, and soliciting input at the community level. Rapport, teamwork, credibility and a resulting "strong voice" have set the framework for the SLRMB to play a significant role in resource management in a large part of northern Manitoba.

Key words: *Rangifer tarandus*, caribou, Aboriginal, Cree, Manitoba Hydro

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Split Lake settlement

Beginning in the 1970s, the regulation of Lake Winnipeg and diversion of the Churchill River in northern Manitoba, has drastically impacted many resources and the communities which depend on those resources (Norway House, Cross Lake, Nelson House, York Land and Split Lake). In 1977 the Northern Flood Agreement (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1977) between the governments of Manitoba and Canada, the Manitoba Hydro-electric Board and the Northern Flood Committee Incorporated, set the framework for assessing impacts on natural resources and ensuring impact compensation. Under this agreement, communities were assured of damage compensation and involvement in development decisions within their respective Registered Trapline Zones. Those users with an existing "right as law" (defined by the existence of the Registered Trapline Zones) would be allowed continued use at current levels. In the early 1990s, settlement of outstanding claims under a "global settlement" was attempted by all parties to reduce costs and facilitate development in northern

Manitoba. However, negotiations broke down because of disagreements among the communities over settlement priorities.

In June 1992, a separate comprehensive settlement was negotiated between the Split Lake Cree First Nation, the governments of Canada and Manitoba and the Manitoba Hydro-electric Board (Canada *et al.*, 1992). The agreement included settlement terms for: monetary and land compensation, water management, establishment of easements, land-use permits, integrated land-use and resource management, environmental monitoring (approximately \$1.5 million), economic and social development (approximately \$12 million), resource compensation funding and social development (approximately \$11 million), remedial works (approximately \$13 million), and implementation (approximately \$4 million). In addition, terms and conditions were established for project employment, creation of a Split Lake Cree Distribution Company and operation of a trust account (Tataskweyak Trust). Upon approval, the trust account can be used for natural resources projects, including caribou management.

Resource Management Board Powers

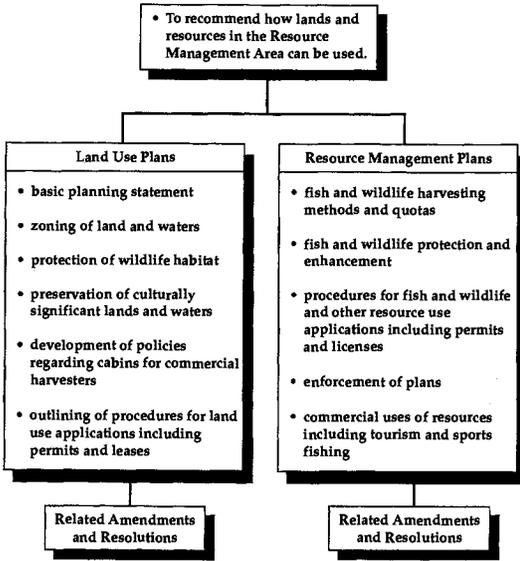


Fig. 1. Responsibilities of the Split Lake Resource Management Board.

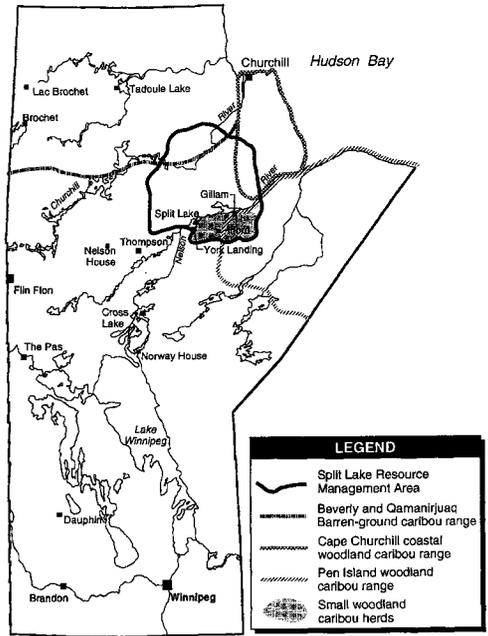


Fig. 2. Approximate distribution of Caribou herds in the Split Lake Resource Management Area.

The Split Lake Resource Management Board

The Split Lake Resource Management Board (SLRMB), formed in December 1992 under Article 5 of the Split Lake Settlement (Canada *et al.*, 1992), comprises five members appointed by the government of Manitoba and five members appointed by the Split Lake Cree First Nation. The government appointees are selected to reflect the interests of the Manitoba government departments of Natural Resources and Northern Affairs, Manitoba Hydro, and the Manitoba Mining Association. The Split Lake Cree appointees are members of the community of Split Lake and include councillors and elders. As defined in the Split Lake Settlement (Canada *et al.*, 1992), the objective of the SLRMB is to ensure that "Integrated Land Use and Resource Management is...achieved" (Article 5.2.1., Canada *et al.*, 1992). The Board's responsibilities are summarized in Figure 1 and include the following specific obligations (Canada *et al.*, 1992): (1) to promote integrated land and resource use (2) to assess consumptive and non-consumptive resource use (3) to monitor resource use (4) to investigate populations and habitats (5) to identify measures to preserve and enhance areas of special significance (through land use plans, zoning, and monitoring) and (6) to review specific plans for forest, land and water management, harvesting of resources, extraction of minerals and commercial interests. The jurisdiction of the

SLRMB extends throughout the Split Lake Registered Trapline Zone, which is referred to as the Resource Management Area (RMA) (Fig. 2).

Annual program and budget

The SLRMB is responsible for developing and recommending annual programs and budgets which are to be shared between the government of Manitoba and the Split Lake Cree First Nation. For the fiscal year, 1993-1994 the SLRMB agreed to combine the Board's funding with technical assistance, office support and travel contributions from both parties, totalling approximately \$187,000. This budget was used to support a chairperson, a secretariat, a local Project Manager, resource planning experts, and a wide range of resource management activities including biological surveys, collection of traditional land-use knowledge and publication of Board newsletters and an annual report. While much of this work has been done within existing government structures, both parties recognize the work as being specific, and accountable to, the Split Lake Settlement (Canada *et al.*, 1992). At the time of this writing, proposed activities for the fiscal year 1994-1995 include continuance of wildlife monitoring, development of locally-based conservation and education programs, development of a fire-watch program, development of a fish stocking program, land-use mapping, as well as providing technical and travel support for the Board.

Caribou and the Split Lake RMA

The RMA is within the range of several caribou herds (Fig. 2) including the Qamanirjuaq barren-ground (*R. tarandus groenlandicus*) herd, the migratory Cape Churchill woodland caribou (*R. tarandus caribou*) herd, the Pen Island woodland caribou herd (*R. tarandus caribou*) and other small resident woodland caribou (*R. tarandus caribou*) herds. In the winter of 1991-1992 and 1993-1994, the Pen Island caribou ventured further inland than usual (C. Elliott, pers. comm.), bringing them close to the communities of Split Lake, York Landing, Ilford and Gillam. In anticipation of additional harvest by treaty Indians, the government of Manitoba reduced the hunting season and increased their public information efforts in the affected communities. Public information emphasized the role of migration in bringing the Pen Island Caribou Herd into the range of many communities, rendering it an important regional, rather than local, resource. These efforts were effective in eliciting an informed and conservation-based response from the communities, largely because a good working relationship had previously been established between the government and the communities.

The SLRMB has established its monitoring and coordination role, recognizing that a lot of the ground work through cooperative initiatives from field staff has been done effectively and has eased its task considerably. The community liaison aspects are day-to-day business in this region, and not an agreement-based obligation. As part of the SLRMB's efforts to ensure long term management of caribou-human interactions, the Board is planning to develop an information package designed to increase community awareness of management of the Pen Island Caribou Herd. Key concepts to be incorporated into this package include: the significance of migration, the concept of sustainable harvest and its importance in setting harvest levels, and the range of communities dependent on this caribou herd.

The Split Lake Settlement (Canada *et al.*, 1992) stipulates that the SLRMB shall develop and recommend land use plans to guide development policies and decisions by the government of Manitoba and the Split Lake Cree First Nation, including resource management plans for the RMA or any portion of it. Both the Split Lake Cree First Nation and the government of Manitoba have directed the Board to proceed quickly on these initiatives. At present, all requests for resource allocations are referred to the SLRMB until land use and resource management plans are completed and approved. The Board has therefore focused its activities on compiling base line data and traditional information on ecosystem components. Moose

(*Alces alces*) was a priority in 1993-1994, because of its consistent and traditional value to the residents, demand from subsistence users, and requests from recreational hunters and outfitters for non-resident use. Caribou are next for concerted management efforts. To date, the Board has recognized sensitivity of caribou to disturbance and access by recommending stringent conditions for mining exploration, to be conditions of the Department of Natural Resources annual work permit.

Conclusions

- (1) After just over one year of operation, the Split Lake Resource Management Board has rapidly coalesced into an effective and credible team founded on trust and cooperation among the representatives from the Manitoba government and the Split Lake Cree First Nation.
- (2) Innovative budget and program arrangements have maintained momentum, enthusiasm and confidence.
- (3) Board effectiveness has been enhanced because appointees: are well respected, are committed to the Board, share a common interest in natural resources, and are effective communicators.
- (4) Since its establishment, the SLRMB has been actively involved with various issues of land use and resource planning including economic development proposals, outfitting requests, community consultations and compiling data and local knowledge about resources in the Management Area.
- (5) Woodland caribou management, including assessment of populations, distribution, harvest, and development proposals in relation to key habitats, will require priority attention starting with the 1994-1995 program-year. Public information and communication will be key components of the Board's approach.
- (6) The mandate of the SLRMB is to bring about cooperative resource management and to manage key wildlife and fisheries species to ensure their sustainability in the face of development, local and Provincial needs, public demand, and habitat changes.
- (7) The SLRMB is being assessed and evaluated by other Communities and First Nations across Manitoba and elsewhere, for its effectiveness and value in co-management. It can set the standard and template not only for co-management agreements, but also for a positive, productive and effective working relationship between government and aboriginal people.

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References

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