

Co-management of the Porcupine Caribou Herd

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The Caribou, the Land and the People

The Porcupine Caribou Herd is a population of 160,000 barren-ground caribou (*Rangifer tarandus granti*) that ranges from the De Cho (Mackenzie) Delta in the Northwest Territories across the northern Yukon and into Alaska almost as far as Prudhoe Bay (Fig. 1). From winter ranges in all three areas, the herd migrates northward in spring to calving grounds mainly on the North Slope of Alaska and extending to the Yukon. Following calving in June, the herd moves to the Beaufort Sea coast and, if the flies are bad, may form dense aggregations in July. Thereafter, various groups of caribou meander back and forth above treeline until fall snow storms encourage them to move southwards. Rutting occurs mainly in October during the fall migration. By November the herd occupies its winter range, although the winter distribution may vary depending on snow conditions (Russell *et al.*, 1993).

Porcupine Caribou are harvested for meat by Gwich'in, Inuvialuit and Inupiat people from 15 communities in Canada and adjacent Alaska. Non-native residents also harvest Porcupine Caribou for meat, and some caribou are taken by non-resident sport hunters. The annual harvest ranges between 3,000 and 4,000 animals. Over the past decade the harvest has remained well below the sustained yield of the population.

The Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement

Interest in the oil potential of the De Cho (Mackenzie) Delta and the Yukon North Slope during the late 1960s and early 1970s focused attention on the Porcupine Caribou Herd because of potential impacts from development. Concerns about the herd and its management were expressed

by community representatives at the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline hearings (Berger, 1977) and separately, by the International Arctic Wildlife Range Society. In particular, the user communities were insistent that they become fundamentally involved in the conservation and management of the caribou herd which had always been the basis of their culture and economy. Originally intended for inclusion

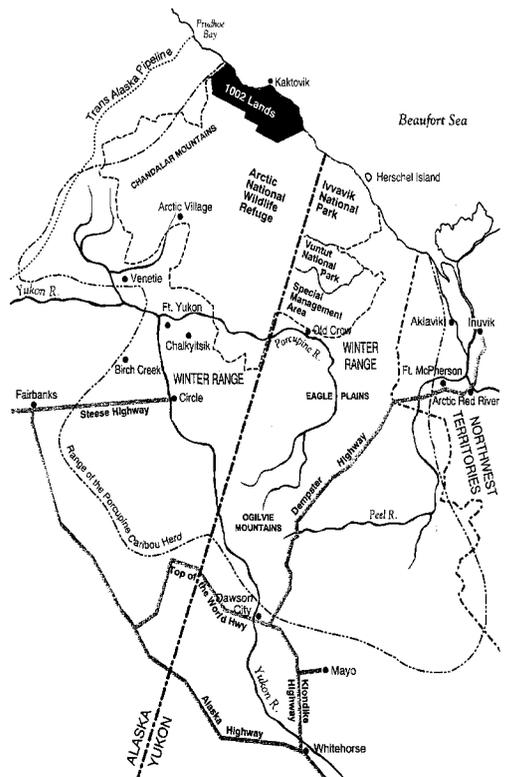


Fig. 1. Range of the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

in the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (Canada, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1984), negotiations on the co-management of the Porcupine Caribou Herd reached an impasse that resulted in its being concluded separately in 1985 (Canada, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1985) - a year after the Inuvialuit Final Agreement was proclaimed. The Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement is however, acknowledged in the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement (Canada, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1992) and the Council for Yukon Indians Umbrella Final Agreement (Canada, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1993).

The Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement (Canada, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1985) was signed on October 26, 1985 by representatives of the government of Canada, the governments of the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, the Inuvialuit Game Council, the Council for Yukon Indians, the Dene Nation and the Metis Association of the Northwest Territories. The five objectives of the agreement are:

- (1) To cooperatively manage, as a herd, the Porcupine Caribou and its habitat within Canada so as to ensure the conservation of the herd with a view to providing for the ongoing subsistence needs of native users;
- (2) To provide for participation of native users in Porcupine Caribou Herd management;
- (3) To recognize and protect certain priority harvesting rights in the Porcupine Caribou Herd for native users while acknowledging that other users may also share the harvest;
- (4) To acknowledge the rights of native users as set out in this Agreement;
- (5) To improve communications between Governments native users and others with regards to the management of the Porcupine Caribou Herd within Canada.

The agreement also provides for the formation of an eight member co-management board (the Porcupine Caribou Management Board - PCMB) consisting of two members each from the Yukon Territorial Government and the Council for Yukon Indians plus one each from the Inuvialuit Game Council, the Dene Nation and Metis Association of the Northwest Territories and the governments of Canada and the Northwest Territories. The duties of the PCMB are to facilitate communication among governments and user communities in the course of providing recommendations to governments concerning the management of the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

Co-management and the Porcupine Caribou Management Board

The PCMB held its first meeting in June 1986 and has been operating continually ever since. In the course of the past seven years, the board has established a reputation among both the user communities and governments, as a reliable organization that is fulfilling the terms of the Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement. Cooperative management of wildlife is a complicated process but we believe that the success of the PCMB can best be summarized as the three "C's" of co-management: composition, communications and consensus.

Composition

Wildlife management boards are generally created according to two models. Under the first model, a board is comprised entirely of non-government representatives. In the Yukon and Northwest Territories, such boards include the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, the Inuvialuit Game Council, and the Mayo Renewable Resources Council. Under the second model, both government and non-government representatives participate on the board. Examples of the latter include the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board and the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (in the Yukon Territory).

The PCMB belongs to the second group and its membership represents equally, government and native user groups. We believe that this arrangement has several advantages over models which exclude government representation, the most important of which is that it removes the adversarial relationship between government and the public because the government representatives are seen to be part of the management team. As such they are able to explain how governments work, what governments can and cannot do, and how the board can best approach government to promote its interests. Government representatives also have access to bureaucracies which the board can use to its advantage for information gathering, report preparation and a host of other administrative functions. The relationship between government and non-government board members is enhanced if government representatives remain on the board for a number of years.

By contrast, a board without government representation remains continually suspicious of government and frustrated by perceived government inefficiency. As well, such boards are disadvantaged by having to rely on their own, often meagre resources to undertake many tasks that could otherwise be assigned to a government representative. In the experience of the PCMB and from observations of

other co-management organizations, the fear that government members will dominate such boards is a minor risk that is far outweighed by the advantages of government participation. Certainly, it is possible for an aggressive individual to be manipulative but this is rare, especially when government members are involved with the communities in their regular work, and thus can empathize with community perspectives and concerns.

The PCMB adheres to the view that non-government representatives must be well supported by the board to ensure their full participation. Foremost is a respectable honorarium that acknowledges that value and importance of the member and provides adequate compensation for time taken away from work. Secondly, the community member must not feel isolated from the board's operations between meetings. To ensure this, the PCMB provides telephone credit cards to each of the community members so they can easily communicate with the chairman, the secretariat, and with each other. It is also important that the community member not be considered a 'volunteer' and therefore, he/she should be compensated for any significant time spent on board work in the communities. Volunteer "burn-out" is a chronic problem in the north and must be strictly avoided to ensure enthusiastic participation of community representatives.

Communication

Communication is at once the most important and the most difficult component of wildlife co-management. The first request from the user communities to the PCMB was to improve communications on Porcupine Caribou issues. To do so the board undertook a study of communications in northern communities (MacPherson, 1987) which recommended the following media in descending order of effectiveness: television, radio, and printed material. Based on this report, the board initiated a communication program that includes television announcements, video documentaries, bi-weekly radio bulletins, monthly newspaper columns and publication of the minutes and summaries of board meetings, annual reports, special reports, pamphlets and posters.

In designing and maintaining its program, the PCMB has found that communication is an endless process and strategies that work best are both passive (radio, newspaper) and persistent. While many people might not read a lengthy newsletter, most people will read newspaper articles or listen to the radio. Radio and newspaper announcements are frequent (every two to four weeks) to ensure maximum exposure to the community. In the past seven years the PCMB has produced over 15 videos, 150

radio bulletins and 75 newspaper columns. Such items also stimulate the mainstream media to follow-up with interviews and subsequent stories so that more communication is generated at no cost to the board. A less orthodox, but very successful form of communication has been the distribution of items carrying the PCMB logo (ball caps, pens, mugs and knives). These serve to remind the public of the importance of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and the role of the board as an organization that works for the communities.

Early in its operation, the Board recognized that education was an essential component of communication and with support from governments and private foundations, the PCMB has initiated a number of projects including a range model for very young students, an elementary school curriculum complemented by a four-part video series, a college scholarship program and a computer package for high schools. All of these materials are designed to increase knowledge and understanding about the caribou herd and its habitat so that the user communities can participate more fully in caribou management.

At the same time, it is crucial for governments to understand and appreciate traditional knowledge and cultural values. This is also a demanding education and communication challenge and one that the PCMB has been promoting through its management plan but which has so far generated few genuine successes. Cross-cultural training and utilizing traditional knowledge are popular topics for reports and conferences but are rarely transmuted into real actions. To counter this, co-management organizations must overcome substantial bureaucratic reluctance to leave the office environment and spend significant time in the communities and the bush.

Communications, if taken seriously, will undoubtedly become the black hole of effort and innovation for any co-management organization. It seems that no matter how much is done and how clever the projects are, it is never enough. Some organizations do not experience these frustrations because they never seriously try to facilitate communications but instead rely on the standard procedures which are barely adequate for any audience.

Consensus

Although the PCMB has equal representation from government and native users, the Yukon Government appoints as one of its representatives, a resident from a user community and hence, there has always been a native majority on the Board. However, since the Board operates by consensus according to native preference, majority representation is not a significant element of decision-making. Consensus has never been formally defined by the

Board but in practice, consensus consists of an understanding that members will work to resolve a problem until all members are satisfied and the resulting motion is passed unanimously. In the 7 years of the Board's operation only one motion has been defeated by a split vote and a subsequent one passed with one abstention.

In conjunction with including government representation on the Board, the consensus principle greatly alleviates the tension of decision-making at the Board level. Not only can each member be confident that particular concerns will ultimately be addressed but consensus eliminates the need for members to form alliances and lobby each other for support on particular issues. This creates a positive atmosphere where each member can think independently about each item and also not worry about trade-offs that might be hard to explain back home.

The PCMB applies the same consensus approach to its consultation with the user communities. The board has found that by providing clearly understood information and a forum for community input, agreements can ultimately be reached on even the most contentious issues. This may entail considerably more time and effort but by building consensus, the recommendations of the Board have greater support and often a process of community self-management can be initiated. This in turn reduces the need for formal regulations being imposed by an outside authority. The best example of a consensus solution to a problem pertains to the sale of caribou antlers for oriental medicine. After considering the economic, conservation, cultural and legal aspects of the issue it was determined that the Gwich'in communities were culturally opposed to such sales while the Inuvialuit had no such constraint. In addition it became clear that no government regulation could be formulated to satisfactorily address these considerations. In the end, the Board was able to achieve a consensus agreement by the communities to voluntarily prohibit antler sales. This agreement has been completely effective without any government intervention.

Consensus management has the additional benefit of strengthening the confidence of the communities in the Board's ability to address their concerns and creates an environment of mutual respect where the Board also recognizes the community's ability to be responsible managers of the caribou.

As Western Arctic MP Ethel Blondin would say, co-management is a "tricky dance" (E. Blondin, pers. comm.) and every co-management organization that is created must be prepared to learn new steps to suit its particular mandate. However, based on the experience of the PCMB and observations of the authors, some approaches appear to be fundamental to success-

ful co-management. We suggest that in designing a co-management system, particular attention should be given to the composition of the management board, methods of communication and approaches to decision-making. Systems which give the greatest independence and freedom to the co-management organization and its members seem to work best because they provide greater dignity to the organization, generate more enthusiasm from the members, and increase confidence and creativity in problem solving.

Ultimately, the success of a co-management organization rests with the user communities. Over the years members of the Porcupine Caribou Management Board have observed that it is the knowledge and concerns held by the people in the communities which are affected by caribou management policies, that provide the greatest inspiration to the Board. In return, the Board must never lose sight of its primary objective which is to manage and conserve the Porcupine Caribou Herd by incorporating native participation at every level of decision-making.

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