

Caribou co-management in Nunavut: Implementing the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement

Michelle Wheatley

Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, Box 1379, Iqaluit, NU, X0A 0H0, Canada (mwheatley@nwmb.com).

Abstract: In 1993 the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA) was signed and this led to the creation of Nunavut in 1999. Under the NLCA caribou and other wildlife in Nunavut are co-managed by government and Inuit. The Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) is the main instrument of wildlife management, working with its government and Inuit co-management partners to manage caribou within the principles of conservation outlined in the NLCA, using both western scientific knowledge and traditional knowledge. When caribou herds cross provincial or territorial boundaries, management boards or management planning committees are established.

Key words: Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, conservation, wildlife, management, traditional knowledge, Inuit.

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Introduction

On April 1, 1999, Nunavut became Canada's newest territory. Previously a part of the Northwest Territories, Nunavut was created as a result of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA). Nunavut occupies over 1.9 million square kilometers or approximately 1/5th of Canada's land mass (Fig. 1). The NLCA was signed in May, 1993, and implementation of the claim has been ongoing since that time.

Under the NLCA, wildlife (defined as all flora and fauna) in Nunavut is managed jointly by the Inuit of Nunavut and the Government. This system is termed co-management. In Nunavut, this means Inuit and the appropriate level of government (federal or territorial) working together. It also means that wildlife management decisions are made based on information from both western science and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ or Inuit traditional knowledge). IQ is Inuit knowledge, values and beliefs about wildlife and reflects knowledge that has been passed down through generations, and/or the knowledge that has been gained through a long association with the land. IQ provides an Inuit perspective

on the resource. Where a scientific survey provides information on a herd at only one point in time, IQ often provides a better long-term picture of the herd and changes in patterns of behaviour, movement patterns and interactions.

Caribou Co-management

The organizations, or co-management partners, who work together to manage caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) in Nunavut include the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB), Hunters and Trappers Organizations (HTOs), Regional Wildlife Organizations (RWOs), Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) and the Government of Nunavut, Department of Sustainable Development (DSD) (Fig. 2). Each of these partners has a role to play in managing caribou in Nunavut.

The NWMB is an Institution of Public Government (IPG), but is not directly a part of the federal or territorial government. The NWMB is also a co-management board, with four members appointed by Inuit organizations and four by government (federal and territorial). The eight Board

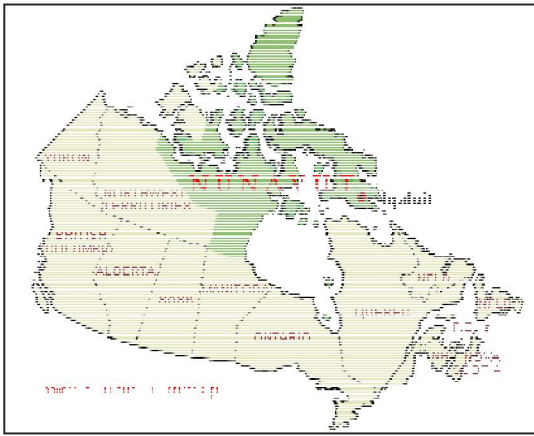


Fig. 1. Map showing the Territory of Nunavut within Canada. The Nunavut Settlement Area (NSA) includes all of the Territory of Nunavut except for Hudson Bay and the southern part of Hudson Strait, but does also include the Belcher Islands in Hudson Bay. Maps courtesy of www.theodora.com/maps, used with permission.

members choose the independent chairperson. The Board is not an Inuit organization, but rather represents the public in general.

The NWMB is the main instrument of wildlife management in the Nunavut Settlement Area (NSA), subject only to the ultimate authority of the appropriate government Minister. The NWMB's mandate includes establishing quotas or non-quota limitations on harvesting (non-quota limitations include seasons, hunting methods etc.). The Board also approves all management or conservation plans and approves the designation of all species (endangered etc.) within Nunavut.

Each of the 27 communities in Nunavut has an established HTO with membership comprised of the Inuit beneficiaries of that community. Each HTO regulates the harvest of wildlife by its members and reviews issues affecting wildlife in the vicinity of the community. In making decisions about wildlife that will affect a community, the NWMB will consult with the appropriate HTO prior to making a decision.

In each of Nunavut's three regions - Kitikmeot, Kivalliq and Qikiqtaaluk - there is an RWO. The membership of each RWO consists of the chairpersons of the HTOs in that region. The RWO has similar responsibilities to the HTOs, regulating harvest by the members of HTOs in the region, where a population/stock/herd is harvested by more than one community. The RWO also reviews issues affecting wildlife in the region. As with HTOs, the NWMB

will always consult with the relevant RWO(s) when making decisions regarding wildlife in each region.

NTI is the Inuit birthright corporation, representing the Inuit of Nunavut and promoting Inuit interests. It is the primary Inuit land claims organization. NTI oversees Inuit rights established under the NLCA and works to ensure that other co-management partners are meeting their obligations established under the NLCA.

The Department of Sustainable Development, Government of Nunavut has two roles in the management of caribou in Nunavut. Under the terms of the NLCA, the Minister of Sustainable Development has the ultimate authority in wildlife management decisions respecting caribou (and other terrestrial wildlife) in Nunavut. However, the Minister can only overrule a decision of the NWMB on the grounds of conservation, public health and safety or interference with Inuit harvesting rights (Government of Canada, 1993).

DSD's biologists are responsible for conducting research on caribou (and other terrestrial wildlife). The biologists and other Nunavut Wildlife Service staff provide advice to the NWMB when the NWMB is preparing to make a decision on an area within the Government of Nunavut's mandate.

Principles of Conservation

In making decisions with respect to wildlife, the NWMB is guided by the Principles of Conservation outlined in the NLCA. The Principles of Conservation are:

- (a) The maintenance of the natural balance of ecological ecosystems within Nunavut Settlement Area;
- (b) The protection of wildlife habitat;
- (c) The maintenance of vital, healthy, wildlife populations capable of sustaining harvesting needs as defined in the NLCA; and
- (d) The restoration and revitalization of depleted populations of wildlife and wildlife habitat. (Government of Canada, 1993, pp. 27-28).

Caribou Populations and Management

There are at least 12 different caribou populations in Nunavut. These include the Bathurst, Bluenose East, Ahlak, Beverly, Qamanirjuaq, Dolphin-Union, Northeast Mainland, Northeast Baffin Island, North Baffin Island, South Baffin Island, Queen Elizabeth Islands and Prince of Wales - Somerset Islands herds. The Northeast Mainland and Queen Elizabeth Islands populations may also contain sub-populations.

The management of the different herds in the NSA varies depending on whether the herd is shared

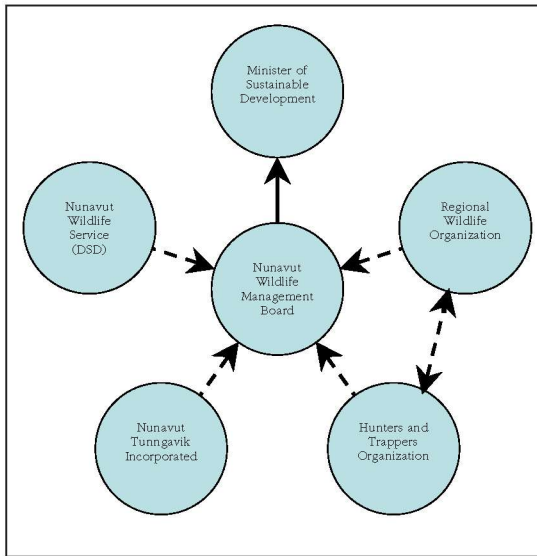


Fig. 2. Relationship between co-management partners responsible for caribou management in Nunavut. Dashed lines indicate advisory relationship, solid line indicates decision authority. Arrows show the direction of flow.

with another region or whether they are found entirely within the NSA. For those caribou herds found entirely within the NSA, the co-management partners outlined above work together to manage the herds and develop management plans as appropriate. However, several herds are shared with other neighboring jurisdictions and these herds require cooperation with the appropriate management organizations in those jurisdictions. The level of development of these management measures varies with different herds.

The Beverly and Qamanirjuaq herds are shared between Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Manitoba and Saskatchewan and are managed together. The Beverly-Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board (BQCMB), with government and aboriginal representation from all four regions is responsible for overseeing the management of these two herds. With respect to Nunavut, the BQCMB makes recommendations to the NWMB. The NWMB then makes a decision and forwards this

decision to the Minister of Sustainable Development.

The Bathurst Caribou herd is shared between Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. Currently the Bathurst Caribou Management Planning Committee is working to develop a Management Plan for this herd. The Committee has representation from governments of both territories and from Dene and Metis from the South Slave and North Slave claim areas in the NWT and Inuit from the Kitikmeot region of Nunavut. The Management Plan developed will require approval of the NWMB.

The Bluenose East caribou herd was previously considered to be part of the larger Bluenose herd. However, recent satellite tracking and genetic work has shown this herd to be separate from the Bluenose West herd. The Bluenose East herd is shared between Nunavut (Kitikmeot region) and the Northwest Territories (North Slave and Sahtu – Dene and Metis). A draft management plan was previously developed for the larger Bluenose herd. However a management plan for the Bluenose East herd has yet to be developed.

For the South Baffin caribou herd, work has begun on a management plan, and is still underway. For the remaining herds, management plans have not yet been developed but in future will follow similar approaches to those described above for other herds.

Summary

The signing of the NLCA and the establishment of Nunavut has seen the development of a co-management system for caribou in Nunavut. Co-management requires government and Inuit work together to manage caribou in the NSA. The NWMB works with its co-management partners: DSD; NTI; RWOs; and HTOs to manage caribou within the principles of conservation outlined in the NLCA. Where trans-boundary populations of caribou occur, management boards or management planning committees have or are being established.

Reference

Government of Canada. 1993. Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. Ottawa.

