

Backgrounder

The BQCMB's draft action plan to help the Beverly barren-ground caribou herd recover

About the Qamanirjuaq and Ahiak barren-ground caribou herds

About the BQCMB

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The Beverly herd's range has historically extended from northern Saskatchewan through the Northwest Territories (NWT) to Nunavut. The estimated annual economic value of the Beverly caribou harvest was about **\$4.9 million** for 2005-2006. The greatest proportion of the Beverly harvest has been by five communities in northern Saskatchewan, where most animals are taken for Aboriginal domestic use.

The total size of the Beverly herd was last estimated at about 276,000, based on surveys conducted in 1994. The herd has since suffered a major population decline. A current estimate of the population isn't known. However, according to the Government of the Northwest Territories (NWT), results of 2007 and 2008 reconnaissance surveys of Beverly caribou indicated that:

- a) the numbers of breeding adult female caribou (cows) seen during June surveys on the calving ground were significantly lower than in past years

<u>Year of Survey</u>	<u># of Caribou</u> (# seen on survey transect)
1994	5,737
2002	2,629
2007	189
2008	93

- b) the number of calves seen during the survey in 2008 was very low (15 calves for every 100 cows), which is much lower than what is normally observed on calving grounds of healthy barren-ground caribou herds near the peak of calving (often around 80 calves per 100 cows).

A mix of natural factors may have spurred the Beverly herd decline, including the natural caribou population cycle, parasites, diseases, predation, climate change, and changes in habitat (including winter range lost to forest fires). Limited satellite-collar data indicate that some cows that had previously calved on the Beverly calving ground shifted to the Ahiak calving ground in recent years. The herd may also have been affected by human-caused activities, including mineral exploration and development, and hunter harvest. Since human-caused factors *can* be managed, the BQCMB is targeting these in its action plan.

The BQCMB's draft action plan will call for:

- providing conservation education on good hunting practices that include the harvest of bulls rather than cows, and reduced wastage of caribou
- reporting and analyzing harvest
- enforcing regulations regarding hunting, and mineral exploration and development
- investigating various options for ways to conduct a population survey of the Beverly herd in 2010
- researching and monitoring caribou health and condition
- tracking caribou using satellite collars, and assessing alternative methods used for collaring
- protecting caribou herds and their habitats, including long-term protection of calving and post-calving areas
- planning related to land use across the caribou range
- protecting caribou winter ranges from wildfires
- commenting to regulatory agencies on the potential effects of proposed projects on caribou and habitat
- compiling information about road impacts on caribou
- incorporating traditional knowledge along with scientific knowledge in management
- adopting consistent and complementary territorial and provincial caribou management strategies that are co-ordinated among governments across the herd's range
- collaborating on funding, research and management among jurisdictions
- publicizing the decline of the Beverly herd and actions needed to promote its recovery, including promoting dialogue between governments, communities, industry and the public
- lobbying politicians responsible for the caribou herd and communities that depend on it
- working with the Prince Albert Grand Council, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and other groups concerned about the future of Beverly caribou, and
- reporting results of BQCMB meetings and decisions to Beverly range communities.

These actions complement the GNWT's existing monitoring plans and will be informed by the results of the GNWT's 2009 Beverly and Ahiak calving distribution surveys. It's hoped that monitoring plans to come from the governments of Nunavut and Saskatchewan in 2010 will also be a good fit with the necessary actions identified by the BQCMB.

About the Qamanirjuaq and Ahiak barren-ground caribou herds

Portions of the Beverly caribou herd's historic year-round range overlap with ranges of several other barren-ground caribou herds. Lack of separation of winter ranges used by Beverly caribou and other herds has been documented for many years. Information from a small number of Beverly caribou tracked using satellite collars in recent years suggests that the Beverly herd's range has overlapped to a large extent during most seasons with Ahiak caribou range. Beverly range also overlaps to a lesser extent with Qamanirjuaq caribou range in the east, and Bathurst caribou range in the west, particularly during winter. Use of separate calving grounds remains the North American standard for defining barren-ground caribou herds. Typically each herd uses distinct areas for calving which are separated geographically, known as "traditional calving grounds." (Each traditional calving ground includes all areas known to be used for calving by a given herd.)

The Qamanirjuaq herd's range has historically extended from northern Manitoba into the Kivalliq Region of Nunavut, with portions in southeastern NWT and northeastern Saskatchewan. The Qamanirjuaq traditional calving ground lies inland from Hudson Bay between Baker Lake and Arviat. The estimated annual economic value of the Qamanirjuaq caribou harvest was about **\$15 million** for 2005-2006. The greatest proportion of the Qamanirjuaq harvest has been by Nunavut communities, with some harvest by communities in northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

When the Qamanirjuaq herd was censused in 1994, its population was estimated at 496,000. Surveys of the Qamanirjuaq herd conducted in 2008 are being used to produce a new estimate of the size of the herd. Official results have not yet been announced. The Government of Nunavut, which spearheaded the surveys, has indicated that the preliminary draft 2008 population estimate for the Qamanirjuaq herd is 345,000.

Information about the Ahiak herd has been limited in the past, in part due to the remoteness of its range and also because caribou programs by the governments of NWT and Nunavut focused more on herds of greater concern to communities. The Ahiak caribou herd calves along the Queen Maud Gulf coast in Nunavut and spends the summers mostly in the Queen Maud Gulf Migratory Bird Sanctuary. Satellite collar studies from 2008 and 2009 suggest that the caribou calving near Chantrey Inlet at the eastern end of Queen Maud Gulf have a different seasonal movement pattern than those calving in the western portion of the Queen Maud Gulf area. Caribou calving near Chantrey Inlet are primarily tundra-wintering while those calving further west have a much more extensive north-south movement. The herd's migration leads them in spring of some years through the Beverly calving ground on their way north to the Ahiak calving ground, and in fall to the south of the Thelon Game Sanctuary, extending their winter range into the southern NWT. The herd is seasonally hunted by people from Gjoa Haven, Umingmaktok, Cambridge Bay and Lutselk'e, and in some winters Ahiak caribou may be taken in northern Saskatchewan.

A calving distribution survey of Ahiak caribou in June 1996 produced a ballpark estimate of about 200,000 caribou in the herd, although the survey had limited spatial coverage.

About the BQCMB

Established in 1982, the BQCMB is a co-management board of Aboriginal hunters, and government biologists and wildlife managers. As an advisory board, it works with governments, communities, industry and other organizations to develop recommendations for the conservation and management of the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq caribou herds and their ranges.

The BQCMB's mission is to ensure the long-term conservation of the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq caribou herds for Aboriginal communities who wish to maintain a lifestyle that includes the use of caribou, as well as for all Canadians and people of other nations. The Board works primarily in the interest of traditional caribou users and their descendents, based on a co-operative partnership that has developed between governments and communities over more than 25 years. Current BQCMB priorities, which are outlined in the *Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Plan (2005-2012)*, include monitoring of populations, habitats, harvest levels and land use activities across the ranges; environmental assessment of development activities; community-based monitoring and education; and incorporating local and traditional knowledge into management programs.

The Board's chairman is Albert Thorassie of the Sayisi Dene First Nation at Tadoule Lake, Manitoba, and the vice-chairman is Daryll Hedman, regional wildlife manager with Manitoba Conservation in Thompson, Manitoba. The Board's secretary-treasurer is Ross Thompson of Stonewall, Manitoba. The BQCMB's core funding comes from the governments of Manitoba, Nunavut, the NWT, Saskatchewan and Canada, the five governments that signed the management agreement for the BQCMB.

The 13-member BQCMB consists of eight members representing communities on the caribou ranges in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, NWT and Nunavut; one government member from each of these four jurisdictions; and one member from the federal government.

To learn more about the BQCMB, the caribou herds, human activities on the caribou ranges and other issues, explore the BQCMB's website for maps, reports, the newsletter *Caribou News in Brief* and much more: www.arctic-caribou.com. Or contact Ross Thompson, BQCMB Secretary-Treasurer. Phone: (204) 467-2438. E-mail: rossthompson@mts.net.