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The Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board

PRESS RELEASE

Continuing drop in caribou numbers makes a “Recipe for Recovery” to help the ailing Beverly herd more important than ever

STONEWALL, Manitoba (July 6, 2009)—Alarmed by the fact that observers on the June 2009 reconnaissance survey of Beverly caribou counted even fewer breeding adult female caribou (cows) and calves on the calving ground than in 2008, the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board (BQCMB) is calling on everyone to work together for the benefit of the Beverly herd – and to make sure that the neighbouring Qamanirjuaq and Ahiak barren-ground caribou herds don't suffer the same fate.

“We have to get everybody together on one side,” urges BQCMB chairman Albert Thorassie, who says he wants to see action, not just talk. “We have to *do* something about it.”

As in previous years, the 2009 reconnaissance survey of caribou on the Beverly calving ground was conducted by the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT). Reconnaissance surveys don't estimate population sizes. They map the location of annual calving grounds and provide information about the number of caribou on calving grounds during the calving period.

During the 2009 survey, fewer than half the number of breeding cows were counted on the calving ground as were counted during the 2008 survey, says BQCMB biologist Leslie Wakelyn, who participated in the survey crew's nine lengthy days of flying over and around the traditional Beverly calving ground. (The “traditional calving ground” includes all areas known to be used for calving since the 1950s.)

BQCMB member Dennis Larocque of Camsell Portage, Saskatchewan and alternate member Pierre Robillard of Black Lake, Saskatchewan also participated as part of a second survey crew, flying transects for five long days over a vast area along the migratory route of Beverly caribou between the Saskatchewan-Northwest Territories (NWT) border and the traditional Beverly calving ground.

“Caribou-wise, it was very depressing,” says Larocque. Outside the calving ground, he saw only one caribou – a bull – and almost no caribou tracks.

The total size of the Beverly herd was last estimated at about 276,000, based on surveys conducted in 1994. The current size of the herd is unknown, but the dramatic continuing drop in numbers of cows and calves counted on the calving ground during comparable June surveys means that the major decline of the Beverly herd documented in 2007 and 2008 has continued. The GNWT will finalize its 2009 Beverly calving distribution survey results later this summer. Five other barren-ground caribou herds west of the Beverly herd (the Porcupine, Cape Bathurst, Bluenose West, Bluenose East and Bathurst herds) have all suffered population declines recently.

Given the survey's gloomy indicators, the BQCMB will continue to create a plan of action as directed by members at the Board's May 2009 meeting (see backgrounder for details). This “Recipe for Recovery” will not only focus on improving the status of the Beverly herd, it will also strengthen efforts to conserve and manage the Qamanirjuaq and Ahiak caribou herds. The draft action plan will be developed during the summer and early fall for presentation to Beverly caribou stakeholders in November 2009.

The BQCMB is seeking funding to host a stakeholders workshop in either Yellowknife or Saskatoon along with its regular fall board meeting. The workshop would allow representatives from communities that traditionally hunted Beverly caribou to join BQCMB Board members and representatives of other key organizations in assessing the BQCMB's draft action plan.

To provide meaningful recommendations to governments, Aboriginal organizations and communities, the BQCMB needs to determine what monitoring and management actions are required to help the Beverly herd recover and increase in size, and how these measures can be implemented. Once input is received from stakeholders, the action plan will be finalized and sent to governments and other organizations as recommendations for further action. An action plan would be carried out by governments, the BQCMB and other stakeholders.

Chief among the ingredients for helping the Beverly caribou herd recover are protecting the calving ground, obtaining accurate harvest statistics, reducing wastage, encouraging hunters to select bulls over cows, and ensuring that the Beverly herd, as well as the neighbouring Qamanirjuaq and Ahiak herds, continue to be monitored.

This last point is key because with few Beverly caribou around now, hunters have been harvesting more caribou from the Ahiak and Qamanirjuaq herds in recent years. The BQCMB also urges governments to implement the caribou management strategy for declining herds with low numbers, as prescribed in the *Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Plan (2005-2012)*.

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