

Backgrounder

About the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq barren-ground caribou herds

BQCMB recommendations to help conserve the Beverly herd

About the BQCMB

1. About the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq barren-ground caribou herds

The year-round range of the Beverly herd includes portions of northern Saskatchewan, eastern Northwest Territories and the Kivalliq Region of Nunavut. The Qamanirjuaq herd's range is primarily in northern Manitoba and the southern Kivalliq Region. About 16,000 Aboriginal people – mainly Dene, Inuit, Métis and Cree – are among the almost 21,000 people living in 22 communities on or near the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq ranges.

According to an independent socio-economic report produced by InterGroup Consultants in 2008 for the BQCMB, the total estimated net annual economic value of the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq caribou harvest, based on 2005-2006 harvest estimates, is **more than \$20 million**. Nunavut depended on these herds the most, accounting for almost \$12 million of the harvest value. Manitoba's share was estimated at about \$4 million, Saskatchewan's share at over \$3 million and the Northwest Territories' share at less than \$1 million. The report, *Economic Valuation and Socio-Cultural Perspectives of the Estimated Harvest of the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Herds*, also indicated that these two caribou herds are harvested mainly to feed northern families. The domestic harvest accounted for more than \$15 million of the total estimated net annual economic value of the herds, while the outfitting industry accounted for most of the remaining economic value of the caribou – more than \$4 million yearly. In addition, the cultural and spiritual value of the caribou herds to Aboriginal peoples is immense and irreplaceable.

A population survey of the Qamanirjuaq herd, spearheaded by the Government of Nunavut and assisted by the governments of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, took place in June 2008. It's expected that a population estimate will be announced in December 2008. Before 2008, the last Qamanirjuaq population census was conducted in 1994, when the size of the herd was estimated at 496,000.

An attempted calving photo survey to estimate population size of the Beverly herd by the Government of the Northwest Territories in 2007 could not be completed due to bad weather. The Government of the Northwest Territories carried out a systematic reconnaissance survey on the Beverly herd calving ground in 2008. Participating in the surveys were Saskatchewan hunters Pierre Robillard of Black Lake, a BQCMB alternate member, and BQCMB member Dennis Larocque of Camsell Portage. They flew extensive flight lines adjacent to the Beverly calving ground to determine whether caribou were using other areas to calve. The last successful population census of the Beverly herd, conducted in 1994, estimated the herd's population at 276,000.

According to the Government of the Northwest Territories, results of 2007 and 2008 surveys of Beverly caribou indicate that:

- a) the numbers of 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).

This points to a serious decline in the Beverly caribou population. The Government of the Northwest Territories has stated that the cause of the decline may never be known. It could result partly from a natural cycle. Five other barren-ground caribou herds to the west of the Beverly range (Porcupine, Cape Bathurst, Bluenose West, Bluenose East, Bathurst) have declined recently.

Other possible contributing factors:

- impacts from exploration and development
- hunter harvest
- changes in habitat, including loss of winter range due to forest fires
- parasites and diseases
- some interchange between the Beverly and Ahiak caribou herds
- predation
- climate change effects.

2. BQCMB recommendations to help conserve the Beverly herd

The BQCMB will communicate the population status of the Beverly herd and the need to increase conservation measures for both the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq caribou herds to governments and regional organizations responsible for managing the caribou herds, their habitats and human activities across the caribou ranges. This will be done through a number of actions, including the following:

- a) The BQCMB will collaborate with governments, communities and other partners to:
- obtain information and advice about action that should be taken (consulting scientists, communities, organizations and others)
 - try to ensure crucial information is communicated between the BQCMB, governments and communities
 - bring together local and traditional knowledge and scientific knowledge in the management process.
- b) The BQCMB will give presentations at workshops, symposia, meetings of regional organizations and communities to ensure that agencies responsible for the management of Beverly and Qamanirjuaq caribou and their habitat, as well as other stakeholders, are aware of this serious issue and the need to address it.
- c) The BQCMB will urge governments to follow the *Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Plan (2005-2012)* and its principles and goals, including:
- recommending “management action to conserve the caribou populations within the parameters of normal and natural population fluctuations” (goal #7)
 - recommending “management action to ensure maintenance of sufficient high quality habitat to support healthy caribou herds” (goal #9)
 - encouraging governments “to manage human land-use activities in a manner that protects caribou and caribou range, particularly in key habitats such as calving and post-calving areas” (goal #10).
- d) The BQCMB will recommend that governments implement the management strategy for a declining herd that is required by the *Management Plan*. This is to intensify management actions “to ensure that herds will be able to follow their natural cycle and increase in size again.”

- e) The BQCMB will continue to encourage the wise use of caribou and seek public support for conservation of caribou (as per *Management Plan* goals # 4 and 5).

The BQCMB also recommends increasing protection for the Beverly herd, through actions that will include the following:

1. Governments, regulatory agencies and others should use a *precautionary approach* when making caribou-related decisions (for example, don't approve any new quotas until the Beverly herd has recovered enough to support increased harvest).
2. The federal government should reject Uravan Minerals Incorporated's permit application for uranium exploration at Garry Lake, Nunavut, on the Beverly traditional calving ground.
3. Additional mineral exploration should not be allowed on the Beverly traditional calving ground.
4. The Thelon Wildlife Sanctuary Management Plan should be implemented.
5. The Beverly calving ground should receive long-term legislated protection.

Recommendations #3 and #5 also apply to the Qamanirjuaq calving ground. Although the Qamanirjuaq herd's situation does not currently appear to be as dire, the BQCMB is concerned about its future as well. Increased monitoring of Qamanirjuaq caribou and caribou range is advisable.

The BQCMB is not against mining. Board members recognize that people living on caribou ranges need jobs through economic development. They also know that people from communities across the caribou ranges don't want jobs that harm the caribou herds. The BQCMB believes that everyone should work together to protect the caribou herds and their ranges.

Because the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq herds travel far and wide, they're exposed to many factors that could cause stress and affect their survival and productivity. In addition to human-caused activity, caribou face natural factors that cause stress like disease, predators, forest fire and extreme weather – factors caribou have dealt with for thousands of years. Today's caribou also have to battle the effects of climate change.

What results from human-caused activities on the ranges and natural factors are "cumulative effects," also known as "cumulative impacts." These are the combined environmental effects from similar activities that add up over time and space, and they could threaten caribou and the people who depend on caribou.

The BQCMB has long urged governments and regulatory agencies to protect the herds and their habitats, especially in the face of recent unprecedented levels of human-caused activity on the ranges. Mineral exploration and development accounts for most of this activity but there are also new roads being proposed and built, greater numbers of people hunting caribou, and more. The BQCMB's 2004 position paper, *Protecting Calving Grounds, Post-Calving Areas and Other Important Habitats for Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou*, recommends numerous ways to protect the herds and their habitats. Here are two of the primary recommendations:

- 1) The caribou herds should be protected from activities that could harm caribou or the land and waters upon which the herds depend.
- 2) It is especially important to protect:
 - o the areas that caribou use while giving birth to their calves (calving areas)
 - o other areas they depend on while the calves are very young (post-calving areas).

The BQCMB has recommended to governments that calving and post-calving areas be protected in permanent, legislated protected areas. The BQCMB has a long history of strong recommendations on caribou and habitat protection, and in recent years has participated in review processes for proposed exploration and development projects on key seasonal caribou habitats in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

The Board has contributed significant information on caribou-related concerns and recommendations for five proposed uranium exploration projects on key spring migration range of Beverly caribou in the Northwest Territories. This was through participation in the preliminary screening and environmental assessment of land use permit applications by the Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board and the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board, or MVEIRB (Ur-Energy 2005-2008, Uravan and Bayswater 2007-2008).

Results to date from five environmental assessments conducted by MVEIRB: one application rejected, and three of four remaining applications recommended for rejection, awaiting the decision of governments.

The BQCMB has also contributed significant information on caribou-related concerns and recommendations regarding proposed uranium exploration on the core traditional calving ground of Beverly caribou in Nunavut. This is being done by participating in preliminary screening and environmental review processes by the Nunavut Impact Review Board, or NIRB (Uravan 2008-09). Results to date: permit application screened and undergoing higher level assessment in a NIRB Part 5 environmental review.

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.

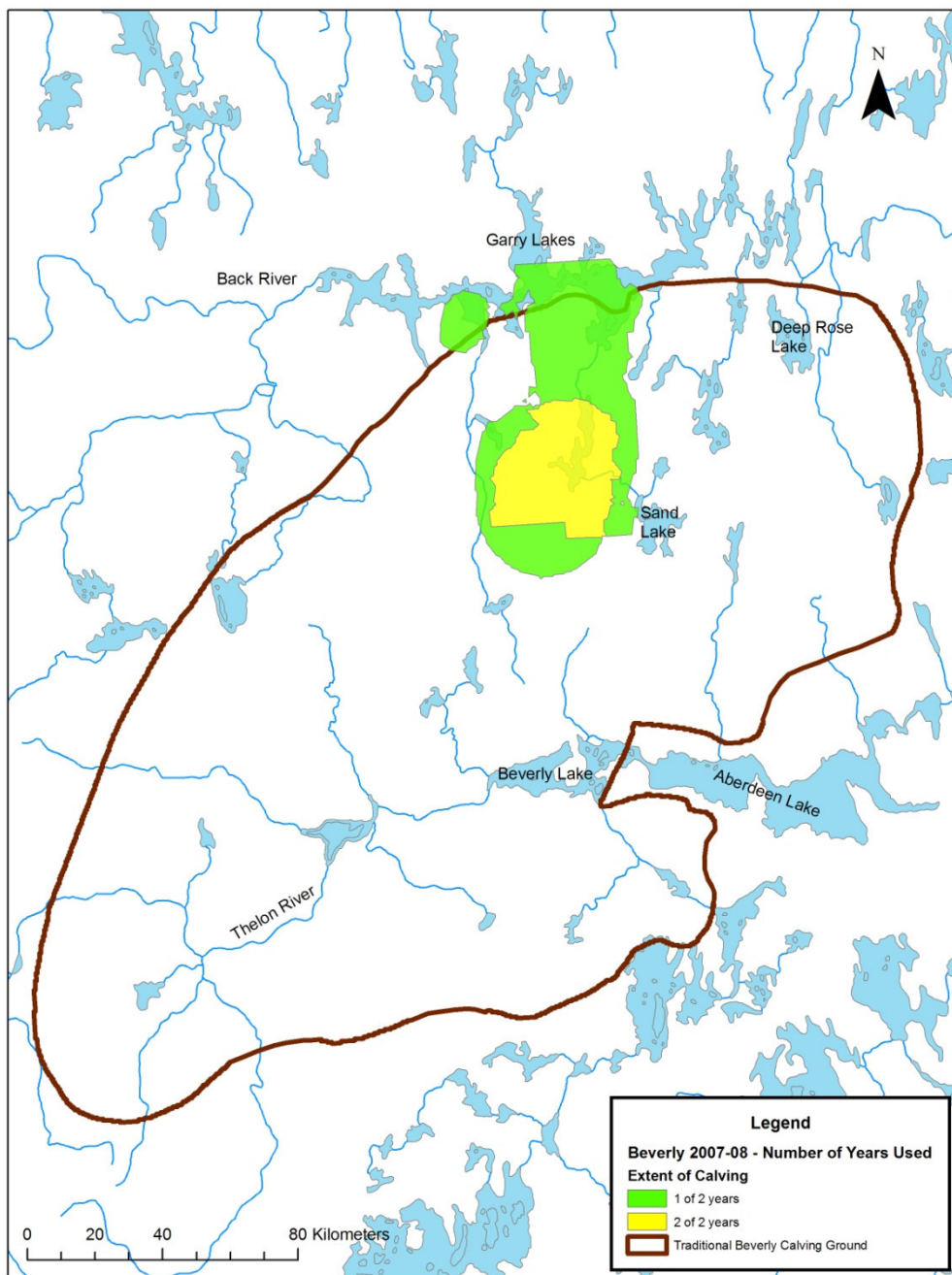
The BQCMB's mission is to ensure the long-term conservation of the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq caribou herds for Aboriginal communities who wish to maintain a lifestyle that includes the use of caribou, as well as for all Canadians and people of other nations. The Board works primarily in the interest of 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 Northwest Territories, 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 Web site 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.

Map courtesy of Deborah Johnson, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, GNWT



Survey information for the calving ground of the Beverly caribou herd, 2007 and 2008, from the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), Environment and Natural Resources.

The “traditional calving ground” is the total cumulative area used for calving by the Beverly herd, based on surveys conducted by the GNWT from 1957-1994.