

# Barren-Ground Caribou Management

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*Hon. J. Michael Miltenberger*  
*Wednesday, November 3, 2010*  
*16th Legislative Assembly*

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Mr. Speaker, barren-ground caribou management has been a major priority for the past five years. In a time when caribou herds around the circumpolar world are declining, we have spent considerable time, effort and resources to conserve our herds.

This work has been done over the years with our partners including Aboriginal governments and wildlife co-management boards. I want to commend all our partners and harvesters for their ongoing actions to help conserve these herds.

Last week Environment and Natural Resources staff participated in the 13<sup>th</sup> North American Caribou Workshop in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The workshop focussed on Aboriginal issues and co-management as well as scientific and technical issues regarding caribou management. The experiences gained here will be useful as we prepare to host the 14<sup>th</sup> Arctic Ungulates Conference in Yellowknife in August 2011.

Recently we signed an agreement with the Yellowknives Dene First Nation on joint management actions to conserve the Bathurst caribou herd, including harvest limits.

The Wek'eezhii Renewable Resources Board has released its recommendations on caribou management in Wek'eezhii.

Results from surveys last year confirmed that management actions taken from the Cape Bathurst and Bluenose-West herds seem to be working and both populations have stabilized.

Mr. Speaker, I have more encouraging news to report this year regarding the Bluenose-East herd.

Based on results from photo-census surveys done this past summer, this herd has stabilized and the population has recovered to 2000 levels at an estimated 98,600 animals.

Two different survey methods were used this summer to obtain the new estimate of the size of the Bluenose-East herd. The post-calving and calving ground surveys produced very similar estimates of the herd. The new herd estimate is based on the post-calving ground survey. The last survey was done in 2006.

The recovery of this herd is most likely due to good calf survival in the last four years and lower harvest pressure on the cows. The herd did not come close to winter roads or communities in the past several years.

Mr. Speaker, while the increase of the Bluenose-East herd is good news, this herd is shared with harvesters from many regions and we must still exercise caution when recommending management actions for the herd, so it can continue to increase.

The next step will be taken by the appropriate wildlife co-management boards and Aboriginal governments. These groups will meet to discuss the harvest target proposed for the Bluenose-East caribou herd by the WRRB in its recommendations report. They will also determine what harvest limitations should be recommended, if any, and how these would be allocated before making recommendations to this government.

We are working with the Tlicho Government to develop a response to the WRRB recommendations. The response will be submitted to the board by the end of December.

With regards to other barren-ground herds, the Porcupine caribou herd, which was estimated to be 123,000 animals in 2001, has been slowly declining for the past 20 years. A new population estimate is expected in the next few years.

The Porcupine Caribou Management Board is implementing the management plan and the recently approved Harvest Management Strategy for this herd.

Recent surveys have indicated a rapid and massive decline in the Beverly caribou herd. Early indications from surveys done this year seem to suggest the Ahiak herd is stabilizing. New estimate and trend analysis for both the Ahiak and Beverly herds will be available by the end of December and a joint Nunavut/Saskatchewan/NWT population survey of the Ahiak herd is planned for the summer of 2011.

Mr. Speaker, given the transboundary nature of these herds, management actions must be done in conjunction with a number of parties. The Advisory Committee for Cooperation on Wildlife Management, consisting of wildlife co-management boards established under the Inuvialuit, Gwich'in, Sahtu, Tlicho and Nunavut land claims agreements, is working on management plans for the Bluenose-East, Bluenose-West and Cape Bathurst herds. These plans will be available in 2011.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources will release the 2011-2015 NWT Barren-ground Caribou Management Strategy for public review in the next few weeks.

Mr. Speaker, we have made progress in working together in conserving our barren-ground caribou herds during the past five years. This has not been without sacrifice. But the management actions and considerable investments are making a difference.

However, we still have more work to do to build capacity for aboriginal involvement and to continue monitoring recovery. By continuing cooperative management approaches that respect and support traditional values, we will be able to make sure the herds are available for the use of current and future generations and can maximize benefits for everyone from this precious resource. Mahsi.