

NWT Barren-Ground Caribou Summit

Hon. Michael McLeod

Friday, February 9, 2007

Statement to the Legislative Assembly

Mr. Speaker, an historic meeting occurred in Inuvik from January 23rd to January 26th. This meeting was held to identify key actions that we can take over the next four years to help barren-ground caribou herds recover.

Leaders from the Northwest Territories wildlife co-management boards, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, northern Saskatchewan and Alberta communities attended the Northwest Territories Barren-Ground Caribou Summit. More than 180 delegates attended the gathering. This included elders, representatives from the tourism, oil and gas and mining sectors, as well as government agencies that have a role in managing the barren-ground caribou of the Northwest Territories. Several MLAs were also in attendance. I would like to thank Mr. Miltenberger, Mr. Braden, Mr. Hawkins, Mr. Pokiak and Mr. McLeod for their support and participation in the summit.

Mr. Speaker, for three days and nights, delegates spoke passionately about their desire to preserve this very important resource. This summit allowed people to share their experience and knowledge. Delegates told us that communities have noticed a difference in caribou numbers, which is supported by the results of surveys and information on calf survival and condition in recent years. I was very impressed with the spirit and willingness shown by all delegates to work together and put politics aside to help the herds recover.

Many delegates spoke of sacrifices they made in the past when caribou herd numbers were low, and they said sacrifices are again needed.

At the summit, delegates identified a number of key actions under these four themes: engaging partners, information for management, managing human activity, and addressing hardships.

The top priorities were:

- protect calving grounds in NWT and Nunavut;
- reduce all harvest;
- bring traditional knowledge into decision-making;
- bring youth into the conference;
- develop management plans for each herd;
- hold an aboriginal conference for harvesters;
- develop codes of conduct for harvest; and
- hold regional harvester conferences.

Many of these priorities are reflected under the NWT Barren-Ground Caribou Management Strategy, which formed the basis for discussion at the summit.

We will share the results from the summit with all partners and wildlife co-management boards in particular. These co-management boards, established under the land claim agreements, have the primary responsibility for wildlife management in their settlement areas.

We will also work with all partners to implement the following immediate actions:

- Meet with Nunavut to begin discussion about protecting calving grounds.
- Improve the way the department shares information on caribou.
- Stop posting data from satellite collars on the Internet.
- Continue implementing recommendations from wildlife co-management boards on harvest levels and seasons.
- Help communities and regions work with their neighbours to cooperate on management issues.
- Expand and improve public education about the status of herds and hunting ethics.
- Develop a closer working relationship with industry and share more information and collaborate on caribou and other wildlife monitoring.

I have appreciated the support from this Legislature in providing additional resources during the past two years to implement the NWT Barren-Ground Caribou Management Strategy. More resources will be needed for the next few years to implement priority actions from the Barren-Ground Caribou Summit and strategy.

I must also acknowledge the considerable support from the following funding partners for caribou management activities: Wildlife Management Advisory Council, NWT; Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board; Sahtu Renewable Resources Board; Wekeezhii Renewable Resources Board; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada; Diavik Diamond Mines Incorporated; BHP Billiton Diamonds and World Wildlife Fund, Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the leaders who have taken to heart their stewardship role of this important resource for the people of the Northwest Territories; in particular, the wildlife co-management boards, which have made some very difficult decisions over the past two years, and the Tlicho Government, which held a special session on caribou with community members and elders last week.

I look forward to continuing to work with all partners to ensure that we have caribou forever. Mahsi cho.