

Update on Barren-ground Caribou Management

*Hon. J. Michael Miltenberger
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Mr. Speaker, the sacrifices of the barren-ground caribou harvesters during the past several years have not been in vain.

Recent surveys indicate the Porcupine herd has increased from an estimated 123,000 animals in 2001 to 169,000 in 2010. The population estimate of the Bluenose-East herd has increased from 65,100 animals in 2006 to 98,600 animals in 2010. Recent surveys point towards a stabilization of the Cape Bathurst and Bluenose-West herds, though overall numbers remain very low.

Reconnaissance surveys on the calving ground of the Ahiak herd in 2011 suggest that the herd is also stable but we are waiting for final results from the Government of Nunavut.

Preliminary results from last April's recruitment survey of the Bathurst herd show a 46 to 100 calf/cow ratio which is considered good and suggests that this herd has also stabilized. A similar survey done on the Bluenose-East herd indicates a 41 to 100 calf/cow ratio which is considered normal.

These are positive signs but we need to conduct population surveys to give us more concrete information on the status of these herds. Population surveys are therefore planned for the Cape Bathurst, Bluenose-West, Bluenose-East and Bathurst herds this summer.

While good information on the status of the herds is an important part of management, so too is planning. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources is working with our co-management partners and stakeholders to develop caribou management plans for all the NWT herds.

A Draft Cape Bathurst, Bluenose-West and Bluenose-East caribou management plan is in the final stages of public review with final comments due by the end of this month.

We are also engaging our co-management partners in developing a management plan for the Bathurst Caribou herd, with a goal of having a final plan this fall.

The results of this year's population surveys will be provided to our co-management partners and the public in the fall once the analysis has been completed.

The results of the surveys, the guidance provided by the management plans, and recommendations on herd harvest levels from the Wildlife Management Boards will allow us to re-examine current limitations on barren ground caribou harvesting.

All harvesters in the Northwest Territories have made sacrifices during the past seven or eight years. In the Beaufort-Delta, all harvest was suspended. Resident and non-resident harvesting was suspended in the rest of the territory while Aboriginal hunters limited their harvest substantially to help these herds recover. The reduction in harvest has helped these herds to stabilize and, in some cases, increase.

I thank everyone for their sacrifices and their commitment to maintaining healthy and sustainable barren ground caribou populations for current and future generations. I also look forward to ongoing collaboration and cooperation between everyone involved in the management of this important species. Thank you.