

Survey Confirms Continued Decline in Bathurst Caribou

YELLOWKNIFE (September 24, 2009) - Results of this summer's photographic survey of the calving grounds of the Bathurst caribou herd confirms an accelerated decline in the number of animals.

The survey was done by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) in June 2009.

The estimated number of breeding females found on the calving grounds has dropped from 55,600 in 2006 to 16,600 plus or minus 4,500 animals in 2009. The overall population estimate of the herd is 31,900 animals plus or minus 11,000.

"Although caribou herds traditionally cycle, these low levels and rapid decline indicate tough decisions must be made for the herd to recover," Minister of Environment and Natural Resources J. Michael Miltenberger said. "We are working with the Tl'ichô Government to develop a Joint Proposal on management actions for herd recovery."

The ENR/Tl'ichô Government Joint Proposal will be submitted to the Wek'èłezhìli Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) by the end of October.

The WRRB, established under the Tl'ichô Land Claims and Self-Government Agreement, is the main instrument for wildlife management in the Wek'èłezhìli area. The WRRB will make recommendations on recovery of the herd.

Consultation with other Aboriginal governments and stakeholder groups will be held in November to determine recommendations for recovery of the herd in areas outside of Wek'èłezhìli.

"ENR biologists are working with independent biologists, population modellers and statisticians to review all current data on the herd," added Miltenberger. "These analyses will be used to produce a technical report which will be provided to the WRRB to assist in its deliberations on recovery actions."

Observers from the Tl'ichô Government, Lutsel k'e, the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, the North Slave Metis Alliance and a staff member from the WRRB participated in the survey.

Results of the surveys done on the Cape Bathurst, Blue-nose West, Ahiak and Beverly herds will be released after being provided to co-management partners.

Background

- Bathurst calving ground survey was done from June 3 – 12, 2009.
- Pregnant cows return to, or near, the calving area every year in early June.
- Satellite-collared cows are monitored to determine when they have reached the calving ground.
- Small aircrafts are then used to map the calving grounds and determine where most of the cows are concentrated.
- The calving grounds are then divided into blocks of high, medium and low density of caribou.
- Transects are flown in each block at the peak of calving, using a specialized photo plane that takes large format stereo photos while flying at altitudes of 600 metres (2000 ft.).
- The photos are used to count the number of animals, generally breeding females, calves and non-breeding females, on the calving ground.
- Observers on the ground check the proportion of breeding cows.
- This information is used to determine a population estimate of the herd.
- In 2009, about 14,000 km of survey lines were flown from Kugluktuk to the east side of Bathurst Inlet and from the Arctic coast south to the treeline and near the diamond mines.
- 21 people participated in the survey including observers from First Nations.
- About 90 hours in a fixed wing aircraft and 30 hours in a helicopter were flown for the survey.
- Estimated cost of the survey is \$350,000.

For more information, contact:

Judy McLinton
Manager, Public Affairs and Communications
Environment and Natural Resources
Tel: 867-873-7379
Email: judy_mclinton@gov.nt.ca
www.enr.gov.nt.ca