

# Report on the 4<sup>th</sup> Biannual Environment and Natural Resources South Slave Regional Wildlife Workshop

November 3 – 5, 2015  
Roaring Rapids Hall, Fort Smith, NT



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December 2015

## **INTRODUCTION**

The 4<sup>th</sup> Biannual Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) South Slave Regional Wildlife Workshop was held November 3 – 5, 2015 at Roaring Rapids Hall in Fort Smith. The workshop has been held every two years since 2009. The overall objectives of the workshop are to ensure that representatives of First Nations organizations in the South Slave Region, as well as local residents, are updated on current and upcoming wildlife research and monitoring programs, to provide an open forum for discussion of regional wildlife concerns and priorities, and to provide an opportunity for other agencies, researchers, and ENR departments to present on research findings or policy initiatives.

This year, approximately 70 – 75 people attended the 3-day workshop including delegates from Salt River First Nation, Smith Landing First Nation, Fort Smith Métis Council, Deninu K'ue First Nation, Fort Resolution Métis Council, Deh Gah Got'ie Dene Council, Fort Providence Métis Council, K'atlodeeche First Nation, Hay River Métis Council, West Point First Nation, and the Athabasca Denesuline. We also welcomed participation from the NWT Wildlife Federation, Parks Canada, Environment Canada, Aurora College (Environment and Natural Resource Technology Program, ENRTP), ENR staff and officers, researchers from southern universities, and local residents and hunters.

The workshop included 18 presentations and 4 breakout discussions. Presenters are listed below and copies of presentations are included as an Appendix to this report. Posters were also on display during the workshop and provided information on additional wildlife research and monitoring programs occurring in South Slave region (listed below).

To address feedback received in previous years, an evening session was held on November 3<sup>rd</sup> to provide an opportunity for South Slave residents, who may be unable to attend the workshop during the day, a chance to participate and learn about ENR's regional programs. Attendance was low at the evening session, but it will still be considered for future workshops. Further, increased participation of children and youth in the workshop was sought after through a contest entitled, "What Does Wildlife in the South Slave Mean to You?". The contest was open to everyone, but advertising of the contest was especially directed at schools across the South Slave to encourage children and youth to submit stories, photos, drawings, and/or songs about wildlife. This initiative was met with marginal success, but the grand prize winner, from Fort Resolution, was awarded a prize pack filled with ENR promotional items and outdoor gear.

## **REVIEW OF 2013 WORKSHOP**

At the beginning of the workshop, a review of the main wildlife concerns and comments from the 2013 workshop was provided along with a summary of how ENR has worked to address these concerns. The following summarizes this information:

<b>Key Wildlife Concerns/Comments</b>	<b>How ENR is Addressing Concern</b>
(a) Low moose numbers- due to disease? Harvest? Habitat quality? Predation?	(a) Developing a moose state of knowledge report and moose management plan, 2016 winter moose survey in the Mackenzie area, ongoing harvest sample collection
(b) Open resident hunt of bison in Slave River Lowlands (SRL) to offset moose harvest	(b) Resident harvest of bison in SRL opened in 2014. Residents have a 1 tag limit (not sex-specific)
(c) Want continued involvement of First Nations groups in wildlife management planning processes	(c) First Nations involvement in bison management plans, boreal caribou range plans, workshop breakout groups inform ENR programs
(d) Declining boreal caribou population- impacts of fire and industry or harvest and predation?	(d) Monitor population with ongoing boreal caribou collaring program, new caribou genetics project, mapping fire severity and response by caribou, new wolf monitoring and diet studies
(e) More research needed on predators	(e) Initiating wolf monitoring program in South Slave in winter 2015/16 (aerial track count survey and collar deployment)

## **2015 WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS AND POSTERS**

List of Presentations: (Copies of individual presentations available on request: Karl\_Cox@gov.nt.ca)

1. Summary of ENR's Wildlife Research and Monitoring Programs in South Slave- Ashley McLaren, Wildlife Biologist (ENR)
2. Boreal Caribou Habitat Use and Survival- Alicia Kelly, Wildlife Biologist (ENR)
3. Boreal Caribou NWT Recovery Strategy and Range Planning- James Hodson, Wildlife Biologist (ENR)
4. Harvest Sample Collection and Update on Moose Surveys- Karl Cox, Wildlife Technician (ENR)
5. ENR and Public Education- Stephanie Yuill, Public Education Coordinator (ENR)
6. Bison and Bat National Recovery Strategies; Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) Waterfowl Programs- Donna Bigelow, Species at Risk Biologist (Environment Canada)
7. Bison Program- Terry Armstrong, Bison Ecologist (ENR)
8. Anthrax Update- John McKinnon, Ecosystem Geomatics Technician (Wood Buffalo National Park)
9. Whooping Cranes- Sharon Irwin, Resource Management Officer (Wood Buffalo National Park)
10. Wildlife Diseases- Brett Elkin, Manager, Wildlife Research and Management (ENR)

11. Wolf Monitoring Program- Ashley McLaren
12. South Slave Wolf Diet Research- Sean O'Donovan, M.Sc. student (University of Alberta)
13. Fur Program- Scott McQueen, Traditional Economy Coordinator (ENR)
14. Fire Management- Larry Nixon, Manager, Fire Science (ENR)
15. Forest Management Agreement Areas- Tom Lakusta, Manager, Forest Resources (ENR)
16. Sight-in-Your-Rifle Events- Karl Cox
17. Joint Caribou Monitoring Program- Tina Giroux, Biologist (Athabasca Denesuline Né Né Land Corporation)
18. Barren-Ground Caribou Update- Brett Elkin

List of Posters (ENR South Slave programs unless otherwise stated):

- Bison Control Area
- American White Pelican Population Surveys
- NWT small mammal and hare monitoring
- NWT-wide Community-Based Water Quality Monitoring (CBM) Program
- Abundance and distribution of potential West Nile mosquito vectors in northwestern Canada (in collaboration with the University of Calgary)
- Mills Lake Duck Banding Program (United States Fish and Wildlife Service)
- Body condition of boreal caribou in the southern NWT (in collaboration with the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement)
- Fish health from the Athabasca and Slave Rivers (3 posters; University of Saskatchewan))
- Mercury trends in colonial water bird eggs downstream of oil sands (2 posters; Environment Canada, Carleton University, Deninu K'ue First Nation)
- ENRTP student posters (a poster session for student posters was held during lunch on Nov. 4<sup>th</sup>)
- Bison collision awareness and reporting
- Maps of the South Slave Region

## **2015 BREAKOUT GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

For each breakout discussion, a question(s) was posed to the attendees and then individuals were divided into smaller groups and given 15 – 20 minutes to discuss and provide comments to the question(s). After reconvening, each group shared their comments to the audience. Breakout discussions were an excellent opportunity for individuals to work together, discuss common concerns for wildlife, and share stories and observations from the land. Below are the breakout group questions and summaries of the flip chart notes made by each group.

### **Breakout Discussion 1: Moose**

Questions: *What are the positive and negative influences on moose? What would you like to see in a NWT moose management plan?*

## Group 1

### Positive Influences

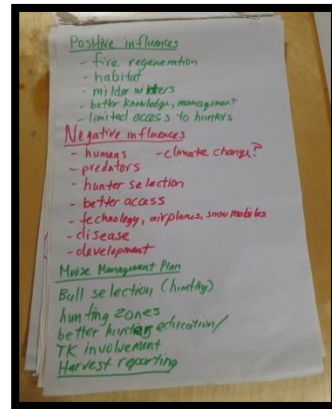
- Fire regeneration
- Habitat
- Milder winters
- Better knowledge, management
- Limited access to hunters

### Negative Influences

- Humans
- Predators
- Hunter selection
- Better access
- Technology, airplanes, snowmobiles
- Disease
- Development
- Climate change?

### Moose Management Plan

- Bull selection (hunting)
- Hunting zones
- Better hunter education/TK involvement
- Harvest reporting



## Group 2

### Positive Influences

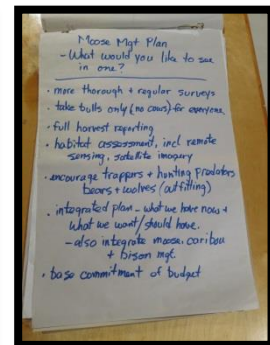
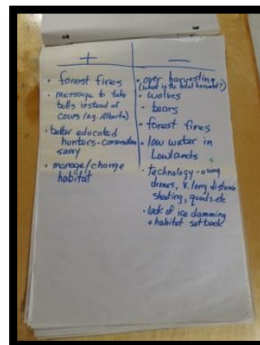
- Forest fires
- Message to take bulls instead of cows (e.g. Alberta)
- Better educated hunters-conservation savvy
- Manage/change habitat

### Negative Influences

- Over harvesting (what is the total harvest?)
- Wolves
- Bears
- Forest Fires
- Low water in Lowlands
- Technology- using drones, very long distance shooting, quads, etc.
- Lack of ice damming and habitat set back

### Moose Management Plan

- More thorough and regular surveys
- Take bulls only (no cows) for everyone
- Full harvest reporting
- Habitat assessment, including remote sensing, satellite imagery
- Encourage trappers and hunting predators-bears and wolves (outfitting)
- Integrated plan- what we have now and what we want/should have; also integrate moose, caribou, bison management
- Base commitment of budget





### Group 3

#### Positive Influences

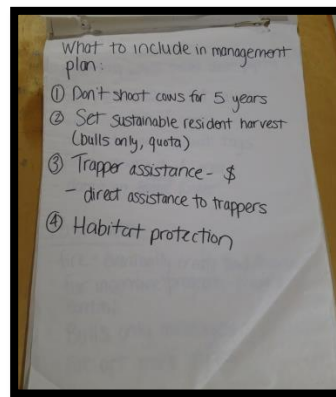
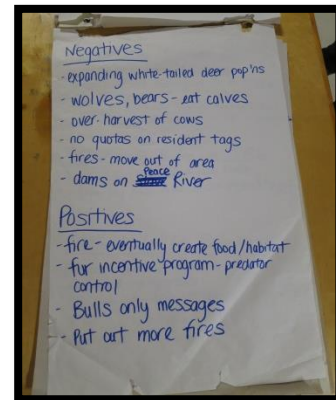
- Fire- eventually create food/habitat
- Fur incentive program- predator control
- Bulls only messages
- Put out more fires

#### Negative Influences

- Expanding white-tailed deer populations
- Wolves, bears- eat calves
- Over-harvest of cows
- No quotas on resident tags
- Fires-move out of area
- Dams on Peace River

#### Moose Management Plan

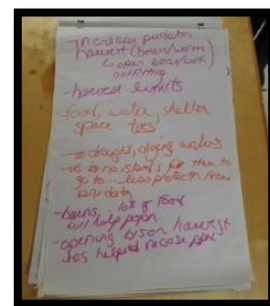
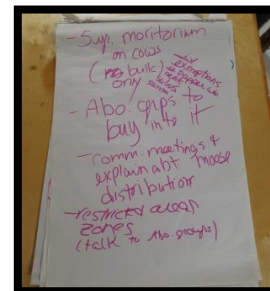
- Don't shoot cows for 5 years
- Set sustainable resident harvest (bulls only, quota)
- Trapper assistance- \$ (direct assistance to trappers)
- Habitat protection



### Group 4

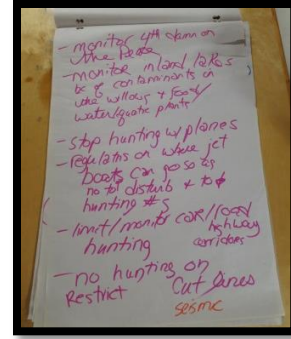
(comments not separated into subheadings)

- 5 year moratorium on cows (bulls only, with exemptions- i.e. trapper who needs to hunt for subsistence/survival)
- Aboriginal groups to buy into it
- Community meetings and explain about moose distributions
- Restricted access zones (talk to Aboriginal groups)
- Increase predator harvest (bears/wolves, open bear/wolf outfitting)
- Harvest limits
- Food, water, shelter (Note: these were described as requirements for healthy moose)
- Negative: drought, drying waters
- Negative: no islands for them to go to, less protection from predation
- Burns- lots of food will help population
- Opening bison harvest has helped moose population
- Monitor 4<sup>th</sup> dam on the Peace



### Group 4 (continued)

- Monitor inland lakes because of contaminants in the willows and food/water/aquatic plants
- Stop hunting with planes
- Regulations on where jet boats can go so as to not disturb and to decrease hunting numbers
- Limit/monitor car/road highway corridor hunting
- No (restrict) hunting on cut and seismic lines



### Summary of moose breakout discussions:

A wide range of positive and negative influences and topics to include in a management plan were listed by participants. Reoccurring themes were:

- Harvest data is critical
- Harvest bull moose instead of cows
- More research and monitoring of moose habitat needed as well as regular moose surveys
- Habitat information is important in understanding moose population levels
- Encourage an increase in predator trapping and hunting

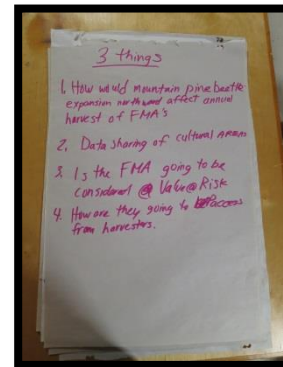
### Breakout Discussion 2: Forest Management Agreement (FMA) Areas

Question: *What should ENR consider when implementing FMAs? Highlight your top 3 priorities if possible.*

#### Group 1

##### Priorities to Consider

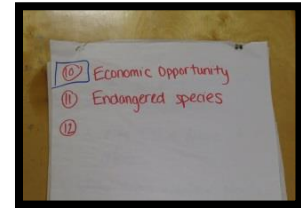
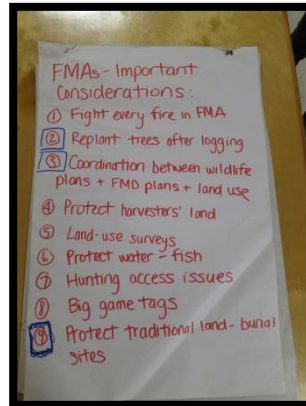
1. How would mountain pine beetle expansion northward affect annual harvest of FMAs
2. Data sharing of cultural areas
3. Is the FMA going to be considered a value at risk
4. How are they going to keep access from harvesters



## Group 2 (top 3 priorities are bolded)

### Priorities to Consider

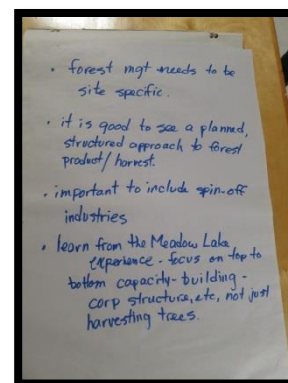
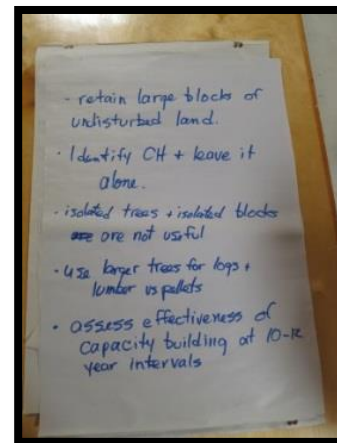
1. Fight every fire in FMA
2. **Replant trees after logging**
3. **Coordination between wildlife plans, FMD plans, and land use**
4. Protect harvesters' land
5. Land-use surveys
6. Protect water- fish
7. Hunting access issues
8. Big game tags
9. Protect traditional land- burial sites
10. **Economic opportunity**
11. Endangered species



## Group 3

### Priorities to Consider

1. Retain large blocks of undisturbed land
2. Identify CH (critical habitat) and leave it alone
3. Isolated trees and isolated blocks are not useful
4. Use larger trees for logs and lumber versus pellets
5. Assess effectiveness of capacity building at 10-12 year intervals
6. Forest management needs to be site specific
7. It is good to see a planned, structured approach to forest product/harvest
8. Important to include spin-off industries
9. Learn from the Meadow Lake experience- focus on top to bottom capacity-building- corporate structure, etc. not just harvesting trees

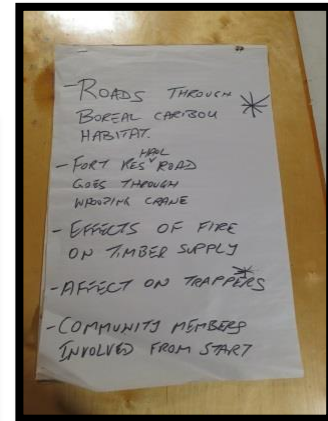
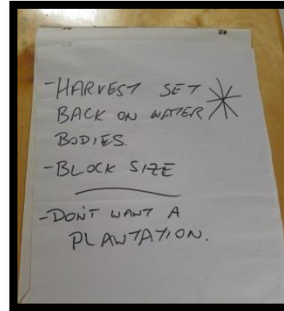




#### Group 4 (top 3 priorities are bolded)

##### Priorities to Consider

1. **Harvest set back on water bodies**
2. Block size (Discussion noted: i.e. fit harvest blocks to natural boundaries)
3. Don't want a plantation ("more natural replanting")
4. **Roads through boreal caribou habitat** (a concern)
5. Fort Resolution haul road goes through whooping crane (habitat)
6. Effects of fire on timber supply
7. **Effect on trappers**
8. Community members involved from start



#### Summary of Forest Management Agreement breakout discussions:

Participants raised a variety of priorities and considerations. The potential impact of the FMAs on wildlife (e.g. boreal caribou, whooping crane, fish) and the potential increase in big-game hunting access (roads) were key concerns. Participants also commented on timber harvest methods and habitat restoration. Taking a planned approach, coordination amongst different groups, spin-off industries and involving community members in this potential economic opportunity were also highlighted as priorities.

#### Breakout Discussion 3: Bison, and 4: ENR Programs and Wildlife Concerns (same session)

**Breakout Discussion 3: Bison** Due to time constraints on day 2 of the workshop, the bison group discussion was moved to day 3 and combined with the breakout questions for discussion 4 listed below. Groups were asked to consider the following questions about bison:

*What should be the management objectives for Slave River Lowlands (SRL) bison? How many bison do you think there should be in the Slave River Lowlands?*

**Breakout Discussion 4: ENR Programs and Wildlife Concerns** Attendees were asked to consider all the ENR South Slave wildlife programs that were discussed over the course of the workshop and provide their feedback on the following questions:

*What ENR wildlife programs are you most supportive of? Are there any wildlife issues or related concerns you would like to see ENR focus on more?*

## Group 1

### Support for ENR Wildlife Programs

1. Boreal caribou program
2. Bison program
3. Moose program

### Wildlife Issues/Related Concerns

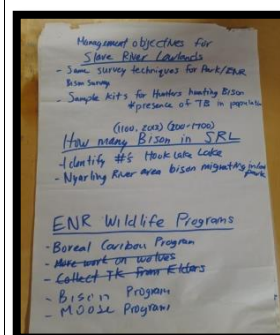
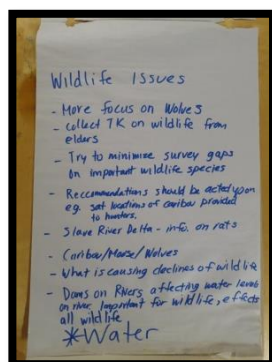
1. More focus on wolves
2. Collect TK on wildlife from elders
3. Try to minimize survey gaps on important wildlife species
4. Recommendations should be acted upon e.g. satellite locations of caribou (Note: reference to barren-ground caribou collar locations which used to be provided to hunters, but this was discontinued after a recommendation from the 2007 Caribou Summit in Inuvik)
5. Slave River Delta- information on muskrats
6. Caribou/moose/wolves
7. What is causing decline of wildlife
8. Dams on rivers affecting water levels on river. Important for wildlife, affects all wildlife
9. \* Water (starred to indicate strong concern)

### Bison Management Plan Objectives

1. Same survey techniques for Park/ENR bison survey
2. Sample kits for hunters hunting bison (presence of TB in population)

### Bison Population Goal for SRL

1. Identify numbers in Hook Lake (Note: answer was provided by the Bison Ecologist during discussion. The 2014 population estimate for bison east of the Slave River was 715.)
2. Nyarling River area bison migrating in/out of Park



## Group 2

### Support for ENR Wildlife Programs

1. Wolf research program
2. Moose and caribou program- but find alternatives to collars

### Wildlife Issues/Related Concerns

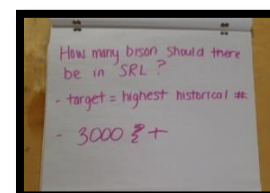
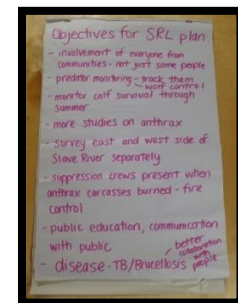
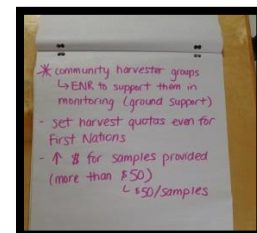
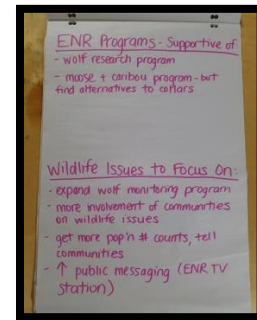
1. Expand wolf monitoring program
2. More involvement of communities on wildlife issues
3. Get more population number counts, tell communities
4. Increase public messaging (e.g. ENR TV station)
5. \*Community harvester groups- ENR to support them in monitoring (ground support)
6. Set harvest quotas even for First Nations
7. Increase incentives for samples provided (more than \$50, e.g. \$50/sample)

### Bison Management Plan Objectives

1. Involvement of everyone from communities- not just same people
2. Predator monitoring- track them, wolf control
3. Monitor calf survival through summer
4. More studies on anthrax
5. Survey east and west side of Slave River separately
6. Suppression crews present when anthrax carcasses are burned- fire control
7. Public education, communication with public
8. Disease- TB/Brucellosis- better collaboration with people

### Bison Population Goal for SRL

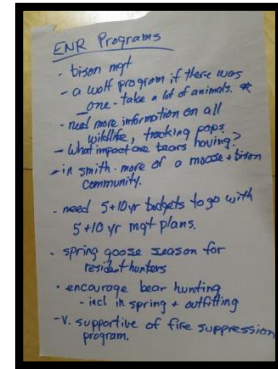
1. Target = highest historical number (Note: highest SRL bison population estimate is 1790 bison in 2009)
2. 3000+ (Note: population size goal suggested by a participant)



### Group 3

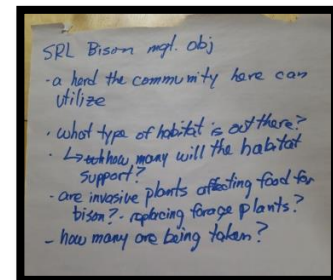
#### Support for ENR Wildlife Programs/Wildlife Concerns

1. Bison management
2. A wolf program if there was one- take a lot of animals
3. Need more information on all wildlife, tracking populations
4. What impacts are bears having?
5. In (Fort) Smith, more of a moose and bison community
6. Need 5 and 10 year budgets to go with 5 and 10 year management plans
7. Spring goose season for resident hunters
8. Encourage bear hunting- including in spring and outfitting
9. Very supportive of fire suppression program



#### Bison Management Objectives/Population Goal

1. A herd the community here (Fort Smith) can utilize
2. What type of habitat is out there? How many will the habitat support?
3. Are invasive plants affecting food for bison? Replacing forage plants?
4. How many are being taken?



### Summary of bison breakout group discussion

A wide range of management actions were suggested for the Slave River Lowlands bison. Topics included habitat, harvest, predators, disease, population surveys and monitoring, movement between SRL and Wood Buffalo National Park bison, and public education. Only one group commented on a population size goal for the Slave River Lowlands bison herd.

### Summary of breakout group discussion on ENR programs and wildlife concerns:

Participants were very supportive of ENR wildlife programs during the breakout groups and subsequent discussion. In addition to caribou, moose and bison programs, there was a lot of support for the wolf research and monitoring programs and support to further increase monitoring of wolves (e.g. in other areas within the South Slave) and other predators (e.g. bears). We received feedback to look more into causes of population declines in monitored species and work towards fewer gaps in monitoring (e.g. population surveys). Participants noted that funding needs to be longer term to develop long-term monitoring plans. Participants also emphasized the ongoing need to involve communities and traditional knowledge in wildlife issues.

## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS**

In addition to the breakout group discussions, attendees were encouraged to ask questions and share their thoughts and wildlife concerns throughout the workshop. This resulted in group discussions during workshop presentations. To accommodate anyone who felt more at ease providing feedback in written form, there was a comments box and flip chart set up allowing people to freely express their opinions. Furthermore, on the last day of the workshop, a round table discussion was held and each attendee was given the chance to share his/her final thoughts on the workshop. From the feedback received, the following summarizes common concerns and important messages, and highlights some key themes heard at the 2015 workshop. Finally, comments on workshop successes and constructive ideas for the next wildlife workshop are included.

### **Common Concerns and Important Messages**

#### **Caribou**

- Concerned about impacts of industry and related activities on boreal caribou (e.g. logging) and barren-ground caribou (e.g. mining)
- How is critical boreal caribou habitat going to be protected in Forest Management Agreement areas?
- Suggest collaring boreal caribou bulls as their geographic range use may be larger than cows
- What impacts do fires have on caribou habitat use? Do caribou use burned areas?
- Suggestion made to establish a restricted resident-hunting zone for boreal caribou between the Hay River and Wood Buffalo National Park
- The Beverly Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board (BQCMB) Chair, Earl Evans, noted that the BQCMB is concerned about harvest pressure being diverted from the Bathurst and Bluenose-East barren-ground caribou herds' ranges onto the Beverly herd's range.

#### **Predators and trapping**

- Suggest ENR conduct a wolf census in the Slave River Lowlands where there are lots of wolves and predator information is lacking
- Want to see information collected on wolves and their impacts on caribou populations. ENR should take action if wolves are reducing caribou numbers
- Discussion on ENR's compensation for trapping wolves. Trappers noted they can see when wolf or wolverine fur is not of good quality for taxidermy and in those cases want to use traditional skinning methods (cut off paws as for lynx) and still sell the pelt through ENR's program for a reduced price. For example, ENR could purchase the fur for trim. The presenter noted that it is important to the Genuine Mackenzie Valley Fur (GMVF) brand to maintain the high quality of NWT fur and fur processing but that the request would be considered.
- Participants from the Saskatchewan Athabasca Denesuline who trap in the NWT want to participate in the GMVF Program. ENR staff noted that this has not been possible because the



program is a benefit to NWT residents and paid by NWT taxes, but agreed to look at it again.

#### Bison

- Very little is known about bison habitat and changes that are occurring to their habitat; it is important to understand critical habitat.
- Discussion on bison collaring. ENR should consider collaring bison to help with monitoring, including locating the currently-small population in the Mackenzie area and when bison are in dense habitat, and to learn more about habitat use.
- Funding was discussed as the main reason bison are not collared; participants suggested lobbying First Nation groups to help support collaring including possible funding.
- Discussion on bison management working group and how information gets back to community members. Participants were encouraged to contact their organization and find out who the working group member is, and encourage working group members to share information which is their responsibility.

#### Other comments

- Understanding habitat is very important: what animals are using it? What is the carrying capacity for a particular species? Habitat inventories are one tool to use.
- Concerns expressed over low water levels and the impact on aquatic furbearers and other species (e.g. moose)
- Over-harvesting of wildlife is a problem
- Harvest information is important for wildlife management
- ENR is looking for suggestions on how to increase participation in Sight in Your Rifle events by people who hunt, but do not normally sight in their rifle.
- Good to continue youth programs to get them on the land
- Important to have local involvement in programs
- First Nations groups and ENR should work together to conserve wildlife
- Want to see ideas discussed at workshop implemented in wildlife management
- Want electronic copies of presentations and a workshop summary

#### Successes from 2015 Wildlife Workshop

- Workshop was very informative
- Nice to see the high level of participation
- Notes taken by delegates will be shared with their people
- Good to have the ENRTP students at the workshop and present their posters
- Felt like we were able to voice our concerns and ideas
- Workshop demonstrates ENR is working with our communities
- Can see that there are respectful relationships among everyone
- Having a workshop is very positive and it should continue in the future

- Good to get everyone together to talk about wildlife concerns and share information

### **Suggestions for 2017 Wildlife Workshop**

- Less chairs at the back of the room and assigned seating for elders at the front (to encourage people to sit at the front of the room)
- Need more elders and youth involved and emphasis on elder traditional knowledge
- Include more breakout discussions
- Provide more information on how ENR works with other jurisdictions
- Continue to do workshop summary report with presentations included

### **KEY THEMES HEARD AT THE 2015 WORKSHOP**

- **Habitat** (importance of habitat and need to increase understanding of how habitat is used by, and affects population trends in, key species)
- **Predators** (support for new wolf program in the Hay River Lowlands and wolf diet project; should look at predators in other SSR areas as well; concerns that predators negatively influence big game species)
- **Support for ongoing caribou, moose and bison programs** (continuing existing projects; integrating research and management of multiple species; reducing gaps in monitoring; collecting new information)
- **Working together** (getting everyone around the table to talk about wildlife is positive, appreciation for ENR for working with communities on wildlife issues; good communication, need to continue to involve communities, and involve elders, TK and youth in wildlife issues)

### **NEXT STEPS**

#### **ENR**

- Distribute workshop summary report to delegates and organization representatives
- Make workshop summary report online (It's at <http://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/file/3920>)
- Presentations are available online as an Appendix (at [www.enr.gov.nt.ca/node/3019](http://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/node/3019)) or by request: [Karl\\_Cox@gov.nt.ca](mailto:Karl_Cox@gov.nt.ca)
- Review recommendations and suggestions from 2015 workshop to help inform priorities for wildlife research and monitoring programs in South Slave region
- Secure funding to host next Regional Wildlife Workshop in 2017

#### **Delegates and Organization Representatives**

- Ensure additional copies of report are available for distribution as requested from community members

**Thank You for a Successful 2015 ENR  
South Slave Regional Wildlife Workshop**

## PHOTOS FROM 2015 WORKSHOP



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