

**Monitoring Caribou  
The Relationship between Tłıchǵ Laws and Indicators of  
Change**

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## **Monitoring Caribou: The Relationship between Tłı̨chǫ Laws and Indicators of Change**

Long ago people gathered to discuss how they would hunt for caribou, then one of the oldest elders spoke up and said, “We will make a rule to make a spear out of it’s own bones. We will use it’s own bone and we will make bow and arrows too. And we will make string from the caribou skin. We will use this string to make snares to catch caribou. That’s how our ancestors first learned to kill caribou; we learned from our ancestors. (Adele Wedawin, Behchokò, 00/11/02)

### **Background**

The Bathurst, Bluenose East and Ahiek caribou herds usually winter south of the tree line within Mǫwǫhì Gogha Dè Nı̨łłèè. Collectively, Tłı̨chǫ speakers referred to these caribou as *zekwò* (barren-ground caribou) as opposed to *tòdzi* (woodland caribou). Information based on harvesting studies suggests that a minimum of 11,000 caribou are taken annually (GNWT 2006: 1) with the majority being *zekwò* wintering on the mainland of the Northwest Territories. Since 2000 there has been a general decline in *zekwò* population, which the Tłı̨chǫ elders and leaders recognized earlier when they discussed the problem in the mid 1990s. They considered the problem to be the result of shrinking caribou habitat caused by increased resource development restricting foraging possibilities for caribou, increased air pollution causing caribou to be confused as to the location of lush vegetation due to unfamiliar smells and noise;, and the destruction of several key water crossings due to pit and road locations. In the mid-1990s the elders with whom we worked also considered the shrinking caribou habitat was to be the result of increased air pollutants settling on plants and in the water, which, in their opinion, slowly destroys wildlife habitat. The elders were, and continue to be, concerned about the behaviour of humans, as they know humans are responsible for the loss of caribou habitat, air pollutants – including noise and smells – and the lose of viable water crossings.

In 1996 the Dogrib (Tłı̨cho) Renewable Resources Committee named caribou as one of four priorities for research associated with monitoring cumulative impacts resulting from mining activity. This concern is also voiced at the Bathurst Caribou Management Plan (BCMP) meetings and has also been expressed by the Environmental

Monitoring Advisory Board (EMAB) to the Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resource Board (WRRB) in a statement issued on March 2, 2007.<sup>1</sup> During the March 28, 2007 Dene Nation Chief's Caribou Committee meetings, several leaders expressed their community's concern that the ratio of wolves to caribou has increased and with caribou showing signs of increased hunger due to diminishing habitat on which they depend.

Between 1997 and 2001, the West Kitikmeot Slave Study Society (WKSS) funded the Tł̨ch̨ project entitled *Caribou Migrations and the State of their Habitat*. This project documented Tł̨ch̨ elders' knowledge of *zekw̨* – most specifically those whose calving ground is adjacent to the Bathurst Inlet and whose summer range extends along Deèzàatì (Coppermine River), and adjacent to ʔek'atì (Lac de Graz). In addition to documenting oral narratives and harvesting information dating back to the early 1900s, the team documented elders' explanation of caribou behaviour and population fluctuations. The team spent time with elders in the communities where oral narratives were documented with male and female elders. They also spent time with harvesters in various camps on the tundra and in the boreal forest during which time observations were made and oral narratives documented when harvesters and elders gathered around the fire. The team also interpreted and analyzed information embedded in the stories documented. The research team consisted of a number of individuals from the four Tł̨ch̨ communities, with Bobby Gon, Georgina Chocolate, and Allice Legat focusing on the project for its duration.

The '*Caribou Migration and State of Their Habitat*' report documented caribou migration routes, water crossings, and yearly distribution patterns based on harvesting patterns between the mid 1920s and late 1990s. Older hunters remembered distribution patterns and these past observations provided information on fitness and foraging

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<sup>1</sup> In March, 2007, the Environmental Monitoring Advisory Board (EMAB), encouraged the Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resources Board to consider provisions in the Bathurst Caribou Management Plan (BCMP). The provisions EMAB referred to are related to monitoring cumulative effects on caribou that may be due to industrial development activities, and are as follows: Monitoring caribou exposure to human activity such as mines, roads (seasonal and all-weather), exploration activity, hunting camps etc. (BCMP, item 1.3.1); Development of standardized monitoring protocols to detect and address impacts of industrial development projects on caribou behaviour and movement (C=BCMP, item 1.3.3); and Development of a computer model to evaluate cumulative effects of all land uses on caribou movement and population size (BCMP, item 1.3.4).

patterns and caribou populations over several decades. Like their ancestors, Tłı̨chǫ youth are told that if caribou are in the region, these caribou will probably frequent specific locations where *dahmı̨* (caribou fences) were traditionally built to harvest caribou in the spring, and where natural water-crossing can be found in the autumn (DT11C, WNK<sup>2</sup> 2001; Legat et al 1995). Numbers of caribou frequenting these locations suggest – to individual hunters – distribution patterns for that year, however it is only after sharing and discussing occurrences with other hunters and elders that distribution becomes clear.

During the spring of 2006, Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) wildlife personnel noted a decline in caribou populations throughout the north, which the Tłı̨chǫ elders had predicted in the mid-1990s based on their observation of human behaviour which they attributed to human’s lack of knowledge of caribou habitat and behaviour (DT11C, WNK 2001). Given the importance of caribou to the Tłı̨chǫ people, the Tłı̨chǫ Chief Executive Council (CEC) requested a caribou project be re-initiated. More specifically they requested that laws governing human behaviour be documented because of their perspective that caribou behaviour, patterns of migration and caribou populations are usually tied to human behaviour. They also requested that, if possible, these laws be tied to changing caribou populations and migration patterns.

## **Project Description**

This project – originally titled *Monitoring Caribou: The relationship between Tłı̨chǫ Principles, Laws and Rules and Indicators of Change* – focuses on the relationship between change and the adherence to Tłı̨chǫ laws associated with caribou; and, is now For this reason Oral narratives documented between 1997 and 2001 were reviewed by Georgina Chocolate, who identified the laws mentioned by the elders. There are significantly more laws. This is only the initial step in a much larger project in which the laws governing behaviour associated with caribou and other aspects of the *dè* will be identified.

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<sup>2</sup> Whaèhdqò Nàowo Kò, the elders program with Dogrib Treaty 11 Council.

## Objectives of Study

1. To identify Tłıchǫ indicators of change, most specifically those resulting from following or dismissing laws and rules governing human behaviour.
2. To compare traditional indicators with scientific indicators in relation to caribou.
3. Rewrite the report submitted to the WKSS in 2003

### Objectives Changed

As the project progressed Objective 2 was dropped. Although the project team originally hoped to compare traditional indicators to scientific indicators in relation to caribou populations, migration and distribution patterns, this task was consistently put aside in favour of completing the list of Tłıchǫ laws. The team simply did not have sufficient time to comprehensively compare the Tłıchǫ knowledge and western scientific perspective. We think it is important to conceptually understand both, or co-management boards will continue to diminish the relevance of one for the other. Furthermore, the tasks of identifying Tłıchǫ laws became somewhat daunting at times for two reasons. First, there is no longer a team of people who worked directly with a Regional Elders' Committee. Rather, the Whaèhdǫ̀ Nàowo Kǫ̀ research team is now scattered, some are now Tłıchǫ Government staff while others sit on various boards and committees. For this reason, we had to work around the demanding time schedule of the Lands Department, Tłıchǫ Government, as well as Boards and Committees to bring the team together. Second, the Tłıchǫ term 'nàowo' conceptualizes the English terms 'principles', 'rules', 'laws', 'knowledge' and 'agreement' depending on the context. After numerous discussions among team members and with elders, the researchers concluded that it was impossible to separate 'rules and laws' from 'principles, 'knowledge' or 'agreement' in relations to the Tłıchǫ term 'nàowo'. They concluded that from the Tłıchǫ perspective; without knowledge one does not know or understand the principles for living, nor does one know the rules and laws governing respectful behaviour towards other beings, including caribou beings. And, finally without knowledge one does not have the skill to take the action necessary to act in a respectful manner or act according to agreements that have been made – whether formal or

informal, old or new. Since the Tł̥ch̥q̥ concept of nàowo has many meanings, from this point on we will use the most appropriate English term for the discussion.

The re-writing of the report submitted in May 2003 and entitled *Dogrib Monitoring and Database* focuses on the following:

1. To identify Tł̥ch̥q̥ laws governing human behaviour towards caribou.
2. To discuss how the adherence to or rejection of Tł̥ch̥q̥ laws can impact caribou populations and migration.<sup>3</sup>
3. To identify Tł̥ch̥q̥ indicators used to monitor caribou.

### **Tasks accomplished**

The following tasks were completed between March 2007 and March 2008.

- Review of audiotapes (1997-2001) for information relating to rules governing human behaviour.
- Information was taken from twenty-five, sixty-minute tapes. Another 500 tapes were reviewed but relevant information was not found.
- Review of sections of Tł̥ch̥q̥ Agreement and other legislated authorities as well as associated policies relating to the interface between the physical and cultural environment, especially in terms of monitoring the environment from a Tł̥ch̥q̥ perspective.
- Verified laws and consequences of laws being broken with Regional Elders Committee.
- Information in report verified.

### **Research Methodology**

This project builds on previous Tł̥ch̥q̥ knowledge research. Georgina Chocolate reviewed the oral narratives documented for the *Caribou Migration and the State of Their Habitat Project*, and in doing so noted the rules governing human behaviour associated with caribou. Prior to Georgina reviewing the audiotapes the research team considered, in conjunction with the Tł̥ch̥q̥ Regional Elders' Committee (TREC<sup>4</sup>), who over-saw the Whaèhdòè Nàowo Kò, the themes that are incorporated into caribou stories. Georgina used the following themes as a guide when listening to the oral narratives.

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<sup>3</sup> From the Tł̥ch̥q̥ perspective, the adherence to or rejection of laws governing behaviour towards caribou impacts the well-being of caribou and humans alike.

<sup>4</sup> Was named Dogrib Regional Elders' Committee.

4. Laws governing behaviour that shows respect for caribou
5. Laws governing use and storage of caribou meat, hide and bones
6. Laws governing 'what is not used'
7. Laws governing female behaviour
  - a) Young girl's behaviour
  - b) The hunter's wife behaviour
  - c) Women behaviour during menstruation
8. Laws governing the hunter's behaviour
  - a) Stalking caribou
  - b) Butchering caribou

Although these themes assisted Georgina Chocolate in reviewing the audio-tapes, while searching the elders' comments taken from the oral narratives for laws and rules, we found the categories needed revising. The elders spoke of laws governing the leaders and elders. They also mentioned laws governing the behaviour of parents' in association with harvesting and using the caribou. The elders did focus on rules associated with the hunter's wife. However, rather than speak to rules governing young girls' behaviour, the elders stressed the importance of watching and learning as a young person, and specified rules associated with women of childbearing age and specifically for women who are menstruating. We also found when reviewing the language associated with hunting, the translation of 'stalking the animals' or 'butchering the caribou' were not conceptually correct. Rather the respectful behaviour is more about 'meeting or following the caribou', and 'respectfully cutting-up caribou'. For the elders and most Tł̨ch̨q̨ adults, 'butchering' implies hacking up and leaving blood everywhere. Finally, all laws governing behaviour are associated with respect demonstrated through knowing caribou, therefore this report discusses becoming and being knowledgeable as an over arching law to respecting caribou.

In reviewing the audiotapes, Georgina found that similar statements were being woven into most of the elders' narratives, and although she noted them all, we selected quotes that could stand alone, and were representative of and consisted with what other elders were saying. Once Georgina completed her review of the audio-tapes and compiled a list of comments on 'laws', they were verified with the TREC, consisting of Robert Mackenzie, Jimmy Martin and Elizabeth Michele from Behchok̨; Romie Wetrade, Phillip Zoe, Laiza Mantla, and Angelique Mantla from Gamètì; Margaret



Lafferty from Wekweètì; and Pierre Beaverhoe and Dora Nitsiza from Whatì. The verification meeting (VM) took place in June 2007 in Gamètì. The TREC agreed with the list of the laws and clarified any misunderstanding with oral narratives. The Committee elders, like the elders whose oral narratives were documented on audiotapes, stressed that when laws are ignored caribou would either migrate elsewhere or the caribou spirit would choose not to be re-born causing a population decline.

The laws documented in this report are only a small number of those governing human behaviour. Since this project was designed only to extract the laws mentioned in audio recording the research team must emphasize that there are many more laws that need to be documented. The themes under which the results are listed and discussed more closely reflect the elders' comments.

## Study Area

The Ṭḥcḥo elders interviewed between 1997 and 2001 travelled and lived in the Ṭḥcḥo ṇèk'è (the place where Ṭḥcḥo belong), throughout their lives. Currently much of Ṭḥcḥo ṇèk'è is now referred to as Ṃowḥi Gogha Dè Ṇittḷèè (Map 1), which is the area described by Chief Ṃowḥi during the signing of the Treaty 11 in 1921, and described in the Ṭḥcḥo Agreement (2003:12-14).



**Map 1: Caribou Hunting Trails**

Ṭḥcḥo continue to travel these trails – especially Ṭḥcḥo hunters and trappers –but also by young and old who are committed to keeping the trails of their ancestors alive

while learning through experiencing places. When the trails are followed, those new to the trail are challenged to think about and realize the value of their ancestors' oral narratives. They often return and make statements such as, "Oh, it is so very true!"

## **Results: Tł̨ch̨ laws governing behaviour towards caribou**

In reviewing the listed comments made by elders during interviews and at the verification meeting, it became immediately apparent that extracting the laws from the story and attempting to categorize them under themes took away from the importance of the oral narratives to understanding correct, meaningful and respectful behaviour.

Tł̨ch̨ rarely list these rules as we have here. Rather, like other Dene (Cruikshank 1998; Goulet 1998) and other North American indigenous peoples (Sarris 1993) they weave these rules into stories that guide the listener. Dene oral narratives tend to meld all that is related to any one concern or occurrence (Basso 1996; Cruikshank 1998; Legat 2007; Sharpe 2001:163). As hunters and elders share their experiences through stories they consider variables while weaving the past with the present. These variables could possibly be impacting a situation (Legat 2007). Oral narratives, then, should be considered in totality just as all scientific literature is reviewed and considered. As stated above, Georgina Chocolate reviewed oral narratives from approximately 500 audio-tapes. The Regional Elders' Committee verified the comments taken from these stories. We are confident therefore, that the information below is reliable, even though not all laws have been documented and further work should be done.

Tł̨ch̨ rules governing behaviour associated with caribou will be presented and discussed in the following manner. A discussion on the over arching law: becoming and being knowledgeable as a sign of respecting caribou, will be followed by a summary of more specific laws under one or more category.

### **Respecting Caribou: Becoming and Being Knowledgeable**

Tł̨ch̨ elders interviewed during the late 1990s emphasized the relationship between personal knowledge and ability to respect the land of which caribou and humans are a part. According to the elders any person can become knowledgeable by listening, watching and experiencing, and with this comes an understanding of what

skills and actions are necessary to survive – today and in the past. Both male and female elders made statements such as:

When we were young men we use to go along and watch our parents hunt. Because we use to love watching the hunters kill and cut-up the caribou that's how we become good hunters too. (Paul Rabesca, Behchokò, 00/11/02)

On December 11, 2000, Moise Martin explained that the laws governing caribou have been the same,

Since this world was created, we still live on caribou, and kill and prepare them the same till today. When we kill caribou we skin it and cut it up. We do a good job of it. If we have to drain the blood we do so, that's what we men do. And the women cut the meat to make the dry-meat. That's how we live on caribou till today.

Similar statements that confirmed Moise's comments was made by Elizabeth Rabesca, who said,

Hard times or not, there are laws for hunters and trappers that they had to follow. Even our leader Mòwhì... (Elizabeth Rabesca, nd).

The importance of being knowledgeable is so basic to success that "long ago the elders use to gather and discuss the most knowledgeable hunter. It was that person who they picked to lead the other hunters" (Jimmy Martin, nd).<sup>5</sup> Survival is, and continues to be, so important to all people that they are expected to continue learning throughout their lives and to know other types of knowledge such as the knowledge that comes from the dominant society, and both men and women are encouraged to know the others' knowledge. As Rosalie Drybone and then Madeline Martin expressed:

Even though we are women, our parents used to teach us how to kill and cut-up and skin a caribou, in addition to cleaning and tanning the caribou hide. We also learned how to set the fish net and how to check the fish net everyday. While our husbands were out hunting, it was we women that did the men's work. (Rosalie Drybone, nd).

Long ago we used to travel to the tundra with our parents. We wore snowshoes and walked along side them. We had to watch what our parents did. I had no father at that time; there was only my mother and I. We used a four-dog team as we traveled along with the people. I had

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<sup>5</sup> Also see Helm (2000: 183-186) and Legat (2007: 227-256) discussions on leadership

to work like a man to help my mother and to take care of her too.  
(Madeline Martin, Behchokò, 00/11/02)

Men are also encouraged to know women's knowledge. It is well known that present day hunters, who travel without their wives, continue to mend their own clothing if necessary and make dry meat the way their ancestors did.

Long ago in fall time the hunter used to canoe to tundra. Only the men had to go, but they sure knew how to cut up dry meat. They laid it flat on the rock to dry; they learned the meat dried fast that way. Then they would make a dry meat parcel and pack it into their canoe. Because when the caribou meat is dry it is lighter. They would travel as far as Kòk'èetì<sup>6</sup> to hunt caribou. (Paul Rabesca, nd)

The older hunters, however, are concerned that young men snub women's work, feeling they do not have to know how to make dry meat or learn to sew (Elders' discussion 1999)<sup>7</sup>. For the elders and active harvesters this lack of knowledge indicates a lack of respect for other beings.

Some rules associated with being knowledgeable focus on understanding the relationship between all beings, including human beings. Take for example, fish and caribou. Caribou distribution is unpredictable whereas fisheries are dependable. Prior to Tłchq settling in their current communities, they moved from camp to camp. Because the fisheries are dependable they camped by these while traveling towards or waiting for caribou. As Angelique Mantla explained:

It is all true. We shared the meat amongst everyone, and in the fall we put fishnets in. We dried the fish and waited for the caribou to come this way. (VM-070613)

If there is no caribou they had to move to a good fishing spot and settle there. (Annie Black, nd)

Current communities are either situated adjacent to well-known fisheries, or on waterways providing access to an important fishery. Tłchq are expected to know something about the relationship between fisheries, the trails of the ancestors and the trails of the caribou, as Anne Black said:

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<sup>6</sup> For location, see map on page 6.

<sup>7</sup> During the elders meeting in Whatì in 1999, Robert Mackenzie told how his father delivered his first child when they were caught on an island during freeze up. He explained that if his father had not paid attention to women's knowledge, his wife and daughter probably would have died.

There are still deep trails - of *whaèhdòò zetò* (ancestor trails) - even today, which is very amazing. According to our ancestors, it is meant to be that way; we are meant to know the trails we travel to meet the caribou. To me this is the same thing as caribou law. (Annie Black, nd)

Humans should observe relationships between caribou and other beings and in doing become knowledgeable of the signs animals give. Adele Wedawin explained:

There is a saying from a long time ago, that when they see a ptarmigan, that means there will be some caribou nearby, and the caribou will come soon. So we are happy to see ptarmigan. The caribou is a quiet and still animal, it will not even struggle when dying, like when it gets caught in a snare it will just fall and die right on the spot. The caribou will never attack or bite a human being.

That's how it gives itself to the Tłıchò (Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)

Jimmy Martin explained during the June 2007 elders' verification meeting on laws:

When we see raven flying around, it gives a message when there is caribou close by, when suddenly the raven flips to one side, it means that it had thrown down the parcels.<sup>8</sup> Shortly after that there will be some caribou. That still goes on today; that is a caribou law.

Being seen as knowledgeable includes being seen to think about the numerous variables influencing the behaviour of caribou as elder Adele Wedawin explained when she said:

Hunters looked out for everything, like for the signs of the weather. They watch the clouds and the sunset. The hunter will know if it will be the best time to go caribou hunting; it depends on how the clouds look. The sunset will tell them how to prepare for next day (Adele Wedawin, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02).

Jimmy Martin made a similar point when he said,

When caribou migrate they go by the wind [to help them decide which way to go], and at the water crossing, it depends on how the water flows. (Behchokò, CHP-02/03/13).

In relation to knowing caribou and caribou habitat, Adele Wedawin when on to explain that to know caribou is to know the vegetation they depend on and therefore to know that habitat should be protected for caribou use. As she explained;

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<sup>8</sup> This type of behaviour by ravens indicates that soon the hunters will soon be packing bundles of caribou meat.

When it rains or snows the caribou can continue to get really fat.  
When it rains, the food *kwets̄* [rock tripe] gets moist and swells.  
That's the caribou's best food because they get very fat on it (CHP-00/11/12).

Phillip Chocolate also emphasized the relevance of observing the caribou, and thinking about how the caribou itself will show people how best to approach an issue. He explained how the T̄h̄ch̄q̄ learned to cut up caribou.

Long ago the T̄h̄ch̄q̄ people first noticed how to cut-up the caribou. They cut off the head first because that was the part that was moving back and forth, then they turned the caribou and found it has the slit in front so that's how they slit open the front hide. Then they pull off the caribou hide, then they noticed that caribou hind leg and forearm can move around too so they cut off those parts, that's how the T̄h̄ch̄q̄ people learned to cut-up the caribou. They studied the caribou and the caribou showed them. (Philip Chocolate, Behchok̄, CHP-00/11/02)

T̄h̄ch̄q̄ are taught from a very early age to watch and learn, and to continue observing and listening to those who know something. As elder Paul Rabesca says,

When we were young men we had to follow our parents, so we would learn to live out on the land. We loved to watch the hunters killing and cutting up the caribou. That's how we learn to become great hunters – we watch. Our elders use to say drink some caribou blood so you will not go hungry or get cold. We drank it either raw or cooked. It doesn't matter; we had to drink the caribou blood that was the rule back then. (Paul Rabesca, nd).

Most young T̄h̄ch̄q̄ love to learn, which is particularly apparent when in the bush and on the tundra hunting caribou, if they are given the opportunity to watch and be challenged.

I use to teach my children how to cut-up the caribou. One time I killed the caribou and my husband only cut the caribou head off. I cut-up the rest of the caribou with the help of my children. My children learned how to respect caribou, by cutting up the caribou properly. (Adele Lamouelle, Behchok̄, CHP-00/11/02).

As individuals become knowledgeable and therefore skilled.

They are expected to know what type of caribou to shoot, and they are expected to aim at and kill that caribou. Like long ago they liked small female caribou hides because the hide is best for making string and rope that was used for caribou snares. Young female meat is very tasty too. (Matton Mantla, nd)

From the elders' perspective individuals who are unable to become knowledgeable were unable to survive in the past and are unable to survive now. Lack of 'real' knowledge in all cultural groups is causing the 'land to die'. As Phillip Zoe from Gamètì (VM: 070615) said,

If the young people don't know caribou, how will they treat caribou?  
We know the laws, so we take good care of the caribou.

Most T̥h̥ch̥q̥ express that those who lack knowledge also lack the ability and skill to 'assist others', 'minimize waste' or 'dispose of bi-products in appropriate ways'. If a person lacks ability and skill, it clearly indicates they lack knowledge. The following sub-sections are listing of laws that govern behaviour towards caribou. If not acted upon, it is a sign of humans that lack knowledge and are therefore emotionally unwell. This in itself indicates the 'land' – including caribou is being disrespected and will therefore probably die. As Alexis Flunki of Whatì, explained:

When we take good care of the caribou and respect its hide, hair, meat and bones there is always plenty of caribou for us. They come to us easily, but when we don't take good care of the caribou they will withdraw from us. That is our ancestors' words, which are true.  
(CHP-000823-1/4)

Rome Wetrade expands on this during the verification meeting:

Caribou know if they are respected and will return to people who respect them, but will not go to those who disrespect them. T̥h̥ch̥q̥ ancestors say the caribou are telepathic and discuss how people treat them, and discuss whom they will travel towards. (Romie Wetrade, Gamètì, VM-070614)

### **Law Governing Treatment of Caribou**

- Caribou should not be hit or clubbed with a stick. It is like clubbing them away from us. If they are, the caribou will not return for years and years. (Nora Nitsiza, Whatì, VM-070613)
- We elders don't want to keep telling [negative] stories about this great animal – caribou – we want to keep on respecting and taking good care of caribou. We want to keep this caribou knowledge and give it to our young people so it can be passed to the future generations (Jimmy Rabesca, Whatì, 000823-1/4)
- Caribou should not be discussed in a negative way – like the way the government is talking about them now. (Pierre Beaverhoe, Whatì, VM-070613)

## Laws Governing Use and Need

- We only killed enough for the whole family; we don't kill more than that. We don't kill caribou for no reason. We only kill how much we need. This caribou travels and struggles to come to us to live and feed on, and we should be thankful for it. But now a days some people are not respecting and caring for the caribou, it sure looks that way, from the look of it; it shouldn't be like that at all. Sometimes we see some dead caribou lying around, people and hunters should kill only what they need. We know some people kill caribou, but not for food. We know that. I, myself, think it is disrespectful for caribou to be treated this way. Some people take only what part they want and throw away and leave some caribou parts on the land. Wasting is not right, it is wrong. It shouldn't be like that. They should be treated with love and respect like our ancestors did in the past. (Johnny Nitsiza, Whatì, CHP-000823-1/4)
- We live on caribou, we depend on caribou, some years there are lots of caribou and some years there are none. ... It is still the same today. We don't shoot the caribou just for the fun of it, that spiritual animal will know it. Because the caribou is so important to us we had to respect the caribou, and shoot it only if you need it for food and clothing, and always remember to cut it up with respect. (Philip Chocolate, Behchokò, nd)
- Only use what you need, share the rest (Dora Nitsiza, Whatì, VM-070612)
- The wife needs to help the mother tan the caribou hide, make some dry meat, pound meat, and pound bones for grease. The wives used to sit in a group together and sew between forty to fifty hides together to make a tent. They would all help each other. Back then the women shared and helped each other, with food, clothing, sewing, berry picking, gathering spruce boughs, gathering firewood, helping poor families, these kind of things the wife needs to do. (Elizabeth Chocolate, Behchokò, nd)
- I use to watch my mother making caribou fat soap, she put a pot of water over the fire and would add some *zedzok'a* (caribou mating fat) she let it boil for a long time, then she added *letì* (hard ashes from the bottom of the fire) into the pot and mixed it all up together and continued boiling it. Once she finished, she would let it set all night. The next day she cut it into small chunks of soap. When she washed clothes with it, the clothes turned white. (Joe Susie Mackenzie, Behchokò, nd)
- Long ago the women had to work with caribou calf hide because the hide was soft and much easier to sew. All the women and men even children were all raised with caribou hair and hide clothing.



They also use to make and raise the baby in a cradle carried on the back that too was made out of caribou calf hide. (Elizabeth Chocolate, Behchokò, nd)

- I always tell the people this story, about how my father use to cut-up all the caribou meat, then he stored all the caribou meat between the two big rocks at Gots'okatì. That was my father's freezer, for the whole winter. (Liza Koyina, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- The oldest female and the wife discussed what should be done with the caribou meat for storage and meal preparation purposes, as well as what should be made with different types of caribou hide. Back then we are suppose to do what we are told - that was the rule. (Elizabeth Charlo, Behchokò, nd)
- We had a law never to throw away any scrap of caribou hide, the hunters can use the small pieces for patching their pants, mittens, coats and moccasins. Even the smallest pieces of hide should be used for a good purpose. (Liaza Mantla, Gamètì, VM, June 2007)

Proper use, then, is key to respecting and therefore the well-being of caribou, as Caroline Beaulieu of Behchokò summarizes:

People should treat caribou with respect because caribou are the ones that struggle to get to us, even though they know they are going to be killed. They are happy to see the people. We people are not the ones to struggle for the caribou (CHP-00/11/02)

This, as stated, above means using all of the caribou has to give.

### **Laws Governing 'what is not used'**

- Long ago the wife made caribou hair blankets, rabbit hair blankets, ptarmigan feather blankets and duck feather blankets. That's the reason why they used to be really careful and respect how they handle the caribou hair and feathers. And if they don't need them, they had to bury them between the rocks or out of the way places. They had to make sure the hair or feathers don't blow all over the place, they use to have rules for all these things. (Madeline Martin, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- It is law that we should use all parts of the caribou, and put bones and hair in a place where people and animals cannot walk over them and in places where the wind cannot spread the hair around. (Margaret Lafferty, Wekweètì, VM:070614)
- When I was a young man my father used to have me build a cache in the trees and store all the caribou bones and scraps there. Then he would tell me to spill all those bones in between the rocks,

where no one goes. Our parents use to tell us take all these caribou bones by dog team and spill them where no one goes. That's how our ancestors used to respect caribou because the caribou are really important to them – for food as well as for clothing. Matton Martin, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)

- If a caribou is sick, or if the meat smells bad and the hides are in poor condition then everything should be thrown between the rocks. (Angelique Mantla, Gamètì, VM:070612)
- Never burn any caribou bones or the caribou will not grow from them again. That is a law (Phillip Zoe, Gamètì, VM-070614)

### **Laws Governing the Responsibility of the Leaders and Elders**

Those who knew the most became the leaders. As Moise Martin (Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02) explained,

I have seen a lot of our elders that know about caribou spirit. They would have a dream or a vision of the caribou on the lake. The next day I would go out to that area and sure enough, there would be caribou on the lake, where they had described it.

- Long ago the leader and elders would pick the best hunter to lead the hunt. (Joe Suzie Mackenzie, Behchokò, nd)
- Long ago the leader and the oldest elders would choose the best great hunters to go hunting, that was the rule long ago when the hunter kills caribou the whole town would share the caribou meat among each other especially with the poor families and elders. It's the same with fish, when the people catch a lot of fish the Tłchq people will share among each other, that was the rule. (Joe Suzie Mackenzie, Behchokò, nd)

### **Laws Governing Parents' and other Family Members' Behaviour**

- A long ago there was a rule for the parent to give the young hunter a farewell and warning before going for a hunt. They do this so he can become a great hunter. (Elizabeth Rabesca, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- Ancestor use to say it is good luck to pack dry meat for the hunters, that's how the caribou are re-born. That's how they find each other again. They get to re-create each other again, if they are respected. That way the hunter gets to kill a lot of caribou. So it was like a rule back then. (Moise Martin, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- Young woman sew for their husbands, and the mother always told us, "Do not miss one stitch or else your husband will not have luck in hunting". That is how our mother use to talk to us, they use to

look out for everything we did, these were the things the wife needs to do daily. They always have rules for everything back in those days. (Rosalie Tailbone, Gamètì, nd)

- Women should always remind their husbands, sons, and younger brothers to take care and respect caribou, travel safely, and to use their gear carefully and to check their snow shoes every morning. Women should also check their own snowshoes. (Elizabeth Rabesca, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)

### **Laws Governing Female Behaviour**

Women have a complex set of laws governing their behaviour that both demonstrate a respect for the *dè*, and a respect for their own ability. This was expressed by most of the elders during the verification meeting.

Women should know men's knowledge about caribou. They should know how to hunt and fish and cut up the meat and to set the fishnets, just like the man. They have the ability. It is the law to know both ways. (Romie Wetrade, Gamètì, VM-070614)

Women obey the following rules to ensure men are successful hunters and caribou are respected and will return to the people.

#### General Rules for Females

- Female elders will often begin by discussing what should be done with the meat for storage and meal preparation purposes, as well as what should be made with different types of hides (Elizabeth Charlo, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- Young women should not step over any part of caribou. (Elizabeth Charlo, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- Women should not step over their husbands' or fathers' hunting gear such as their axe, gun, fishing net, and clothing in general or they will be unlucky in hunting and fishing. Women should not step over their husbands' or fathers' hats or they will get a headache and will be unlucky in hunting (Adele Wedawin Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- Long ago the women were not allowed to cut a hole through the dry meat. That was way back in our ancestors' time. That was their law then. (Adele Wedawin, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)

#### Rules for Females of Childbearing Age

- The young women are not allowed to walk over caribou blood, that was the rules back then, only the hunters are allowed and only

when they are cutting up the caribou. (Elizabeth Charlo, Behchokò, nd)

- There is a law that the expectant mother is not allowed to eat newborn calf meat when cooked in grease, or the newborn baby will have blisters all over their body. (Adele Wedawin Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- Young women can't eat caribou calf while it is very hot, or they will loose their teeth at an early age. (Adele Wedawin, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- The expectant mother is not allowed to throw calf hoof into the fire or she will have a stillborn baby. These are the rules that originated from long ago. (Philip Chocolate, Behchokò, nd)

#### Rules for Menstruating Women's Behaviour

- When a teenage girl gets her first menstruation, she is not allowed to watch cooking caribou head or eat caribou head or the tongue, or she will go blind. That was the law. (Adele Wedawin, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02).
- There's a rule the young women who gets their first menstruation is not allowed to go over the caribou blood or meat, or any of the hunters belongings or the hunter will have bad luck. (Elizabeth Chocolate, Behchokò, nd)
- And there was a law the young women with first menstruation was not allowed to eat raw caribou meat with blood, she really had to hard cook the caribou meat till the blood is all gone then she eats it. And she has to live all by herself in the hut or tepee away from the camp. (Elizabeth Rabesca, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- The mother use to tell their daughter don't go over your father's hat or, he will get a headache, don't go over your father's gun, or he won't kill anything he will be unlucky in hunting, don't go over your father fishnet or your father won't catch any fish at all, these sort of thing was the rules back then. (Adele Wedawin, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- When the women or the wife get her menstruation when travelling with the family on dog team, she has to walk on the outside of the trail, because she is not allow to walk on the trail of the hunters, or the hunter would become unlucky that was the rules back then. (Adele Wedawin, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)

#### Rules Governing Hunter's Wife's Behaviour

- Long ago the wife sewed the hunters clothing, packed their hunting bag, make sure their snowshoes were ready on their sled,

and the wife packed lots of babiche. The women make sure they are all ready and they are dressed warm. When the wife gives the husband her farewell, she warns him to be careful on their journey. It means that's how the wife is saving their husband lives. That's a law. (Moise Martin, Behchokò, nd)

- Long ago there was hardly any caribou. ... We weren't allowed to throw away any scrap of caribou hide. They should use everything - use caribou skin for tablecloth, when they are having the feast. These sorts of things are the women rules. (Annie Black, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)

### **Laws Governing Hunters**

Although men and women had their own roles, their work complemented the other. As Laiza Mantla explained at the verification meeting (VM-079615),

The men we lived with brought the meat home, but they did not touch the meat after that. He hunts and we clean the meat. If you don't know the job, you learn from observing. We learn to clean meat, do hides; we learn to do everything in relationship to meat. We didn't throw any parts away.

#### General Rules

- At that time there was a rule that men are not allowed eating thighbone marrow or they won't have luck in hunting. (Annie Black, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- The hunters had to make sure they do not wear broken or incorrectly cross-stitched snowshoes. If they do the caribou will take off like lightning. The caribou knows if they are not respected. Caribou know if what they provide for us is used correctly. The hunter had to watch out for all these sort of things. (Robert Mackenzie, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02).
- At one time men used to bring the caribou meat through the back entrance of the tent, so the caribou blood didn't drip on the floor or spruce boughs. That was the law.<sup>9</sup> (Adele Wedawin, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02).
- The leader Mòwhì used to say, "women are important". In the past the women had to work the hardest. They cook, clean up, raise the baby, sew, work on caribou hide; they do all these daily chores. One time Mòwhì took his wife's hand, and while kissing it, he said, "this hand has done me a great deed by cooking and sewing for me, for that I am very grateful, happy". People should

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<sup>9</sup> This made it easier on the women who could not step over the blood – most of the rules are complementary.

appreciate and be thankful for each other, that's the law. (Moise Martin, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)

#### Rules Governing Following and Meeting Caribou

- There is a rule not to wear any caribou hide clothing of woodland caribou when hunting towards the tundra. These two type of caribou are afraid of each other. Our parents use to tell us these sort of things, don't wear woodland caribou moccasin or mitts or carry anything like gun case or shell bag that is made from woodland caribou when you go hunting. Barren-ground caribou will know and it will take off so fast. You have to respect both. That's the rule. (Matton Mantla, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- Hunters are not to wear bison clothing either, or the barren-ground caribou will run off. (Romie Wetrade, Gamètì, VM-070613)
- First, the hunter has to know where the caribou is, then the hunter prepares to go after it by following the caribou tracks; they shoot what type of caribou they want, and how many they think they need. (Jimmy Martin, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- The hunter had to spear the caribou in between the ribs. It was the law to make sure you killed the caribou. If a caribou is wounded, it must be followed and killed. (Paul Rabesca, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- A rule is that the hunter had to approach the caribou against the wind that way the meat is tasty. But if the hunter approaches the caribou with the wind, the caribou will smell the scent and it will go throughout the whole body. The meat is not that tasty. (Jimmy Martin, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- Long ago hunters called caribou by shaking immature female caribou antlers bones to make sounds. They cut the bone into four inch pieces and pulled the string through the hole of the bones and dangle them together to make sounds like bells. That's how the hunters use to call the caribou. I think I would call that a caribou law. (Jimmy Martin, Behchokò, nd).
- Not too many caribou bulls should be taken. It is the law. If too many are taken there aren't enough to protect the females and the calves. (Jimmy Martin, Behchokò, VM-070614)

#### Rules Governing the Respectful 'Cutting Up' of Caribou

- There are rules to cutting up the caribou. When the hunter is ready to cut-up the caribou, they cut off the head first, then they tear off the caribou hide. Then they cut off one hind leg and one arm then they pull out the sinew along the back. After they turn the caribou to the other side and do the same thing over again. Then they pull

out the intestine – everything right out. Then they take the ribs and the back strap. (Jimmy Martin, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)

- Long ago when I was a young man I use to watch some elders. They had a rule that when they killed the caribou, they put the caribou where no one walked - like in the shade of the tree where they skinned and cut-up the caribou. If, like our ancestors, people respect the caribou, then the caribou will respect you back; our elders use to say this all the time. (Philip Chocolate, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)

### **Concluding Remarks on Tìchq Nàowo (laws)**

Considering the relevance of monitoring and managing human behaviour to ensure stewardship of caribou, three categories of laws governing behaviour became apparent: i) assistance and care for others - human and non-human; ii) that waste is minimized; and iii) bi-products are disposed of correctly. As Joe Champlain from Whatì explained, “The spirit of the caribou looks after itself. It knows when it is being respected or not. It knows when we treat it with respect and learn its knowledge. (CHP-000823-2/4)

### **Assist and Care for Others**

Assisting and caring for others, whether human or non-human beings, is key to survival. Although we have categorized many of the rules for this report, it is difficult to separate as cooperating and working together is highly valued as is indicated in the narration shared by Madeline Martin:

There is a story that tells of an old woman who set out to hunt caribou when her husband was really sick. They were out of food; they had nothing to eat. While his wife was out hunting the husband was back at the tent. He started singing to the caribou. He was singing a caribou song. Then all of a sudden there was caribou standing in front of the old woman. That’s how she killed a caribou; she caught caribou in the snare. They ended up with lots of caribou meat (Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)

Other stated rules associated with assisting and caring for others can be summarized:

- Share caribou and fish with those less fortunate.
- Think about all beings – caribou as well as all other humans and non-humans – with the same respect.

- Think about how one's actions may cause harm or cause unfortunate situations for another being – including caribou.
- Work together for the best possible results
- Help others prepare
- Remind others of potential dangers
- Do not insult non-humans beings by treating them as if they lack intelligence or a spirit.

### **Minimize Waste: Use, do not Abuse**

Elders emphasized how respectful behaviour is to know, use and share resources. Without knowledge of caribou and the language to discuss caribou behaviour, caribou habitat, and indicators of caribou health, people are likely to abuse and waste rather than use, preserve and share. Those who do not understand and respect caribou will kill without using the meat and hide. As Johnny Nitsiza from Whatì said:

We only kill enough for the whole family, we don't kill more than that; we don't just kill caribou. We only kill what we need. ... We know some people kill caribou, without needing it for food. I myself think it is disrespectful for caribou to be treated this way. Some people only take the part they want and throw away the rest. It is wrong. ... We are not allowed to burn caribou bones in the fire. [If we want them to return we should not burn their bones]. The caribou love their bones. Simply stated, caribou will not re-birth if it is not shown that it is both 'needed' and 'respected' (CHP-00/08/23-1/4).

To summarize:

- Use everything the caribou provides.
- Do not harvest if you do not need, or if you do not know someone who you can share with
- Store what you do not need in appropriate ways by drying or freezing.
- Know the type of caribou you need.

### **Disposing of non-usable bi-products**

- Dispose of caribou bi-products in appropriate ways.

### **Indicators**

During any discussion with the senior elders including during the verification meeting, they discuss people's behaviour – both the behaviour of their own community members and that of those belonging to the dominant society. They do this because



human behaviour is tied to the well being of all that is part of the *dè*, including caribou. From the Tł̨ch̨q̨ elders' perspective knowing how to: i) respect and care for others – whether human or non-human beings; ii) minimize waste; and, iii) dispose of bi-products is tied to both caribou survival and the well being of the community. Lack of knowledge demonstrates disrespect of oneself, the *dè*, and the caribou, all of which can lead to a decline in caribou population, changes to caribou distribution, and a dysfunctional society. During the verification meeting, the elders who had once made up the Regional Elders Committee (TREC) added to the list of laws governing behaviour associated with barren-land caribou. They expressed these laws in association with their concern for social problems, for the *dè*, of which the caribou are a part. They expressed how the inability of humans to follow the most basic laws indicates a problem throughout the *dè*. They expressed how the lack of knowledge of the relationships between all that is part of the *dè* relates to a disregard for using all that a caribou provides. If the caribou are not respected, not needed and not used they will eventually disappear. Lack of respect and lack of knowledge of caribou is also indicated by “bothering” the caribou as Moise Martin expressed,

Even the trees look different, the *dè* is changing – like the grass, lichen and all the plants. And why did they start counting the caribou. Our creator put caribou on this earth to be free and roam the land. They are not to be counted (Behchok̨, CHP-00/11/02)

For many of the elders and active harvesters, they are concerned with the manner in which the western perspective encourages people to discuss the negative aspects associated with caribou. This was of particular concern at the verification meeting as, expressed by Romie Wetrade when he said:

White people raise animals. So they are always thinking about what to do with them. Tł̨ch̨q̨ do not raise animals. Caribou migrate all over the land. Because of white people we are now talking negatively about caribou. For me that is not right. Talking all the time about how we will fix it. How they will migrate back to us? What will happen to the young? We should leave them alone and let them be. (VM: 080612)

All elders attending the verification meeting agreed that there was a lot of talk but fewer people are using caribou. As Elizabeth Michel explained, the best “hunters do not

talk about problems with caribou because they know that caribou talk amongst themselves, and they will decide when to return”. As discussed above becoming and being knowledgeable is the overarching law. If one lacks knowledge then it is virtually impossible to know the more specific laws or to have the skill to act on these laws. During the mid-1990s the elders expressed their concern that those approving, building and operating mines lacked sufficient knowledge of caribou and caribou habitat to make decisions about whether or not to construct mines in vicinity of ʔekati. The elders predicted that to go ahead with these developments would ultimately destroy caribou habitat, and pollute the water and air that would lead to a decline in the caribou population. They based this prediction on their observations that those talking about the land did not seem to have any experience and lacked an understanding of basic relationships between entities. In an attempt to encourage leadership to question development, they told stories of Rayrock mine, including how they were told it was safe, and emphasized how dust on plants, pollutants in the water, and smells coming from the mines were all indicators that the caribou would be on decline. As the elders on the TREC agreed, “people should know that when the plants die then the animals will die as well”. They continue to articulate that the caribou are moving away, not being re-born, skinny, and that their meat smells due to the pollutants – air, noise, and water – at the mine sites, coupled with the increased lack of knowledge about how to respect caribou.

They also predicted that if caribou collars were used, the caribou spirit would probably decide not to be re-born. Collaring caribou demonstrates a lack of respect, not just during the capturing process, but also by forcing the caribou to wear the collar. They as well as the active harvesters express their concern that the use of caribou collars is similar to hitting a caribou with a stick or club. For the elders and active harvesters, the decline in caribou could be predicted by a number of human behaviours, as Moise Martin explains:

There are hardly any fat caribou around now. Even their bone marrow has no more taste to it. A lot has changed. Could it be because of the wildlife management? It is because nobody does anything or says anything to those Wildlife Economic development and Renewable Resource people. That’s the reason why they still put radio collars on

the caribou and other animals. And they use a tranquilliser to put animals to sleep that spreads throughout the animal's body, which does not make the meat tasty. (CHP-00/11/02)

**Indicators: Human Behaviour**

- People are choosing to treat caribou with disrespect: collaring, throwing bones and other bi-products in the dump
- Women and men no longer know the others knowledge and skill when working with caribou.
- Parents no longer have the time to teach young people through example and to talk to them about how to hunt and how to treat caribou. This is because the children are in school all day.
- Currently the government has restricted our ability to hunt bulls, so people are killing cows. Also the caribou bulls are taken for their antlers. If there aren't enough bulls then there will not be enough calves. The bulls protect the females and the calves.
- More and more caribou are obviously sick - hunters know this is because of the number that are killed are in very poor condition. It could be the chemicals of associated with the mine
- Young people and non-Dene do not know how to approach caribou, especially when they are on skidoos.
- More and more caribou are wounded and left, rather than followed and killed.
- People, especially those from the dominant society, do not acknowledge the caribou's strong spirit; they do not understand or believe the caribou knows when it is respected or not.
- Hides and other parts of the caribou are left where they were shot.
- Caribou meat, hides and bones are being thrown in the garbage with baby diapers and women's sanitary napkins.
- People are not cleaning up blood that has been dropped.
- People no longer save small pieces of caribou hide for patching - only the hunters still take them.
- More and more young women do not know they should stay away from men's hunting gear, and step over men's clothing.
- Caribou are being discussed in a negative way – like the way the government is talking about them now.
- Greed, rather than use, determines number of caribou taken and the reason for killing a caribou.

**Indicators: the Dè**

Moise Martin indicated that there were problems and commented while remembering his observations during a trip to BHP in 1999, he said:

To me it seems like they [unknowingly] killed all the animals, like, for example, we took a trip to BHP, but we never saw any kind of animal pass by – no foxes, bears, wolves or other animals. We went flying around with the helicopter to three other places, but I had never seen any kind of animals on the land. That was very strange to me. It was the time of year there should be a lot of animals all over the barren-ground. But there was nothing in sight. Even the water is not safe to drink anymore. What about all the animal food, and the plants and trees that depend on water? (Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)

Indicators of poor caribou well-being are expressed:

- My son Edward shot a caribou that was so thin, and the tongue was partly blue colour with pus. (Angelique Manta, Gamètì, 02/08 as referenced in DT11C 2003)
- Long ago the caribou were fat and tasty. Today the caribou are not fat and tasty (Philip Chocolate, Behchokò, CHP-00/11/02)
- The caribou used to migrate to our land. But now there are mines in the way of their major migration route. That's the reason why caribou mind-spirit is weak – it is too weak to come toward our land now. The caribou feel like there is something in their path, so they turn the other way. The smell of fumes and smoke can blow far on the barren ground, and the caribou can sense that. (Caroline Beaulieu, Behchokò, 00/11/02)
- I see that the caribou tracks are changing direction from the usual trails. It looks like that now, but what about in the near future? What will it look like? (Louis Whane, Wekweètì, CHP-000823-2/4)
- Before when we skin a caribou we only use our hands and our hands feel smooth, just like we put on hand lotion – that's how good the hides use to be. ... Now, today, when we skin the caribou with our hands it feels rough, like sand, and when we pull the caribou hide it can rip, it never did that in the past (Louis Whane, Wekweètì, CHP-000823-2/4)
- This change is not just happening to the caribou, it is the same with fish. Like the trout's colour used to be red and tasty, now the colour is pale and lighter. (Louis Whane, Wekweètì, CHP-000823-2/4)
- The yellowish colour of snow around Ekati, that is a concern as it melts into the lake (Louis Whane, Wekweètì, CHP-000823-2/4)
- Because of all the forest fires in our area, there is a lack of caribou vegetation – it was burned out. (Moise Martin, Behchokò, CHP-000806-1/2)

- The low flying planes stress the caribou (Margaret Lafferty, Wekweètì, VM 07/06/15)

## **Solutions**

In discussing changes that have been observed with others in the community, the questions of ‘why’ and ‘can it be solved’ are always topics of conversation.

- Need places for elders to sit with young people so they can tell younger people how to respect animals, especially the caribou.
- Moise Martin said that the bones and other parts of caribou that are not used should be put on an island. People can take them there by skidoo in winter and by boat in the summer rather than putting them at the dump. (CHP-00/06/08-½)
- Use the schools to teach the children not to spill caribou bones and hides or hair at the dump.
- Elizabeth Chocolate said she believed that the young people must learn to use the caribou properly (VM-070616)
- Hunters know best about caribou, so they and the elders are the best to monitor the caribou. For example, the harvesters know when the caribou should be in a certain place at a certain time of the year.
- The leadership should designate an island so all the caribou bones can be placed there, it is not right that they are throw in the dump. It is not respectful. (Moise Martin, 00/06/08 – ½)
- No more mines where the caribou need to feed in the summer and during the winter.

## **Watching Caribou; Monitoring Cumulative Impacts**

Oral narratives provide harvesters with knowledge of occurrences from the past. Much of the information is useful as realistic baseline information because it originated from before development and in the telling of these occurrences, the oral narrators weave various factors together. Harvesters along with the elders use oral narratives to think about what has changed and what has remained the same. Hunters, fishers and trappers also use oral narratives to think about why the environment may have changed. While watching and caring for the ‘land’, those who observe have an obligation to talk about how the caribou behaved in various locations, including what they ate, how they walked, their weight, how the young look and anything else that may seem relevant.

During the June, 2007 verification meeting, the elders stressed that the harvesters – men and women - are the ones who know the bush best, and what skill and knowledge is necessary, especially those who were raised and use resources found in the boreal forest and on the tundra. They are the ones that know about watching caribou, and as the elders say, when the air and the water is polluted, the plants on the land died, then the animals will die too.”

Like any monitoring process – including scientific – Tł̥ch̥q̥ stewardship focuses on observations and statements made by a group of individuals who are considered knowledgeable. It is the harvesters who observe, and the elders who put the hunters’ observations into context with past occurrences and experience, while youth listen and learn. Senior elders emphasize that remembering past occurrences, having knowledge, and continuing to obtain information indicates how well both caribou and community members are coping with industrial development, climate change, and a variety of contemporary socio-economic choices (Legat 2007; DT11C, WNK 2001; Parlee and Marlowe 1998, 1999, 2000). Without adequate knowledge, the Tł̥ch̥q̥ elders emphasize, people lack the ability and skill to understand indicators of change and the ability to know if the change is part of a cycle, or if the indicators should trigger concern by the community.<sup>10</sup> As Behchok̥ elder Elizabeth Michel explained:

One caribou law is to think about how the caribou migrate, by following the weather changes, and thinking about where they might migrate according to the vegetation they eat. In summertime the caribou roam around due to the insects, but in wintertime the caribou stay in one particular area. Wherever the caribou know there will be a lot of food they will stay to feed; there will be at least forty to fifty caribou living in an area for a while (June 14 2007).

The Tł̥ch̥q̥ with whom we worked, consider the ‘land’ as being in constant flux, and for this reason remember and consider the stories of their ancestors when considering current cumulative impacts. Rarely do they limit their conclusions to a small spatially or temporally bounded area, such as the life or size of a mining lease or the boundary of a past mining site such as Rayrock Uranium Mine. Rather Tł̥ch̥q̥ adults

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<sup>10</sup> This has also been emphasized by traditional knowledge researchers working on the Sahtu Regional Traditional Knowledge Research and Monitoring Program when giving presentations such as *Communities, Caribou and Ecological Change* (D. Simmons: personal communication, March 2008).

consider as many variables – through time and space – as possible as they believe all things are interrelated. Rules and laws governing behaviour towards caribou are embedded in a body of stories telling of consistency and change over time.

A statement made by Amen Tailbone, an elder from Gamètì, in 1995 expanded on Elizabeth’s explanation:

You must know the caribou and observe the caribou and if the caribou does something that is different than you expect, then you must watch them even more intensely so you understand why it did not behave the way you expected it to. (as quoted in Legat et al, 1995)

Distribution is also impacted by the state of caribou habitat, which harvesters study through observation and discuss among themselves and with elders. Not only do they discuss the abundance of lichen, grasses and sedges, they discuss the amount of dust that has accumulated and covers vegetation in the proximity of the mines, just as they discuss the degree to which any given fire has destroyed caribou habitat in the boreal forest, and how fish, caribou and water fowl taste. Elders and active hunters know the degree to which fires have damaged the availability of plants on which caribou forage. Knowledge of what caribou eat is gained while observing them forage, and by inspecting what is in their mouth when harvested. According to Tł̨ch̨q̨ elders, caribou are able to locate rich sources of food because they have a strong sense of smell. Forest fires that have destroyed their preferred food will cause caribou to migrate elsewhere to find food, just as the smell of gases and cooking fumes from mines and communities can often create problems for caribou when trying to find lush habitat (DT11C, WNK 2001).

Section 12 of Tł̨ch̨q̨ Agreement reflects this cultural perspective by stressing the importance of having good information so appropriate action can be taken. More specifically Section 12.16 commits the Wek’èezhì Renewable Resources Board to “take steps to acquire and use traditional knowledge as well as other types of scientific information and expert opinion.”

## **Concluding Remarks**

As stated above this is only the initial step towards documenting Tł̨ch̨q̨ laws associated with wildlife. For this reason, during the verification between June 12 to 16,

2007 the Elders' Regional Committee acknowledged that more documentation was required specifically on barren land caribou but also on other wildlife including boreal caribou. They agreed with the above list of laws, making additions as they expressed their concern in the observations in both the communities and while listening to the hunters' observations of caribou.

From the Tłı̨chǫ perspective, all impacts, whether negative or positive, can be traced back to human behaviour with the main indicator when watching for negative change being due to a lack of knowledge. This is the first indication that the caribou may be in trouble – that people do not know the basic rules of how to treat caribou and do not have knowledge of caribou habitat and behaviour.

Indicators in caribou behaviour, migration pattern, distribution and population are related to human behaviour and the state of habitats in which caribou find their nutrients. Loss of habitat can be related to lack of knowledge among humans. Take for example; caribou have a sensitive sense of smell that leads them to the lushes sedge and grass habitats, which are required to feed their young and the lactating females. Elders and hunters recognize the caribou ability to smell and their ability to remember landscape and habitat conditions as key to their ability to find lichen to survive the winter. It also gives caribou the ability to give birth within meters of lush habitat (Elizabeth Chocolate discussing what Kitikmeot Inuit told her at Kòk'èetì). As elders discussed in numerous situations, and as Alfred Arrowmaker, an active hunter and trapper from Gamètì, articulated on June 4, 2008,

Different animals habitats are lush at different times, sometimes the wolves are healthy because their habitat is lush, and sometimes the caribou are healthy because their habitat is lush – it balances out if you watch over a long time. That's what my elders told me and that's what I have observed.

Small caribou populations and rapid changes in distribution can mean there is insufficient food for them to forage, or their habitat has been damaged in some way. Habitat changes can be the ebb and flow of natural cycles, or can be caused by human behaviour. Problems with caribou habitat are evident when the following are observed: sore or broken limbs; damaged hooves; hair in poor condition; foul smelling meat; grainy hides, and weight problems. Something is wrong and they think it is related to



mines being developed on caribou habitat that is needed in the summer to build up fat and strength for the winter. It is interesting to note that elders shared the observations they had made around Rayrock Uranium Mine, which are listed in ‘The Trees all Turned to Wood’. Mostly these indicators refer to the animals that remain in situ around the mine, and although they rarely referred to caribou they did make assumptions about what may be happening to caribou based on what was happening to their own bodies and the bodies of beaver and fish.

If, however, the habitat on which caribou depend is lush, it is usually inappropriate human behaviour that inevitably creates situations causing caribou to move away from an area. Caribou will move away from excessive dust, smoke or the smells of gas, and from humans who treat them in a disrespectful manner. The elders and many of the hunters consider radio collaring to be disrespectful to caribou in general.

Traditional educators stress the important of knowing and using appropriate language when hunting, cutting up and preserving caribou. Not only did the Tł̨ch̨q̨ elders stress this during out work on caribou and migration patterns, the elders living in Łutselk’è also considered a lack of cutting up and lack of appropriate language skills as an indication of negative change and the need to heighten awareness of how to ‘care’.

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