



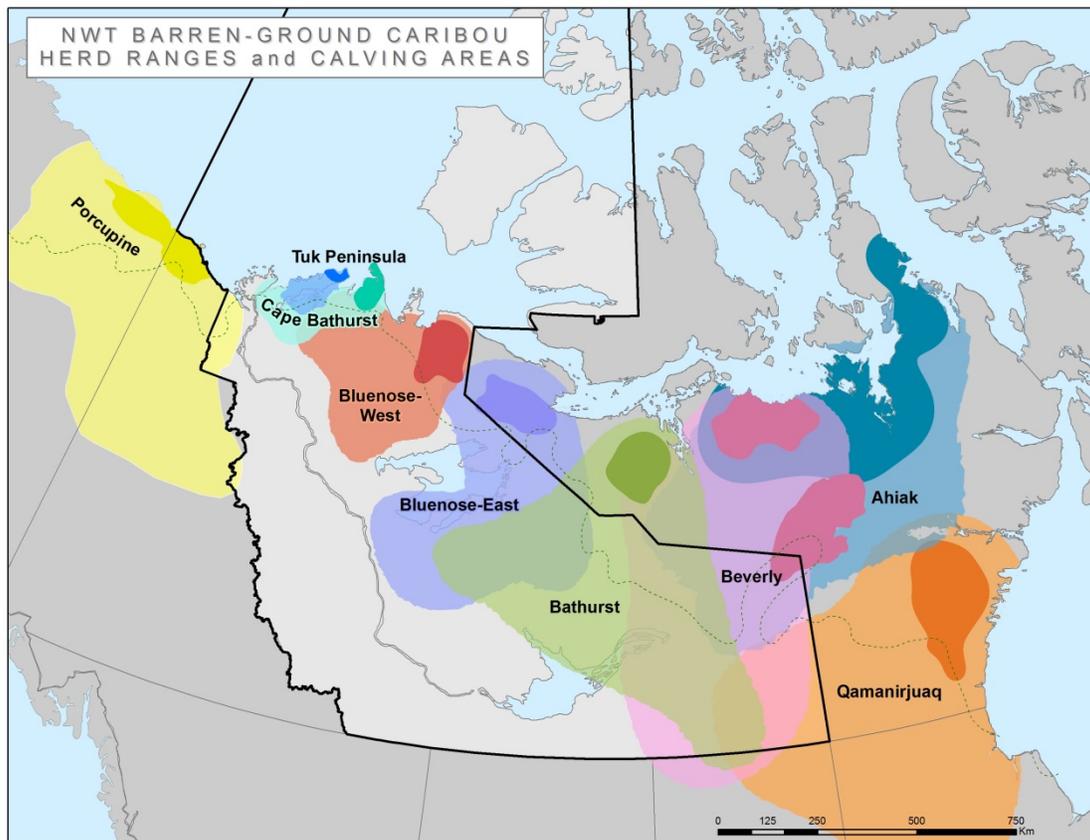
## 2018 Barren-ground Caribou Survey Results

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### Which herds did you survey this year?

Biologists from the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) worked with 13 community observers to photograph and survey five barren-ground caribou herds this summer. The surveys were carried out in collaboration with Indigenous governments, the Government of Nunavut and Renewable Resource Boards.

- The **Bathurst** and **Bluenose-East** herds were surveyed in June on their calving grounds in Nunavut.
- We also conducted a count in late October, during their rut, to determine the ratio of male to female caribou. Because the June calving survey provides us with estimates for female caribou only, the results of each of these surveys are combined to provide an estimate of the entire population.
- The **Bluenose-West**, **Cape Bathurst** and **Tuktoyaktuk Peninsula** herds were surveyed in July, when the caribou gather together in large groups on their post-calving grounds.



Historical NWT barren-ground caribou herd ranges and calving areas (1996-2018)

## **How does the GNWT track caribou movements and population trends?**

The GNWT uses regular aerial surveys along with satellite telemetry (collars) to help us better understand caribou movements and population trends. We have also been working with scientific and Traditional Knowledge experts to better understand the pressures affecting caribou.

## **How often are population surveys conducted?**

Population surveys are conducted every three years for herds experiencing low numbers. The frequency is determined in collaboration with our co-management partners using existing management plans, and is based on the health of the herds. Conducting surveys more often than every three years (even when numbers are low) does not provide a more accurate reflection of population change, as time needs to elapse between surveys for change to be observed. For herds with higher numbers, population surveys have been conducted every 5-7 years.

## **What were the 2018 results?**

This year's surveys show most barren-ground caribou herds across the Northwest Territories (NWT) continue to decline. Population estimates for the Bathurst and Bluenose-East populations are especially concerning.

For Bathurst caribou, the 2018 calving ground survey indicates the herd is less than half the size it was three years ago, decreasing in size from about 20,000 to about 8,200 animals (nearly a 60% decline).

The Bluenose-East herd, while larger, has seen a similar decline, from 39,000 caribou to about 19,000 (nearly a 50% decline).

Survey results for the Bluenose-West, Cape Bathurst and Tuktoyaktuk Peninsula herds are slightly more positive. In the case of the Cape Bathurst herd, results show an increase in numbers to 4,500 caribou from 2,500 in 2015. The Bluenose-West herd is stable at about 21,000 animals, while the Tuktoyaktuk Peninsula herd continues is now estimated at about 1,500 animals, down from 1,900 in 2015.

## **Why do some caribou populations continue to decline?**

There could be many reasons why we continue to see a decline in some herd numbers. Large fluctuations in caribou populations are a natural process and we know there have been both sharp declines and rapid increases in the past. Caribou numbers can bounce back, and it is important that we manage the herds responsibly and work together to support them through this current low.

## **Does the continued decline of caribou populations mean conservation efforts, such as harvest restrictions, aren't working?**

We all have a responsibility to share, use and protect the land and wildlife in a way that helps ensure the persistence of healthy caribou populations for future generations of northerners. The actions taken by co-management authorities (including Indigenous governments and organizations, co-management boards and the GNWT) are grounded in the best available information and address things we can

change, such as harvest levels. However, there are multiple pressures facing caribou, some of which we have little control over, including weather, disease and food availability.

## **Caribou populations have always had highs and lows. Won't they just recover on their own?**

Although we only have survey data for the NWT herds from the last 30 years or so, Traditional Knowledge tells us that caribou populations do experience cycles of highs and lows. Information from Inuvialuit and Gwich'in Elders indicates a historical scarcity of caribou in the first half of the 1900s. In the Tłı̄chǫ region, documented Traditional Knowledge suggests the most recent low for the Bathurst herd was in the 1960s.

Other Canadian barren-ground herds, for example the George River herd in Quebec and Labrador, have also shown peaks and lows in abundance going back more than a hundred years. What's different now is the magnitude of human impact compared with 50 years ago, and the changing climate, which is having multiple and unpredictable effects on caribou. When caribou are at low numbers, they are particularly vulnerable to natural and human impacts.

Our actions should be focused on giving the herds the opportunity to recover, while recognizing that we do not have full control over all things that affect caribou populations.

## **What are we doing to help promote recovery?**

### **Management Approach**

Our cooperative approach to managing barren-ground caribou is guided by two overarching documents:

1. *Taking Care of Caribou* was developed by a committee of six co-management boards who share authority for three northern caribou herds: the Bluenose-West, Bluenose-East and Cape Bathurst. It addresses the long-term caribou management and stewardship of these three herds.
2. The *Northwest Territories Barren-ground Caribou Management Strategy* provides overall guidance for the management and long-term sustainability of all NWT barren-ground caribou herds.

For the Bluenose-East herd in the Sahtú, the community of Déljı̄ne has developed its own caribou conservation plan, *Belare wı́lé Gots'é ʔekwé*, which sets the context of regional management with the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board and ENR working in collaboration with the community. Self-limitation and self-directed management actions arrived at by consensus have been viewed as the preferred approach by Déljı̄ne.

There are also herd-specific management plans for the Porcupine, Beverly and Qamanirjuaq herds, as well as a draft *Bathurst Caribou Management Plan* that help guide how the GNWT and its co-management partners address the specific situations and needs of each herd.

All caribou protection and herd management efforts are supported by ongoing monitoring and research, including satellite telemetry and regular aerial surveys. The GNWT also provides support for Traditional

Knowledge and community-based caribou research and monitoring programs, including the Tłıchq *Boots on the Ground Caribou Monitoring Program* and the Łutsel K'e Dene First Nation *Moccasins on the Ground* program.

### **Harvest**

The GNWT promotes responsible harvesting practices through harvester training programs and materials, and encourages (or requires, depending on the herd) reporting of harvest and submission of samples so we have the best possible information on harvest numbers and caribou health. We are also responsible for enforcing harvest restrictions on barren-ground caribou herds set by the Renewable Resource Boards. A no-hunting zone was established in 2015 for the Bathurst herd (Mobile Core Bathurst Caribou Management Zone), and the GNWT issues authorization cards for a limited harvest of Bluenose-East caribou in Wek'èezhii. The Délı̨ę Got'ı̨ę Government, in coordination with the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), manages its own allocation of 150 Bluenose-East caribou (80% bulls).

### **Predators**

Predator management can be an important part of caribou protection when populations are at extremely low levels. Wolves and bears can have a significant impact on caribou herds, especially when numbers are declining or low. While the GNWT introduced an incentive program for wolf harvesters in 2010, there is no formal predator management program in the NWT. In 2017, a collaborative process involving the GNWT, the Wek'èezhii Renewable Resources Board and Indigenous governments and organizations in the North Slave region, resulted in the development of a technical wolf management feasibility assessment, which analyzes options for wolf management. The assessment was released in November 2017.

### **Land Use and Development**

Land use plans and range plans (including the draft *Bathurst Caribou Range Plan*, currently being finalized) help regulators who need to consider how to manage new development that could affect caribou. These plans can set limits for how much habitat disturbance is too much or require best industry practices through environmental assessments.

There are also tools for managing loud noises that could affect caribou during sensitive periods, and ways to prevent caribou mortality from vehicle collisions or other physical hazards, including open pits and trenches and entanglement in fences. These are often implemented by mining companies as conditions of project approval. Mining projects also have their own independent boards responsible for monitoring land, air, water and wildlife as commitments resulting from environmental assessments.

The GNWT, through ENR, actively participates in environmental assessments and land use planning processes on the range of the Bathurst herd and other herds, including assessments in Nunavut for transboundary herds. We have also supported the Tłıchq Government's community-based caribou monitoring program, *Boots on the Ground Caribou Monitoring Program*, and the *Moccasins on the Ground* program established by the Łutsel K'e Dene First Nation.

## **Forest Fires**

Habitat protection can also include fire protection for key caribou winter ranges. Caribou habitat is considered as a value-at-risk within our hierarchy of value protection, and ENR is looking at the feasibility of amplifying fire suppression activities on key caribou winter ranges within existing policy to protect communities, lives and property during the forest fire season. It is important to note that fire is a normal part of the boreal forest ecosystem, and that there are also practical limits to fire-fighting in remote areas.

## **Many of the calving grounds are in Nunavut. How is the Northwest Territories coordinating with the Government of Nunavut (GN) to help the herds recover?**

Coordination and collaboration are crucial to effective management of our transboundary caribou herds. The governments of the NWT and Nunavut have a long and positive relationship working together to support these shared herds. It is important to recognize that Nunavut has its own land claim and co-management processes, such as the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, that must be followed in that territory.

The GNWT and GN have a formal Memorandum of Understanding to support collaboration and information sharing on barren-ground caribou. The GNWT, through ENR, participates in all environmental assessments and land use planning processes on the Bathurst range (NWT and Nunavut). Biologists and wildlife managers in the NWT and Nunavut also work together regularly to conduct caribou research and monitoring, share information and results, and support caribou management efforts. Most recently, GNWT biologists held a technical meeting with Nunavut biologists in October 2018 to discuss preliminary results and management options.

## **What happens next?**

ENR has informed affected communities, Indigenous leaders and co-management partners of the latest survey results and will work with them to identify what more we can do to help the Bathurst and Bluenose-East caribou herds recover. We will work within our established co-management processes set out by the land claim agreements, ensuring we provide for consultation and engagement on a way forward.

The GNWT will work with the Tłı̨chǫ Government to submit two joint management proposals to the Wek'èezhìi Renewable Resources Board (one for each herd) and a management proposal to the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board (for the Bluenose-East herd). All three management proposals will lay out further actions to be taken to protect the herds.

## **Additional Information**

**Taking Care of Caribou – The Cape Bathurst, Bluenose-West and Bluenose-East Barren-ground Caribou Herds Management Plan**

[www.enr.gov.nt.ca/node/2322](http://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/node/2322)

**Barren-ground Caribou Management Strategy, 2011-2015**

[www.enr.gov.nt.ca/node/1494](http://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/node/1494)

**Draft Bathurst Caribou Range Plan – Plain Language Summary**

[www.enr.gov.nt.ca/node/4371](http://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/node/4371)

**Tłıchq Government's Boots on the Ground Program**

[tlicho.ca/news/2017-boots-ground](http://tlicho.ca/news/2017-boots-ground)

**VIDEO: Boots on the Ground** (English, Tłıchq Yatıì & Français)

[www.enr.gov.nt.ca/en/services/cumulative-impact-monitoring-program-nwt-cimp/videos-nwt-cimp](http://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/en/services/cumulative-impact-monitoring-program-nwt-cimp/videos-nwt-cimp)

**VIDEO: 2018 Barren-ground Caribou Calving Ground Surveys**

English: <https://youtu.be/l4bOjFhofj8>

Tłıchq Yatıì: <https://youtu.be/DaBeDBZ36H4>

Sahtúq̓'ı̄ne Yatı̄: <https://youtu.be/Ut854mbzH5g>

Français : [https://youtu.be/kW\\_ojvVypc](https://youtu.be/kW_ojvVypc)