Dear [Redacted]

Re: Your request for access to information under Part II of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (Act) [Our file #ENV/046/2014]

On December 8, 2014 the Department of Environment and Conservation received your request for access to the following records/information:

"ANY and ALL information related to the discussions and/or implementation of a Long Term Management Plan and/or Recovery Strategy for the George River Caribou Herd. Info to included, but shall not be limited to, any and all discussions, correspondences of any nature, or any type of collaboration efforts made between the NL government, the Prov. of Quebec, and Aboriginal governments regarding a Joint Management Plan, along with a breakdown of of any "enhanced management efforts" and any related "infusions of funding" for the development of a management plan."

On December 30, 2014 the Department advised you that the 30 day time period for responding to your request had been extended for an additional 30 days, in accordance with subsection 16(1)(b) of the Act, as a large number of records had to be searched to respond to your request. On January 26, 2015 the Department provided you with a fee estimate for processing your request and on February 19, 2015, in response to the fee estimate, the Department received the following modified request:

"Whereas no Long Term Management Plan or Recovery Strategy currently exists for the George River Caribou Herd, the information requested shall be narrowed down to all "Briefing Materials and Notes" related to the formation of a future Management Plan/Joint Management and/or Recovery Strategy for the GRCH, following the information provided in response to File # ENV/010/2013, and dated May 17, 2013. Information to further include responses to the following questions, in relation to a Public News Release dated August 14, 2014:"
1) Specifically, what were the “significant investments”, and what is the “enhanced management” being referred to by Minister Vaughn Granter?
2) Specifically, what is the “Improved collaboration with the Province of Quebec”?
3) Specifically, what is the “infusions of funding” referring to?”

On February 27, 2015 the Department advised you that, with approval from the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the time period for responding to your request had been extended for an additional 14 days. The deadline for responding to your request was further extended with your consent as per your phone conversation with the Departmental ATIPP Coordinator on March 19, 2015.

I am pleased to inform you that your request for access to information has been granted in part. Portions of the attached documents, responsive to the first part of your request, have been severed in accordance with the following exceptions to disclosure:

1. Section 18(1): In this section
   
   (a) "cabinet record" means

   (ix) that portion of a record which contains information about the contents of a record within a class of information referred to in subparagraphs (i) to (viii);

2. Section 18(2)(a): The head of a public body shall refuse to disclose to an applicant a Cabinet record, including an official Cabinet record.

3. Section 23(1): The head of a public body may refuse to disclose information to an applicant if the disclosure could reasonably be expected to

   (a) harm the conduct by the government of the province of relations between that government and the following or their agencies:

   (i) the government of Canada or a province,
   (v) the Nunatsiavut Government;

With respect to the remainder of your request, I shall address each of your questions related to the News Release dated August 14, 2014 in the following itemized list:

Item 1: “Specifically, what were the “significant investments”, and what is the “enhanced management” being referred to by Minister Vaughn Granter?"

1. The “significant investments” refer to funding in the amounts of $1.9 million in 2011 for the three-year Labrador Caribou Initiative Phase 1 and $975,000 in 2014 for the three-year Labrador Caribou Initiative Phase 2. This funding has allowed for enhanced management efforts through the continued research and monitoring of the George River caribou herd.
Item 2: “Specifically, what is the “Improved collaboration with the Province of Quebec”?”

2. “Improved collaboration” refers specifically to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador working with the Government of Quebec to develop a joint management plan to manage and conserve the George River caribou herd. This process will incorporate consultations and collaboration with resource users, including Aboriginal governments and organizations. In addition, both governments are working collaboratively on the delivery and funding of the technical components related to the research and monitoring of the herd.

Item 3: “Specifically, what is the “infusions of funding” referring to?”

3: The “infusions of funding” refers to the funding allocated for the monitoring and research of the George River caribou herd as outlined in item 1 above.

As required by subsection 7(2) of the Act, we have severed information that is exempted from disclosure and have provided you with as much information as possible. In accordance with your request for a copy of the records, the appropriate copies have been enclosed.

Section 43 of the Act provides that you may ask the Information and Privacy Commissioner to review this response or you may appeal to the Supreme Court Trial Division. A request to the Information and Privacy Commissioner shall be made in writing within 60 days of the date of this letter or within a longer period that may be allowed by the Commissioner.

The address and contact information of the Information and Privacy Commissioner is as follows:

Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner
2 Canada Drive
P. O. Box 13004, Stn. A
St. John’s, NL A1B 3V8

Telephone: (709) 729-6309
Facsimile: (709) 729-6500

In the event that you choose to appeal to the Trial Division, you must do so within 30 days of the date of this letter. Section 60 of the Act sets out the process to be followed when filing such an appeal.

Please be advised that this response will be published following a 72 hour period after the response is sent electronically to you or five days in the case where the response is mailed to you. It is the goal to have the response posted to the Office of Public Engagement’s website within one business day following the applicable period of time. Please note that requests for personal information will not be posted online.
If you have any further questions, please contact the Departmental ATIPP Coordinator at 709-729-7183 or courtneyblundon@gov.nl.ca.

Sincerely,

JAMIE CHIPPETT
Deputy Minister
Information Note
Department of Environment and Conservation

Title: George River Caribou (GRC) Management Plan: A Proposed Approach

Issue: Discussion on a possible path forward with the writing, delivery, consultation and implementation of a Management Plan (or Conservation Strategy) for George River Caribou.

Background:

Status
- The GRC population has declined from an estimated 775,000 in 1993 to 385,000 animals in 2001 to 74,000 animals in 2010 and to 24,300 animals in July 2012.
- Population projections based on adult mortality of collared animals, and age and sex ratios collected during fall classification surveys, indicate that the GRC declined further to approximately 22,000 animals by October 2012 and is now approximated at under 20,000.
- The current population projection represents a 70% population decline since the 2010 census and a 97% decline since 1993.
- Population demographics indicate that the decline will continue into the near future.
  - A Fall 2012 classification indicated the percentage of calves was just 5%; the lowest ever recorded for a northern caribou population. Observations from aerial surveys and collar deployments conducted January and February 2013 confirm this very low calf recruitment.
  - Annual adult survival, measured from collared caribou, remains low, at only about 69%. In order to maintain a stable or growing population, a minimum adult survival of about 90% is required.
- As the population becomes smaller, the effect of even limited harvest becomes a measurable, magnified and significant contributor to the population decline, acting to further impede and delay recovery of the herd.
- In collaboration with Justice and IGAAS, initiate an immediate closure on harvesting GRC by all users for a period of five years; (with an commitment to assess the response of the GRC herd to the closure after a two years)
  - Consult with Labrador Innu and the Nunatsiavut Government with respect to the above;
  - In collaboration with IGAAS and the Government of Quebec to engage in a Round Table to focus on the long term management of GRC
- NL lead Aboriginal Consultations occurred during the spring of 2012.
- On 13 December 2012, the Nunatsiavut Government announced their recommendation that all Labrador Inuit immediately suspend hunting of George River caribou for a period of two years. The Nunatsiavut Government also requested that all other Aboriginal groups suspend hunting for two years. On December 20, the NunatuKavut Community Council joined with the Nunatsiavut Government by
recommending their members not hunt caribou for a minimum of one year and requested other Aboriginal groups to suspend hunting on the herd.

- On 29 January 2013, ENVC announced an immediate closure on harvesting animals from GRCH by all users for a period of five years.
- Following the hunting ban, the Innis in QC and NL openly defied the Ban on hunting, illegally harvesting an estimated 504 caribou.
- The aboriginal groups of the QC-Labrador Peninsula recently formed an Aboriginal Round Table in order to address concerns of the steep decline of the GRCH and increased concern over the status of the Leaf River and Torngat Mountains caribou herds. The Round Table was formally established at a meeting in Uashat, QC, April 16-18, 2013. The meeting was preceded by an Aboriginal only meeting in Kuujjuaq in January 2013. The next Aboriginal Round Table meeting is scheduled for September 2013 in Labrador. Representation by NL and QC government has not been allowed at any of the Aboriginal Round Table meetings.

Proposed Path forward: GRCH Management Plan

- Long-term Management Plans (or Strategies) are used by all other jurisdictions that manage for caribou.
- There is currently a shared goal among ALL parties to recover the George River caribou herd to a population level that would allow for a sustainable harvest. A shared goal is important, as caribou management challenges elsewhere can be characterized by a divergence of goals and objectives among stakeholders.
- Wildlife Division is positioned both legislatively and in terms of scientific findings to offer a constructive and cooperative path forward. Preparing a draft management plan framework as a starting point for discussions and seeking the input and support of others will be important first steps.
- It is recommended that NL and QC collaborate to prepare a proposed framework for a long-term management plan for presentation to Aboriginal groups for by-in and consultation, with the final management plan to be co-authored by both Aboriginal groups and government.
- The Aboriginal Round Table is well positioned to speak for all aboriginal groups and provide focused and timely input into a management plan.
- It is suggested that a “liaison” committee be established comprised of government representatives from QC and NL and the Aboriginal Roundtable to further develop the management plan.
- In general, it will be most efficient and workable for all groups to review, comment and participate in the completion of a draft management plan (prepared by QC and NL), rather than groups duplicating efforts by preparing plans individually.
- In order to increase communication and efficiency of efforts, it is recommended that the intent of government drafting and then subsequently co-authoring the document be communicated to all Aboriginal groups prior to the next Aboriginal Round Table meeting. Delay in doing so will likely result in duplication of efforts, entrenchment of positions, and act to impede forward progress in reaching the shared goal. For example, development of a management plan for the GRCH is the goal Aboriginal Round Table
• The draft management plan would address comprehensive issues facing GRCH and include specified opportunities/suggestions for engagement and participation of stakeholders, particularly Aboriginal groups, in decision making (e.g. decisions on caribou harvest facilitated by use of caribou calculator and opportunities for Aboriginal people to participate in population surveys).

• Buy-in by all aboriginal groups will be essential to ensure that the caribou heritage of Labrador Aboriginal peoples is to be safeguarded into the future.

**Actions Being Taken:**

• Population monitoring and collaboration with partners on research work continues.

• Continue to compile, analyze and prepare data/findings for inclusion in the plan.

• Finalize table of contents as the framework for the MP and proceed with writing draft sections to be available for review and input from stakeholders.

Prepared/Approved by: J. Pisapio, K. Mehl, J. Blake

Approved by:

August 29, 2013
Information Note
Department of Environment and Conservation

Title: George River Caribou Herd

Issue: Nunatsiavut Government concerns regarding ban on hunting of George River Caribou (GRCH)

Background and Current Status:

- The GRCH has long been used by Aboriginals, residents, non-residents and businesses in Labrador and Quebec as a source of food, recreational activity, and economic benefit. Caribou on the Ungava Peninsula have important social, dietary and cultural ties to many different Aboriginal groups. Management of the GRCH is the responsibility of the Governments of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) and Quebec (QC).

- The GRCH population has declined from an estimated 775,000 in 1993 to 27,000 in 2012. Ongoing population monitoring suggests the herd is now less than 20,000 animals and continues to decline. Biologists believe the initial decline was not precipitated by hunting; however, as the population becomes smaller, hunting adds to natural mortality, leading to a faster decline and impeding recovery efforts. Continued harvest, even in the short term, increases the risk for extirpation of this herd.

- In 2011, the Department to maintain harvest restrictions implemented for the 2010/11 hunting season which included the limiting of one caribou per resident licence, no transfer of licences, and no commercial or outfitter harvest. Additional conservation measures for the 2011/2012 hunting season included a reduction in the season length for resident harvest, limiting license sales to government offices only, and herd health monitoring program where successful hunters were required to collect/submit biological samples from their animals. In January 2013, an announcement was made ending legal harvesting of GRCH by all users for a period of five years (until March 31, 2017) with a review after two years.

- Despite the closure, limited harvesting by Aboriginal groups continued in 2012/2013. An estimated 500 caribou were harvested, including approximately 300 by the Labrador Innu. In December 2013 the Innu Nation announced that it would harvest 300 male caribou from the GRCH; 150 for the community of Sheshatshiu and 150 for the community of Natuashish in open defiance of the ban.

- In December 2012 the NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) announced that it was placing a 1-year moratorium on hunting the GRCH. This moratorium was recently extended for a further year.

- In December 2012 the Nunatsiavut Government (NG) announced that it was recommending that the Labrador Inuit immediately suspend harvesting of GRCH for a period of 2 years. It also requested that all other Aboriginal groups suspend harvesting for 2 years. Recent communication from NG indicates that they are receiving requests from beneficiaries to commence immediate harvest of the GRCH and what is perceived as a lack of enforcement of the hunting moratorium by the Province.

- On January 22, 2014, the Minister of ENVC spoke with the NG’s Minister of Lands and Natural Resources, who expressed concern with the GRCH 5-year hunting ban and noted a perception that Aboriginal groups are being treated differently when it comes to enforcement (see attached correspondence). The NG Minister asked the Province to immediately remove the ban for Aboriginal people, but noted he would continue to recommend that his people suspend hunting should no new information emerge indicating an improvement with the herd’s numbers. Alternatively, the NG Minister noted that if the ban on the Aboriginal harvest was to remain, aggressive enforcement was essential. This message has also been communicated by the NG President in the media.

- On January 22, 2014, the Department of Justice announced that charges were laid by the Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Division (FWED) relating to allegations of illegal hunting of caribou that took
place in Labrador in March 2013. Following a lengthy investigation into allegations that members of the Innu community were violating the GRCH hunting ban in the Shipiskan Lake region, officers charged 12 individuals (10 aboriginal residents and 2 pilots from Ontario) with violations under the *Wild Life Act*. One corporation (pilot’s employer) has also been charged.

- QC closed its sport hunt of the GRCH in 2012-13, but there is no restriction on Aboriginal harvest in QC. In September, 2013 Aboriginal groups of the Ungava Peninsula initiated an Aboriginal Round Table (UPCART) to discuss Aboriginal management of the GRCH. The group has not sought the participation of government officials. Furthermore, it has indicated its intent to develop its own management plan for GRCH. The Round Table has two Co-chairs: Sarah Leo (NG President), and Adanik Desile Alaku (QC Inuit), as well as an executive committee composed of representatives from each Aboriginal group, namely Réal McKenzie (QC Innu), George Guanish (Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach), Todd Russell (NCC), Prote Poker (Innu Nation) and Isaac Masty (QC Cree).

- NL and QC are preparing to engage Aboriginal groups in the development of caribou Management Plan. NL and QC are collaborating to draft the plan for presentation to Aboriginal groups for input and consideration. This approach envisions a final Management Plan co-authored by both governments and representatives from UPCART.

- In 2011/12, Government approved the Labrador Caribou Initiative (LCI); a $1.9 million investment over 3-years designed to enhance data collection of the GRCH and help better understand the factors affecting the caribou population. Funding for this initiative will conclude March 31, 2014.

**Action Being Taken:**

- The next 3-year phase would conclude intensive monitoring and would (i) include an assessment of the effects of the hunting ban after 2 & 5 years; (ii) help document whether or not the herd has stabilized, including the completion of an aerial survey in the summer of 2014; (iii) enhance understanding the influences of predation and other factors in supporting management options/decisions; (iv) demonstrate a commitment to caribou and long term Aboriginal food security; and (v) help facilitate the development/implementation of the Management Plan including establishment of long term target population thresholds and possible mechanisms for eventual future harvest (resources to support Aboriginal consultation have not yet been identified).

- The Department plans to complete a population census in the summer 2014 in collaboration with QC. The outcome of this census, combined with the Fall 2014 classification, will form the basis of an update in late 2014. The Department advises that up to date scientific information about the GRCH supports prosecutions against hunters who choose to ignore the hunting prohibition. In the absence of this information, management decisions are also subject to greater error and criticism.

- The Department of ENVC is preparing a response to the NG’s recent letter indicating the ongoing need for the ban and committing to further engage them as more information about the GRCH is collected. The Department of Justice remains active in conducting land based patrols and intelligence gathering in Labrador to assess compliance with the hunting ban. Helicopter surveillance is scheduled to resume on January 29, 2014. Current intelligence indicates that Innu and Inuit hunters are engaged or plan to engage in caribou hunting this season. Ten FWED officers are currently located in Labrador and a plan has been developed to enable quick mobilization of additional resources should they be required.

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Prepared by: J. Blake/D. MacKenzie/R. Firth, ADM, ENVC
In Consultation with: Departments of Justice / Aboriginal Affairs
Approved by: J. Chippett, DM, ENVC
January 29, 2014
January 23, 2014

Via email: joanshea@gov.nl.ca and Fax: (709) 729-0112
Honorable Joan Shea
Minister of Environment and Conservation
P.O. Box 8700
Confederation Building
St. Johns, NL A1B 4J6

Dear Minister:

Further to our telephone call on January 22, 2014 the Nunatsiavut Government is becoming increasingly concerned over how the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is implementing the five-year ban on the hunting of George River caribou.

On December 13, 2012 I wrote to your predecessor and requested the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately impose a ban on all non-aboriginal harvesting of the George River caribou. We indicated that we recognize that Labrador Inuit have defined rights with regards to the management of wildlife harvesting in the Labrador Inuit Land Claim Agreement. We also recognize that other aboriginal groups do not have defined rights as it applies to this issue, a fact that makes this herd difficult to manage. It is essentially up to the aboriginal groups to make hard decisions to ensure the future health and sustainability of the George River caribou. We still feel that a ban on the non-aboriginal harvest, and allowing aboriginal groups to manage any aboriginal harvest is the only meaningful way to ensure the sustainability of the herd.

As you are no doubt aware the five-year ban that was imposed by your government is extremely difficult and may be impossible for the province to manage effectively. The perception in Nunatsiavut is that aboriginal groups are being treated differently when it comes to the enforcement...
of the ban. This reality has placed tremendous pressure on our government to take steps to address this issue.

We are requesting that the Province immediately remove the provincial ban on harvesting George River caribou for aboriginal people as per our initial recommendation in December 2012.

As you know, prior to your government imposing the five-year ban last year we had recommended to our Beneficiaries that they not harvest George River caribou for a period of two years. If the provincial ban is lifted for the aboriginal harvest and as we are not aware of any new information to indicate that the health of the herd has improved since then we will continue to recommend to our beneficiaries that they respect this recommended two year harvesting suspension. Your staff has indicated that the Government of NL and the Government of PQ will complete a population survey in June / July 2014. We will have new information to make a more informed decision on any inuit harvest of George River caribou after this summer.

If the Province is not willing to remove the five-year ban for the aboriginal harvest of George River caribou the Nunatsiavut Government requests that you immediately begin to aggressively enforce the five-year ban across the board on all harvesting of the George River caribou. The lack of enforcement currently on the provincial five year ban raises questions on the legitimacy of the ban and is very concerning to our Beneficiaries.

I look forward to discussing this very important issue with you as soon as you are available.

Sincerely,

Darryl Shiwak
First Minister and Minister of Lands and Natural Resources

cc. Honourable Nick McGrath
Minister for Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs
Via email nickmcgrath@gov.nl.ca

Honourable Darin King
Minister of Justice
Via email darinking@gov.nl.ca
Title: George River Caribou Herd Information Forums

Issue: At the request of the Nunatsiavut Government, information forums will be held in Inuit communities to discuss the status and management of the George River Caribou Herd (GRCH).

Background and Current Status:
- The GRCH has long been used by Aboriginals, residents, non-residents and businesses in Labrador and Quebec as a source of country food, recreational activity, and economic benefit. Management of the GRCH is the responsibility of NL and QC.

- The GRCH population has declined from an estimated 775,000 in 1993, to 385,000 in 2001, to 74,000 in 2010, and to 27,000 in 2012. Ongoing population monitoring suggests the herd is now less than 20,000 animals and is continuing to decline in number.

- In January 2013, an announcement was made ending legal harvesting of GRCH by all users for a period of five years (until March 31, 2017) with a review after two years.

- In December 2012 the Nunatsiavut Government (NG) announced that it was recommending that the Labrador Inuit immediately suspend harvesting of GRCH for a period of two years. It also requested that all other Aboriginal groups suspend harvesting for two years.

- Recent communication from NG indicates that they are receiving requests from Beneficiaries to commence immediate harvest of the GRCH and what is perceived as a lack of enforcement of the hunting moratorium by the Province.

- Despite the closure, limited harvesting by Aboriginal groups continued in 2012/2013. An estimated 500 caribou were harvested, including approximately 300 by the Labrador Innu, who have recently indicated their intention to take a similar number in 2014. The 500 caribou harvested is a rough estimate based on anecdotal reports to Conservation Officers and Wildlife Biologists.

- On January 22, 2014, the Minister of ENVC spoke with the NG's Minister of Lands and Natural Resources, Darryl Shiwak, who expressed concern with the GRCH 5-year hunting ban and noted a perception that Aboriginal groups are being treated differently when it comes to enforcement. The NG Minister requested that the Province immediately remove the ban for Aboriginal people, but noted NG would continue to recommend that Labrador Inuit suspend hunting should no new information emerge indicating an improvement with the herd's numbers. Alternatively, the NG Minister noted that if the ban on the Aboriginal harvest was to remain in place, aggressive enforcement was essential.

- On January 22, 2014, the Department of Justice announced that charges were laid by officers of the Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Division (FWED) of the Department of Justice related to allegations of illegal hunting of caribou that took place in Labrador in March 2013. Following a lengthy investigation into allegations that members of the Innu community were violating the GRCH hunting ban in the Shipniskan Lake region, officers charged 12 individuals (10 aboriginal residents of Labrador and 2 pilots from Ontario) with violations under the Wild Life Act. One corporation (pilot's employer) has also been charged.

- The Department of Justice remains active in conducting land based patrols in Labrador to assess compliance with the hunting ban. Helicopter surveillance resumed on January 29, 2014 and some
additional seizures have occurred. Current intelligence indicates that Innu and Inuit hunters are engaged or plan to engage in caribou hunting this season.

- In early February, 2014, Minister Shivak raised matters pertaining to GRCH in a meeting with Minister Shen. This followed a request by NG for the Province to hold information sessions in the Inuit communities to share the results from the past year’s research and monitoring efforts and discuss regulations and enforcement. It was requested that the forums be facilitated by senior representatives from both the Wildlife Division and the Department of Justice. Minister Shivak noted the importance of engagement with the Inuit communities and hunters on the activities/methodologies to be employed in the future to monitor the herd.

- ENVC biologists generally make themselves available to discuss caribou status and health with any group or community requesting same. Prior to the announcement of the ban, consultations were held with all ten aboriginal groups in Labrador and Quebec with an interest in GRCH. In addition, information sessions have been held with the Innu Nation, Labrador Hunting and Fishing Association, Outfitters, and the Torngat Wildlife and Plant Co-Management Board.

- On February 4, 2014, ENVC biologists provided Nunatukavut Community Council members with an update on herd status. Following the meeting community leaders expressed their intent to respect the ban on hunting.

**Action Being Taken:**

- Public information forums have been arranged for the evenings of March 10-14, 2014 in each of the five Inuit communities: Nain, Hopevale, Makkovik, Rigolet and Postville. Representatives from the Department of Environment and Conservation will include John Pisapio - Senior Biologist in Labrador, and Ross Firth – Assistant Deputy Minister, Natural Heritage. The representative from the Department of Justice will be Hayward Taylor – Chief of Enforcement for FWED.

- On March 5, 2014, NG’s Department of Lands and Natural Resources circulated a public notice to inform Beneficiaries of the information forums and inviting their attendance.

- Biological information to be disseminated will focus on the recent population estimate (modelling shows projected population of less than 17,000 animals), and findings from the annual fall classification (including calf recruitment, male to female ratio, and % of large males). Other topics include calf weights, adult survival, pregnancy rates, and general condition of GRCH animals.

- Wildlife Management topics to be discussed include how a photo census is conducted, past, present, and future factors in the population decline, compensatory vs. additive mortality, the notion of a male only hunt, and plans for an inter-provincial George River Caribou Management Plan.

- Enforcement staff is preparing a short presentation. Topics to be discussed include an overview of FWED mandate, inter-agency partnerships for enforcement (ie, RCMP/ RNC, Forestry, DFO etc) and commitment to continue Labrador patrols and enforcement of caribou hunting ban.

- Any feedback from the sessions will be recorded for consideration during future monitoring and management planning.

- ENVC biologists and Justice officials will be available to any other groups who would like to avail of information sessions.

Prepared/Approved by: J. Blake, S. McCarthy/ J. Chippett in consultation with JUS and LAAO

Approved by: [Signature]

March 10, 2014
Issue: The QC-NL bilateral relationship in regard to the management of the George River Caribou Herd (GRCH) and woodland caribou.

Background and Current Status:
- The GRCH are a migratory species that frequently travel between QC and Labrador and have a widespread distribution over a 700,000 km² range, extending from Ungava Bay in the northwest to the Labrador coast in the east. The GRCH population has declined from an estimated 775,000 animals in 1993 to a current estimate of just under 20,000 animals. The current projection represents a 97 per cent decline since 1993. Current information suggests the decline will continue, most likely due to changes in the quality, quantity and accessibility of food as a result of herd expansion during the 1980’s and 1990’s.

- NL and QC officials regularly consult each other on management activities over the years through an informal relationship between both provinces with discussions at a technical and administrative level. While a formal co-management relationship does not currently exist for NL and QC on the GRCH, ongoing engagement efforts continue under an informal process. This relationship has worked well to date in allowing both jurisdictions to share data and engage in joint research.

- Current scientific understanding suggests that as the population becomes smaller, the effect of continued hunting becomes a magnified contributor to population decline. Continued hunting when numbers are low, in addition to natural mortality, leads to an even faster decline. A limited harvest, even in the short term, may contribute to the demise of this herd given current population levels.

- To address the decline in 2011-12, NL imposed harvest restrictions for the GRCH which included limiting each resident to one caribou licence, no transfer of licences, no commercial or outfitter harvest, a reduced season length for resident harvest, selling licenses through government offices only, and introducing a mandatory herd health monitoring program where hunters were required to submit biological samples from their animals.

- Similarly, for the 2011-12 hunting season, QC implemented a 50 per cent reduction in outfitter harvest on GRCH (compared to 2009 levels) with a closure of the sport hunt for the 2012/2013 season. In addition to the harvesting restrictions, the QC government hosted a multi-stakeholder meeting in September 2012 to discuss declining caribou herds.

- On 28 January 2013, NL announced an immediate closure on harvesting animals from GRCH by all users for five years, with a review after two years. QC Innu have openly defied the ban and have claimed a right to compensation from the Province because NL has closed the hunt. The Labrador Innu have not complied with the ban during each of the last two hunting seasons, harvesting 300 caribou in 2013 and at least 150 in 2014.

- On February 5, 2013, then-Minister Hederson wrote to Yves-François Blanchet, then QC’s Minister of Sustainable Development, Wildlife and Parks, informing him of the ban and noting NL and QC’s collaboration and information sharing on the GRCH in the past while encouraging such collaboration to continue. Minister Blanchet replied on April 8, 2013 noting that QC was in the process of engaging stakeholders on the George River Herd and Leaf River Herd (located wholly in QC). The letter also indicated QC would collaborate with NL to work towards restoring the GRCH and supported the continuation of joint collaborative efforts to that end.
• During the multi-stakeholder meeting hosted by the QC government in September 2012, Aboriginal groups held a separate meeting to discuss management of GRCH, the Leaf River herd, and the Torngat Mountain herd. Aboriginal groups from NL and QC requested both governments provide funding to establish an aboriginal round table to act as a forum for exchange and support in view of finding solutions, actions and recommendations built upon consensus and respect. The April 8, 2013 letter from Minister Blanchet noted that QC was making a “financial contribution” but did not provide details.

• In April 2013 Aboriginal groups from Labrador and QC formed the Ungava Peninsula Aboriginal Round Table (UPCART) over concerns of the steep decline of the GRCH and increased concern over the status of the Leaf River and Torngat Mountains caribou herds. This meeting was preceded by a meeting of the same Aboriginal groups in January 2013. Representatives from the NL and QC governments have not been invited to attend any of the Aboriginal Round Table meetings.

• On Feb 26, 2014, NL and QC officials sent a letter to the co-presidents of the UPCART, signed jointly by DMs from NL and QC. This letter informed the roundtable that NL and QC are responsible for implementing plans for the management of the GRCH within their respective jurisdictions and there was an intention to develop one management plan for the GRCH to be implemented by each jurisdiction. The letter noted that the Plan’s development would need input from Aboriginal groups if it was to be successful. The letter also noted that the governments of QC and NL would also consult Aboriginal groups directly.

• The preparation of the Management Plan, including Aboriginal consultation throughout its preparation and on the final draft Plan, will be a multi-year process. The Management Plan will incorporate Aboriginal consultations throughout its development and will propose the formation of a “Liaison Committee,” comprised of 50 per cent government officials and 50 per cent Aboriginal representatives. This Liaison Committee was noted in the February letter and, if endorsed by UPCART, represents an opportunity for officials from NL and QC to work with the Aboriginal Round Table, which to date has not engaged either government nor revealed the substance of its deliberations, workplan or initiatives.

• Budget 2014 provided funding of $975,000 over three years to fund a scientific monitoring and research program for the George River Caribou herd under the Labrador Caribou Initiative. This most recent funding represents a continuation of a three year $1.9 million initiative first announced in 2011.

• ENVC advises that future discussions and activities will include a focus on population monitoring and collaboration with QC, as well as the identification of additional partners as part of ongoing research work. For the summer of 2014, NL and QC officials are undertaking a joint calving ground survey and population census.

• Three woodland caribou herds are listed as Threatened under NL’s Endangered Species Act – the Red Wine, Mealy Mountain and Lac Joseph herds. The Lac Joseph herd’s habitat also extends into QC. Woodland caribou are also listed as Threatened under the federal Species at Risk Act.

• The Institute for Environmental Monitoring and Research (IEMR) was established to monitor wildlife and propose mitigation strategies following a federal environmental review of low-level military flight and weapons training at 5 Wing Goose Bay in 1994. This federally funded work comprises the majority of all caribou monitoring activities for woodland caribou herds in Labrador and assists in the management of the GRCH.

• The Department of National Defence (DND) reduced IEMR funding by $550,000 for 2014-15. The potential loss of critical data from collared woodland animals, a key component of recovery programs required by
federal and provincial legislation, could undermine NL and QC’s joint efforts to manage the GRCH and sedentary caribou.

- IEMR caribou monitoring data has been an important source of information for numerous federal assessments. The CEAA response to the Comprehensive Study Report for the Labrador-Island Transmission Link concluded, “that the Project, when cumulative environmental effects are taken into account, is likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects on the Red Wine Mountains Herd, even if the Project itself will only minimally contribute to these effects. The Agency recognizes that Nalcor would implement extensive measures to mitigate further impacts to the Red Wine Mountains Herd.” Nalcor’s Species at Risk Impacts Mitigation and Monitoring Plan was designed to be augmented by data from the IEMR program, the loss of which could limit or undermine its rigour.

- ENVC officials wrote to the IEMR’s chair objecting to DND’s unilateral budget reduction. The Chair of IEMR subsequently wrote to the federal Ministers of National Defence and Environment on behalf of the IEMR Board of Directors to express opposition to the decision. ENVC has also raised this issue with the federal Deputy Minister of Environment in person and, on June 19, 2014, in writing, and Minister Kent issued a news release on May 2, 2014 and discussed the topic with the Commander of Joint Task Force Atlantic on June 4, 2014.

- On June 10, 2014 QC officials wrote to the head of the IEMR requesting that the institute’s mandate be renewed and expanded to all military training activities throughout the year.

- On June 16, 2014, the IEMR Chair wrote to ENVC to advise “it looks like the IEMR will proceed with the closure of its operation as of March 31, 2015.”

- ENVC estimates that the cost of maintaining the minimum number of required collars currently provided by IEMR would be in the range of $160,000 per year.

**Actions Being Taken:**

- Premier Marshall may wish to raise this issue with Premier Couillard and make the following points:
  - NL and QC have been collaborating for some time in caribou management activities;
  - Our governments share a concern with federal cutbacks to the Institute for Environmental Monitoring and Research which has supported the collection of data from satellite collars that has been vital to our respective management activities;
  - We should task our respective Ministers responsible for Wildlife to continue to work together to oppose these federal cuts;

Prepared by / Approved by: H. Simms in consultation with ENVC & LAAO/ G. Clarke/ S. Dutton
Ministerial Approval:
July 3, 2014