Dear [redacted]

Re: Your request for access to information under Part II of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act [Our file #ENV/049/2014]

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

"Any and all information directly related to the initial planning of the 2010 George River Caribou Herd GRH) census. Information to include, but shall not be limited to the following: 1) Any reviews or reports relating to the management approaches and methods used at the time 2) And reviews/reports or preliminary evidence that the GRH was in a state of decline 3) Any reviews or reports supporting the need for the census 4) Identification and confirmation of which gov't department initiated the plan for the census, including any federal involvement, if applicable 5) All details as to how the planned census was communicated to the public and Industry Stakeholders."

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. 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:

"Information to be narrowed down to specifically address the following questions:

1) What prompted the 2010 census on the George River Caribou Herd?
2) Which department of the NL government initiated the plan for the census, and specifically, was there any involvement or participation by the Federal Government?
3) With reference to the Public News Release dated July 15, 2009, in connection with the GRCH census, was there a “review of current management approaches and methods” conducted? If so, information to include a copy of said review.
4) How was the planned census communicated to the Public, Industry Stakeholders, and Aboriginal Groups?"
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 and that we expected to respond to your request by March 16, 2015.

I am pleased to inform you that your request for access to information has been granted and I shall respond to your questions in the following itemized list:

Item 1: “What prompted the 2010 census on the George River Caribou Herd?”

Item 1: The previous census, conducted in 2001, estimated the George River Caribou herd at 385,000 animals, a significant decline from the previous estimate of 785,000 animals in 1993. Observations from local people suggested that the dynamics of the herd were changing and that there were fewer caribou on the landscape. In addition, preliminary evidence such as fluctuations in the number of calves per 100 females, a decrease in the number of males per 100 females and below average survival rates suggested that the herd may have continued its decline since 2001. Given this information, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador recognized the importance of having up-to-date, accurate information on the status and trend of the herd to ensure that appropriate management measures could be developed to safeguard the herd. In response, a census of the George River caribou herd was scheduled to be completed in 2010.

Item 2: “Which department of the NL government initiated the plan for the census, and specifically, was there any involvement or participation by the Federal Government?”

Item 2: The department of Environment and Conservation initiated the plan for the census, which was conducted in collaboration with the Government of Quebec, Laval University, the Nunatsiavut Government, the Torngat Plant and Wildlife Co-Management Board and the Institute for Environmental Monitoring and Research (IEMR). IEMR conducted unbiased scientific research in Labrador and northeastern Quebec ecosystems affected by the low-level flying program and was funded by the Federal Government. This was the extent of involvement or participation in the 2010 census by the Federal Government.

Item 3: “With reference to the Public News Release dated July 15, 2009, in connection with the GRCH census, was there a “review of current management approaches and methods” conducted? If so, information to include a copy of said review.”

Item 3: Yes, a “review of current management approaches and methods” was conducted however this review did not involve the production of a report. Provincial government officials, along with other stakeholders, were engaged to evaluate research and monitoring efforts and harvest management tools. During this review, changes were made to both research and monitoring and harvest management programs. For example, prior to the review the number of collared caribou averaged 19 per year; post-review, this number increased to 73 per year. After the review and beginning in the 2010-2011 hunting season, significant conservation measures were implemented. As such, changes to harvest management included a shortened hunting season for all non-Aboriginal groups, the elimination of the remainder of commercial caribou licenses and
the announcement of the elimination of commercial outfitting, a reduction in the number of animals available to harvest on each license from two to one for both resident and non-resident licenses and the suspension of the resident caribou license transfer system. It is important to note that prior to the implementation of these conservation measures, stakeholder consultations were conducted to advise of the potential significant decline and to seek input into management strategies that may be required to address this decline.

Item 4: "How was the planned census communicated to the Public, Industry Stakeholders, and Aboriginal Groups?"

Item 4: On July 15, 2009 the former Minister of Environment and Conservation, the Honourable Charlene Johnson, announced the planned census of the George River Caribou herd in a joint news release with the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs. It was indicated at that time that the census would be completed in 2010 and in collaboration with the Nunatsiavut Government, the Government of Quebec, the Institute for Environmental Monitoring and Research and the University of Laval.

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