

For Immediate Release



Zehdzo Got'Ine Gots'É Nákedı (Sahtú Renewable Resources Board) Commences Hearing Looking at Community-Led Conservation Planning for Caribou

January 20, 2020 – Colville Lake, NWT – The Zehdzo Got'Ine Gots'É Nákedı (Sahtú Renewable Resources Board, or SRRB) is holding a hearing or “Public Listening Session” in Colville Lake on January 21-23 to look at the most effective way to approach caribou harvesting and address conservation pressures on the caribou herds in the region.

The Colville 2020 Public Listening Session is a hearing process set up in a way to encourage maximum participation from Sahtú Dene and Métis as well as government. The SRRB will hear evidence from Sahtú communities and harvesters, as well as the NWT's Department of Environment and Natural Resources, on the topic of *Sahtú Ragóza (Hunting Laws) and Approaches to Wildlife Harvesting*.

The Session will address the central question, “What is the most effective way to regulate the harvest of caribou?” Unlike previous caribou hearings that have focused on individual populations, this Public Listening Session will consider all three ecotypes of caribou that live in the Sahtú Region, including ʔədə/ʔekwé (Bluenose West and Bluenose East barren-ground caribou), ʔədzı (boreal caribou), and shúhta goʔepé (mountain caribou). The Board has received evidence of conservation concerns related to all three kinds of caribou.

The hearing will highlight the host community Colville Lake's proposed caribou conservation plan. The Colville Lake plan, entitled the *Dehlá Got'Ine ʔədə Plan and Ts'ıduweh ʔədə ʔeʔá (Law)*, proposes a community-led approach to caribou stewardship in their homeland. The Colville Lake plan includes proposals for community oversight of caribou harvesting, direct participation in collecting and assessing caribou information, community monitoring of the local harvest, and extensive community education efforts about caribou conservation matters.

Other Sahtú communities as well as Elders (sponsored by Sahtú Dene Council) and the Sahtú Youth Network will also present evidence related to harvest regulation at the hearing. The hearing will also explore how the Sahtú community-led conservation planning approach fits within the broader territorial framework (including cross-regional conservation plans that are already in place) for caribou conservation.

The SRRB has also encouraged participation from concerned neighbouring regions, and a number of communities and regions will be either observing or participating as Parties. In particular, the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (NWT), Inuvialuit Game Council, Ross River Dena Council have contributed submissions. Kugluktuk Angoniatit Association, Dehcho First Nations and Acho Dene Koe First Nation have also been confirmed as Parties.

The designation “Public Listening” emphasizes the SRRB's intention to ensure that the hearing proceeding is as fair as possible in a cross-cultural context. Several innovative methods will be introduced for the first time to support cross-cultural understanding, including pauses for discussion of terms and concepts, and live graphic recording of presentations by Drawing For Change artist Sam Bradd.

This hearing follows in the wake of the 2016 Sahtú hearing on the Bluenose East ʔekwé which considered a community-led caribou conservation plan for the first time. In 2016, the community of Déliŋe presented the *Déliŋe Belare Wıle Gots'É ʔekwé – Caribou For All Time Plan* which included local involvement in monitoring harvesting, educating community members on conservation issues, applying traditional Dene laws related to respect for caribou, supporting the harvest of alternative species and a number of other initiatives.

The SRRB accepted the principle in the 2016 hearing that community conservation planning offered the best chance of successfully protecting Bluenose East Ɂekwé in the Sahtú based on evidence presented by all the parties at the hearing. The SRRB's resulting Ɂekwé hé Dene Ts'ili - Sustaining Relationships report concluded that, to be successful, solutions for caribou conservation in the Sahtú region needed to come from the Sahtú communities themselves. The SRRB's consideration of an Indigenous wildlife conservation plan and its formal acceptance were historic firsts in Canada.

The SRRB's 2016 report also affirmed the wide variety of research and policy initiatives needed on issues such as land use planning, climate change mitigation, predator control, forestry and wildfire management that are also key to protecting caribou health and habitat. A series of upcoming "Public Listening Sessions" in the other Sahtú communities will consider these issues in more detail over the next several years along with any other proposed Sahtú community conservation plans. Together, the series of "Public Listening Sessions" will try to answer the question, "What is the most effective way to conserve caribou?"

The SRRB decided to examine issues related to caribou conservation needs on a topic-by-topic basis rather than the herd-by-herd basis usually used for hearings on caribou conservation. This will allow more detailed consideration of specific "hot topics" in caribou conservation and addresses a concern raised by Sahtú Dene and Métis that better processes for examining the issues affecting caribou are needed in the face of current extreme conservation pressures on the herds.

The SRRB Public Registry for the Colville 2020 Public Listening Session is online at www.srrb.nt.ca.

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