

**Northern Wildlife, Northern People: Native Hunters and Wildlife
Conservation in the Northwest Territories, 1894-1970**

Excerpts: Chapters 6, 7 and Conclusion

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the conflict between Native hunters and federal wildlife conservation programs within the present-day borders of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut from the late nineteenth century to the end of the 1960s. From the first conservation legislation specific to the northern Canada in 1894 to the broad range of responses to the so-called caribou crisis of the post-war era, the introduction of wildlife conservation in the Northwest Territories brought a series of dramatic changes to the lives of Dene and Inuit hunters in the region. The imposition of restrictive game laws, the enclosing of traditional hunting grounds within national parks and game sanctuaries, and the first tentative introduction of police and game wardens to the area were all part of a process whereby the nation-state had begun to assert authority over the traditional hunting cultures of the Dene and Inuit. This work traces the historical development of the discord between Aboriginal subsistence hunters and federal wildlife managers over three species that were all thought to be threatened with extinction at various points in the study period: the wood bison, the muskoxen, and the caribou. It also questions the common assumption that conservationists were motivated solely by an enlightened preservationist philosophy of wildlife management. Through a close study of the federal government's proposals to domesticate large ungulates on vast wildlife ranches in Arctic tundra, this work argues that conservationists were also motivated by a desire to conserve wildlife for commercial purposes. In either case, the subsistence hunting cultures of Native people were marginalized and excluded from state wildlife conservation programs, a process that the Dene and Inuit resisted through various forms of protest throughout the study period. The dissertation invokes themes from the literature of environmental history, northern Canadian history, and the history of science in an effort to reveal the intersection between the discourse of wildlife conservation and the expansion of state power in the Northwest Territories.

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A Note on the Terminology

The archival documents that were used as the basis for this study generally do not distinguish between the ethnic and linguistic groupings of northern Aboriginal people, referring to them only as “Indians” or “Eskimos.” In keeping with contemporary convention, the Athapaskan speaking people of the Mackenzie Valley are generally referred to in this dissertation as the Dene, although the names of linguistic sub-groups (i.e., Chipewyan, Dogrib, Gwich’in, etc.) are used when I am certain that the people being discussed are members of these particular groups. The hunting people of the High Arctic are referred to as the Inuit throughout the dissertation. The Cree people of northern Alberta also enter this story in the early chapters.

Changes to the administrative structure surrounding wildlife conservation in the Northwest Territories were a frequent and complex phenomenon throughout the twentieth century. To further complicate matters, at certain periods the federal government administered wildlife matters through a variety of divisions and bureaus within the bureaucracy. While some of these changes are highlighted in the text when they bear upon the narrative, others are left out so as to avoid cluttering the story with needless detail. To avoid confusion on the part of the reader, I have often adopted generic terms to refer to particular administrative bodies (i.e., the northern administration, the federal wildlife bureaucracy, the department). Readers who are interested in the precise evolution of the administrative structure governing federal wildlife policy in the Northwest Territories should consult the appendices (I-II).

Chapter 6

Saving Caribou; Managing People

Far away to the East lives a tribe of people who once had plenty of caribou in their land. Bye and bye the hunters got good rifles then they said "now we will kill all the caribou we want," but they were stupid people because they killed and killed until there were only a few caribou left far away from their hunting place, and now they have no deer skins for winter clothes and their children cry because they are cold in winter... The government and the Police are the true friends of the Indians. The Indians should do as they say because it is right. The government wishes the Indians to be well and happy.

- O.S. Finnie, "Letter from the Government to the Indian People"¹

In his report for the month of February 1918, Sgt. A.H. Joy of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police recounted a conversation with a 'Caribou-Eater' Indian near Fort Fitzgerald, Alberta, who "told me that the band with whom he lived very seldom used guns to kill the caribou between the end of July and the middle of September, as the caribou came through the country so thick that they could crowd them into the lakes and rivers and on the lake shores and kill them with sticks and axes, and on these occasions the animals are slaughtered in hundreds, and, I presume, wasted."² One month later, in a separate report on a patrol to the hunting ranges just to the north of the 'Caribou-Eaters' near Fort Resolution, Corporal L.M. Walters of the Northwest Mounted Police painted a very different picture of the caribou hunt. He noted that "the Indians are not wasting deer so far and any place I passed where deer had been killed they had hauled away everything and what they could not haul in the first place they had cached properly." Although Walters attributed the restrained nature of the hunt to the "exorbitant" price of cartridges, he stated unequivocally that the Chipewyan hunters were immediately consuming many of the downed caribou and the rest were being made into dry meat.³

How can we explain the marked contrast between these two accounts of a northern caribou hunt? Aside from the obvious issue of high prices for ammunition, one also might suggest that the reported wasteful slaughter at Fort Fitzgerald took place in the late summer and early fall, when caribou meat was much more difficult to cache than during the winter hunt at Fort Resolution. It is also possible to speculate that cultural differences between the Chipewyan of Fort Resolution and the 'Caribou Eaters' to the southeast produced a stark contrast between the hunts at each location. A close reading of each of the police reports suggests, however, an additional explanation: Sgt. Walters'

¹ O.S. Finnie, "Letter from the Government to the Indian People," 1 April 1924. RG 85, vol. 768, file 5208, National Archives of Canada.

² Sgt. A.H. Joy, Fort Fitzgerald Detachment to OC 'N' Div, Peace River, 18 February 1918. RG 85, vol. 665, file 3914, vol. 1, NAC.

³ Col. L.M. Walters, "Patrol East of Fort Resolution," 6 March 1918. RG 10, vol. 4084, file 496658, NAC.

description of a ‘clean’ hunt at Resolution was based on his own eyewitness account while Sgt. Joy assumed that the Fitzgerald hunt was ‘wasteful’ based on a second-hand report that large numbers caribou were killed. There was, in fact, no solid evidence to suggest that a large numbers of caribou ever were wasted near Fort Fitzgerald in 1918. Indeed, three months earlier Sgt. Joy himself had recorded that there was no sign of an ‘improvident’ mass slaughter at any of the hunting camps visited during a patrol to Hay Lake in the early winter of 1917 despite the passage of vast numbers of caribou near Fort Fitzgerald for the first time in five years.⁴

The imprecise and contradictory nature of these examples illustrates some of the basic characteristics of the ‘field data’ that was used to formulate caribou conservation policy in the Northwest Territories during the inter-war years. Most importantly, in this era before the advent of aerial census techniques the only available information on caribou abundance, movements and mortality came from on the ground observations. In some cases, these reports originated from the writings of naturalists and explorers as in previous decades, but more often it was the increasing numbers of mounted police, government agents, and non-Native trappers who flooded into the region beginning in the 1920s that provided the primary source of knowledge about Native hunting practices and their impact on the caribou. Speculation and conjecture were the hallmarks of these reports. Estimates of caribou abundance across the Northwest Territories were often based on wildly hypothetical assumptions derived from local reports of ‘scarce’ or ‘plentiful’ caribou within a particular region. And as in the case of Sgt. Joy’s report, several of the descriptions of Native hunting practices were based on rumour, hearsay and second-hand evidence. Many reports of mass caribou slaughters—particularly those forwarded to the police by the non-Native trappers who were in direct competition with Native northerners for access to game—turned out, in fact, to be highly suspect upon further police investigation.

In spite of such imprecision, the ongoing reports of mass caribou slaughters and regional scarcity continued to incite fear among government officials of an imminent crash in the caribou population. The creation of additional caribou protective measures in the Northwest Game Act of 1917, as well as the existence of contradictory reports suggesting that wastage of meat was not an inherent feature of Dene and Inuit caribou hunts, did little to allay fears that the caribou might some day go the way of the plains bison. The transfer of authority over northern wildlife from the Parks Branch to the Northwest Territories and Yukon branch in 1922 also had little impact on the urgency and attention that federal officials afforded to the caribou. Indeed, the new northern administration continued to push not only for more stringent game regulations in the Northwest Territories, but they also began to assert tentative control over the subsistence cycle of Native people in the 1920s and 1930s, promoting increased fishing and limits on

⁴ Extract from report of Sgt. A.H. Joy, Great Slave Lake Sub-Dist., Fort Fitzgerald Detachment, 5 December 1917. Ibid. Despite the speculative nature of Joy’s allegations of a mass slaughter, Maxwell Graham nevertheless cited his report as evidence that caribou could be approached and killed *en masse* in his proposal for a mass caribou slaughter near Churchill to meet wartime food demands. See Graham to Harkin, 24 April 1918. RG 85 vol. 665, file 3914, pt. 1, NAC.

the number of sled dogs as part of a series of newly established ‘conservation education’ programs meant to alleviate hunting pressure on the caribou.

Several historians have characterized the inter-war years as a period when the federal government adopted a ‘do-nothing’ stance toward northern Canada. Even the activist ambitions of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch under its first Director Oscar S. Finnie have been described as a ‘shackled administration’ due to a lack of funds and personnel.⁵ But the case of caribou management suggests that the federal government maintained, at the very least, a consistent and unwavering commitment to the development of an interventionist wildlife conservation policy in the North during the years leading up to the Second World War. While it is undoubtedly true that the federal government’s capacity to conduct scientific research on northern wildlife reached its peak in the post-war era due to the creation of the Canadian Wildlife Service—and as a consequence official concern for the caribou reached unprecedented levels with the declaration of a ‘caribou crisis’ in 1950 (see Chapter Seven)—it would be a mistake to describe northern wildlife management in the period from 1920 to the beginning of the war as a *laissez faire* policy regime. As the only contiguous landmass where the federal government had absolute jurisdiction over wildlife, the Northwest Territories captured a large share of the federal bureaucracy’s attention between the two world wars. The Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, for example, devoted an overwhelming amount of its attention to northern wildlife during this period.⁶

The evolving structure of governance in the Northwest Territories also indirectly advanced the cause of northern wildlife conservation. From 1905 until 1918, the sole member of the Northwest Territories Council was its Commissioner Lieutenant-Colonel Fred White, Comptroller of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. Beginning in 1919, however, the Deputy Minister of the Interior (the department charged with the

⁵ This description of the Northwest Territories and Yukon branch comes from chapters 3 and 4 of a report authored by the anthropologist Diamond Jenness. See Jenness, *Eskimo Administration II: Canada*, Arctic Institute of North America Technical No. 14 (May 1964). See also Shelagh Grant, *Sovereignty or Security? Government Policy in the Canadian North, 1936-1950* (Vancouver; UBC Press, 1988), p. 18. The historian William R. Morrison has argued that it was the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who served as “agents of metropolitanism” during this early period of ‘opening’ the Canadian North. According to Morrison, the police were charged with the task of spreading the federal government’s laws, regulations and economic policies throughout the region. Yet Morrison has also argued that this process was so slow when compared to the colonization of the prairies in the nineteenth century, the federal government’s northern policy in the 1920s might be characterized as a period of “benign neglect.” See William R. Morrison, *Showing the Flag: The Mounted Police and Canadian Sovereignty in the North, 1894-1925* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985), pp. 179-80. Mark Dickerson, on the other hand, has argued that the federal government’s role in the Northwest Territories from 1921-1950 was more activist in nature, a series of deliberate and dynamic policy initiatives in the fields of education, health, welfare, and education. See Mark Dickerson, *Whose North? Political Change, Political Development, and Self-Government in the Northwest Territories* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), pp. 28-60. While it is beyond the scope of this study to comment on all of these policy arenas, it is my contention that wildlife policy in the NWT was driven by an activist agenda (albeit one that was tempered by the fear that Native people would become wards of the state if access to their basic sources of subsistence was removed).

⁶ Throughout the 1920s until the beginning of the 1950s, the policy issues surrounding northern wildlife dominated the meetings of the Advisory Board. See the records of minutes contained in RG 10, vol. 4085, file 658-1, NAC; RG 22, vol. 4, file 14, NAC; RG 22, vol. 16, file 69, NAC.

administration of wildlife policy in northern Canada) was appointed Commissioner of the Northwest Territories. By 1921 the membership of the Northwest Territories Council had expanded to six appointed federal civil servants. Many of these individuals (particularly Finnie and the long-serving Deputy Commissioner Roy A. Gibson) were high-ranking bureaucrats within the Department of the Interior who remained staunch supporters of restrictive conservation policies throughout their careers.⁷ Although the power of this Council to pass game ordinances was subject to the approval of the federal cabinet and limited by the statutory authority of Parliament, this small group of unelected officials evolved slowly from a largely advisory body to one of the main architects of game regulations in the North. To a large extent, the bureaucratic, legislative and executive power to enact and administer game laws in the Northwest Territories had been concentrated in one small body of civil servants based in Ottawa. The formation of wildlife policy in the Northwest Territories was thus a fairly seamless process: field agents provided senior federal wildlife officials with ‘data’ on wildlife abundance and Native hunting practices, the Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection in turn passed resolutions calling for the greater protection of northern fur and game animal to the Northwest Territories Council, and then the Council passed recommendations for appropriate amendments to the Northwest Game Act to the federal cabinet or Parliament. Finally, the senior civil servants and field officers who started the process were granted the task of administering and enforcing the new game regulations.

If such a policy framework allowed for frequent innovation and revision of the game regulations in response to ambiguous allegations of impending wildlife crises, it was also a thoroughly colonial instrument, responsive only to the voices of the ‘outsiders’ who furnished reports on game conditions in the Northwest Territories and wholly unaccountable to the Aboriginal people on whose behalf northern wildlife was apparently to be protected. Indeed, the steady stream of reports alleging mass wildlife slaughters conducted by Dene and Inuit hunters served to reinforce the notion that increased state management rather than local control of northern wildlife was the only possible way to save the barren ground caribou from annihilation. Although the attempts to conserve caribou in the inter-war years were limited by a widespread recognition that the animals were an irreplaceable staple of the northern diet, federal wildlife officials nevertheless waged a consistent campaign to limit local access to the herds: adjusting closed seasons, prohibiting mass slaughters, limiting the sale of skins and meat, establishing outright hunting bans, and prosecuting some violations of the game regulations to the fullest extent of the law. If federal officials had little evidence to suggest an impending collapse

⁷ For an overview, see Dickerson, *op cit.* pp. 29-30. The membership of the expanded NWT Council included (in addition to the Deputy Minister W.W. Cory, Finnie, and Gibson) J.W. Greenway, Commissioner of Dominion Lands, Charles Camsell, Deputy Minister of Mines, and Lt.-Col. Cortlandt Starnes, Assistant Commissioner, RCMP. See “Annual Report of the Department of the Interior.” Sessional Paper No. 12 (1923), p. 20. The northern administration was placed under the auspices of the Department of Mines and Resources after the Department of the Interior was abolished in 1936. In 1950, responsibility for the North fell under the newly created Department of Resources and Development. In 1953, the name of this department was changed to the Northern Affairs and National Resources. Gibson served as the senior northern administrator under all of these departments.

in the caribou population other than the contradictory reports of their field agents, non-Native trappers and the mounted police, a dire sense of urgency nevertheless continued throughout the decades between the wars to provoke the northern administration toward an expansion of their influence and authority over people and wildlife in northern Canada.

The 'Wanton' Slaughter of the Caribou

On September 28th, 1923, O.S. Finnie wrote to the Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Cortlandt Starnes, at the behest of the Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection. Within the correspondence, the Director of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch claimed he had found “indubitable evidence that both Eskimos and Indians actually slaughter caribou in a wanton and altogether senseless manner.” As proof, Finnie cited a series of reports dating back to 1920 suggesting that ‘Indian’ and ‘Eskimo’ hunters had needlessly slaughtered hundreds of caribou in the sub-arctic forests and arctic prairies of the Northwest Territories. The mounted police Sergeant S.G. Clay had reported on 25 June 1920, for example, that Native hunters from Fort Norman, Fort Good Hope and Rae, and Inuit hunters from the Coronation Gulf region had congregated near the west side of Great Bear Lake during the spring and fall migrations and killed thousands of caribou. Although Sgt. Clay did not witness this slaughter, merely the scattered remains of downed carcasses on a patrol from Fort McPherson to Coronation Gulf in the early summer, he urged his superiors to take immediate action before there were no longer any caribou left in the region. Finnie also cited a report from the Superintendent of Wood Buffalo National Park, John A. McDougal, who claimed that Native hunters near the park were slaughtering three hundred and fifty caribou per family on an annual basis while white trappers were taking only twenty-five. Finnie concluded from these reports that a new approach was needed to address the vexing problem of caribou conservation in the Northwest Territories. He called for the establishment of an active education campaign among Dene and Inuit hunters to prevent such immoderate killing of game. “I would suggest,” Finnie wrote, “that in a language to be understood by these people they be informed that without caribou enormous areas in the North West Territories would become uninhabitable, and that if such wanton slaughter is persisted in drastic steps will have to be taken and severe punishment meted out to the offenders.”⁸

Finnie’s memo reflected a renewed concern among federal officials over the status of the barren ground caribou in the early years of the 1920s. In part, the growing anxiety was the result of increasing numbers of reports of mass caribou slaughters from newly established RCMP posts along the Arctic Coast and on Baffin Island.⁹ There was

⁸ O.S. Finnie to Commissioner, RCMP, 28 September 1923. RG 85, vol. 1087, file 401-22, pt. 1, NAC.

⁹ In addition to existing posts at Baker Lake, Cape Fullerton and Herschel Island, RCMP detachments were established in the Arctic at Tree River in 1920, Port Burwell in 1922, Craig Harbour and Pond Inlet in 1922, Pangnirtung in 1923, Dundas Harbour in 1924, Bache Peninsula in 1926 and Lake Harbour in 1927. From 1916 to 1923, the total number of RCMP personnel in the Northwest Territories increased from nineteen to sixty-four officers. See Morrison, *op cit.*, p. 168. For data on the number of officers staffing each post, see the

also a notable enthusiasm for wildlife conservation among senior officials in the newly created Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch. As noted in earlier chapters, both the transfer of Maxwell Graham to the Branch in 1922 and Finnie's enthusiasm for wildlife conservation ensured that the new northern administration would not neglect the question of barren ground caribou conservation. Finnie in particular was well positioned to influence conservation policy in the North. Not only was he the Director of the northern administration, he was also a sitting member of both the Northwest Territories Council and the Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, a situation that gave him unparalleled political and bureaucratic control over the formulation and implementation of caribou conservation measures within the Northwest Territories. For example, just six weeks after his proposal for a conservation education program was forwarded to the RCMP Commissioner, an Advisory Board meeting was held specifically to discuss the alleged destruction of the caribou on the part of Native hunters. The result was a ringing endorsement of a "poster and pamphlet propaganda" campaign designed to limit the excessive exploitation of the caribou by Dene and Inuit hunters. Finnie's proposed education campaign had thus quickly become official policy; Graham was instructed the day after the meeting to draft notices in 'simple language' informing 'Indian' and 'Eskimo' hunters not to kill more game than that which was absolutely required.¹⁰

In addition to the education campaign, Finnie also organized the first formal government sponsored study of the barren ground caribou herds. In January 1924, W.H.B. Hoare, an Anglican lay missionary who had previously spent five years in the Coronation Gulf region, reported to the Advisory Board that the caribou of the Central Arctic were fast disappearing due to human over-hunting. In response, the Board recommended that the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch send an agent to study the situation and recommend measures to protect the caribou.¹¹ Finnie subsequently appointed Hoare to conduct an investigation of the caribou population in the central Arctic; the range, numbers and migration routes of the herds were all to be assessed over a two year period. Hoare was also instructed to "personally disseminate propaganda regarding the conservation of Caribou [sic] among the Eskimos," particularly the regulation prohibiting caribou hunting in the spring and summer (Apr. 1 – Aug. 1) calving season.¹² To fulfil this mission, the Anglican missionary travelled an astonishing

annual reports of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in the Sessional Papers of the federal parliament from 1917 to 1925.

¹⁰ The endorsement of Finnie's conservation education program came at a meeting of the Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection held 8 November 1923. The minutes of this meeting were not present in any of the early records of the Advisory Board found at the National Archives, but the meeting is described briefly in a letter from Graham to Finnie, 29 April 1924. RG 85 vol. 1087, 401-22, pt. 1, NAC. Finnie ordered Graham to draft material for the campaign in a letter dated 9 November 1923. Ibid.

¹¹ The meeting, held 14 January 1924, is summarized in a letter from Finnie to Graham, 15 January 1924. RG 85, vol. 1087, file 401-22, pt. 1, NAC.

¹² Finnie's instructions to Hoare appear in a letter dated 14 May 1924 at the beginning of the lay missionary's final report. See, W.H.B. Hoare, *Report of Investigations Affecting Eskimo and Wild Life, District of Mackenzie, 1924-1925-1926*. Unpublished Report, Department of the Interior, Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch. The report consists of two separate entries for each year of the investigation, the first dated 1

distance of over ten thousand miles from August 1924 to July 1926 by schooner, canoe and dog sled along the Arctic Coast as far east as Bathurst Inlet, and inland to the community of Rae on the north arm of Great Slave Lake. According to Hoare, the most dire threat to the caribou had arisen from the abandonment by the coastal Inuit of a taboo that had formerly prevented them from going inland to hunt caribou until the late summer when a good supply of seal blubber had been stored for the winter and hunting on the 'rotting' sea ice was no longer possible. With the renunciation of the old 'superstitions' and the introduction of the high powered rifles that accompanied the whalers and traders in the late nineteenth century, Inuit hunters were now leaving their sealing and fishing camps earlier each spring to engage in the comparatively easy hunt of the caribou herds migrating northward to their calving grounds.¹³

Hoare painted a grim picture of this spring hunt, writing that Dene hunters to the south and Inuit hunters moving in from the Arctic Coast had besieged the caribou herds on all sides, stretching "from west to east like the advance line of a modern army."¹⁴ He claimed that the inland hunting, combined with the pervasive smell of coal and oil smoke from the increasing numbers of trading posts along the Arctic Coast, were diverting the caribou from their 'traditional' spring migration to Victoria Island and other High Arctic islands, forcing them on to smaller calving grounds each year and exposing the concentrated herds more readily to human hunters. The Anglican missionary thus took every opportunity "to teach and instruct [the Inuit] to save the caribou," pleading with them to obey the game regulations and trying to convince them to remain on the coast and subsist on fish from local lakes and streams until the late spring or early summer.¹⁵ Hoare did claim some success for his efforts: he reported in May 1926 that he had convinced many Inuit that the principles of caribou conservation were "nearer to the truth than their own wild ideas," and that he had persuaded half the Inuit population in the Coronation Gulf region to remain on the coast until summer and subsist on the salmon from local streams and rivers.¹⁶ He nevertheless concluded that the proliferation of trading posts and continued persecution by human hunters had created a desperate situation for the caribou herds that habitually summered in the Central Arctic. The final report on this first caribou investigation thus contained a number of dramatic

August 1925, and the second 17 January 1927. A copy of the report was found in the library of the Northwest Territories Archives, Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, Yellowknife.

¹³ Ibid., 1 August 1925, pp. 12-13; 17 January 1927, p. 37.

¹⁴ Ibid., 17 January 1927, p. 37.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1 August 1925, p. 12. Hoare suggested that the year 1915 had marked the 'opening up' of the Central Arctic, with the Hudson Bay Company having opened posts at Herschel and Baillie Islands that year, and at Bernard Harbour in 1916. In subsequent years, the HBC established posts near Tree River in 1917, on the Kent Peninsula in 1920, at Fort Brabant on Victoria Island in 1922, at the mouth of the Coppermine River in 1925, and along the Western River in that same year. In addition, the free trader Capt. C. Klengenber opened posts at the mouth of the Coppermine (which was closed in 1923), at the southwest and southeast reaches of Victoria Island (both closed in 1925), and in Bathurst Inlet in 1925. Finally, the Northern trading Company opened a post at Tree River in 1917, and the DeSteffanny Brothers opened a post at Ellice River in 1924. See the second section of Hoare's report, p. 33. For detailed study of the proliferation of trading posts in the Western Arctic during the 1920s, see Peter Usher, "The Growth and Decay of the Trading and Trapping Frontiers in the Western Canadian Arctic," *Canadian Geographer* 19, 4 (1975), pp. 308-20.

¹⁶ Hoare, *op cit.*, 1 August 1925, p. 13.

recommendations. Under a section titled “To Remedy the Evils,” Hoare urged the government to educate Native hunters against wanton slaughter and waste, limit the number and location of trading posts along the Arctic Coast and on the islands to the north, and create a caribou sanctuary on the Arctic Islands from the 90th to the 125th degree of longitude. He also clearly evoked the ‘pastoral dreams’ that are described in earlier chapters, arguing that the caribou might best be protected if the federal government attempted to introduce of fundamental changes to the productive basis of their subsistence economy. Hoare reasoned that if the caribou herds formed the most important source of food for the Dene and Inuit, then the most important means to divert Native hunters from the herds was to introduce alternative industries such as white fox farming and reindeer herding. He also advocated the promotion of alternative subsistence strategies among the Inuit, particularly the distribution of nets in coastal communities so these hunters could remain near the Arctic Coast and catch fish in the early summer.¹⁷ Clearly, for Hoare, one of the most important means by which the state could impose discipline on ‘unruly’ Native hunters was to introduce fundamental changes to the indigenous modes of production that were thought to have wrought so much destruction on the caribou herds.

Although Hoare’s caribou study was clearly a remarkable accomplishment in terms of the vast territory covered and range of his observations, the final report did stretch the bounds of scientific certitude in many respects. In general, Hoare’s assertion of an impending caribou crisis was clouded by his relative lack of experience in the Arctic and his consequent lack of any historical baseline data against which to judge the present status of the caribou herds. The benefit of hindsight suggests, for example, that Hoare misinterpreted the concentration of migrating caribou herds on relatively small calving grounds in the spring as the recent product of Native hunting pressure when in fact he was observing the traditional yearly spring aggregation of the Bathurst and Bluenose caribou herds just to the south and east of the Coronation Gulf region. Furthermore, Hoare’s contention that the migration of the mainland caribou herds from their “former fawning grounds” on “Victoria Land” and the other Arctic Islands had been severely curtailed by smoke and Native hunters—an observation based partly on the fact he saw only thirteen caribou tracks while crossing Coronation Gulf in May 1925 where he had seen innumerable tracks six years ago—was also likely exaggerated, a probable reference to the migration of caribou indigenous to the Arctic Islands between their winter range on the Arctic Coast and their summer ranges on Victoria and King William Island.¹⁸ Finally, Hoare’s claim that the caribou had declined to one-tenth of their former

¹⁷ Ibid., 17 January 1927, pp. 40-43.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1 August 1925, p. 11. Indeed, writing in the late 1930s, the biologist C.H.D Clarke described the presumption of a former massive migration of the interior caribou herds to the Arctic Islands as one of the significant fallacies of the early theories on caribou migration. For Clarke’s comments, see his monograph, *A Biological Investigation of the Thelon Game Sanctuary*, National Museum of Canada Bulletin No. 96, Biological Series No. 25 (Department of Mines and Resources, Mines and Geology Branch, 1940), pp. 95-98. See also Clarke’s comments at the Dominion-Provincial Wildlife Conference, 16 January 1939. RG 22, vol. 4, file 13, NAC. Although a seasonal massive migration of barren-ground caribou to the Arctic Islands remains an unlikely possibility (given the contemporary tendency of the herds to congregate around summer calving grounds on the mainland), it is nevertheless possible that there was some interchange between the Peary

strength due to human over-exploitation rested on his theory that Inuit were leaving the coast earlier each spring to hunt caribou, a few first-hand observations of rotting carcasses in Inuit hunting camps, and the testimony of local traders at Rae suggesting that the caribou had previously been more plentiful in that region. He went on to cite the reports of once numberless caribou herds that had been circulating in the natural history literature for five decades—particularly Ernest Thompson Seton’s wildly speculative estimate of thirty million animals—as a baseline against which to judge the present status of the herds.¹⁹ To conclude from such uncertain numbers that “in a very short time the story of the barren ground caribou will coincide with that of the plains bison,” seems almost extraordinary in retrospect, but it is likely Hoare felt the need to provide a particularly acute description of a wildlife crisis on the Arctic Plains to spur government action on his recommendations for a more rigorous caribou conservation program in the Northwest Territories.²⁰

Despite the degree of uncertainty in Hoare’s report and the general lack of precise knowledge on wildlife conditions in the Northwest Territories, the basic theme of a declining caribou population was repeated time and time again in a series of informal reports to senior wildlife officials of the federal government. One particularly important source of information federal officials used to assess the impact of Native hunters on the caribou herds was the correspondence from newly established RCMP detachments along the Arctic Coast. At a meeting held on 2 November 1926, for example, the Advisory Board tabled a report on wildlife in the Western Arctic from Sergeant Barnes, who claimed that it was “hard to stop” Inuit hunters when they began to kill caribou because “they do not believe in the white man’s version of a caribou slaughter.” The Advisory Board files contain several other police reports from detachments throughout the Arctic—from Chesterfield Inlet in the east to Herschel Island in the Western Arctic—many of which provided details on alleged caribou slaughters and the apparent decline of the herds along the Arctic Coast.²¹ In addition, large numbers of explorers and traders were called before the Advisory Board between 1924 and 1926 to testify as to the possible threats facing the caribou herds. In March 1925, the sport hunter Henry Toke Munn claimed that the export of caribou skins numbering in the hundreds from Baffin Island to Hudson Bay Company posts in Labrador and the Mackenzie Delta were severely depleting the herds. He recommended a ban on the traffic in caribou hides and the creation of a game preserve on the Arctic Islands.²² The possible impact on the caribou of new trading posts along the Arctic Coast also received a great deal of attention

caribou of the Arctic Islands and the barren ground caribou. Little is known, however, of the extent to which Peary caribou migrated south to the arctic mainland or the barren ground caribou to the Arctic Islands. See Frank Miller, “Caribou.” in *Wild Mammals of North America: Biology, Management, and Economics*. J.A. Chapman and G.A. Feldhamer, eds. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982), pp. 923-24.

¹⁹ Hoare, *op cit.*, 17 January 1927, pp. 39-40.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²¹ Reference to Barnes’ report was made in the Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 2 November 1926. RG 13, vol. 924, file 6101, pt. A, NAC. See also the reports of Cst. Gibson, 10 February 1924, Inspector Stuart T. Wood, 30 April 1924, Cst. D.F. Robinson, 1 June 1926, O.G. Petty, 1 June 1926. RG 10, vol. 4065, file 496,658-1B, NAC.

²² Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 30 March 1925. RG 10, vol. 4085, file 496,658-1B, NAC.

from the Advisory Board. At a meeting held in November 1925, John Hornby and the free trader Charlie Klengenber (who had lived near Coronation Gulf since 1888) cited the establishment of new trading posts as one major factor leading to the depletion of the muskoxen and the caribou. Although he may have been slandering his competitor, Klengenber claimed that the Hudson's Bay Company routinely killed caribou around their trading posts so that Native hunters were dependent on them for provisions. Klengenber also made reference to the effects of coal smoke on the caribou population and recommended a ban on trading posts in isthmuses where caribou formerly travelled between the Arctic Islands and the mainland. Hornby similarly advocated a ban on the establishment of all posts between Baker Lake and the East Arm of Great Slave Lake to protect the remnant muskoxen in the area and the thousands of caribou Hornby had seen along the Thelon River in July.²³ Three months later, the geologist G.H. Blanchet addressed the Advisory Board with the claim there was a surplus of bull caribou in the Northwest Territories, a situation he attributed to the preference among Native hunters for the hides of the females and the young to manufacture clothing. He strongly endorsed proposals that had been circulating among federal officials to find some sort of industrial occupation for the Inuit, such as white fox farming, the tanning of seal skins, or the production of ivory, to relieve the strain on the caribou and muskoxen herds.²⁴

Perhaps no other informant on the question of barren ground caribou conservation influenced federal wildlife officials more than the Danish explorer Knud Rasmussen. From 1921 to 1924, Rasmussen led the Fifth Thule Expedition, an archaeological and anthropological study of Inuit society across the Arctic. Shortly after the end of the expedition, Rasmussen appeared before a series of special Advisory Board meetings in late April and early May of 1925 to answer questions on the material and social life of the Inuit. His testimony clearly contradicted the image of a 'friendly' Arctic that Stefansson had been promoting in the public arena for several years. Rasmussen cited the yearly occurrence of starvation among the inland 'Caribou Eskimos' near Yakhed Lake, the common practice of infanticide among the Inuit, and the general misunderstanding of "white man's" laws against murder as evidence that cultural norms of the indigenous Arctic people were as harsh as the local climate.²⁵ With respect to the caribou,

²³ Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes 19 November 1925. RG 13, vol. 924, file 6101, pt. B, NAC. At the next month's Advisory board meeting, William Duval, who had lived on Baffin Island for forty-eight years, repeated Klengenber's concern about the impacts of coal smoke on the caribou. He recommended that no post be established without government approval, and a ban on the establishment of posts in fiords where the caribou spend the winter months. See Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 2 December 1925. Ibid.

²⁴ Advisory Board Minutes, 20 February 1926. RG 10, vol. 4085, file 496,658-1B, NAC. In October 1924, L.T. Burwash, an 'Exploratory Engineer' with the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch, supplied a major report to the Advisory Board on possible sources of alternative employment for the Inuit of Baffin Island. Burwash stressed in his report the importance of value added production, noting that a tanning industry for seal hides in the NWT would keep "many thousands of dollars" within the Dominion "which today go to European mercantile concerns." He also noted that an ivory tusk purchased at twenty cents per pound would fetch twenty to thirty times that amount if carved by Inuit artisans. See L.T. Burwash, Economic condition of the Eskimo in Baffin Island," 25 October 1924. Ibid.

²⁵ See Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 29 April 1925, 30 April 1925, 1 May 1925, 5 May 1925. Ibid. A report from the RCMP Inspector Stuart T. Wood on his time spent with Rasmussen on Herschel

Rasmussen repeated the now familiar charge that Native hunters engaged in wasteful slaughters of caribou at water crossings. Furthermore, the introduction of firearms and the burning of coal smoke along the Arctic Coast were having such a severe impact on the caribou that Rasmussen predicted none would be left in ten years. Although the Danish explorer did recommend the close regulation of caribou hunting at lake and river crossings and restrictions on the establishment of trading posts, he generally favoured modification of the Inuit economy as the most pragmatic approach to caribou conservation. He recommended the distribution of fish nets to communities in lake districts or coastal regions to prevent starvation and divert hunting pressure from the caribou. He was most emphatic, however, in his claim that the Inuit would become more “economical” and less wasteful if they abandoned caribou hunting for reindeer herding.²⁶ In general, Rasmussen preferred acculturation through missionary education rather than law enforcement as the best means to erase the social ‘pathologies’ (infanticide, murder, indiscriminate hunting, etc.) he associated with traditional Inuit culture. His was an entirely colonial vision of conservation, one that required a dramatic transformation of Inuit social and material life as means to protect the dying herds of barren ground caribou.²⁷

In keeping with Rasmussen’s recommendations (and those contained in the plethora of other reports outlining a serious decline in the barren ground caribou population), federal officials proposed a series of reforms to the game laws and several changes to the material culture of northern Native hunters throughout the latter part of the 1920s. In March 1925, the Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection passed a resolution calling for more research on wildlife conditions in the Canadian Arctic and the education of the Native population “along industrial lines” to divert hunting pressure from the caribou herds. The resolution also suggested a program of conservation education among Native hunters to reduce the wasteful exploitation of a valuable natural resource.²⁸ In addition, the Advisory Board took action to limit the impact of the trading posts along the Arctic Coast and on the Arctic Islands, unanimously recommending in March 1926 the extension of the Back’s River Game Preserve east and north to include the Arctic Islands.²⁹ When this new Arctic Islands Preserve was created in July, hunting, trapping, and trading privileges were extended only to Dene, Inuit, and ‘half-breed’ hunters who were pursuing their traditional livelihood; the Order in Council also included a clause granting the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories power to regulate the establishment of new trading posts throughout the area

Island suggested that the Danish explorer thought the Inuit held life very cheaply. Rasmussen’s assessment came only one month after two Inuit were hanged at Herschel Island for the murder of RCMP Cpl. Doak. An attempt was also made on Rasmussen’s life at the HBC post on the Kent Peninsula. See Wood, “Re: Knud Rasmussen – Explorer,” 30 April 1924. Ibid. For details on the high profile murder cases involving Inuit people see William Morrison, *Showing the Flag*, pp. 158-161. See also, “Commissioner’s Report, Royal Canadian Mounted Police,” Sessional Paper No. 21 (1923), pp. 35-43.

²⁶ See Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 29 April 1925, 1 May 1925. RG 10, vol. 4085, file 496,658-1B, NAC.

²⁷ For an overview of Rasmussen’s attitude to the Inuit, see his popular travelogue, *Across Arctic America: Narrative of the Fifth Thule Expedition* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1927).

²⁸ Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 30 March 1925. RG 10, vol. 4085, file 496,658-1B, NAC.

²⁹ Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 11 March 1926. RG 13, vol. 924, file 6101, pt. B, NAC.

under his jurisdiction.³⁰ The Advisory Board also condemned the export trade in caribou skins with an informal call for a ban on the practice at a meeting held on 15 January 1925. No clear action was taken on the issue until July 1926, when the Advisory Board approved a draft memo to the Northwest Territories Council requesting a ban on the traffic in caribou meat and skins over the strong objections of the Hudson's Bay Company.³¹ The Northwest Territories Council quickly approved the proposed amendment to the game regulations; in August 1926, an Order in Council was passed banning the export of caribou hides or meat from anywhere in the Northwest Territories.³²

Finnie also took the first step toward transforming the Inuit economy from hunting and gathering to pastoral herding during this period. In April 1926, he appointed the botanist A.E. Porsild to conduct a study of possible pasture areas near the Mackenzie Delta and Great Bear Lake for the development of a domestic reindeer industry in the Northwest Territories. Three years later, the federal government bought 3,400 reindeer from an Alaskan company, which were then herded over a remarkable five year period to a grazing area east of the Mackenzie River. The project was never much of a success: problems with animals straying and grazing on unsuitable lands ensured that the herds did not increase to the point where they were anything but a minor supplement to the food needs of the Inuit in the Aklavik area.³³ Taken together, however, all of these reforms represented a resolute attempt on the part of federal officials to address the concerns that had been brought before the Advisory Board. Many of the regulations, particularly those meant to control the establishment of new trading posts and limit the hunting and trapping activities of non-Native outsiders, and also the prohibitions on the export of caribou meat and skins from the Northwest Territories, were clearly meant to protect the interests of the Native population as well as limit the 'outside' commercial exploitation of caribou herds.³⁴ But other policy initiatives, such as the promotion of conservation education and the monumental task of herding reindeer all the way from Alaska, suggest that federal officials were more than willing to establish more direct forms of control over the local economy and material culture of Dene and Inuit hunters in order to protect the caribou population.

Of all the proposed changes to the game laws in the 1920s, perhaps none inspired as much enthusiasm among federal wildlife officials as the plan to regulate what many

³⁰ P.C. 1146, July 19, 1926 – Extracted from the *Canada Gazette* of July 21, 1926. Ibid.

³¹ Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 15 January 1925, 1 May 1925. RG 10, vol. 4085, file 496,658-1B, NAC. For the discussion of the draft memo to the NWT Council, see Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 20 July 1926. RG 13, vol. 924, file 6101, pt. B, NAC.

³² Order in Council P.C. 2265, *Canada Gazette* 60, 9 (28 August 1926), p. 595.

³³ See A.E. Porsild, *Reindeer Grazing in Northwest Canada: Report of an Investigation of Pastoral Possibilities in the Area from the Alaska-Yukon Boundary to Coppermine River* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1929). For a summary of the reindeer project up to the late 1970s, see Erhard Treude, "Forty Years of Reindeer Herding in the Mackenzie Delta, NWT," *Polarforschung* 45, 2 (1975), pp. 129-48.

³⁴ In the case of the Arctic Islands Preserve, it is clear that many Native communities in the NWT—and also the Catholic Bishop Gabriel Breynat—had been lobbying since the early 1920s for the creation of additional game preserves in the NWT that were exclusively for the use of Aboriginal hunters and trappers. For a discussion, see René Fumoleau, OMI, *As Long as this Land Shall Last, A History of Treaty 8 and 11, 1870-1939* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), pp. 245-50. See also Kerry Abel, *Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), pp. 194-95.

considered the most disturbing aspect of the crisis facing the barren ground caribou: the wasteful slaughters that Native hunters were reportedly inflicting on the herds. In addition to the previously mentioned reports of mass slaughters conducted by the Inuit of the Arctic regions, federal wildlife officials had also been deluged in the early 1920s with reports concerning wildlife massacres in the sub-arctic regions inhabited by Dene hunters. The source for many of these reports was the itinerant non-Native trappers who flooded into the region after the war. In March 1924, for example, John McDougal, the Superintendent of Wood Buffalo National Park, received several reports from non-Native trappers of excessive caribou slaughters at the east end of Lake Athabasca near Fond du Lac, Saskatchewan.³⁵ Four months later, Corporal W. H. Bryant reported that four trappers, Harfst, Mellendorf and the Hughes Brothers, had come to his office at Fort Fitzgerald to complain of ‘wantonly slaughtered’ caribou along the Talston River.³⁶ Similar reports also reached the general public through newspaper articles. In just one example, a story in the *Regina Leader* on 22 July 1926 cited the testimony of the trapper Barney Magnusson, who claimed that Native hunters near Fort Smith conducted several wanton caribou slaughters in the two years he lived in the area.³⁷ Such complaints against Native hunters prompted urgent calls among federal wildlife officials for a more exacting enforcement of the game regulations in areas near the southern border of the Northwest Territories. In response to the allegations of slaughter near Fond du Lac, both McDougal and Maxwell Graham recommended close co-ordination between federal agents and their provincial counterparts to curb the apparent excesses of the caribou hunt.³⁸

If the allegations of mass caribou killing began to set off alarm bells among federal wildlife officials, at least some observers doubted the authenticity of many caribou slaughter stories that were circulating throughout the Canadian North in the 1920s. Four days after the story about Magnusson appeared in the news, the *Winnipeg Free Press* ran a story claiming that northern trappers such as Bearcat Buckley, Old Man Mundy and Matt Murphy had “laughed” at the idea the caribou around Fort Smith were disappearing. In the case of the alleged Fond du Lac slaughters, the provincial police officer M. Chappuis conducted an investigation and concluded there was no evidence of a wasteful caribou slaughter, nor had he encountered any excessive killing over the past three years of patrolling the region.³⁹ Nonetheless, in the summer of 1927, the hunting practices of the Fond du Lac Natives near Selwyn Lake again became the subject of intense debate after the trappers Fred Riddle and A.G. McCaskill complained that Native hunters had conducted a large and wasteful caribou slaughter near Selwyn, Wholdaia, and Daly Lakes in the Northwest Territories, taking only the tongues from the dead animals. Once again, Chappuis investigated the complaints and found no evidence of a large caribou massacre in the region. In more general terms, Chappuis reported that the Maurice Band at Fond du Lac was “one of the most careful [group of] hunters that are to be found in the Northern

³⁵ McDougal to Finnie, 24 March 1924. RG 85, vol. 1087, file 401-22, pt. 1, NAC.

³⁶ Bryant to Officer Commanding, Mackenzie Sub-District, RCMP, 15 July 1924. Ibid.

³⁷ “Urges Action be Taken to Stay Slaughter of Cariboo,” *Regina Leader*, 22 July 1926. A clipping was found in RG 85, vol. 1087, file 401-22, pt. 1, NAC.

³⁸ See McDougal to Finnie, 24 March 1924. Ibid. Graham to Finnie, 29 April 1924. Ibid.

³⁹ A reference to Chappuis’ investigation was found in a letter from Graham to Finnie, 29 October 1924. Ibid.

Saskatchewan.”⁴⁰ Further investigation by the Indian Agent Gerald Card and the RCMP Constable R.H. Clewy revealed that even Riddle’s trapping partner, Oscar Johnson, denied that the two men had seen any caribou carcasses killed only for their tongues.⁴¹ In a similar case three years later, the trapper Peter Baker reported to the Wood Buffalo Park Superintendent John McDougal that Native hunters and white trappers had conducted an excessive caribou slaughter east of Fort Smith near Great Slave Lake. When Corporal Burstall of the RCMP was sent to investigate the allegations in May 1930, he found no signs of a wasteful slaughter. He reported that non-Native trappers had killed approximately five to six caribou each during the spring migration, while Native hunters had taken fifty to sixty per family, an amount Burstall considered “not excessive.”⁴² Certainly it is plausible that some individual Native hunters may have conducted the kind of wasteful slaughter that was described in the reports of the ‘outside’ trappers, but the extent to which many of the ‘overkill’ reports appear to be built on flimsy evidence or even outright falsehood suggests that both the danger of a collapse in the caribou population and the apparent need for more stringent conservation measures were overstated.

It is not entirely clear what might have prompted these trappers to produce inaccurate reports of caribou massacres. As noted previously, however, the 1920s were a period of intense competition between Native trappers and a growing population of Euro-Canadian trappers in the Northwest Territories.⁴³ Crying ‘foul’ over the issue of caribou slaughters may have been an attempt on the part of some non-Native hunters to undermine the legitimacy of the ‘special rights’ accorded to Native hunters in the Northwest Territories (i.e., no licensing requirements, exclusive access to preserves). At the very least, there is evidence of a generalized contempt for Native hunters in several reports of mass caribou slaughters. In July 1926, for example, *The Winnipeg Free Press* cited the testimony of three trappers, A.C. Spence, Peter Apsit and T. Hrobjartson, who suggested that Native hunters near The Pas, Manitoba were killing caribou “for the love of knocking them over,” as opposed to the white trappers, who “do not indulge in the lust for blood.”⁴⁴ E.J. Gaul, a trader on Baillie Island, also echoed the sentiments of many non-Native traders and trappers in 1928, when he testified to J.F. Moran, a special investigator for the Department of the Interior, that “the natural instinct of the Eskimo is to kill—he will not conserve the game.”⁴⁵

Considering the general negative sentiment toward Native hunters, it is possible that some accusations of excessive hunting may have been the product of the local rumour

⁴⁰ Riddle’s original complaint is contained in a letter he wrote to Finnie on 20 June 1927. Ibid. See also, “Report of A.G. MCCaskill, Trapper, Hinde Lake,” June 1927. Ibid. For the results of the provincial police investigation, see M. Chappuis to Gerald Card, 2 July 1927. Ibid.

⁴¹ See Const. R.H. Clewy, “Report re Complaint – Alleged Unlawful Slaughter of Caribou, Selwyn Lake District, Fond du Lac, Saskatchewan,” 22 July 1927. Ibid.

⁴² Cpl. Burstall, Report from Fort Smith Detachment to Officer Commanding, Great Slave Lake Sub-District, 10 May 1930. Ibid.

⁴³ Fumoleau, *op cit.*, pp. 239-41.

⁴⁴ “Northern Trappers Attest Magnusson’s Statement of Wanton Cariboo Slaughter” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 31 July 1926. A clipping of this article was found in RG 85, vol. 1087, file 401-22, pt. 1, NAC.

⁴⁵ “Evidence of E.J. Gaul, Baillie Island – Re: Caribou – J.F. Moran Report, 1928,” RG 85, vol. 798, file 6556, NAC.

mill. When Corporal Burstall questioned Peter Baker on his allegations of wasteful slaughters east of Fort Smith, the trapper “became very indefinite on the subject and eventually informed me that he had been told this. He could not tell me who had told him.”⁴⁶ In other cases, caribou that had been the victims of natural accidents, particularly mass drownings at a water crossing, may have been mistaken for carcasses killed and abandoned by Native hunters. Chappuis alluded to this possibility when he reported that hundreds of caribou had died on the thin ice of a lake northeast of Fond du Lac. Because of the frequent occurrence of this type of accident, the provincial police officer warned that it was folly to jump to any quick conclusions when one saw large amounts of dead caribou.⁴⁷ In a like manner, the discovery of over five hundred drowned caribou along the Hanbury River in the summer of 1929 during an RCMP expedition in search of the missing explorer John Hornby inspired the Indian Agent C. Bourget to declare that Native hunters should be absolved of the blame for needless caribou slaughters that had been foisted on them by “trappers and traders of small vision.”⁴⁸ Finally, there may have been a degree of misinterpretation of the caribou slaughters on the part of newcomers to the region who had never in their lives witnessed the large-scale hunting of a herd animal. When the trader G.E.G. Craig complained of an excessive slaughter in the Kugaryuak River district in April 1929, the investigating RCMP constable Richard Wild paraphrased the following statement from Mr. Purcell at the East Kugaryuak trading post: “to anyone not familiar with the conditions under which the natives have to live while inland, the amount of caribou they had killed might appear excessive, but when it is taken into consideration that this is their only means of subsistence outside of what supplies they may be able to get from the trading companies on debt, the amount killed was not very large.” Based on Wild’s reports, Inspector A.N. Eames concluded that, “the winter of 1928-29, when the slaughter was said to have taken place, was Craig’s first year on the Arctic Coast, and in all probability his first experience of caribou and the grounds which they are hunted.”⁴⁹

Such comments tend to support the notion that the widespread criticisms of the Dene and Inuit hunting methods in the 1920s were a product of the cultural prejudices of outsiders who had experienced revulsion at their first sight of a mass slaughter of large mammals. But what of the cultural biases of those who defended the hunts? Is it possible that the intimacy of non-Native police officers, Indian agents, and traders with the population of the Aboriginal communities in which they lived elicited a sympathetic tendency to deny and apologize for local incidents of over-hunting? Certainly the existence of sympathetic outsiders within Native communities was a relatively new social phenomenon in the North, one that did not exist as a counterweight to the accusations of Aboriginal overkill that the hunter-naturalists had circulated in the late nineteenth century. While it is tempting to conclude that the tendency of some local non-Natives to defend Aboriginal hunting practices was the product of a heightened cultural sensitivity in

⁴⁶ Cpl. Burstall, Report from Fort Smith Detachment to Officer Commanding, Great Slave Lake Sub-District, 10 May 1930. RG 85, vol. 1087, file 401-22, pt. 1, NAC.

⁴⁷ M. Chappuis to Gerald Card, 2 July 1927. Ibid.

⁴⁸ C. Bourget, “Report of the Treaty Trip of the Great Slave Lake Agency,” 9 September 1929. Ibid.

⁴⁹ Const. Richard Wild to Officer Commanding, Western Arctic Sub-district, 5 September 1929. Ibid. Inspector A.M. Eames, “Reported Slaughter of Caribou – East Kugaryuak District,” 6 May 1930. Ibid.

response to frequent contact with Native hunters, one cannot discount the possibility that local police officers, fur traders, and Indian agents may have occasionally turned a blind eye to incidents of excessive hunting as a means of maintaining good standing in their communities.⁵⁰ Although the body of evidence pointing to a specious origin for many caribou slaughter reports that were issued in the 1920s and 1930s is too broad for them all to have been tainted by local biases, it is clear that there all ‘outside’ representations of Native hunters—whether as wanton killers or principled conservationists—must be treated with caution.⁵¹

Regardless of the general uncertainty surrounding the allegations of Aboriginal overkill that circulated throughout the Northwest Territories in the 1920s, there can be little doubt as to what side of the debate that federal wildlife officials chose to adopt as a foundation for the creation of wildlife policy in the region. In particular, the alleged slaughters east of Fond du Lac in the Selwyn Lake region became a rallying point for federal officials who supported stronger regulations to prevent the indiscriminate killing of

⁵⁰ Although there was little evidence of this phenomenon in the archival record, it is unlikely that the authors of police reports and Indian agency diaries would admit in official documents an overt bias toward the people who they were supposed to be supervising.

⁵¹ In addition to the reports already mentioned from the 1920s, the archival record contains many questionable reports of caribou slaughters made by non-Natives during the 1930s. The non-Native trapper W.F. Cooke reported in March 1935 that caribou carcasses were being left to rot near Rocher River. Two months later, the RCMP Constable at Fort Smith, W.T. James, reported that Cooke admitted he heard the story from Alexan King, who was “well known for carelessness handling the truth.” Other trappers informed James that there were only a few carcasses rotting along the Talston River that spring, probably the result of a few animals drowning in the rapids during the high water season. See the report of Cst. W.T. James, RCMP, Ft. Smith Detachment, 4 May 1935, *Ibid.* Also in March 1935, H.A. Swanson, a trader at Cameron Bay complained of caribou meat being left to rot in the district. The RCMP officer, Corporal J.H. Davies claimed, however, that he had found no evidence of meat being wasted nor any flagrant violations of the NWT game regulations in the area. See H.A. Swanson to Turner, 2 March 1935. *Ibid.* See also Corporal J.H. Davies, RCMP to Officer Commanding, Fort Smith, 15 November 1935. *Ibid.* In January 1938, a Canadian Press story about W.J. Windrum, a pilot with Canadian Airways, appeared in a variety of newspapers. Windrum claimed that the caribou herds had declined in northern Saskatchewan and adjacent areas in the NWT because Native hunters were slaughtering the herds indiscriminately and using the meat as bait on the trapline. Two months later, F.W. Schultz, the Inspector Commanding of the Prince Albert, Saskatchewan Sub-division, reported that his officers at the Goldfields detachment in northern Saskatchewan had investigated and reported no evidence of an indiscriminate slaughter in the region. See “Ruthless Slaughter,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 8 January 1938. A clipping was found in RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 2, NAC. See also F.W. Schultz, Inspector Commanding, Prince Albert S/Div to Officer Commanding, “F” Div, Saskatchewan, 16 February 1938. *Ibid.* In February 1939 one of the RCMP constables at Eskimo Point, E.E. Wilkinson, was highly critical of a claim made by the trapper George Lush that “Indians kill caribou as long as their ammunition will last.” Wilkinson questioned many of the Inuit hunters in the region, who said they had not seen any Indians in the region for quite some time. The police officer concluded that the information was hearsay, and that “these trappers are trying to make as much trouble for the Indians as possible, in order to keep them out of the district, as Lush stated once, they are a nuisance and should be prevented from coming into the Territories [from Manitoba].” See Constable E.E. Wilkinson, RCMP, Eskimo Point to Officer Commanding, Eastern Arctic Sub-Division, 18 February 1939. RG 85, vol. 1088, file 401-22, pt. 3, NAC. Finally, in a reversal of the usual pattern, a report that the non-Native trader Frank Conibear killed one hundred and twenty five caribou was dismissed by the local RCMP as a false rumour spread by Cree and Chipewyan hunters. See Constable G.E. Combe, RCMP, Fort Smith, Report, 10 February 1939. RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 2, NAC, and Sergeant F.V. Vernon, RCMP, Fort Chipewyan, Report, 6 February 1939. *Ibid.*

wildlife. In July 1927, W.H.B. Hoare responded to the complaints of Riddle and McCaskill with a recommendation to prohibit the killing of game in excess of personal needs.⁵² In September, the RCMP Commissioner Cortlandt Starnes also reacted to the alleged slaughters at Selwyn Lake with a proposal to restrict the slaughter of caribou in excess of immediate subsistence needs. One month later, Starnes suggested the addition of a statement to the game regulations emphasizing that Native hunters were not permitted to kill caribou during the closed season. According to the RCMP Commissioner, such a clause would help to discredit an idea that had arisen among Treaty Indians, particularly those living in the bush, that the Northwest Game Act did not apply to them.⁵³ Although there was at least one dissenting opinion among federal officials—Guy Blanchet of the Topographical Survey wrote to Finnie in July 1927 to support Chappuis' skepticism about the Selwyn Lake slaughters and also to suggest that protecting a trapped-out beaver and marten population from non-Native trappers who often used poison was the most pressing conservation problem in the region—the prevailing bureaucratic momentum was clearly moving in the opposite direction.⁵⁴

Indeed, by the end of the 1920s, curbing the 'excesses' of Native hunters on the caribou range became an administrative priority despite the absence of any clear evidence pointing to a systemic overkill of caribou in the Northwest Territories. On January 18th, 1928, Finnie wrote to Hoyes Lloyd, Secretary of the Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection to suggest that the reports emanating from the Selwyn Lake region had presented a "most alarming situation."⁵⁵ Six days later, the Advisory Board concluded that Finnie had presented "considerable evidence" in support of the allegations that wasteful slaughters were taking place in the area surrounding Selwyn, Wholdaia and Daly Lakes. Although Finnie was able to bolster his case somewhat with a photograph the RCMP had obtained from McCaskill depicting several dead caribou east of Fond du Lac, the meeting minutes suggest very little attention was afforded to Chappuis' contrary opinions, nor is there any record of the Saskatchewan police officer having been invited to attend the meeting. Furthermore, the photograph itself provides only inconclusive evidence of a massive and wasteful caribou slaughter; it shows only a few emaciated caribou that may have died for any number of reasons (see Plate 20). The Advisory Board nevertheless passed motion at the meeting in support of a regulation that would prevent the slaughter of caribou in excess of a hunter's personal requirements or those of his or her dependents.⁵⁶ On May 15th, 1929, a clause prohibiting the slaughter of caribou, moose and deer in excess of individual needs, one that also included a ban on killing most female ungulates with young at foot, was incorporated into a revised set of game regulations for the Northwest Territories. The new regulations were also telling, however, for what they omitted. Most importantly, the removal of the 'starvation clause' exempting Native hunters from the closed seasons, and also the lack of any specific regulation authorizing the widespread local trade in caribou meat, had suddenly created a situation where Dene or Inuit groups facing

⁵² Hoare to Finnie, 23 July 1927. Ibid.

⁵³ Starnes to Finnie, 20 September 1927. Ibid. Starnes to Finnie, 15 October 1927, Ibid.

⁵⁴ Blanchet to Finnie, 10 July 1927. Ibid.

⁵⁵ Finnie to Lloyd, 12 January 1928. Ibid.

⁵⁶ Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 18 January 1928. RG 13, vol. 924, file 6101, pt. A, NAC.

food shortages due to a regional or seasonal scarcity of caribou might not be able to obtain legally an out of season or bartered supply of caribou.⁵⁷

Native hunters clearly recognized this possibility: Finnie heard repeated and vigorous objections to the new restrictions during an exploratory journey down the Mackenzie River in the summer of 1929. The Northwest Territories Council responded to the pressure by recommending the legalization of the local trade in caribou and moose meat provided the hunter did not kill more animals than could be sold.⁵⁸ The subsequent amendments to the new regulations, which received approval from the federal cabinet in November, also allowed Inuit, Dene and Métis hunters the continued privilege of taking game during the closed season if they were in “dire need” of food and provided that no other source of sustenance was available.⁵⁹ If these changes did remove some of the more draconian measures in new game regulations, it was also apparent that killing caribou to satisfy mere hunger rather than actual starvation, even among people who were almost wholly dependent on ‘bush meat’ for food, could result in criminal sanctions and a possible prison term. The revisions to the game regulations in 1929 thus represented an unmistakable advance in what Peter Usher has described as the criminalization of subsistence in the Canadian North.⁶⁰ The definition of ‘dire need’ and of an optimal kill size were now at least nominally the province of federal law enforcement officers and not the people who had staked their very survival on the caribou herds for centuries.

Nonetheless, the actual impact of the new game regulations on the Native population of the Northwest Territories is difficult to gauge. There is some evidence to suggest that provisions against large slaughters and killing caribou out of season were only sporadically enforced. Up to the end of the Second World War, the federal government’s general caribou files contain records of only two charges being laid in the Northwest Territories for killing caribou out of season (both stemming from a single investigation at the community of Rae) and none for slaughters in excess of personal needs.⁶¹ While this

⁵⁷ The new regulations were drafted and approved at a special meeting of the Advisory Board on Wildlife protection held 29 April 1929. For the revisions to the NWT game regulations, see Order in Council P.C. 807, *Canada Gazette* 67, 47 (15 May 1929), p. 2079.

⁵⁸ The events leading up to the removal of the ban on the traffic in caribou meat are summarized in a letter from Austin L. Cumming to R.A. Gibson, 15 February 1938. RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 2, NAC. The local trade in caribou meat and skins had been conducted in the Northwest Territories at least since the first trading posts were established in the middle of the nineteenth century. Although caribou meat was certainly used to provide food for the non-Native population at the posts, the traders never developed large export markets for caribou products. The trade in skins and meat primarily served local areas where caribou had been in short supply. See John P. Kelsall, *The Migratory Barren-Ground Caribou of Canada* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1968), pp. 225-226. See also, Philip Godsell, *Arctic Trader: The Account of Twenty Years With the Hudson’s Bay Company* (New York: G. Putnam’s, 1932), pp. 275-76.

⁵⁹ Order in Council P.C. 2265, *Canada Gazette* 63, 23 (7 December 1929), p. 2079.

⁶⁰ Peter Usher, “Contemporary Aboriginal Land, Resource, and Environmental Regimes: Origins, Problems, and Prospects,” Report prepared for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Land Resource and Environment Regimes Project, February 1996. Found on the CD-ROM, *For Seven Generations: An Information Legacy of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*.

⁶¹ Const. Rivett, RCMP, to Officer Commanding, Ft. Smith Sub-Division, 15 August 1941. RG 85, vol. 1088, file 401-22, pt. 3, NAC. Four Native hunters were also prosecuted and fined for killing caribou out of season to feed their dogs at Fort Chipewyan, Alberta in April 1937. See H.W. McGill, Director of Indian Affairs, to

does not preclude the possibility of additional arrests, several RCMP reports from the 1930s suggest that Inuit hunters in the Coronation Gulf region were freely taking caribou during the spring and summer months of the closed season when large numbers of caribou were massed on their calving grounds near the Bathurst Inlet.⁶² Many RCMP officers were also clearly reluctant to enforce a law that placed such severe restrictions on the primary food source in the Northwest Territories. For example, the RCMP Corporal L. Basler found the members of a hunting camp near Rae killing caribou outside the closed season in April 1936, but considered it “highly inadvisable” to prosecute as the Chief Susie Abele assured him that the animals were their only means of subsistence.⁶³ In a broad sense, it is likely that Native hunters in the many small bush camps that dotted the northern landscape simply ignored the provisions of the 1929 game regulations and continued with their usual patterns of hunting and trapping as if nothing had changed. Furthermore, vague definitions of such concepts as ‘dire need,’ and when exactly a caribou slaughter could be described as excessive, added to the inherent difficulty of enforcing the new game regulations over such a wide area. When the game returns for the 1932 hunting season at Fort Rae revealed, for example, that several individual hunters had taken between one hundred and two hundred caribou, the Indian Agent C. Bourget was able to counter accusations of an illegal slaughter with the claim that all the caribou were used to feed large extended families and their dog teams.⁶⁴ On the other hand, there is some indication that government agents at larger settlements were able to establish some measure of control over Native hunters. At the community of Pagnirtung on Baffin Island, the RCMP Sergeant O.G. Petty reported in 1930 that he had never once ordered an Inuit hunter to follow the game regulations, but he had persuaded many to abandon the ‘wasteful’ practice of slaughtering pregnant females in the spring by reiterating the government’s fear that the surrounding country might someday be barren of game.⁶⁵ The new regulations were nevertheless strictly enforced at Aklavik in the late winter of 1933, where Native hunters had to request permission from the Medical Officer of Health, J.A. Urquhart, to hunt caribou out of season as a response to local food shortages.⁶⁶

Deputy Minister, 22 April 1937. RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 2, NAC. It was not until a meeting held in R.A. Gibson’s office among senior wildlife officials on 26 February 1947 that a formal decision was made to strictly enforce the closed season across all of the Northwest Territories. A report on this meeting, dated 27 February 1947, can be found in RG 85, vol. 1088, file 401-22, pt. 1, NAC.

⁶² See Constable S.E. Alexander, St. Roch Detachment, RCMP to Officer Commanding, Aklavik, 27 April 1937. RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 2, NAC. See also Acting Lance Corporal G. Abraham, Coppermine Detachment, RCMP, to Officer Commanding, Aklavik 6 May 1938. Ibid.

⁶³ Corporal L. Basler, RCMP, Rae Detachment to Officer Commanding, Rae Detachment, 28 April 1936. Ibid.

⁶⁴ For the game returns at Fort Rae for 1932, see H.E. Hume to Maj. MacBrien, Commissioner, RCMP, 4 May 1933. Ibid. Bourget’s response is contained in a letter to Hume dated 8 November 1933. Ibid.

⁶⁵ Sergeant O.G. Petty to Officer Commanding, RCMP, Ottawa, “Re: Sec. 31 – Game Regulations – Excessive Slaughter of Game By Natives,” 30 June 1930. RG 85, vol. 1087, file 401-22, pt. 1, NAC.

⁶⁶ Dr. J.A. Urquhart to H.E. Hume, 28 February 1933. Ibid. Permission for this request was granted. See Hume to Urquhart, 2 March 1933. Ibid. In November 1934, Urquhart claimed the appearance of a large caribou herd near Fort McPherson and Arctic Red River was due to the strict enforcement of the closed season within his district See Urquhart to Turner, 2 November 1934. RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 2, NAC.

There was one source of irony attached to this burgeoning encroachment of the new game regulations. Despite the new restrictions on the scale and season of the caribou hunt, the general policy of Indian Affairs during this period remained one of preserving the self-sufficient hunting and trapping economy as a hedge against expanding relief costs. The reports from government field agents and police officers are thus replete with accounts of warnings they had proffered against ‘wanton’ caribou hunting, but several also contain references to the apparent laziness of Native hunters in terms of providing enough food for their families. In June 1928, Corporal Starnes reported from the Fort Reliance RCMP detachment that he had gone to great pains to impart the government’s warnings against excessive caribou slaughters. But he also noted that many Native hunters in the area killed only four to five caribou at a time in the winter of 1927-28, even though the herds were abundant south of the Snowdrift River. Starnes was “forced to the conclusion that the local Indians are too lazy to slaughter many caribou... many camps I have visited had very little caribou meat on hand.”⁶⁷ In a like manner, the RCMP Sergeant O.G. Petty at Pangnirtung wrote in July 1930 that he had repeatedly discouraged the wasteful killing of caribou but had also “held out no hope of food to the lazy hunter.” Petty mused that “to some degree it will seem to the native, that we, who encouraged them to hunt, now to some degree try to prevent their hunting.”⁶⁸ Although the government’s mixed message on wildlife conservation was at least partly the result of a divergent emphasis on Native welfare and wildlife conservation within Indian Affairs and the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch, the contradictory notion of self-reliance within framework of state supervision over traditional hunting activities must have appeared to Native hunters as the outgrowth of a singular but perplexing colonial authority, one that added immeasurably to their frustration with the new game regulations.

Indeed, there is at least some scattered evidence to indicate that the changes to the regulations governing caribou hunting throughout the 1920s provoked anger and resentment in many Native communities. One early case suggests that even the mere hint of a change to the regulations was enough to bring a hostile response. In the summer of 1927, then-Corporal Petty reported that the Inuit population at Pangnirtung was ‘very upset’ because of a rumour suggesting that hunters would be subject to a bag limit of four caribou.⁶⁹ As mentioned above, Native hunters at Aklavik objected to the strict enforcement of the spring and autumn closed seasons (April 1–July 30; Oct. 1–Nov. 30) on caribou in their district, particularly during the months of October and November because the herds generally migrated through the area only for a few short days at this time of year. According to Dr. Urquhart, this policy had created hardship in his district during the autumn of 1928. To add insult to injury, Native hunters just across the border in the Yukon Territory were permitted to kill caribou in October. As a result, Native hunters were reportedly “not happy” at the prospect of having to obtain a non-resident hunting license to kill caribou on their traditional hunting grounds in the Richardson Mountains.⁷⁰ The issue

⁶⁷ Cpl. Starnes, RCMP, Reliance Detachment to Trundle, Officer Commanding, Great Slave Lake Sub-district, 1 June 1928. Ibid.

⁶⁸ Sgt. O.G. Petty, RCMP, Pangnirtung, to Officer Commanding, Headquarters, Ottawa, 31 July 1930. Ibid.

⁶⁹ Corporal O.G. Petty, RCMP, to Officer Commanding, 30 August 1927. Ibid.

⁷⁰ Dr. J.A. Urquhart, Medical Officer of Health, Aklavik, Annual Report, 29 January 1929, Ibid.

was finally resolved when a single closed season for caribou from March 1 to August 31 was established at a special meeting of the Advisory Board held in April 1929 to draft the new game regulations for the Northwest Territories.

But as much as this reform may have addressed some of the concerns of Native hunters in the Aklavik region (and also suggest at least some flexibility on the part of federal wildlife officials) the new closed season had the effect of banning the August hunt when caribou hides were at their prime for the manufacture of winter clothing.⁷¹ A report from the RCMP Corporal H.G. Nichols suggested, for example, that the closed season in August had caused unrest and deprivation among the Native population at Baker Lake.⁷² In all of these cases, one major reason for the objections to the new game regulations was the increased difficulty facing Dene and Inuit hunters when attempting to meet their basic material needs. Indeed, the new restrictions on caribou hunting could not have come at a worse time for Dene communities in the Mackenzie Valley. In the spring of 1928, a flu epidemic that swept through the region and killed several hundred people proved to be a disaster for the local hunting and trapping economy as many of the deceased were elders who carried vital knowledge of the bush life.⁷³ That same year, a three-year closed season was established on beaver, a mainstay of the local trapping economy.⁷⁴ When copies of the new game regulations were distributed down the Mackenzie River in the summer of 1929, the added restrictions on species such as caribou, moose and muskrat were almost too much to bear for Native communities. In July, Bishop Breynat wrote to the Minister of the Interior, Charles Stewart, to inform him that the new regulations were “causing great disappointment by provoking intolerable [sic] new hardships to Natives... I feel it is my duty to quiet our Natives and tell them that no human law can prevent them from honestly seeking life necessities for themselves and families in their own country.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ The ban on the summer hunt for skins was implemented at the behest of R.M. Anderson, who felt the hunt was wasteful. See Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 29 April 1929. RG 10, vol. 4085, file 496,658-1, pt. 4, NAC.

⁷² Corporal H.G. Nichols, Baker Lake, to Officer Commanding, Headquarters, Ottawa, 31 July 1931. RG 85, vol. 1087, file 401-22, pt. 1, NAC. The RCMP Commissioner J.H. MacBrien nevertheless sided with the opinion of Sergeant Wight at Chesterfield Inlet and his direct superior, Inspector Belcher, who both feared a revival of the skin trade if the closed season was re-opened in the late summer. MacBrien also concluded that there would have been more reports from RCMP detachments if the regulation had caused a general hardship. See MacBrien to Finnie, 8 December 1931. Ibid. The proposal to open the season did have some support within the federal bureaucracy. Richard Finnie, an administrator who had a wide experience in the North, claimed that caribou hides were unsuitable for clothing in September. See Finnie to J.A. Urquhart, 22 December 1931. Ibid. Even the staunch conservationist W.H.B. Hoare recommended that the caribou season be opened in August. See Hoare to O.S. Finnie, 14 September 1931. Ibid.

⁷³ Abel, *op cit.*, pp. 197-99. See also George Blondin, *Yamoria the Lawmaker: Stories of the Dene* (Edmonton: NeWest, 1997), pp. 38-39; June Helm, *The People of Denendeh: Ethnohistory of the Indians of Canada's Northwest Territories* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), pp. 140-43.

⁷⁴ Native trappers were allowed to take limited amounts of beaver as a relief measure on an *ad hoc* basis. See Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 10 March 1927. RG 13, vol. 924, file 6101, pt. A, NAC.

⁷⁵ Breynat also wrote to Finnie and Duncan Campbell Scott on 3 July 1929. In his telegram to Scott, Breynat wrote, “after carefully reading the new Game Act I cannot but fully concur with Inspector Parker’s criticism of same and for humanity’s sake you must insist that steps be immediately taken to bring necessary relief to our Indians whose preservation should appeal to the Government as much as the preservation of wild animals.” All three telegrams are quoted in Fumoleau, *op cit.*, p 283.

But Dene hunters did not only oppose the new game regulations because they contributed to growing material deprivation within the Mackenzie Valley. At the Treaty gatherings of 1929 and 1930, there was a notable air of discontent over the numerous game regulations that had been introduced since 1923, not only because they made it difficult to gather fur and meat but also because they appeared to violate the hunting and trapping rights guaranteed in Treaty 8 and Treaty 11. In his report on the Treaty gatherings held in 1929, Indian Agent Bourget suggested that Dene communities up and down the Mackenzie Valley had invoked their Treaty rights in their criticisms of the game laws:

the same motto was repeated to the Department agent viz: that the Government had promised the Indians that they would hunt and trap forever, as long as the sun would shine and many more rhetorical flowers, but that in spite of all that, every year there was new regulations and restrictions, so much so that they were always anxious to know what would be the next one. At some posts it was difficult to explain these points to their satisfaction.⁷⁶

Clearly there was a political dimension to the discord over the expanding system of game regulations in the Northwest Territories. The treaties had guaranteed Dene hunters a right to pursue their “usual vocations” of hunting, trapping and fishing in perpetuity subject to “regulations as may from time to time be made by the Government of the country.” By the end of the 1920s, however, state regulation and control over wildlife matters north of the sixtieth parallel had expanded to the point where many Dene hunters felt that this guaranteed right had been compromised. The restrictions on caribou were particularly important in this regard because the species was by far the most important source of subsistence for Native communities living along the migration routes. For many Native hunters the expansion of federal control over the caribou hunt in the 1920s constituted a particularly blatant abrogation of their right to a livelihood on traditional lands. Even if the government’s conservation policies were at times couched in the benevolent idea of conserving the caribou supply as a means to maintain the self-reliance of the Native hunter, the crux of the matter for many northern Aboriginal people remained the issue of who rightfully controlled access to the caribou herds and not just the maintenance of an adequate numbers to satisfy immediate material needs.

Caribou and the Mining Frontier

Managing the impacts of the hunting and trapping economy in the Canadian North was not the only administrative dilemma facing federal wildlife official at the beginning of the 1930s. In 1932, silver and pitchblende were discovered east of Great Bear Lake and, one year later, gold deposits were found on the north shore of Great Slave Lake. The ensuing mineral rush precipitated a dramatic transformation of the northern economy: small hydro-electric dams were built, the oil fields at Norman Wells were re-opened, supplies were rushed in by air and steamship, and hundreds of non-Native prospectors and labourers

⁷⁶ C. Bourget, “Report of the Treaty Trip of the Great Slave Lake Agency,” 9 September 1929. RG 85, vol. 1087, file 401-22, pt. 1, NAC.

began to pour into the region. The advent of an industrial economy in the Northwest Territories also dramatically altered the character of several settlements in the region. The growth of small trading posts such as Aklavik—the terminus of the Mackenzie River transportation network—and new mining communities such as Port Radium and Yellowknife brought small towns to the Northwest Territories where there had only been trading posts. For the first time, modern amenities such as hotels and restaurants appeared in the North. How to reconcile the needs of this new industrial economy with the older hunting and trapping life pursued by Native and some non-Native people became one of the primary questions facing the northern administration in the 1930s.⁷⁷ In particular, the issue of meeting the subsistence needs of Native people and also placating the demands of miners, prospectors and restaurant owners for access to the most readily available local source of food—the barren ground caribou—became the subject of a pivotal debate among federal officials during this period.

On November 21st, 1933, Jimmy Soldat, Chief of the Dene band at Fort Norman, reported to the local RCMP Constable that a white man had been seen illegally killing caribou near Great Bear Lake within the boundary of the Yellowknife Game Preserve. On November 24th J.A. English, the RCMP Constable at Cameron Bay, interviewed Oscar Burnstad, a foreman for the El Dorado Mining Company, who readily admitted killing eight caribou but claimed the hunting was legal under the authority of his miner's license. English charged Burnstad with the crime of killing caribou without a license; on November 26th he was convicted and fined one hundred and fifty dollars.⁷⁸ The case prompted an angry response from the burgeoning mining community in the Northwest Territories. Two days after the conviction, the President of the Northwest Territories Prospectors' Association, Herbert Beresford, wrote to H.H. Rowatt, Deputy Minister of the Interior, to protest Burnstad's conviction and complain that the government's refusal to allow miners and prospectors to kill game except in cases of dire need had created hardship among his members. Although miners and prospectors could legally buy caribou from Native hunters, Beresford claimed this arrangement was inadequate because the Natives seldom killed more caribou than their families could use. According to Beresford, the membership of his organization almost unanimously agreed that permitting miners and prospectors to take a few caribou each year would not adversely affect the herds.⁷⁹

The source of the swelling discontent over the Burnstad case was series of policy measures the federal government had introduced almost two years earlier to protect the game supply of the Northwest Territories from the influx of non-Native industrial workers. At a meeting of the Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection held in February 1932, the

⁷⁷ See Morris Zaslow, *The Opening of the Canadian North, 1914-1967* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), pp. 174-202. According to Zaslow, from 1941-1931, the non-Native population in the northwest Territories increased from 782 to 2,400 people, roughly twenty per cent of the total (see p. 1860).

⁷⁸ Cst. J.A. English, RCMP Report, Fort Smith Sub-Division, 28 November 1933. RG 85, vol. 851, file 7856, NAC.

⁷⁹ Herbert G. Beresford, Pres., NWT Prospectors Assn., to H.H. Rowatt, 28 November 1933. *Ibid.* Burnstad was even more forthright than Beresford. He wrote to John McDougal, the District Agent at Fort Smith, to advise that a fresh supply of meat was vital in northern mining communities, and “that both the fine and trial do not seem in keeping with the recognized standards of British Justice.” See Burnstad to McDougal, 24 January 1934. *Ibid.*

Catholic Bishop Gabriel Breynat had pleaded with federal officials to prohibit any additional 'outside' trappers from entering the NWT and competing with the Natives. According to Breynat, the non-Native trappers used longer traplines than their non-Native competitors; poison and airplanes were also common tools of the trade among the 'outside' trappers. Breynat also claimed that the miners going into the Great Bear Lake region would further compete with Native people for fur and game animals.⁸⁰ Although the Advisory Board did not pass any immediate resolution to respond to Breynat's appeal, the Northwest Territories Council passed a resolution two weeks later recommending the restriction of the issue of hunting and trapping licenses only to those who qualified as residents of the Northwest Territories (i.e., four years living in the NWT) or those who had previously held licenses. In November, the NWT Council decided to limit the issue of hunting and trapping licenses only to those non-Natives who were residents of the Northwest Territories before June 30th, 1932. In effect, no newcomers to the region were permitted to hunt big game or trap fur animals under this new policy except in cases of dire need.⁸¹

In spite of the new ruling, the mining community at Cameron Bay appears simply to have ignored the game regulations that winter. In April 1933, several newspapers reported a large caribou slaughter in the Great Bear Lake region. Although the major source of the story, a miner named Bernard Day, claimed that Native hunters were entirely responsible for the slaughter, a subsequent investigation by the RCMP Sergeant E.G. Baker and the District Agent MacKay Meikle revealed that it was the miners who had illegally killed large numbers of caribou. Sgt. Baker recommended that posters be distributed defining the precise meaning of 'dire need' and emphasizing that lawbreakers would be "rigorously prosecuted."⁸² The miners at Cameron Bay did, however, receive sympathetic consideration from some federal officials. J.P. Richards, a senior wildlife official within the Dominion Lands Board, recommended that a special license could be issued allowing miners to take limited quantities of big game.⁸³ The Medical Officer of Health at Cameron Bay, T.O. Byrnes, wrote to the Minister of the Interior, T.G. Murphy, suggesting that a diet of preserves was insufficient for the miners and that they be permitted to supply their own food needs until fresh meat could be imported.⁸⁴ Conversely, the RCMP Superintendent for the region, T.H. Irvine, was adamantly opposed to the extension of special hunting and trapping rights to non-Native miners. He alleged that the mining community at Cameron Bay had made no effort to import food staples and recommended that the caribou herds be granted protection from new mining communities "in the interests of the native."⁸⁵ The Northwest Territories Council reached a compromise on the issue in November 1933 when it was decided that non-Natives

⁸⁰ Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 29 February 1932. RG 10, vol. 4085, file 496,658-1, pt. 4, NAC.

⁸¹ For a summary, see J.P. Richards to H.E. Hume, Chair, Dominion Lands Board, 7 October 1933. RG 85, vol. 1087, file 401-22, pt.1, NAC.

⁸² Sgt. E.G. Baker, RCMP Report, "Slaughter of Cariboo – Great Bear Lake," 11 August 1933. Ibid.

⁸³ Richards to H.E. Hume, 26 September 1933. Ibid.

⁸⁴ Byrnes to Murphy, 26 August 1933, Ibid.

⁸⁵ Report of Superintendent T.H. Irvine, Officer Commanding, "G" Division to RCMP Commissioner J.H. MacBrien, 24 October 1933. Ibid.

would once again be permitted to obtain hunting and trapping licenses after four years' residence in the Northwest Territories.⁸⁶ The concession had little immediate impact on the disgruntled mining community, however, as the conviction of Oscar Burstad that same month renewed demands for hunting and trapping licenses to be issued to miners. In December 1933, the Northwest Territories Prospectors' Association requested amendments to the game regulations allowing miners and prospectors to kill a limited number of caribou.⁸⁷ That same month, the issue was discussed again at a Northwest Territories Council; the consensus of the membership was that any extension of hunting privileges to non-Natives would diminish the game supply for Dene and Inuit hunters.⁸⁸ Once again, however, the miners received support for their claim from some government officials. The Indian Agent at Fort Chipewyan, Harry Lewis, professed that wolves killed ten times the caribou taken by human hunters; a small increase in human hunting pressure would pale in comparison to this level of destruction. The Indian Agent at Fort Simpson, W.R.M. Truesdell, was more reserved than Lewis, remarking that white men who had been given permission of hunting in the territories "have invariably abused the privilege and killed far more than they need." Truesdell advocated a policy granting non-Native hunters the privilege of taking one or two caribou per year, but also emphasized that sufficient supplies must be brought into the country to feed the mining settlements. Finally, Inspector Irvine maintained his vehement objections to proposed policy change, arguing that "the White Settler goes into the country with one intention of getting all he can out of it and putting as little as possible back."⁸⁹ In March 1934, the Northwest Territories Council decided to maintain the status quo: non-Native miners could only obtain local fresh meat from Native hunters (or other holders of a valid hunting license), preferably at a fair price so that Native hunters would be provided with "an incentive to work."⁹⁰

The tacit support this decision granted to the development of a market hunt for caribou meat is surprising in retrospect, particularly in light of vehement disdain that most North American wildlife conservationists held toward this 'lower class' practice

⁸⁶ See H.H. Rowatt to H.H. MacBrien, 28 November 1933. Ibid.

⁸⁷ See Rowatt to MacBrien, 27 December 1933. Ibid.

⁸⁸ Rowatt to Dr. Harold McGill, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 27 December 1933. Ibid.

⁸⁹ Harry Lewis to the Secretary of Indian Affairs, 19 January 1934. Ibid. Truesdell to the Secretary of Indian Affairs, 2 March 1934. T.H. Irvine, Officer Commanding, 'G' Division, to the Commissioner, RCMP, 8 December 1933. RG 85 C-1-a vol. 851, file 7856, NAC.

⁹⁰ Extract of Minutes of the Fifty-first Session of the Northwest Territories Council held on Thursday, 15th March, 1934. RG 85, vol. 1087, file 401-22, pt. 1. NAC. Although the Northwest Territories Prospectors' Association continued to lobby for a yearly caribou quota for its members, the District Agent at Fort Smith, John McDougal, reported that mining interests traveling down the Slave River promised they would respect the regulations and obtain caribou from Native hunters. For a record of McDougal's discussions with miners passing through Fort Smith, see "Extract from the Minutes of the Fifty-second Session of the Northwest Territories Council held on Friday, May 4, 1934." RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 2, NAC. At a meeting of the NWT Prospectors' Association held in August 1934, a resolution was passed requesting a yearly quota of ten caribou for married men and five for single miners. The proposal was rejected at a NWT Council meeting held 17 October 1934. See Extract from the Minutes of the Fifty-Third Session of the Northwest Territories Council held on Oct. 17, 1934. Ibid.

sine the late nineteenth century.⁹¹ One might reasonably argue that a strictly enforced small bag limit for non-Native miners would have provided more effective protection of the caribou supply than a market system permitting unrestricted amounts of legally killed caribou to be sold to mining communities. Indeed, by the latter half of the 1930s, severe criticism of the commercial trade had emerged: the Hudson Bay Company's Fur Trade Commissioner Ralph Parsons complained that almost eight thousand caribou were sold at two mining camps; J.P. Richards argued in 1938 that the caribou trade at Yellowknife constituted a "serious drain" on the herds.⁹² Roy Gibson, Deputy Commissioner of the NWT Council and the head of the northern administration, defended the commercial hunt based on the idea that it was in the public interest to afford Native hunter an opportunity to earn cash income rather than depend on relief. Although Gibson later had second thoughts about the impact of the commercial slaughter, in 1936 he concluded that caribou herds hunted near large mining communities were not threatened because they would likely develop an "intuitive sense" of which areas to avoid during future migrations.⁹³

Clearly the northern administration had stepped back somewhat from its fervent pursuit of strict caribou protective regulations in the late 1920s. It is possible that administrative changes that had reduced the Northwest Territories and Yukon branch to a mere bureau within the Dominion Lands Board in 1931—a move that precipitated the departure of the dedicated wildlife conservationist O.S. Finnie—reduced both the available resources and general enthusiasm for the development and enforcement of new conservation measures in the Canadian North. For many northern administrators and field officers, the demands of the non-Native mining community for fresh meat were as important an administrative priority as conserving the caribou. Even the biologist C.H.D. Clarke—one of the first trained scientists to study the caribou and a staunch defender of the 'wilderness value' of the caribou—declared that the commercial activities of Native hunters were "a great aid to development," and the "presence of the caribou herds a great boon to the mining development, which is the white man's portion in this country."⁹⁴ Although the distribution of meat to mining communities was not quite on the scale of earlier proposals for a full-scale caribou industry in the Northwest Territories, the northern administration clearly still believed that the commercialization and conservation of wildlife were reconcilable goals. What had once been the white man's burden in the North—the preservation of the world's last great population of herd animals—was now part of white man's claim stake in this new mining frontier.

⁹¹ Market hunting had, in fact, been banned in much of Canada and the United States by the early twentieth century. For a discussion of market hunting, see James Tober, *Who Owns the Wildlife? The Political Economy of Conservation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981). pp. 52-58.

⁹² Ralph Parsons, to R.A. Gibson, Director, Lands, Parks and Forests Branch, 16 June 1936. RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 2, NAC. Richards cited mounted police reports detailing traffic in caribou meat well in excess of ten thousand pounds to support his contention. According to Richards, caribou meat was selling at Yellowknife for fifteen cents per pound as opposed to seventy cents for imported beef. See J.P. Richards to A.L. Cumming, 30 November 1938. Ibid.

⁹³ Gibson to Ralph Parsons, 22 June 1936. Ibid.

⁹⁴ C.H.D. Clarke, *A Biological Investigation of the Thelon Game Sanctuary*, p. 112.

Fish, Guns, and Education

In spite of the support among some policy makers in Ottawa for the expansion of the commercial caribou hunt to feed the new mining settlements, federal wildlife officials still attempted to establish control measures on Dene and Inuit hunting practices throughout this same period. The focus of wildlife conservation policy in the Northwest Territories nevertheless shifted perceptibly during this period, moving away from rigorously enforced game regulations toward indirect measures designed to influence the hunting practices and material culture of Dene and Inuit communities. Non-regulatory initiatives such as the encouragement of fishing, the development of alternative employment, and the promotion of alternative food sources for dogs, were all part of a broad program of conservation education aimed at Dene and Inuit hunters in the 1930s. In part, this move away from regulation toward subtle coercion was a product of administrative pragmatism. Both financial and human resources were extremely scarce throughout the Depression and the war years. A comprehensive system of vigorously enforced game laws that might have seemed possible in the 1920s as northern RCMP outposts regularly sprang up in the Northwest Territories now seemed almost a pipe dream as detachments were closed and the number of police officers reduced during the following decade.⁹⁵ But the implementation of conservation education programs in the 1930s was not simply a move toward bureaucratic efficiency. The ‘education’ of Native people in the art of fishing or in the execution of ‘proper’ hunting methods also represented the first attempts of the federal government to fundamentally alter the subsistence cultures and economies of Native northerners. Beginning in the 1930s, Native hunters were not longer subject only to the control mechanism of formal game regulations; they were also subjects to coercive forms of instruction and supervision designed to shape their subsistence cultures in conformity with the conservation agenda of the federal wildlife bureaucracy.⁹⁶

In January 1934, the Department of the Interior issued a questionnaire to field agents and several non-Native resident trappers in the Northwest Territories asking for opinions on the status of the barren ground caribou. One overwhelming response from both government agents and non-Native trappers was that too much caribou meat was being ‘wasted’ as dog feed on Native traplines. Dr. Urquhart professed, for example, that the Dene at Aklavik “do not look ahead to any extent and if they do not fish in September and early October they do not put up enough fish to feed their too numerous dogs with the result that without exception, by Christmas they are feeding cooked oatmeal to their dogs that they should be feeding to their children.”⁹⁷ Peter McCallum, a trapper and former

⁹⁵ From 1930 to 1938, the size of the RCMP force in the NWT declined from ninety-eight to eighty personnel. In the Mackenzie Valley alone, three detachments were closed and the personnel reduced from fifty-two to thirty-one people. For a summary, see Zaslow, *op cit.*, pp. 192-93.

⁹⁶ To use Michel Foucault’s terms, the education programs marked the beginning of an attempt to control Native hunters not simply as objects of modern power (i.e., regulation, enforcement, punishment). They also marked the beginning of an attempt to diffuse power through the most elemental aspects of daily life in Dene and Inuit communities (i.e., food choices, modes of production, material culture). See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1977), pp. 135-149.

⁹⁷ Urquhart to J. Lorne Turner, Chair, Dominion Lands Board, 31 January 1934. RG 85, vol. 1087, file 401-22, pt. 1, NAC. In contrast to his previous position on opening the closed season on Caribou in October and

buffalo ranger at Fort Smith, likewise indicated that “some supervision should be insisted on to prevent too many caribou being killed for dog feed when plenty of fish [are] available in lakes.” Other trappers—R. Lacombe and A.N. Blake at Aklavik—complained that Native hunters did not cache downed caribou properly, leaving much of the meat to the wolves and foxes. In summarizing all of this testimony for his superiors, J.P. Richards concluded that Native hunters had made no “serious” attempt to feed their dogs with this source of sustenance, despite the fact the majority of rivers and lake in the NWT were apparently well stocked with fish.⁹⁸

As the above testimony suggests, many Dene and Inuit communities did unquestionably prefer hunting caribou to fishing. But those who accused Native hunters of not bothering to catch an adequate supply of fish may have underestimated the importance of this secondary food source. Dene and Inuit hunters at various locations traditionally caught large amounts of fish, particularly when such species as whitefish and lake trout were at their most abundant during the autumn spawning season. Large catches were often frozen or dried, and fish served as an important food source for dogs during the summer and autumn season when trapping groups were relatively immobile. At the same time, however, the critics of Dene and Inuit subsistence strategies may have overestimated the amount of fish available on a seasonal basis and the practical difficulties involved in using this particular form of sustenance on the trapline. With the advent of the winter trapping season, both dogs and humans remained on the move; packing large amounts of preserved fish or stopping frequently to chisel holes and set nets in frozen rivers and lakes where catches were not abundant was likely not effective as a subsistence strategy when compared to killing a moose or caribou opportunistically along the trapline and sharing the spoils between humans and dogs.⁹⁹

Once again, however, government field staff and senior wildlife officials in Ottawa chose to rely on the anecdotal information provided by non-Native trappers rather than make any serious effort to understand the social and ecological conditions governing Dene and Inuit subsistence practices. Although the importance of caribou as a source of dog feed while on the trapline was generally recognized (and thus not subject to prosecution), R.A. Gibson endorsed a suggestion in November 1934 to indict—under the regulation

November, Urquhart strongly advocated closing the caribou season in September so that Dene hunters would be forced to catch a supply of fish for the winter. His recommendation was rejected because it might provoke ‘considerable opposition’ among local Native hunters. See Turner to Urquhart, 30 October 1933. Ibid.

⁹⁸ The comments of the three trappers are recorded in Richards’ summary. See Richards to H.H. Rowatt, Deputy Minister, 11 April 1934. Ibid.

⁹⁹ See Margaret W. Morris, “Great Bear Lake Indians: A Historical Demography and Human Ecology,” pt. 1, *The Musk-Ox* 11 (1972), pp. 12-13; Henry S. Sharp, “The Caribou-Eater Chipewyan: Bilaterality, Strategies of Caribou Hunting and the Fur Trade,” *Arctic Anthropology* 14, 2 (1977), pp. 35-40; James G.E. Smith, “Economic Uncertainty in an ‘Original Affluent Society’: Caribou and Caribou Eater Chipewyan Adaptive Strategies,” *Arctic Anthropology* 15, 1 (1978), pp. 71-72. Although comprehensive statistical information is lacking, Inspector Christianson with Indian Affairs reported in August 1936 that virtually all dog food at Fort Norman, Fort Good Hope, Aklavik and Simpson was made up of fish, while fish comprised fifty percent of dog feed at Fort Resolution, ten percent at Reliance and twenty five percent at Rae and Yellowknife. See “Extract of Report of Inspector Christenson, Dept. of Indian Affairs. 18 August 1936. RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 2, NAC.

prohibiting slaughter in excess of personal needs—trappers who hauled caribou meat back to their base camp for use as dog feed.¹⁰⁰ In June 1935, a more general notice was distributed throughout the Northwest Territories warning that “the use of the meat of moose or deer for dog feed in districts where fish or other kinds of food for dogs are available is not permitted.”¹⁰¹ Two years later, four Native hunters from Fort Chipewyan, Alberta were fined for killing caribou to feed their dogs while on a hunting foray in the Northwest Territories. Even H.W. McGill, the Director of Indian Affairs and normally a defender of subsistence harvesting, concluded that the four Indians were “too lazy to put up fish in the fall” and thus “they deserved no sympathy.”¹⁰² The Advisory Board on Wildlife protection also considered limiting each Native hunter in the NWT to seven dogs in February 1938 after a report from the RCMP Constable S.E. Alexander described an Inuit camp of eight families with almost two hundred dogs in the Bathurst Inlet region.¹⁰³ Although the proposal never became official policy, informal efforts to limit the amount of caribou used for dog feed remained a key pillar of the caribou conservation program until snowmobiles came into widespread use three decades later.

Proposals to alter the subsistence strategies of Native hunter were not limited, however, to the question of animal feed. Federal officials also actively promoted the idea that human population of the Northwest Territories should replace caribou with fish protein as a conservation measure. A major proponent of this policy was Dr. J.A. Urquhart, who continually pressed Native hunters in the Aklavik region to forego caribou hunting during the September fish runs. In the autumn of 1934, Urquhart became embroiled in a heated dispute with the Indian Agent, W.R.M. Truesdell, who allowed Native hunters to take two caribou each at Arctic Red River during the summer closed season because he believed their summer supply of rabbits and fish had failed. Urquhart vigorously opposed Truesdell’s decision, claiming that there were no shortages at Arctic Red River, and that it “was not a hardship” to expect the Natives to survive on fish for nine to ten weeks.¹⁰⁴ Urquhart’s superiors enthusiastically supported his efforts to uphold the game regulations; his policy of encouraging fishing over hunting during the summer months in the Aklavik region also received tacit support at the most senior levels of the northern administration. For example, R.A. Gibson wrote to T.R.L. MacInnes, Secretary of Indian Affairs, in the spring of 1937 to remind him that increased fish production in Native communities was an important caribou conservation strategy; if the Natives did not like fish, Gibson suggested, they could take the trouble to make dry meat during the open season. A.L. Cumming, the Superintendent of the Mackenzie District, similarly wrote that “it is not too much to ask the Indians to put up sufficient meat for their needs or to supplement the same with fish or

¹⁰⁰ R.A. Gibson to H.W. McGill, Deputy Superintendent General, Indian Affairs, 26 November 1934. Ibid.

¹⁰¹ “Public Notice,” 20 June 1935. Ibid.

¹⁰² H.W. McGill, Director of Indian Affairs to Gibson, 22 April 1937. RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 1, NAC.

¹⁰³ Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes. 7 February 1938. RG 22, vol. 4, file 14, NAC; Cst. S.E. Alexander to Officer Commanding, Western Arctic Sub-Division, 27 April, 1937. RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 2, NAC.

¹⁰⁴ Urquhart to J. Lorne Turner, 14 July 1934. Ibid.

rabbits during the three summer months when the protected species require complete protection if they are to survive.”¹⁰⁵

In addition to the exertion of control over the seasonal diet of the Dene and Inuit, federal officials also considered exerting control over the tools of the northern caribou hunt during this period. In the spring of 1937, a popular article authored by the trader Philip Godsell and an extensive report from the RCMP Constable S.E. Alexander at the St. Roch Detachment near Bathurst Inlet added to a sense of alarm among federal wildlife officials. While both of these reports cited several factors that were to blame for mass caribou slaughters in the Coronation Gulf region (i.e., the renewal of the hide trade, the excessive use of caribou for dog feed), they noted in particular the apparent detrimental impacts of high-powered and repeating rifles on the caribou.¹⁰⁶ As with earlier cases, however, there is some evidence to suggest that Godsell and Alexander’s wholesale condemnation of the caribou hunt in the Coronation Gulf region was based on questionable assumptions. In April 1938, Corporal G. Abraham was sent from the Coppermine RCMP detachment to investigate the caribou hunt near Bathurst Inlet. He reported no incidents of waste among the Inuit hunters; even the meat from caribou whose hides were sold was used. Abraham believed that the “greatly exaggerated” stories of wasteful slaughters had arisen because many individual hunters killed far more caribou than they could use, but then distributed the meat among families who were less fortunate.¹⁰⁷ Regardless, federal wildlife officials chose to accept the claims of Godsell and Alexander before further study of the situation in Coronation Gulf could be completed. On February 7th, 1938, the Advisory Board on responded to the two reports with a resolution calling for measures to control the distribution of high powered guns and repeating rifles.¹⁰⁸ On this issue, however, the Advisory Board was wholly out of touch with the opinion of federal field agents in the Northwest Territories. When field officers were asked to respond to a questionnaire on caribou conservation that was distributed in June 1939, most warned *against* the use of low calibre such as .22s and single shot rifles because such weapons would allow an inordinate number of wounded caribou to escape capture and die without ever being used for food.¹⁰⁹ Based on the responses to the questionnaire, the Advisory Board passed a resolution at a meeting held in March 1939 suggesting that lack of consensus over the issue of firearms had hampered any new reforms to the game laws. “In view of the opinions of field

¹⁰⁵ Gibson to MacInnes, 2 April 1937. Ibid. Cumming to Gibson, 22 June 1937. Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ See Philip Godsell, “The Passing of the Caribou,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, Magazine Section, 13 March 1937, p. 3; Constable S.E. Alexander, RCMP, St. Roch Detachment to Officer Commanding, Western Arctic Sub-Division, Aklavik, 27 April 1937. RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 2, NAC. Although not cited by the Advisory Board during their meeting in February 1938, a second popular article blaming the excessive caribou slaughter on high powered rifles and the tendency of Native hunters to go ‘berserk’ when faced with a large herd appeared in June 1937. The author, George Anderson, was a member of the fur trade staff for the Hudson’s Bay Company in the Nelson River District. See George Anderson, “Enemies of the Caribou,” *The Beaver*, Outfit 268, No. 1, (June 1937), pp. 30-32.

¹⁰⁷ Corporal G. Abraham, Coppermine, RCMP, to Officer Commanding, Aklavik, 6 May 1938. RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 2, NAC.

¹⁰⁸ Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 7 February 1938. RG 22, vol. 4. file 14, NAC.

¹⁰⁹ See “Summary of Replies to Departmental Questionnaire dated 6th June, 1939, requesting observations of the field agents upon certain definite suggestions for the further conservation of caribou,” n.d.. Ibid.

officers,” the resolution states, “the only action that can be recommended to the Northwest Territories administration is to continue efforts to educate the Eskimos in conservation.”¹¹⁰

In spite of this new focus on instruction—one might cynically describe it as indoctrination—in the practice and philosophy of wildlife conservation, there is every indication that Native hunters continued to defy existing game regulations and resent the ongoing supervision of their hunting and trapping activities throughout the 1930s. As noted earlier, in areas such as Coronation Gulf, where police officers were spread over a large area and the seasonal caribou migration ensured that most hunting of the species took place during the spring and summer closed seasons, most field reports suggest that Native hunters simply ignored the game regulations. But in larger towns such as Aklavik where there was close supervision of hunting and trapping activities, Native hunters took exception to the appeals of local officials to maintain a strict fish-only diet during the closed season on caribou.¹¹¹ In addition to such generalized grievances, there were also very targeted formal protests during this period. As a result of a meeting of Native hunters and Chiefs from the Great Bear Lake region held at Cameron Bay in September 1934, for example, Chief Jimmy Soldat forwarded a petition to Indian Affairs, claiming that the local sale of caribou meat during the summer months was a ‘common practice’ in Northwest Territories that had previously been authorized by Bishop Breynat. According to Soldat, the seasonal ban on this local trade in caribou meat had removed “our only means of support during the summer months.”¹¹²

To the skeptic, this particular entreaty might seem an opportunistic attempt to take advantage of the growing market for caribou meat among the mining population at Cameron Bay. The Northwest Territories Council clearly adopted this view of the protests and rejected the petition in January 1935.¹¹³ But the description of local barter as an entrenched practice among northern Aboriginal also suggests that the Great Bear Lake hunters understood their protest as a defense of customary use rights, an objection *in principle* to any game laws that encroached upon their former sovereignty over their local resources. This aspect of the protests against the caribou regulations is even more obvious in the case of the Dene band at Fort MacPherson, who complained to Indian Agent Truesdell in November 1934 that a regulation requiring them to pay for non-resident licenses to hunt on their traditional hunting grounds in the Yukon Territory violated the letter of Treaty 11.¹¹⁴ The case of a Treaty boycott at Fort Resolution in July 1937 also suggests that opposition to the game laws constituted a rejection of the federal government’s authority to establish game regulations affecting Native hunters. Though the

¹¹⁰ Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 31 March 1939. RG 22, vol. 4. file 14, NAC. Perhaps as a reflection of ongoing administrative inertia respecting the development of game regulations in the North, the Advisory Board again passed a nearly identical resolution eighteen months later stating that “it would be desirable to extend throughout Northern Canada instructions concerning wild life to the end that wasteful practices be prevented and conservation of wild life resources be advanced for the benefit of all concerned.” See Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 28 . RG 22, vol. 4. file 14, NAC.

¹¹¹ Supt. Irvine, RCMP to T.R.L. MacInnes, 4 February 1937. RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 2, NAC.

¹¹² Chief Jimmy Soldat, Petition to Indian Affairs, n.d. Ibid.

¹¹³ Extract from the Minutes of the Fifty-fifth Session of the Northwest Territories Council held on Wednesday, January 23rd, 1935. Ibid.

¹¹⁴ W.M. Truesdell to J. Lorne Turner, Chair, Dominion Lands Board, 16 November 1934. Ibid.

Fort Resolution hunters did express some pragmatic concerns, claiming that the prohibitions on hunting big game had resulted in almost continual hunger on the trap line, when the presiding RCMP officer, Sergeant Makinson, “asked them if they had ever been prosecuted for taken game during the close season, they replied that they had not, but never the less [sic] they would like to have the privilege of taking Game for food during thr [sic] close season.”¹¹⁵ Evidently, the mere idea of an outside authority usurping the traditional right to hunt and trap in the Northwest Territories had provoked the ire of the demonstrators as much as any practical difficulties imposed by the game regulations. More precisely, the recognition of an unrestricted right to hunt and trap on Treaty lands was a key political aspiration of the Fort Resolution hunters regardless of whether the federal government was willing to accord Native people the ‘privilege’ of killing game during the closed seasons in times of hunger. Exactly which polity—the federal government or the Dene—had the right to control and manage game was at the root of this conflict and the ‘dire need’ clause that federal wildlife officials continually promoted as evidence of the liberal nature of the game regulations offered nothing to Native hunters in terms of addressing this fundamental question.

Indeed, the issue again came to a head once again in April 1941, when two hunters at Fort Rae, Susie Beaulieu and Edward Zoe, were charged with killing caribou out of season during the spring migration. The RCMP officer who laid the charges, Cst. A.T. Rivett, found both men skinning a caribou on Marian Lake and claimed that “there is certainly no legitimate reason, or excuse for the killing of caribou at this time of the year. There is none of them in dire need for food, and the widows are issued with a monthly ration from the Indian Department supplies.” Chief Jimmy Bruneau saw the issue differently, however, and approached Rivett a few days after the charges were laid to argue that Native hunters had a right to kill caribou during the closed season.¹¹⁶ At the Treaty gathering on July 7th 1941—where Zoe and Beaulieu were scheduled to go to trial—the Native people at Rae refused to take payments until the trials went ahead, claiming once again they had a Treaty right to take game at any time during the closed season. After a private meeting with the local chiefs, the Indian Agent J.H. Riopel was able to convince the Dogribs at Rae to abandon their boycott.¹¹⁷ The reward for such acquiescence may have been leniency for the two hunters—both Zoe and Beaulieu pleaded guilty to the charges, but Riopel, who presided over the trial the next day, suspended their three month sentences.¹¹⁸ Regardless, federal officials such as R.A. Gibson later attributed the controversy at Rae to Riopel’s “overly generous” interpretation of the ‘dire need’ clause in the game regulations, which in turn gave rise to the erroneous idea that Native hunters could kill game at any time of the year. Such a dismissal of the Rae protests as the mere product of miscommunication among federal officials nevertheless miscalculates the extent

¹¹⁵ Extract from Sgt. G.T. Makinson’s Report Re: Treaty Indians, Fort Resolution, Refusal to Accept Treaty Payment. 3 July 1937. Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Constable A.T. Rivett, RCMP, Rae Detachment, Report, 29 April 1941. RG 85, vol. 932, file 12231, NAC.

¹¹⁷ Constable A.T. Rivett, RCMP, Rae Detachment, to Officer Commanding, Fort Smith, 15 August 1941. RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 2, NAC.

¹¹⁸ See Constable A.T. Rivett, RCMP, Rae Detachment, “Report on Conclusion of Case,” 4 August 1941. RG 85, vol. 932, file 12231, NAC.

to which the Zoe and Beaulieu cases were a catalyst for the expression of a longstanding political objection among Dene hunters to game regulations that violated what they understood as fundamental Treaty rights to hunt and trap on traditional lands.¹¹⁹

Despite the vigorous prosecution of the Zoe and Beaulieu cases, there was little enthusiasm among federal officials for broad reforms to the Northwest Territories game regulations during the years of the Second World War. The administrative inertia was at least partly the result of widely divergent opinions among field officers, not only on the issue of firearms, but also with respect to proposed reforms to the regulations governing the sale of meat, the use of sled dogs, and the unrestricted bag limit on caribou. After consulting widely with police officers and Indian Agents on these issues in the summer of 1938, the RCMP Commissioner concluded that “with such a diversity of opinion it is very difficult to arrive at any suitable general regulation.”¹²⁰ Undoubtedly, the federal government’s preoccupation with the war and all its attendant demands on personnel and financial resources curtailed any expansive caribou conservation efforts during this period. Aside from the obvious wartime pressures, however, the Advisory Board records from 1939 to 1945 suggest that senior wildlife officials considered the sudden crashes in such economically important fur bearer populations to be the most pressing wildlife crisis in the Northwest Territories during the 1940s (see Chapter 3).¹²¹

The concerns of conservationists over the status of the caribou were also likely assuaged by the results of C.H.D. Clarke’s study of wildlife conditions in and near the Thelon Game Sanctuary. At the annual Dominion-Provincial Wildlife Conference held in January 1939, Clarke reported that he had seen a magnificent herd of 20,000 caribou near the Hanbury River. More importantly, by transposing data on reindeer densities in Alaska to the available grazing range in the Northwest Territories, Clarke was also able to produce an estimated total caribou population of up to three million animals. If Clarke’s estimate paled in comparison to Seton’s guess of thirty million caribou, he assured the conference delegates that the earlier estimate was wildly inaccurate. Moreover, Clarke’s estimate of a human kill of two hundred thousand caribou combined with an annual kill of four hundred thousand animals by wolves was well within an approximate annual population increment of seven hundred and fifty thousand animals. Clarke also invoked a growing concern among ecologists for achieving optimal productivity on wildlife ranges by suggesting that the annual kill might be serving a useful measure of control on any potential overabundance of caribou inhabiting the Arctic Prairies. “It is clear,” Clarke wrote, “that were the increase of caribou to go unchecked over the carrying capacity on which our figures are based a disaster would result. Too many caribou is just as bad as too few. Nature’s whole set-up seems designed to keep them at or near an average.”¹²² Although

¹¹⁹ For Gibson’s assessment of the issue, see his letter to H.W. McGill, Director of Indian Affairs. RG 85, vol. 932, file 12232, NAC.

¹²⁰ See Memorandum Re: Taking of Caribou for Food Purposes, Summary of Correspondence, 27 December 1939. RG 85 vol. 1088, pt. 3, NAC.

¹²¹ See RG 22, vol. 4, file 14, NAC.

¹²² C.H.D. Clarke, Address on Caribou Given at the Provincial-Dominion Wildlife Conference 16 January 1939, RG 22, vol. 4, file 13, NAC. Clarke’s results were published in 1940. See his monograph, *A Biological Investigation of the Thelon Game Sanctuary*. For a discussion of the influence of such concepts as ‘cropping’

stories of 'indiscriminate slaughter' had passed over the desks of northern administrators throughout the late 1930s, the best available scientific information at the end of the decade suggested that the overall caribou population was not under any immediate threat from human hunters.

If the crisis mentality surrounding the survival of the caribou herds had eased somewhat in the early 1940s, the northern administration still displayed a willingness to act decisively in cases of reported threats to local caribou populations. The apparent decline of the caribou herds on Baffin Island during this period led, in fact, to one of the most intrusive conservation programs yet to be imposed upon Native hunters in the Northwest Territories. The official concern for the Baffin Island herds was spurred by a report issued in June 1943 by the RCMP Constable at Lake Harbour, D.P. McLauchlan, suggesting that three Inuit families who spent the previous winter trapping white foxes in the interior of Baffin Island near Nettilling Lake killed between six hundred and one thousand caribou. The Commanding Officer for the region, D.J. Martin, deemed that this number of caribou 'very excessive' and instructed McLauchlan to impress upon the Natives the need for conservation.¹²³ By the next winter, however, high fox prices had attracted fifteen families to the Nettilling Lake District. McLauchlan estimated that these trappers and their dogs would require two to three thousand caribou out of a total Baffin Island herd of fifteen thousand. Federal officials such as R.A. Gibson and D.L. McKeand, Superintendent of the Eastern Arctic, considered several options to curtail the Baffin Island hunt, particularly the distribution of reindeer skins from the Mackenzie Delta herds and bison robes from the annual slaughter at Wood Buffalo National Park.¹²⁴

But as events unfolded in the winter and spring of 1945, northern administrators increasingly became convinced that more dramatic action was necessary to save the Baffin caribou herds. In April, an Inuit deputy police officer, Special Constable Sheutiapik, reported that the hunter Kooloola and an unnamed boy had killed twenty-nine caribou and taken only the choice cuts of meat with no intention of returning for the rest of the animals. Furthermore, the game returns from that winter revealed that two thousand animals had been taken at Nettilling Lake to support seventeen families and their dogs. As a result, McLauchlan proposed a series of dramatic measures to remedy the apparent dramatic overkill of caribou on Baffin Island. He first proposed sending Kooloola's "bad influence" across the Hudson Strait to Wakeham Bay in northern Quebec, the village from where he had migrated in 1942. The police officer also proposed an absolute ban on Inuit hunters wintering inland at Nettilling Lake, arguing that unless the Inuit were forced to winter

game populations to fit the carrying capacity of their range on wildlife management practices in the Canadian national parks during this period, see Alan MacEachern, *Natural Selections: National Parks in Atlantic Canada, 1935-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2001), pp. 190-203.

¹²³ Constable D.P. McLauchlan, RCMP, Lake Harbour Detachment to Officer Commanding, 'G; Division, 30 June 1943. RG 85, vol. 1088, file 401-22, pt. 3, NAC; Inspector D.J. Martin to the Commissioner, RCMP, 21 October 1943. Ibid. The biologist T.H. Manning also suggested in a scientific paper that wasteful hunting was occurring on Baffin Island. See Manning, "Notes on the Mammals of South and Central West Baffin Island," *Journal of Mammalogy* 12, 11 (1943), p. 47-59.

¹²⁴ Constable D.P. McLauchlan, RCMP, Lake Harbour Detachment to Officer Commanding, 'G; Division, 1 June 1944. Ibid. For comments on the distribution of buffalo and reindeer, see D.L. McKeand to Gibson, 16 October 1944. Ibid., and Gibson to the Commissioner, RCMP, 3 November 1944. Ibid.

along the coast near Cape Dorset and Lake Harbour where there were “plenty of seals for everyone,” then the caribou on Baffin Island would become extremely scarce in just a few short years.¹²⁵ Although the action against Kooloola was restricted to a stern lecture on “the evil effects of killing excessive caribou” when the Eastern Arctic Patrol passed through the region in July, the proposed policy of removing Inuit hunters from the Nettilling Lake district was implemented informally when McLauchlan convinced the managers of the Hudson’s Bay and Baffin Island Trading Companies not to outfit any hunters to spend the winter in the interior.

This approach to caribou conservation received the full support of federal officials on the Eastern Arctic Patrol that summer.¹²⁶ By 1947, the strategy of dissuading of Inuit hunters to winter in the interior of Baffin Island had become official policy. When Inuit hunters complained at the Pangnirtung Christmas celebrations in 1946 that two hunters from the mainland community of Igloolik, Kridluk and Panikpa, had crossed over to Nettilling Lake to trap foxes, R.A. Gibson ordered the police in October 1947 to persuade these hunters to move to Clyde River on the northern coast of Baffin Island. Gibson justified this policy of coercive relocation as absolutely essential for the purposes of caribou conservation, arguing that “the main thing is to get these Natives out of the interior and prevent the heavy drain on the caribou. If these methods fail to keep natives from living in the interior on caribou the only recourse will be to declare the area a game sanctuary.”¹²⁷ No game sanctuary was ever established at Nettilling Lake; presumably Kridluk and Panikpa were persuaded to leave. But clearly the federal government had shown a willingness to compel Native hunters to relocate their seasonal camps and shift their subsistence hunting patterns away from caribou and toward coastal marine mammals. Displacing people from their seasonal camps and from their preferred food sources had now become an acceptable means of conserving wildlife. No other example from this period illustrates so starkly the manner in which federal wildlife conservation programs had moved beyond a basic regulatory approach to conservation and instead begun the process of colonizing the material cultures of the Dene and Inuit.

Conclusion

In some respects, the development of a modern approach to game management in the Northwest Territories from the 1920s to the end of the Second World War did not work entirely against the interests of the region’s Aboriginal hunters. In many cases, Dene and Inuit hunters were exempt from game laws that were applied to non-Native outsiders. Large tracts of land in the Northwest Territories were also set aside as the exclusive hunting preserve of the region’s indigenous people, a direct inversion of the general policy of excluding local people from game preserves often promoted by wealthy sport hunters in the more southerly reaches of the continent. In addition, the wildlife conservation measures

¹²⁵ Constable D.P. McLauchlan, RCMP, Lake Harbour Detachment to Officer Commanding, ‘G; Division, 14 April 1945. Ibid. Constable D.P. McLauchlan, RCMP, Lake Harbour Detachment to Officer Commanding, ‘G; Division, 15 April 1945. Ibid.

¹²⁶ J.A. Peacock, Eastern Arctic Patrol Report, 24 July 1945. Ibid.

¹²⁷ R.A. Gibson to the Commissioner, RCMP, 1 October 1947. Ibid.

introduced to the Far North between the two world wars were not uniquely imposed on the Native hunters of that region. Such measures as the enforcement of closed seasons, the restrictions on hunting females with young at heel, and the prohibition against wasteful hunting were in fact typical of the game laws established in rural and ‘wilderness’ hinterland throughout North America during the early decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, perhaps the most unique aspect of the Northwest Territories game regulations was the degree to which some northern administrators and federal field agents were willing to observe them in the breach, primarily as a means to stave off destitution due to the collapse of the Dene and Inuit hunting and trapping economy.

But if there was some flexibility afforded to the administration of the regulations governing hunting and trapping in the Northwest Territories, the price of such benevolence seems to have been, at least in some locations, the exertion of more openly paternalistic forms of authority over Dene and Inuit subsistence practices. The exhortations of the police, medical officers and Indian Agents to exploit wildlife resources other than caribou, or in the case of Baffin Island to move away from areas of high caribou abundance, suggest that the federal government was not content merely to regulate the northern caribou hunt through game laws but also hoped to exert control over the material culture of the Dene and the Inuit as a means to conserve caribou. If the efforts of the federal conservation bureaucracy were tentative at times due to a lack of financial resources, the federal government’s conservation policies in the inter-war years did, in some locales, circumvent the ability of Aboriginal people to manage their traditional subsistence economy. Above all else, federal wildlife officials deemed that Dene and Inuit hunters were not just in need of a set of regulations to govern their hunting practices, but also a broad program of conservation education so they could, as the prominent conservationist Harrison Lewis described it, develop “a rational attitude toward the wild life creatures which they utilize, and on which they are largely dependent.”¹²⁸

A constructive dialogue between wildlife users and managers was clearly not a characteristic of the caribou conservation program during this period. There is perhaps no better confirmation of this point than the following comment from Dr. J.A. Urquhart advocating stricter enforcement of the summer closed season: “the Indians cannot be expected to foresee the possible results of an extensive summer hunt and those who have the best interests of the Indians or Eskimos at heart realize that they must in a large measure do their thinking for them.”¹²⁹ Such language confirms that wildlife conservation in the Canadian North was part of a much broader colonial discourse, one that entailed the imposition of an ‘outside’ system of wildlife management that proclaimed itself inevitably superior to the apparently thoughtless actions of Native hunters. Conservation in the Northwest Territories was thus as much an ideological crusade as a pragmatic attempt to reverse the apparent decline of the caribou, an interjection of a rational discourse on wildlife management in a region where, in the minds of federal wildlife officials, none had ever existed. Of course, considering the speculative nature of many of the reports detailing mass caribou slaughters in the Northwest Territories—and the failure of senior wildlife

¹²⁸ Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 28 November 1940. RG 22, vol. 4, file 14, NAC.

¹²⁹ Urquhart to Turner, 31 October 1934. RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 2, NAC.

officials to consider contradictory evidence from their own field agents suggesting that Native hunters did not, as a matter of course, slaughter wildlife indiscriminately—the growth of wildlife conservation during this period appears more as a form of institutionalized social control over indigenous people than a rational response to a declining caribou population. If the actual effect of both the game regulations and ‘conservation education’ programs were inconsistent across the broader Northwest Territories, such initiatives as the stricter enforcement of the closed seasons, the promotion of fishing, the encouragement of sea mammal hunting, and the coercive relocation of hunters away from areas of intense hunting activity all laid a groundwork for the renewed and much more pervasive caribou conservation programs of the post-war period. Indeed, the policy framework governing caribou conservation in the Northwest Territories that had been slowly developing over nearly four decades took on a sudden and renewed urgency in the 1950s with the advent of the so-called caribou crisis.

Chapter 7

The Caribou Crisis

We must give the Eskimos and Indians freedom from their long starvation, and we must do this not as a dole, but by helping them to feed themselves. Charity is usually fatal to a primitive people, even as it is often fatal to civilized ones. The outright gift of food to the natives brings about a dependence which is often mortal, for they do not understand our motivations, and they believe—not unreasonably—that we are so rich we can afford to give and go on giving, and they will never again lift their hands in their own cause.

– Farley Mowat¹

Too often, I am afraid, the native mentality is left unconvinced by the logic of conservation and regards game laws as simply another of the white man's eccentricities.

– R.A. Gibson²

Shortly after the Easter celebrations at Fort Resolution in March 1947, Chief Pierre Frise of Rocher River, a small Chipewyan village on the south shore of Great Slave Lake, returned home to find the door to his meat shack broken open and one quarter of his caribou supply removed. The guilty party in this theft, Frise learned, was none other than W.H. Day, the Forest and Game Warden for the Fort Resolution region. It was not the first time, moreover, that Warden Day had deprived Frise of caribou meat. Only a few days earlier, when the Chief first arrived at Fort Resolution for Easter on March 27th, Warden Day searched his belongings and found caribou meat in his carry-all. Because the open season on these animals had ended almost one month earlier, Day confiscated the meat and charged the Chief with killing caribou out of season. But Day did not let the matter rest here: the resolute game warden was determined to ensure that the charges against Frise would be held up in a court of law. While the Easter festivities continued at Fort Resolution, Warden Day travelled sixty kilometres to Rocher River to inspect Frise's meat shed. If there was evidence that Frise had an ample supply of meat stored near his home, Day reasoned, then the Chief would not be able to claim starvation as his justification for hunting caribou out of season. No search warrant was ever issued for Frise's shack; perhaps Warden Day regarded his own break and entry into the premises as a minor indiscretion that was justified in the name of preventing the crime of caribou poaching.³

¹ Farley Mowat, *People of the Deer* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1951), p. 328. His emphasis.

² Gibson to J.R.E. Bouchard, District Administrator, Aklavik, 24 November 1949, RG 85, vol. 1088, file 406-13, pt. 5, National Archives of Canada.

³ A detailed description of Warden Day's actions can be found in a letter from Eugene Oldham, now Superintendent of Forests and Wildlife with the Bureau of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Affairs, to Roy A. Gibson, 29 May 1947. RG 85, vol. 1088, file 401-22, pt. 3, NAC.

But if Warden Day understood his actions as a routine part of a thorough investigation, his aggressive law enforcement tactics provoked outrage among local people in the region. In an angry letter to the local Indian Agent, Dr. W.P. Earle, Frise complained that no notices had been posted to announce that the closed seasons would be strictly enforced. Frise also questioned the validity of seasonal restrictions on the caribou hunt, claiming that the closed season “can never be applied to this country as our life depends on meat all year round.” The Chief closed his letter with the following demand: “I am hopeful, therefore, that you will be kind enough to take necessary steps to stop the Game Warden from molesting myself and my people for peace’s sake.”⁴ The petition received local support from the Catholic priest at Fort Resolution, Reverend L. Mokwa, who wrote to R.A. Gibson, Deputy Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, to suggest that “the radical proceedings of Mr. Day came as a shock to the Indians and caused a lot of indignation and dissatisfaction among them, so much so that I fear some kind of complication.” Mokwa went on to argue that the poor winter fur catch had created a desperate situation where it was absolutely essential for local hunters to have access to caribou and moose throughout the year to prevent starvation.⁵ Finally, the uproar over the incident with Warden Day reached the most senior levels of the Indian Affairs bureaucracy. In May 1947, R.A. Hoey, Director of the Indian Affairs Branch, informed Gibson that he believed that the ‘starvation clause’ in the game regulations allowed Native hunters to take caribou at any time of the year for their own personal use. Hoey also advised Gibson that he was “disturbed” by Warden Day’s breaking and entering into Frise’s shed without a search warrant.⁶ While Gibson conceded that Warden Day should have obtained a warrant, and also that some leniency might be exercised for Native hunters who were first offenders against the game laws, he was nevertheless obstinate in his contention that “the closed seasons must be observed for the sake of caribou conservation.”⁷

In many respects, the ‘Warden Day incident’ exemplified a renewed enthusiasm for wildlife conservation among federal administrators in the years following the Second World War. Indeed, Day was not simply a maverick game warden determined to enforce seasonal restrictions on caribou that were largely ignored by other law enforcement officers; his actions instead reflected the first tentative efforts of federal administrators in the years after the war to create a comprehensive conservation program for an apparently dwindling caribou population. Just one month before the incident at Rocher River, a meeting was held in Ottawa among officials from the northern administration and Indian Affairs to discuss the caribou situation. The Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, Roy Gibson, opened the meeting with the contention, based on a number of field reports,

⁴ Frise to Earle, 11 April 1947. Ibid.

⁵ Mokwa to Gibson, 30 April 1947. Ibid.

⁶ Hoey to Gibson, 30 May 1947. Ibid.

⁷ Gibson to Mokwa, 8 May 1947. Ibid. For more of Gibson’s analysis of the Warden Day incident, see Gibson to Oldham, 18 June 1947. Ibid. Chief Frise’s case was concluded when he pleaded guilty to the charges and was given a severe reprimand and warned that any additional offenses would bring severe punishment. See Cst. G.R. Brown, RCMP, Fort Resolution to Officer Commanding, Fort Smith, 12 April 1948. RG 85, vol. 1088, file 401-22, pt. 4, NAC.

that the wildlife situation in the Northwest Territories had “deteriorated” in recent years. It had thus become necessary, Gibson argued, to enforce strictly the closed season on caribou. There was surprising unanimity on the issue. Even R.A. Hoey from Indian Affairs was convinced at this point that strict enforcement of the closed season was necessary except in the most extreme cases of hunger and privation.⁸ In addition to the more stringent enforcement of existing regulations, several other new caribou protective measures were introduced in the years immediately following the war. In July 1947, an Order in Council was passed making it illegal to serve caribou in restaurants, hotels, or any other institution that imposed a charge for meals. The same cabinet decree also established a permit system specific to caribou for non-Native residents of the Northwest Territories.⁹ These new regulations were accompanied by an increase in the number of game officers in the Northwest Territories. In addition to the existing RCMP force, the game warden service, which Warden Day had so admirably served near Fort Resolution, was established in 1946 under the auspices of the Superintendent of Forests and Wildlife for the Northwest Territories.¹⁰ Finally, in an attempt to address the lack of basic information about the caribou, the federal government organized the first comprehensive scientific research program on the population status of the barren ground herds beginning in 1947.¹¹

Local hunters were no more sympathetic to the federal government’s new caribou conservation measures than they had been in previous decades. In the summer of 1947, several Indian Agents from the South Slave Region—L.J. Mulvihill from Fort Resolution, J.W. Stewart from Fort Chipewyan, and G.H. Gooderham, the Superintendent of the Athabaska Indian Agency in Alberta—forwarded letters to Hoey suggesting that Native hunters in that part of the Northwest Territories and in the Alberta sections of Wood Buffalo National Park were angered by the fact that the enforcement of the closed seasons on moose (Apr. 1st to Sept. 1st) and caribou (March 1st to Sept. 1st), combined with the absolute ban on hunting wood bison, had deprived them of a local source of fresh meat between the beginning of April and the end of August.¹² Federal officials did show some flexibility on this issue. In a partial response to Chief Frise’s

⁸ See J.P. Richards, “Re: Northwest Game Regulations – Application and Enforcement of,” 27 February 1947. Ibid. In addition to Gibson, Hoey and Richards, the following individuals were also present at the meeting: H.R. Conn, Fur Supervisor, Department of Indian Affairs; Eugene Oldham, Supt. of Forests and Wildlife, NWT; MacKay Meikle, Chief of the Mackenzie Division, Northern Administration Service; Sgt. Cray, RCMP; Dr. Ian MacTaggart Cowan, Biologist, University of British Columbia; and A.W.F. Banfield, soon to be the lead investigator of a major caribou study undertaken by the Canadian Wildlife Service.

⁹ Order in Council P.C. 2567, 3 July 1947. A copy was found in RG 85, vol. 1088, file 401-22, pt. 1, NAC.

¹⁰ In addition to Day’s post at Fort Resolution, game warden offices were established at Aklavik, Fort Norman, Fort Simpson and Yellowknife. See, “Extracts Regarding Caribou Populations from the 1947 Reports of Forest and Wildlife Wardens in Mackenzie District,” n.d. RG 85, vol. 1088, file 401-22, pt. 3, NAC.

¹¹ A resolution to undertake a major scientific study of the caribou was passed at the Dominion-Provincial Wildlife Conference on 28 February 1947. For summary of the events surrounding the decision to undertake the study, see Harrison Lewis to Mr. Smart, 9 October 1947. RG 85, vol. 1088, file 401-22, pt. 3, NAC.

¹² The letters are summarized in a report from J.P. Richards to MacKay Meikle, Chief of the Mackenzie Division, 25 September 1947. Ibid.

complaints, the open season on male caribou was extended to include the month of March, thus allowing the people of the South Slave region to pursue their ancient tradition of procuring a summer's meat supply during this peak period in the annual northward migration.¹³ Such tinkering over the exact dates of the closed seasons did little, however, to address the much broader objection many Native hunters harboured toward *any* enforcement of seasonal hunting restrictions on big game. In his letter to Hoey, Mulvihill reported that the grievances over the closed seasons on big game were rooted in the widespread belief that the provisions of Treaty 8 included a perpetual guarantee of hunting and trapping rights. Mulvihill went so far as to investigate the veracity of this claim by interviewing two witnesses of the Treaty signing at Fort Resolution nearly a half century ago, each of whom confirmed independently that the government delegation had promised no game laws would ever apply to Native hunters in the Treaty area. Mulvihill concluded that, "they resent, and my opinion, justly so, the present restrictions on the killing of game for food, which are strictly enforced for the first time this year."¹⁴ Such discontent over the enforcement was not limited to the communities in the South Slave region. In December 1947, Warden Parsons reported from the Yellowknife Game Office that the Dogrib Chief at Rae, Suzi Abel, was "very disturbed" about the new caribou regulations and remained convinced that, as a matter of principle, there should be no closed season for Native hunters.¹⁵

If the fierce opposition to the increased regulation of the caribou hunt in the years immediately following the war was rooted in longstanding grievances over unfulfilled Treaty promises, the initial discontent was also likely exacerbated due to the fact that federal officials had little evidence before 1950 to back their claim that the northern caribou were in decline. Although there can be little doubt that wildlife conditions had deteriorated the Northwest Territories throughout the 1940s, particularly in the case of fur bearing mammals (see Chapter Three), several newspaper articles from the early winter of 1946 cited reports from railway passengers and local hunters suggesting that uncommonly large numbers of caribou had migrated through the northern reaches of Manitoba.¹⁶ While these articles may have reflected the tendency among popular writers

¹³ A resolution allowing the hunting of male caribou in March so that the Dene at Fort Smith and Fort Resolution could obtain their summer supply was passed at an Advisory Board meeting in November 1947. See Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 17 November 1947. RG 22, vol. 4, file 14, NAC.

¹⁴ Mulvihill to R.A. Hoey, 17 July 1947. Quoted in Kerry Abel, *Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), pp. 217.

¹⁵ "Extracts Regarding Caribou Populations from the 1947 Reports of Forest and Wildlife Wardens in Mackenzie District," n.d. Ibid.

¹⁶ For an overview of the decline of fur in the NWT, see, Peter Clancy, "State Policy and the Native Trapper: Post-War Policy toward Fur in the Northwest Territories," in *Aboriginal Resource Use in Canada: Historical and Legal Aspects*, Kerry Abel and Jean Friesen, eds. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1991), pp. 191-218. See also Morris Zaslow, *The Opening of the Canadian North, 1914-1967* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), pp. 130-150. For the reports of abundant caribou in 1946, see "Large Numbers of Caribou Seen in Northern Manitoba," *Prince Albert Daily Herald*, 4 December 1946; "Bay Train Hits Trekking Caribou," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 22 November 1946; "March of the Caribou," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 12 November 1946; "Huge Caribou Herds Start Annual Trek," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 1 September 1946; "Thousands of Caribou Halt Winter Trek," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 8 November 1946; "Huge Caribou Herds Start Annual Trek," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 1 September 1946; "North Knows no

to exaggerate the enormity of the caribou herds, even the more official field reports of the game wardens and the RCMP did not point conclusively to a general decline in the caribou herds, with some claiming local abundance and others a regional scarcity of the animals.¹⁷ At the Dominion-Provincial Wildlife Conference in 1945, an overview of the RCMP reports from the past ten years was presented with the general conclusion that the caribou had maintained their numbers “pretty well” over that period.¹⁸ At an Advisory Board meeting held in October 1947, Harrison Lewis, who would become the first Chief of the newly created Dominion Wildlife Service one month later, admitted that “nobody has any idea how many caribou there are and it is unfortunate that His Majesty’s Government should be in that position.”¹⁹

The absence of any compelling evidence pointing to a diminishing caribou population in the earliest years following the war suggests that the renewed enthusiasm for caribou conservation in the Northwest Territories was at least partly the product of a more general growth in the federal wildlife bureaucracy as the government turned its attention more toward civilian matters at the end of the war. At the final Dominion-Provincial Wildlife Conference before the end of hostilities in Europe and the Pacific, the Minister of Mines and Resources, Thomas Crerar, emphasized the importance of renewed support for wildlife science and management in Canada. In the post-war world, Crerar argued in his plenary address, “our wildlife will be used by more people and in more ways than ever before,” and thus, “abundant scientific information and great administrative care will be necessary so that the maximum use may be obtained without injury to the fundamental stock.” In a paper delivered at the same conference, Harrison Lewis argued that wildlife resources were the most important single natural resource in many areas of the country, a critical economic base for the fur, tourism, and sporting industries, and thus worthy of careful and judicious scientific management.²⁰

Certainly the creation of the Canadian Wildlife Service in November 1947 was a catalyst for the kind of wildlife management that Lewis envisioned, one that ensured the federal government was at the centre of many wildlife management initiatives throughout the country despite their lack of official jurisdiction over wildlife on provincial lands. In the Northwest Territories, the creation of the CWS offered an unprecedented opportunity for federal administrators to develop ‘in house’ wildlife research and management projects.²¹ No longer would federal management of the barren ground caribou proceed on

Lack of Meat Thanks to Caribou Folly,” *Winnipeg Free Press Tribune*, 21 January 1946; “Northland Rarity,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, 9 January 1946. Federal administrators were clearly aware of these reports as clippings of all the articles were found in RG 85, vol. 1088, file 401-22, pt. 3, NAC.

¹⁷ See, for example, “Extracts Regarding Caribou Populations from the 1947 Reports of Forest and Wildlife Wardens in Mackenzie District,” n.d. RG 85, vol. 1088, file 401-22, pt. 3, NAC.

¹⁸ Minutes of the Tenth Dominion-Provincial Conference on Wildlife, 22-24 February 1945. RG 22, vol. 4, file 13, NAC.

¹⁹ Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 7 October 1947. RG 22, vol. 4, file 14, NAC.

²⁰ Minutes of the Tenth Dominion-Provincial Conference on Wildlife, 22-24 February 1945. RG 22, vol. 4, file 13, NAC.

²¹ For a summary of the creation and early development of the Dominion Wildlife Service, later named the Canadian Wildlife Service, see J. Alexander Burnett, “A Passion for Wildlife: A History of the Canadian Wildlife Service, 1947-97,” *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* 113, 1 (January-March 1999), pp. 15-53.

the basis of an odd assortment of field reports from naturalists, trappers, and police officers; northern administrators were now able to base new game regulations at least partly on a wealth of new scientific information extracted from the many CWS-sponsored studies of the barren ground caribou that were carried out from the late 1940s to the late 1960s.

There was also a significant expansion of interest in wildlife conservation within the northern bureaucracy in the post-war years. A specific Forests and Game Section was established under the Northern Administration and Lands Branch's Territorial Division, but the renewed activism in the field of northern wildlife conservation was also clearly linked to the much broader increase in federal government activity in the region. Most importantly, the growth in the number and variety of federal field agents in the Northwest Territories—the new game warden service, the welfare teachers, and the Northern Service Officers (a position analogous to that of an Indian Agent for the Inuit, but one that reflected the policy priorities of the northern administration)—greatly furthered the ability of the federal government to promote wildlife conservation and assert direct control and supervision over the northern caribou hunt.²²

In spite of all of these changes, there was still much continuity between post-war caribou conservation programs and their predecessors from previous decades. Although spectacular stories of 'wanton' caribou slaughters began to fade somewhat from the official and popular discourses on the caribou during this period, a crisis mentality still pervaded the northern administration on the question of conserving these animals, particularly after the first aerial surveys of the herds in the late 1940s suggested a much lower population than earlier naturalists and biologists had once thought. More importantly, the relationship between the federal wildlife conservationists and northern Aboriginal people did not change appreciably during this period. The Native caribou hunt was still regarded as the most dire threat to the caribou population; the unilateral regulation and control of this hunt by the federal government was still posited as the only possible means to save the migratory herds of the tundra plains. In keeping with caribou conservation policies before the war, proposals to exert increased managerial control over the northern caribou hunt in the post-war period did not concentrate solely on the further imposition of game regulations, but also on the intensification of more systemic measures to protect the caribou. The promotion of alternative resources such as fish and marine mammals, the creation of conservation education programs, and the urgent appeals to reduce the amount of caribou fed to sled dogs were thus all key pillars of the caribou conservation program in the post-war era.

Despite the continuity with previous conservation programs, the government's attempts to induce changes in the Dene and Inuit hunting economy took on a broader and more coercive hue during this period. As northern development became a new mantra for successive governments in the post-war era, preserving the traditional hunting and

²² For an overview of administrative development in the Northwest Territories following the war, see Mark Dickerson, *Whose North? Political Change, Political Development, and Self-Government in the Northwest Territories* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), pp. 61-87; Shelagh Grant, *Sovereignty or Security? Government Policy in the Canadian North, 1936-1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988), pp. 188-210; and Morris Zaslow, *op cit.*, pp. 306-331.

trapping culture of the northern Native no longer dominated the social policy discourse among northern administrators after the late 1950s, particularly in the case of the Inuit, who came under the sole jurisdiction of an increasingly activist northern administration that was much less sympathetic to the idea of preserving traditional hunting cultures than their counterparts within the Department of Indian Affairs.²³ Instead, the northern administration increasingly put forward the idea that an advance of a modern industrial economy in the Canadian North, with its potential to provide wage labour for Native workers, was the only realistic means to reduce hunting pressure on the caribou. In the most extreme application of this policy, the federal government pursued a program of relocating Dene and Inuit communities away from the interior caribou herds to areas where they might find industrial wage labour. Although caribou conservation was only one of many complex influences on the development of the relocation program, such an extreme form of social control and engineering represented perhaps the clearest indication that the measures designed to mitigate the post-war ‘caribou crisis’ entailed much more than the simple regulation of the caribou hunt through statutes and regulations. By this point, caribou conservation had become one of the most important means federal authorities used as a justification to colonize and control the economic and social life of Dene and Inuit communities.

That the Tundra Should have no Caribou

On February 28th, 1947, officials at the Dominion–Provincial Wildlife Conference passed a resolution calling for a comprehensive scientific investigation of the barren caribou population. In the spring of 1948, the Canadian Wildlife Service initiated an ambitious caribou study under the leadership of the mammalogist A.W.F. Banfield. Over the course of two years, Banfield and his technical assistants A.H. Lawrie, A.L. Wilk, John Kelsall, and the soon to be famous author Farley Mowat conducted the first extensive aerial surveys over the tundra and sub-arctic forests of the Northwest Territories in light aircraft, a relatively new census technique that positioned the investigation at the cutting edge of post-war wildlife biology. The research team also conducted close observations of the caribou and their predators from base camps spread throughout the region. The result was a remarkably broad study of almost every aspect of caribou biology from herd movements to rutting behaviour.²⁴

²³ Authority over ‘Eskimo Affairs’ was placed under the northern administration rather than Indian Affairs because, until a Supreme Court decision in 1935, the Inuit had never been included in the definition of an “Indian” under the BNA Act and thus never included in the terms of the Indian Act. In addition, no Treaties were ever signed between the Inuit and the federal government. Thus the traditional role of Indian Affairs in administering and interpreting Treaty rights and obligations did not apply in the case of the Inuit. For an overview, see Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939-63* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), pp. 13-42. As shall be seen later in this chapter, the housing of Inuit social policy and conservation in one department led to a great deal of collaboration between officials from these two administrative units.

²⁴ For the background and terms of reference for the investigation, see, A.W.F. Banfield, *Preliminary Investigation of the Barren-Ground Caribou, pt. 1 of 2*, Canadian Wildlife Service, Wildlife Management Bulletin, Series 1, No. 10, (1954). p. 2-7.

Most importantly for federal wildlife officials, Banfield was able to provide a population estimate for the mainland caribou herds. In his final report on the study, which was presented to the Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection in November 1950, Banfield suggested that the caribou herds in the mainland Northwest Territories and northern reaches of Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan were comprised of a mere 670,000 animals. Although one board member, A.E. Porsild, cautioned that this figure should not be judged against the highly speculative estimates of the caribou population from earlier in the century, the notion that the caribou numbered in the thousands rather than millions nevertheless came as something of a surprise to federal wildlife officials.²⁵ Apparently heedless of Porsild's warning, Banfield himself highlighted this point when he readily cited R.M. Anderson's population estimate of 1,750,000 caribou from 1900 as the basis for his claim that the herds had suffered a decline of 62 per cent over the previous half century.²⁶ Even more ominous for federal officials was Banfield's analysis of caribou mortality and reproductive rates. In the printed version of his comprehensive report on the caribou, Banfield used the records of game returns from 1932 to 1950 to estimate an annual human kill of 100,000 caribou in the Northwest Territories—50,000 by Dene hunters, 30,000 by the Inuit and 20,000 by non-Native hunters. His more general estimates of caribou mortality suggested that wolf predation produced a further annual loss of 34,000 animals; disease, accidents and inclement weather caused the destruction of an equivalent number of animals each year. Banfield suggested that the total mortality rate from all sources was 178,000 caribou, a number that clearly exceeded the estimated annual calf crop of 145,000 animals and which indicated an annual five per cent decline in the mainland caribou herds.²⁷ Although Banfield's final report on the caribou study recognized the influence of non-anthropogenic ecological factors such as fire on the winter range, the mammalogist claimed that the only possible way to stave off the decline of the barren ground caribou was through management strategies designed to control the human harvest.²⁸ Although his initial submission to the Advisory Board did contain recommendations to expand predator control and fire suppression efforts, Banfield clearly emphasized the importance of regulating human hunting through restrictions on the sale of meat and hides, an expansion of the game warden service, and an extension of

²⁵ Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 6 November 1950. RG 22, vol. 16, file 69, NAC.

²⁶ This claim first appeared in a 'popular' summary report printed in 1951 for the convenient reference of departmental officials. See A.W.F. Banfield, *The Barren-Ground Caribou*, Department of Resources and Development (1951), pp. 13-14. The same claim is made in the complete printed report on the caribou study. See, A.W.F. Banfield, *Preliminary Investigation of the Barren-Ground Caribou*, pt. 1 of 2, p. 38.

²⁷ A.W.F. Banfield, *Preliminary Investigation of the Barren-Ground Caribou*, pt. 2 of 2, p. 70. Banfield's estimate of an annual human kill of 100,000 animals was based on the average annual kill at the trading posts, with an adjustment of 15% based on the assumption that hunters were under-reporting their kill (see p. 68). The summary report cited above uses slightly different figures, citing the total annual caribou mortality at 141,000 animals. The report merely suggests there is an annual loss without going into exact details on the figures.

²⁸ A.W.F. Banfield, *Preliminary Investigation of the Barren-Ground Caribou*, pt. 2 of 2., p. 71.

conservation education programs to prevent excessive human waste on the caribou range.²⁹

Although senior wildlife officials hailed Banfield's study as the first accurate assessment of the caribou population, his results were not universally accepted as a scientific breakthrough in the human understanding of the caribou herds.³⁰ In a review of the study forwarded to Harrison Lewis in November 1950, Ian McTaggart-Cowan, a leading zoologist at the University of British Columbia, questioned Banfield's use of straight aerial transect lines, a technique that was notoriously inaccurate for a species with such uneven distribution across its range. Indeed, a glance at the map of Banfield's transect lines reveals an entirely random network of flight paths that were widely spaced and conducted over an extremely lengthy study period of twenty four months. McTaggart-Cowan suggested that more refinement of this technique was needed. He wrote, "no reasons are given for assuming accuracy to within 20% and I doubt that the approximation is as close as that. Experiments with deer on limited areas have shown departures from accuracy greatly exceeding this." Considering the tentative nature of the survey results, McTaggart-Cowan disputed Banfield's population estimate and claimed that the caribou population as a whole might still number as many as one million animals, a figure that suggested no dramatic overall decline in the mainland herds if conservative appraisals of the herd numbers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were used as a baseline. The UBC zoologist concluded that population shifts in the caribou population were regional in nature rather than a range-wide phenomenon. Regulations that might cause hardship to Native hunters should thus be imposed only on a regional basis, in areas where it had been clearly demonstrated that the local caribou herds were in decline.³¹

A period of close to four years passed between Banfield's original presentation of his results and the printing of his final report, but there is little evidence that he incorporated McTaggart-Cowan's criticisms of his work into the process of revising his manuscript. While Banfield did suggest that the caribou decline was concentrated regionally in four areas at the northern edge of the northward migratory routes, his central conclusion remained, as noted above, the declaration of a range-wide annual decline in the herds amounting to 32,000 animals. But even with four years to shore up his arguments in support of this claim, the evidence Banfield marshaled in support of an absolute decline in the barren ground caribou population remained tentative at best. To

²⁹ The full text of Banfield's report was not included in Advisory Board or general caribou files held at the National Archives. His recommendations were, however, printed in full in the minutes of the Advisory Board meeting held in November 1950. Although most of Banfield's recommendations were, for the most part, oriented toward conservation, with calls for an expanded warden service, greater fire suppression on the winter range, and limits to the sale of caribou meat and hides, he also called for an expansion of the open season on caribou by one month, from August 15 to February 28. It is not clear why Banfield recommended this change. See Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 6 November 1950. RG 22, vol. 16, file 69, NAC.

³⁰ The Advisory Board accepted Banfield's results as the "most reliable estimate of the caribou population to date." See Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 6 November 1950. RG 22, vol. 16, file 69, NAC.

³¹ Ian McTaggart-Cowan to Harrison Lewis, 2 November 1950. Ibid.

begin with, his calculation for all sources of caribou mortality—a human kill of 100,000, wolf predation amounting to 34,000, and 34,000 additional deaths from disease, weather and accidents—amounted to an annual mortality of 168,000 animals and not the figure of 178,000 cited in the 1954 report.³² Whether this was a typographical mistake, a mathematical error, or the omission of an additional source of caribou mortality is unclear, but the deaths of ten thousand caribou remain unaccounted for in Banfield's discussion of the annual mortality rate. Adding to this air of uncertainty is the fact that Banfield was clearly aware that other sources of data contradicted his theory of a universal decline in the barren ground caribou. His analysis of the annual departmental caribou questionnaires that had been distributed throughout the Northwest Territories since 1934 revealed, for example, "no clear cut trend in the ratio of the 'increase' reports that would indicate a regular decline."³³ To further complicate the issue, Banfield acknowledged that his research team did not gather sufficient data to determine the annual loss of caribou to wolf predation and the combined effects of disease, accidents and weather. The lead investigator nevertheless ascribed a mortality rate of five per cent to both of these ecological influences in his analysis of the annual herd decrement, a figure that was based on a 1935 study of domesticated reindeer herds in Siberia.³⁴

Despite such imprecision, Banfield assigned the primary blame for the looming caribou crisis to Dene and Inuit hunters. He attributed the entire annual caribou deficit to the "improvident and wasteful hunting techniques of the native population," and roundly condemned such practices as the feeding of caribou meat to dogs, the careless caching of meat, and the slaughter of caribou beyond the limits of personal need.³⁵ Unlike many of the earlier reports of wanton Native hunting practices in the Far North, Banfield's report did at least furnish a few first-hand accounts of human wastage of caribou. In August 1948, A.H. Lawrie observed Inuit hunters leaving several whole caribou for later use as dog food on the shores of Nueltin Lake in August 1948, all of which were subsequently lost after rising water froze over the carcasses. Banfield also provided his own eyewitness account of several Inuit hunters who had failed to utilize several downed caribou and had allowed an unspecified number of wounded animals to escape during a summer hunt near Contwoyto Lake in 1949.³⁶ Beyond these two examples, however, Banfield's report contained little evidence to suggest that these practices were widespread and systemic, or that they could account for the annual deficit in the caribou herds. Instead of a quantitative account of the actual impact that so-called wasteful Dene and Inuit hunting practices might be having on the herds, Banfield defended his allegations of widespread

³² The figure for the herd decrement is also inexplicably cited as 32,000 animals, but according to the figures Banfield cited—an increment of 145,000 and a loss of 178,000—the caribou herds were suffering from an annual deficit of 33,000 animals. See A.W.F. Banfield, *Preliminary Investigation of the Barren-Ground Caribou*, pt. 2 of 2., p. 70.

³³ A.W.F. Banfield, *Preliminary Investigation of the Barren-Ground Caribou*, pt. 1 of 2., p. 37. For the results of these questionnaires for the years 1948-49, see RG85, vol. 1089, file 401-22-4, pt. 16, NAC.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44, p. 51. For the study on reindeer, see V. M. Sbodnikov, "Relations Between Reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*) and the Animal Life of Tundra and Forest," *Transcripts of Arctic Institute* 24 (1935), pp. 5-66.

³⁵ A.W.F. Banfield, *Preliminary Investigation of the Barren-Ground Caribou*, pt. 2 of 2, p. 70.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56, p. 59.

waste with a broad reference to the widespread rumours of caribou slaughters that had been circulating in the North since the late nineteenth century:

Such wastage has been reported by many writers during the last century and the early part of the present century.... From interviews with wardens, traders, missionaries, and trappers in the northern parts of the provinces and the Northwest Territories it is known that excessive wastage is widespread throughout the whole range of the caribou and is indulged in by Indians, Eskimos, and some European Trappers.³⁷

The possibility that at least some of these accounts might be a product of local rivalries and prejudices is never discussed in Banfield's report. As in earlier decades, wildlife management according to rumour and anecdote still apparently maintained a residual significance in this apparently modern work of biological science.

Nonetheless, the circulation of Banfield's study prompted the creation of a much broader series of game regulations to govern the Dene and Inuit caribou harvest. In December 1951, the NWT Council, which had been granted the exclusive authority to create game regulations under the territorial ordinances in 1949, strengthened an existing regulation prohibiting the use of caribou for dog feed when other sources of food were "reasonably available" by banning the practice—widely loathed among federal officials—of feeding caribou to dogs within settled areas.³⁸ There was also a great deal of bureaucratic momentum behind a proposal to restrict the market hunt in the NWT. This effort was in part a response to longstanding pressure from game administrators in the provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, who had for many years prohibited white settlers in northern communities from purchasing wild game. The northern administration and Indian Affairs had previously deflected such criticism with accusations that the licensing of 'outside' sport hunters to kill caribou under provincial regulations did much more to harm the credibility of the caribou conservation program in the eyes of Native hunters.³⁹ But as the results of Banfield's report began to circulate among federal wildlife officials and northern administrators, many began to target the local sale of caribou meat as an anachronistic practice in light of the available scientific data on the caribou population. The revisions to the game ordinance for 1950 took a small step toward this policy goal, limiting the right to sell caribou meat only to those hunters who held a valid General Hunting License—essentially all Native hunters and those few non-Natives who held a valid NWT hunting and trapping license on May 3, 1938. The result was an

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³⁸ In order to confine the use of caribou for dog meat to the trapping trail, the ordinance banned the use of caribou for dog feed within four miles of any settlement in the Mackenzie District. See "Extract from the Votes, Proceedings and Debates of the NWT Council Meeting in Yellowknife, December 1951. RG 85, vol. 1089, file 401-22, pt. 6, NAC.

³⁹ Although the federal government's general caribou files contain many correspondences on this issue, the debate was particularly acrimonious at the Dominion-Provincial Wildlife Conference held on 3 June 1949. See RG 22, vol. 16, file 68, NAC.

effective ban on the distribution of caribou meat in trading posts and grocery stores throughout the Northwest Territories.⁴⁰

The new restrictions on the sale of caribou meat provoked at least some opposition from the local population at Fort Resolution. In July 1950, several Native hunters wrote to their Member of Parliament, J. Aubrey Simmons, to protest the new regulation.⁴¹ In addition, the Superintendent of the Indian Agency at Fort Resolution, I.F. Kirkby, suggested in his report on local game conditions that there was widespread opposition to the prohibitions on the sale of caribou meat. Kirkby went on to complain that the new restrictions had created hardships because local Natives could no longer sell caribou killed during the fall migration to the local store and buy back the meat over the course of the winter trapping season. For Kirkby, the new regulations had all the markings of a policy initiative that paid little heed to local conditions. An *ad hoc* arrangement that had allowed Native hunters to obtain both badly needed funds in advance of the trapping season and a freezer in which to store meat from the autumn caribou hunt had now been made illegal under the new game regulations.⁴²

Kirkby's objections to the regulations received little sympathy, however, when they were tabled at a meeting of the Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection in March 1950. After one board member complained that he had seen over four hundred caribou hams in the shop warehouse in Rocher River, the board passed a resolution calling for a ban on all sale and purchase of caribou meat except among the Native population.⁴³ Further opposition to this proposed regulation came not only from local hunters and from within Indian Affairs, but also directly from within the ranks of the Canadian Wildlife Service. W.E. Stevens, a biologist with the CWS who was serving as District Administrator in Aklavik, wrote to Harrison Lewis in July to argue that the number of caribou killed for the purposes of sale was relatively small, but was still needed in many communities because of the "primitive conditions" that prevailed in the Northwest Territories.⁴⁴ The resident CWS biologist at Wood Buffalo National Park, William Fuller, was even more blunt, calling the sale issue a "bogy" that was diverting attention from the more serious problem of wastage. Fuller recommended a 'buck law' as the most effective means to conserve the caribou population.⁴⁵ The issue was only resolved with a compromise amendment to the game ordinance in 1951 permitting Native hunters alone to sell caribou within twenty miles of a major settlement. An outright ban on trafficking

⁴⁰ "Proposed Revisions of NWT Game Ordinance for 1950," 3 August 1950. RG 85, vol. 1088, file 406-13, pt. 4, NAC.

⁴¹ The letter protesting the impending change to the regulations was sent to Simmons on 25 July 1950 and signed by Chief Alexie Jean Marie Beaulieu, Pierre Phressie, and Samuel Simmons. Reference is made to the petition in a letter from Gibson to Aubrey Simmons, 9 September 1950. Ibid.

⁴² I.F. Kirkby, "Fort Resolution Indian Agency: Report on Fur and Game Conditions in this Area," n.d. Ibid.

⁴³ Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 2 November 1950. RG 22, vol. 16, file 69, NAC.

⁴⁴ Stevens to Harrison Lewis, 6 July 1950. RG 85, vol. 1088, file 406-13, pt. 4, NAC.

⁴⁵ W.A. Fuller, "Comments Concerning the Northwest Game Ordinance," 3 August 1950. Ibid.

caribou near large, well-supplied communities such as Yellowknife and Fort Smith was finally implemented in July 1952.⁴⁶

If the controversy over the issue of selling caribou meat did suggest at least some diversity of opinion among CWS biologists, Banfield's allegations of a scarce caribou population also resulted in an unmistakable hardening of attitudes among several federal wildlife officials toward the Aboriginal caribou harvest. While some biologists such as Stevens and Fuller continued to espouse the maintenance of the traditional Aboriginal food supply as the fundamental goal of the caribou conservation program—in effect, reconciling the demands of the Native hunting economy with a philosophy that upheld the controlled use of game resources as the highest end of wildlife conservation—others had concluded from Banfield's study that the relatively liberal game regulations in the Northwest Territories were incompatible with the principles of modern wildlife management.⁴⁷ During the Advisory Board's discussion of the resolution to ban the sale of caribou, the Chief of the CWS, Harrison Lewis, invoked the “conclusive” evidence in Banfield's report to argue that when the “learned commission” of 1900 included guarantees of perpetual hunting and trapping rights among their Treaty promises, they could not have envisioned the kind of wildlife management that would be necessary in the present day.⁴⁸ The CWS biologist John Kelsall also became a passionate advocate of the idea that caribou conservation measures must supersede even the most basic subsistence requirements of the Dene and Inuit population. In a debate with the RCMP Inspector H.A. Larsen, Kelsall argued that, though the game regulations could not be enforced efficiently without causing hardship among the Inuit, any effort to cut down the caribou harvest “should be given all consideration possible.”⁴⁹ Clearly the more utilitarian concerns of previous decades—the protection of the Aboriginal food supply and the possible commercial exploitation of the caribou—were no longer a primary concern for some CWS biologists and senior officials. Indeed, meetings of the CWS technical staff throughout the 1950s were dominated with suggestions that Aboriginal Treaty rights represented both an injustice to the non-Native population and the primary obstacle to the caribou conservation program in the Northwest Territories. Kelsall summed up the sentiment in his expansive 1968 monograph on the barren ground caribou:

The position of the Treaty Indians is legally sound, but in many ways it appears morally indefensible. There is no valid reason, other than the Treaty terms, why they as a group should be permitted privilege in resource use beyond that afforded

⁴⁶ See, “Caribou Protective Legislation,” n.d. RG 85, accession 1997-98/076, file 401-22, pt. 22, NAC. For a summary of the debate over the sale of caribou meat, see Peter Clancy, *Native Hunters and the State: The 'Caribou Crisis' in the Northwest Territories*, Studies in National and International Development Occasional Paper, Queen's University. No. 87–101 (1987), p. 11.

⁴⁷ Fuller wrote in 1949 that conservation of the caribou “should not be interpreted as a setting aside for mere admiration. In my opinion, conservation is intelligent utilization—harvest of a resource in such a manner that the total supply is not permanently depleted. Regulations should not be aimed at stopping all killing in the case of an abundant resource such as caribou, but at the elimination of excessive and wasteful killing.” See Fuller to Gibson, 2 September 1949. RG 85, vol. 1088, file 401-22, pt. 4, NAC.

⁴⁸ Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection, Minutes, 17 March 1950. RG 22, vol. 16, file 69, NAC.

⁴⁹ Kelsall to Harrison Lewis, 7 November 1950. RG 85, vol. 1088, file 401-22, pt. 4, NAC.

to other aboriginal groups having equal need of the resource. The privilege would be of little importance if the Treaty Indians exercised restraint and conservation in using the resource, but they do not. *There is no major instance on record where Treaty Indians have shown restraint in caribou hunting unless it has been imposed on them, often illegally, by authorities concerned with the welfare of the caribou.*⁵⁰

As Kelsall's words suggest, the shift toward a more rigid preservationist philosophy among some caribou biologists in the Canadian Wildlife Service had begun to deepen as scientific research suggested further declines in the caribou population throughout the 1950s.

The Formation of the Caribou Crisis

In the years immediately following the completion of Banfield's study, several scattered reports suggested that the cause of barren ground caribou conservation was not entirely without reason for hope. More specifically, there was a flood of positive new population data from the Canadian Wildlife Service's continued caribou survey work. Beginning in 1950, the caribou study—confined for budgetary reasons to the herds migrating between the north side of Great Bear Lake and Great Slave Lake—came under the leadership of John Kelsall. In spite of the more limited scope to the survey, the research on these caribou herds revealed no clear evidence of a dramatic decline in their population between 1951 and 1953. Of the five caribou herds Kelsall identified within the study area, both the so-called Great Bear Lake herd (including populations at Colville Lake and Point MacDonnel) and Radium herd showed a marked increase according to the survey data. Only the Rae herd showed a severe decline from Banfield's estimate of 210,000 caribou to only 138,000 animals in 1951, and a further drop two years later to an estimated 40,000 animals in what Kelsall described as a "widely scattered" caribou herd.⁵¹

But Kelsall did not conclude from the available evidence that the decline in the Rae herd represented a catastrophe for the caribou conservation program. Instead, he argued it was untenable to attribute such a rapid and severe decline in the Rae herd to influences such as human utilization and disease because the mortality rates from either of these factors were nowhere near the level where they could cause such a spectacular decimation of the caribou population. In addition, calf counts for these caribou conducted over the winter of 1952-3 had been very high, suggesting an annual herd increment of 29.5 per cent. Instead of an absolute decline in the Rae herd, Kelsall reasoned that a

⁵⁰ Kelsall, *The Migratory Barren-ground Caribou of Northern Canada* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1968), p. 286. My emphasis.

⁵¹ John Kelsall, *Continued Barren-Ground Caribou Studies*, Wildlife Management Bulletin, Series 1 Number 12 (Ottawa: Canadian Wildlife Service), pp. 6-25.

major shift in the population had occurred, with over 150,000 caribou migrating to calving grounds east of Bathurst Inlet.⁵² Local testimony and Kelsall’s own ground and aerial study also suggested that a large herd of caribou numbering from between 126,000 to 176,000 caribou had inexplicably taken up a year-round residence in the Arctic Coast region in 1951. According to local testimony, a caribou herd of more than 100,000 head remained in the area throughout the winter of 1952-53.⁵³ While all of this evidence pointed to the difficulty of tracking the erratic movements of the caribou, the population data suggested no rapid decline in the Rae herd but a massive outmigration. Indeed, Kelsall’s population estimates for the study herds suggest they had not diminished since the time of Banfield’s estimates but had increased by a total of almost 70,000 caribou (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1: Population Estimates of the Caribou Herds Between the North End of Great Bear Lake and Great Slave Lake to the Arctic Coast

Herd or Area	Banfield’s Survey (1948-49)	Continuing Survey (1950-52)
Colville Lake	5,000	--
Great Bear Lake	30,000	34,000
Point MacDonnel	--	11,000
Radium	5,000	10,000
Rae	210,000	138,000
Yellowknife	4,000	--
Adelaide and Sherman Gulfs	500	--
Coastal Caribou	--	126,000
TOTAL	254,500	319,000

Source: John Kelsall, “Continued Barren-Ground Caribou Studies,” *Wildlife Management Bulletin*, Series 1 Number 12 (Ottawa: Canadian Wildlife Service), p. 93.

In spite of the figures suggesting an expansion of the caribou population in the best case scenario, and ambiguity due to erratic herd movements in the worst, Kelsall remained pessimistic over the prospect of conserving the barren-ground herds in the Northwest Territories. At a meeting held among federal and provincial game officials in June 1953 to discuss the status of the herds, Kelsall dismissed reports from Manitoba and Saskatchewan indicating exceptionally large calf numbers and “heavy” caribou migrations throughout the winter range. And while Kelsall acknowledged the difficulty of estimating the population of the ‘Rae herd’ due to “variations in distribution,” he largely de-emphasized his own herd drift theory by stating that the caribou in this area were “heavily utilized” and “in great danger of being depleted,” a claim that was put forward despite limited data on human utilization of the caribou herds between Great Bear and

⁵² John Kelsall, “Barren-Ground Caribou Movements in the Canadian Arctic,” North American Wildlife Conference, Proceedings 19 (1954), pp. 551-561.

⁵³ Kelsall, *Continued Barren-Ground Caribou Studies*, pp. 17-22. In retrospect, it is not surprising that Kelsall had difficulty tracking the movements and overlap between the migratory caribou: his five study herds were in fact made up of what are now understood to be the discrete Bathurst and Bluenose caribou herds.

Great Slave Lakes.⁵⁴ Perhaps sensing the uncertain nature of the available evidence, the meeting delegates concluded that the existing game regulations in all jurisdictions were adequate for the present moment. Kelsall's report did nevertheless inspire the passing of a resolution calling for a major federal–provincial co-operative re-survey over the entire range of the barren ground caribou.⁵⁵

It is likely that federal wildlife officials expected the new survey to reveal at least some reduction in the caribou population. A much wider public perception of chronic game shortages in the Northwest Territories had arisen in the three years since Kelsall had taken control of the caribou study as the first reports of starvation among the inland Inuit of the Keewatin region reached a wide public audience through the books and popular articles of popular authors such as the American biologist Francis Harper and his one-time field assistant Farley Mowat.⁵⁶ But perhaps no amount of portentous warning signs could have prepared federal wildlife officials for the release of catastrophic survey results in the summer of 1955. According to Kelsall and his co-investigator, A.G. Loughrey, the mainland caribou herds had declined to a mere 278,900 animals in the six years since Banfield's estimate of 670,000 animals. The two biologists claimed that their aerial survey was so comprehensive that no significant caribou herds could have been missed in all the mainland range.⁵⁷

The news from further studies only worsened. In 1957, Kelsall was placed in charge of a herd-specific air and ground survey that was undertaken in lieu of a third costly range-wide aerial caribou survey.⁵⁸ The new study focused primarily on the large caribou herd that migrated from their winter range in the boreal forests of northern Saskatchewan to spring calving grounds on the tundra in the vicinity of Beverly Lake. Although the results of the study showed a dramatic increase in the study herd from 79,354 caribou in 1955 to 142,500 caribou in 1957-58, Kelsall assumed that the enlarged population was due entirely to migrations from the Keewatin caribou herds to the east and the "Rae herd" to the west. Even more remarkably, Kelsall estimated from a limited survey that the caribou population north of Great Bear Lake numbered only 16,000 animals. Furthermore, he used anecdotal evidence of scarce caribou in northern Manitoba to conclude that the Keewatin herds "certainly numbered less than 40,000," down from a population of 150,000 caribou only two years earlier. Based on all this ambiguous

⁵⁴ Minutes of Meeting, "Barren-ground Caribou," 18 June 1953. RG 22, vol. 270, file 40-6-3, pt. 2, NAC. In the final printed report on his studies, for example, Kelsall used game returns from 1946 to 1950 showing a variable harvest from 2,500 to just over 8,000 animals in the region and adjusted for the presumed inaccuracy of these statistics to produce a "theoretical annual kill" of 8,105.6 caribou. See Kelsall, *Continued Barren-ground Caribou Studies*, pp. 27-28.

⁵⁵ Minutes of Meeting, "Barren-ground Caribou," 18 June 1953. RG 22, vol. 270, file 40-6-3, pt. 2, NAC.

⁵⁶ See Mowat, *People of the Deer*; Francis Harper, "In Caribou Land: Exploration in one of the Least-known Sections of Canada, Where Timber Meets the Tundra," *Natural History* 58, 5 (May 1949), pp. 224-31, pp. 239-49, and Harper, *The Barren Ground Caribou of Keewatin* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1955).

⁵⁷ John Kelsall and A.G. Loughrey, "Barren Ground Caribou Re-survey 1955," n.d. RG 22, vol. 865, file 40-6-3, pt. 3, NAC. See also, "Appreciation of the Mainland Caribou Situation—Eastern Mackenzie and Keewatin Districts," 15 August 1955. RG 22, vol. 270, file 40-6-3, pt. 2, NAC.

⁵⁸ For details of the decision to confine the investigation to a herd specific study, see Minutes, Administrative Committee on Caribou Conservation, 4 June 1956. RG 22, vol. 865, file 40-6-3, pt. 3, NAC.

evidence, Kelsall argued that the mainland caribou population had declined to a mere 200,000 animals.⁵⁹ The CWS biologist placed the responsibility for this apparently dire situation squarely on the shoulders of Native hunters: “the fact that Treaty Indians are not subject to restrictive legislation [in the provinces] has been an obstacle to the maintenance and increase of the caribou population.”⁶⁰

Was the caribou population as imperiled from the hunting activities Native people as Kelsall claimed? Certainly his analysis had an intuitive appeal: too many hunters with guns, too many sled dogs, and too few caribou could only lead to a significant and inevitable crash in the caribou population. But human hunting was only one cause of caribou mortality on the northern range: wolf predation, deep snow, fire on the winter range, and the effect of severe weather on calving success could all have a limiting impact on the caribou population. Kelsall’s second study did in fact include a great deal of research on a broad range of ecological factors affecting the caribou herds. One investigation suggested that fires on the caribou’s winter range had severely impacted the abundance of their preferred sources of food such as fruticose lichens. Although forest fires are an inherent element in the ecology of the taiga forest, the study claimed that the amount of burning activity greatly increased during the mining rush of the 1930s as an influx of prospectors began intentionally to scorch large areas as a means to provide easy access to the rock surfaces beneath the covering forest. Thus any large-scale decline in the caribou population might partly be explained by a severe reduction in suitable range in the years leading up to the war.⁶¹ A separate study of the relationship between weather and calf survival also suggested a shorter-term limitation on the caribou population: severe wind chill during the calving season might have accounted for extremely low herd increments from 1955 to 1957.⁶² In spite of his own research program pointing to a varied and complex array of ecological influences on the caribou population, Kelsall continued to highlight the human hunt as the most significant threat facing the northern herds. Although there was a dramatic reduction in the annual kill to only 12,000 to 15,000 animals in 1957-58, Kelsall argued in the printed report on the results of his second study

⁵⁹ John Kelsall, *Co-operative Studies of Barren-ground Caribou, 1957-58*, Wildlife Management Bulletin, Series 1, Number 15 (Ottawa: Canadian Wildlife Service, 1960), pp. 24-26. Kelsall’s ‘study herd’ is now termed the Beverly Caribou Herd.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-93. The human kill of the study herd declined by 900 animals between 1956-57 and 1957-58. Aboriginal Treaty rights to hunt and trap were guaranteed in the western provinces under the terms of the Natural Resources Transfer Act of 1930.

⁶¹ See Kelsall, *Co-operative Studies of Barren-ground Caribou, 1957-58*, p. 102-109. See also Kelsall, “Forest Fire on the Caribou Winter Ranges,” n.d. RG 85, vol. 1250, file 401-22, pt. 14. For further elaboration on the impact of forest fires on the caribou winter ranges, see George Wilby Scotter, *Effects of Forest Fires on the Winter Range of Barren-Ground Caribou in Northern Saskatchewan*, Wildlife Management Bulletin, Series 1, No. 18 (Ottawa: Canadian Wildlife Service, 1964). For a historical overview of the effects of forest fires on the caribou winter range due to prospecting activity, see Anthony G. Gulig, “Determined to Burn Off the Entire Country: Forest Fires and Environmental Change in Northern Saskatchewan,” paper presented at the 81st annual meeting Canadian Historical Association, 27-29 May 2002, University of Toronto.

⁶² Kelsall, *Co-operative Studies of Barren-Ground Caribou, 1957-58*, p. 51-62.

that even this rate of human utilization might completely eliminate the caribou population by 1969.⁶³

In addition to this questionable conclusion regarding the relative ecological impact of human hunting on the caribou herds, there is some evidence to suggest that Kelsall's prediction of an imminent demise for the mainland herds rested on a broadly inaccurate scientific analysis. In 1971, the CWS biologist Gerry Parker published a study that questioned the accuracy of Kelsall and Loughrey's population figures, arguing that such factors as the use of wide aerial transects ranging from 0.71 to 1.42 miles, an aerial coverage amounting to less than five per cent of the caribou range, the limited use of aerial photographs, and the failure to adjust population figures for caribou outside the study area or those missed within taiga forests all pointed to an excessively low estimate of the caribou population in 1955. Using the analytical standards of a population survey conducted in 1967, Parker adjusted Kelsall and Loughrey's numbers for the western mainland herds upward from 257,700 to a total of 390,000 caribou.⁶⁴ But even with this revision, Kelsall and Loughrey's estimates remain highly questionable. More recent critics have suggested that the potential for error in a range-wide caribou study is difficult to quantify. One group of biologists who conducted a survey of Alaskan caribou in the early 1980s concluded that aerial surveys based on less than ten per cent coverage of the range were "little more than quantitative wild guesses."⁶⁵ With such coarse methods and little baseline data to draw on, the studies of Banfield, Kelsall and Loughrey reveal little about whether the caribou population in the 1950s was stable, had suffered a moderate downturn since the turn of the century, or was in a state of precipitous decline as the CWS biologists claimed.⁶⁶

Limiting the Caribou Hunt; Limiting Aboriginal Rights

If Kelsall's caribou surveys included a degree of speculation and conjecture, federal wildlife officials and northern administrators accepted the results with little

⁶³ Kelsall, *Co-operative Studies of Barren-Ground Caribou*, p. 92.

⁶⁴ Gerry R. Parker, *Trends in the Population of Barren-Ground Caribou of Mainland Canada Over the Last Two Decades: A Re-evaluation of the Evidence*, Canadian Wildlife Service Occasional Paper 10 (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1972): 5.

⁶⁵ R.D. Cameron, K.R. Whitten, W.T. Smith, and D.J. Reed, "Sampling Errors Associated With Aerial Transect Surveys of Caribou," in *Proceedings of the Second North American Caribou Workshop*, Thomas C. Meredith and Arthur M. Martell, eds. McGill Subarctic Research Paper No. 40, Centre for Northern Studies and Research, McGill University, 1985, p. 282. Possible sources of error during aerial surveys include variable observer biases due to fatigue, boredom, poor light, snow glare, air speed, inaccurate definition of the transect width, and difficulties counting individuals within large caribou herds. For an overview, see Douglas C. Heard, "Caribou Census Methods Used in the Northwest Territories." *Ibid.*, pp. 229-238.

⁶⁶ The inconclusive nature of the population data also casts further doubt on Kelsall's claim that the native kill was the primary factor causing an annual deficit in the herds. Because the size of the annual herd increment was derived from percentage of calves in individual herds, low population estimates inevitably produced low appraisals of the amount of caribou available to native hunters. For the results of Kelsall's second major study, see *Co-operative Studies of Barren-ground Caribou, 1957-58*. For data on calf increments, see Kelsall, *The Migratory Barren-Ground Caribou of Northern Canada*, p. 163.

reservation. Indeed, the scientific evidence suggesting that the caribou population had declined from countless millions at the turn of the century to less than one quarter million at the end of the 1950s provoked the declaration of a caribou crisis in government circles. Immediately after the results of Kelsall's first range-wide survey were released in June 1955, Gordon Robertson, the Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources and Commissioner of the NWT, informed his Minister Jean Lesage that the results were "extremely disturbing" and called for abrupt government action to avoid public criticism.⁶⁷ Robertson subsequently organized a meeting of federal and provincial wildlife officials in October 1955 to discuss the situation.⁶⁸ Delegates to the meeting generally agreed—in keeping with the decision of the Northwest Territories in January 1955 to allow holders of a General Hunting License (Dene, Inuit, and long-time non-Native residents of the NWT) to kill big game at any time of the year for food purposes—that Native hunters were "in the right" to kill caribou for their own sustenance.⁶⁹ But the delegates also concluded that all forms of wastage, including improper caching of meat and the use of caribou for dog feed, should be eliminated through a comprehensive conservation education program. For 'problem' areas such as Duck Lake and Brochet in Manitoba, where allegations of wasteful slaughters persisted, the delegates proposed that a game officer be stationed in the area to curb the intensity of the caribou hunt. Fire suppression on the winter range of the caribou was thought to be too expensive, but delegates did recommend an expansion of existing predator control programs and the distribution of freezers to aid with the storage of meat killed in the summer months. The most important result of the meeting was the creation of a new federal-provincial Administrative Committee for Caribou Conservation, whose purpose was to provide policy recommendations to senior levels of government based on the advice of a separate Technical Committee composed primarily of CWS scientists and provincial game officers.⁷⁰

The renewed administrative enthusiasm for caribou conservation among the meeting delegates produced immediate results. Predator control operations that began in the winter of 1952-53 were greatly expanded as strychnine baits were distributed more widely and professional hunters hired to increase the kill of wolves.⁷¹ Several new

⁶⁷ R. Gordon Robertson to Jean Lesage, Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, 6 July 1955. RG 22, vol. 270, file 40-6-3, pt. 2, NAC.

⁶⁸ R.G. Robertson, Circular Memo, 30 September 1955. Ibid.

⁶⁹ This liberalization of the game regulations was the result of political pressure from Indian Affairs and a growing frustration with the impossibility of enforcing the game regulations in remote areas. Senior officials within the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources deemed it "most difficult" to remove this privilege due to a potential political backlash and the prospect of swelling relief budgets. Holders of a General Hunting License were still only permitted to sell caribou taken during the open season. See Ben Sivertz, Acting Director, Northern Administration and Lands Branch, to R.G. Robertson, Commissioner of the NWT, 23 August 1955. Ibid.

⁷⁰ Minutes, Federal-Provincial Meeting on Barren-Ground Caribou, 13 October 1955. Ibid.

⁷¹ The initial proposal to expand the predator control program is contained in a document titled, "Brief Presented to Northwest Territories Council, 1 September 1955." Alexander Stevenson Fonds, N-1992-023, box 33, file 1, Northwest Territories Archives. For an overview of predator control efforts in the Northwest Territories in the 1950s and 1960s, see NWT Council, Sessional Paper No. 8, Second Session, 1964, 20 October 1964. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, file 401-22, pt. 22, NAC.

restrictive amendments were also added to the NWT Game Ordinance after the disastrous results of the 1955 survey became widely known; many were focused in particular on the curtailment of caribou hunting activities by non-Natives. A regulation allowing the issue of special licenses for newcomers to the NWT to take five caribou annually was, for example, rescinded from the Game Ordinance in 1956. In a further effort to restrict the caribou harvest among primarily non-Native hunters in large population centres, a regulation was also passed through the NWT Council that same year to limit all holders of a General Hunting License who were no longer dependent on 'country food' to a kill of only one of each big game species per year. In a final legislative initiative to limit access to caribou among the non-Native population, the NWT Council passed a regulation in January 1957 banning the sale of caribou except among holders of a General Hunting License.⁷² The council also took some limited steps to regulate the Aboriginal caribou harvest on a local basis. In May 1957, caribou hunting was banned entirely on Coats and Southampton Islands at the north end of Hudson Bay due to reports of a severe decline in the caribou population.⁷³

These new conservation measures were, for the most part, a reflection of the longstanding policy of preserving the northern food supply primarily for the Dene and Inuit population. Nonetheless, the apparent gravity of the caribou crisis provided momentum for conservationists within government to at least consider the imposition of more stringent game regulations on Aboriginal subsistence hunters. Throughout the late 1950s, senior wildlife officials at the federal and particularly the provincial level became increasingly dismissive of the Treaty provisions guaranteeing perpetual Aboriginal hunting and trapping rights within the caribou range. Although federal officials had long maintained that the treaties allowed the government to impose game regulations on the Aboriginal hunters of the Northwest Territories, the terms of the Natural Resources Transfer Agreement of 1930 unquestionably prevented the provincial governments from imposing any regulations on the subsistence hunting activities of Treaty Indians. This constitutional arrangement presented a major stumbling block for caribou conservation efforts, as any new regulation proposed by the Administrative or Technical Caribou Committees could have no effect on Aboriginal hunters on the winter ranges in the northern reaches of Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta. At the Administrative Committee meeting held in October 1957, federal and provincial officials thus passed a resolution calling for a review of treaties and agreements that limited the imposition of conservation measures on the caribou range. The rationale behind the resolution suggested that their efforts were much more than a pragmatic attempt to implement

⁷² The changes to the Game Ordinance for 1956 are summarized on a letter from F.J.G. Cunningham, Director, Northern Administration and Lands Branch to the Commissioner of the RCMP, 12 February 1957. RG 85, vol. 1250, file 401-22. pt. 14, NAC. The General Hunting License was generally restricted to Dene, Inuit and Métis hunters 'living the life of a native,' but non-natives who had lived in the NWT since 1938 were also permitted to hold a GHL.

⁷³ For a record of the meeting of senior northern administrators and CWS biologists that led to a recommendation to close hunting on Coats and Southampton, see F.J.G. Cunningham, to R. Gordon Robertson, Commissioner of the NWT, 28 February 1957. RG 22, vol. 865, file 40-6-3, pt. 4, NAC. A copy of the order to close the season, dated 6 May 1957, was found in the Alexander Stevenson Fonds, N-1992-023, box 33, file 1, NWTA.

enabling legislation for some of the more extreme conservation measures that the Administrative Committee were considering such as regional caribou quotas or a closed season on the species for five years. Indeed, the committee adopted a rigidly liberal ideological approach to regulating the caribou harvest, arguing that all hunters should have equal right to harvest limited resources irrespective of their ethnicity. The final text of the resolution thus rejected any notion of collective rights to a traditional food source that was the very material base of Dene and Inuit culture for centuries. The resolution also emphasized the importance of removing the ‘discriminatory’ hunting privileges accorded to Treaty Indians. One passage from the rationale reads as follows:

Any attempt to enforce the suggested prohibitions among non-Treaty Indians and other groups is bound to fail unless the same sanctions can be shown to apply to all. Most Treaty Indians may be expected to be co-operative but it is useless to suggest that all will voluntarily accept the stringent regulations proposed. Indeed many of the Indians are now well acquainted with their rights. Since the present apparent favourable position of the Treaty Indian leads to discrimination, recrimination and inability or unwillingness to establish sound management measures, it is felt in the best interests of all, and particularly of the Treaty Indians, to review the various Treaties and Acts as they relate to Indians and caribou utilization, with a view to making desirable changes, or if necessary renegotiating the Treaties.⁷⁴

This notion that placing limitations on Aboriginal Treaty rights was “in the best interest” of Native hunters is rife throughout the discourse on caribou conservation in the 1950s. In just one of many examples, Ben Sivertz, the new Director of the Northern Administration and Lands Branch, wrote in December 1957 that his sympathies for the “moral obligation” to uphold Treaty rights were superseded by the notion “that if the caribou are to be saved we must have adequate legislation applicable to all, regardless of racial origin.” It was, according to Sivertz, “in the interest of the Indians to preserve the caribou,” a necessary surrender of political rights to save “a resource that is as important, if not more important, to the Indians as any other racial group.”⁷⁵ Such sentiments represented one of the most thoroughly paternalistic aspects of federal government’s approach to wildlife conservation during this period. Certainly the implication of this idea was that Native hunters could no longer manage their own affairs. According to the conservation orthodoxy, the political rights and freedoms accorded to Aboriginal hunters only impeded the efforts of the more rational guiding hand of state wildlife managers to save the Dene and Inuit from their own worst excesses.

Almost inevitably, however, the proposal to abrogate Aboriginal Treaty rights as part of the caribou conservation program elicited protests from within Indian Affairs. In

⁷⁴ Minutes, Administrative Committee for Caribou Conservation, 3-4 October 1957. RG 22, vol. 865, file 40-6-3, pt. 4, NAC. Alberta was not an active participant in the campaign to revise the terms of the Natural Resources Transfer Act because the caribou only migrated to a small section of the northeastern corner of the province.

⁷⁵ Sivertz, to E.A. Cote, Asst. Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, 23 December 1957. Ibid.

December 1957, E.D. Fulton, the minister responsible for Indian Affairs, wrote to the Minister of Northern Affairs, Alvin Hamilton, to suggest that the application of strict caribou regulations, particularly those that contained no “starvation clause” in case of dire need, would violate the spirit of the Treaties both in the provinces and in territories under federal jurisdiction.⁷⁶ Hamilton’s reply, which was drafted by Sivertz, indicated that the department was determined to move ahead with restrictive legislation regardless of Fulton’s concerns. The letter claimed that the Treaties provided the federal government with an authority to apply game laws that superseded the right to hunt for food. If this argument failed to persuade Fulton, Sivertz presented the issue in the starkest possible terms, warning that Treaty rights to hunt for food would become meaningless if the caribou were to go extinct.⁷⁷

In accordance with such sentiment, federal officials within Northern Affairs enacted several broad ‘non-discriminatory’ measures to limit caribou harvest of Native hunters in the Northwest Territories. In March 1958, the Northwest Territories Council voted to implement one of the Administrative Committee’s key recommendations from the previous year’s meeting: the hunting of female caribou east of the Mackenzie River and all caribou under the age of one year was banned for Native and non-Native hunters in the Northwest Territories, with no ‘starvation clause’ or other formal exemption afforded to Dene or Inuit subsistence hunters. At the same time, the feeding of caribou meat suitable for human consumption to any domestic animal was banned everywhere in the Northwest Territories, a provision that had the potential to cause severe hardship in outlying bush camps where Native hunters were dependent on sled dogs for transportation. Law enforcement officials were asked to be lenient when infractions did not constitute a repeat offense or a vaguely defined ‘flagrant violation’ of the game regulations. It was clear, however, that with the advent of the caribou crisis wildlife officials were willing to implement broad restrictions on the caribou harvest regardless of the subsistence requirements of Dene and Inuit hunters.⁷⁸

But for all the enthusiasm among federal officials in support of stricter game regulations in the Northwest Territories, the legislative approach to caribou conservation remained limited in scope and effect throughout the caribou crisis. Most importantly, the issue of regulating the Aboriginal harvest in the provinces was never resolved despite the lengthy negotiations on the issue of revising the Natural Resources Transfer Act. It is not clear why the discussions failed, but it is possible that the issue was simply not a high priority at the level of the federal cabinet. At a December 1951 meeting of the Administrative Committee, the provincial delegates pushed through a resolution registering their ‘amazement’ that the federal government had chosen to take no action on

⁷⁶ E.D. Fulton, Minister of Citizenship of Immigration to Alvin Hamilton, 5 December 1957. Ibid.

⁷⁷ Hamilton to Fulton, 24 December 1957, RG 85, vol. 1495, file 401-22, pt. 17, NAC. The numbered treaties do generally allow the federal government to make regulations “from time to time” in the interests of conserving game. The assumption that this authority was absolute was perhaps somewhat presumptuous on the part of Sivertz and Hamilton because the extent to which this authority could infringe upon Treaty rights to hunt and trap had not been subject to any definitive legal interpretation at this point.

⁷⁸ The amendments to the Game Ordinance in March 1957 were enclosed with a letter from R.G. Robertson to Alvin Hamilton, Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, 3 March 1957. RG 85, acc. 1997-98, box 68, file 401-22-5. pt. 3, NAC.

the necessary legislative amendments that the senior caribou committee had proposed three months earlier.⁷⁹ When the relevant federal agencies (Indian Affairs, Northern Affairs, and the CWS) again forwarded legislative amendments to cabinet in the spring of 1963, once again no action was taken.⁸⁰ At a meeting of the Administrative Committee held in January 1964, Paynter was resigned to the fact that “any program designed to control the killing of caribou must take for granted that nothing can be done with native rights.”⁸¹

Of course, it was still technically possible in a legal sense for the federal government to enact protective legislation for the caribou in the Northwest Territories, but the continued inability of the provinces to regulate the Aboriginal caribou harvest undoubtedly created a politically awkward situation for the federal government. To proceed with some of their more draconian proposals such as regional quotas or a closure of the caribou season for five years was bound to spark intense protests and civil disobedience among many Native communities if their counterparts in the provinces were permitted a *de facto* unregulated caribou hunt. Indeed, federal officials had already received reports suggesting that the imposition of strict game regulations in both the provinces and the territories had provoked anger and frustration among the Native population. For example, the Indian Affairs field officer, W.G. Turnstead, reported in November 1957 that Native hunters at Stony Rapids and Stony Lake, Saskatchewan had refused to accept hunting permits in response to an attempt on the part of provincial game officials to restrict the Native harvest to two caribou per hunter.⁸² The general unwillingness of the Native population to accept the new quota was so widespread through northern Saskatchewan in the winter of 1957-58 that the regulation proved unenforceable.⁸³ In a like manner, the Chief at Fort Rae, Jimmy Bruneau, responded to the federal cabinet’s designation of the caribou as an endangered species by informing H.R. Conn of Indian Affairs that his people would make every effort to conserve the animals, but they insisted that caribou hunting was a political right and a fundamental

⁷⁹ Minutes, Administrative Committee for Caribou Preservation, 27 January 1964. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, box 68, file 401-22-5-1, pt. 1, NAC.

⁸⁰ See a report from H.R. Conn presented Administrative Committee for Caribou Preservation, 17 April 1963. Ibid.

⁸¹ Minutes, Administrative Committee for Caribou Preservation, 1 December 1961. Ibid.

⁸² See W.G. Turnstead, Diary for the Month of November, 1957,” n.d. RG 22, vol. 865, file 40-6-3, pt. 4, NAC.

⁸³ The refusal of native hunters in Saskatchewan to comply with quotas became the basis for federal officials to conclude that such a measure would be unenforceable in the Northwest Territories. See J.E. Bryant, Superintendent of Game, to the Deputy Commissioner, 9 December 1958. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, box 67, file 401-22, pt. 18, NAC. Regardless, E.L. Paynter’s attempt to enforce a quota of two caribou per hunter “regardless of racial origin” constituted a clear violation of the Natural Resources Transfer Act. Although the policy was to be administered with “some flexibility” toward native hunters, the incident suggests the extreme measures that some officials were willing to adopt to limit Aboriginal Treaty rights to harvest caribou for subsistence purposes. For a summary of Paynter’s policies, see “Caribou Management Policy for 1957-58, Saskatchewan,” RG 85, vol. 865, file 40-6-3, pt. 4, NAC. In Manitoba, there was a year-round closed season on caribou established in 1957, but the regulation did not apply to Treaty Indians. See Minutes, Technical Committee on Caribou Conservation, 13-15 November 1958, RG acc. 1997-98/076, box 68, file 401-22-5, pt. 3, NAC.

part of their cultural heritage. According to Bruneau, the Dene hunters at Rae would continue to kill cows and calves in violation of the game regulations when no other food was available.⁸⁴ At times, objections to some of the most severe proposals to change the game regulations came even from the northern administration's own field officers. In October 1962, T.H. Butters, the Area Administrator at Baker Lake, recommended against a proposal from the Technical Committee to strictly prohibit the feeding of any part of the caribou to dogs regardless of whether it was fit for human consumption. Butters claimed that "the land hunter who respects and obeys the law would foreseeably [sic] jeopardize the well-being of his family, lose his teams to starvation, and ultimately be forced into the settlement." A clear majority of field officers who responded to a query on the issue of dog feed supported Butters' analysis of the proposed regulation.⁸⁵

With both Native hunters and many northern field officers objecting to some of the key policy initiatives of senior wildlife administrators, there was clearly little hope that a comprehensive set of strict game regulations would be adhered to or enforced in many parts of the Northwest Territories. At an Administrative meeting held in October 1964, David Munro, the Chief of the Canadian Wildlife Service, concluded that legislation to protect the caribou had largely been ineffective because "it evoked little sympathy before the magistrates and the number of enforcement personnel was small." Munro also claimed that "key administrative agencies... have seemed unable to accept the fact that [the] human kill has taken any prominent part in the ten or twenty-fold decrease that has quite obviously occurred."⁸⁶ Indeed, there were simply too many legal, political and administrative obstacles in the way of far-reaching game regulations to protect the barren ground caribou. Moreover, for many opponents of stricter game regulations, the material cultures of many Dene and Inuit communities were so entwined with the seasonal migrations of the caribou, they would likely not survive a rigidly enforced set of limitations on the slaughter of these animals. Almost from the beginning of the caribou crisis, wildlife conservationist began to focus less on limiting the caribou hunt through formal regulations, and more on a much broader program to fundamentally alter the caribou culture of northern Aboriginal people.

Controlling Livelihoods; Controlling Lives

The advent of the caribou crisis in 1955 created a quandary for many northern administrators and federal wildlife officials. How could a conservation program effectively preserve the caribou, they wondered, without creating absolute material deprivation among the nearly six thousand Native northerners who depended on the

⁸⁴ For a summary of Bruneau's comments, see W.G. Brown to H.M. Jones, 25 May 1961. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, box 67, file 401-22, pt. 20, NAC.

⁸⁵ T.H. Butters to the Regional Administrator, 28 October 1961. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, box 67, file 401-22, pt. 20, NAC. A record of the broad reaction among field staff to the proposed strict ban on using caribou for dog feed can be found in a memo from C.L. Merrill, Administrator of the Mackenzie Region, to W.G. Brown. Ibid.

⁸⁶ Minutes, Administrative Committee for the Preservation of Caribou, 20 June 1964. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, box 67, file 401-22, pt. 22, NAC.

species for food? Although the previous paragraphs have suggested that many federal officials did not shy away at least from the idea of imposing strict game regulations on subsistence hunters, the conservation programs implemented after the release of Kelsall's studies also contained a wide-ranging set of policies designed to address the subsistence needs of the Native population. A report to the Northwest Territories Council from January 1958 demonstrates the breadth of the caribou conservation program. Drafted primarily to assess the implication of a drastically reduced caribou harvest due to either rapidly diminished herds or protective legislation, the report proposed such measures as the distribution of imported foods to Native communities in need, the promotion of fish and marine mammal resources among suitably located communities, and the intensification of conservation education programs. These measures were not put before the NWT Council merely to mitigate the worst effects of any new game regulations. They were also promoted as key conservation measures in their own right, perhaps the only realistic means to reduce human pressure on the caribou herds.⁸⁷ As a result, non-legislative measures came to dominate the federal government's caribou conservation programs in the late 1950s and early 1960s, not only because of the relative failure of legislative initiatives, but also because Indian Affairs was willing to invest a great deal of money and personnel to support conservation programs that did not threaten the hunting rights of Treaty Indians.⁸⁸ Certainly such measures as the distribution of high powered rifles to reduce 'crippling loss' among the caribou herds, the sponsorship of predator control hunts, and the construction of underground freezers for the year-round storage of caribou meat were relatively benign conservation measures, at least in terms of their social and ecological impacts on human communities. Other programs implied a much more profound upheaval to the human ecology of the North. Conservation education initiatives, for example, became far more intrusive during this period as government messages on how best to pursue the caribou hunt appeared in print, in schools, and over the radio. The promotion of alternative resources among the Dene and Inuit was also pursued with a particularly naive enthusiasm, as if people who had been caribou hunters for centuries could suddenly transform their material culture to one based on fish or marine mammals in one season. This search for alternate forms of sustenance often entailed relocating entire communities from one part of the Arctic to areas with more 'suitable' resources, and then moving them again if a project failed. The reach and breadth of these programs suggests the extent to which conservation had become a totalizing force in the lives of many northern Aboriginal people, controlling their choices about where to live, what animals to hunt, how to transport themselves. By the end of the 1950s, the institutional practice of wildlife conservation had become much more than a process of simply managing the caribou herds according to scientific principles, but also

⁸⁷ The report suggests a reduction in the caribou harvest from 28,000 to 9,000 animals annually. See, "Council of the Northwest Territories, Report on the Conservation of Caribou." Alexander Stevenson Fonds, N-1992-023, box 33, file 3, NWTA.

⁸⁸ For a summary of the contributions of Indian Affairs to the caribou conservation program and their rationale for participating, see E.D. Fulton, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to Alvin Hamilton, Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, RG 22, vol. 865, file 40-6-3, pt. 4, NAC.

an intimate part of the federal government's broader post-war programs to colonize and control the lives of northern Aboriginal people.

Perhaps no other federal program reveals the neo-colonial discourse behind the caribou conservation program quite so completely as the attempts on the part of the Department of Northern Affairs to 'educate' Native hunters on the principles of caribou conservation. Before the onset of the caribou crisis in 1955, conservation education was more an abstract idea than a concrete program, an assortment of infrequent poster campaigns and appeals for field officers to do more work with the Natives to prevent wastage or the excessive slaughter of caribou. After 1955, however, the department produced a broad range of more formal educational material such as filmstrips, booklets, and curriculum supplements for local schools.

Not all of this material was directed at the Dene and Inuit population. On occasion, biologists from the Canadian Wildlife Service drafted popular articles to highlight the severity of the caribou crisis for the broad Canadian public. In keeping with the prevailing sentiment after 1955, many of these articles were alarmist in tone. In the spring of 1956 Banfield published an essay in *The Beaver*, the Hudson Bay Company's 'magazine of the North,' that reviewed the results of the major scientific studies leading up to the declaration of the caribou crisis. Despite his position as an apparently objective scientist, Banfield was not averse to embellishing his article with sensational descriptions of the caribou hunt. He wrote that, "orgies of killing still take place at several crossing points where caribou are speared from canoes or kayaks as they cross lakes in crowded ranks. Each year thousands of caribou carcasses are abandoned—their bloated bodies crowding the shores of northern lakes whose waters flowed red a few days before." Banfield supported this image of widespread carnage with the same general reference to stories of wanton caribou slaughters that had been circulating throughout the Northwest Territories. The article also included a photograph of recently killed caribou that were apparently abandoned by a lakeshore near the Dene community at Duck Lake, Manitoba.⁸⁹ Such vivid images of the 'wasteful' slaughters apparently perpetrated by Native hunters was undoubtedly an invaluable piece of public 'educational propaganda' regarding the severity of the caribou crisis. Indeed, the department ordered four thousand offprints of the article for distribution throughout the Northwest Territories and northern parts of the Prairie provinces.⁹⁰ Similar articles blaming Native hunters for the decline in the caribou appeared in popular publications throughout the 1950s and 1960s.⁹¹ The department also published its own popular book on the caribou entitled *Tuktu* in 1965. The author of the volume, Fraser Symington, blamed Native hunters for the caribou decline in no uncertain terms, arguing that, "their way of life did not encourage the conservation of game."⁹²

⁸⁹ See A.W.F. Banfield, "The Caribou Crisis," *The Beaver*, Outfit 286 (Spring 1956), pp. 3-6.

⁹⁰ See W.G. Brown to F.J.G. Cunningham, 3 February 1956. RG 22, vol. 865, file 40-6-3, pt. 3, NAC.

⁹¹ See, for example, John Tener, "The Present Status of the Barren-ground Caribou," *Canadian Geographical Journal*, 60, 3 (1960), pp. 98-105; John P. Kelsall, "Barren-Ground Caribou and their Management," *Canadian Audubon Magazine* (Nov-Dec. 1963), p. 2-7.

⁹² Fraser Symington, *Tuktu* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1965), p. 52.

The department also initiated a more formal conservation education program that was targeted squarely at Dene and Inuit caribou hunters. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of much of this material is its patronizing tone, as if its intended audience was comprised of children rather than adult hunters. A filmstrip commentary circulated among departmental officials in 1955 claimed, for example, that “in years when there are many animals, food is plentiful and the Eskimos are fat and happy,” but because of the impact of wolves and rifles on the caribou, “soon few animals will be left. The herds will become smaller and smaller and the Eskimos will be starving and cold.” The commentary over the next several numbered frames continues on as follows:

12. Here is the Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman to tell the Eskimos how they may help save the caribou.
13. First, by digging out the wolves’ dens. Just think of how many caribou one wolf kills in a lifetime.
14. Second, by following wounded animals whenever possible and killing them for food.
15. Third, by killing only what is needed and not shooting every animal that is to be seen. This is the way young and foolish hunters do much harm because they do not know any better.
16. Fourth, by being careful not to shoot the cows in the Spring when the calves still need them. The young calves will have much meat if they have a chance to grow up.
17. Fifth, by teaching the younger and inexperienced hunters to follow these suggestions. If this is done, less animals will be killed and the herds will be large enough to permit the young animals to fill in the gaps cause by the loss of those killed for food. By saving the herds it will mean that, not only will there be more to eat now...
18. but that young children, like this one, will have animals to hunt and eat when he grows up. So, protect your food supply for the present and future.⁹³

In 1956, the department issued a publication that can only be described as a children’s storybook. Titled *Tuktut*, the Inuktitut word for caribou, the booklet featured simple passages offering advice on caribou conservation with cartoon-like line drawings on the facing pages. Near the beginning of the slim volume, the intended Inuit audience was given a lesson in the government’s interpretation of their own history: “your forefathers saw many more caribou than you now see. Had there not been careless killing, this would not be so.” Having been taught that any decline in the caribou was solely their own fault, with no mention of itinerant whalers or hide traders at the turn of the century, the projected Inuit reader was then given instruction in several basic principles of caribou conservation: gather all parts from any animal you kill, catch fish to feed dogs, cache meat properly, and kill wolves whenever possible. At one point, the book suggests the

⁹³ “Filmstrip Commentary on Conservation of the Caribou,” n.d. RG 85, vol. 1250, file 401-22, pt. 11, NAC. This particular filmstrip was used in local schools, but it was also based on the conservation sections of the Eskimo ‘Book of Wisdom,’ a government publication dedicated to improving the lives of the Inuit through the provision of information on subjects ranging from wildlife to personal hygiene.

time may have come for the Inuit to abandon the caribou hunt due to its inherent inefficiency. The author writes, “many of the people live by the sea but they travel by Kamutik [dog sled] far inland to hunt deer. The dogs eat most of the meat from the hunt. When they return they have almost nothing.”⁹⁴

Clearly both the form and content of *Tuktut* is imbued with paternalism and condescension toward Inuit culture. The historical analysis manages to mock the hunting culture of the Inuit; the storybook format reinforces the idea they are a childlike people in the eyes of the government. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that many Inuit hunters reacted with disdain as Northern Service Officers began to distribute the book throughout the Arctic. On August 31st, 1956 an article with the headline, “Eskimos Deride Ottawa Comics,” appeared in the *Edmonton Journal*. The report cites a recent meeting of the Northwest Territories Council, where the elected member from Aklavik, Frank Carmichael, informed his colleagues that *Tuktut* was a “joke among the Eskimos... He said Eskimos, when given the book, illustrated in comic book fashion, say ‘what do you think we are, little children?’”⁹⁵ The article was provocative enough for Ben Sivertz, at this time Chief of the Arctic Division, to solicit opinions on the booklet from all his Northern Service Officers. Although several of these field officers reported no adverse reaction to *Tuktut*, their accounts must be interpreted with caution. In one case, A.J. Boxer, the NSO at Aklavik, dismissed Carmichael’s comments because one Inuit trapper, Donald Gordon, had found the book interesting.⁹⁶ Jameson Bond, the NSO at Cambridge Bay, reported there was no local criticism at Cambridge Bay, but also recounted a meeting where resident hunters had complained they could not understand the booklet because it was not printed in the local dialect.⁹⁷ In more general terms, it is not clear if reports suggesting that the booklet was ‘favourably received’ in locations such as Frobisher Bay and Churchill precluded the possibility of Inuit criticisms proceeding behind the backs of the local government field staff.⁹⁸ Regardless, it is clear that local reaction to the booklet in at least one other part of the Arctic was similar to that in Aklavik. At Fort Chimo, Québec, the NSO J.G. Walton regretfully reported that *Tuktut* was received with “cynical amusement.”⁹⁹ Certainly this negative reaction on the part of some Inuit did little to inspire a less paternalistic approach to conservation education. When reports of the negative reaction to *Tuktut* reached the volume’s illustrator, the Northern Service Officer James Houston, he replied that he was “attempting to imitate the Eskimo style of serious cartoon in this booklet, knowing that this would appeal to those more naïve and charming Eskimo hunters living east of the

⁹⁴ A copy of *Tuktut* was found in the Alexander Stevenson Fonds, N-1992-023, box 33, file 4, NWTA. There is no publishing data other than the fact the booklet was produced by the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources.

⁹⁵ “Eskimos Deride Ottawa Comics,” *Edmonton Journal*, 31 August 1956. A clipping was found in RG 85, vol. 1250, file 401-22, pt. 13, NAC.

⁹⁶ A.J. Boxer to Chief, Arctic Division, 19 September 1956. Ibid.

⁹⁷ Bond to Sivertz, 31 October 1956. RG 85, vol. 1250, file 401-22, pt. 14, NAC.

⁹⁸ See Doug Wilkinson, NSO, to Sivertz, 25 September 1956. RG 85, vol. 1250, file 401-22, pt. 13, NAC; W.G. Kerr, NSO, to Sivertz, 21 September 1956. Ibid.

⁹⁹ Walton to Sivertz. 20 September 1956. RG 85, vol. 1250, file 401-22, pt. 13, NAC.

Mackenzie Delta.”¹⁰⁰ Nor did the negative publicity surrounding *Tutktut* prevent the publication of similar material. A second ‘picture story’ booklet titled *Save the Caribou* was printed in 1957 and a comic book with the title *A Question of Survival* appeared in 1965.¹⁰¹

In addition to the distribution of printed material, the inauguration of the caribou crisis in 1955 brought about more direct attempts to ‘educate’ Native hunters on the basic principles of wildlife conservation. To a certain extent, these efforts were a repeat of older programs that relied on the *ad hoc* efforts of federal field officers to deliver lectures on conservation in Native villages and hunting camps. The RCMP Constable R. Locker reported in March 1957, for instance, that he had travelled to all the Native communities around Great Slave Lake to inform local hunters of the new caribou regulations, and impress upon them the general need for conservation.¹⁰² The CWS biologist Ward Stevens also gave a series of lectures on caribou conservation at Yellowknife, Snowdrift, and Fort Rae, the last of which was apparently not well received by the Native population.¹⁰³

Field officers also increasingly sought to establish supervisory control over the day-to-day subsistence activities of Dene and Inuit hunters. In order to prevent waste or blatant violations of the game regulations, both the NWT Game Warden Service and the Indian Affairs Branch began to organize supervised caribou hunts beginning in 1955.¹⁰⁴ Field staff from all branches of the northern administration were also directed to take an active role trying to teach Native hunters to exploit sources of country food other than the caribou. In August 1955, the Northwest Territories Council discussed the possibility of developing alternative sources of meat for the local populations. Proposals ranged from the increased provision of bison meat from Wood Buffalo National Park to a revival of older ideas such as the introduction of new herds of domesticated reindeer or yaks. The council members also suggested that nets might be supplied and field staff augmented in order to teach Dene and Inuit modern fishing techniques so they could better harvest the marine mammal and fisheries resources of large inland lakes and coastal waters.¹⁰⁵ Ben

¹⁰⁰ James Houston to Sivertz, 31 October 1956. RG 85, vol. 1250, file 401-22, pt. 14, NAC. Houston was well known for having set up several successful Inuit handicraft co-operatives in the Eastern Arctic.

¹⁰¹ *Save the Caribou* was created and printed by the Education Division of the Northern Administration and Lands Branch in 1957. A copy was found in RG 85, vol. 1250, file 401-22, pt. 14, NAC. The Canadian Wildlife Service printed *A Question of Survival* in 1965. A copy was found in the Alexander Stevenson Fonds, N-1992-023, box 33, file 4, NWTA.

¹⁰² Cst. J.E. Locker, Reliance Detachment, RCMP, Patrol Report, 27 March 1957. RG 85, vol. 1495, file 401-22, pt. 15, NAC.

¹⁰³ W.G. Brown, Chief, Territorial Division, to Sivertz, Director, Northern Administration and Lands Branch, 21 May 1957. RG 85, vol. 1495, file 401-22, pt. 16, NAC.

¹⁰⁴ A description of the supervised hunting program is contained in a memo from W.E. Stevens, Supt. of Game, to all the game wardens in the NWT. The memo is dated 3 January 1956. RG 85, vol. 1250, file 401-22, pt. 12, NAC.

¹⁰⁵ See F.J.G. Cunningham, Director, Northern Administration and Lands Branch, Memorandum for the Commissioner of the NWT, Alternative Sources of Meat for the People of the North, 25 November 1955. RG 85, vol. 1255, file 472-1, pt. 1, NAC.

Sivertz was so enthusiastic about this proposal that he called for “an intensive campaign to switch Natives from a ‘caribou economy’ to a ‘fish economy.’”¹⁰⁶

The thought of expanding fishing projects to relieve hunting pressure on the caribou held a particular appeal for federal officials who hoped that the increased exploitation of alternative resources might keep Native hunters from becoming overly reliant on relief. A report forwarded to the Northwest Territories Council in January 1958 on a fishing project at Baker Lake summed up the prevailing sentiment when it suggested that it was “not considered advisable or desirable to distribute imported foods as such action might tend to destroy all initiative in using fish and other local sources of food.”¹⁰⁷ In part, this statement was a reiteration of the long-standing policy of encouraging the Native people of the Northwest Territories to remain self-sufficient hunters rather than wards of the state. It was also reflective of a more recent debate concerning the relationship of the Inuit to the emerging modern welfare state. After the market for Arctic foxes, a mainstay of the fur trade economy north of the tree line, collapsed in the late 1940s, many Inuit came to rely at least partly on new post-war social assistance programs such as the family allowance. Relief outlays to Inuit hunters in the Northwest Territories increased dramatically over this period, from \$3,978 in 1945 to \$68,978 in 1954.¹⁰⁸ A widespread and at times very public discourse began to emerge blaming the Inuit for their apparent ‘laziness’ and penchant for handouts. Several newspapers in Canada and the United States ran articles and editorials in the early 1950s that were highly critical of the reduced ‘self-reliance’ and ‘vitality’ among the Inuit since the introduction of social welfare to the Far North.¹⁰⁹ The Union Oil Company of California went so far as to place an advertisement in *Newsweek* highlighting the emerging ‘indolence’ of the Inuit as ‘proof’ that the emerging welfare state could only result in “enslavement by security.”¹¹⁰ Such attacks on federal policy in the North ignored the contribution of fickle global fur markets to the collapse of the Inuit fur trading economy. They also ignored the fact that some form of social assistance was absolutely necessary for the Inuit in response to the disintegration of their trading economy. Although federal officials at times dismissed their critics as ideologues bent on discrediting Canada’s social welfare programs, others were not entirely indifferent to the idea that welfare payments were having detrimental social effects among the Inuit.¹¹¹ At a meeting of the federal government’s Committee on Eskimo Affairs held in May 1952, delegates suggested revising welfare policies to

¹⁰⁶ Sivertz to Gordon Robertson, Deputy Minister, 8 August 1956. RG 85, vol. 1250, file 401-22, pt. 13, NAC.

¹⁰⁷ Council of the Northwest Territories, Report on the Conservation of Caribou, 2 January 1958. Alexander Stevenson Fonds, N-1992-023, box 33, file 3, NWTA.

¹⁰⁸ See “Relief Issued to the Eskimos,” n.d. RG 22, vol. 254, file 40-8-1, pt. 3, NAC.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, “Eskimos Hunting Less Since Pensions Granted,” *The Globe and Mail*, 17 May 1952; “The Government and the Eskimos,” *Calgary Herald*, 5 June 1952. Clippings of these articles were found in RG 22, vol. 254, file 40-8-1, pt. 3, NAC.

¹¹⁰ See “What Price Kanaukyaksait?” *Newsweek*. A clipping of this advertisement, stamped with the date 27 January 1953, was found in RG 22, vol. 254, file 40-8-1, pt. 3, NAC.

¹¹¹ For a rebuke of the criticisms leveled at the government’s welfare policies, see George Davidson, Deputy Minister of Welfare, to Harry Young, Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, 21 January 1953. *Ibid.*

discourage the Inuit from giving up life on the land and congregating near larger settlements in the hopes of obtaining social assistance payments.¹¹² The search for alternative food sources to the caribou in the middle to late 1950s can therefore be understood not just as conservation measure designed to optimize the production of food resources in the NWT. It was also part of much larger policy regime that was designed to keep the Inuit off the dole despite the unreliable nature of the Arctic fox, and at times the caribou, as the basis for their material economy.

This convergence of northern social policy and the caribou conservation program encouraged the northern administration to pursue local fishing projects with an almost missionary zeal. Perhaps the most urgent attempt to convert a local Inuit group from caribou hunters to fishers occurred at Contwoyto Lake, a large body of water about two hundred kilometres southeast of Coppermine. In March 1957, the RCMP constable T.J. Garvin reported that the Inuit at Contwoyto Lake were living almost exclusively on caribou. Close to three hundred of the animals had apparently been killed there the previous autumn to feed both dogs and humans. Garvin recommended the distribution of fishing nets as the only practical caribou conservation measure.¹¹³ The nets arrived in May, but due to an oversight lacked the requisite floats, leads, backing twine, or hanging twine. In August, the Game Officer F.S. Bailey and a predator control hunter and longtime trapper named Matt Murphy arrived with additional nets for the fishing project. Unfortunately, they brought no boat with them, and discovered that the Inuit had only one heavily damaged vessel that was no longer seaworthy. By December, however, the nets could be set under the lake ice, and boats were constructed at the vocational school in Yellowknife for use in the spring of 1959. Nonetheless, the Inuit were only able to catch approximately seventy fish per day, an amount that was barely sufficient to feed their dogs. There was no monitoring of the fishing project through that summer. When a flight arrived in August, the Inuit were found to be starving. Clearly the new fishing equipment had failed to provide a reliable food source for the Inuit at Contwoyto Lake, but still the field officers pressed ahead. Murphy remained in the camp with Game Officer R. Douglas through the autumn of 1959 to assist with the fishing project, but problems with bad weather resulted once again in little more fish being caught than what was needed to keep the dogs alive. Perhaps sensing the precarious nature of the fishing project, the Inuit at Contwoyto Lake killed one thousand caribou in the autumn and early winter of 1959, some apparently for local trade at Coppermine.¹¹⁴ The next summer, the CWS biologists

¹¹² See, Summary of the Proceedings at a Meeting on Eskimo Affairs Held May 19 and 20, 1952, in the Board Room of the Confederation Building, Ottawa. Ibid. For an extensive summary of the development of Inuit welfare policy, see Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes)*, pp. 43-101.

¹¹³ Constable T.J. Garvin, RCMP, Report Re: Caribou Conservation – Coppermine Area, 23 April 1958. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, box 67, file 401-22, pt. 18, NAC. Garvin learned of the fall caribou hunt at Contwoyto Lake in March 1958 from several Inuit who had been evacuated to Yellowknife with acute cases of pneumonia. He visited that site in April and confirmed that the slaughter had taken place.

¹¹⁴ See of J.E. Bryant, Superintendent of Game, “Report on Contwoyto Lake Fishing Project,” 29 December 1959. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, box 67, file 401-22, pt. 19, NAC. Bryant reported that there were two groups of Inuit at Contwoyto Lake, one from Bathurst Inlet and one from Coppermine. Apparently, the group from Coppermine had killed the bulk of the caribou that winter, a fact that angered the Bathurst Inlet group.

Don Thomas and E.H. McEwen found over five hundred caribou carcasses which had been left out on the open tundra with only their hides and tongues removed.¹¹⁵ On August 3rd, Game Officer Douglas wrote in a report that Joe Otoyak, a Predator Control Officer, had suggested that the shaman woman ‘Old Eda,’ who “dislikes all government officials,” had likely counseled the Inuit to slaughter the caribou.¹¹⁶

Why did such large caribou slaughters take place at Contwoyto Lake between the fall of 1959 and the summer of 1960? Inevitably, it is difficult to answer this question using archival evidence that generally omits the voices of the Inuit. It is possible, however, that the kill constituted a form of protest against the failure of the fishing project to provide enough food through the spring and summer of 1959. Old Eda’s generalized contempt for federal officials may have become more widespread as the bite of starvation began to impact the community that summer. Perhaps a more likely explanation was that the Contwoyto Lake Inuit actually needed the large numbers of caribou killed in the summer of 1960. When Game Officer Douglas flew to the site to investigate the circumstances surrounding the slaughter in September, several hunters claimed that the hides were absolutely necessary for winter clothing, tents, and sleeping bags. Douglas was, for a game officer, uncommonly sympathetic to these arguments. He reported that the approximately six hundred caribou were required to clothe and shelter the thirty-nine Inuit at Contwoyto Lake (twenty hides alone were required to make a tent for one family). While some caribou hides were sold for cash income at Coppermine and Bathurst Inlet, Douglas argued that the white fox population around Contwoyto Lake was so small that caribou hides had become the sole medium of barter for staple goods. Furthermore, the Inuit hunters at Contwoyto Lake lacked enough wooden drying racks to preserve all the meat from a hunt for prime late summer caribou hides (though much of the ‘abandoned’ meat from the 1960 hunt was not technically wasted as it was used to feed the eighty sled dogs in the camp). Finally, Douglas concluded that Contwoyto Lake was “not suitable” for harvesting fish in quantities large enough to divert hunting pressure from the caribou. He recommended instead the construction of ice houses and wire drying racks, the provision of trapping equipment, and the supervision of all hunting activities in the area by a game officer.¹¹⁷ The following summer, the Game Officer J.H. McCauley had apparently managed to curb the ‘excessive slaughter’ through the construction of cold storage pits, instruction in the art of drying meat, and the erection of permanent dwellings.¹¹⁸

The failure of the fishery at Contwoyto Lake as a conservation measure and attempts to diversify the material base of the Inuit economy epitomized much broader problems with the attempt to convert the Native economy of the NWT from hunting to fishing. Beginning in the late 1950s, several other fishing projects experienced problems

¹¹⁵ McEwen to Chief, Canadian Wildlife Service, 6 August 1960. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, box 67, file 401-22, pt. 20, NAC.

¹¹⁶ R. Douglas to J.E. Bryant, 17 August 1960. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, file 401-22, pt. 20, NAC.

¹¹⁷ R. Douglas, “Utilization of the Caribou by the Eskimos of Contwoyto Lake,” n.d. RG 85, vol. 1944, file A-401-22, pt. 1, NAC.

¹¹⁸ See E. Kuyt, “Thelon River – 1961, Caribou Movements, Segregation Data,” n.d. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, Box 67, file 401-22, pt. 21.

with resource scarcity and a lack of the equipment and personnel similar to those at Contwoyto Lake.¹¹⁹ In more general terms, however, the idea that the Dene and Inuit could survive on a largely fish diet did not account for the fundamental significance of caribou to the material ecology of the Dene and Inuit. Not only were fish unable to provide the skins to manufacture clothing and shelter that was absolutely essential for some Native people in the NWT, they lacked sufficient quantities of nutrients such as iron and protein that were necessary for long-term survival in the Arctic.¹²⁰ Dogs too, it seemed, could not maintain their health on a fish diet. The Northern Service Officer at Baker Lake, T.H. Butters, reported in August 1960 that “fish, Ottawa notwithstanding, cannot build dogs strong enough for winter work, of this I am convinced.”¹²¹ While the distribution of fishing nets and boats may have provided greater access to a supplemental food source than had previously been possible in many communities, the idea that fish could become the basis of the northern subsistence economy seems, as Butters implied, to have been dreamed up in the offices of civil servants who had little knowledge of local food requirements or environmental conditions.

In any case, the idea that northern Natives could live a traditional lifestyle based entirely on local food sources began to fade somewhat from prominence in the late 1950s. Several cases of starvation among the Inuit of the Keewatin interior, which gained a high public profile primarily due to the popular writing of Farley Mowat, provided strong indications that leaving the Inuit to fend for themselves in Eastern Arctic tundra regions might have disastrous consequences. In addition, the election of John Diefenbaker’s Conservatives in 1957 brought in a government that was committed to a policy of intense industrial development in the Canadian North. As a result, there was a marked shift in conservation policy in the Northwest Territories: the provisions of wage employment, it was thought, might be the best means by which to divert Dene and Inuit hunters from their dependence on the caribou. The idea was not entirely new. In 1951, Farley Mowat advocated a gradual transition from “primitivism to modernism” among the Inuit in his best selling volume *People of the Deer*. Although he later recanted his assimilationist stance in a revised edition of *The Desperate People*, at this earlier stage he suggested a dramatic expansion of the reindeer industry to provide secure food supply for the North, the development of the mining industry to provide wage employment to the Inuit, and finally the enlistment of as many Inuit as possible in the armed forces to

¹¹⁹ In October 1957, for example, the Game Officer F.S. Bailey reported that Indian Affairs had offered the Dene at Snowdrift two months rations as an incentive to put up a good supply of fish for the winter. The people of Snowdrift failed to catch many fish, however, a shortage they blamed on the increase of commercial fishing operations on Great Slave Lake. See F.S. Bailey to W.E. Stevens, Supt. of Game, 19 October 1957. RG 85, vol. 1495, file 401-22. pt. 17, NAC. In the summer of 1957, the RCMP Sergeant Abraham at Eskimo Point organized and supervised a relatively successful beluga whale fishery near the mouth of the Tha-anne River. The hunt was abandoned the next year, however, due to a lack of supervisory personnel. See, “Meat Substitutes for Caribou,” NWT Sessional Paper No. 17, 1959. RG 85, vol. 1944, file A-401-22, NAC.

¹²⁰ For a discussion, see Tester and Kulchyski, *op cit.*, p. 256.

¹²¹ Butters to R.L. Kennedy, Regional Administrator, 25 August 1960. Ibid.

provide for continental security.¹²² In government circles, the Director of the Northern Administration and Lands Branch, F.J.G. Cunningham, proposed a shift in emphasis toward wage employment as early as 1955:

considering the changes that are even now taking place throughout the Arctic and in our thinking on the future place of Eskimos in the northern economy, it may be that long-term development of native food resources may not be so important now as it was when Eskimos had fewer opportunities of making a living other than by hunting and trapping.¹²³

Two years later, the Administrative Committee for Caribou Conservation urged increased efforts to provide alternative employment as a means to help the Dene and Inuit move away from their ‘primitive’ way of life. Indeed, well in to the 1960s, senior wildlife officials continued to produce comprehensive proposals to modernize the Native economy in the North as a means to conserve caribou. In June 1964, for example, the Chief of the Canadian Wildlife Service, David Munro, presented a draft statement on reducing the take of caribou through non-legislative means to officials from the Education, Welfare, and Industrial Divisions of the Northern Administration Branch. The document placed a heavy emphasis on reducing the caribou kill through work programs for Native hunters, who would perform such tasks as clearing right of ways for fire roads or guiding visiting sport hunters and fishers.¹²⁴ The draft statement grew into a much larger policy document that was the product of collaboration between the CWS and the Northern Administration Branch; it advocated a radical transformation of the Dene and Inuit economy through vocational education programs, the creation of work programs to develop recreational facilities and roads for a proposed national park near Fort Reliance, and the further development of cottage handicraft industries, all as a means to conserve the caribou population.¹²⁵

¹²² Farley Mowat, *People of the Deer*, pp. 332-38. Mowat’s rejection of assimilation can be found in *The Desperate People*, Revised Edition (Toronto: McClelland-Bantam, 1975), pp. 210-13.

¹²³ F.J.G. Cunningham to Deputy Minister, 8 June 1955 RG 22, vol. 270, file 40-6-3, pt. 2, NAC.

¹²⁴ Munro’s original proposal was titled, “Draft Statement on the Barren-Ground Caribou.” It was presented at a meeting held 28 May 1964 among officials from the CWS and the Northern Administration and Lands Branch. See G. Abramson, Projects Section, Industrial Division, memo for file, 1 June 1964. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076. Box 68, file 401-22-5, pt. 5, NAC

¹²⁵ “Barren-Ground Caribou and Northern Development – A Proposal,” Appendix A, Northwest Territories Council, Sessional Paper No. 8, Second Session, 1964. Alexander Stevenson Fonds, N-1992-023, box 33, file 3, NWT. The success of these work programs was decidedly mixed. While Inuit art from the Eastern Arctic has sold throughout the globe, the development of wage employment opportunities depended on the erratic flow of industrial capital to Canada’s hinterland region. For example, a nickel mine that opened at Rankin Inlet in 1957 provided ample job opportunities for the Inuit in that region due to a rare employment policy that emphasized the local hiring of native workers. At its peak, the mine employed ninety Inuit workers but then closed after only five years of operation. At a meeting of the Administrative Committee in February 1965, C.M. Bolger, the Assistant Director of the Northern Administration Branch, worried that Inuit vocational trainees might find only limited employment opportunities outside of a few positions that had been created along DEW Line radar system. See Minutes of the Administrative Committee for Caribou Preservation. 25 February 1965. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, box 68, file 401-22-5-1, pt. 2, NAC.

Although grand in their design, the proposals to modernize the Inuit economy in the late 1950s and early 1960s never completely displaced programs that were devoted to the development of alternative country food sources. Even Munro's proposal advocated hiring a resource geographer to assess the possible development of alternative resources for subsistence and cash income purposes. The response of the federal government to the caribou crisis of the 1950s and 1960s was thus dominated by two distinct and contrary policy proposals for 'reforming' the Dene and Inuit subsistence economy. On the one hand, the government imposed a kind of 'enforced primitivism' based on the development of alternative food sources and the hope that northern Aboriginal people would not become a significant drain on the public welfare purse. On the other, the federal government also promoted the idea that some Native hunters might give up their life on the land and become assimilated to the needs of the modern industrial economy. Despite their antithetical relationship to one another, both of these programs demonstrate how closely caribou conservation initiatives had become tied to the formation of social and economic policy in the Northwest Territories. This broad expression of state power becomes even more obvious, however, when one examines the relationship between the programs to fundamentally alter the subsistence strategies of northern hunters and the those designed to relocate of Dene and Inuit communities away from their traditional hunting grounds to areas 'more suitable' for them to pursue their livelihoods.

Moving People; Saving Caribou

Relocating Native people from one location to another in the Arctic was not an idea that was completely original to the post-war period. In 1934, the federal government convinced the Hudson's Bay company to open a trading post at the abandoned RCMP detachment at Dundas Harbour on Devon Island, where over thirty Inuit were transferred from Baffin Island to see how well they would survive in the High Arctic. The results of this 'experiment' were not encouraging, however, as hunting marine mammals amid the abundant sea ice in the harbour proved to be nearly impossible. The resident Inuit hunters were thus moved again to Arctic Bay on Baffin Island in 1936, but supply problems prompted a final move to Spence Bay on the Boothia Peninsula in 1947.¹²⁶

Despite the limited success of this early example, the concept of relocating Native hunters from areas with a limited game supply to more productive hunting grounds came to be regarded as a cure-all for a range of policy issues in the post-war era. In 1953, several Inuit families were moved from Port Harrison, or Inukjuak, in northern Québec to the distant High Arctic locations of Craig Harbour (and later Grise Fiord) on Ellesmere Island and Resolute Bay on Cornwallis Island. In the late 1950s, various groups of inland 'Caribou' Inuit were moved from point to point within the Keewatin district, and finally from the interior region to communities along the west coast of Hudson Bay. Despite repeated claims from the federal government that the projects were carried out in the best interest of willing Inuit participants, the vast majority of scholarly research on this subject has concluded that the relocations were pursued in a coercive manner, with Inuit

¹²⁶ See Tester and Kulchyski, *op cit.*, p. 110-111.

participants either unaware of the full implications of the relocation or restricted in their choice of where to move. Moreover, several historians have presented overwhelming evidence suggesting that two key policy goals of the northern administration lay at the root of the relocation program: the maintenance of Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic Islands in the case of the Craig Harbour and Resolute Bay relocations, and more broadly the deterrence of welfare dependency as Native hunters were moved from areas with poor game conditions to locations where they could become 'self-sufficient' in their search for country food or wage employment.¹²⁷

But even if the latter two considerations were the most crucial influences on the development of the relocation policy, there is evidence to suggest that the relocation of Dene and Inuit hunters was tied in part to post-war concerns over the caribou population in the Northwest Territories. Senior officials from the CWS were active participants in meetings of the interdepartmental Eskimo Affairs Committee, where much of the relocation policy was formed. Many of these senior wildlife officials were attracted to the idea of relocating Inuit hunters to unoccupied regions in the Arctic Islands or coastal areas as a way to increase the exploitation of alternative food resources such as fish and marine mammals. Furthermore, it is not a great leap of logic to suggest the relocation of subsistence hunters to areas where there were apparently improved hunting and fishing opportunities might have also have constituted an attempt to move them away from the caribou herds. At the very least, the policy of relocating Inuit and Dene hunters from the interior regions of the Eastern Arctic in the late 1950s accorded well with the Canadian Wildlife Service's goal of reducing the human kill of caribou. By the early 1950s,

¹²⁷ The historical interpretation of the Inuit relocations of the 1950s has been a matter of contention between the government and the Inuit for some time. In 1990, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development commissioned a study from the Hickling Corporation that exonerated the government of any wrongdoing in relation to the Inuit relocations. See Hickling Corporation, "Assessment of the Factual Basis of Certain Allegations Made Before the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs Concerning the Relocation of Inukjuak Inuit Families in the 1950s." Report Submitted to DINA, 1990. Subsequent responses to the Hickling report from Inuit who were involved in the relocations, and from scholars who have conducted archival research on the issue, have suggested that the relocation program was coercive in nature and a violation of international and domestic human rights laws. For responses to the Hickling report, see Shelagh D. Grant, "A Case of Compounded Error: The Inuit Resettlement Project, 1953, and the Government Response, 1990," *Northern Perspectives* 19, 1 (1991), pp. 3-29, and Alan R. Marcus, "Out in the Cold: Canada's Experimental Inuit Relocation to Grise Fiord and Resolute Bay," *Polar Record* 27, 163 (1991): pp. 285-95. For an analysis of the relationship between the relocation projects and human rights law, see Russel Lawrence Bash, "High Arctic Relocations: International Norms and Standards," Research Report for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, *Seven Generations: an Information Legacy of the RCAP* (CD-ROM). For the relationship between the relocation policy and the maintenance of Arctic sovereignty, see Alan R. Marcus, *Relocating Eden: The Image and Politics of Inuit Exile in the Canadian Arctic* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995); Alan R. Marcus, "Inuit Relocation Policies in Canada and Other Circumpolar Countries, 1925-60," Research Report for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, *Seven Generations*; Lyle Dick, *Muskox Land: Ellesmere Island in the Age of Contact* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2001). While many of these sources also discuss the relocations as a program of social reform designed to enhance Inuit self-reliance and reduce welfare dependency, no other volume delves into this theme, or examines the Keewatin relocations of the 1950s, quite so exhaustively as Frank Tester and Peter Kulchyski's, *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939-63*.

wildlife managers and ‘people managers’ had found common cause in their efforts to save both the caribou and the Native hunters of Canada’s North.

This sympathetic attitude among federal wildlife officials toward a broad policy of Inuit relocation was readily apparent at the first meeting of what would become the interdepartmental Committee on Eskimo Affairs held in May 1953. The biologists J.S. Tener, V.E.F. Solman, and their administrative colleague J.P. Richards, all represented the interests of the Canadian Wildlife Service at the meeting. Accordingly, the section of the minutes on conservation and utilization of wildlife emphasized in particular the apparent decline of the caribou over the previous fifty years, and invoked the familiar refrain that the solution to this problem lay in “educating the Eskimos themselves to realize the necessity and reasons for sound conservation practices and for making greater use of all the resources of the country, rather than concentrating on those most readily available.” The delegates to the meeting discussed many of the Canadian Wildlife Service’s preferred methods of achieving this goal—the distribution of fishing nets, the organization of whale hunts, the restriction on the number of dogs, and the construction of permafrost cellars—but they also suggested a quite novel method of conserving wildlife. The diversion of hunting pressure from the caribou to other species of wildlife might also be achieved, they reasoned, through “the movement of Eskimos from over-population areas to places where they can be assured of being able to make a better living.”¹²⁸ A press release issued two days later was equally forthright, stating that delegates to the meeting had concluded the Inuit should be encouraged to live their traditional life in outlying areas because “the concentration of Eskimos at posts and settlements had resulted in the rapid depletion of accessible country produce.”¹²⁹ One month later, Solman and Tener penned a memo suggesting the extreme measures they were willing to support in order to implement a program of relocations to areas with abundant natural resources:

Eskimo reluctance to move should not preclude moves any more than has been the case in the relocation of prairie farmers under P.R.F.A. and the expropriation of property and removal of persons for necessary purposes in connection with recent National Defence [sic] developments in large areas in Alberta and Saskatchewan.¹³⁰

In spite of such rhetorical support for the relocation policy among senior wildlife officials, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the original movement of Inuit families from Port Harrison to Ellesmere and Cornwallis Islands in July 1953 was influenced by conservation policy. At a meeting held to discuss the relocation in August 1953, the main reasons cited for the “experiment” were the federal government’s desire to strengthen its sovereign claim over the Arctic Islands by having Canadian citizens occupy as much of the region as possible, and also “to see if it is possible for the people

¹²⁸ “Meeting on Eskimo Affairs Held in the Board Room of the Confederation Building on the 19th and 20th of May, 1952.” RG 22, vol. 254, file 40-8-1, pt. 3, NAC.

¹²⁹ Press Release, Editorial and Information Division, Department of Resources and Development, 22 May 1952. RG 22, vol. 254, file 40-8-1, pt. 2, NAC.

¹³⁰ Victor Solman and John Tener to J.A. Smart, 4 June 1952. RG 22, vol. 254, file 40-8-1, pt. 3, NAC.

to adapt themselves to the conditions of the High North and secure a living from the land.”¹³¹ Undoubtedly, the much broader policy of diverting subsistence hunters from depleted local game populations to other sources of country food provided some context for the latter statement. Writing in November 1960, C.M. Bolger, the Administrator of the Arctic, recalled that, “part of the history of the scheme was one of a greatly increased population over-burdening a depleted game population. Withdrawal of some hunters from the area not only benefited them but relieved Port Harrison of some of its large human population.”¹³² Aside from such general comments, however, there was almost no evidence in the available archival documents to suggest the Port Harrison move was tied specifically to the Canadian Wildlife Service’s caribou conservation program.¹³³ In broad terms, the lack of CWS involvement was partly because the Ungava caribou fell entirely under provincial jurisdiction; the seamless integration of the Canadian Wildlife Service’s conservation programs with the social policy goals of the northern administration was thus less likely to take place in northern Québec.¹³⁴ Furthermore, the barren ground caribou herds of northern Québec had been reduced to only a remnant population of a few thousand over the early part of the twentieth century. Wildlife officials generally assumed that the law of diminishing returns would prevent the absolute extinction of the species as hunters travelled further from the coast each year to obtain fewer and fewer caribou. It was not until the results of a co-operative federal–provincial study of the Ungava herds was completed in 1956 that biologists became aware that Native hunters were still travelling inland up to three hundred miles in search of scarce caribou.¹³⁵ At the

¹³¹ “Minutes of a Meeting Held at 10:00 AM August 10, 1953, in Room 304, Langevin Block, to Discuss the Transfer of Certain Eskimo Families from Northern Quebec to Cornwallis and Ellesmere Island.” RG 22, vol. 254, file 40-8-1, pt. 4, NAC.

¹³² Bolger to the Director, Northern Administration Branch, 15 November 1960. RG 85, vol. 1392, file 1012-13, pt. 5, NAC. Writing over two decades after the original relocations, Alex Stevenson, an employee with Arctic Services at the time of the High Arctic relocations, used almost the exact same terms to describe the purpose behind the program. See Stevenson to Gunther Abraham, Chief, Social Development Division, Indian and Northern Affairs, 30 November 1977. Alexander Stevenson Fonds, N-1992-023, box 24, file 14, NAWTA.

¹³³ It is, in the end, difficult to evaluate the extent to which the priorities of wildlife conservation might have influenced the High Arctic relocations. A major series of files on the Inuit relocations covering the years 1951-1959 (RG 85, vol. 1070, file 251-4, pts. 1-4) have, sadly, gone missing from the National Archives of Canada. After several unsuccessful attempts to order these files, I requested a search for the missing documents. In September 2003, I was informed that the search had revealed nothing, and finding the missing files would be like searching for a needle in a haystack.

¹³⁴ Of course, there was a great deal more integration between federal caribou conservation programs and those in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. To an extent, this was inevitable due to the fact that wildlife officials from each jurisdiction were managing the same migratory caribou herds. Perhaps because the Ungava herds migrated largely within Québec’s borders, game officials from this province were not active participants in either of the two caribou committees. The federal government did retain responsibility for the Inuit in Québec, however, due to a 1939 Supreme Court ruling that declared the Inuit to be the same as “Indians” for the purposes of apportioning constitutional responsibility for their welfare.

¹³⁵ The Ungava caribou study commenced in 1954 under the leadership of John Tener and A.W.F. Banfield. The research team concluded that the herds in this region had declined from hundreds of thousands at the turn of the century to a mere 6,000 a half century later. Human over-hunting and particularly forest fires were blamed for the decline. Tener and Banfield likely overstated their claim that human hunting threatened the Ungava caribou with extermination. The two scientists recorded a human kill of only 206

time of the High Arctic relocation, however, the primary complaint of federal officials was not the vast distances the Port Harrison Inuit travelled in pursuit of declining wildlife herds, but rather their supposed tendency to stay close to the community in order to collect relief payments.¹³⁶

As the perception of a looming caribou crisis deepened in the mid-1950s, however, the affiliation between relocation programs and conservation policy on the mainland caribou range became much more evident. A well documented case involving the relocation of the Sayisi Dene Band at Duck Lake, Manitoba to Churchill in 1956 reveals a great deal about the contribution of the emerging co-operative federal–provincial conservation programs to the development of the relocations policy. The Sayisi Dene Band at Duck Lake were major users of caribou, and inhabited one of the largest and most reliable caribou crossings in the eastern reaches of the caribou range. Reports that this band routinely conducted large caribou slaughters with many carcasses abandoned had given them a reputation as a ‘problem’ group of hunters by the mid-1950s. In a 1955 report on the barren ground caribou of Manitoba and the Keewatin District, for instance, Alan Loughrey identified Duck Lake as one of six settlements in the region where large caribou kills were made annually.¹³⁷ At the first federal–provincial meeting to discuss the caribou crisis in October 1955, delegates also identified the Dene bands at Duck Lake and Brochet as the most wasteful caribou hunters on the mainland ranges and recommended that Indian Affairs place an agent in the region to supervise the caribou hunt. Earlier in the meeting, the Manitoba Game Officer, J.D. Robertson, had shown the meeting participants pictures taken by provincial government officials in September 1955 depicting the aftermath of a caribou hunt where over seven hundred animals had been speared at a water crossing and apparently abandoned.¹³⁸ One of these pictures, a stark photograph showing several caribou carcasses on the shores of Duck Lake, received wide publicity after it was printed in the spring of 1956 on the front page of Banfield’s *Beaver* article describing the ‘orgies of killing’ that had brought about the caribou crisis.¹³⁹ In a similar manner, Robertson’s official report on the “carnage” at Duck Lake described “caribou lying scattered over the barrens, some bloated and rotten,

caribou in 1955-56, the largest number of any of the three study years. See A.W.F. Banfield and J.S. Tener, “A Preliminary Study of the Ungava Caribou,” n.d. RG 85, vol. 1495, file 401-22, pt. 15, NAC.

Incidentally, the George River herd of northern Quebec staged a remarkable recovery through the 1970s and 1980s, and now numbers over one million animals.

¹³⁶ A document describing ‘assisted Eskimo projects’ for the year 1952-53 complained of the rising relief costs in the ‘overpopulated’ community of Port Harrison. That winter, the Department approved an initiative whereby over one thousand dollars of relief money was used to outfit thirty five Port Harrison hunters to catch seals on the Sleeper Islands. See F.J.G. Cunningham, Director, Northern Administration and Lands Branch, 10 March 1953. RG 22, vol. 254, file 40-8-1, pt. 4, NAC.

¹³⁷ See A.G Loughrey, Recommendations from Manitoba and Keewatin Barren-Ground Caribou Re-Survey, 1955. n.d. RG 85, vol. 1250, file 401-22, pt. 13, NAC. Human utilization statistics for the winter of 1955-56 suggest that two thousand caribou were killed at Duck Lake, second only to Brochet in northern Manitoba. See “Barren-Ground Caribou Populations and Utilization, Winter, 1955-56,” n.d. Ibid.

¹³⁸ Minutes, Federal–Provincial Meeting on Barren Ground Caribou, 13 October 1955. RG 22, vol. 270, file 40-6-3, pt. 2, NAC.

¹³⁹ Banfield, “The Caribou Crisis,” p. 3.

others eaten (all but the bones) by ravens. The sight was terrible.”¹⁴⁰ The sight of so many dead caribou may have been jarring for Robertson, but the testimony of Sayisi Dene elders and anthropologists suggests that caribou on the shoreline of Duck Lake had not been ‘wantonly’ abandoned at all, but were merely indicative of a time-honoured and practical method of preserving food for people and dogs with freezing temperatures so close at hand.¹⁴¹

Clearly, however, the photographs of the slaughter at Duck Lake had focussed the attention of both the federal and provincial governments on what they believed to be the wasteful hunting practices of this particular band of Native people. Although there can be little doubt that one important impetus behind proposed relocation of the Sayisi Dene was to provide the people with an alternative source of livelihood after the impending closure of the Hudson Bay Company’s nearby trading post, there is also evidence to suggest that concerns over the caribou slaughter may have played a role in the relocation.¹⁴² The elder John Solomon recalled that a meeting held to discuss the move in July 1956 included representatives not only from the federal Indian Affairs Branch, but also officials from Manitoba’s Department of Natural Resources who had routinely accused the Sayisi Dene of killing excessive amounts of caribou.¹⁴³ Furthermore, a memo authored by the supervisor of Indian Affairs in the region, R.D. Ragan, suggests that there was some urgency to remove the Sayisi Dene before the caribou migration in September, or “they will wish to remain for the kill which might upset all our plans.”¹⁴⁴ The memo can be interpreted simply as a practical recommendation to proceed with the relocation before the Dene became busily engaged with the caribou hunt, but it may also represent an urgent appeal to proceed with the relocation to prevent a second high-profile slaughter such as had occurred the previous autumn.

In any event, the Sayisi Dene were moved in August 1956 to North River, forty miles up the Hudson Bay coast from Churchill. After a flood destroyed all the cabins at the North River site the following spring, people were slowly moved to “Camp-10,” a site on the outskirts of Churchill where alcoholism, violence and sexual abuse came to dominate the social fabric of the community. From the perspective of game officials, however, the relocation was an unqualified success. At a meeting of the Technical Committee held in November 1959, Robertson noted approvingly that “since the Duck

¹⁴⁰J. D. Robertson, *Caribou Slaughter—Duck Lake* (Manitoba Game Branch Officer’s Report, 1955). Quoted in Kelsall, *The Migratory Barren-ground Caribou of Northern Canada*, 219.

¹⁴¹ See Takashi Irimoto, *Chipewyan Ecology: Group Structure and Caribou Hunting System* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 1981), p. 104 and Virginia Petch, “The Relocation of the Sayisi Dene of Tadoule Lake,” Research Report for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, *Seven Generations CD-ROM*. Petch cites an interview with the hunter Charlie Ellis on the issue of storing caribou. A documentary film on the relocation of the Sayisi Dene also features an interview with the hunter Charlie Learjaw, who claimed that the caribou were left above the shoreline of Duck Lake as food for dogs and people. See Alan and Mary Code (Directors), *Nu Ho Ne Yeh – Our Story* (Whitehorse: Treeline Productions, 1995).

¹⁴² See Virginia Petch, “The Relocation of the Sayisi Dene of Tadoule Lake.”

¹⁴³ See Ila Bussidor and Üstün Bilgen-Reinhart, *Night Spirits: The Story of the Relocation of the Sayisi Dene* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1997).

¹⁴⁴ R.D. Ragan, Departmental Memo, 27 July 1956. Quoted in Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinhart, p. 44-45.

Lake people had been moved to the coast there had been no heavy kill at Duck Lake.”¹⁴⁵ In a similar manner, the CWS biologist John Kelsall blandly noted in his 1968 monograph on the caribou that “a comparable situation [of large caribou slaughters near trading posts] prevailed at Duck Lake in northern Manitoba until that post was closed and the resident Chipewyan Indians moved to Fort Churchill in 1956.”¹⁴⁶ The urgency accorded to the caribou crisis had evidently compelled at least some game officials to advocate for the preservation of the remaining herds no matter what the social cost to the region’s Native people.

A similar case at Ennadai Lake in the Keewatin District of the Northwest Territories reveals a comparable pattern of coercive migration that was tied to the broader caribou conservation program. By the late 1950s, the northern administration had for many years classified the small band of just over fifty Inuit that lived at Ennadai Lake as a ‘problem’ group that was increasingly dependent on handouts from local government agents. These were, after all, the ‘Ihalmiut’ described in Farley Mowat’s *People of the Deer* (1952) and *The Desperate People* (1959), the very symbol of the privation and hunger that had come to afflict the Inuit following the post-war collapse of fox prices and the unreliability of several local caribou migrations. A report on the Ennadai Lake Inuit from April 1952 suggests that they were among the “most primitive” of all Inuit groups in the Arctic. In fact, there was very little government involvement with this group until a visit from a medical officer from Indian Health Services, Doctor Robert F. Yule, in February 1947 revealed that they did not have enough food cached to take them to the spring. Yule arranged for food and ammunition to be shipped to the area, but ongoing reports that the Inuit were congregating near the radio station operated by the Royal Canadian Corp of Signals at Ennadai Lake in search of the occasional ‘hand-out,’ combined with the need for continued relief shipments on a semi-annual basis up to 1950, reinforced the image of this Inuit group as a ‘backward’ group in need of a dramatic intervention to improve their condition. In April 1950, the radio station personnel reported that the caribou migration had again missed the Ennadai Lake group. The resulting material hardship prompted the department to recommend the relocation of this group so they could take part in a commercial fishing venture at Nueltin Lake. In the summer of 1950, forty-seven Inuit were flown to Nueltin Lake only to discover several weeks later that the two traders who had set up the fishing venture had concluded that the operation was not economical and thus were shutting it down. If this catastrophe was not enough to discourage the Inuit, scattered reports also suggest that a cultural preference for caribou hunting rather than fishing among the Inuit and poor relations between the Ennadai Lake people and a local group of Dene had each contributed to the failure of the relocation project. By December 1950 all the Inuit participants in the project had travelled on their own back to Ennadai Lake.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Minutes of the Technical Committee on Caribou Preservation, 13 November 1959. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, box 68, file 401-22-5, pt. 4, NAC.

¹⁴⁶Kelsall, *The Migratory Barren-ground Caribou of Northern Canada*, 227.

¹⁴⁷ The events surrounding the Nueltin Lake relocation were constructed from an undated report forwarded by Gordon Sinclair to the Deputy Commissioner of the NWT on 7 April 1952, “Eskimos Living in the Nueltin Lake – Kazan River Areas of the District of Keewatin, NWT.” RG 22, vol. 254, file 40-8-1, pt. 2,

Caribou were plentiful in the Ennadai Lake region over the next four years. Although the abundant food supply eased concerns over the material conditions of the local Inuit, the apparently wasteful nature of their hunting practices was beginning to cause a great deal of anxiety among northern administrators. In April 1955, Ben Sivertz wrote to P.A.C. Nichols, Manager of the Hudson's Bay Company's Arctic Division, to request that the Hudson's Bay Company establish a small post at Ennadai Lake as an incentive to prevent what was thought to be the extremely wasteful local practice of butchering caribou carcasses without removing the skins.¹⁴⁸ Nichols responded with skepticism to the idea, arguing that such a remote post could not be economically feasible. He nevertheless offered to trade for the hides at the Padlei post at a low price and distribute them to needy communities throughout the Arctic.¹⁴⁹ The Ennadai Lake people did not routinely travel to Padlei, however, and Sivertz concluded that the only viable course of action was to move them closer to the trading post. If persuasion failed to convince the Inuit to move, Sivertz reasoned that, "it can be pointed out to them that we cannot carry on the present arrangements any longer and that if they persist in staying in this area, they cannot expect any assistance either from the Department of Transport station or ourselves."¹⁵⁰

There was no immediate attempt to move the Inuit from Ennadai Lake in 1955. Nonetheless, the failure of the caribou hunt in the autumn seasons of both 1955 and 1956, which resulted in large periodic relief shipments beginning in 1955 and the starvation of most of the community's sled dogs in the winter of 1956, added weight to the argument that the Ennadai Lake people should be moved to a new location.¹⁵¹ In June 1956, F.J.G. Cunningham wrote to Nichols, requesting the services of Henry Voisey, post manager at Padlei, to act as an interpreter for the Northern Service Officer, W.G. Kerr, as he attempted to convince the Ennadai Lake Inuit of the wisdom of moving to a site further west at Henik Lake within forty-five miles of Padlei. Cunningham offered two reasons for the move: the impoverished condition of the Ennadai Lake Inuit due to the failure of the caribou hunt and the "inadequate supervision of the hunting and trading operations of these Natives due largely to the remoteness of the region in relation to the established trading posts and the local administrative offices."¹⁵² The extent to which Cunningham's comments are a direct reflection of the concerns over the issue of abandoned skins is unclear, but there can be little doubt that the Henik Lake relocation was intended to deliver the Inuit to a location where non-Natives might have a better chance of asserting some measure of control over the subsistence hunting practices of the Ennadai Lake people.

NAC. For a retrospective report, see Sivertz to the Deputy Minister, "Background of Henik Lake Eskimos," 9 March 1959. Alexander Stevenson Fonds, N-1992-023, box 24, file 6, N.W.T.A.

¹⁴⁸ Sivertz to Nichols, 28 April 1955. RG 85, vol. 1250, file 401-22, pt. 9, NAC.

¹⁴⁹ Nichols to Sivertz, 6 May 1955. Ibid. The price was kept low so as not to provide an incentive for killing caribou for the hides alone.

¹⁵⁰ Sivertz to W.G. Kerr, Northern Service Officer, 17 May 1955. Ibid.

¹⁵¹ R.A.J. Phillips to the Director, 20 October 1958. Ibid.

¹⁵² Cunningham to Nichols, 25 June 1956. Ibid.

And so they were moved. In May 1957, fifty-eight Inuit were airlifted to North Henik Lake with tents, ammunition, fish nets and one month worth of food supplies. A press release titled, “Eskimos Fly to New Hunting Grounds” trumpeted the good fishing, the abundant white fox population, and the plentiful caribou that still migrated through the Henik Lake region.¹⁵³ The press release also described the Inuit as volunteers, a claim that historians Frank Tester and Peter Kulchyski have argued is highly questionable, given the evidence suggesting that the threat of reduced relief distribution was indeed used to compel Inuit cooperation with the move.¹⁵⁴ In any event, the relocation itself proved to be an unmitigated disaster. The caribou did not come in sufficient numbers to feed the Inuit at this apparently ‘happy hunting ground’ during the autumn migration, nor did government officials take sufficient steps to monitor the condition of the Inuit and distribute relief supplies when necessary. In total, seven people died from the combined effects of starvation and hypothermia at Henik Lake that winter.¹⁵⁵ Few events in the history of the Canadian North have received as much public attention as the tragic deaths at Henik Lake in 1957-58. The gut-wrenching story of Kikkik, in particular, who was forced to leave two of her weakened daughters in a snow grave as she fled to Padlei after her husband Hallow had been murdered by another starving member of the band, was disseminated widely through the writings of Farley Mowat.¹⁵⁶

As mentioned earlier, the incidents of starvation among the Inuit at Henik Lake, and in a second high profile case further to the north at Garry Lake, prompted a major re-evaluation of federal Inuit policy. According to the new orthodoxy, the frequent failure of the caribou migrations made it impossible to preserve ‘self-sufficient’ and widely dispersed traditional hunting and trapping communities in the remote interior regions of the Northwest Territories. Conveniently ignoring the fact that the Henik Lake deaths were a direct result of the department’s own intervention in the lives of the Inuit, officials within the northern administration argued that the material culture of the inland ‘Caribou Eskimos’ of the Keewatin District was no longer viable. In April 1958, Alex Stevenson of the Arctic Division wrote that, “what has happened to this handful of people, is a forerunner of what is going to happen to all of the Eskimos of this culture. There are many indications of this, but the main one is the decline of the caribou with no visible recovery—the mainstay of a people whose whole life depended for generations on this animal.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ See, “Eskimos Fly to New Hunting Grounds,” Press Release, Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, 24 May 1957. Alexander Stevenson Fonds, N-1992-023, box 24, file 6, NWT.A.

¹⁵⁴ See Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes)*, p. 220.

¹⁵⁵ The events at Henik Lake in the winter of 1957-58 are summarized in a report from R.A.J. Phillips to Sivertz, “Starvation Among the Eskimos in the Winter of 1957-58,” 29 October 1958. Alexander Stevenson Fonds, N-1992-023, box 24, file 6, NWT.A. Phillips’ report blames the failure of the caribou migration for the starvation at Henik Lake and intimates that fish were plentiful at the site but the lack of caribou skin clothing prevented full exploitation of this resource. For a more critical assessment of the failure of government agents to properly monitor the situation at Henik Lake, see Tester and Kulchyski, *op cit.*, p. 233-37.

¹⁵⁶ See Farley Mowat, “The Two Ordeals of Kikkik,” *McLean’s*, 31 January 1959. A revised version of this article appears as the third chapter of Mowat’s *The Desperate People*, chap. 13.

¹⁵⁷ Alex Stevenson to R.A.J. Phillips, 16 April 1958. *Ibid.*

For government officials, the solution to this predicament was obvious: a further relocation. In May 1958, a memo from Alvin Hamilton, the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, to cabinet noted that the incidents at Henik Lake were symptomatic of a broader social collapse and disintegration of the caribou economy in the Keewatin interior. Among the many options considered, Hamilton most clearly supported the creation of a community on the west coast of Hudson Bay designed specifically to “rehabilitate” the interior Keewatin Inuit. He requested \$150,000 to establish a settlement where the ‘Caribou’ Inuit could be trained to develop a diversified economy based on marine resource harvesting, handicraft production and tourism.¹⁵⁸ The first attempt to establish this planned community at Whale Cove failed due to the difficulty of landing supplies in the harbour, but a second community known alternatively as the ‘Keewatin Reestablishment Project’ or Itavia was established just outside of Rankin Inlet in the autumn of 1958. In addition to the nearly eighty survivors of the Ennadai Lake and Garry Lake famines, Inuit families that were moved primarily from Baker Lake brought the population of Itavia to one hundred and forty by January 1959. Upon arrival, the Inuit were kept employed building housing, caring for a small store, manufacturing handicrafts and hunting marine mammals.¹⁵⁹ By 1960, however, many of these Inuit families had abandoned the labour training programs and moved to the site at Whale Cove because of their frustration with the pervasive influence of the many white ‘bosses’ at Itavia.¹⁶⁰ In spite of this setback, the Henik and Garry Lake disasters had clearly given rise to a broad policy of shifting the ‘primitive’ Inuit population from the Keewatin interior to coastal towns that were thought to provide more modern economic opportunities. The Northern Service Officer, R.L. Kennedy, summed up the prevailing sentiment when he wrote, “the outlook for the interior Eskimos, on the land, appears hopeless to me. I can see no alternative to their grinding poverty except to move the majority of them.”¹⁶¹

If the Keewatin Reestablishment Project was meant to open new economic vistas for the Inuit, it was also intended to restrict traditional modes of Inuit subsistence and survival. More precisely, the relocation of the Keewatin Inuit was thought of not only as a means to bring these inland hunters closer to marine resources and technical training opportunities, but also as a way to keep hunters away from the interior caribou herds. Although Hamilton’s proposal to cabinet did outline a broad range of benefits arising from an Inuit rehabilitation project on the coast—from the greater potential to provide health and education services to the possible development of an industrial economy—the document also suggests that the relocation of the Inuit might be effective as a caribou conservation measure. If the Keewatin Inuit were concentrated in one community near the coast, the document reasoned, then “the caribou would be released from the hunting

¹⁵⁸ Hamilton, Memo to Cabinet, 9 May 1958. Alexander Stevenson Fonds, N-1992-023, box 24, file 6, NWTA.

¹⁵⁹ See “Keewatin Reestablishment Project,” 14 July 1959. Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ For an overview, see F.G. Vallee, *Kabloona and the Eskimo in the Central Keewatin* (Ottawa: Canadian Research Centre for Anthropology, St. Paul University, 1967), pp. 54-56.

¹⁶¹ R.L. Kennedy, NSO, to Chief, Arctic Division, 22 December 1958. RG 85, vol. 1382, file 1012-13, pt. 5, NAC.

pressure exerted by the Keewatin Eskimos and, with proper conservation measures, might increase and again become the invaluable source of food they were in former years.”¹⁶² Ben Sivertz, Director of the Northern Administration and Lands Branch, took this logic one step further with the claim that the relocation of Native hunters might be the only possible means to effectively introduce restrictive game laws such as a caribou quota. If the inland Inuit continue to live off the land, Sivertz argued they would continue to kill caribou in large numbers out of necessity. A quota would invite nothing but contempt for the law under such circumstances, according to Sivertz, and thus a more all-encompassing transformation of the Inuit subsistence economy was necessary before the government could even begin to contemplate severe restrictions on the caribou hunt. Sivertz wrote,

The only realistic solution which I can suggest for caribou conservation in Eskimo country is to relieve the pressure of hunting by provision of alternative sources of food and income. The Keewatin re-establishment project is an important beginning in this direction for not only does it provide alternative sources but it makes possible close supervision of all concerned. If this is successful, we will be proposing moderately rapid expansion of this approach throughout the caribou country.¹⁶³

These comments are reminiscent of those found in a memo authored by C.M. Bolger, Chief of the Arctic Division, three months earlier:

Should quotas be imposed in the Northwest Territories, it is obvious that the suggested quota of five caribou per person for inland Eskimos will not provide such Eskimos with adequate food and clothing for the period of a year. We will therefore have to take steps to supplement the food and clothing for these people unless, of their own volition, they move to the coast where other local resources are available.¹⁶⁴

While it is unquestionably true that improving the economic condition of the Inuit was offered as the primary justification for the relocations in the vast majority of relevant archival documents, such comments as Sivertz’s and Bolger’s suggest that a policy of population reduction in the Keewatin interior was entirely in accord with the priorities of the caribou conservation program. Indeed, the link between the relocations and wildlife conservation suggests the extremes to which the northern administration was willing to go to assert control over Native hunters. Caribou conservation in the Northwest Territories demanded not only a modification of hunting behaviour in order to protect a

¹⁶² Hamilton, Memo to Cabinet, 9 May 1958. Alexander Stevenson Fonds, N-1992-023, box 24, file 6, NWTA.

¹⁶³ Sivertz to J.R.B. Coleman, 11 December 1958. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, box 67, file 401-22, pt. 18, NAC.

¹⁶⁴ Bolger, Memo for File, 11 September 1958. Ibid. A departmental press release dated 11 December 1962 similarly stated that “since caribou can no longer be relied on to provide an adequate food resource in many parts of the Central Arctic, some communities have been assisted to move to coastal areas. See “Welfare of Indians and Eskimos Endangered by Caribou Decline,” Draft Press Release, 11 December 1962. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, box 67, file 401-22, pt. 21, NAC.

species that was believed to be endangered, it imposed sweeping and dramatic changes to the way of life of an entire people.

The process continued throughout the early 1960s. After the mine at Rankin Inlet was closed in 1962, several Inuit families were relocated to work in the mining communities of Yellowknife in 1963 and Lynn Lake, Manitoba in 1964. In addition, fifty-one Inuit from Rankin Inlet were moved to Daly Bay in 1964 to take part in an experimental fishery. None of these projects could be described as successful. The Daly Bay project was closed in 1966 due to an inadequate fish supply; the miners at Yellowknife and Lynn Lake returned sporadically to Rankin Inlet over the next several years after experiencing social alienation and culture shock in these predominantly non-Native communities. Much the same experience of loneliness and isolation was reported from the Inuit who were relocated to southern Canada after the federal government began to organize work placements with local companies in southern cities such as Winnipeg and Edmonton.¹⁶⁵ To a large extent, this general movement toward wage employment and outmigration from the NWT was tied to the broader assimilationist policy framework that had produced the Liberal government's White Paper on Indian Policy in 1969.¹⁶⁶ But the relocations of the mid-1960s were also promoted once again as practical means of conserving the caribou herds. At a meeting of the Administrative Committee in February 1965, C.M. Bolger highlighted the Lynn Lake and Yellowknife relocations, as well as a recent program to train Inuit to work on the DEW Line, by suggesting that "it is hoped... such training activities will divert people from caribou hunting."¹⁶⁷ The biologist John Kelsall similarly recommended the removal of Native hunters from remote areas to larger employment centres in his 1968 monograph: "through both voluntary and government-aided withdrawal of substantial portions of the human population," he wrote, "the annual kill will fall consistently below deficit populations."¹⁶⁸ The relocation program undoubtedly achieved its main goal of a sparsely populated Keewatin interior. In his book *Tuktu*, Fraser Symington wrote in 1965 that "only a few groups [in the Eastern Arctic] remain 'on the land': a small group at Chantrey Inlet, another at Bathurst Inlet, and a few isolated kin groups at such places as Contwoyto Lake, Wager Bay, Aberdeen Lake, and Yakthed Lake."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ For a summary of these projects, see David Stevenson, "First Draft of a Report on the Relocation of Eskimo," 24 October 1967. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, box 165, file 1012-13, pt. 6, NAC. See also R.G. Williamson, Proposal, Keewatin Relocation Study, 2 February 1972. Alexander Stevenson Fonds, N-1992-023, box 24, file 6, NWT.A.

¹⁶⁶ For an overview of the politics surrounding the White Paper see Sally Weaver, *Making Canadian Indian Policy: The Hidden Agenda, 1968-70* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981). In 1972, the Trudeau government approved a ten year plan for the Canadian North that involved the voluntary depopulation of the Keewatin region so people could move to areas with greater opportunities. See "Depopulation Due for Keewatin," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 7 January 1972. Alexander Stevenson Fonds, N-1992-023, box 24, file 6, NWT.A.

¹⁶⁷ Minutes of the Meeting of the Administrative Committee for Caribou Preservation, Edmonton, Alberta, 25 February 1965. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, box 68, file 401-22-5-1, pt. 2, NAC. Alexander Stevenson Fonds, N-1992-023, box 24, file 13, NWT.A.

¹⁶⁸ Kelsall, *op cit.*, p. 288.

¹⁶⁹ Symington, *op cit.*, p. 70.

Considering the extremely intrusive nature of this response to the caribou crisis, it is perhaps ironic that the scientific consensus that first pointed to a decline in the herds began to dissipate during this period. Extremely large increases in the caribou calf crop were noted as early as 1960; scattered internal reports began to suggest a major population increase by the middle of the decade.¹⁷⁰ In 1966, Robert Ruttan, a former caribou biologist with the CWS, published an article claiming that the mainland caribou had undergone a rapid population surge and now numbered 700,000 animals. He further claimed that a new caribou crisis threatened the herds: a rapidly growing caribou population might outstrip the carrying capacity of its range.¹⁷¹ Ruttan went so far as to suggest an annual cull of 100,000 animals to prevent mass starvation within the herds. Although this view was certainly not the orthodoxy among wildlife officials—Ruttan’s article was dismissed as being full of “dangerous information” at the July 1966 meeting of the Administrative Committee—a range-wide survey conducted by the CWS biologist Don Thomas in 1967 postulated that the herds had increased significantly to a total of 385,000 animals.¹⁷² The improved population data did not bring an immediate end to the urgent concern over the mainland caribou herds.¹⁷³ Nonetheless, the emergence of scientific data suggesting even a moderate increase in the caribou population by the end of the 1960s in many ways marked the end of the so-called caribou crisis.

Conclusion

¹⁷⁰ Calf percentages in the range of 23-28% were reported in 1960. See “The Current Barren-Ground Caribou Situation,” NWT Sessional Paper No. 8, Second Session, 23 June 1960. RG 85, vol. 1944, file A-401-22, pt. 1, NAC. The first report of increased caribou numbers came from a survey of the Keewatin herds conducted by R.A. Ruttan and a Mr. Look, Asst. Supt. of Game at Churchill. The two men estimated a dramatic increase in the herd to 148,677 animals. See “Report on the Keewatin Herds,” 28 July 1965. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, box 68, file 401-22, pt. 23, NAC.

¹⁷¹ R.A. Ruttan, “New Crisis for the Barren-Ground Caribou,” *Country Guide* 85, 11 (November 1966), pp. 24–25.

¹⁷² For the comments on Ruttan’s article, see the Minutes of the Administrative Committee on Caribou Preservation, 15 July 1966. RG 85, acc. 1997-98/076, box 68, file 401-22-5-1, pt. 2, NAC. Thomas estimated that an increase from 200,000 in 1958 to 387,000 in 1967 would require either the “extremely high” recruitment rate of 17.6 percent or would indicate that “the 1958 population was larger than 200,000.” See Donald C. Thomas, *Population Estimates of Barren-Ground Caribou*, March to May, 1967, Canadian Wildlife Service Report Series No. 9 (Ottawa: The Queen’s Printer, 1969), p. 42.

¹⁷³ The projected increase in the caribou numbers did lead, however, to a slow moderation of the crisis mentality that had surrounded caribou management for over a decade. Moreover, the increased political activism of native groups such as the Indian Brotherhood and the Inuit Tapirisat in the early 1970s, combined with the devolution responsibility for wildlife matters from the federal government to a duly elected Northwest Territories government in 1970, led to a return of some measure of local control over the caribou harvest through co-management agreements between native hunters and state wildlife officials. For an overview of one co-management agreement, see Cizek, Peter. *The Beverly—Kaminuriak Caribou Management Board: A Case Study of Aboriginal Participation in Resource Management*, Canadian Arctic Resources Committee Background Paper #1 (Ottawa: Canadian Arctic Resources Committee, 1990). For a collection of essays that effectively summarize the rise of the Indian Brotherhood as an umbrella political organization for the Dene, see Mel Watkins (ed.), *Dene Nation: the Colony Within* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

For over a decade after the inception of the caribou crisis in 1955, the air of urgency surrounding the conservation of this wildlife population contributed to the imposition of some of the most far-reaching changes to the subsistence economy of Dene and Inuit hunters in the Northwest Territories. In order to conserve the caribou, federal wildlife officials supported a broad array of coercive programs that seemed to have been designed as much to weaken the political and cultural sovereignty of northern Aboriginal people as they were intended to save an endangered species. Throughout the post-war era, the politics of wildlife conservation in the Northwest Territories became increasingly tied to a broad expansion of federal influence over the lives of the Dene and Inuit. It was during this period, moreover, that the caribou conservation program took on the most visible characteristics of a colonial institution; one that was intent on imposing the cultural norms and economic priorities of the 'centre' as a means to reform the 'deficient' hunting cultures of local Aboriginal people living at the periphery. The main tenets of the federal government's response to the caribou crisis—the re-settlement schemes that were designed in part to move Native hunters off the caribou range, the fishing projects that aimed to divert hunting pressure from the caribou, and the employment and training programs that promoted a modernization of the northern economy—all reinforced the one basic theme: Native hunters had lost a large measure of control over their lives due to the autocratic imposition of the 'outside' institution of wildlife conservation. The caribou conservation program was not limited, in the end, to the mere imposition of a rational harvesting scheme for the mainland herds. It also sought to induce fundamental social and cultural changes among the Dene and Inuit, turning subsistence hunters into fishers or industrial labourers and, if necessary, moving them from their traditional hunting grounds so they could fully participate in these new economic 'opportunities.' Accordingly, the range of cultural, economic, and ecological choices available to Native hunters in the post-war era were, to a large degree, circumscribed and appropriated by a state authority that placed more faith in scientific expertise and bureaucratic management than in the purely local and supposedly ignorant interests of northern Aboriginal people. The CWS biologists Gerry Parker summed up the prevailing disdain for local Native hunting practices as late as 1972 when he quoted extensively from no less of an authority than Warburton Pike to argue that "many people are under the impression that the primitive Indian was a dedicated conservationist," but in reality "nothing could be further from the truth."¹⁷⁴ Such derogatory comments serve to remind the contemporary reader that the practice of wildlife conservation in the Northwest Territories was not simply a benevolent or visionary attempt to protect the caribou, but was instead an expression of state authority over the apparently 'corrupt' local hunting cultures of the Dene and Inuit, a process of coercive change that led many northern Aboriginal communities toward a future that was not of their own making.

¹⁷⁴ G. R. Parker, *Biology of the Kaminuriak Population of Barren-ground Caribou, Part I*, Canadian Wildlife Service Report Series No. 20 (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1972), p. 74.

Conclusion

In June 1998, my wife Yolanda and I were travelling north on the dirt highway leading out of Fort Smith through the endless twilight of a northern summer evening. We had just spent three days hiking in Wood Buffalo National Park, observing sandhill cranes, pelicans, one black bear, and an astonishing variety of boreal songbirds and migratory waterfowl. There was nevertheless a lingering feeling of disappointment: the only signs of the park's namesake we had found were scattered tracks and sun-baked dung patties along the Salt River. We soon discovered, however, that we might have had better luck locating bison if we had driven along on the road rather than searching them out on the walking trails. As our car approached the northern boundary of the park, we encountered a large herd of well over seventy bison spread out across the highway, no doubt enjoying the abundant grasses at the side of the road and a reprieve from biting insects in this windswept right of way. Traffic is a rare thing in this part of the world; we were thus able to sit on the hood of our car for over three hours observing the herd. For the most part, the bison kept to their grazing, but slowly, almost imperceptibly, a portion of the herd began to work its way towards us as they grazed. One of the largest bulls approached so closely that we were forced back inside the car. He stared at us for several long minutes through the window; now the observers had become the observed. We managed eventually to enact a form of peaceful co-existence with the herd: we would allow them to graze undisturbed just a few feet from us and they would allow us to watch. In time, the herd scattered to the forest as a second car approached with its horn blaring and with no intention of slowing down. What had been a mere common annoyance for this local resident had nevertheless provided an unsurpassed moment of awe and rapture for two outsiders who had never before experienced such intimate contact with large wild animals. Indeed, we were acutely aware of the rarity of the moment. Northern Canada remains one of the world's last remaining great reservoirs of wildlife, one of the few places where one can still encounter free-roaming herd animals in large numbers. The bison of Wood Buffalo National Park, the massive caribou herds of the Arctic interior, and the muskoxen on the Arctic Islands and in the Thelon Game Sanctuary still offer the urban-based wilderness enthusiast the same exceptional opportunities for contact with the charismatic megafauna that so enthralled hunter-naturalists such as Warbuton Pike, Caspar Whitney and Ernest Thompson Seton.

Such experiences in the present cannot help but shape our perceptions of the past. The writing of history, as Hayden White has argued, is a process of narrativization that inevitably imposes moral meaning on the chaotic swirl of events that make up our collective experience of the past.¹ Although not a historical event, a rare encounter with a once abundant population of wood bison in one of the world's largest wilderness preserve

¹ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1987). For the application of White's ideas to environmental history, see William Cronon "A Place for Stories: Nature, History and Narrative," *Journal of American History* 78 (March 1992), pp. 1347-1377.

suggests a certain ‘moral’ to the history of wildlife conservation in northern Canada. Surely, one might conclude, the mere fact that these animals still exist implies an act of foresight on the part of the government officials who created Wood Buffalo National Park. Through the latter half of the nineteenth century, governments in Canada and the United States had done very little to protect the wildlife that was being slaughtered on the Great Plains. In the early decades of the twentieth century, however, Canadian officials adopted a more activist approach to wildlife conservation as they attempted to prevent the destruction of the wood bison, the caribou, and muskoxen in the Northwest Territories. One could argue that a contemporary encounter with a herd of wood bison along a lonely highway is a monument to their success, a testament to the judicious application of conservation policies in Canada’s Northwest Territories.

There is some truth to this narrative. The expansion of a commercial economy in the Northwest Territories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did pose a very real threat to the region’s wildlife populations. The influx of ‘outside’ trappers, traders, whalers, explorers and miners to the Northwest Territories brought increased numbers of subsistence hunters and a commercial trade in the meat and skins of the muskoxen and the caribou.² The participation of Dene and Inuit hunters in this new market hunt for fur and meat extended its reach far inland from the whaling stations of the Arctic Coast and the trading posts strung along Great Slave Lake and the Mackenzie Valley. There are, of course, many ecological factors other than human hunting that may account for the decline of a species in a given area, including climate, disease, snow depth, and shifting fire regimes. Nonetheless, there can be little doubt that the expansion of the robe and meat trade in the latter half of the nineteenth century contributed to the severe reduction of the wood bison of the South Slave region, the caribou herds in the lower Mackenzie Valley, and the muskoxen population of the Arctic mainland. In light of such severe wildlife crises, it is tempting to conclude that the northern administration’s conservation initiatives were both reasonable and prudent. Measures designed to control the growing commerce in big game in particular, such as the ban on the trade in muskoxen parts and the restriction of the caribou trade to domestic markets, reflected almost a brave willingness on the part of the federal bureaucracy to challenge the interests of the trading companies and fur auction houses to prevent the kind of commercial overkill that so greatly contributed to the demise of the bison on the Great Plains.

And yet the broad sweep of events surrounding the introduction of federal wildlife conservation programs to northern Canada does not sustain this singular conclusion. Everywhere within the published writings and correspondences of Canada’s early conservationists there are statements that contradict the ‘enlightened preservationist’ label that has been attached to their endeavours. Those looking for signs of heroic and prototypical environmentalists in the writings of conservation pioneers such as C. Gordon Hewitt, James Harkin, and Maxwell Graham will certainly find rapturous soliloquies attesting to the inherent value of wildlife, but they will also find praise for the economic

² Peter Usher, “The Canadian Western Arctic: A Century of Change,” *Anthropologica*, New Series, 13, 1-2 (1971), pp. 169-83.

importance of Canada's wildlife. In his expansive monograph on wildlife conservation, Gordon Hewitt argued that Canada's wildlife should be preserved in part for posterity, "on the higher grounds of our obligations to other countries, as guardians of our portion of the wild life of the world, and to future Canadians, the heirs of a region so richly endowed." Yet a far greater portion of Hewitt's book was devoted to a catalogue of the immediate economic benefits that could be derived from the conservation of wildlife. These included the exploitation of the caribou as an "inestimable" food supply, the use of game species as a recreational resource, and even the more intangible "resourcefulness" that sport hunting brings out in its practitioners, a quality that Hewitt suggested served Canadians well in the second battle of Ypres.³ Such a willingness to combine seemingly contradictory approaches to wildlife conservation suggests that the presumed philosophical gulf between the 'wise use' wing of the conservation movement and 'intrinsic value' preservationists may not have been nearly so wide in the early decades of the twentieth century as some historians have suggested.⁴ This is particularly true of natural resource agencies within government, many of which were not apt to make fine philosophical distinctions in the arguments they used to justify wilderness and wildlife protection in the North American hinterland.⁵ Ultimately, men such as Harkin, Hewitt, and Graham were pragmatic bureaucrats rather than visionaries: they appealed to both the highest ideals of the nature enthusiast and the basest commercial aspirations of the industrialist in an effort to promote their conservation initiatives.

The abundance of wildlife and unreserved land in the Northwest Territories ensured that commercialism and the doctrine of usefulness were particularly important driving principles behind the early wildlife management programs in this part of Canada. Senior wildlife officials such as Maxwell Graham were eager, as we have seen, to place wildlife at the service of specific national interests such as the alleviation of wartime food shortages. On a much broader scale, federal wildlife officials were keen to foster linkages between conservation and the advance of a new commercial empire in the Far North.

³ C. Gordon Hewitt, *The Conservation of the Wild Life of Canada* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), pp. 6-16.

⁴ For works that assume a rigid distinction between preservation and conservation, see Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind, Third Edition* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991); Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness from Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Janet Foster, *Working for Wildlife: the Beginnings of Preservation in Canada*. Second Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998). One could argue that the rigid distinction between preservation and conservation is valid in an American context, particularly if one considers the debates among the pantheon of prominent philosopher-conservationists such as Pinchot, Leopold and Muir. However, some recent historical work suggests that the mix of preservationist idealism and conservationist utilitarianism that characterized the Canadian wildlife conservation movement also existed in the United States. The final chapter of Andrew Isenberg's recent monograph, *The Destruction of the Bison*, suggests that the combination of preservationist idealism and profiteering that dominated the early bison conservation movement was not unique to Canada. See Andrew Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 164-92.

⁵ Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997). See also the second chapter of Alan MacEachern's, *Natural Selections: National Parks in Atlantic Canada, 1935-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2001), pp. 25-46.

Drawing on the reports of explorers, naturalists and government agents who extolled the virtues of a pastoral future for the Canadian North, federal wildlife officials actively promoted the establishment of game ranches in the Northwest Territories, a radical shift in land use patterns they hoped might one day facilitate further settlement and economic development in the region. One does not have to look very deeply in the historical records to find evidence of this close equation of wildlife conservation with the development of productive agricultural enterprises in the North. Gordon Hewitt's enthusiastic promotion of muskoxen ranching in his published writings, James Harkin's participation in the muskoxen and reindeer commission, and Maxwell Graham's fervent support for the transfer thousands of wood bison from southern Alberta to the 'understocked' ranges of Wood Buffalo National Park provide only the most obvious evidence that wildlife policy in the North was tied to the 'rational production' conservation ethos of the American Progressives.

The enthusiasm among federal wildlife officials for agricultural models of wildlife conservation in the 1920s and 1930s shares a close affinity with what James Scott has described as the high modernist faith in the ability of centralized bureaucracies to produce simplified and predictable environments to serve the requirements of industrial production.⁶ Federal wildlife officials repeatedly emphasized that the introduction of a simplified agro-economic system to the Canadian North would not only preserve individual species from the vagaries of human and non-human predation, it would also provide stable and predictable supply of food for both Native people and newcomers to the region. However, as Scott has argued, in their rush to 'improve' upon the productive potential of natural systems with narrow management schemes, state bureaucracies often ignore the complexity of local ecosystems and human cultures, an oversight that can bring disastrous consequences. Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that the dogmatic emphasis on production among Canada's early conservationists brought about one of the worst blunders in the history of federal wildlife management: the transfer of thousands of plains bison from southern Alberta to the Wood Buffalo National Park. This project was intended as a comprehensive solution to the dual problem of too many bison on the limited range of Buffalo National Park and too few on the ranges of northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories. But in their zeal to maximize the numbers of bison within Wood Buffalo Park, wildlife managers such as Maxwell Graham neglected to account for the potential ecological impacts of the transfer, most notably the possible introduction of diseases such as tuberculosis to the wood bison herds. Ironically, when scientific study two decades later revealed that tuberculosis had spread widely in the northern bison herds, wildlife scientists increasingly identified the central 'problem' of northern bison management as quite the opposite of Graham's: too many bison concentrated on too small a range had allowed for the spread of diseases and raised the possibility of over-grazing on the vast northern bison ranges. For wildlife biologists, the solution to this dilemma was quite simple: thin the herds by killing large numbers of bison. If the byproducts of this slaughter could be sold as part of a commercial marketing

⁶ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

program, so much the better not only for the well-being of the bison herds but also for the health of government coffers. Although the scheme never successfully eradicated tuberculosis from the bison herds, the image of government owned abattoirs conducting large commercial slaughters of wildlife in a national park—even as Native hunters were forbidden to kill the same animals—provide perhaps the most vivid example where local wildlife resources were appropriated by a state wildlife management program devoted to the principles of agricultural herd management.

On a much broader scale, it is clear that the earliest articulation of a ‘productive’ wildlife conservation policy regime was also linked inseparably to the government’s colonial ambitions in the Northwest Territories. The wildlife herds of the sub-arctic taiga and the arctic tundra were to be conserved in part because they provided the only ecologically viable means to introduce an agricultural base for the more general expansion of settlement and economic activity in the Northwest Territories. On the advice of explorers and promoters such as Vilhjalmur Stefansson, the federal government thus envisioned a northward expansion of empire that was novel for its time. Save for importation of semi-domesticated European reindeer herds, agricultural expansion into the Canadian North was to be achieved using native wild animals rather than Old World domesticates. If this colonization scheme would not radically alter the faunal composition of the northern tundra (except for the almost inevitable destruction of predatory animals), the enclosure of northern wildlife on vast ranches would have almost certainly entailed a fundamental change to the material cultures of the region’s Native people as hunters were coerced into adopting the more sedentary life of ranch hands and herders. Indeed, the proposed conversion of the arctic landscape from a wildlife commons to an enclosed and domesticated landscape was no less a vision of economic and ecological imperialism than the colonial processes that had transformed much of North America into ‘neo-European’ agricultural landscapes over the previous four centuries.⁷ Of course, the North had not been closed to external commercial markets prior to the twentieth century, but had served as a staple-producing region for the global fur trade since the eighteenth century. However, the shift among Aboriginal hunters from an almost exclusive focus on subsistence hunting to petty commodity production within a partly commercialized economy had not produced radical changes in the hunting cultures of the North. Other than subtle changes in seasonal movements, the availability of material goods, and trading patterns, there was a great deal of continuity with the ‘bush life’ of the pre-contact era. The proposed ranching schemes demanded a much broader transformation of economic and social life in the North, however, one that entailed the marginalization of the hunting and trapping economy, the introduction of capitalism to the region, the transformation of Native hunters into wage labourers, the intensive management of wildlife for the purposes of production, and the further entrenchment of the North as a staple producing region for southern commodity markets. Although the idea of a pastoral north remained a dream deferred, it is clear that wildlife enthusiasts within government

⁷ See Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986); William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

were more than willing to subordinate their conservation programs to the economic priorities of private capital and the colonial ambitions of an expansionist state in the early decades of the twentieth century.⁸

The federal government's attempts to assert 'imperial' control over northern wildlife populations were synonymous with its efforts to establish administrative control over Native hunters in the region. By the early twentieth century, the cultural stereotype that cast Native hunters as unruly and improvident killers of wildlife had become firmly entrenched within the conservation discourse. Continued reports of wasteful caribou slaughters and clandestine bison hunts—many of which turned out to be false on further investigation—contributed to a general sentiment among federal wildlife administrators that Native hunters represented a dire threat to northern wildlife and must therefore be subject to increased levels of regulation and control. The result was dramatic changes in the ability of Native hunters to access wildlife on their traditional hunting grounds. Beginning with the passage of the Unorganized Territories Game Preservation Act in 1894, the hunting practices of the Dene and the Inuit became increasingly circumscribed by formal game regulations. By the end of the 1920s, Native hunters were subject to closed seasons on valued fur-bearers and waterfowl and were no longer permitted to hunt big game species such as bison and muskoxen under any circumstances. Even the caribou hunt—a mainstay of the northern subsistence economy for centuries—was subject to closed seasons that Native hunters were permitted to ignore only if they were starving. At the local level, Native hunters were excluded both individually and *en masse* from traditional hunting and trapping grounds that were enclosed in protected areas such as Wood Buffalo National Park and the Thelon Game Sanctuary. In some locales, particularly Wood Buffalo National Park, the establishment of a game warden service or police detachment provided the federal government with a tentative means of implementing direct surveillance and supervisory control over Native hunters. As a result, many of the most basic aspects of the Dene and Inuit subsistence cycle—seasonal movements, fur trapping, and, most importantly, the gathering of food—were now re-defined as criminal activities.

The support for these initiatives within government circles was not monolithic. Throughout the inter-war years, the Department of Indian Affairs remained consistently opposed to game regulations that undermined the ability of the Dene to make a living off the land. Although the department was motivated in part by concerns over rising relief costs rather than an a sincere desire to defend the viability of traditional Native hunting cultures, the sympathetic influence of senior officials such as Duncan Campbell Scott did

⁸ This pattern of collusion between the interests of resource industries and the state is manifest most prominently in Canada at the provincial level, simply because jurisdiction over natural resources is retained at this level of government. Nonetheless, much the same pattern of convergence between the interests of capital and the state was exhibited at the federal level in the Northwest Territories, particularly during the post-war expansion of industrial expansion in the region. See Kenneth J. Rea, *The Political Economy of the Canadian North: An Interpretation of the Course of Development in the Northwest Territories of Canada to the Early 1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968). For an examination of the intimate association between the state and resource industries in Ontario, see H.V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines and Hydro-Electric Development in Ontario, 1849-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974)

stave off more extreme policy proposals from the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch and the Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection such as the removal of all Native hunters from Wood Buffalo National Park and the extension of closed seasons on caribou to Native hunters. Nonetheless, such opposition from within the halls of the federal bureaucracy had little effect on the attitudes of senior wildlife officials and northern administrators such as James Harkin, Maxwell Graham, O.S. Finnie and R.A. Gibson. These men promoted a thoroughly strident approach to the regulation of Native hunting in the Northwest Territories, one that included harsh penalties for those convicted of poaching, the dismissal of the hunting and trapping rights guaranteed in Treaties 8 and 11, and the application of bureaucratic pressure on police and warden services to ensure strict enforcement of the game laws.

Taken together, all of these policy initiatives suggest a second ‘moral’ to this historical narrative: the institution of wildlife conservation and its attendant legal instruments constituted an arbitrary imposition of state power over Aboriginal people in northern Canada. This argument requires some qualification. As E.P. Thompson has noted, it is far too easy to simply dismiss the rule of law as a ‘sham’—a singular expression of power on behalf of the ruling classes—without acknowledging its essential role mediating between competing interests within complex societies.⁹ A modern conservationist, for instance, can quite legitimately argue that in a crisis situation where human hunters knowingly threaten the immediate survival of a particular species, the legislative intervention of the relevant state authorities is the most expedient, and perhaps the only possible way to prevent the extinction of a unique life form. There are, however, several reasons to conclude that the intervention of the federal government in the lives of Native hunters during the early decades of the twentieth century was more a product of cultural contempt for Native cultures than a legitimate imposition of state authority to protect endangered species. To begin with, the evidence that federal wildlife officials used to bolster their case against Dene and Inuit hunters as improvident killers of wildlife was often based on rumour and conjecture rather than any specific knowledge of Aboriginal hunting practices. Moreover, federal officials often based their conservation policies on the most rudimentary scientific assessments of the species they were trying to protect, often only the casual observations of naturalists and explorers. Thus the idea that Native hunters as a whole were in need of state regulation was based more on assumptions than established facts. For instance, the federal government had little evidence other than the questionable reports of the police officer A.M. Jarvis to suggest that Native hunters were killing off the wood bison and several other police reports indicating that moose and caribou formed the primary source of meat for hunters in the South Slave region. Nor was there any solid evidence to suggest that Native hunters were killing muskoxen in the Thelon-Hanbury region in the years leading up to the creation of the Thelon Game Sanctuary. Of course, the absence of evidence does not mean that some illegal killings did not take place, but the lack of widespread reports of large-scale hunting of these two species suggests that Native hunters had by and large chosen to

⁹ E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: the Origins of the Black Act* (London: Allen Lane, 1975), pp. 258-69.

abandon them in favour of hunting more abundant alternatives. Nonetheless, federal officials refused even to consider the idea that existing local systems of wildlife management might act as an effective check on the excesses of individual hunters, or that a co-operative approach to managing the northern wildlife commons might be a more just and effective approach to achieving their desired conservation objectives. Instead, federal officials were more likely to anticipate Garrett Hardin's call for the imposition of external authority over the commons, positioning themselves as a Leviathan-like presence that would reign supreme over the supposedly 'improvident' traditional hunting cultures of the Dene and Inuit.¹⁰

These attempts to assert control over Native hunters in the North were not limited to specific legislative initiatives. As we have seen, federal wildlife officials also hoped to expand their policy framework beyond mere regulation of the hunt and toward the assertion of direct control over the social life and material culture of Dene and Inuit hunters. The earliest manifestation of this policy direction was linked to the broader colonial vision of a pastoral northland. With the introduction of a northern ranching economy, federal wildlife officials hoped that Native people might be convinced to give up hunting and trapping for the presumably more stable, productive, and docile life of a pastoral herder.¹¹ The low biological productivity of the caribou and the muskoxen and the consequent dampening of enthusiasm for Arctic ranching schemes prevented this particular program of cultural transformation from progressing beyond the few Inuit hunters who became reindeer herders at the Mackenzie Valley operation.

The attempts by federal conservationists to control the daily production of subsistence among northern Natives continued through the 1930s, however, and began to intensify during the post-war period. Recognizing that law enforcement agents could not regulate the hunt over such a vast territory, federal officials in both the northern administration and Indian Affairs found common cause promoting the use alternative resources as a means to ease hunting pressure on the caribou and implementing education programs designed to instill a conservationist ethic among the Dene and the Inuit. Working through field agencies such as the police, the game warden service, the Indian Agents, and the Northern Service Officers, the federal government distributed nets, boats and other fishing gear as a means to encourage the use of fish and marine mammals instead of caribou. Posters, booklets, filmstrips and other 'educational propaganda' were distributed throughout the Northwest Territories to promote a more rational approach to wildlife conservation among the Dene and Inuit. In sum, the government had begun to assert direct authority over many of the most intimate aspects of the Dene and Inuit

¹⁰ Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162 (1968), pp. 1243-48.

¹¹ There were some 'experts' on northern cultures, such as the anthropologist Diamond Jenness and the explorer D.B. MacMillan, who advised the government that the Inuit would not give up their lives as hunters for the more 'humdrum' life as herders. The general consensus of the witnesses that appeared before the reindeer and muskoxen commission was that Inuit would make better herders than the Dene, and only if they were trained adequately by Sami herders. See John Gunion Rutherford, James Stanley McLean, and James Bernard Harkin, *Report of the Royal Commission to Investigate the Possibilities of the Reindeer and Musk-ox Industries in the Arctic and Sub-Arctic Regions of Canada* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1922), p. 33-34.

subsistence economy. Although the ability of the federal government to influence Native hunters was constrained in some locales by the lack of nearby field agents, in other areas the most basic cultural choices available to the Dene and Inuit such as what food to eat, what tools to use for the hunt, and the proper means to maintain a dog team had all become the province of and external state authority. This approach to wildlife conservation took on a particularly coercive hue in the late 1950s and early 1960s as federal officials became convinced that the traditional Dene and Inuit economy had become an anachronism in the face of declining wildlife populations and the expansion of industrial resource activities in the region. With increased wage earning opportunities, Native hunters could now become passive workers in a modern capitalist economy rather than subsistence hunters who continually undermined the government's wildlife conservation agenda in the North. This policy received its most overt expression in the relocation of 'primitive' Inuit communities from the interior caribou regions of the Keewatin to the Hudson Bay Coast, where they received 're-habilitation' and employment training that would in theory allow them to adopt modern livelihoods as miners, commercial fishers, DEW Line workers, or market-oriented craft producers. Although there were other policy issues that influenced the development of the relocation program—the assertion of Arctic sovereignty, for instance, and the fear that the Inuit would develop welfare dependency if left to their own devices—there can be little doubt that the program appealed to wildlife conservationists because it removed 'reckless' hunters from close proximity to the caribou herds. As such, the relocation program represents the most overtly colonial idea to have emerged in six decades of federal wildlife administration in the Northwest Territories. According to federal officials, the conservation of wildlife in the Northwest Territories required the complete transformation of the subsistence cultures that had sustained Dene and Inuit communities for generations. Native people that were once independent hunters and trappers had now become townsmen, labourers, or wards of an external authority that sought to control every aspect of their social, cultural and material lives.

The development of such a broad conservation program can be attributed in part to the expanding role of science in the post-war federal wildlife bureaucracy. The creation of an internal scientific agency in the form of the Canadian Wildlife Service brought enough personnel, funding, and expertise to conduct the first aerial surveys of the caribou population, a census technique that produced estimates of the mainland caribou population in the mere thousands rather than millions. Although these studies provided only a coarse assessment of the caribou population, they were accepted as accurate markers of disastrous decline in the mainland caribou population. The CWS biologists tended, moreover, to repeat in their writings the stories of wasteful caribou slaughters that had been circulating in the region for over seven decades, adding an air of scientific legitimacy to the idea that Native hunters were primarily responsible for the decline in caribou numbers. Indeed, the broad participation of the CWS in caribou management programs reinforced the idea that the hunting cultures of indigenous people were deficient and needy of expert management and control. Several of the service's leading biologists became persistent advocates of comprehensive control measures to reduce the impact of Native hunting on the caribou herds. If some of their more radical proposals,

such as the campaign to abrogate Treaty rights to hunt and trap in the provinces, were never implemented, CWS biologists remained tireless advocates of programs to alter the Dene and Inuit subsistence economy throughout the nearly twenty five years in which they studied the mainland caribou herds.

In addition to their persistent attempts to control human hunters, the CWS also established intensive managerial control over specific populations of northern wildlife. The increase in predator control operations in response to the post-war caribou crisis, and the intense herding and culling program that was implemented in Wood Buffalo National Park as an attempt to control disease suggests that CWS biologist were not averse to slaughtering wildlife so long as the killing was part of a 'rational' herd management scheme. The CWS scientists responsible for the culling program did not object even to the blatant commercialization of the bison herds, so long as this pecuniary goal did not completely displace the scientific objective of disease eradication. Given such a willingness to merge wildlife management and marketing programs, it is tempting to adopt the familiar argument that science is an inherently 'imperialistic' form of knowledge dedicated to the control and domination of nature in the service of state commercial interests.¹² The danger of such a generalized analysis is that we forget the historical moments when biologists and utilitarian wildlife managers held irreconcilable views. The widespread objections of wildlife biologists in Canada, the United States, and Britain to the Wainwright bison transfer and the heated debates between scientists and managers over the efficacy of predator control operations in the 1920s suggest that the scientific community was not simply a passive servant of state interests. Although the scientific objections to the managerial ethos were grounded in what was perhaps a naïve faith in Frederic Clements' theories of an ideal 'balance of nature' free from human influence, it is clear that biologists prior to the Second World War were not always compliant in response to the federal government's intensive wildlife management programs. By the post-war period, however, the rise of more economic models of ecology (i.e., energy flow, trophic exchange) and the centralization of wildlife research within the federal bureaucracy had produced a new generation of scientists who were more amenable to the managerial and commercial interests of the state.¹³ While there is little

¹² For general critiques of the 'mastery' of nature by science, see Vandana Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology* (London: Zed, 1993); Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993).

¹³ For the influence of Clements on wildlife ecology, see Thomas Dunlap, *Saving America's Wildlife: Ecology and the American Mind, 1850-1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 44-45. For a summary of Elton's influence, see Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 291-314. The historian Richard West Sellars has argued that the history of the national parks in the United States has been dominated by conflicts between managers and scientists. See Sellars, *op cit.*, pp. 91-148; pp. 204-266. For further discussion of the conflict between ecologists and natural resource managers, see Stephen Bocking, *Ecologists and Environmental Politics: A History of Contemporary Ecology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Anders Sandberg and Peter Clancy, *Against the Grain: Foresters and Politics in Nova Scotia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000). For examples of conflict between scientists and state officials from outside North America, see Doug Weiner, *Models of Nature: Ecology, Conservation and Cultural Revolution in*

evidence that the early Canadian Wildlife Service falsified results to serve state objectives, they were more than willing to frame their scientific studies and management programs in terms of the administrative priorities of their bureaucratic masters. Hence a disease control program in Wood Buffalo National Park became intimately tied to the post-war administrative push for economic development in the North. In addition, the tenuous results of the caribou studies were interpreted in both the CWS and the northern administration as a justification for the introduction of strict wildlife regulations and coercive conservation education programs in the Northwest Territories. Although the capacity of wildlife biologists to assess and manage wildlife over such a vast territory remained limited even in the 'high tech' age of the aerial survey, science had become a powerful legitimating force for federal intervention in the lives of humans and wildlife in the more 'primitive' regions of the Northwest Territories.

At the intersection of all these historical forces—the disdain among conservationists for traditional hunting cultures, the authoritarian approach of the state to wildlife conservation, and the rise of scientific knowledge—lies a much broader conclusion to the narrative history of wildlife conservation in northern Canada. Put in its larger context, wildlife conservation in the Northwest Territories was bound to a much broader modernization agenda in the region.¹⁴ In pragmatic terms, wildlife conservation provided one of the principal reasons that the trappings of modern statecraft—legal codes, a bureaucracy, and a capacity to enforce the law—were imported to northern Canada. The expansion of the state conservation bureaucracy also brought a cadre of scientific 'experts' intent on replacing the supposed 'primitive' spontaneity of Dene and Inuit hunting cultures with more modern (i.e., rational) principles of wildlife management. The subsequent introduction of legal restrictions on indigenous hunting activities was only one expression of the idea that traditional Aboriginal relationships to nature were somehow lacking. Indeed, the coercive programs that were designed to alter the subsistence cycle of Aboriginal people represented perhaps the most profound diffusion of state power over the most basic subsistence activities of Native hunters.

In theoretical terms, the attempts of the state to control and shape the daily processes of production among the Dene and Inuit recalls Foucault's depiction of the modern state as a pervasive imposition of authority over its citizenry rather than overtly threatening expression of power. In his volume *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault employs the metaphor of the panopticon—a prison where the guards maintain constant surveillance from a central tower—to argue that discipline in a modern society emerges not from the threat of violence, pain, or death, but from the constant observation and supervision of individuals by institutional authorities.¹⁵ Native hunters of the Northwest Territories were, like the denizens of Foucault's panopticon, subject to a state system of wildlife management that emphasized the surveillance and supervision of some of the

Soviet Russia (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000); Judith Shapiro, *Mao's War on Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ The process of modernizing traditional hunting cultures through the imposition of wildlife conservation measures was repeated in other parts of the globe. See Roderick P. Neumann, "The Postwar Conservation Boom in British Colonial Africa," *Environmental History* 7, 1 (January 2002), pp. 22-47.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1977).

most intimate aspects of their material lives. Although the vast geography of the Northwest Territories limited the supervisory reach of game wardens, police, and other federal agents, wildlife conservation had nevertheless become a totalizing influence on the lives of many Native hunters at the end of the post-war period. Indeed, by this time, many Native hunters had lost much of their former independence as they became subject to coercive policy measures that encouraged them to abandon their traditional lives as caribou hunters and become fishers, whalers, or compliant wage labourers within the modern industrial economy.¹⁶ The federal government had achieved this level of control over the lives of Native hunters not through the threat of violence, but through more subtle forms of coercion (i.e., education, relocations) that allowed the state to manage and regulate the most basic aspects of everyday life among the Dene and the Inuit.

Nothing in this analysis is meant to suggest, however, that the Dene and Inuit passively accepted the influence of state conservation programs on their livelihoods. On the contrary, Native hunters in the Northwest Territories actively resisted the imposition of wildlife sanctuaries and game regulations on their traditional hunting grounds. Native hunters registered their objections to federal wildlife policies using a variety of formal protest methods such as Treaty boycotts, petitions, and protest letters. There is some evidence to suggest that objections to the game laws became a dominant theme in the local political discourse of many Native communities. In 1950, for example, the anthropologist June Helm reported that, for the people of Jean Marie River, “the restrictions [on hunting] are a source of continual resentment and give rise to such ironic jokes as ‘they are going to close mice next.’”¹⁷ It is also probable that the refusal of some hunters to obey the game regulations constituted a form of rebellion against the federal government’s assumption of control over wildlife. Although it is difficult to interpret the motivations of those who broke the game laws from an archival record that contains little direct testimony from Aboriginal hunters, the highly politicized nature of the trials in Wood Buffalo Park in the late 1920s and early 1930s and the hostile community reaction to charges laid for ‘poaching’ caribou in the 1940s suggests that conscious attempts to break the law provided Native hunters with a direct means to register their discontent with the federal government’s conservation initiatives in the region. Of course, there was an instrumental element to all of these protests: many of the participants went to great pains to remind federal officials that the regulation of wildlife harvesting in the Northwest Territories had made an already precarious existence more difficult for them. But there was also clearly a political component to the various protests of Dene hunters, a consistent complaint that the federal government had breached its obligation to uphold the perpetual hunting and trapping rights guaranteed in Treaties 8 and 11. Indeed, despite the continual pressure from federal authorities to comply with the game regulations, the assertion of a fundamental right to hunt and trap on traditional lands has remained a powerful political rallying cry for both Dene and Inuit hunters, forming the primary basis for the rejection of the proposed Mackenzie Valley pipeline in the late 1970s.

¹⁶ This interpretation was derived in part from Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski’s, *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939-63* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994).

¹⁷ June Helm, *The People of Denendeh: Ethnohistory of the Indians of Canada’s Northwest Territories* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2000), p. 35

Much has changed in the past thirty years since wildlife management has been placed under the control of the Northwest Territories government and more recently the new territorial government of Nunavut. Both the federal and territorial governments have slowly abandoned the older authoritarian approach to conservation in favour of a more co-operative approach to wildlife management. In recent years, the co-management of wildlife populations by scientists and Aboriginal harvesters has become the rule rather than the exception in both federal parks and the vast areas under territorial jurisdiction. Native communities in the Northwest Territories have also been able to take much more control over the creation of national parks in the Northwest Territories, rejecting parks in some cases and establishing others on their own terms through the process of settling land claims.¹⁸ In light of such recent innovation, there are some who might question the need to re-visit the history of conflict between Native people and conservationists in the Northwest Territories. Surely, one could argue, a thorough examination of the more inclusive contemporary initiatives rather than a reiteration of past mistakes would constitute a more positive contribution to the causes of conservation and Native cultural survival in the North.

But can the practice of wildlife conservation in the Northwest Territories be so easily severed from its own past? A close look at the newspapers from the past two decades indicates that many themes from the early history of wildlife conservation in the region still linger in the present. The recent conflicts over the wolf, seal, and bowhead whale hunts in the Northwest Territories suggest that relationships between northern Aboriginal people and the broader wildlife conservation movement continues to be less than harmonious.¹⁹ Shades of the older intensive approaches to wildlife management survive as well, as vehement controversy has developed in the past two decades over proposals to completely eradicate the diseased bison of Wood Buffalo National Park and replace them with a transplanted herd of wood bison.²⁰ Clearly both the history of longstanding conflict between Native hunters and conservationists and the historical controversy over intensive wildlife management schemes such as the Wainwright transfer continue to reverberate through the region.

¹⁸ Throughout the 1970s, the Dene community of Lutzel'ke was able to maintain a united front during community consultations to prevent the creation of a national park in their traditional territory on the East Arm of Great Slave Lake. See Kerry Abel, *Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), p. 254. For more on the creation of national parks through the land claims process, see Juri Peepre and Philip Dearden, "The Role of Aboriginal Peoples," in *Parks and Protected Areas in Canada: Planning and Management, Second Edition*, Philip Dearden and Rick Rollins, eds. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 323-32.

¹⁹ For an overview of impact of the seal hunt controversy on the Inuit, see George Wenzel, *Animal Rights, Human Rights: Ecology, Economy and Ideology in the Canadian North* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 94.

²⁰ For a survey of aboriginal perspectives on the slaughter proposal, see Theresa A. Ferguson and Clayton Burke, "Aboriginal Communities and the Northern Buffalo Controversy," in John Foster, Dick Harrison and I.S. MacLaren eds., *Buffalo* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1992). See also Ludwig N. Carbyn, Nicholas J. Lunn, and Kevin Timoney, "Trends in the Distribution and Abundance of Bison in Wood Buffalo National Park" *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 26, 3 (Fall 1998), pp. 463-70.

Indeed, if we were to return once again to the road leading out of Wood Buffalo National Park with a more thorough knowledge of the past, an encounter with a herd of bison might raise more questions than simple answers about the history of wildlife conservation in the region. How many of the bison we encountered that night were infected with tuberculosis or brucellosis? How many of their ancestors were killed as part of the disease control and meat production programs in the park? To what extent is the continued ban on bison hunting in the park a lingering source of discontent for Native hunters in the region? Any presumption of historical success for federal wildlife conservation programs must, in the end, be measured against the answers to such questions. The free-roaming herds of bison, caribou, and muskoxen may have survived to the present day, but so too has the memory of wildlife conservation as an arbitrary projection of federal power over both humans and nature in the Northwest Territories.