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Acting Chair
?ehdzo Got'ıne Gots'ę Nákedı
Sahtú Renewable Resources Board
P.O. Box 134
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Re: Tłegóhtı 2024 Public Listening Session – Responses to Information Request Round No 2

The Tłıchq Government (TG) received an information request from the ?ehdzo Got'ıne Gots'ę Nákedı (SRRB) as part of their second round of information requests, circulated on January 2, 2024.

Our response to the information requests is provided below. Please do not hesitate to contact me for further clarification.

Sincerely,



Tammy Steinwand-Deschambeault
Director, Department of Culture & Lands Protection
Tłıchq Government
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The SRRB has compiled a list of Round 2 Information Requests, including questions from other Parties. Please submit responses to Round 2 Information Requests by January 30, 2024.

ROUND 2 INFORMATION REQUESTS (IRS) FOR INDIGENOUS PARTIES:

A. Communication about climate change:

IRs from the SRRB to all Indigenous Parties

- 1. What is the best way for governments and other agencies to communicate information to your community about climate change, changes to the land, and changes to the animals?**

TG Response:

Word of mouth is always the best form of communication but having posters, pamphlets and newsletters to distribute amongst the communities are useful in getting information to the public. The Tłıchq Government (TG) has their annual Assembly where reports are developed to showcase the work being done by all the different departments; some departments do community tours on an annual basis to let the communities know what type of programs are being offered as well as the type of work that the TG has been working on.

TG has also established Dedats'eetsaa – the Tłıchq Research and Training Institute (TRTI) to advance the study of Tłıchq lands, language, culture and way of life. The TRTI operates under the direction of the Chiefs Executive Council (CEC) of the Tłıchq Government, and establishes programs and research to fulfill Government commitments and responsibilities for training, education and monitoring, within a Tłıchq cultural framework. A key strategy of the TRTI is to work with elders to research and document Tłıchq knowledge and to make those findings available to Tłıchq communities through social media or on their website; topics of interest may also be discussed on radio.

Social Media

- Social media and online sources are great tools to get information out to the younger generations; even the older generations are beginning to adapt.
- The TRTI maintains a website where resources are available online with regular updates including reports, digital archives and mini documentaries.
 - <https://research.Tlıchq.ca>
 - <https://www.Tlıchq.ca/news/boots-ground-mini-documentary-about-bathurst-caribou#>
 - <https://www.Tlıchq.ca/news/Tlıchq-film-wins-international-human-rights-award>

Conventional Media

- Tide Godi (Tłıchq Yatıi) is southern NWT's weekday Tłıchq Yatıi language radio program, 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. MT on CBC Radio One and CKLB.
 - o <https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-417-tide-godi-Tlıchq>
 - o <https://tunein.com/radio/Tlıchq-Yati-Program-p347979/>

B. Questions about adaptation to changes you cannot control, including climate change and Wildfires:

IRs from the SRRB to all Indigenous Parties

- 1. As land users, has your community changed the way you live, move, or behave on the land, in response to changes you have noticed on the land? What kinds of things are people in your community doing differently?**

TG Response:

The Tłıchq region encompasses a vast landscape including the communities of Behchokò, Gamètì, Wekweètì and Whatì extending to the West up to the Great Bear Lake and North to the desolate lands of the tundra and the Tłıchq people have travelled near and far within these lands as well as beyond since time immemorial. Historically, the Tłıchq people were nomadic, moving to different areas throughout the landscape where the land provided for them. Most of the communities are situated on lakes where fish is plentiful, so the people would travel from fall to spring hunting and trapping and then would settle in the community in the summer where they would fish (TRTI, 2013).

“People hardly stayed in the community because they always travelled after the caribou....” – Dora Nitsiza, February 2010.

Tłıchq elders and harvesters have seen and noticed many changes in the environment in the past and now. They are saying that there will be, and has been huge impacts on wildlife especially caribou and their habitat. The overall warming is affecting the amount of precipitation in the environment; there is less rain, the lakes and ponds are drying up, the forest is drying up making it susceptible to extreme and intense forest fires. With the warmer temperatures, the ice thickness is not what it used to be, the snow is deeper and looser than it used to be and the winter season is shorter. There are rain events occurring in the winter now, as of recently, on January 29, 2024, we experienced above zero temperatures and rain when it should be -40°C. These rain-on-snow events results in ice layers covering ground lichens and reducing availability for caribou to forage in the winter. The warmer weather creates periods of weaker ice and overflow on lakes and rivers. This is dangerous for hunters when out on the land, areas they expected to have thick sturdy ice is now unsafe and so they have to avoid these areas by changing their travelling routes (TRTI, 2013).

Hunters used to be able to travel alone with their dog teams, now with all these uncertainties with snow and ice conditions people have to travel in groups so that they ultimately make it home safe. In the past, the weather was more predictable, it was cold and windy, hunters were able to plan better for their successful journeys. The elders used to be able to observe the wind and predict the weather before planning a trip, now that information seems to be untrustworthy. It is difficult to plan a trip now based on weather predictions because it is so variable; this creates uncertainties when planning for a hunting trip and travelling on the land (TRTI, 2013).

When it was colder, the caribou used to go into the forest in October – November, now they don't come till December, the caribou used to spend more time with us in the winter (TRTI, 2013). Caribou used to travel south below the treeline near the communities when it was colder, now that its warmer, the caribou don't come as far south anymore, it seems like they stay around the treeline where it's

colder causing hunters to travel further away from the communities (TRTI, 2013). Hunters used to travel with dog teams and sometimes they didn't have to go too far from their communities or if they did, it didn't cost much (TRTI, 2013). Currently, hunters travel in their trucks going North on the winter roads as well as using their skidoos which can lead to be an expensive endeavour as they are reliant on gas which is quite costly. Most hunters who can afford to go hunting, have to take time off work. The caribou do not spend as much time with us below the treeline like they used to, so hunting is done on a time crunch making the experience quicker and because they have to travel further away, it is more expensive; hunting is typically done within a couple days such as on the weekends.

2. What role should humans have in helping caribou adapt to changes in the climate?

TG Response:

The Tłı̨chǫ Government has the responsibility of managing 39,000 square kilometers of Tłı̨chǫ lands, including surface and subsurface rights. The preamble of the Tłı̨chǫ Constitution, "Affirms our relationship with God and respects the interconnectedness of all living things. We acknowledge our responsibility to serve for all time as custodians of our lands, including our water and resources." (TGLUP, 2023). As people and as a Nation, we are connected with our land and our landscape. We were not given our lands; they have always been ours and we have the responsibility to serve for all times as the custodians of our lands (TG, 2021-2025). The relationship between the Tłı̨chǫ and the caribou is sacred and has been held at the highest respect. The elders always say "if you take care of the land, the land will take care of you". This implies that everything on the land has a life and spirit on its own, including humans. If one shows respect and gratitude to the land, the land will provide and take care of you (TRTI, 2013). The Tłı̨chǫ have lived on this land since time immemorial, and through this historical connection with the land and animals they have created strong spiritual ties to the land. Although the Tłı̨chǫ have lived on the land since time immemorial, it is often said that no one knows the ways of the caribou, how they will behave or where they will travel to (TRTI, 2013). Most elders explained that no one can know or understand all the ways of the caribou and that no one can decide or manage for the caribou (TRTI, 2013). The caribou are like people, they care for themselves just like we do. Each individual caribou and each herd have their own will to decide what they want to do, or where to go, what to eat and where they want to travel to (TRTI, 2013).

"Caribou has its own way to survive, they are like human beings. How will they survive? They will probably change what they eat" – Dora Nitsiza, February 2010.

Elders have said on numerous occasions, the climate is changing but the caribou have their choice as to how they will react and adapt to these changes (TRTI, 2013).

There are many reoccurring themes that have been shared and discussed with respect to future challenges facing Tłı̨chǫ and caribou – including climate change. J. Judas (2012) and J.B. Zoe (2012) have highlighted these themes respectively, and some of their key points are included below.

- Our relationship with ekwò defines who we are. It's a foundation for our nàowo – a Tłı̨chǫ concept that encompasses our language, culture, way of life, as well as our knowledge and laws. (J.B. Zoe 2012)

- Our survival depends on the survival of ekwò. We've tried to work on a solution together with all our elders and our people back home. The elders have got long vision, they can see for the future generations, and they're talking for the younger people. (J. Judas 2012)
- We're trying to work on science and traditional knowledge together. Science has a lot of tools to work with. But we're not going to give away the knowledge, we're not selling it. We keep it and pass it on to all the generations of the future. That's my traditional knowledge. That's how strongly I feel about the knowledge that I have. (J. Judas 2012)
- The young people are going to inherit the decisions that we make. We need to ensure that there's something left for them to inherit. But the survival of future generations as Tłıchq in this environment requires that they remain rooted in their language, culture, and way of life. (J.B. Zoe 2012)
- We have to get the young people out there, because otherwise our nàowo is all going to end up in a museum. That's the last place we need it. We need to get the information out to the young people. We should make an effort to get them out. (H. Simpson as quoted by J.B. Zoe 2012)
- Our children have a right to enjoy ekwò as we once did. It is our responsibility to begin to change our thinking and expectations, to give the herd an opportunity to recover. The future really belongs to the youth. (J.B. Zoe 2012)

3. Has your community started planning or taking actions related to climate change or wildfires and their impacts on caribou? What kind of actions has your community taken?

TG Response:

The Tłıchq Government respects and commits to sustain barren-ground and boreal caribou beyond management of hunting and includes the broader and longer-term issues of managing traditional, industrial, and recreational land use activities on Tłıchq lands. The Tłıchq Government recognizes that sustaining healthy barren-ground caribou and boreal woodland caribou into the future will require foresight, which will integrate the collection and sharing of knowledge to manage the combined effects of:

- a) Natural disturbances and cycles in caribou abundance;
- b) Human activities arising from hunting and land use; and
- c) A changing climate.

The Tłıchq Government will continue to develop and implement an integrated approach to monitoring and managing land use activities that support long-term conservation and resilience of migratory caribou on Tłıchq lands, and that is guided first and foremost by Tłıchq traditional knowledge. Existing programs that contribute to this directive include the Ekwò Nàxoède K'è (ENK) caribou monitoring program, the Tłıchq Government Dìga (wolf) harvesting program, Ekwò Harvest Monitoring Program, and environmental monitoring activities related to the opening of the Tłıchq Tildee to Whatı (TGLUP, 2023).

The Tłıchq Government recognizes that although forest fires are important to the health and growth of the forest, fires may also threaten valued Tłıchq infrastructure, traditional activities, and areas of

forest that are valuable to wildlife. In partnership where appropriate, Tłıchq Government will work to establish forest fire management approaches and protection measures to protect natural values vulnerable to fire on Tłıchq lands, including forests, parks, and wildlife habitat such as the old-growth forest strands that are important habitat for Tqdzı (Boreal Caribou) and Hozıı ekwq (Barren Ground Caribou) (TGLUP, 2023) .

4. What resources does your community need to adapt to and mitigate the effects changes on the land that you cannot control, such as climate change and wildfires?

TG Response:

Climate change is having an increasingly significant effect on the Tłıchq region. Since the 1940's, the average surface temperature in the Northwest Territories has increased by about 2°C – a trend anticipated to continue over coming decades. These changes are already affecting the Tłıchq people and their relationship to the land through impacts on travelling, hunting, fishing and trapping. Tłıchq elders have noticed how the land is changing. Warmer winters and earlier springs lead to changing ice conditions that can make overland travel more difficult and unpredictable. Drier summers increase the likelihood of large forest fires, which can devastate caribou habitat, food sources, and migratory routes. In addition, these larger and more frequent fires can cause danger to homes, structures and personal safety. This in turn can compromise traditional cultural practices, food security, and economic activities. While there is still much to learn about the impacts of climate change in the North, it is crucial that Tłıchq communities be prepared for the challenges that lie ahead. Tłıchq Wenek'e (Land use Plan) is an important tool in this process, and updating the land use plan regularly to reflect emerging knowledge about climate change is necessary. As Tłıchq Elder, former Grand Chief, and member of the Tłıchq Wenek'e Review Committee, Joe Rabesca, explains,

“Things change, and this plan should change too. The land is changing. There are more fires now, and the land is drier than it used to be... this land use plan is important for land management, and for protecting our land. It ties everything together.” – Joe Rabesca, LUPRC, 2021

To address impacts due to climate change we can build resiliency and adapt. Climate resiliency focuses on finding ways to withstand climate change-related changes that are occurring or yet to come. It also includes the capacity to absorb stress and continue to function in the face of external stressors. Adaptation measures relate to modifying decisions, activities and ways of thinking to adjust and respond to negative and positive impacts of a changing climate. Recently it has been acknowledged that scientific knowledge alone is inadequate in addressing the crisis created by climate change. Our unique Tłıchq traditional knowledge and expertise are vital sources of climate mitigation and adaptation strategies. Enriching climate science with our knowledge can create local community driven solutions to complex and unpredictable challenges brought by climate change (TG, 2021-2025).

The Tłıchq Government will work to develop its own regional Climate Change Adaption Plan. This plan is intended to incorporate the extensive knowledge of Elders and others who travel on the land to document the effects of climate change on Tłıchq lands. This plan will include innovative, practical solutions to mitigate climate challenges that can be implemented at a regional and local scale and through the Tłıchq Wenek'e, on Tłıchq lands.

Some key priorities addressed by this plan shall be how the Tłı̨chq̓ can:

- a) Transition to a healthy economy that uses less fossil fuels;
- b) Improve knowledge and education of the climate change impacts happening on Tłı̨chq̓ lands; and
- c) Build resilience and adapt to a changing climate at the local community level.

- 5. Does your community have stories about how communities should respond or adapt to changes on the land that you cannot control? Can you share how you have learned from these stories to guide your community in a good way in the past? Can you share how you learn from these stories now?**

TG Response: no response

- 6. Do you have any comments about other parties' responses to round 1 IRs? To help us understand your comments, please indicate both the party who gave the response and which of their IR responses you are commenting on. Other parties' responses can be found at <https://www.srrb.nt.ca/documentrepository/public/public-hearings-registry/caribou-conservation-climate-change-and-forest-fire/02-1-submissions-response-to-information-requests>.**

TG Response: no response

C. Observations of caribou and climate change in general:

IRs from the SRRB to all Indigenous Parties

- 1. Please share any changes, if any, has your community observed in:**
 - a. Mice and/or other small rodents**
 - b. Birds**

TG Response:

We have noticed in the Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è (ENK) program that there is an increased presence of Golden Eagles on the barrenlands and that the Bald Eagle distribution is now extending further north into the barrenlands.

- 2. If you have observed changes in bugs/insects, mice and/or other small rodents, or birds, have these changes affected caribou? In what ways?**

TG Response:

Tłı̨chq̓ Government established the Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è ekwò (ENK) monitoring program in 2016. Its goal is to bring Tłı̨chq̓ people to the ancestral hozì ekwò (barren-ground caribou) harvesting locations on hozìidee (barrenland). The main basecamp is established at Kokèti (Contwoyto Lake), located in the northernmost region of Tłı̨chq̓ traditional territory, and is centrally located on the summer range of the Kokèti ekwò (Bathurst) herd; the place where hozì ekwò migrate with their newborn calves to spend the summer. In summer 2020, an additional base camp was established at Deèzàati (Point Lake) to oversee the monitoring of the Sahti ekwò (Bluenose-East) herd.

In August 2022, a small monitoring camp was established at Ek'ati (Lac de Gras) and Łiwets'aᖅᖅahti (Lac de Sauvage) to initiate research and monitoring activities on the lakes around the diamond mines in the years ahead.

ENK monitors apply the Tłı̄ch̄ research methodology, “We Watch Everything” to study current environmental conditions, cumulative impacts to ekwò health and population numbers, and gain first-hand experience of the ekwò life cycle. The research methodology “Do as Hunters Do” is formed around traditional ways of traveling the land and sharing knowledge through people’s daily activities and interactions on the land. With respect to changes affecting caribou at Kokèti, some of the key observations by ENK monitors are noted below (TRTI 2023):

- The Ekwò Nàxoèhdee K'è monitors reported a trend of warm and dry habitat, with high calf abundance in 2016 to 2017, shifting to a trend of cold, wet weather. During the four years, 2018 to 2021, monitors reported ekwò habitat and food in generally excellent condition due to much rain and wind, and that ekwò health has been observed as “good”, including fat bulls and cows, but low calf abundance during the last four summers, from 2018 to 2021. During summer 2022, the previous year’s climate trend of wet and cold started to change. The summer was dry and warm. There were good forage conditions but short growing season, dry and windy conditions, few or none insects & lower water levels.
- During the summers of 2016 and 2017, warm and dry weather conditions were prevalent and resulted in dry, “crusty” ekwò forage. The summers were similarly warm and dry except for periods of rain and cold temperatures. During a few of that season’s heat waves (especially in August, where temperatures at Kokèti reached 30 degrees Celsius) ekwò forage was dry and crusty. Harassment by biting insects was high during these days, and we observed herds walking into the wind on high elevation to minimize insect harassment. Ekwò were in “normal” body condition, but were unable to build up fat reserves in July, due to high insect harassment. During 2016 to 2017, monitors observed that ekwò had “normal” and average body condition, and ekwò groups had at times high calf abundance, with most cows accompanied by calves, resulting in nearly a one-to-one calf-cow ratio.
- During the summers of 2018 and 2019; the weather trends turned cold, windy, and with frequent rain showers. The vegetation quality was good and tundra flowers and mushrooms were visibly abundant, as compared to previous years. This was optimal environmental conditions for ekwò, with consistently good foraging conditions and with much less insect harassment. The herds had more time to feed uninterrupted and build up fat reserves, without the need to continuously run from biting insects. With the continuously cold and windy weather, the bulls started to accumulate fat reserves on their rumps and lower back and grew large and wide, dark-coloured, palmated antlers earlier in the season (in mid-July), compared to earlier years. During July and August, the Bathurst herd showed signs that it was in strong and normal health. Thus, ekwò were healthy, and bulls were building fat reserves in mid-July. Although weather and forage conditions were favourable for ekwò fitness, however, in summer 2018 the positive trend had changed and we observed a declining trend in calves.
- The summers of 2020 and 2021 were comprised of similarly favorable weather conditions for ekwò; with continuously cool temperatures, strong winds and frequent rain. This weather created good vegetation quality and low activity of biting insects. Consequently, the monitors

reported healthy and strong animals throughout the summers. While forage conditions were considered 'good' and ekwò showed healthy body conditions, the calf to cow ratio remained low; similar to the previous two years. With the favorable environmental conditions and strong animal health, we expected that more calves were born and survived the summer. However, that was not the case for the summers of 2020 and 2021.

- At Kokèti during summer 2022, habitat and forage were in overall good condition for caribou, however vegetation became drier throughout the season. There were low water levels in lakes and little to no water in muskeg and ponds, thus the growing season was shorter. The Kokèti ekwò showed signs of good health during summer and fall, most of the adult caribou were in good body condition, however they were not as fat as the previous years. During mid-August, vegetation conditions appear to be very dry in all the plant communities. Wet sedge meadows were dry, with cracks often showing in the dried soil or organic surface. When walking in hummocky grassy meadows which would normally leave moisture on your boot or free-standing water in your tracks, there was no indication of surface water in these normally wet meadows. Due to dry conditions, there was a noticeable lack of mushrooms on the land, and by mid-August, ends of grasses and leaves were brown.
- In summer 2023, the dry drought-like conditions continued. Water levels at Kokèti (and Deèzàati) were more than a meter below the higher water mark visible on shoreline rocks. Notably small ponds and meadows had no standing water. Habitat and forage conditions are indicative of a dry summer. We have noticed more yellow leaves in many dwarf-birch, as well as some browning of leaf margins. In some areas around Fry Inlet, the grass growth appeared to be less than the last growing season – we saw fewer green seed heads (from this year) compared to the number of dead standing heads from last year. Most days in early summer had low or no insect (mosquito) activity. The low mosquito levels were likely tied to the lack of standing water and small ponds, which are important places for mosquito larvae to live and mature. The absence of severe biting insect conditions provided good conditions for caribou behavior, although the continued drought likely reduced quality and quantity of green forage relative to “normal” moisture conditions. ENK monitors also observed tundra fires burning at the south end of Kokèti, and are considered a rare occurrence and indicative of the dry conditions on the land.
- Caribou forage and biting insects are closely tied to environmental conditions on the land, which in turn are strongly influenced by moisture conditions and precipitation through the spring and summer. The relationship is dynamic and is not necessarily straightforward. For example, hot, windy, and dry conditions are not suitable for biting insects, which is good for caribou because they are subject to less disturbance and can spend more time feeding. But those same drought conditions reduce the quality and quantity of the forage plants, so the lower nutritional value of the food may reduce or slow their rate of gain in fat and body condition.
- There has been an increased presence of Golden Eagles on the barrenlands and that the Bald Eagle distribution is now extending further north into the barrenlands. Eagles are predatory species and if there is an increased presence and an extension of their range into the calving grounds of barren-ground caribou then we may see more mortalities amongst the calves of the herds with the increased predator population.

Key References

- Judas, J. 2012. TłjchoꞤ stories for EkwòꞤ management. Rangifer Special Issue No. 20:49-51.
- Tłjchq Research and Training Institute (TRTI). 2013. Tłjchq knowledge of environmental changes: Implications for caribou hunting. Tłjchq Government, Behchokq, NT. Online [URL]: <https://research.Tłjchq.ca/content/traditional-knowledge-environmental-changes-implications-caribou-hunting>
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