

For immediate release

Worsening caribou status highlights importance of Indigenous-led conservation



December 19, 2016 – Tulita, NWT – The worsening plight of barren ground caribou throughout Canada, as shown in a recent assessment released last week, emphasizes the importance of Indigenous-led wildlife stewardship now more than ever. The ᐱᕐᕈᕐᕐ ᑕᑦᕐᕐᕐ ᑕᑦᕐᕐᕐ ᑕᑦᕐᕐᕐ (Sahtu Renewable Resources Board / SRRB) has been working with Indigenous communities in the Sahtú region of the Northwest Territories to respond to emerging conservation needs for Bluenose East and Bluenose West ᐱᕐᕈᕐᕐ (barren-ground caribou) that travel through their region.

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) recently completed an assessment of the more than a dozen barren ground caribou in Canada as threatened, meaning they are likely to become endangered if nothing is done to protect them.

“As more scientific and Dene náowerə (traditional knowledge) that helps us to understand the conservation concerns around ᐱᕐᕈᕐᕐ emerges, it is increasingly vital that the communities who are dependent upon the herds for their well-being have a lead role in making decisions around ᐱᕐᕈᕐᕐ stewardship.” – Michael Neyelle, SRRB Chair

The SRRB has been working with Délı̨nę in the Sahtú Region of the Northwest Territories to address the pressures facing the Bluenose East ᐱᕐᕈᕐᕐ herd, in particular. Last year, Délı̨nę formed a working group to design a community-led conservation plan for ᐱᕐᕈᕐᕐ, done in consultation with local Elders and land-users and based on the respectful relationship that the community’s Dene and Métis harvesters have shared with the herds since time immemorial.

Délı̨nę’s plan was reviewed through a public hearing, and recommended for approval by the SRRB. Rejection or approval of this comprehensive conservation plan is currently awaiting the final decision of the NWT Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.

In the meantime, the SRRB continues to support Sahtú communities in advocating for community-led conservation approaches and respectfully working through interjurisdictional matters regarding ᐱᕐᕈᕐᕐ herd health and conservation. Last week, representatives from the Délı̨nę ᑕᑦᕐᕐᕐ ᑕᑦᕐᕐᕐ ᑕᑦᕐᕐᕐ and Tłı̨chǫ Government held a technical meeting to discuss opportunities for cross-regional cooperation around ᐱᕐᕈᕐᕐ conservation.

COSEWIC will release recommendations to the Minister of Environment Canada next year to list barren ground ᐱᕐᕈᕐᕐ as threatened under the federal legislation. If such a designation moves forward, a recovery plan will have to be implemented with actions identified to help caribou populations rebound.

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