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Responses to ʔehdzo Got'ıne ʔotsé Nákedı Information Requests - Belarewılé Gots'é ʔekwé – Caribou for All Time Proposal

February 27, 2016

The Délıne ʔehdzo Got'ıne thanks the ʔehdzo Got'ıne ʔotsé Nákedı (Sahtú Renewable Resources Board – SRRB) for the opportunity to provide further information about our perspectives related to the *Belarewılé Gots'é ʔekwé – Caribou for All Time* proposal. Below please find responses to the Board's Information Requests.

Information Request 1 - Understanding the environment in which ʔekwé live

Sahtu Dene and Metis know ʔekwé behaviour and habitat as well as other detailed knowledge, and rules and laws governing people's relations with ʔekwé. Please explain what types of information you would like from the scientists about the environment that might help in future community planning.

Response

Délıne is currently developing a research and monitoring program related to the newly-approved Tsá Túé International Biosphere Reserve. A meeting to develop the strategy was held during February 9-11, 2016 and included discussions specifically about ʔekwé research and monitoring. The report on the strategy will be forthcoming shortly.

The Délıne plan will be complemented by a research and monitoring strategy being drafted by the Sahtú Environmental Research and Monitoring Forum. This strategy will also include an ʔekwé research and monitoring component. A meeting of the Forum to discuss the strategy is planned for the last week of March – and it is expected that this will be reviewed by all interested parties, including Délıne.

Délıne has opposed invasive ʔekwé research and monitoring techniques, including collaring. The Délıne ʔehdzo Got'ıne has supported related regional consensus resolutions, including Resolution 2 of the Renewable Resources Council Gathering, Fort Good Hope, September 18,

2012¹, and Resolution 5 of the Sahtú leadership meeting, Colville Lake, April 23, 2015². The community supports non-invasive research that addresses community questions.

Délıne has already partnered in non-invasive Ɂekwé populations research with Jean Polfus and Micheline Manseau involving genetic research as well as traditional knowledge to understand population distribution and relationships. The Délıne Ɂehdzo Got'ıne is also sponsoring research on contaminants in Dene béré (country foods), including Ɂekwé, as well as a human biomonitoring to learn about any health risks of eating Dene béré.

A number of additional issues requiring further social and natural science research are identified in *Belarewıle Gots'ę Ɂekwé*, including:

- Processes and implications of changes in Ɂekwé habitat
- Impacts of fire and fire management
- Díga (wolf) and Ɂekwé relationships
- Food security and alternative harvesting practices
- Socio-cultural implications of Ɂekwé decline and conservation practices
- Harvest monitoring approaches and methods
- Community governance as it applies to Ɂekwé conservation

Information Request 2 - Keeping the land healthy

One of the points under your section “Dene há Ɂekwé há - What makes people and Ɂekwé healthy?” is to keep the land healthy. Please explain Délıne views on how the land is kept healthy.

Response

Délıne Got'ıne (the people of Délıne) believe that Dene néné (our land) and all living things must be kept healthy as a self-regulating system, just as the people must be self-regulating. This view is reflected in the guiding vision for *Belarewıle Gots'ę Ɂekwé*, “Dene and Ɂekwé are free to maintain their relationships through their own ɁeɁa.” This is also the vision underpinning the new Tsá Túé International Biosphere Reserve.

Although Délıne Got'ıne may curtail Ɂekwé harvesting for conservation purposes, it is critical that we find ways to continue our land-based knowledge and practices, our role and relationships as part of the ecological system. The ɁeɁa (laws or principles) and actions outlined in the Délıne plan aim to support this. Of special note are the following:

¹ The SRRB and RRCs should jointly support caribou traditional knowledge and harvesting research as well as appropriate scientific research that does not disrespect the animals or harm them in any way, benefits both the caribou and the communities, and helps to maintain and strengthen our relationships with caribou.

² We the undersigned oppose the use of collars for monitoring wildlife, and instead support the use of the knowledge of the RRCs and the hunters.

- Dene béré kats'įnįwe (harvesting a wide variety of country foods)
- ʔekwé gha máhsı ts'įnįwe (ceremonial harvest), including respectful harvesting practices
- Dene ts'įlį (Being Dene) awards, celebrating Dene land-based practices, including teaching and sharing.

Information Request 3 - Defining ʔekwé populations

The Deline plan acknowledges the ACCWM's *Taking Care of Caribou* plan which separates caribou into three separately managed herds – Bluenose East, Bluenose West and Cape Bathurst. The *Taking Care of Caribou* plan recognizes that the definition of herds is a hot topic that needs to be resolved. Please clarify whether Délįnę wishes to see decisions made about the Bluenose East and Bluenose West herds separately or as one population.

Response

Belarewílé Gots'ę ʔekwé acknowledges and accommodates the definition of ʔekwé populations as defined in the *Taking Care of Caribou* plan and agreed to by the ACCWM. However, this does not necessarily constitute agreement with this definition. *Taking Care of Caribou* recognizes the definition of ʔekwé populations as a “hot topic” bearing further research.

The Délįnę Got'įnek'ə gokədá has one word for the kind of caribou who travel to gokw'ı (the barren-grounds) – ʔekwé (otherwise referred to as ʔekwéwá, “the real caribou). People do talk about ʔekwé in relation to the territory that they're travelling through at certain times, just as they talk about people in relation to their seasonal harvesting areas. However, focused traditional knowledge research is required on Délįnę Got'įnę understandings of ʔekwé populations in relation to their habitat to be able to respond with confidence to this question posed by the SRRB.

Information Request 4 – Ecotourism program

One of the objectives associated with the plan for stewardship (conservation) is an ecotourism program to be self-sustaining by 2020. Please explain why the ecotourism program important to your ʔekwé conservation plan? How is it linked to ʔekwé conservation?

Response

Belarewílé Gots'ę ʔekwé is a plan to conserve ʔekwé while maintaining and strengthening Dene Ts'įlį. Innovative programs are required to provide opportunities for Délįnę Got'įnę to keep our land-based knowledge and practices alive when the environment is changing. Ecotourism is one of a variety of means for people to maintain our relationship with the land and to mitigate the economic impacts of reduced access to Dene béré. Moreover, a vital ecotourism program can be a basis for protection of the migration corridors that are necessary for ʔekwé survival and self-regulation.

Information Request 5 - Working together

Your proposal mentions that the allocation of regional Ɂekwé harvesting quotas is causing competition among regions, communities and families. What do you think could happen that would address this problem?

Response

One of the ɁɁa described in *Belarewílé Gots'é Ɂekwé* is areyɁné etóot'Ɂné ats'Ɂt'e (we are all one family). Building strong co-management relationships with our neighbours is critical for successful Ɂekwé conservation. This requires strong community and regional governance. Local harvesting committees such as Ɂehdzo Got'Ɂné must have proper support in order to have the capacity to exercise its mandate in the co-management system. The DélɁné Ɂehdzo Got'Ɂné has also supported annual regional and cross-regional user group gatherings to share knowledge and experiences build consensus on caribou knowledge and conservation approaches³. The *Ɂekwé ghɁ Łánats'edá - Gathering for the Caribou* sponsored by the SRRB and hosted by DélɁné on January 27-29, 2015 was a good starting point for this kind of discussion.

Information Request 6 – Reviewing and revising the plan

Your proposal points out that it's helpful in planning: “to change the process when it needs changing.” The proposal also notes that “it's important to review the plan often to see what's working, what's not working, how we are progressing on our objectives, and plan our next steps.” How will DélɁné Got'Ɂné know when the plan needs changing? What is the process for making changes?

Response

Belarewílé Gots'é Ɂekwé envisions regular review and revision as part of the planning cycle. The plan has often been referred to as an iterative or “living document” that is responsive to the need for changes. Changes will be required when difficulties are identified in achieving plan objectives or tasks; when the context for the objectives changes, requiring an adjustment of the objectives; or when milestones are achieved, allowing for the identification of new objectives.

DélɁné has already undertaken a six month review of the plan in January (the planning process began in July), and already a number of issues have been identified that will necessitate improvements in the plan. The review has involved a meeting of the Ɂekwé Working Group to scope issues and possible solutions; a door-to-door campaign and presentations at the school

³ Per the Sahtú leadership resolution 1.3 that the Sahtú communities assemble together regularly to share knowledge and plans related to caribou in the Sahtú region, including celebrating our culture through traditional stories, music, dancing and cultural exchange (Colville Lake, April 23, 2016).

and adult learning centre, polling community members about the plan; and a harvesters meeting to review issues and recommendations of the Working Group.

The Délı̨nę ʔehdzo Got'ı̨nę acknowledges that while the starting point for this process is within the community, review of plan implementation and identification of changes needed must take place at different scales – including regional and cross-regional forums. For example, there will need to be regular dialogue with user groups (per IR 5), the SRRB, the Sahtú Secretariat Inc. and NWT Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) to reflect on the effectiveness of the plan from a larger perspective, given the large distances that encompass ʔekwé goʔededáhk'á (habitat). The 2016 Bluenose East ʔekwé hearing is an opportunity for such a feedback process that can support positive changes to the plan driven from within the community. Questions posed by ENR and the SRRB about the plan have already exposed gaps and areas requiring more detailed planning.