

Traditional and Community Knowledge Compilation for the 2021 SRRB Public Listening

“Tłch’ádıı hé Gots’edı – Living with Wildlife: Caribou Predators and Competitors”

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Introduction:

- January 2021 – Prepared a written summary of available Dene náowerə (Sahtú Dene and Métis Traditional Knowledge) for the Délıne Public Listening session.
- Reviewed and included information from more recent submissions, sources and meetings since.
- Topic: *“What should people’s role be in maintaining healthy relationships between caribou and other wildlife?”*

Specific research topics:

1. *What are Sahtú Dene and Métis traditional understandings of healthy relationships between caribou and other wildlife?*
2. *What do people in the Sahtú Region think about caribou predators and predator control programs?*
3. *What do people in the Sahtú Region think about caribou “competitors” and their relationships to caribou?*
4. *What are Indigenous peoples doing today for ecosystem planning and caribou conservation?*



Topic 1: What are Sahtú Dene and Métis traditional understandings of healthy relationships between caribou and other wildlife?

Main themes:

- Everything is connected – Stories of balance, responsibility, and respect
- We are not the boss of caribou – Understanding Dene law
- Moving the stories forward – How to find balance in a changing world.



Topic 2: *What do people in the Sahtú Region think about caribou predators and predator control programs?*

Main themes:

- Caribou predators are part of a healthy system.
- Predators are spiritually powerful creatures that must be treated with respect.
- Wolves and bears are the main predators of caribou, but there are also other and new predators now.
- Relationships between caribou and their predators are complex; increasing numbers of moose and muskoxen influence these relationships, as does environmental change.

Topic 2: *Recent trends and info (2021 & 2022)*

- NW: More wolves, bigger packs, more lone wolves coming into camps/town, but is a natural cycle that shouldn't be interfered with. Not enough info to take actions like a wolf cull, and there are other factors to consider (e.g., industry).
- FGH: Fewer bele seen recently. Predators are respected; people don't like to talk about them and don't support baiting, culling or sport hunting bele. Let nature take its course, find its own balance.
- CL: Do not interfere with the relationship that exists between caribou and wolves. Need more info about predators before making decisions about actions. Looking at ethical and traditional ways of monitoring, harvesting, etc.
- DEL: Díga are traditionally rarely harvested. When Ɂekwé are around there is more of everything, including díga and nóggha. Wildlife manage their own relationships with each other. Wolf control methods have been disrespectful in the past.
- TUL: Elders say don't bother animals that aren't bothering you. People are not seeing wolves because caribou aren't around; wolves help to balance caribou. Grizzlies follow caribou herds.

Topic 3: What do people in the Sahtú Region think about caribou “competitors” and their relationships to caribou?

Main themes:

- All things have a role in maintaining balance.
- There are new and invasive species now that complicate things and may change what “balance” looks like.
- There are more moose, woodland caribou, and muskoxen in some places.
- Muskoxen may compete with caribou for food, or might make caribou go away.
- The management history with muskoxen changed Dene relationships with them.

Topic 3: *Recent trends and info (2021 & 2022)*

- NW: More muskoxen now; are aggressive; use cutlines as corridors. People are starting to harvest them. Caribou avoid muskoxen, but they do share food somewhat. T̥ɔdzı and muskoxen co-exist. Wolves keep muskoxen in check. Need to understand relationships between species better before taking actions.
- FGH: T̥ɔdzı seem to be doing well; people are getting a lot of moose. Need more on the land monitoring for ɤədə. No concerns about how ɤəjire may impact shúhta goɤepé and doe. ɤədə does not come around ɤəjire, but ɤəjire and t̥ɔdzı tracks are seen in the same area. Climate change affects the movement and distribution of wildlife, including ɤəjire.
- CL: T̥ɔdzı harvesting has increased. Plan describes need for more info about “competitors” before making decisions about actions. Looking at ethical and traditional ways of monitoring, etc. Better to protect ɤədə habitat and range from mining and industry & reduce disturbance. Muskoxen are part of the natural system.
- DEL: T̥ɔdzı harvesting has increased. People did harvest ɤəjire before the ban in 1917, but colonial management changed that relationship.

Topic 4: *What are Indigenous peoples doing today for ecosystem planning and caribou conservation?*

Main themes:

- There are more Indigenous-led stewardship initiatives taking place in many parts of Canada.
- Some involve land protection (e.g. IPCAs), research and monitoring (e.g. Boots on the Ground), and re-assert Indigenous authority on the land (e.g., Guardians, Watchmen).
- Community Conservation Planning in the Sahtú.

Topic 4a: *How are Indigenous peoples maintaining healthy caribou / predator relationships in the north?*

Other peoples, other places:

- Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan.
- ENR / TG joint management proposal for wolves.
- Ekwò Nàxoède K'è (Boots on the Ground) Bathurst monitoring.
- West Moberly and Sauteau First Nations protecting woodland caribou.
- Rebuilding the Fortymile herd.
- Tahltan Nation predator management policy.

Topic 4b: *How are Indigenous peoples maintaining healthy caribou / competitor relationships in the north?*

Other peoples, other places:

- Yukon North Slope muskox co-management plan.
- ISR CCPs.
- Planning for muskoxen in the Qikiqtaaluk and Kivalliq Regions.
- Alaska muskox management – the ‘cooperators group’.
- Greenland’s community-led harvest planning.

Conclusions:

- Sahtú Dene and Métis traditional systems of knowledge, belief, spirituality, governance, and stewardship are still important today. People want to find ways to ensure that Dene náoweré and Dene ts'ı́lı continue to shape the future for younger Dene.
- Even in times of change, ancient teachings about balance and harmony, respect and responsibility provide a source of wisdom that can be helpful to find a way forward.
- More information is needed so we can better understand what is happening on the land today. Part of gaining this information must include a return to returning to the land to learn from it.