Dìga Harvesting Program 2019-2022

Tłı̨chǫ Ndek'àowo

Tłı̨chǫ Government

Project Manager, Stephanie Behrens, Wildlife Biologist

Department of Culture and Lands Protection

Program Goal:

Implement dìga harvest and monitoring actions undertaken by TG in the winter season as described in the TG/GNWT joint response to WRRB

Photo source: Petter Jacobson

<u>Overarching goal: help the recovery of ekwǫ̀</u>

Timeline in achieving Dìga Harvest Program:

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- 2015 – zero harvest for Bathurst herd and Mobile Conservation Zone is developed
- 2016 – limited harvest of 193 bulls on Bluenose East
- 2010, 2016, 2019 – TG and ENR Joint Management Proposals for Bathurst and Bluenose East
  - Recommendations to develop community-based harvesting program and provide incentives
- January 2020 – Joint Management Proposal for Wolf Management (TG/ENR) for 5 years (2020-2024) submitted to WRRB
  - WRRB approved a wolf management pilot program for the winter of 2020
- 2020 – ENR and TG to review and assess wolf management pilot program and adjust to make improvements to the program
  - WRRB reviewed and approved Revised Joint Management Proposal (2021-2024)

Tłı̨cho perspective:

- Ekwǫ̀ have been declining drastically, even after Indigenous Harvest was eliminated for the Bathurst herd – they continued to decrease
    - Dìga Harvest is the last resort, Indigenous Harvest was already put to zero in 2015
- Nobody is out on the land anymore
    - Dìga seems to be increasing because nobody is hunting/trapping them anymore
- Building relationships amongst people, dìga and ekwǫ̀
- Doing what we can to ensure there is ekwǫ̀ for the future generations

Objectives:

- Harvest dìga in the ways that are informed by Tłı̨chǫ culture and protocols keeping safety as the highest priority
- Train Tłı̨chǫ harvesters to trap, snare and hunt dìga using the effective, legal and respectful (i.e. humane) techniques
- Facilitate on-the-land knowledge transfer and provide Tłı̨chǫ with opportunities to harvest dìga and support recovery of ekwǫ̀ populations

2019-2020 Season

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Elder and Harvester Meeting (December 17, 2019)

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- Tłı̨chǫ Government reached out to all four Tłı̨chǫ communities for experienced and knowledgeable hunters and trappers with elders that would know the history of harvesting dìga in the Tłı̨chǫ region.
  - 28 participants attended the meeting from all Tłı̨chǫ communities except Gameti
  - Each participant discussed their experiences with dìga harvesting and shared knowledge that would help in the Tłı̨chǫ Government harvester's program, elders shared the strong spiritual beliefs and ties that the Tłı̨chǫ have with dìga.
  - The participants provided suggestions and recommendations on how to run the dìga harvesting program and suggested a location for the camp.
- Identified the need to have training to learn the best techniques in harvesting dìga.

Training (January 8-12, 2020)

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- 18 participants
- ATA instructor
- Participants from Whati, Wekweeti and Behchoko
- Dìga behavior and different techniques in harvesting dìga and different snare sizes
- Hands-on knowledge (making and setting snares as well as setting traps and skinning dìga)
- ENR regulations

Dìga Harvest Program (January 31 – March 20, 2020)

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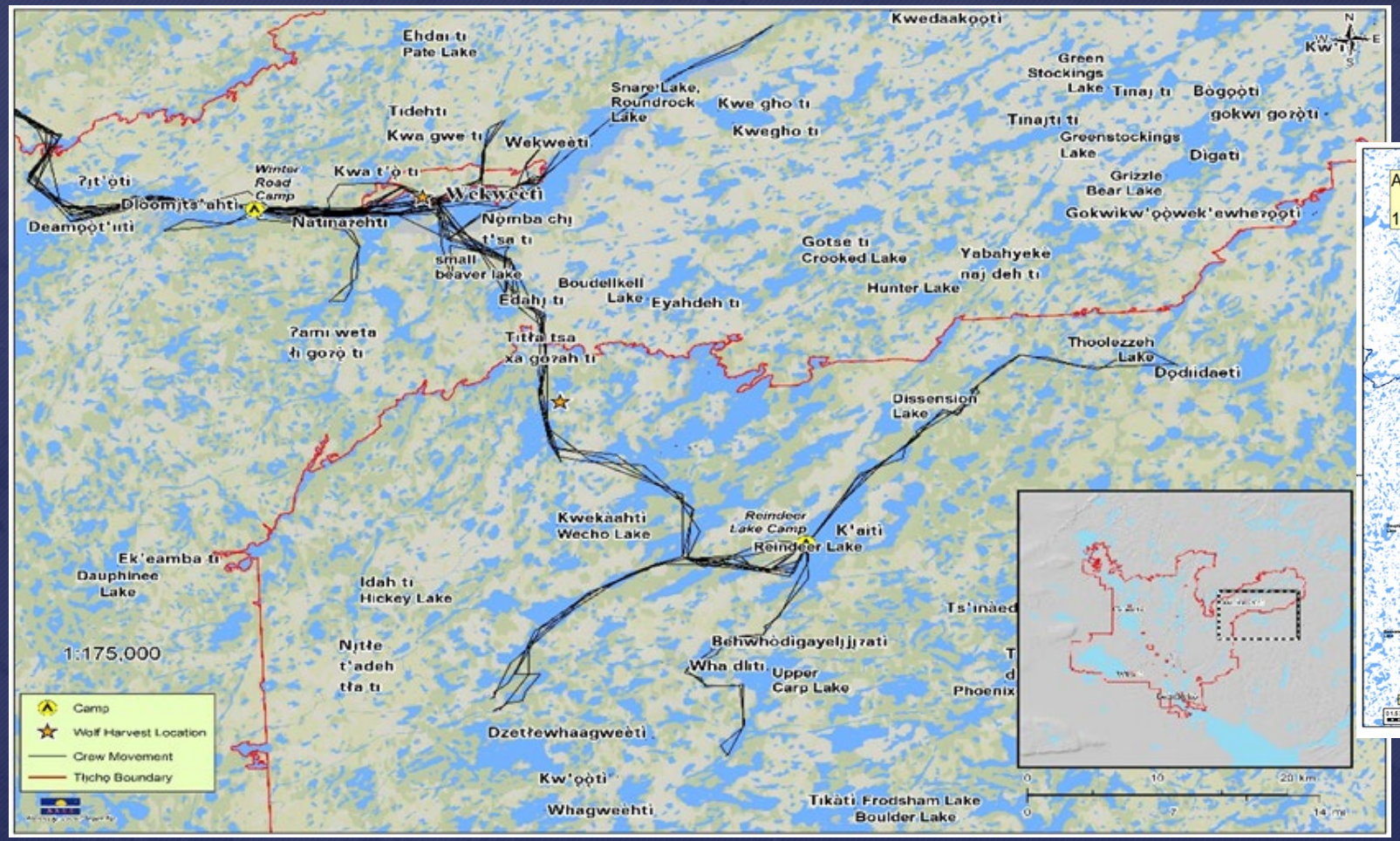

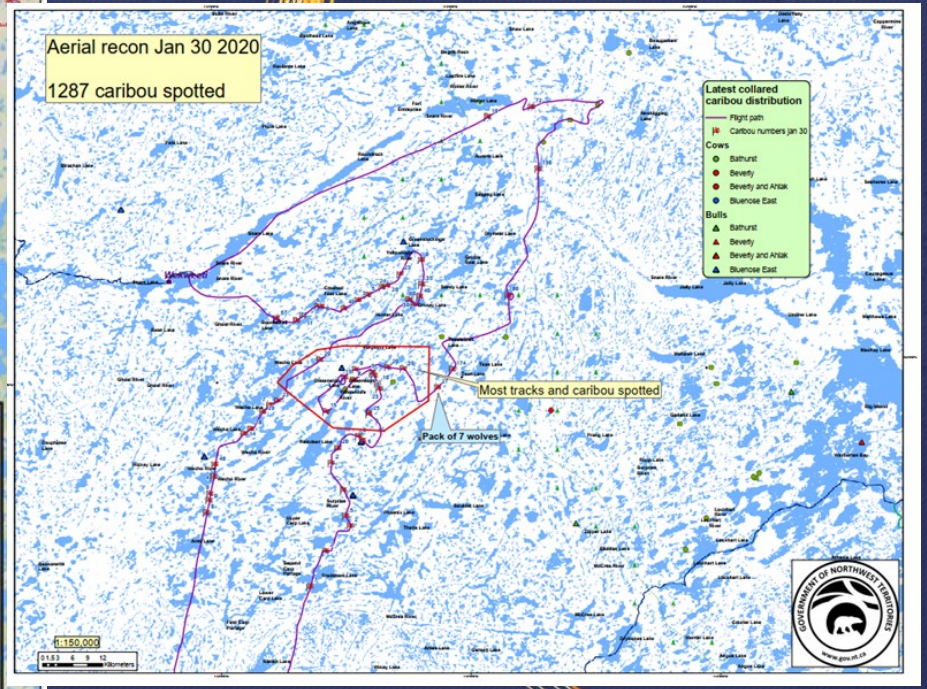

Recommendations from pilot year (2019/20)

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- More training – safety training, inReach and GPS, field notes
- Prepping bait
- Downsizing amount of people – only 2 crews
- Better location for base camp
- Each participant with own firearm (PAL required)
- Staying out of town
- Proper carcass storage
- Include people from Gameti

2021 Season

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Elders and harvesters meeting (December 2, 2020)

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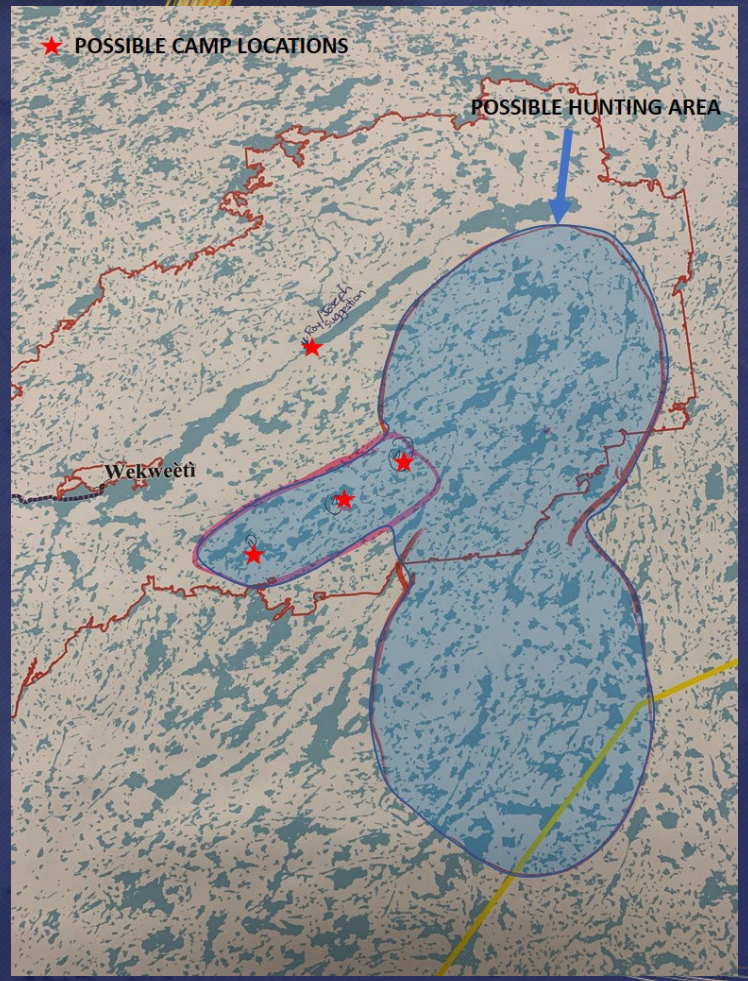
Tłı̨chǫ Government

- Due to COVID restrictions we had to limit the amount of people to attend (16 participants)
- Gave update of the pilot year and explained process with the Joint Management Proposal (awaiting WRRB decision)
- Discussed all the concerns from the participants of the pilot year
- Discussed ways to improve the program and recommendations from the previous year
- Plans for 2021 program and identified possible locations



Training (December 3-5, 2020)

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- Identified the need for Wilderness First Aid
- Most participants have PAL

ENR Aerial Reconnaissance Survey – January 20, 2021

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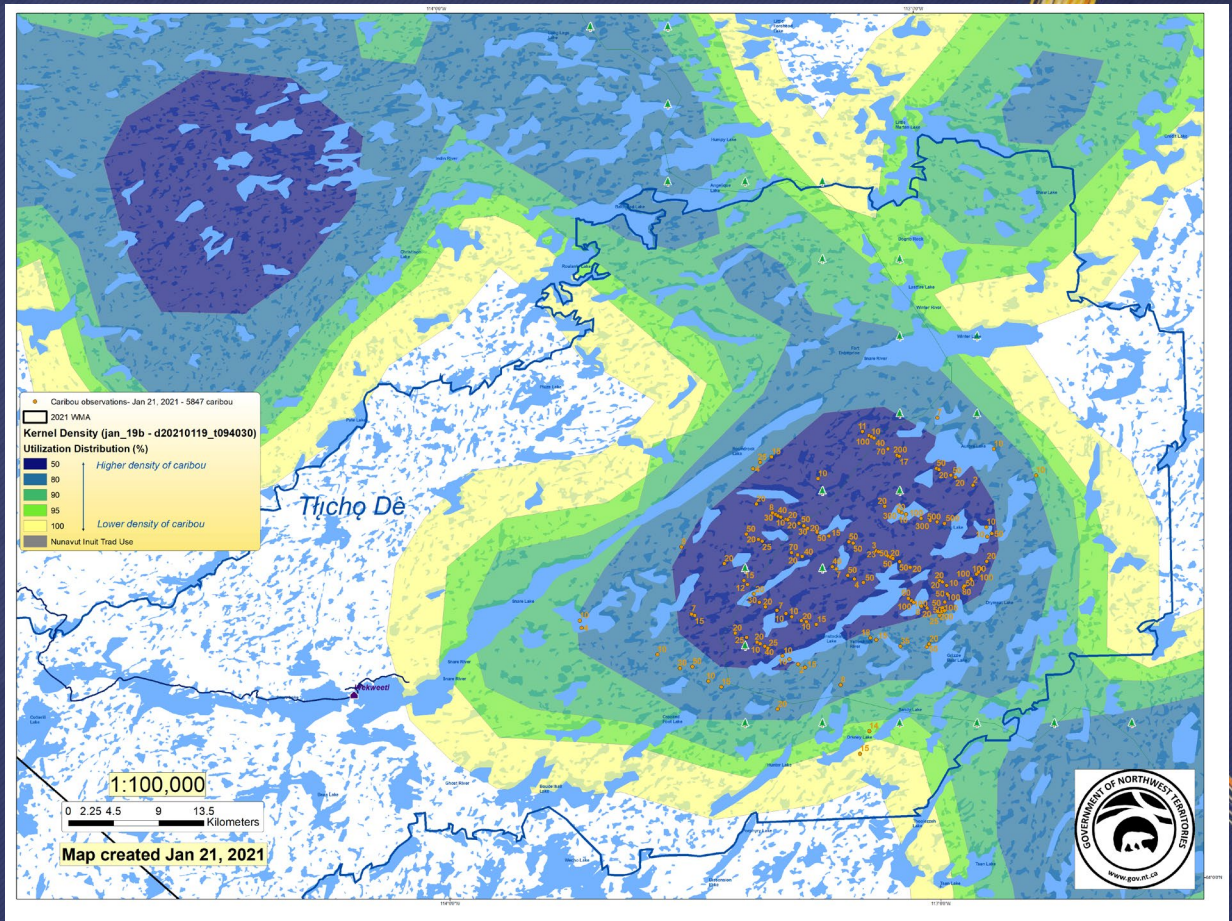
- No dìga spotted
- No kill sites
- Approximately 6000 caribou spotted



Dìga Harvest Program (January 22 – March 29, 2021)

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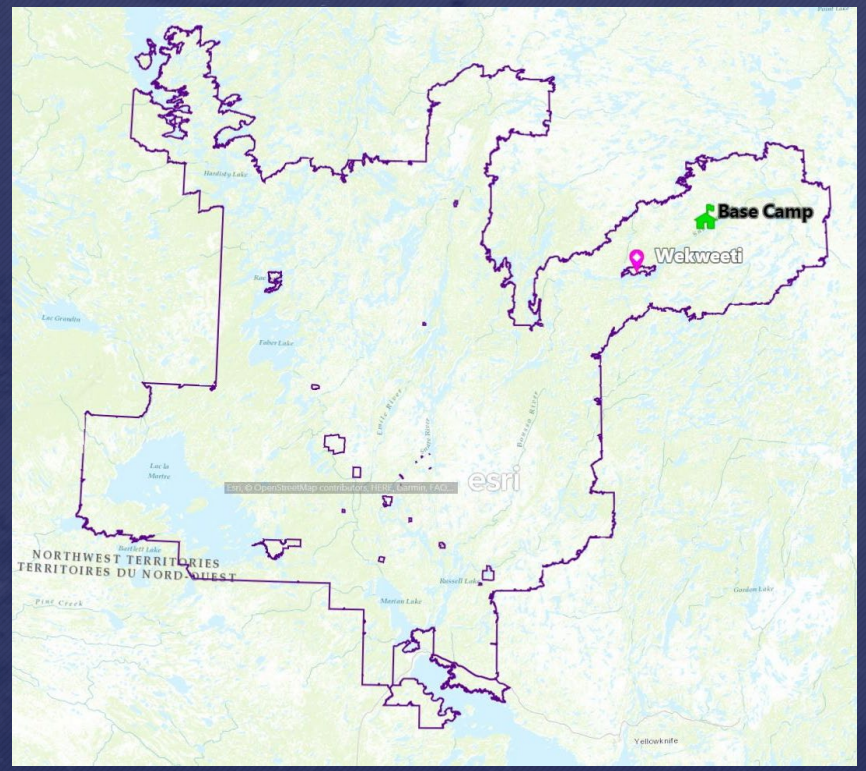
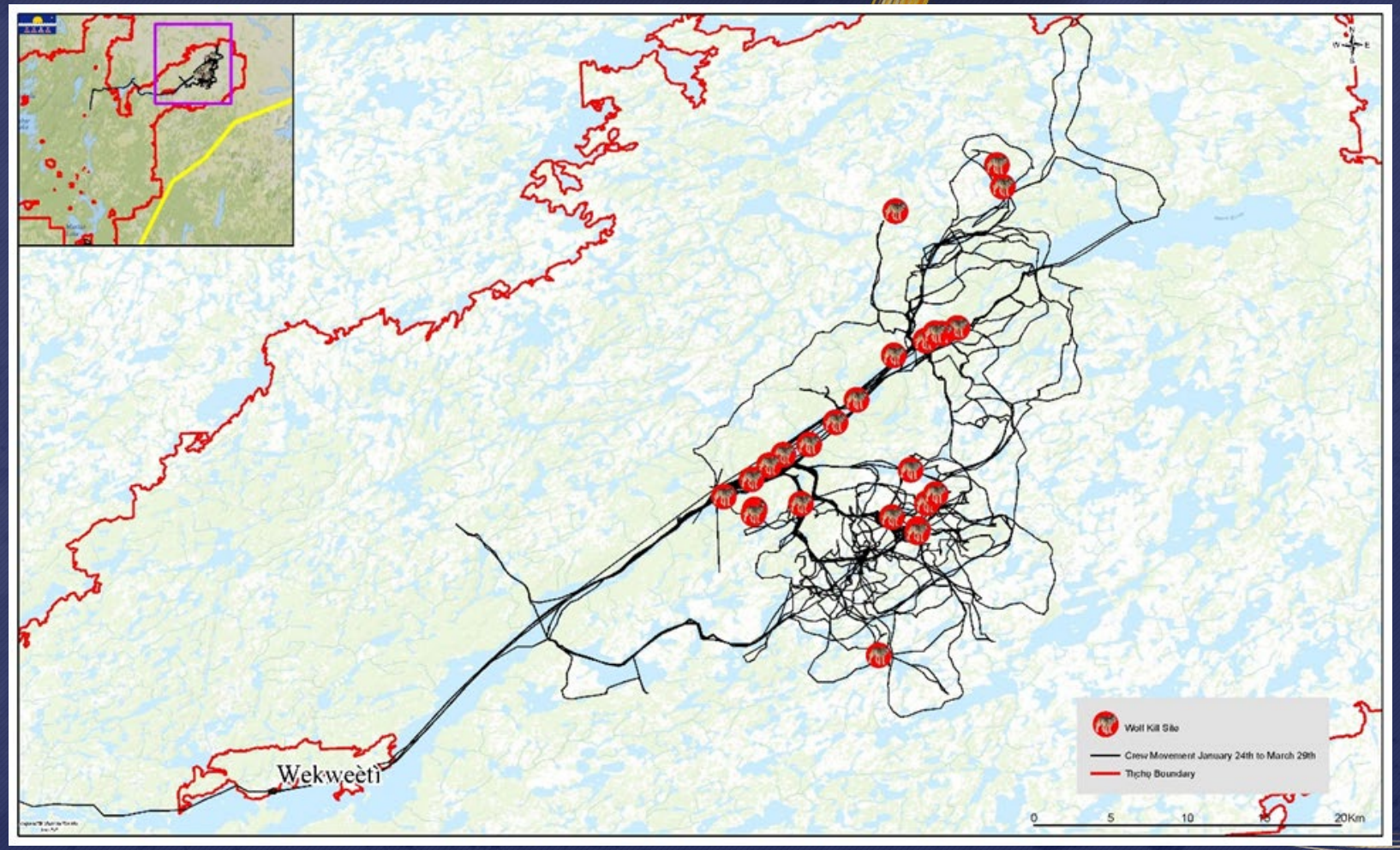
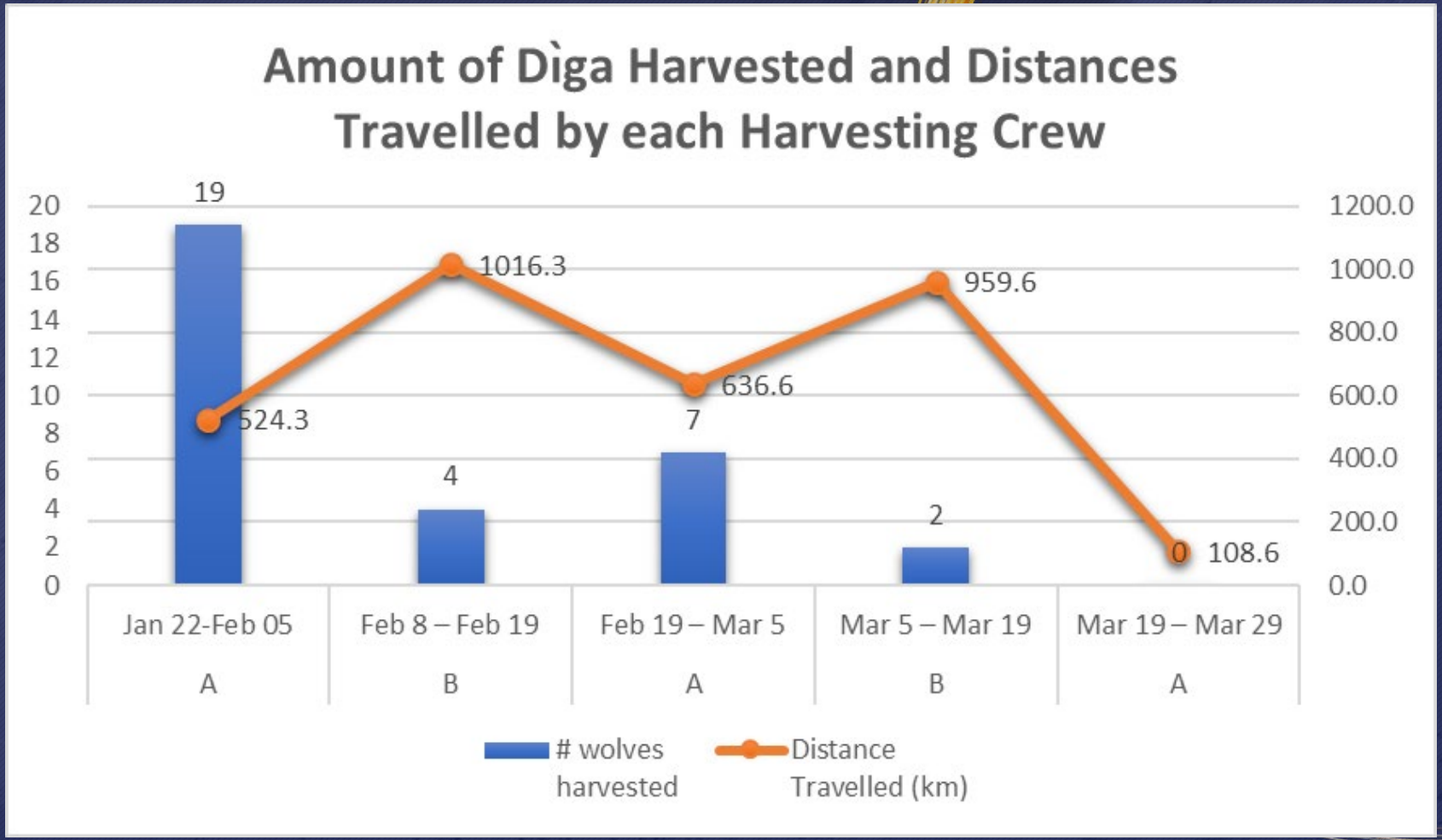
Roundrock Lake





2021 Results

- 32 wolves in total
- All were shot
  - Too many caribou in the area
    - Caught a calf in a trap
- Unknown sex ratio until ENR necropsies are done
- Unknown age ratio until ENR necropsies are done



2022 Season

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Elders and harvesters meeting (December 10-11, 2021)

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- Gave update of the program of what's been done so far
- Discussed all the concerns from the participants and ways to improve the program
- Plans for 2022 program and identified possible locations
    - School cabin, Boline's camp, Roundrock Lake
- Humane presentation by ENR
- Identified best caliber of firearm to use

*also met weekly from Jan to Feb

Dìga Harvest Program (February 25 – March 24)

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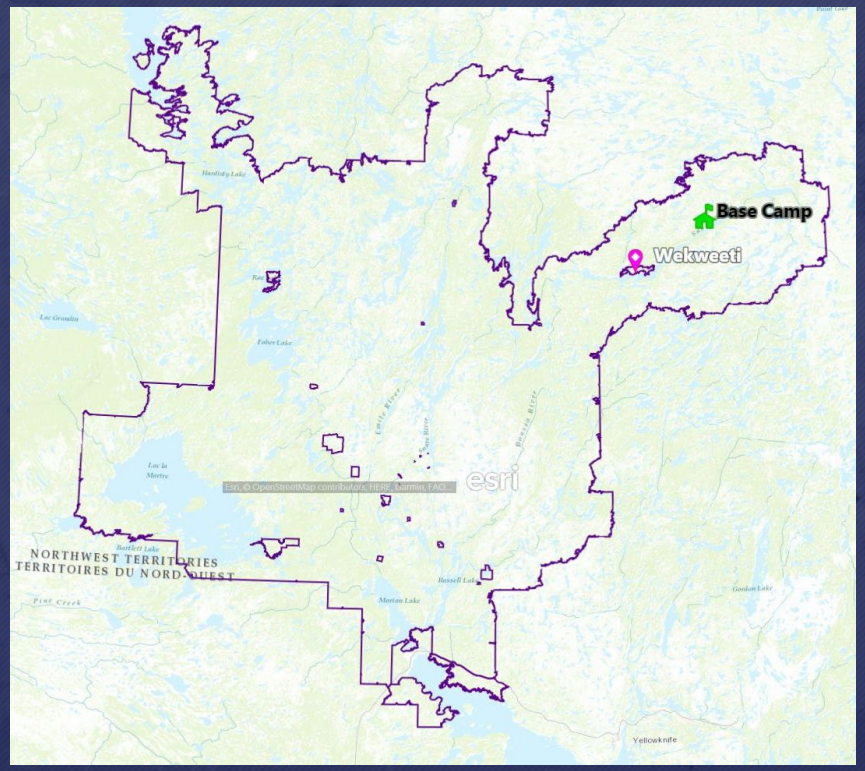
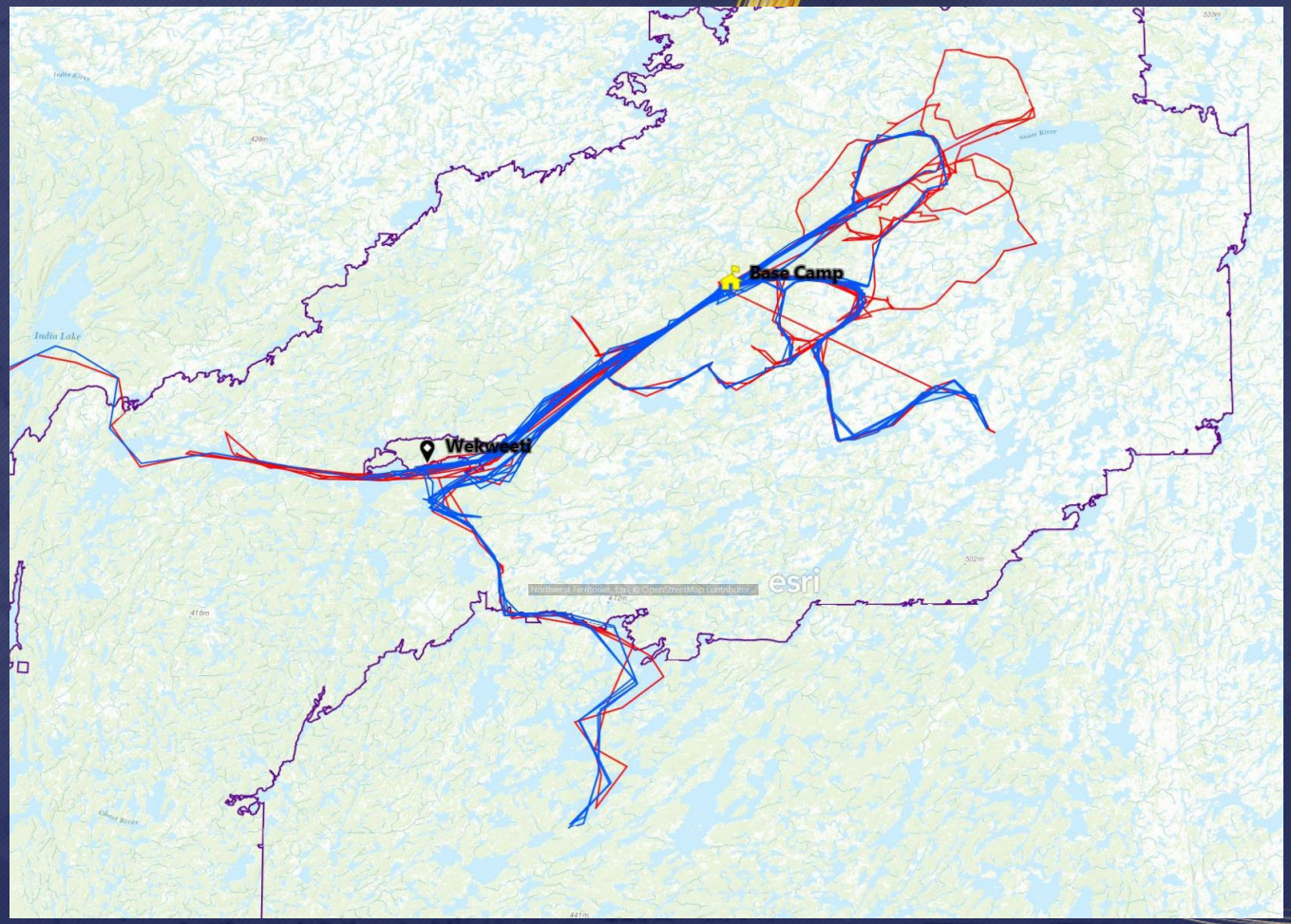
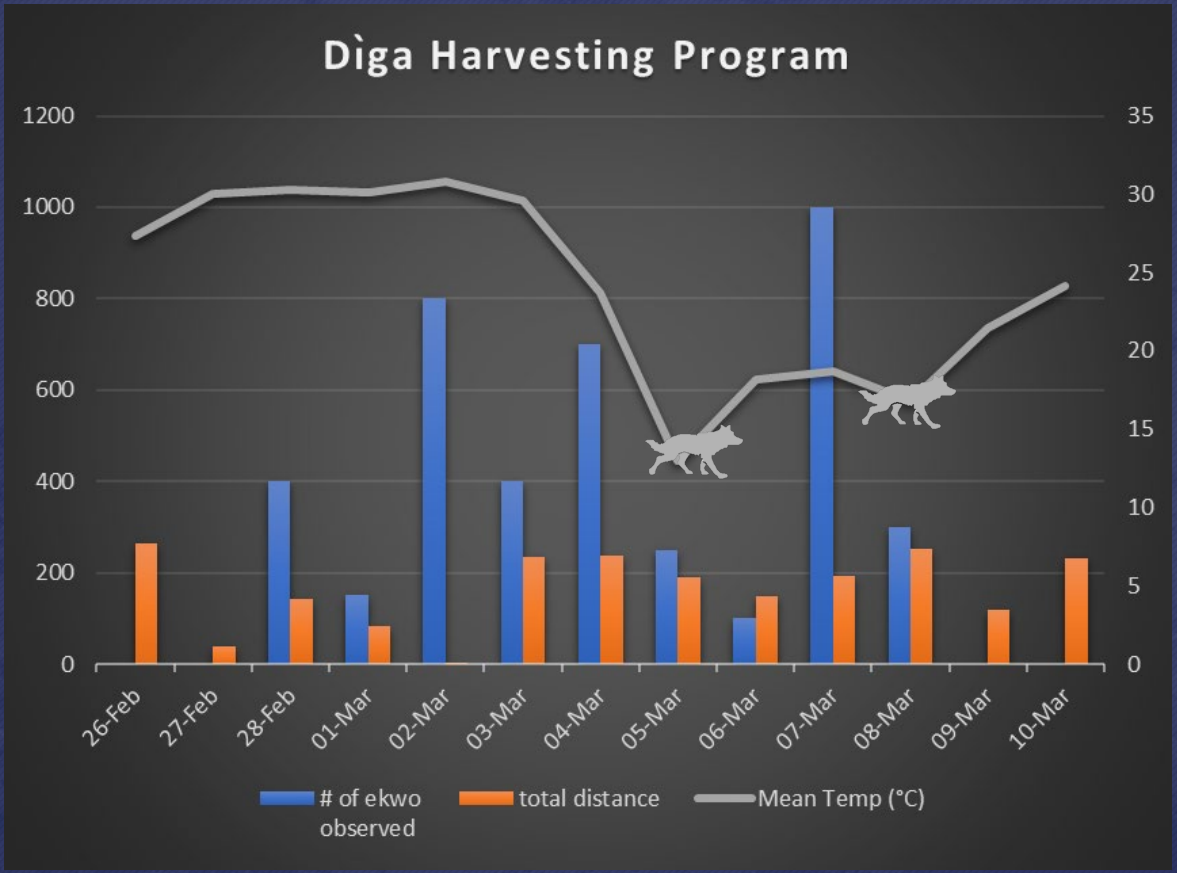
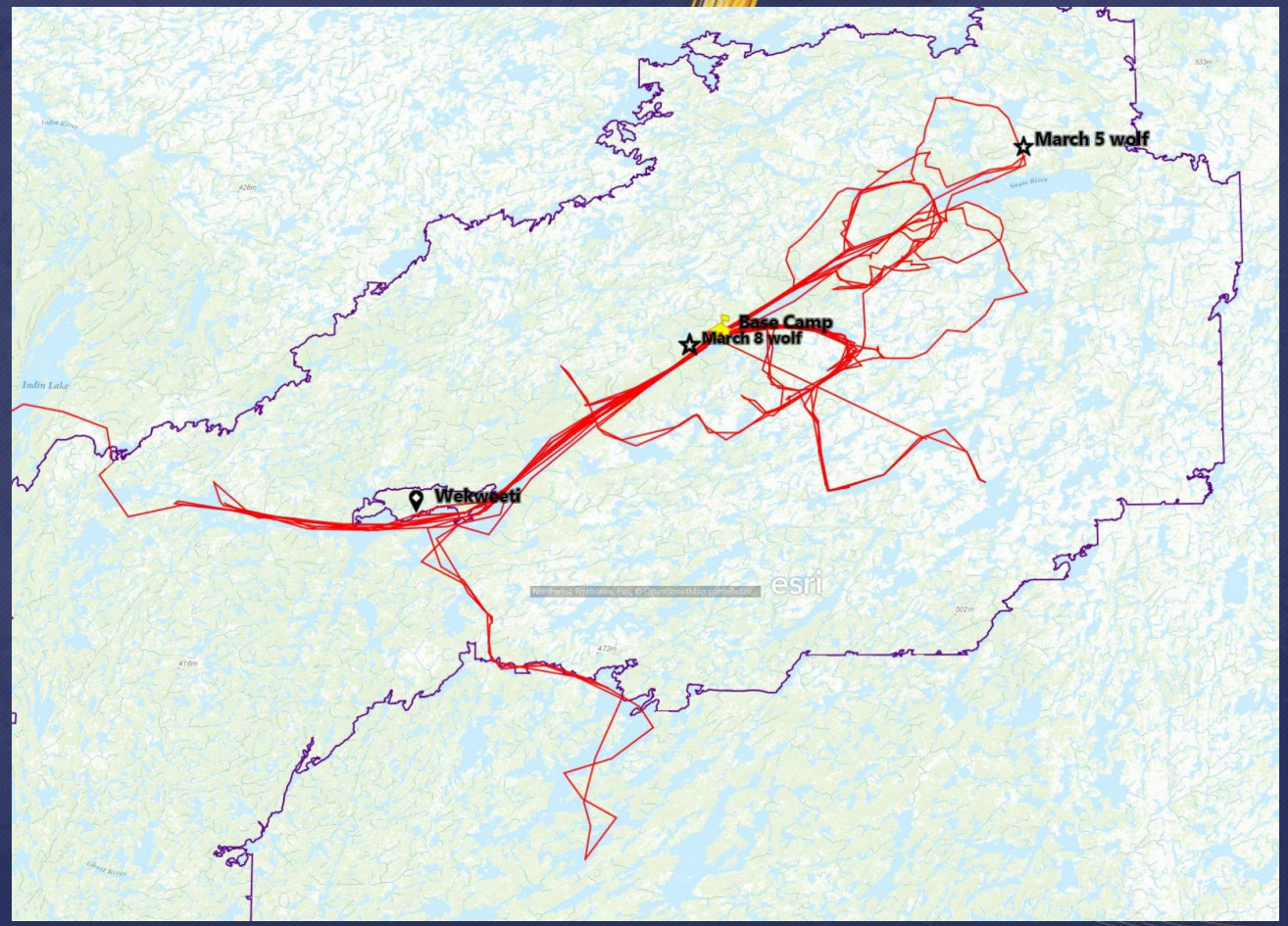
Roundrock Lake



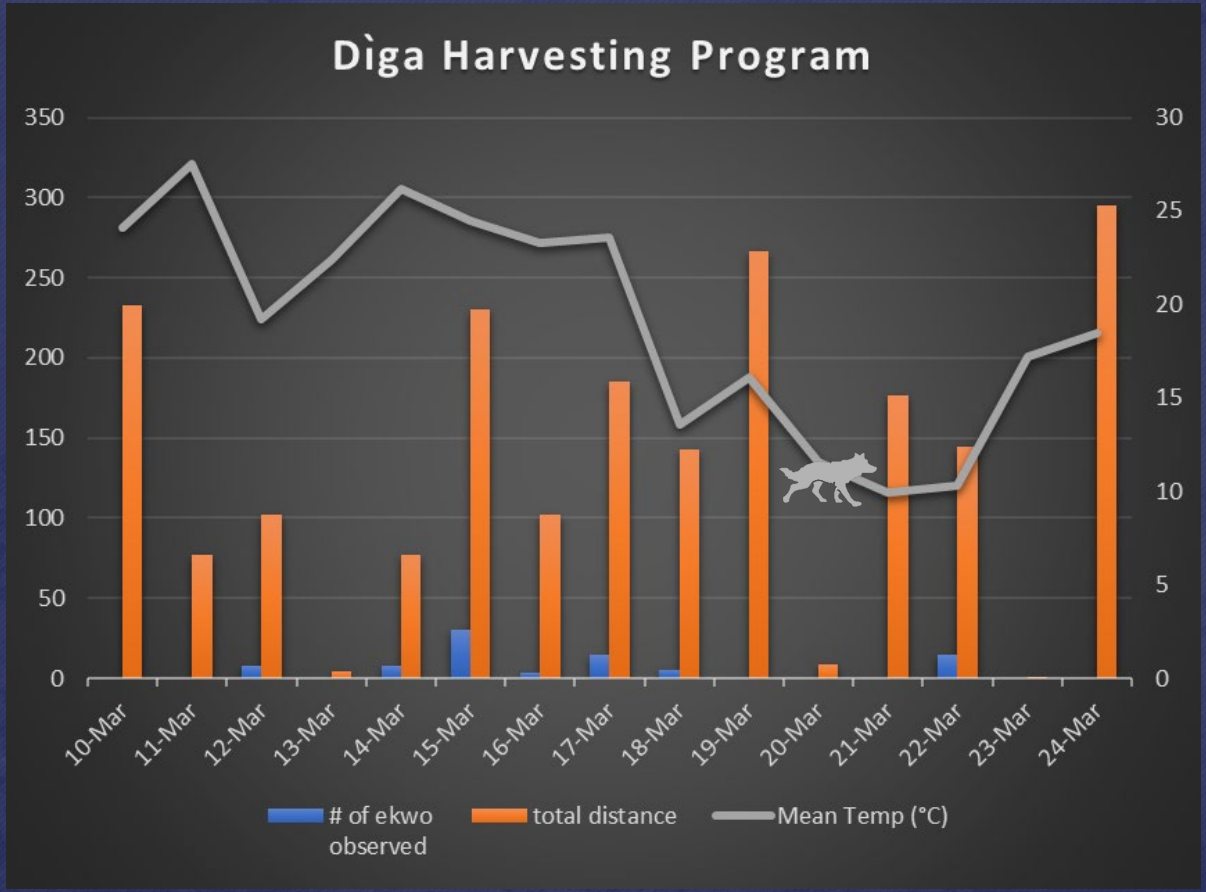


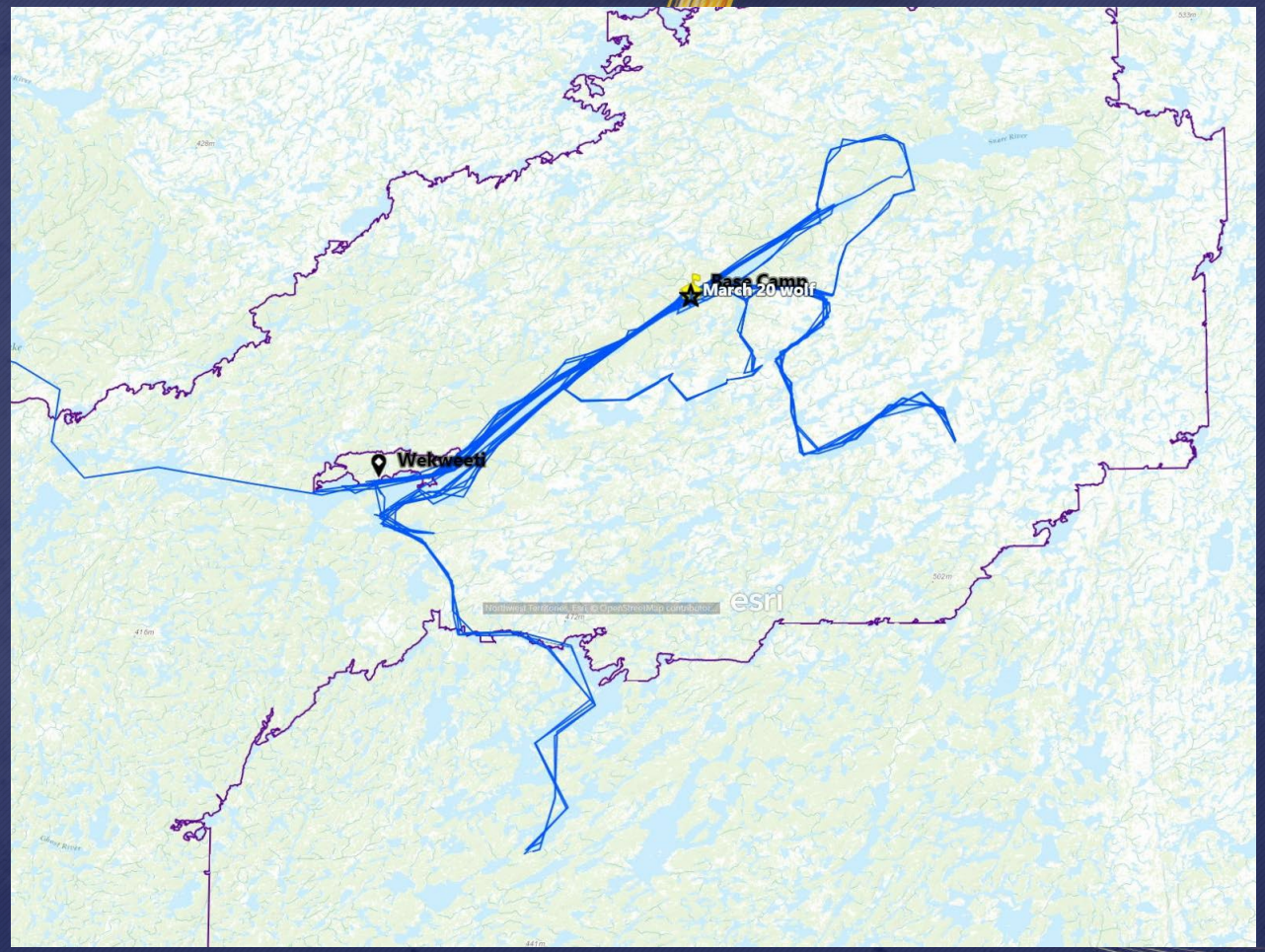
2022 Results – Crew 1 (Feb. 25 – March 10)





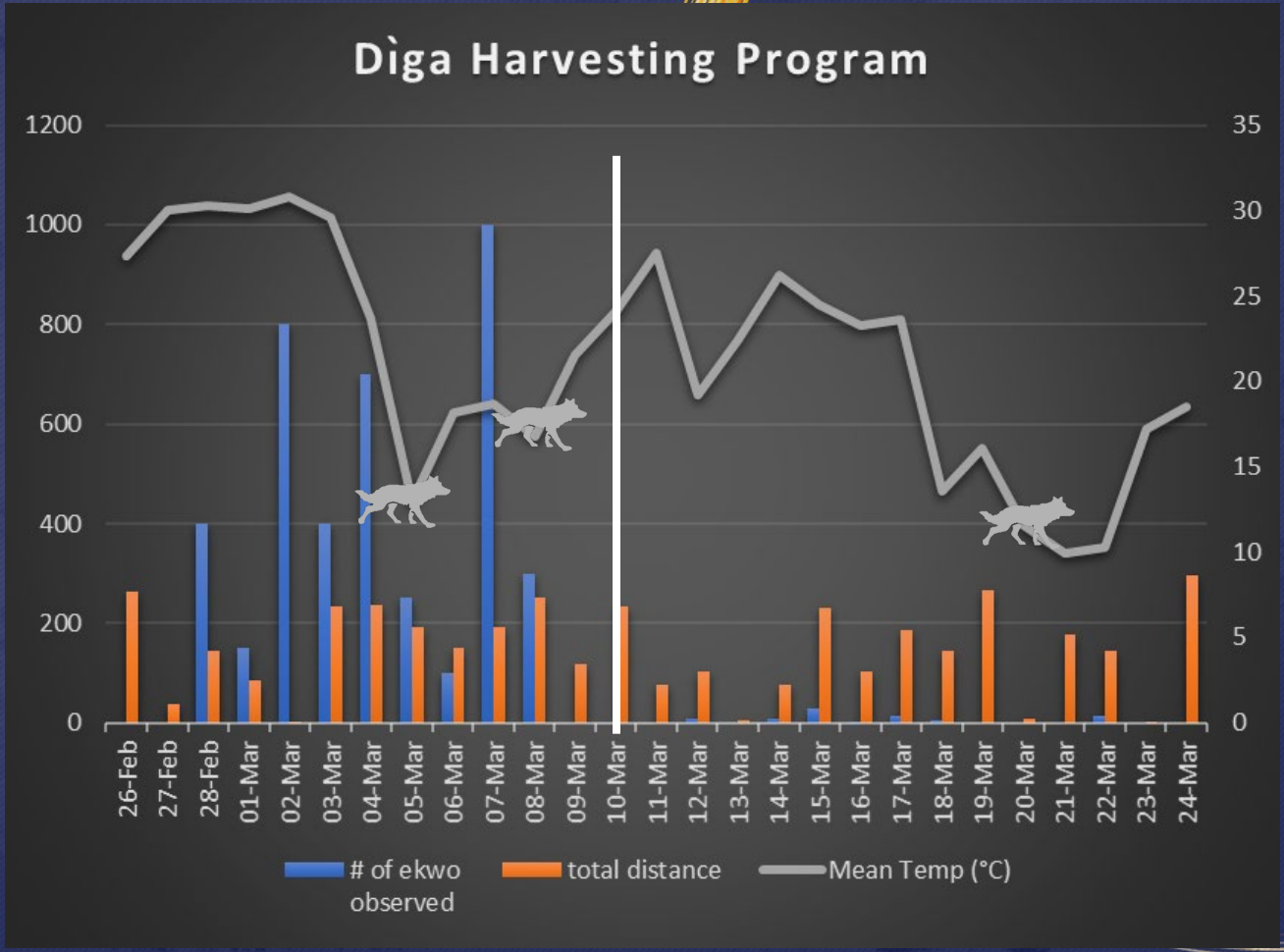
2022 Results – Crew 2 (March 10 – March 25)





2022 Results – Crew 2 (February 25– March 24)

- 3 wolves harvested from the camp
- 6 wolves harvested from Wekweeti with increased incentive (Jan 31 – Feb 25)
  - $1200 ENR incentive
  - $500 TG incentive
- 1st crew had way more sightings of caribou and wolf tracks then the 2nd



Lessons learned from 2022

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- Need to be more adaptable – when harvest is low move camp
- More trapper training is needed – learn how to target wolves specifically so that caribou do not get caught in traps
- Proper team mechanics – clear roles for participants
- Start earlier – may have started program too late
- Need a scout from Wekweeti

Masì Cho
Questions?

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