

CARIBOU NEWS

Keeping people in touch with the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board (BQCMB), and with issues affecting caribou.



BEVERLY & QAMANIRJUAQ
CARIBOU MANAGEMENT BOARD

in Brief

Volume 27 No. 2 • October 2024

BQCMB Meeting #97

December 3-5, 2024

Saskatoon, SK

Qamanirjuaq Herd: Continued Slow Decline

Mitch Campbell, BQCMB member for the Government of Nunavut Department of Environment (GN-DOE), presented the final results of the 2022 Qamanirjuaq herd survey to the BQCMB at its May, 2024 meeting in Winnipeg.

The final estimate is 252,892, down from 288,200 animals in 2017, or a reduction of about 2% a year. This indicates a continued slow decline of the herd.

Overall, the herd has dropped by 49% since 1994, when 496,000 caribou were estimated.

Campbell explained that in each survey, the number of caribou on the calving grounds has slowly gone down. He noted that the Qamanirjuaq calving grounds have been shifting northeast and their

winter range shifting west. He also emphasized that caribou populations cycle over long timespans and that scientific knowledge does not have a complete cycle of data. "It is important to recognize that Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ) has knowledge of these cycles and that we have more to learn," Campbell added.

Alex Ishalook, BQCMB member representing the Kivalliq Wildlife Board, compared the calving grounds to a hospital for caribou. "The calving ground has special plants that produce milk for the cows. Our ancestors have always told us to keep the area clean and not build cabins there, because the calving grounds are very precious."

The Government of Nunavut hopes to get another estimate on the Qamanirjuaq herd in 3-4 years.

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Photo courtesy of W. Lynch
Arcticphoto.com

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Around the Range

Beverly Herd Survey Results Coming Soon

The wait continues for the results of a successful population survey of the Beverly herd in June 2023. Mitch Campbell, BQCMB member for Government of Nunavut Department of Environment (GN-DOE), explained the reasons for the delay at the BQCMB meeting in Winnipeg in May 2024. “The visual survey was challenging due to a clumping effect occurring with the herd,” he said, adding a lack of snow and surging rivers were some of the environmental conditions creating the clumping situation. Surveyors were also unable to secure a photo plane, but improvised an effective method that allowed observers to cross-reference the caribou counts using a video recorded system. Due to these unforeseen challenges, “results are being double and triple-checked,” for accuracy, Campbell told Caribou News in Brief earlier this month. “The final report is in its first draft and being reviewed.”

Another estimate is expected in 3-4 years. Based on the previous survey, the herd had declined 63% between 1994 and 2018, a rate of 4-5% a year.

Jan Adamczewski, BQCMB member representing the Government of Northwest Territories Environment and Climate Change (GNWT-ECC) noted a March 2024 composition survey showed mixing amongst the Beverly, Bathurst & Bluenose-East collared caribou. The survey showed 48.7 calves:100 cows, which is a healthy ratio indicating a stable herd.

See p. 6 for the article “How we count caribou” for more information on the different types of caribou surveys.

Kivalliq Harvest Reporting Project

BQCMB Wildlife Biologist **Gilly McNaughton** gave the board an update on the Kivalliq Harvest Reporting Project. This project ran from 2019-2021 with funding from the Nunavut General Monitoring Plan (NGMP) to support Kivalliq communities to collect Qamanirjuaq caribou harvest survey data. Unfortunately, the program was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, after which funding ran out, but the Arviat HTO has the program going again. The BQCMB provided harvest calendars to the HTO in June, 2024 and will look forward to an update on how the program is running at its December 2024 meeting in Saskatoon.

Proposed Developments on the Range

The BQCMB continues to watch development of the Kivalliq Hydro-Fibre line project. During its May 2024 meeting, the Board heard from **Christina Bloew** of Nukik Corporation (which is overseeing the project). Bloew noted the route of

The BQCMB encourages and supports Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs).

this project has been adjusted, including shifting the routing slightly to start somewhere south of Churchill, at the Churchill River, and shifting slightly north of the area near Baker Lake to Rankin Inlet. However, as the initial proposed corridor has been included in the proposed Nunavut Land Use Plan (NLUP), these adjustments would require an amendment to the NLUP.

Bloew added that they have begun talks with the Manitoba government. She noted this is a challenging and very expensive project, over \$3 billion. They continue to receive pieces of funding from the federal government but much more is needed. She also noted that environmental assessment will begin in both Nunavut and Manitoba in spring of 2026.

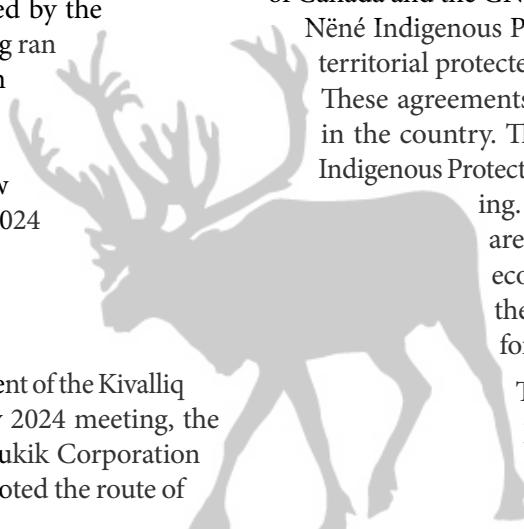
ADNLC Completes Caribou Relationship Plan

The Athabasca Denesųliné Ne Ne Land Corporation (ADNLC) in northern Saskatchewan has completed its Athabasca Denesųliné Caribou Relationship Plan for monitoring and stewardship of caribou. A series of small pilot projects have begun, including a guardians pilot project in collaboration with Yathi Nene Lands and Resources. The three Athabasca Denesųliné First Nations (Fond du Lac, Hatchet Lake, and Black Lake) collaborated to monitor the caribou harvest. They had monitors out on the land seeing if people were following protocols but also to lend a hand to hunters if needed.

Five Years of Thaidene Néné

This past August marked five years since the Łutsël K'è Dene First Nation signed establishment agreements with the Government of Canada and the GNWT to designate parts of the Thaidene Néné Indigenous Protected Area a national park reserve, territorial protected area, and wildlife conservation area. These agreements were historic, the first of their kind in the country. The governance of the Thaidene Néné Indigenous Protected Area has been equally ground-breaking. Indigenous and Crown governments are working together to ensure that the ecological integrity of Thaidene Néné and the Dēnesųliné way of life are protected forever.

The BQCMB encourages and supports the establishment of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs).•



Member Spotlight: Athabasca Denesųliné

The Etthen-eldeli-dene (caribou eaters) of northern Saskatchewan traditionally followed the caribou north to the tundra for the summer months, and back to the boreal forest in the winter. Their nomadic lifestyle ended with the establishment of permanent settlements, strategically established on a major migration route of the Bathurst, Beverly and Qamanirjuaq barren-ground caribou herds, where caribou could be harvested during both fall and spring migration and within their winter range. These harvests provided people with a year-round supply of meat, which was eaten fresh during fall and spring, frozen in winter, and dried during summer.

However, this food supply was only available when caribou wintered near the Dene communities. When caribou wintered far from these communities, much hardship resulted.

Today, snowmachines, aircraft, and modern communication devices make caribou more accessible to Dene from northern Saskatchewan communities, although these options are not always affordable.

Athabasca Communities

Peter Gazandlare (member) and **Jimmy Laban** (alternate) represent the three Athabasca Denesųliné First Nations on the BQCMB. Black Lake Denesųliné First Nation is located in Northern Saskatchewan's Athabasca Basin region, approximately 1,180 km northwest of Prince Albert. Fond du Lac Denesųliné First Nation began as a fur trading post in the late 1700s and is located about 1,275 km northwest of Prince Albert. Hatchet Lake Denesųliné First Nation is located

“My goal is to see the herds come back up.”

Jimmy Laban, Black Lake Denesųliné First Nation

on the southeastern shore of Wollaston Lake and was originally a trading post for commercial fishing and trapping. Their traditional territory “Nuhenéne” extends into the NWT and Nunavut.

The Dene language is still very strong in the communities and traditional ways of life are important. All three communities traditionally live a hunting-gathering lifestyle and are primarily hunters of caribou, which are important nutritionally, culturally, and spiritually.

That's why the decline of the herds is a major concern. Jimmy Laban says, “As a member of the Dene community, my goal is to see the herds come back up.”

Camsell Portage

Camsell Portage is Saskatchewan's most northern and isolated community. Serene and tranquil, it is located on the north central shore of Lake Athabasca, 36 km west of Uranium City. At its peak, Camsell Portage had a population of about 300 residents. BQCMB member **Dennis Larocque** is now one of fewer than 10 residents remaining in the community year-round.

Community residents continue a traditional lifestyle, living off the land by fishing and trapping. There have been no caribou reported near Camsell Portage in several years, which is why Dennis often shares teachings such as the essay at right. •



Don't Forget to Care

C - Caribou
A - Are
R - Rightfully so, to be
E - Everlasting

As we all know the barren ground caribou are all declining. We as hunters have to be smarter hunters by putting our traditional knowledge to use, and help from industries by staying off and away from the calving grounds.

So the next time you're out hunting and see lots of caribou—make a plan. Kill only what you need. Shoot bulls, not cows or calves, they are the future. Put your gun away. Use your willpower, we all have it.

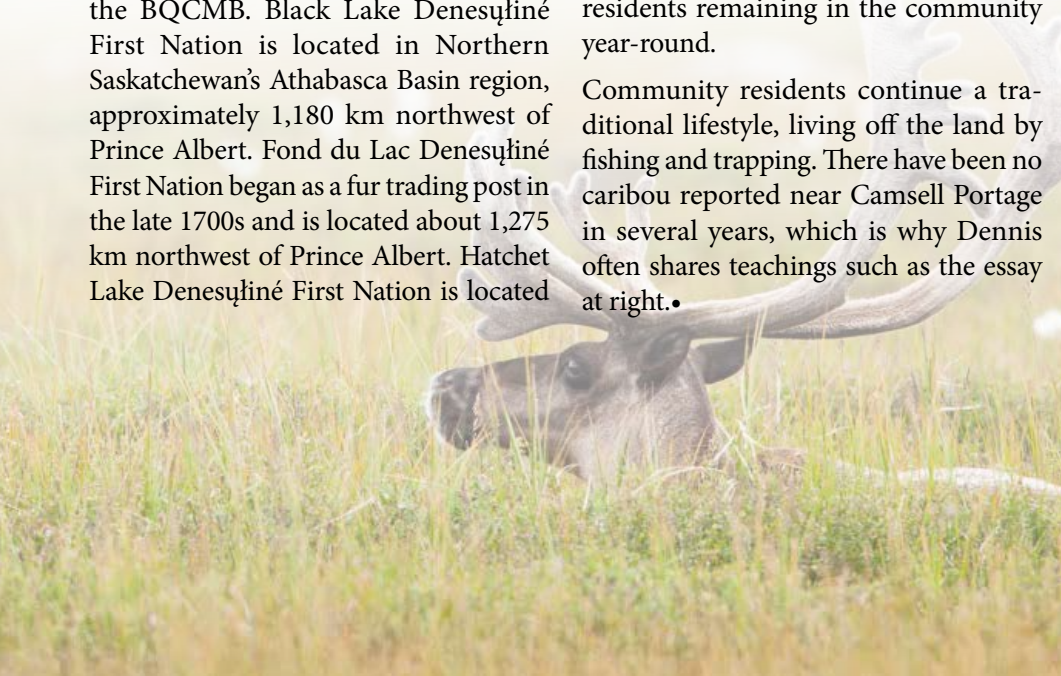
After you have finished skinning and had a good meal, and while you are enjoying your hot tea, look out on the lake and see the rest of the caribou walking around, and you'll say, I did that. I made them walk around for another day, another week, another year.

Your heart will be happy, and you will be proud of yourself for doing that. If every hunter does that without wasting meat, I'm 100% sure we'll see an increase in the caribou population in the coming year.

So, look after the caribou and the caribou will look after you, and they'll be everlasting.

And don't forget to care.

Dennis Larocque, Camsell Portage, SK



People and Caribou

Happy Retirement

Another long-time BQCMB member has retired, leaving big shoes to fill on the Board. Jan Adamczewski, a Wildlife Biologist with Northwest Territories Environment and Climate Change in Yellowknife, has served on the Board twice. First, as an alternate member from 2008-2013, and more recently from 2019 until his retirement on November 1, which came directly on the heels of his final caribou composition survey (see photo on p. 6). For the past five years Jan has been a member of the BQCMB's Executive Committee as Vice-Chair of Operations.

The Board celebrated Jan at the May 2024 BQCMB meeting in Winnipeg. He shared his thoughts on the BQCMB: "What I have most appreciated about working with the BQCMB is the sense that the board has been having an intelligent conversation for more than 40 years. I remember Jimmy Laban talking about the board as 'family' and that is how it felt. I felt like the board had a clear purpose, which was to work toward the welfare of the caribou and the communities that depend on them. It was one place where I could speak from the heart about what is best for caribou conservation, and find kindred spirits who saw things in similar ways. The board has benefited greatly from the long-term participation of board members and staff, which has made good conversations possible."

Jan is also a gifted artist. His "caribou cow and her calf" drawing inspired the BQCMB's logo (see photo, top left), but he has had little time to spend on his craft. "I don't quite know yet what retirement will feel like," he said. "I hope to stay engaged to some extent in caribou and wildlife conservation. I am looking forward to spending time on drawing and painting, something I have neglected in recent years. I would like to do some traveling as there are places



"It was one place where I could speak from the heart about what is best for caribou conservation, and find kindred spirits who saw things in similar ways."

Jan Adamczewski, GNWT

in the world I haven't seen. I think a change every few years in terms of what a person spends time on is healthy; new challenges keep a person's mind active."

Jan will be missed on the Board for his depth of experience, quiet guidance, and kind nature. Happy retirement, Jan!

Welcome to the ExComm

Matthew Tokaruk (right) who has served as the BQCMB's Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment representative since 2021, has been appointed to serve as Vice-Chair, Operations on the BQCMB's Executive Committee. Matthew graciously accepted the



position and noted Jan's experience and knowledge have been helpful to him.

Minister's Visit

Minister of Manitoba Economic Development, Investment, Trade and Natural Resources, **Jamie Moses**, brought greetings to the BQCMB's meeting in Winnipeg in May 2024. The Minister said he is glad to work alongside the board because he recognizes the significant importance of caribou and the work that the board does. Chair **Earl Evans** thanked the Minister and presented him with a gift (see top right).



People and Caribou



Welcome Back

A familiar face has returned to the BQCMB. Former Kivalliq Wildlife Board (KWB) representative Alex Ishalook served on the Board from 2011-2018. Explaining that he “took a break for a couple of years”, he decided to again run for a spot on the Arviat Hunters and Trappers’ Association (HTO), and after being elected was appointed by the KWB to serve on the BQCMB.

(Alex was profiled in Caribou News in Brief in 2016, during his last term with the BQCMB. You can read the article at https://arctic-caribou.com/pdf/CNIB_winter_2016.pdf.)

His time away from the Board was busy. Chairing the Arviat HTO meant Alex was a very involved participant in the Nunavut Land Use Plan hearings, including the final public hearing which took place in late 2022 in Rankin Inlet.

L to R: George Tsannie (Hatchet Lake Denesułiné First Nation and former BQCMB member), Freddie Thorassie (Black Lake Denesułiné First Nation), Stephanie Behrens (BQCMB member, Tłicho Government), Earl Evans (Chair, BQCMB) and Gilly McNaughton (Biologist, BQCMB) at a meeting of the Caribou Guardians Coalition near Wekweèti, NWT.

“I love dealing with wildlife and respecting the land.”

Alex Ishalook, Kivalliq Wildlife Board, Arviat, NU

The Arviat HTO has always had a concern with the calving ground, he says. “I live very close to the calving ground. It is a special place where caribou go to give birth, and it’s been used by the caribou for thousands of years.”

In addition to serving on the KWB and BQCMB, Alex works as a maintenance manager for the Government of Nunavut, and just recently stepped down from serving on the Hamlet of Arviat council. “Those four are big responsibilities,” he says. “I travel a lot with my work, so I had to release one, so I resigned from hamlet council.”

It’s also important for him to have time to pass his knowledge onto his children. “I mostly let my sons do the harvest now, and I just kind of lead and instruct.” He and his wife Janet are also grandparents to eight grandchildren who are learning to hunt and fish.

Alex was excited to learn he would be coming back to the BQCMB, as he enjoys the camaraderie. “I love meeting other Indigenous people that are dealing with the same wildlife—caribou.

I love dealing with wildlife, and respecting the land. My family and a lot of friends are involved with wildlife—it’s in my blood.”

Caribou Guardians Coalition

BQCMB Chair Earl Evans and Wildlife Biologist Gilly McNaughton were invited to share the 2023-2032 Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Plan at a Caribou Guardians Coalition meeting Sept 4-6, 2024. The meeting was held at Wekweèti Culture Camp, near Wekweèti, the smallest and most remote of the Tłicho communities in the NWT. Attendees from Indigenous governments and organizations across the NWT and northern Saskatchewan discussed the decline in caribou populations, concerns around climate change and industrial activity in caribou habitat, the need to integrate Traditional Knowledge (TK) with modern scientific methods, and the benefits of community-based Guardian programs. •



Feature Story: How We Count Caribou

Several types of surveys are needed to estimate the size of caribou herds and monitor changes in the herds. The Government of Nunavut (GN) estimates the population of the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq herds using scientific methods developed and improved over many years. Aerial surveys are conducted by the GN and the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) at different times of year to gather data on herd size, composition, and reproductive status. Newer methods have improved survey quality, so the results are becoming more accurate.

Calving Ground Surveys

The calving ground photographic survey is one of two main methods used to count migratory caribou. This type of survey takes place in June during calving season. During the spring migration period, government biologists monitor the movements of collared caribou cows closely to help determine when most of the cows are in the calving area.

Then, a series of flights—called a reconnaissance survey—fly along pre-determined gridlines covering a large area. The reconnaissance survey finds smaller and larger numbers of caribou and finds out where the caribou are giving birth.

This information is divided into blocks showing high, medium, and low caribou numbers. A specialized aircraft that takes thousands of high-resolution photos flies over the areas with high numbers, divided into strips of strips of land called transects. The photos are used to count the number of animals in each transect.

Once a photo-survey has been conducted, the numbers of caribou on each photograph are counted to estimate the number of caribou in each survey block. This process can take several months due to the thousands of photographs taken and the large numbers of animals on each photograph.

Areas with lower numbers of caribou are also surveyed from the air, but with people counting. Two people on each side of the plane count in a specific transect, and data recorders are also present to ensure information is recorded accurately.

The estimates from the photo survey blocks are added to the estimated numbers of caribou in the visually surveyed blocks. However, these numbers alone aren't enough to produce an estimate of the overall size of the herd, because most male caribou aren't on the calving grounds in June.

Composition Surveys

During the fall breeding season, all caribou come together in mixed groups. The GNWT often conducts a fall composition survey to find the ratio of cows to bulls. This is also an aerial survey, with survey participants using motion stabilized binoculars to identify calves, yearlings, bulls and cows. This information is combined with the calving ground survey results to get an estimate of the total population size of the herd.

Late winter composition counts (sometimes called spring recruitment surveys) are done using aerial surveys in March-April in locations of collared caribou to count the numbers of calves and cows. Recording the proportion of females in each herd that were still accompanied by a calf provides an estimate of calf survival through the first 9-10 months of life. This information helps to determine the trend of the herd and anticipate how the herd size might change. Younger calves generally survive at much lower rates than caribou at least one year old, so high calf:cow ratios in late winter are considered positive.

Collar data has shown mixing of the Beverly, Bathurst and Bluenose East caribou herds on their winter ranges, and in some years with the Qamanirjuaq herd. This situation has created additional challenges for these surveys by making it difficult to assign animals to a particular herd in areas with mixing.

For more information on how caribou are counted, watch “How We Count Caribou” produced by GNWT-ECC at <https://bit.ly/3O5y8Jj>.

Pictured L to R: Robin Abernethy (GNWT); Judy Williams (GNWT); Kurt Pedersen (pilot for Acasta HeliFlight); and Jan Adamczewski (GNWT) recently completed a fall composition survey.



Youth and Caribou

Youth Representatives attend BQCMB Meeting

Youth are a big part of BQCMB meetings and the May 2024 meeting in Winnipeg was no exception, with three youth members sharing their thoughts about caribou with the Board and invited guests.

Cameron Enzoe (right, Łutsël K'è Dene First Nation, NWT) stated something has to be done to coserve the herds. Whether it's removing the road, giving caribou a safer way of crossing the road, or removing anything that could harm the caribou. Those are small steps, but they are steps, nonetheless.

Ian Donard (left, Black Lake Denesųliné First Nation, SK) noted his community used to celebrate the return of caribou with round dances and other ceremonies, and he would like to see that come back. He said there needs to be balance between industry, the caribou, and the Denesųliné people. Youth need to be taught the same lessons he was taught by his elders in order to gain their culture back. Caribou are spiritual animals.

Dillon Smith (centre, Tlıcho Government, NWT) described a hunting trip with his grandparents that took 16 hours to find caribou. He observed non-stop activity on the road which made the caribou anxious. He stressed the importance of following respectful harvest protocols, and suggested the way to promote a generation of respectful harvesters is to ensure they are watching somebody—parents, uncles, grandparents, cousins—so youth learn to respect the animals and the land.”

We are grateful to these youth for sharing their wisdom. •

Thaidene Nënë On The Land Program

Over the winter months from December to March 2023, the Ni Hat'ni Dene guardians and local Elders led weekly workshops and training for Denegothe students from the Łutsël K'è Dene School. The students participated in the following activities:

- Ice safety awareness
- Setting and checking nets, cleaning and cooking fish
- Setting and checking traps and fur preparation
- Harvesting meat and safe food storage
- Sharing fish and meat with Elders
- Tanning caribou hides and making drums
- Storytelling and Denesuline history
- Wilderness safety and camp maintenance
- Trip and weather planning and navigation
- Dene Laws
- Caribou stewardship and respectful hunting protocols
- Harvesting and using traditional medicines

The Ni Hat'ni Dene program was designed to pass on teachings to youth. Local children and youth received hands-on activities and training from Ni Hat'ni Dene guardians, Elders, and local harvesters.



“The way to promote a generation of respectful harvesters is to ensure they are watching somebody—parents, uncles, grandparents, cousins.”

Dillon Smith, Tlıcho Government, NWT

In partnership with the Łutsël K'è Dene School, all grades from pre-K to grade 12 will be invited to a Hide Camp for the weekly programming.

All participants will be fully immersed in the traditional Denesuline way of life. Students may bring fresh meat and fish home to their families and Elders. There will be travel on land by skidoo from Łutsël K'è to the hide camp on the camp days. The camp will run from February to May.

The BQCMB is pleased to provide a portion of the funding for these activities through its On The Land Camp program. •



Caribou is Life

Management Plan 2023-2032

The BQCMB's 10-year Caribou Management Plan, "Caribou is Life", may be complete but the work has only just begun. The Plan is a living document that is composed of several key parts:

- **Caribou is Life – Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Plan 2023-2032:** This is the main document, widely available through our website or hard copy.
- **Caribou Connect:** Our tracking tool and map will help identify all the great caribou conservation projects across the range. Submit YOUR project today!
- **Supporting Document:** Looking for even more detail? Our Supporting Document has it.
- **Infographic:** A one-page description of the Management Plan—soon to be available in Dene, Inuktituk, and Athapaskan Dene.
- **Caribou is Life Edu-Kit:** Hot off the press is the new Caribou is Life "Edu-Kit", a junior version of the BQCMB's Management Plan geared toward elementary level students.

BQCMB members will have these tools available for schools, community facilities, band and HTO offices, government offices, tourism operations, and anywhere else people gather and talk about caribou.

Scan the QR code to view and download the documents, submit your caribou project, and help us spread the word that Caribou is Life!



Heard around the BQCMB Table

"There is too much activity on the land, and the old lifestyle of living off the land is diminishing, but it should still be respected. Industry shouldn't have final say, the people should."

Geoff Bussidor, Sayisi Dene First Nation, Tadoule Lake, MB

"Kill only what you need. Shoot bulls, not cows or calves, they are the future. Put your gun away."

Dennis Larocque, Camsell Portage, SK

"Reporting harvest is still an issue. Drugs and alcohol are also an issue. The Elders are concerned."

Jimmy Laban, Black Lake Denesūliné First Nation, Black Lake, SK

"Climate change played a role in how people travelled this year. One day it rained in January for 10 hours, adding ice above the snow."

Earl Evans, BQCMB Chair, NWT Métis Nation, Fort Smith, NWT

Publisher's Box

Caribou News in Brief is published by the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board.

Comments and suggestions may be sent to:
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BEVERLY & QAMANIRJUAQ CARIBOU MANAGEMENT BOARD

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The Gunther Abrahamson Caribou Research and Management Award.

Value: \$5,000

Students enrolled in a Canadian college or university who are conducting **traditional knowledge** studies as well as **scientific** studies are encouraged to apply.

Fieldwork not required
Deadline: January 31

MORE INFO <https://arctic-caribou.com/education>

BEVERLY & QAMANIRJUAQ CARIBOU MANAGEMENT BOARD

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