

News from the BQCMB Caribou Workshop, February 23 - 25, 2010

Photo by David Vetra



Here, people from Saskatchewan and Manitoba talk about things affecting caribou today, as part of smaller group discussions at the BQCMB Caribou Workshop

Most caribou herds around the world are shrinking

What is happening to barren-ground caribou these days?

Most herds around the world are decreasing in size. Here in Canada, the Beverly caribou herd is very small now. Nobody knows how big it is.

Surveys that the Northwest Territories (NWT) government did on the Beverly calving ground in 2007, 2008 and 2009 found fewer and fewer animals there during the June calving period. Nobody knows why the Beverly herd has declined

so much, but a combination of natural and human-caused factors is the likely cause.

And while the neighbouring Qamanirjuaq herd is still plentiful, results from a 2008 Nunavut government population survey show that this herd is also shrinking.

“We have to *do* something about it,” BQCMB chairman Albert Thorassie has said about the need to help people work together to aid the caribou. “We have to get everybody together on one side.”

Workshop brought together elders, hunters and others

The BQCMB hosted a Caribou Workshop in Saskatoon February 23 to 25, 2010. The Workshop was held to find ways to help the ailing Beverly caribou herd to rebuild, and to try to stop the Qamanirjuaq population from going through a major decline as well.

More than 75 elders, hunters and others

from Saskatchewan, NWT, Manitoba, Nunavut, Alberta, Yukon, British Columbia and Ontario came to the Caribou Workshop because of their concern for caribou. They want to help make sure that the herds are strong and healthy in the future. They took the first step toward achieving that by sharing their valuable knowledge about caribou.

What is the BQCMB?

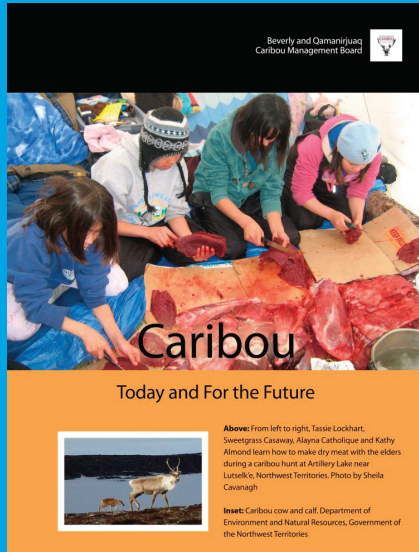


The Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board (BQCMB) is an Aboriginal-led co-management board of hunters, biologists, and land and wildlife managers. It has advised governments, communities and others since 1982 on ways to safeguard the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq barren-ground caribou herds of northern Canada.



Photo by David Vetra

BQCMB member Earl Evans of Fort Smith, NWT describes the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq herds



Posters at the workshop showed how people depend on caribou

Sharing knowledge to find ways to help the caribou

At the BQCMB Caribou Workshop, people were respectful, listened to each other, and shared their knowledge. Everyone agreed there is lots of work to be done.

During three very busy days, people heard presentations about challenges facing caribou herds in Canada and around the world. Then participants divided up into smaller groups to discuss caribou issues further and suggest ideas.

Some of the main issues affecting caribou today, they said, are climate change, disturbance from human land use activities, habitat loss due to forest fires on the winter range, harvesting, and predators—especially on the calving grounds.

People had many good ideas, such as:

- making sure everyone knows how to hunt caribou properly and with respect
- reducing the loss of winter range from forest fires by re-examining fire priority zones, streamlining fire fighting approvals, and building fire guards around buildings and communities
- banning all exploration and development on calving grounds.

This summer, the BQCMB will send out a detailed plain language report that summarizes the discussions and presentations from the BQCMB Caribou Workshop.

Ways to help declining caribou herds

In 2009, the BQCMB listed five important ways to help declining caribou herds:

- 1) Governments and others should protect areas that are very important to caribou, starting with the calving grounds.*
- 2) Governments and regulatory agencies should do more to help protect caribou from disturbance and habitat loss resulting from mineral exploration and development, which have been increasing for years across the Beverly caribou range.*
- 3) Hunters should help by taking only what they need.*
- 4) Hunters should help by preventing wastage.*
- 5) Hunters should help by harvesting bulls instead of cows whenever possible.*

The BQCMB Thanks the Caribou Workshop's Sponsors

NWT's Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Nunavut's Department of Environment, Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (NWT and Nunavut regional offices), Manitoba Conservation, Prince Albert Grand Council, Athabasca Land Use Office, Athabasca Denesuline Negotiation Team, Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, WWF-Canada, AREVA Resources Canada Inc., and Cameco Corp.

Visits to caribou-range communities next

Starting in the summer of 2010, the BQCMB will visit caribou-range communities to talk with residents about caribou issues. The BQCMB wants to work with communities to ensure that there are healthy caribou herds for current and future generations.

These meetings will allow many more people who rely on the herds to hear from the BQCMB about the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq caribou herds. And more people will be able to share their knowledge and provide input on ways to help caribou.

Once meetings have been completed—hopefully by the fall of 2011—the BQCMB will publish another report that summarizes discussions from these meetings and makes recommendations based on all the input that the BQCMB has received.



Richard Aksawnee of Baker Lake, Nunavut (in cap) makes a point during a small group session

Photo by David Vetter