

Athabasca Denesuline

10 Traditional Protocols of Caribou Hunting

(as taught by our Elders)



1. Do not chase caribou

“Someone has done something to the caribou, if they chase it until they run them out of breath. If the caribou is mad about something, they will not migrate back.”

“It is not good to chase caribou, which is our life. If you do they won’t come back to us.”

“We have to learn how to shoot caribou on skidoos... There is no use to chase caribou. No use. Do not bother them as well.”

2. Kill only what you need

“I only harvest a little over 10 caribou. That’s lots. I could have killed more but I didn’t.”

“As long as you need 8 caribou, you get 8 caribou then you leave, then it is not a waste.”

“Do not take too much. Four is good enough. We didn’t kill too much caribou for nothing. If we respect the caribou and what we survive on in the future, you and the caribou will benefit.”

3. Respect cows

"After December, killing bulls is better; leave the cows."

"Respect cows, they will reproduce more."

4. Do not play with food or wildlife

"Long ago, even when people were poor, they did not play around with things."

"Hunting is not a play thing. It has to be respected. If caribou is not respected, it knows it."

"Never play with wildlife, any wildlife. It was given to us to use to live."

"It is not good to play around with the caribou. Our Creator felt sorry for us so he has given us them to use."

5. Use all parts of the caribou, do not waste

"When a caribou is killed, every part of it was used. Not even a small piece of meat was left behind."

"All meat is good. Wasting meat is no good. If you are to use the meat, you take it all."

"When I kill a caribou, I take everything. I never leave anything behind. When I cut off the legs, I put them by the shore. When I get all the organs, I put the stomach away and cover it. You will not see a hide laying around. I need everything from the caribou. My wife needs the hide to make moccasins."

6. Bring all waste to land, do not leave on the lake

“The young people should be taught how to hunt, how to skin, and cut up caribou and take care of the waste left behind by taking it to the land and not expose it on the lake.”

“I cut up all the meat that I will take home. All the waste that is left, I take to the land. You must do this.”

7. Store meat properly

“Food for winter is stored away. This is how people survived in the past.”

“If you have no room in your toboggan, put the meat in a safe place to pick up later. If you do this, the caribou meat will be protected.”

“I do not leave meat behind, I take all that I need. I put it in a safe place under the snow and put trees on top of it and put a marker and then I leave. I also take care of the bones and their hides. For me, this is the way caribou can be protected.”

“Today, storage is in freezers in freezer bags.”

“In summer, make dry meat and store after cutting.”

“Dry meat keeps meat long.”

“Bones should be crushed to make lard.”

8. Teach the future generation

“If a young man goes hunting with you, he will be behind and will waste meat and would not know that he is. You should go see and tell him why he is wasting meat and help him.”

“The children that are in school should watch and observe the elders and people that work. They can learn by watching. This is the way they will learn by doing this. They will not learn on their own.”

“When we were young our parents and grandparents taught us all that they know for as long as they lived; how to live off the land, how to trap, how to set nets and everything that we need to know. The young people are not like that anymore. If something happens where they need to survive in some situations, they will not know what to do. We must teach them.”

“When people go hunting, they should hunt as a group to educate the young people about the protocols on how to hunt and have respect for the caribou. The young people do not think of doing things in a orderly manner.”

“Even if the rules or procedures are written down, they will not learn unless they are taught as lessons on the land.”

“If youth are not taught, they will not know anything. They will shoot only for good meat, and will damage and waste meat.”

9. Do not hunt under the influence of drugs or alcohol

"If hunters are using alcohol or drugs, all the rules of hunting could be broken."

"Hunters who drink are not aware of what they are doing."

"It is an important rule, hunting under the influence is dangerous."

10. Use the caribou drum

"Make use of the caribou drum, we make use of it because the caribou migrates back to us. Without the drum you cannot live, without it you will not survive. Caribou love it, and that is for people to survive on."