

CARIBOU NEWS

in Brief

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



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BQCMB Meeting #98

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Rankin Inlet, NU

Wastage on the Rise

The worst case of illegal caribou harvest since 2021/22 has raised alarm bells in the Northwest Territories.

In early March, **Jay Macdonald**, Minister for the Government of the Northwest Territories Department of Environment and Climate Change (GNWT-ECCC), sent a letter to Indigenous leaders across the territory with troubling information. "I must write to inform you that there have been at least ten cases of illegal harvest along the winter road already during the 2025 winter road season. This includes wastage from 48 caribou, including some full carcasses. Most recently, a case of wastage was found involving 22 pregnant cows, where most only had the backstraps taken. All these cases are currently being investigated."

Macdonald called upon Indigenous governments and organizations to actively promote messaging related to caribou conservation and the importance of safe, respectful and legal harvesting practices.

This isn't the first time Macdonald's department has asked for help; in December 2021, ECCC hosted a meeting of respected harvesters from seven Indigenous governments

and Indigenous organizations to discuss ways they could work together to encourage legal and respectful harvesting. This meeting came about due to the illegal killing of more than 50 caribou that winter; a situation BQCMB Chair **Earl Evans** called the worst he'd seen in his 50 years of hunting and trapping. "I saw every regulation in the book being violated," Evans said at the time. "Snowmobiles chasing caribou, people shooting into the herds, hunters using the wrong calibre of rifle required to make a clean kill and/or not retrieving their kills, pollution, and outright dangerous hunting."

The main culprit is the Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road (pictured below), which serves the Ekati, Diavik and Gahcho Kué diamond mines and extends 400 kilometres north of Yellowknife. The winter road provides easy access to caribou, opening it up to inexperienced hunters, which leads to many instances of disrespectful hunting. The use of high-powered rifles creates more wounding and wastage, while drug and alcohol use also results in improper and unsafe hunting practices.

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Around the Range

Collaring Conversation

Most BQCMB meetings have a discussion around caribou collaring and the December 2024 meeting in Saskatoon, SK was no exception. **Mitch Campbell**, BQCMB member for Nunavut Environment (GN-DOE) shared an animation of the Qamanirjuaq herd's migration, showing the path of the 48 collared caribou. He explained that the GN collars cows only, as they move toward the calving grounds while the bulls stay behind to feed.

Chair **Earl Evans** noted he often fields questions about collaring, but he explains they are the best way to get telemetry results. Mitch explained there is a very low mortality rate due to collars, and they only collar full adult cows. He noted 85% of the animals carry the collars until the collar breaks away as designed; others die their natural death while collared. Local Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO) representatives are always with the collaring crews to lend their expertise and ensure the caribou are healthy enough for collaring.

James Hodson, BQCMB member for Northwest Territories Environment and Climate Change (GNWT-ECCC), shared the Beverly collaring program. There are 43 collars on Beverly caribou—26 cows and 17 bulls. They aim to put about 10 more collars on.

Caribou are not the only animals tracked using collars. During the GNWT's wolf harvesting program, which concluded last year, collars were deployed on some wolves to learn more about their movements. Harvested wolves were also examined to collect data regarding body condition, and the percentage of wolves whose stomachs contained caribou.

Proposed Developments Create Concern

The BQCMB has submitted comments to the Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) on several proposed developments across the range, including:

- **Gray's Bay Road and Port Project Proposal:** The BQCMB has concerns about the potential impact the 230 km all-season road would have on the barren-ground caribou populations in the region, including the Beverly herd.
- **Canadian North Resources' Ferguson Lake, Nunavut, Environmental Baseline Studies:** This project is of concern due to its proximity to Qamanirjuaq Lake and well-documented calving and post-calving areas.
- **ATHA Energy Corp Thelon Property:** The BQCMB has concerns about the potential adverse impacts of the proposed project on the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq herds as the project location overlaps with a critical spring migration corridor leading to Beverly and Qamanirjuaq calving grounds.

Did you know?

Barren-ground caribou herds travel thousands of kilometres each year, and collars on a limited number of animals help to track the movements of the entire herd. Visit the BQCMB's YouTube channel at <https://youtu.be/-tNjfZC4aSYv> to view our animation showing the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq herds' spring and fall migrations from 2018-2022, as they make their way up to their calving grounds in Nunavut and back down to the treeline. Amazing!

Complete submissions can be found under "Project Review Comments" at <https://arctic-caribou.com/development-issues/>.

Chronic Wasting Disease

Ruth Aschim with Saskatchewan Environment (pictured below with **Matthew Tokaruk**, BQCMB member representing Saskatchewan Environment) gave a presentation on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) during the BQCMB's December 2024 meeting in Saskatoon, SK. There are significant numbers of CWD in Saskatchewan in mule deer, but the risk of infection to barren-ground caribou is low due to the distance between the mule deer infections and the barren-ground caribou winter range. The disease has also been detected in moose and elk but in low numbers.

Saskatchewan currently has a voluntary carcass disposal program to collect carcasses or CWD infected meat. Saskatchewan Environment has conducted engagement workshops with Indigenous communities, trained people in the communities to take CWD samples, and provided sample kits and freezers to store samples for testing.

While the species is susceptible to CWD and has been detected in reindeer in Europe, CWD has never been detected in barren-ground caribou. •

WILDLIFE SAMPLING INFORMATION

Notice something unusual in your caribou harvest?



If you see something in your caribou that is unfamiliar and you are not sure what it is - take a sample! Scan the QR code above to see where to send your samples for testing.

Wastage on the Rise (continued from page 1)

Since then, community monitors and guardian programs from North Slave Métis Alliance, Thcho Government and Yellowknives Dene First Nation have been assisting Renewable Resource Officers along the road and “have been extremely helpful in supporting the Officers in responding to illegal and disrespectful harvesting,” according to Macdonald.

Over the past two years, those efforts seemed to pay off. In 2024 there were no cases of illegal harvest reported, and only a small number of wastage cases. Unfortunately, this year’s cases and number of caribou were more than what had been observed over the previous two winter road seasons.

Indigenous governments in the Northwest Territories have developed programs to encourage respectful hunting and reporting of harvest. Łutsël K’è Denesųliné First Nation has developed its Caribou Stewardship Plan and Respectful Hunting Laws, which are shared with visitors to the area. Thcho Government has created Thcho Ekwo Harvest Protocols as well as Thcho Traditional Practices and Harvester Responsibilities. Since 2016 they have also conducted a “Boots on the Ground” program for ground-based observation of Bathurst caribou, along with a winter harvest monitoring and hunter education program on the winter roads.

In response to this year’s situation in the Northwest Territories, the BQCMB updated its “Respectful Caribou Harvest” poster (see below) and video from the “You Can Make a Difference – Caribou for the Future” campaign from 2016.

Sadly, its messages are just as needed today as they were then. •

BQCMB Member Stephanie Behrens, from Thcho Government, posted this comment on social media after hearing about the illegal harvest:

Remember this! Remember what this looks like as you have this beautiful animal in the sights of your gun and think to yourself, are you worthy of taking her life and her precious baby. Will you treat her deceased body with the utmost respect when you harvest her or will you drag her body amongst the ice, scraping her skin making it unusable for anything or take her head and use as a prop in photos or kill her just to sell her or kill her and her baby just to take her back strap or kill her and take just her legs and leave her body and precious baby to lie out there for scavengers instead of taking it home to offer to your family?

If you have only good intentions and will properly respect her by properly butchering her, packing it up so nothing is lost and bring to your family to enjoy then go ahead and shoot but if you don’t intend to respect her and her family then don’t, don’t shoot just because you are trigger happy! It’s so sad to hear of all these stories of our people, indigenous people of all nations, not just one! It’s everyone who prides themselves as great hunters but leave so much behind! It’s infuriating and it happens every year, what will it take to stop? Maybe hunting should be limited until people learn to harvest like our ancestors used to, taking only what is needed and treating the animals with respect!



People and Caribou

Farewell

The BQCMB said farewell to longtime Government of Manitoba member **Vicki Trim** recently. Vicki's departure leaves two large holes to fill, as she was both lead member for Manitoba and Co-Chair, Administration on the BQCMB's Executive Committee.

Vicki (pictured top right) started working with Manitoba's Wildlife Branch in Thompson in 2001. She has spent her career focusing on all types of caribou including barren-ground, boreal-woodland, and Eastern Migratory caribou. During her time in Thompson, Vicki implemented multiple caribou monitoring programs in cooperation with Indigenous communities, to support caribou conservation and Indigenous land-use planning.

Vicki accepted a similar position with the Government of Alberta and will be living and working in the Slave Lake/High Prairie area.

In a message to BQCMB member, Vicki said "I just wanted to thank everyone for the experience and privilege working on this Board. It is not often that a group of people can come together with a common interest and create such success, both for wildlife and people."

The BQCMB will miss Vicki's friendship, professionalism, and vast knowledge of caribou and wildlife. We wish her all the best in her new position.

BQCMB Honourary Members

During its December 2024 meeting in Saskatoon, SK, the Board posthumously recognized **Joe Marten** (pictured centre right) and **Albert Thorassie** (bottom right) as Honourary Members. The BQCMB recognizes Honourary Members for their outstanding and exemplary service to the Board and to the range communities.

Joe, from Fond du Lac Denesųliné First Nation, SK, was an alternate member of the BQCMB since 2014. He was a

"It is not often that a group of people come together with a common interest and create such success, both for wildlife and people."

Vicki Trim

passionate board member who was dedicated to caribou conservation. He spent his life hunting, trapping, and fishing, and was a longtime volunteer with the Athabasca Working Group Environmental Monitoring Program. Joe passed away in September 2023.

Albert, from Sayisi Dene First Nation, Tadoule Lake, MB, was a member of the BQCMB for over three decades and served as Chair for many years. He loved his Denesųliné culture, language, and the land and was a voice for the caribou. Albert passed away in December 2022.

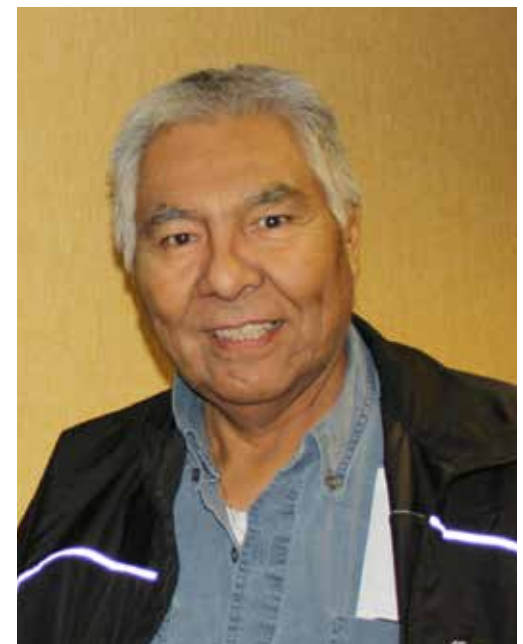
A complete list of BQCMB Honourary Members can be found at <https://arctic-caribou.com/about-bqcmh/honourary-members/>.

Winner, Winner

Congratulations to **Jean Tsannie** who won the BQCMB's Caribou Connect contest in October. Jean submitted her caribou conservation project, a youth culture camp at Wollaston Lake, SK, on the BQCMB's **Caribou Connect** page to win a Stanley thermos and BQCMB t-shirt. Jean's project now appears on our interactive map, along with other great initiatives taking place on the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq ranges.

BQCMB member **Peter Gazandlare** caught up with Jean to present her winnings (see photo on facing page, bottom right). Jean's response was "thank you! Nice hot tea when I'm out on the land."

Visit Caribou Connect at <https://arctic-caribou.com/caribou-connect/> to submit YOUR project!



“You’ve been wonderful co-management partners.”

Dan Shewchuk, Chair, NWMB

BQCMB Relationships Thrive

At the BQCMB’s December 2024 meeting in Saskatoon, **Dan Shewchuk**, Chair of the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB) commended Chair Earl Evans and BQCMB staff on their work toward conserving the herds for current and future generations. “We are fully committed as the NWMB in working with you on sustaining these herds,” he said. “I want to continue the cooperation with you and the Nunavut government—you’ve been wonderful co-management partners.”

Mitch Campbell added the NWMB has put about \$2M dollars toward conserving the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq herds over the years, and Chair Evans also thanked Shewchuk. “It’s money well spent.”

Pictured with Dan are **Daryll Hedman**, BQCMB honorary member (centre) and **Jason Akearok**, Executive Director, NWMB (far right).



BQCMB goes to ArcticNet

The BQCMB’s **Wildlife Biologist**, Gilly McNaughton, attended ArcticNet’s Arctic Change Conference 2024 in December. ArcticNet is a multidisciplinary annual conference that unites researchers from diverse fields as well as community organizations to address the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly transforming Arctic.

The annual event fosters an understanding of the North, encompassing Inuit Nunangat, the Canadian territories and provinces, and the circumpolar Arctic.

Pictured with Gilly (3rd from left) are some of our friends with WWF-Canada, from left to right, **Paul Okalik**, **Missy MacLellan**, and **Emina Ida**. •



Caribou Connect

Share your caribou conservation project!

1 Visit arctic-caribou.com/caribou-connect

2 Fill out the online form

3 Include a photo of your project!

4 Look for your project on our interactive map!

Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board



Indigenous Protected Areas



Just over five years ago, during a BQCMB meeting in Arviat, Nunavut, the board passed a motion to support the establishment of Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs). The first IPA the board officially supported was the Seal River Watershed Indigenous Protected Area in northern Manitoba.

Since then, the Seal River Watershed Alliance (SRWA), which includes Sayisi Dene First Nation, Northlands Denesuline First Nation, Barren Lands First Nation, and O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation, has taken great strides toward establishing the protected area. On January 18, 2024, the SRWA, the Manitoba Government, and the Government of Canada signed an historic agreement committing to conducting a feasibility study for the IPA and calling for creating an interim land withdrawal from mining claims while the study is underway.

That feasibility study was released in February 2025, following a year-long engagement and assessment of the natural, economic, social and cultural impacts of creating a protected area. With the governments of Manitoba and Canada, along with the SRWA, finding the Seal River Watershed IPA is feasible, it marks a major milestone in the effort to sustain one of the largest intact watersheds left in the world.

“We want Manitobans to come and catch 30-pound trout with their children and float the last undammed river in Manitoba,” said **Stephanie Thorassie**, Executive Director of the Seal River Watershed Alliance. “Creating the IPCA will ensure these healthy lands, clean waters, and fish and caribou will be here for generations to come. And expanding tourism and hiring Land Guardians to care for the watershed will create economic opportunity in the region right now.”

Now that all parties have determined a protected area is feasible, they will move into negotiations for an establishment agreement. This next phase will include ongoing engagement with stakeholders and the public, with ample opportunities to share feedback and input.

While there is strong public support for the IPA, there is also misinformation being shared about the proposal. Part of the engagement process will be correcting that misinformation, and Thorassie has already started by releasing a series of “question and answer” videos on the SRWA’s social media channels. The first question she’s answered is “will non-Indigenous people be able to visit the area?” and the answer is yes, of course. “We want people to visit the area, we want to encourage tourism, we want people to come float down the last truly wild river in Manitoba,” says Thorassie. “This is for ourselves, and for Manitobans, and for all Canadians. This is really important for all of us.”

“We want Manitobans to come and catch 30-pound trout with their children and float the last undammed river in Manitoba.”

Stephanie Thorassie, Executive Director, SRWA

Another question is “are we trying to kick anybody out from the watershed or limit access?” Thorassie’s answer is “no, not at all. From the start, we’ve been having discussions with stakeholders, governments, and neighbours to ensure this project reflects shared values. Protecting the watershed isn’t about exclusion, it’s about ensuring that

everyone who loves and relies on this land can continue to do so in a good way.”

During the December 2024 BQCMB meeting in Saskatoon, the board heard about another developing IPA, this one in northern Saskatchewan. IPA Project Coordinator **Keesha Martin** gave a presentation on Ya’thi Néné Lands and Resources Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) Project.

The Denesūliné have always followed the caribou, and the four main IPA areas, located in the Athabasca Basin, coincide with barren ground caribou habitat. The proposed boundaries encompass 18,500 sq total and would protect the land and wildlife from disturbances and support the practice of Dene culture.

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Youth and Caribou

Youth Representatives attend BQCMB Meeting

Two interrelated initiatives were born out of the BQCMB's meeting in Saskatoon, SK last December: honour the past while creating a path for youth to be the future of the organization.

Not only did the BQCMB posthumously award two Honourary Memberships to past Board members – Joe Marten and Albert Thorassie (see “People and Caribou on page 3), but the two youth representatives (pictured top right) at the meeting were grandchildren of beloved Elders. Keesha Martin is the granddaughter of Joe Marten, and **Dezmond Sayazie** is the grandson of the late Ernie Bussidor, another long-time BQCMB member.

Keesha, a member of the Fond du Lac Denesųliné First Nation in northern Saskatchewan, gave a presentation on Why Caribou are Important—something she learned from her grandfather. “I’m really honoured to do the work that I’m doing, in honour of him,” she said. Dezmond, a member of Sayisi Dene First Nation from Tadoule Lake, Manitoba, has attended BQCMB meetings in the past with his grandfather, who was beginning to teach him how to use the Dene drum. As a student of Indigenous Social Work, he now wants to give back. “I want to go back home after I get my degree and do some good work.”

Youth like Keesha and Dezmond need no encouragement to participate in the BQCMB and carry on the work of their Elders. They received all that they needed from their grandfathers, and we look forward to hearing more from these youth as they carry on their work.

Caribou Edu-Kit sent to Schools Across the Range

A key part of the BQCMB's Management Plan, Caribou is Life, is community connection, including more outreach with caribou using communities. In March,

the BQCMB distributed its new Caribou Edu-Kit to 37 schools across the ranges of the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq herds. The kits include a wealth of information and activities for elementary school students to learn about caribou. The books also found their way to the Hatchett Lake First Nation Culture Camp at Pimutik Lake, SK, where **Katie Rasmussen** (pictured middle right) shared them with youth participants.

Gratitude to the Government of Saskatchewan

The BQCMB sends a huge “Thank You” to Saskatchewan's Ministry of Environment for providing an additional \$14,250 to our On The Land Camp fund this year! This unexpected and very welcome contribution provided funding for two additional culture camps for youth possible—one for Hatchett Lake First Nation and the other for Fond du Lac First Nation. The stories and photos of these culture camps will be featured in the fall 2025 issue of Caribou News in Brief.

Thcho Culture Camp

From February 8-11, 2025, six students and two teachers from Chief Jimmy Bruneau School in Behchoko, NWT, along with four Thcho hunters/Elders, spent two nights in the Mackay Lake area. The BQCMB provided partial funding for the school's 2025 Caribou hunt trip through its On The Land Funding Program.

Students (see photo bottom right) were exposed to packing and preparing for a trip, safety preparation, selecting appropriate winter gear, setting up camp, wall tents and stoves, participating in a caribou hunt with Thcho hunters, and learning the skills of skinning, gutting and quartering the caribou. Students learned responsible and respectful hunting techniques and gained traditional knowledge from Elders sharing stories of the land and



past. Each student was able to bring caribou back to their family, and the school has caribou in its freezers for future traditional events, school seasonal camps, and culture programming within the school.

According to organizers, “Events like this make lasting memories for students, connect school and community and strengthen traditional learning and culture. “Masi Cho” to the BQCMB for helping support and fund our trip!” •

Heard around the BQCMB table

(from the December/24 meeting in Saskatoon, SK)

"The more board members we get at the meeting the more information we have, because they are out on the land all the time."

*Chair Earl Evans, Northwest Territory Métis Nation
Fort Smith, NWT*

"Educating youth important. I teach them about the antlers, the way they look, whether it's a cow or a bull or a young calf. Dene people hunt caribou for food; we take just enough for our freezers, and that's it."

*Peter Gazandlare, Hatchet Lake Denesyliné First
Nation, Hatchet Lake, SK*

"It's really expensive to be a hunter now. Gas is expensive, skidoos expensive. You might hear "oh, the herd's just over there"—but it's \$600 more dollars and a few more days to get there and there is no guarantee. It's not for fun—they're filling up that sled for their mothers and aunts."

*Atuat Shouldice, Crown Indigenous Relations and
Northern Affairs Canada, Rankin Inlet, NU*

"We have to try to work with the animals and mother earth, where we live. It's not only for us, it's for the young people. Money doesn't mean anything sometimes; your land, caribou, fish, water...we all have to protect those things."

*Doris Enzoe, Łutsël K'è Dene First Nation,
Łutsël K'è, NWT*

Indigenous Protected Areas (continued from page 4)

Martin noted northern Saskatchewan is of interest to mining companies for uranium and other minerals, and along with mining and exploration comes a cumulative negative effect on lands and waters. "Cumulative cut lines can be described as "death by a thousand cuts," she stated, adding wild animals do not like disturbance in their natural habitat.

Like the SRWA in Manitoba, Ya'thi Néné has partnered with the federal and provincial governments to advance the IPA, but it's been a slow process due to the groundbreaking nature of the project—there are currently no other IPAs within Saskatchewan. Martin hopes more engagement amongst all stakeholders will move the project forward. "My community is seeing and feeling the decline with caribou, because of climate change, disease, habitat disturbances, predation, and disrespectful hunting and harvesting."

Food security is another concern. "Every year people go up to hunt but with rising costs it is getting more expensive. With caribou not coming into the region like they used to, sometimes people go hunting and come home empty handed. They travel long distances by snowmobile, seeming to go further and further every year. People don't have freezers full of meat anymore. Some now rely on store bought foods, which is really expensive and filled with additives and things we can't pronounce." People are also not risking taking their children as they could be away for long periods of time. "So, the culture and knowledge of caribou hunting and harvesting is not being passed on as it used to."

Marten is grateful to be able to apply her scientific knowledge and education toward protecting land and water for caribou. "I want my community members to continue practicing our culture and traditions for generations to come," she said. "Things need to change, because without caribou, I don't think our people can thrive." •

BEVERLY & QAMANIRJUAQ
CARIBOU MANAGEMENT BOARD

FUNDING
AVAILABLE

NEXT
INTAKE:
JUNE 15,
2025

ON THE LAND
Camps

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EMAIL: INFO@ARCTIC-CARIBOU.COM



Correction

The article "Qamanirjuaq Herd: Continued Slow Decline" in the October 2024 issue of Caribou News in Brief contained an error. It should have read "The final estimate is 252,892, down from 288,200 animals in 2017, or a reduction of about 2% a year."

Publisher's Box

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

Comments and suggestions may be sent to:

E-mail: info@arctic-caribou.com

Website: www.arctic-caribou.com

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