

**Addressing the Caribou Crisis**

Mr. Speaker, this Assembly made a mandate commitment to improve food security in the Northwest Territories through the effective co-management of wildlife including caribou. Our government is therefore taking significant steps with our co-management partners to support the recovery of our struggling barren-ground herds, including investing an additional \$6.8 million over five years for conservation and recovery efforts.

The Bathurst and Bluenose-East herds have traditionally been an important food source for a number of our communities, and are central to the culture, identity and way of life of many Indigenous Northerners. Despite extensive actions by the Government of the Northwest Territories and our co-management partners to support caribou conservation and promote herd recovery, both herds continue to decline and in just the last three years they have been reduced by half.

Mr. Speaker, since receiving the latest population results last fall, our government has moved quickly to put a number of initiatives into place in an effort to slow the decline.

Environment and Natural Resources has worked closely with the Tłı̨chǫ Government to submit two joint management proposals to the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board—one for each herd. These management actions are being reviewed by the board, and we expect to receive their decisions in the coming weeks. We continue to work with the community of Délı̨nę to support their community-based caribou plan for the Bluenose-East herd, and are supporting other communities interested in forming their own conservation plans for barren-ground caribou.

Some of the conservation and recovery efforts led by the Department include doing population surveys every two years instead of three, so we can detect changes sooner and

if necessary adjust our management approach. We are increasing the number of satellite collars we use, to give us better information about how caribou use their range. We are also keeping a close eye on the health of the herds through regular composition surveys and by providing financial support for on-the-land caribou monitoring programs such as the Tłı̨chǫ Government's *Boots on the Ground* program and the Ni Hat'ni Dene Rangers run by the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation. In addition, the Government of the Northwest Territories continues to support community-based harvest monitoring programs in a number of communities across the Northwest Territories.

This winter we also introduced a new incentive program targeting wolves on the winter range of the Bathurst and Bluenose-East herds. A total of 57 wolves have been harvested under this program to date, Mr. Speaker. That is an increase over the average of 40 wolves per year harvested in the North Slave Region since 2010. It is also important to note that all of the wolves caught under this program were in the area where barren-ground caribou wintered this year, rather than around communities and landfills, which was the case in the previous eight winters.

Mr. Speaker, the pressures facing caribou also include habitat loss in critical areas on their winter range, mostly due to wildfire. The department plans to establish a new fire crew in Wekweètì to allow us to detect and respond to fires more quickly in the heart of the Bathurst caribou herd's traditional range. We are working closely with Elders and land-users in the North Slave region to help us identify key caribou habitat and corridors that we will aim to protect as values-at-risk during the upcoming fire season.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, we are very close to approving a range plan for the Bathurst herd. This plan was developed together with 21 organizations and agencies, including Indigenous governments, industry and wildlife management boards from across the Bathurst range, in response to community concerns about the impact of development on caribou. Through this range plan, we are working together to support the Bathurst herd in a way that recognizes the importance of conservation and economic opportunities for Northerners.

Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, protecting caribou is a shared responsibility that requires the commitment and action of multiple partners, across multiple jurisdictions. Our co-management system here in the Northwest Territories is strong, but caribou are not confined to our borders. We need to work with our neighbours in Nunavut as well. That is why, I travelled to Kugluktuk in April and met with the Honourable Joe Savikataaq, who is both the territory's Environment Minister and Premier.

Our governments discussed the Bathurst and Bluenose-East herds, which calve every year North of our border in Nunavut, as well as the Beverly herd, which was also surveyed in 2018. Premier Savikataaq agrees the current declines in these populations are alarming, and that immediate and strong action to support herd recovery is needed.

As a result, our governments have agreed to host a meeting of key co-management partners from both jurisdictions to discuss how we can work together to support the recovery of these herds. We will work together on wolf harvest incentive programs in both the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, and continue to support each other's research and monitoring activities, including on-the-land and community-based programs to improve our understanding and management of caribou.

Mr. Speaker, the last few months have seen a lot of positive work to support our caribou—but this is just the beginning. It will take a commitment from each and every one of us to do our part to give caribou the support they need to survive and thrive. In the next few months, engagement will begin on the development of a recovery strategy for barren-ground caribou. This strategy will bring together the efforts of all management authorities across the Northwest Territories to protect barren-ground caribou under territorial Species at Risk legislation, and will guide our actions going forward.

I would like to thank all of our co-management partners for their dedication and hard work, and for helping to make what have been some very difficult decisions in order to support our caribou herds. The Government of the Northwest Territories is committed to continuing this work with our partners to ensure that together we make effective decisions

about managing wildlife so our communities can continue to enjoy harvesting opportunities now and into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.