



News Release

For Immediate Release

New population estimates for the Beverly and Ahiak caribou subpopulations.

IQALUIT, Nunavut (March 7, 2013) – The Government of Nunavut, Department of Environment, successfully completed a population estimate of the Beverly and Ahiak barren-ground caribou herds. The June 2011 survey examined caribou abundance on the Beverly calving grounds in the vicinity of Beverly Lake and the Queen Maud Gulf, as well as the calving range of the Ahiak subpopulation in the vicinity of the Adelaide peninsula, east to Pelly Bay. The survey estimates suggest that there are an estimated 124,000 caribou within the Beverly herd and an estimated 83,300 caribou within the Ahiak herd.

“Caribou are an essential component of Nunavut’s terrestrial ecosystem,” said James Arreak, Nunavut Minister of Environment. “They represent an indispensable source of sustenance, clothing, and economic opportunities through guided hunts, tourism, and commercial hunts. The importance of caribou to Nunavummiut and our cultural heritage cannot be overstated.”

Survey efforts were led by the Government of Nunavut’s Department of Environment, and included representatives from Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI) and biologists from the Saskatchewan and Northwest Territories governments. In addition, 38 community representatives, including 34 Nunavut beneficiaries, two Saskatchewan representatives and two GNWT representatives participated in the field program.

“The survey results are good news,” said Northwest Territories Environment and Natural Resources Minister J. Michael Miltenberger. “Given the population numbers, the GNWT will be discussing the potential of a limited resident harvest on the Beverly and Ahiak herds with the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board and the governments of Nunavut and Saskatchewan.”

The last calving ground population survey of the Beverly Herd, flown in June 1994, estimated the herd at 276,000 caribou. This survey effort also represents the first time a calving ground visual population survey of the Ahiak Herd has been undertaken. The development and application of a new method, designed specifically for this survey using four observers,

increased the accuracy and precision of the estimates. The estimates surpassed all expectations and resulted in the most accurate estimate for the Beverly herd to date.

“The herd size is just under half of the June 1994 population estimate,” said Minister Arreak. “The Government of Nunavut recognizes that ongoing monitoring is critical if co-management partners are to effectively manage this herd in a way that will meet the needs of current and future generations.”

In addition to the new abundance estimates, a recently completed range-wide spatial analysis of collared caribou movements suggests that the Beverly herd has shifted its calving grounds about 200 to 300 km north. Reasons for this shift in the calving area are unknown, but it may be related to numerous human and natural factors, including: range-wide human disturbances, such as road construction and increased hunter access to caribou; harassment by biting insects; food limitations; predation, and forest fires. Similar shifts have been documented for other barren-ground caribou herds.

The Government of Nunavut plans to monitor any changes from the June 2011 results, so timely and effective decisions about management actions can be made.

The financial value of caribou as a staple to Nunavummiut can be conservatively estimated to be well over 22 million dollars per year territory wide. The Qamanirjuaq and Beverly herds alone are estimated to provide 15 million dollars and 5 million dollars per year, respectively, of nutritional benefits to subsistence hunters.

Results of the population surveys are being shared with the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board and other users of the herds.

The full report is available on the GN website at: env.gov.nu.ca

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