

Backgrounder

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About the Beverly herd

The Beverly herd's range has historically extended from northern Saskatchewan through the Northwest Territories (NWT) to Nunavut. The estimated annual economic value of the Beverly caribou harvest was about **\$4.9 million** for 2005-2006. The greatest proportion of the Beverly harvest has been by five communities in northern Saskatchewan, where most animals are taken for Aboriginal domestic use. The Beverly herd has also been hunted by residents of Lutselk'e, Fort Smith and Fort Resolution in NWT, and Baker Lake in Nunavut.

The size of the Beverly herd was last estimated in 1994 at about 276,000. A current estimate of the herd's size isn't known. However, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) carried out systematic reconnaissance surveys on the Beverly calving ground during the June calving period in the last three years (2007, 2008, 2009), and these surveys indicate that the herd has suffered a major population decline since 1994. (In 2007, the GNWT attempted a calving photo survey to help estimate the size of the Beverly population but it could not be completed due to bad weather.)

According to the GNWT, results of these recent reconnaissance surveys of Beverly caribou provide two key types of information:

- a) the numbers of adult caribou seen during June surveys on the calving ground were significantly lower than in past years

Year of Survey	Number of Adult Caribou (on transect)	Annual Rate of Change	Estimated Population Size	
1994	5,737	-	276,000	
2002	2,629	6.8% (8 years)	N/A	
2007	189	18.6% (5 years)	N/A	
2008	148	21.7% (1 year)	N/A	
2009	78	47.3% (1 year)	N/A	

- b) the numbers of calves seen during the surveys in 2008 and 2009 were very low, much lower than what is normally observed on calving grounds of healthy barren-ground caribou herds near the peak of calving.

Declines in other caribou herds hunted by communities in southern NWT and northern Saskatchewan

1. **Qamanirjuaq herd:** The Qamanirjuaq herd's range overlaps with the eastern portion of the traditional Beverly range, primarily during the winter. Communities in northeastern Saskatchewan harvest caribou from this herd. The Qamanirjuaq herd is also harvested by communities in northern Manitoba and the southern part of the Kivalliq region of Nunavut.

Preliminary results from 2008 surveys show that the Qamanirjuaq herd may have decreased about 30% since 1994, from about 496,000 in 1994 to 345,000 in 2008. These results are based on aerial surveys and Qamanirjuaq calving ground photo censuses conducted by the NWT government in 1994 and by the Nunavut government with assistance from the Manitoba government in 2008.

2. **Ahiak herd:** Recent information from locations of satellite-collared caribou show that the winter range of the Ahiak herd overlaps with the winter range of the Beverly herd in southern NWT. Hunters from southern NWT and northern Saskatchewan have likely been harvesting Ahiak caribou in some years.

Results of 2009 surveys suggest that the Ahiak herd is also declining, with 60% fewer caribou cows seen on the calving ground during surveys in June 2009 compared to June 2006. These results are based on systematic reconnaissance surveys conducted by aircraft. Extensive aerial surveys and an Ahiak calving ground photo census are being planned by the NWT and Nunavut governments for June 2010.

3. **Bathurst herd:** This caribou herd has been hunted in some years by northern Saskatchewan communities and has been regularly hunted by southern NWT communities.

There were 70% fewer breeding females on the Bathurst calving ground in June 2009 than in June 2006. The size of the Bathurst herd was estimated at about 128,000 in 2006 and 32,000 in 2009, representing a decrease of about 75% in three years. These results are based on aerial surveys and Bathurst calving ground photo censuses.

Globally, the majority of caribou and reindeer populations are in decline. A study by University of Alberta biologists Liv Vors and Mark Boyce, published in the November 2009 issue of the journal *Global Change Biology*, showed that caribou and reindeer numbers worldwide have plunged almost 60 percent in the last three decades.

Actions that could help declining herds rebuild

These are some actions the BQCMB has identified that could help address challenges faced by declining caribou herds and promote conservation of those herds:

- Providing conservation education on good hunting practices that include the harvest of bulls rather than cows, and reduced wastage of caribou.
- Reporting and analyzing harvest.
- Enforcing regulations regarding hunting, and mineral exploration and development.
- Investigating various options for ways to conduct a population survey of the Beverly herd in 2010.
- Researching and monitoring caribou health and condition.
- Tracking caribou using satellite collars, and assessing alternative methods used for collaring.

- Protecting caribou herds and their habitats, including long-term protection of calving and post-calving areas.
- Planning related to land use across the caribou range.
- Protecting caribou winter ranges from wildfires.
- Commenting to regulatory agencies on the potential effects of proposed projects on caribou and habitat.
- Compiling information about road impacts on caribou.
- Incorporating traditional knowledge along with scientific knowledge in management.
- Adopting consistent and complementary territorial and provincial caribou management strategies that are co-ordinated among governments across the herd's range.
- Collaborating on funding, research and management among jurisdictions.
- Publicizing the decline of the Beverly herd and actions needed to promote its recovery, including promoting dialogue between governments, communities, industry and the public.
- Lobbying politicians responsible for the caribou herd and communities that depend on it.
- Working with the Prince Albert Grand Council, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and other groups concerned about the future of Beverly caribou.
- Reporting results of BQCMB meetings and decisions to Beverly range communities.

These actions would complement the NWT government's existing monitoring plans and, hopefully, monitoring plans to come from the governments of Nunavut and Saskatchewan in 2010.

About the BQCMB

Established in 1982, the BQCMB is a co-management board of Aboriginal hunters, and government biologists and wildlife managers. As an advisory board, it works with governments, communities, industry and other organizations to develop recommendations for the conservation and management of the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq caribou herds and their ranges.

The BQCMB's mission is to ensure the long-term conservation of the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq caribou herds for Aboriginal communities who wish to maintain a lifestyle that includes the use of caribou, as well as for all Canadians and people of other nations. The year-round range of the Beverly herd includes portions of northern Saskatchewan, eastern NWT and the Kivalliq Region of Nunavut. The Qamanirjuaq herd's range is primarily in northern Manitoba and the southern Kivalliq Region. About 16,000 Aboriginal people – mainly Dene, Inuit, Métis and Cree – are among the almost 21,000 people living in 22 communities on or near the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq ranges.

The Board works primarily in the interest of traditional caribou users and their descendants, based on a co-operative partnership that has developed between governments and communities over more than 25 years. Current BQCMB priorities, which are outlined in the *Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Plan (2005-2012)*, include monitoring of populations, habitats, harvest levels and land use activities across the ranges; environmental assessment of development activities; community-based monitoring and education; and incorporating local and traditional knowledge into management programs.

The Board's chairman is Albert Thorassie of the Sayisi Dene First Nation at Tadoule Lake, Manitoba, and the vice-chairman is Daryll Hedman, regional wildlife manager with Manitoba Conservation in Thompson, Manitoba. The Board's secretary-treasurer is Ross Thompson of Stonewall, Manitoba. The BQCMB's core funding comes from the governments of Manitoba, Nunavut, the NWT, Saskatchewan and Canada, the five governments that signed the management agreement for the BQCMB.

The 13-member BQCMB consists of eight members representing communities on the caribou ranges in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, NWT and Nunavut; one government member from each of these four jurisdictions; and one member from the federal government.

To learn more about the BQCMB, the caribou herds, human activities on the caribou ranges and other issues, explore the BQCMB's website for maps, reports, the newsletter *Caribou News in Brief* and much more: www.arctic-caribou.com. Or contact Ross Thompson, BQCMB Secretary-Treasurer. Phone: (204) 467-2438. E-mail: rossthompson@mts.net.