DRAFT

Photo: Minnie Clark

SOUTHERN LAKES CARIBOU RELATIONSHIP PLAN

for public review

DISCLAIMER:This is draft for public review and comment. When finalized, the Plan shall not create any commitments or obligations that are legally binding on the planning participants or create or affect any legal rights of the planning participants. Nor shall it create, affect, define, interpret, or apply any roles, responsibilities, rights or interests under the Canadian *Constitution Act*, Umbrella Final Agreement, or respective Land Claim Agreements.

Dedication

This Plan is dedicated to the Caribou and the many people who have spoken for them over the years. It is the culmination of decades of hard work that started with a group of committed and concerned people speaking up for the caribou, initiating the Caribou Recovery Program. Their work has been carried on through the years by many individuals on behalf of their communities, governments, Nations, Councils, Boards, schools, and of course, the caribou. We respectfully thank them all for their efforts.

Implementation

The Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee will coordinate and track the implementation of this Plan, utilizing the Annual Gathering as a forum for communication and collaboration. An implementation review will be performed by the Parties five years after Plan approval to evaluate the implementation of specific recommended actions and the success of the Plan overall.

Photo: Sonny Parker

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Illustration: Heidi Marion

A GUIDE TO THIS PLAN

This Relationship Plan shares similarities with traditional wildlife management plans. It brings together knowledge, establishes objectives, reflects the intent of the Parties, and makes various commitments and recommendations. However, as the title reflects, the First Nation focus of relationship with the land, water, animals, and each other has been emphasized in addition to conventional scientific wildlife management concepts. By focusing on relationships, the planning team hopes to better reflect First Nation teachings, improving our connection with caribou and each other.

The Plan begins by taking the reader through the history and efforts of the Southern Lakes Caribou Recovery Program. This is followed by a description of the planning process and the evolution of management objectives for Southern Lakes Caribou. The Plan then uses a "Seasonal Round" framework, to provide context for recommendations made, and organize them according to the needs of caribou throughout the seasons.

The Seasonal Round used in the Plan contains nested circles with the Spirit of Caribou at the centre, moving outward to traditional teachings of Share, Care, and Respect, the Caribou's story, our responsibilities to Caribou, and finally to our human actions. Each circle informs the next. This demonstrates the philosophy used in creating the Plan, placing caribou first, guided by First Nation Traditional Knowledge and western science together, and employing the Seasonal Round as a story-telling device to help the reader understand the caribou and human perspective.

Throughout the Plan, traditional stories and the words of Elders and knowledge holders are presented to support the direction and recommendations made by the Steering Committee.

Readers will observe both Commitments and Recommended Actions presented throughout the Plan. Commitments are statements of intent by the Parties. Recommended Actions are made to the Parties as achievable steps that help meet the objectives and commitments of the Relationship Plan. There is a summary of all Commitments and Recommended Actions at the end of the Plan.

THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

Red stands for blood, blood is life.
The blood of the caribou is a part of the circle
of life. If this circle is broken and we let the
caribou die, all that will be left will be the
antlers, the black antlers of death.
And only the spirit of the caribou will be
left to wander our lands.

The Carcross caribou is in danger of extinction.
We indeed need to be together today for
our children tomorrow.
Let's each do our part to bring back
the caribou.

GEORGE POULIN
(LOGO AND POEM), 1994

VISION

Through our actions we build our relationship with caribou and each other, growing our collective knowledge and a caring and respectful attitude towards caribou and the land, supporting resilient and healthy caribou herds now and into the future.

RESPECT FOR ALL LIVING THINGS

"If we do not respect all creations on earth, bad luck will happen (Dooli Law). Animals and plants were here long before man. When man arrived he was a pitiful creature. So all the animals got together and said that they need to help man. So Caribou went to the man and said:

'Take my coat to keep you warm, and my meat for food, and my bones for tools and weapons, and my stomach for medicine...'

That is why it is so important we respect all creations; after all, animals and plants gave Man their lives for us to survive. Our stories were not about the past, but for the present and for the future. As I understand and interpret our oral traditions, it was not for just entertainment, but had valuable lessons of survival."

PAT JOE

Tagish Kwan Elder

THE JOURNEY SO FAR

Since time immemorial, there has existed a relationship between First Nations and caribou in the Southern Lakes and Atlin, BC areas. This relationship is founded on traditional laws and relationality, where caribou are family, inseparable from First Nations, and essential for healthy land. We exist because of the gifts caribou have given us in the past, and now we must do what we can to ensure caribou exist in the future.

The Southern Lakes Caribou are woodland caribou (Rangifer tarandus caribou) of the Northern Mountain population and include four individual herds: Carcross, Ibex, Laberge, and Atlin. The people of the Southern Lakes developed relationships with them over millennia, including the Peoples of the Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, Teslin Tlingit Council, and Taku River Tlingit First Nation.

"The Caribou would want the young people to hear that they are part of the culture. That they allowed the people to survive. We were all Caribou people at one time and were allowed to survive because of the Caribou. All Southern Yukon Peoples were at one time Caribou people, that's how we all survived and developed our culture.

JAMES ALLEN

Champagne and Aishihik First Nation (2021)

"The incredible connection between, or melding of, our people and caribou, has meant that respecting and taking care of caribou are part of our traditional law. Everything is taken and used with the understanding that we only take what we need, and we must use great care and be aware of how we take and how much of it, so that future generations will not be put in peril. It may be our right to harvest caribou, but it is our responsibility as First Nations people to respect and care for our animal relatives. Respect is at the core of the relationship between people and caribou.

BRANDY MAYES

Tagish Kwan (N.D.)

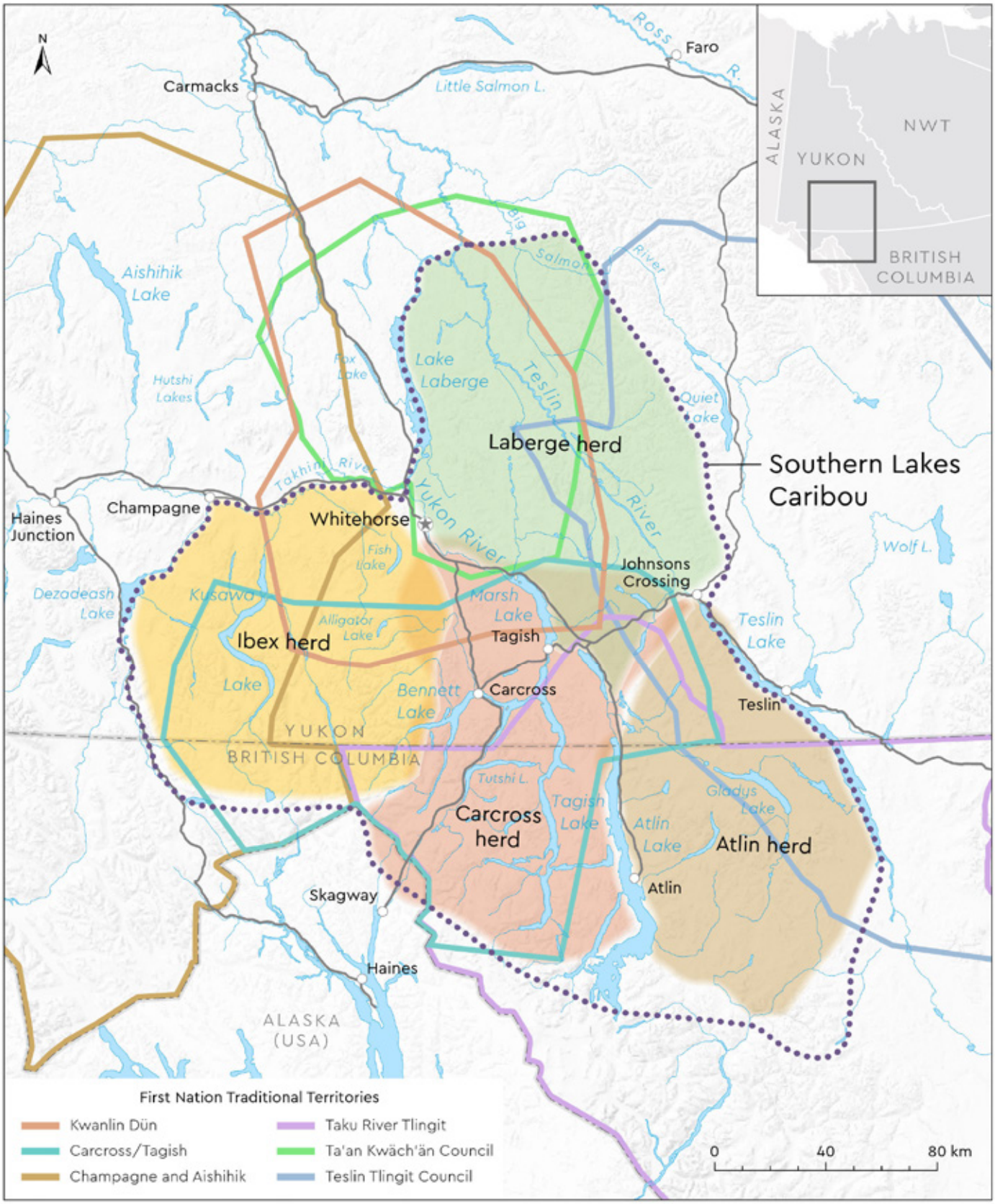
"Part of my culture, heritage, they were just fully part of our lives. It is our historical animal to our people. Caribou has been carrying our people for centuries."

RON CHAMBERS

Champagne and Aishihik First Nation (2021)

Photo: Minnie Clark

MAP 1: Southern Lakes Caribou Range



"They used migrate through Whitehorse and below between Marsh Lake and Whitehorse. They used to come through there. There's old signs in there... They used to set snares for when the migration is coming. They pile up brush and make a fence, maybe a mile long and then they set moose hide snares there. That's the way they used to get them. I seen that."

BILL GOOD

Carcross/Tagish Elder from *Southern Lakes Caribou Recovery Program: Progress Report 1992–1996*

Illustration: Heidi Marion

Ancient Times

In 1997, ancient caribou dung was first discovered melting out of an ice patch on Thandlat, west of Kusawa Lake. This discovery spurred years of research on this and other ice patches across the Southern Lakes, helping to illustrate the long relationship between people and caribou. Ice patches are high alpine locations where patches of snow and ice remain throughout the heat of the summer. Caribou seek these areas to escape the heat and the insects. Understanding this behaviour, people knew where they could find the caribou at these times. Archaeological research has recovered hunting tools that date back as far as 8,000 years, supporting our understanding of a long-term and ongoing relationship with the caribou.

A mosaic of hunting blinds and fences in the alpine areas of the Southern Lakes indicates a history of sophisticated and large-scale communal hunting of caribou. The scale of the sites indicates large numbers of caribou moved through the area to be hunted; many more than are currently found in the area. These ancient sites are sometimes located in places where caribou are no longer regularly seen. The large number of ancient artifacts recovered from ice patches within the Champagne and Aishihik Traditional Territory, in areas where caribou were long absent, is an indicator of the changes in population size as well as potential local and climatic conditions.

People's understanding of the caribou and their places on the land are reflected in the traditional place names. In Southern Tutchone caribou are called mezi (Lake Laberge dialect) or udzi, in Tlingit caribou are called watsix, and in Tagish caribou are called medzih. Medzih Dzele (Tagish) /Watsix Shaayi (Tlingit), which translates as "caribou mountain", is the traditional name for what is now called Nares Mountain. Watsix Heeni is the Tlingit name for Caribou Creek. Similarly, a narrow part of Nares Lake was called Medzih E'ol (Tagish)/ Watsix Nakwaani ye (Tlingit), which translates as "place where caribou swim across in groups". The Caribou Lakes place name in Tlingit is Watsix Teix'I, which translates to "caribou heart."

> Our ancestors witnessed the decline of Southern Lakes caribou and their habitat associated with the Klondike gold rush, White Pass rail line, early riverboat travel, resident meat hunting, non-resident sport hunting, and the construction of the Alaska Highway through critical caribou winter range which brought thousands of soldiers followed by an influx of new residents to the area.
>
> **BRANDY MAYES**
>
> Tagish Kwan (N.D.)

> The Alaska Highway brought literally tens of thousands of men to the Yukon between 1942 and 1943. The roads they built made a permanent change in the Yukon's culture and landscape, starting with the displacement of river traffic and immigration to Whitehorse and new, smaller communities along the highway. The roads place severe hunting pressure on wildlife adjacent to the right-of-way...
>
> **ROBERT MCCANDLESS**
>
> from *Yukon Wildlife: A Social History* (1985)

> The Tutshi [boat] would have to wait for hours for the caribou to pass. Caribou was very easy to get when I was young and provided many months of subsistence.
>
> **PATRICK JAMES**
>
> Carcross/Tagish First Nation (N.D.)

1898 to 1990

Traditional Knowledge recalls that the mountains moved with caribou. Since the arrival of European settlers to the south Yukon in the late 19th century, and particularly during the Klondike Gold Rush in 1898, the Southern Lakes landscape has been inexorably changed by the growth of the human population and associated development. These changes affected the land, water, and all its inhabitants.

Caribou numbers in the Southern Lakes begun to decrease during the Gold Rush in the late 19th century, when commercial harvesting[1], widespread harvest, and a massive influx of human population took place. Then, in the 1940s, the construction of the Alaska Highway (and subsequently, the roads to Carcross, Tagish, and Atlin) had a profound impact on the people and wildlife. In the decades following the construction of the Highway, the Yukon population started to grow. Steadily, as roads, communities, and cities were built, the number of caribou declined.

1 Wild meat was legally sold in Yukon from 1897 to 1947. Market hunters were established via legislation in 1920 (specific individuals obtained permits to hunt and provide meat for licensed vendors). In response to the influx of people circa 1898 the Northwest Mounted Police (NWMP) reported widespread decline in game and furbearers, which can likely be in part attributed to commercial use (McCandless, 1985).

Photo: Library of Congress

Photo: Fort St. John North Peace Museum

> All the miners and prospectors and whoever it was who was coming over the White Pass, they had to eat something so they ate caribou and moose; now, forty thousand people coming through this area, they must have shot everything that they could find.
>
> ***ART JOHNS***
>
> Carcross/Tagish First Nation (2015)

The caribou adapted their behaviours to these impacts. The Southern Lakes caribou became more isolated due to habitat fragmentation from the road network and associated human activities. Traditional and local knowledge tells us that from the 1950s to the 1960s caribou populations began to increase again, potentially linked to widespread and indiscriminate predator control in Yukon at that time. Yet, from the 1970s to the 1990s caribou populations declined sharply, largely attributed to a combination of overharvest, bad weather events, and predation, alarming Elders and First Nations within the Southern Lakes[2].

It should be noted that up until the 1930s, there was potential for overlap between caribou of the Southern Lakes and those of the Fortymile herd, whose winter range used to come at least as far south as Lake Laberge. At that time, the Fortymile herd numbered in the hundreds of thousands, and this large group of migratory caribou may have influenced historic understandings of caribou abundance in the Southern Lakes. However, ice patch research and Traditional Knowledge indicate that Southern Lakes caribou were once much more numerous during summer and fall, outside the season where there would have been potential overlap with the Fortymile herd.

2 Clyde et al., (1995).

FORMATION OF THE CARIBOU RECOVERY PROGRAM

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, alarm bells were ringing in the communities of Southern Lakes. It was estimated that only about 350 caribou remained within the Southern Lakes herds. This number would have excluded caribou in the Laberge and Atlin herds which were brought under the Recovery Program umbrella after the initial recovery plan was built in 1993. These inclusions came about through community interest and radiotelemetry data that indicated a close relationship between these herds.

By 1996, the caribou recovery area included a wider area, encompassing the herd ranges of all four herds. Including these areas, there were likely about 1000 caribou combined at the start of the recovery program.

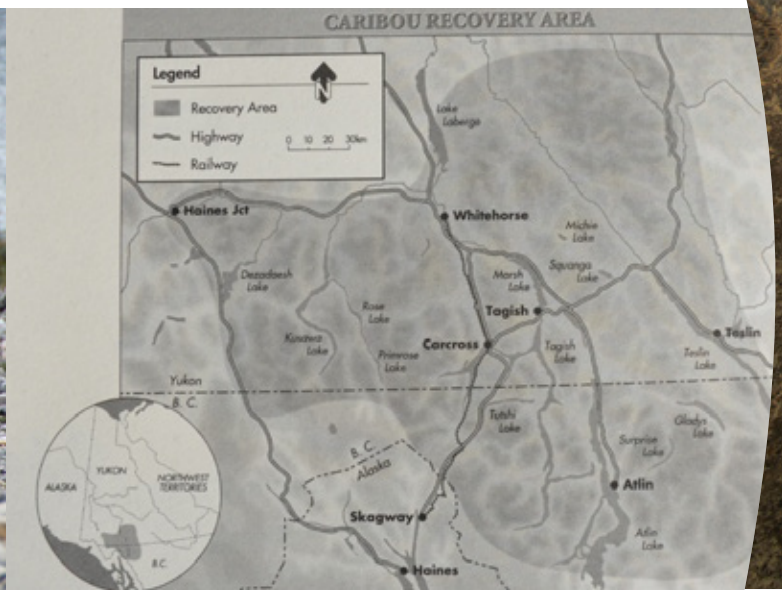
Photo: Government of Yukon

First Nations and biologists came together in 1992 to discuss what could be done to help the caribou. This was a grassroots initiative, starting in the community of Carcross and gaining support from governments. The Southern Lakes Caribou Recovery Program was born of these meetings, and a five-year Recovery Plan was developed. Excessive hunting was seen as the main culprit of the decline and continued low numbers of the herds, with additional concerns raised related to predators, human disturbance, and habitat loss.

"For eleven years (1982–1992), annual helicopter surveys were undertaken in the Ibex area (Coal Lake, Friday Creek, and Watson River) every October when the caribou aggregate during the rut. It was assumed that the composition and trend of the Ibex sub-herd would be similar to that of the other sub-herds. These counts were surprising because calves consistently survived better here than at any other location studied in Yukon (even the Finlayson herd, after seven years of wolf control). This group of caribou should have been doubling every four years. But no growth was seen. Today it numbers about 150 – the same as in 1982. Why? Intensive wolf studies in the mid-1980s revealed only moose and sheep in the wolves diet – wolves were not to blame. Because caribou hunting by outfitters and non-natives was closed, the only explanation was that excessive hunting by First Nation hunters and poaching must have been responsible. Evidence of this has been reported by local residents, primarily of kills near roads and snowmobile trails in the winter."

CARCROSS CARIBOU HERD RECOVERY PLAN

(1993–1998)



Southern Lakes Caribou Recovery Area, from Southern Lakes Caribou Recovery Program Progress Report 1992-1996. This area includes the present-day herd ranges of the Carcross, Ibex, Laberge, and Atlin herds.

Photo: John Meikle

> "You see them mountains up there? I've been all through them, and every place the caribou hung out, I knew those spots. And right where I knew there was going to be caribou there, there was none. That's when I knew we were really in trouble."
>
> **ART JOHNS**
>
> Carcross/Tagish First Nation (2015)

Thirty years into the Southern Lakes Caribou Recovery Program, it is useful to look back at some of the rationale that drove the recovery program at that time. The following quote seems remarkably prescient given the steps towards recovery that the herds have taken, the progress made in co-management, and the risks that the herds still face:

"The Carcross caribou herd could become a significant economic and social asset if it were to increase in size and reoccupy its historical range. A larger herd would resume movement patterns over a broader area. This would contribute to tourism and modest harvest opportunities. It could easily be the most visible woodland caribou herd in Yukon because its range is crossed by five highways... and because migration is concentrated by a few narrows on the large lake systems where caribou would easily be seen. In addition, several First Nation communities in the herd's historic range rely on country food, particularly wild meat, to a large extent. Many non-native people residing in and around the City of Whitehorse also hunt and rely on wild game to some degree. It should be recognized however that because the herd's range is within the most densely populated are of Yukon, it can never provide enough caribou to meet harvest demand for the 24,000 people that live adjacent to or within its range. Finally, conserving and recovering a highly visible herd like this, through the collaboration of 5 First Nations and 2 provincial / territorial governments and 4 communities, serves as a strong stimulus for cooperative, community-based, and intensive wildlife management."

CARCROSS CARIBOU HERD IN THE YUKON AND BRITISH COLUMBIA: DRAFT RECOVERY PLAN

(1993–1998)

The Yukon government began limiting licensed caribou hunting of the Southern Lakes herds in the 1980s, eventually eliminating all hunting opportunities by 1996. In 1993, First Nations endorsed a voluntary restriction of their Indigenous right to subsistence harvest to support the recovery of the herds. This voluntary harvest moratorium officially remains in place today.


Photo: Government of Yukon

The Southern Lakes Caribou Recovery Program outlined 11 goals in the original 1993–1998 management plan:

1. Reduce or eliminate harvest
2. Increase the herd to 2000 caribou within its historic range in Yukon and B.C
3. Discourage human developments and activities detrimental to caribou in important habitat
4. Manage for a wildlife regime aimed at protecting and enhancing caribou habitat
5. Increase the moose population through habitat enhancement (anticipating an increase in moose hunting because of caribou hunting closure) to provide an alternate prey base for humans, wolves, and bears
6. Determine the abundance of wolves and bears
7. Promote harvest of wolves by trappers
8. Encourage hunting of bears
9. Monitor composition, distribution, and trends in all sub-herds of the Carcross caribou herd
10. Determine the abundance of alternate prey species
11. Increase knowledge of the status, management, and recovery of the Carcross herd

CHANGES TO THE HUNTING REGIME FOR SOUTHERN LAKES CARIBOU IN YUKON AND BRITISH COLUMBIA

1980
Caribou hunting closed in Game Management Zones (GMZs) 7 & 9 (YT)

1981
Limited entry permit hunt established in Game Management Subzone (GMS) 7–36 (5 permits); remainder of GMZ 7 closed (YT)

1982
Limited entry permit hunt established in GMS 9–05 & 9–07 (2 and 5 permits, respectively).

1983
Cow caribou hunting closed in GMZ 7 & 9 (YT)

1984
Limited entry permit hunt established in GMSs 7–17, 7–20, 7–21, 7–24, -25, 7–27, 7–30 - 7–32 (8 permits) (YT)

1987
Limited entry permit hunt established in GMSs 9–01, 9–02, and 9–04 (YT)

Many significant initiatives originated from these goals, including the establishment of a Game Guardian program, the Caribou in the Schools Program, collection of local and traditional knowledge, widespread public education initiatives, establishment of long-term scientific monitoring programs, work to recognize caribou values on the land, and the voluntary harvest moratorium. Equally significant was the partnered approach and movement towards co-management of the caribou herds, combining both western and traditional methods.

The decision to stop the traditional harvest of caribou was a great hardship and changed the relationship between people and the caribou. The First Nations acted because of their connection and relationship to the caribou; traditional teachings about the need to care for caribou, as they have provided for us. Now, thirty years of not hunting caribou has taken its toll on the culture and relationship with caribou. Youth are missing out on cultural teachings about caribou. We must work to rebuild and strengthen our relationship and connection to caribou to ensure it is not lost. After all, it is this connection that inspired the recovery work to begin with.

> I hate to see native people suffer because of some of the discrepancies... not consistent with the native way of conserving wildlife. Before 1950s, native people had customs which is their original laws and how they regulate their hunting and hunters, then the game commission came in and talked... they said you don't need your laws anymore, we have a law to take their place that will help us in the future to look after wildlife. With that, the native people abandoned their way of doing things... regulating hunters, and they relied completely on the government system. Today, 30 to 40 years later, the system is not going to work for us. If anything is going to work in the future, it has to be some form of integration, a process with native peoples... dealing with the wildlife harvest. I think that is the only method that will work.

PATRICK JAMES

Carcross/Tagish First Nation (1993)

> From the caribou's perspective it is critical that we proceed with some kind of plan. The strongest plans are built from community-based groups. We should not get too hung up on the process. You are probably more sensitive to these processes, but caribou is the main issue here. If you feel uncomfortable with government process, think about a non-government process, but let's not drop the ball. This process you have initiated is the first of its kind in the Yukon and has a lot of potential and could set a good example. Don't let this opportunity slip through your fingers.

DOUG LARSEN

Wildlife Biologist, Yukon Government, at Carcross Caribou Recovery meeting (1993)

1988
Limited entry permit hunt established in Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) 6–25 east (BC)

1990
Caribou hunting closed in Game Management Zones (GMZs) 7 & 9 (YT)

1993
First Nations voluntarily cease subsistence harvest

1994
Caribou hunting closed in (WMU) 6–28 (BC)

1996
Caribou hunting closed in GMS 8–12 - 8–17, 8–26, 8–27 (YT)

2020
Caribou hunting closed in WMU 6–27 (BC)

CULTURAL LOSS

First Nations recognize a need to re-establish a cultural connection with caribou and the landscape. The loss of cultural connection to the land began with residential schools, where Elder Ted Hall noted that interest in traplines began to wane when children were taken away, causing their parents to move off the trapline (SLWCC, Elder's Tea, Feb. 9, 2012). The voluntary caribou harvest restriction adopted by the Nations in 1993 limited the ability to teach, further severing the cultural connection to caribou. Even during the early days of the Caribou Recovery Program, people were concerned about a loss of relationship with caribou.

The First Nations of the Southern Lakes have done their part to support the recovery. However, the transfer of important cultural knowledge between Elders and youth has suffered, with a generation not harvesting caribou. The traditional economy in local communities has also declined, with caribou related tools and regalia all but disappearing. This is a loss of relationship with caribou and with each other, as well as a loss of harvest opportunities. There is concern that if harvest opportunities are not restored, or if caribou decline again, First Nations culture will be further impacted.

The emphasis on recovery planning today must be on education, the importance of First Nations teachings and values, and the restoration of relationships with caribou. Haa Kusteyi, Dooli, Kwaday Dun Ke, or Adooli Law says: take care of the land and the land will take care of you, take only what you need and use everything you take, and give thanks.

> "Let them caribou live, not for you, for your children eh. Or for anyone you know. Bessie's kid ain't never going to see a caribou up there. They're lucky if they're ever going to eat caribou meat again.
>
> **BILL GRANT**
>
> Carcross Resident

> "...households with big rolls of babeesh, buckskin jackets – I really miss these things. Ladies selling their arts and crafts. Beautiful Mukluks. Miss those. When we decided to voluntarily quit hunting, there was a negative effect.
>
> **PATRICK JAMES**
>
> Carcross/Tagish First Nation (2019)

> "Caribou is our culture, they are us, we are them. There is no division.
>
> **GEORGINA SIDNEY**
>
> Teslin Tlingit Council (2021)

> "Our time, our culture, and practices. We sacrificed a lot. Our people need to be kept in touch with their culture. Many of them need to reconnect. The children need to know our history. We can't teach that if the numbers of Caribou are not there. I'm reluctant to let any hunting go on, except for the cultural purposes we have been talking about.
>
> **ALAN CARLICK**
>
> Taku River Tlingit First Nation (2021)

Art Smith, SLCSC Chair, Jim Kenyon, Minister of Environment (2002–2004), Art Johns, Game Guardian and SLCSC member, and Patrick James, SLCSC member.

THE STEERING COMMITTEES

The Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee (SLCSC; originally the Carcross Caribou Steering Committee) was established in 1994 and led the efforts of the Southern Lakes Caribou Recovery Program. This was an early example of co-management, forming around the same time as the newly signed Umbrella Final Agreement (1993) in Yukon. The Yukon government and Council of Yukon First Nations provided the initial funding and hired three staff members to get the Committee started, including a coordinator and two game guardians. The Committee included six First Nations, two provincial/territorial governments, and had an independent chair. The recovery program involved community participation, school programs, research, knowledge collection, and Game Guardian programs. The elevated profile of caribou and the broad public support for the program began to inform the development assessment process to limit impacts to caribou.

The Steering Committee operated until 2008, when it was discontinued to make space for the Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee (SLWCC), which was a commitment under the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Carcross/Tagish First Nation Final Agreements. The SLWCC involved the same partners but had a broadened the scope to consider all wildlife. Following the completion of the SLWCC's report on wildlife in the Southern Lakes and associated recommendations in 2012[3], the SLWCC was disbanded and there was no longer a collaborative body to steward the Caribou Recovery Program

At the Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council's 'On the Land Gathering' in 2016, the concept of a refreshed management plan for caribou was discussed[4]. The following year, the First Nations in Southern Lakes developed a project charter outlining a First Nation-led process to develop a Caribou Plan and invited the governments of Yukon, British Columbia, and Canada as partners. In 2018, the Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee (SLCSC) was reformed for the purpose of drafting a plan. For thirty years, through these initiatives, the caribou have successfully brought together the governments of British Columbia, Canada, Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Champagne and Aishihik First Nation, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, Taku River Tlingit First Nation, Teslin Tlingit Council, and Yukon.

3 SLWCC (2012). Regional assessment of wildlife in the Yukon Southern Lakes area: Volumes 1 and 2 (Context and Recommendations, and Species Status Assessment).

4 Zimmerman, (2016).

CARIBOU

AS TOLD BY ANNIE NED
IN CRUIKSHANK, 1990

Already moose was getting short when caribou came.
Lots of caribou around here when I got my kids.
Used to be [1910 – 15].

When lake froze in winter,
When caribou came,
It was just like horses, same.
You could hear their feet making noise,
Making noise [imitates hoof on ice].
Lots of caribou covered up these hills.

I want to talk about this story.
Old people tell this story

One time caribou took people.
That man had a little bit of doctor I guess.
Well, caribou took him.

Everybody felt bad: he was gone.
His wife was left alone.

Right in the middle of the lake, they heard caribou singing his song.
People don't know what to do –
They tried to get him.

One man said, " Well, let's go. We're going to try."
Yeah!

They've got bow and arrow, that all – they have no gun yet.
It was a long time ago, I guess.
They heard that man's song.

I think it was wintertime.
Wintertime.

That caribou just lay down in the middle of that ice.
All the time he stayed in the middle.
For a long time, they watched him.
Whenever they tried to come to that caribou, all the time he watched them.
He looked from person to person.
And all the time he didn't sleep.

One man told them he was going to do it.
Then he sneaked in. [She shows how he wrestled with the caribou and held it down].

The caribou spoke:
"You smell," he told people.

Well, that man knew how to talk to caribou.
"What about your kids?" they ask him.
"Your kids are crying for you," his own brother told him.
"What's wrong with you?"

He couldn't help it.
So they brought him. They brought him home.
They took him home!
I guess his wife is glad: he's got kids, too!
His wife came, and his kids.
He held his kids' hands, but for his wife, nothing.
He doesn't know her yet.
Well, they took him back.
They told him.

Illustration: Heidi Marion

Then they watched him.
They made a camp for it [away from the human camp].
Somebody watched him there.
He wanted to go!
He doesn't eat their food – he only eats willows.
You know what that means!
But they kept him the other side of the fire.

Then he came back to person.
But he can't hunt caribou anymore.

This was way before my time, but I saw lots of caribou.
They came back, caribou.
All this mountain was covered by caribou.
Used to be we had caribou not too long ago when my kids were growing up.

One time lots of caribou fell through the ice, one lake: I called my husband back to get the meat.
My mother-in-law came to get the skins.
She got enough that time: she had her son with her.
But they are hard to clean when they fall in that way.
That's the last time caribou came this way.
That's the last time we saw caribou come.

But they didn't come back. How come?
The man came back to person.
Then he knew where moose are, where caribou are.
He tells them, but he can't hunt them.
That's the last time caribou came this way.

Since then, nothing.

After Skookum Jim found gold, everything changed.
White people came to this country.
White people learned everything from Indians.
Now they want the whole thing, the land!
I've got sixty-four grandchildren in this Yukon.
I worry about them, what's going to happen?
White people, where's their grandpa? Their grandma?
Indians should have their own land.

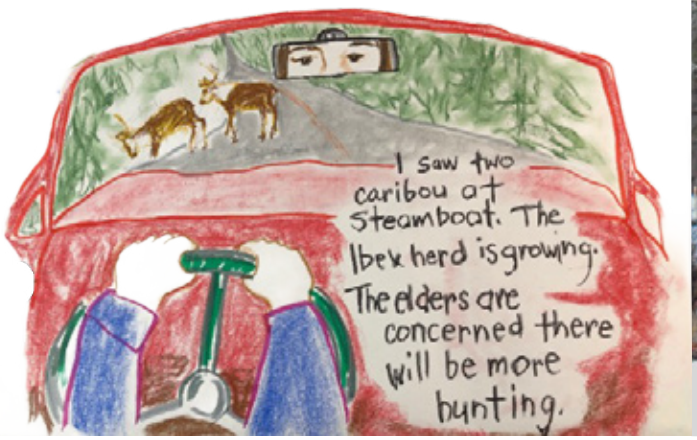


Illustration: Heidi Marion

Photo: Minnie Clark

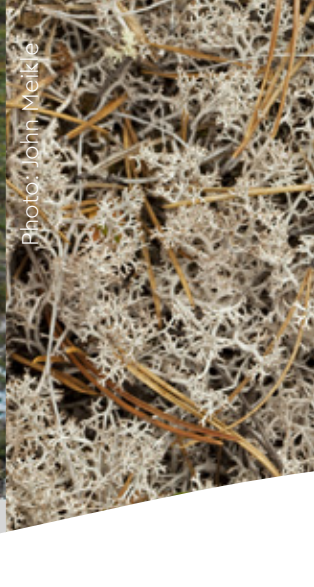


Photo: John Meikle

RECOVERY

Over the past thirty years, the Recovery Program has experienced many successes, and none more important than the growth of the herds. People are seeing caribou on the land more often and in places where they have not been seen for many years. The Ibex herd, for example, has been on a remarkable trajectory, increasing from about 150 animals in 1992 to over 1700 in 2019, and expanding into ranges west of Kusawa Lake where they had not been seen in living memory. However, all the herds have seen significant growth, with the combined population more than doubling in size since the start of the recovery program.

Science-based population surveys and collaring programs also provide evidence of the ongoing population recovery. Aerial mark-resight surveys to estimate the size of the caribou herds were performed in 2018 and 2019 to support this planning process. The results demonstrate that the recovery efforts have born fruit and that the herds are recovering, with substantial growth occurring between 2007/2008 and 2018/2019.

The growth of the Southern Lakes herds over the past thirty years is to be celebrated. This is particularly true when we consider the continued human impacts that the herds endure. Many of these stressors, like the human development footprint and disturbance from human recreation, have only increased during the recovery. The success is a testament to the caribou as well as the many individuals, communities, organizations, Nations, and governments that contributed their efforts, knowledge, and resources over the years. Not least of the successes of the Recovery Program has been the forging of enduring relationships, programs, and partnerships in the Southern Lakes.The growth of the Southern Lakes herds over the past thirty years is to be celebrated. This is particularly true when we consider the continued human impacts that the herds endure. Many of these stressors, like the human development footprint and disturbance from human recreation, have only increased during the recovery. The success is a testament to the caribou as well as the many individuals, communities, organizations, Nations, and governments that contributed their efforts, knowledge, and resources over the years. Not least of the successes of the Recovery Program has been the forging of enduring relationships, programs, and partnerships in the Southern Lakes.

Aerial mark-resight survey results from the 2019 surveys of the Carcross, Ibex, and Laberge herds and the 2018 survey of the Atlin herd, including the previous survey results.

Herd	Updated Population Survey Results	Previous Survey Results (Year)
Carcross	851 (724–1001)	800 (2008)
Ibex	1732 (1462–2053)	850 (2008)
Laberge	746 (594–938)	200 (2003)
Atlin	1527 (1077–1927)	777 (2008)
Southern Lakes combined	**4856**	**2650**

Photo: Minnie Clark

"The thing is too, once you start talking about caribou, and you look at the ranges. Winter range, summer range, and stuff. We go along in our territory, we started off, probably numbering about 300, now it's up in the 2000 range, somewhere in there. The herd is getting bigger. They are not only going to say where their winter range is, they are using other spots now. They don't recognize that those are caribou winter ranges. I always talk about that; we are finding caribou where we never find them before. So much food, caribou need food; if they can't find it in their winter range, then they are going to go somewhere else, so it's changing. Everything is changing. But they keep harping on that winter range/winter range, especially in that forest plan.

ALBERT JAMES

Carcross/Tagish First Nation
(2017)

"People are seeing caribou again. Kids on the school buses are seeing caribou. This has really been a miracle, what has been accomplished in the last thirty years. Our greatest danger is we take that for granted. We can't take caribou on the landscape for granted. We need to continue to work to look after them.

DON TOEWS

Chair of the Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council
(2023)

"I see caribou at Robinson all the time this winter, haven't seen them there in years.

JIM JAMES

Carcross/Tagish First Nation
(2021)

Photo: John Meikle

WHAT IS A HERD AND WHY DO HERD RANGES CHANGE? A BIOLOGIST'S PERSPECTIVE

To wildlife managers, a caribou "herd" is the basic unit for making conservation and management decisions for caribou. Caribou within a herd tend to occupy and share seasonal ranges throughout the year, sometimes mingling with other herds. In the Southern Lakes, the annual ranges of the four herds have changed since the beginning of the Recovery Program, mostly due to two factors: growing caribou populations, and advancements in collar technology improving our understanding of their distribution.

As the herds have grown, they have expanded into historical ranges not occupied by caribou in the 1980s and early 1990s. For example, at the beginning of the Recovery Program, the Ibex herd occupied a relatively small range east of Kusawa Lake. As the herd's numbers increased, their range use expanded south into British Columbia and west across Kusawa Lake, resulting in a much bigger range today than in the 1990s.

Starting in the early-mid 1990s, radiotelemetry collars were deployed on caribou in the Southern Lakes, allowing biologists to track individuals during seasonal aerial surveys. Typically, an animal would be tracked a few times per year, providing extremely valuable information, but relatively few locations overall. Starting in the late 1990s, collared caribou began to be equipped with satellite collars, enabling biologists to monitor caribou movements remotely, often with multiple locations per day. This detailed data on caribou distribution allows biologists to identify patterns, trends, and changes over time that improve our understanding of caribou range use and identify important habitats for the herds.

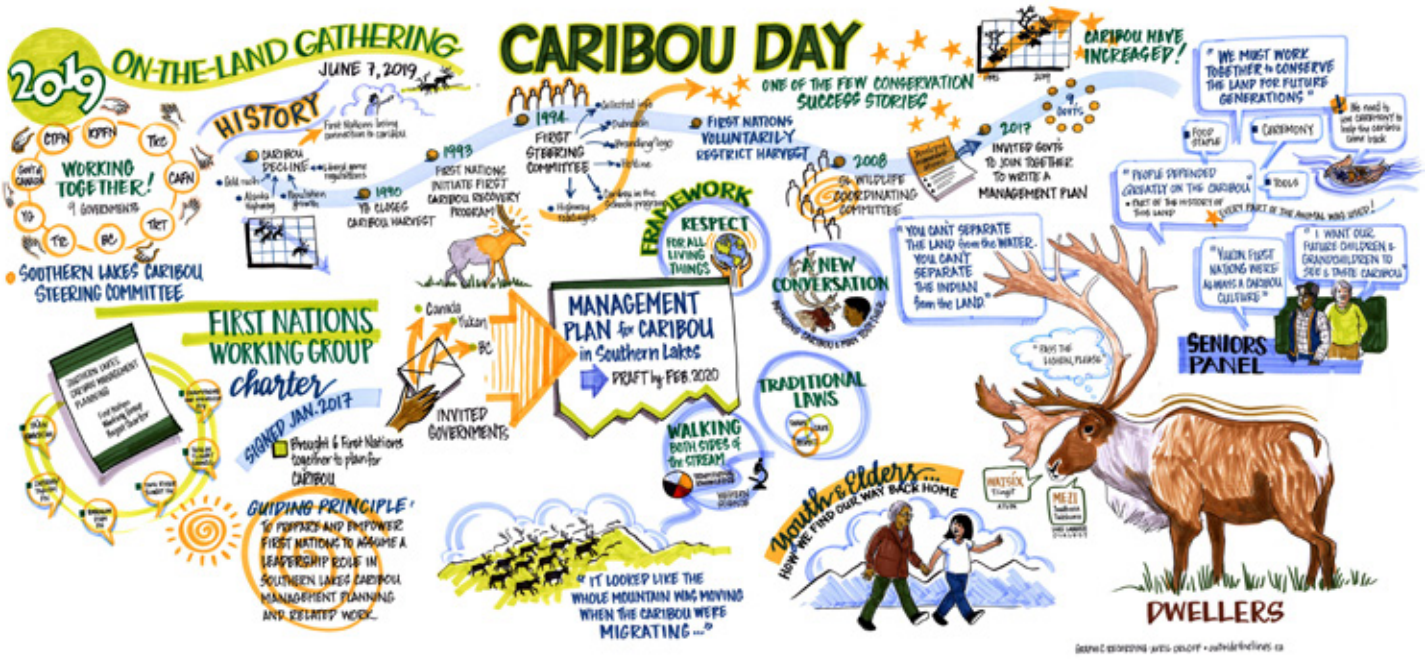
In the Southern Lakes, GPS collar technology has allowed us to track caribou distribution and range use as the populations have grown, contributing to changes in the mapped herd ranges over time.

KELSEY RUSSELL

Caribou Biologist, Fish and Wildlife Branch, Government of Yukon

- **8000 years ago:** Earliest dated caribou dung in ice patches in Southern Lakes[5]
- **1400–1000 years ago:** Gap where no caribou dung was deposited on ice patches, indicating that caribou may have moved out of the area, potentially related to ash fall from the Mount Churchill volcanic eruption in Alaska and/or warm conditions in the medieval warm period[6,7]
- **1000 years ago:** Caribou dung begins to accumulate in the ice patches again, indicating a return of caribou to the area. The Southern Lakes herds today can still be differentiated genetically from surrounding herds[8]
- **1800s:**The mountains moved with caribou
- **1898:** Klondike Gold Rush leads to stampede of tens of thousands of people moving through southern Yukon and northern British Columbia, construction of the Whitepass Railroad one of the first permanent developments in the herd ranges, hungry Klondike stampeders and advent of market hunting leads to high harvests
- **1942:** Completion of the Alaska Highway, followed by the construction of the Carcross, Tagish, and Atlin Roads in the following years. Yukon population starts to increase
- **1940s–1960s:** Local and Traditional knowledge indicate a rise in caribou numbers – "You can see that mountain (Nares), it's going like that with caribou. There was so many caribou there… I think it was '62 or '63. That was the most I've seen caribou… And after that I haven't seen that many caribou again." – Winnie Atlin, C/TFN Elder[9]
- **1960s–1990s:** Yukon's population roughly doubles, increasing from about 15,000 people in 1960 to 28,000 in 1990.[10]
- **1970s:** Increasing numbers of resident and non-resident hunters, liberal bag limits, and open cow harvest, as well as increased predation and poor weather events all contribute to population declines
- **1990:** Licensed hunting closures in Southern Lakes caribou range in Yukon
- **1992:** First caribou recovery meetings held in Carcross, Yukon
- **1993:** Signing of the Umbrella Final Agreement as the framework for Yukon Land Claim Agreements
- **1993:** Champagne and Aishihik First Nations and Teslin Tlingit Council sign Final and Self-Government Agreements
- **1993:** Initial Southern Lakes Caribou Recovery Plan drafted
- **1993:** Total caribou abundance thought to be around 1000 animals between all herds
- **1993:** Southern Lakes First Nations endorse a voluntary caribou hunting moratorium
- **1994:** Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee established and program coordinator hired
- **1994:** Southern Lakes Caribou Game Guardian Program initiated
- **1994:** "Wildlife Hotline" established to encourage public to report wildlife sightings
- **1996:** Licensed caribou hunting closures in the Squanga Lake area of Yukon
- **1997:** Signs warning motorists of caribou collision risk first placed on highways
- **1997:** Southern Lakes Caribou Recovery Action Plan updated
- **1997:** Ancient caribou pellets and human artifacts first discovered in ice patches on Thandlat, west of Kusawa Lake
- **1998:** The herds have increased to about 1600 caribou
- **1998:** Southern Lakes Caribou in the Schools Program first enters schools
- **2000:** Partnership with Klondike Snowmobile Association promoting respectful snowmobiling in caribou range
- **2002:** Research into the impacts of snowmobiles on caribou in Ibex winter range
- **2002:** Ta'an Kwäch'än Council signs Final and Self-Government Agreements
- **2003:** The herds have increased to about 2000 caribou
- **2005:** Carcross/Tagish and Kwanlin Dün First Nations sign Final and Self-Government Agreements, including specific provisions for management of Southern Lakes Caribou
- **2008:** The herds have increased to about 2650 caribou
- **2008:** Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee disbanded to make room for the Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee
- **2012:** Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee completes their assessment of wildlife and associated recommendations and is disbanded
- **2015:** Carcross caribou herd range assessment developed as a tool to address cumulative effects on the winter range
- **2016:** Southern Lakes Caribou planning concept discussed at the Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council's On-the-Land Gathering
- **2017:** Southern Lakes First Nations sign a project charter to establish a planning process
- **2017:** How We Walk with Land and Water process initiated by Carcross/Tagish and Kwanlin Dün First Nations and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council
- **2017:** Southern Lakes Caribou First Nation Working Group formed to lead the planning process
- **2018:** Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee reformed to create a caribou plan
- **2019:** The herds have increased to about 4850 caribou
- **2020:** Licensed hunting closed for the Carcross herd in British Columbia
- **2022:** Southern Lakes First Nations hold a Caribou Summit in Carcross to support the planning initiative
- **2024:** Southern Lakes Caribou Relationship Plan completed

5 Farnell et al. (2004).
6 Kuhn et al. (2010).
7 Farnell et al. (2004).
8 Kuhn et al. (2010).
9 O'Donoghue (1996).
10 Statistics Canada (2018).



Graphic illustration of discussions held on "Caribou Day" at the Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council's On-the-Land Gathering in 2019, one year into the planning process. This graphic illustrates the process and approach taken up until that period in the development of the plan.

THE RELATIONSHIP PLANNING PROCESS

The Southern Lakes Caribou Relationship planning process has been led by the First Nation partners and supported by all governments, making this a unique wildlife planning process in Yukon. First Nation leadership was coordinated through the work of the Southern Lakes Caribou First Nations Working Group (SLCFNWG), which operated alongside the SLCSC throughout the planning process. The SLCFNWG began meeting in 2016, developing a Project Charter to guide their work. Once the SLCSC was formed, both the SLCFNWG and SLCSC met regularly between 2018 and 2024 to move the planning process forward.

The Plan is guided and grounded in First Nations' Traditional Knowledge, values, culture, and history. Each planning partner brought different experiences, knowledge, and mandates to the process. Elders, youth, and First Nation Game Guardians, Land Stewards, and Environmental Monitors provided regular contributions at Steering Committee meetings and helped shape the Plan. The Steering Committee has also taken guidance from other models such as the Lands and Peoples Reconciliation Model[11] and All Knowledge Comes from the Land model[12]. We have striven for true collaboration in our planning process and look towards co-management in implementation. The success of the process is a testament to the relationships and respect forged through the Recovery Program and the continued commitment of the Parties and communities to work together for the sake of caribou.

The SLCSC Parties completed the terms of the planning relationship in 2019 in a document called the *Protocol and Procedures*. This document established the mandate of the SLCSC to create a plan for Southern Lakes Caribou. Among the stated goals of the Steering Committee was the intent to implement the 2012 recommendations of the SLWCC related to caribou, which is reflected in many of the recommendations found in this Plan (See the Appendices for the complete SLWCC recommendations related to caribou). The following are the Guiding Principles and Goals of the SLCSC during the planning process, as written in the *Protocol and Procedures*:

11 Jack, Joe Copper (2019).
12 Carcross Tagish First Nation, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. (2023).

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- This process is led by First Nations with an Indigenous worldview.
- The planning process will be holistic and inclusive in the spirit of reconciliation. All science and Traditional knowledge sources and perspectives are valued and integrated to the greatest extent possible.
- Traditional and Customary Practices of "Share, Care, and Respect" and "Respect, Reciprocity, and Relationship" will form the context for planning and management. We take care of the land and the land will take care of us.
- Steering Committee members will have equal access to the best available and relevant information, promoting the meaningful participation of all Parties, while respecting the confidentiality of sensitive information.
- Collaborate in good faith: Express concerns openly and directly. Be curious about diverse perspectives.
- The process will consider and use Case Law for self-governing and other First Nations.
- The process will implement the spirit and intent of the respective First Nation Final Agreements and other Government to Government agreements.

GOALS

12. Produce a management plan for the Southern Lakes caribou herds (Ibex, Laberge, Atlin, Carcross) that will:
    - Address the ecological, cultural and spiritual importance of caribou.
    - Identify habitat needs of caribou that has a long-term focus.
    - Coordinate First Nation Traditional Knowledge and Indigenous Science, including game guardian information.
    - Adaptively and proactively addressing climate change related threats to caribou
    - Establish peoples' relationship with caribou through education.
    - Provide for the implementation of the SLWCC recommendations.
    - Recognize First Nation land use laws.
    - Develop a co-management process for implementation of the management plan.
13. Address the management of issues as they arise in the interim while developing the management plan including:
    - Identifying and addressing data and knowledge gaps to better inform decision making.
    - Coordinating management efforts regionally and strategically.
    - Discussing development assessment proposals as needed.
    - Linking to relevant regional and local planning initiatives such as regional land use planning, forest resources planning, local area planning, etc.
14. Engage and educate managers, politicians, and the public through a variety of means about how to create and maintain sustainable and enduring caribou populations for future generations.

Knowledge Comes from the Land and Flows Together, from Connecting the Broken Salmon Trail: Our Relationship with Southern Lakes Salmon (2023).

WALKING BOTH SIDES OF THE STREAM

Traditional Knowledge has been and is often incorporated into management plans in tokenistic or cursory ways. It can be a struggle to truly integrate Traditional values and cultures with western science in decision-making processes without reconciling their fundamental differences. However, we believe that both forms of knowledge can complement each other in such a plan. By incorporating and respecting both approaches we have strived to create a foundation for implementation and decision-making that respects and is informed by both.

Consider the following metaphor: imagine a stream with two banks; on one bank walk First Nations, Traditional Knowledge, and local knowledge, while on the other side walk western governments and technical science. Both sides respect the stream and want to protect it. Both have knowledge and experience that can be used to inform decisions. At times, the stream narrows and allows western governments and First Nations to interact and collaborate. The stream cannot exist with only one stream bank. In this metaphor, the caribou are the stream, and both western and First Nation Governments must come together as equal partners. The Relationship Plan must reflect this partnership to truly resonate with all people and be successfully implemented.

VOICELESS/ DWELLERS PERSPECTIVE

Another approach used during the planning process was consider those that have no voice when making deliberations. Those that have no voice may include the Dwellers on the landscape (caribou) or future generations that have not yet been born. The Parties have consciously tried to give caribou a voice throughout the process. One way we have done so is by "leaving a seat at the table" for caribou in our discussions. This has been achieved by leaving one chair empty, with a photo of caribou, an antler, or a plush toy caribou sitting there. When the meetings were virtual, an image of caribou was shared to the screen or used as the profile photo for one participant. Time was taken to consider what the dwellers or voiceless may need or say.

As a Steering Committee, we wondered what Caribou would say to us now. How would they feel? What are their needs? What are their fears? How has the caribou seen our relationship change over time – good and bad? As we embraced the concept of giving the caribou a seat at the planning table, we also embraced that same perspective in this Relationship Plan. This is the spirit and energy that we have attempted to imbue in this plan, helping to tell the caribou's story, past, present, and future.

"I think the Caribou would tell us that our culture is so important to us. If we move away from our culture, if we lose part or parcel of it, we don't have much of a future as a people. Here the culture has grown out of and around the Caribou, so they are the culture.

ALLAN CARLICK

Taku River Tlingit Council (2021)

"They would want us to know where the Caribou come from, why the Caribou is here today. What it does for the people. All the gifts they give. Food, medicine, clothing, the history of the Caribou and how long they have been here. How they have allowed the people to survive and thrive, celebrate, with ceremony, song, dance. Young people need to know that; they need to know that the Caribou has always been a part of the people here. They are the reason that people were able to survive here and learn to live and be happy here.

RUSSELL BURNS

Kwanlin Dün First Nation (2021)

"Speaking for the Caribou: What are you people doing here? If you keep building and playing here, I will move away. I will find another place to live because you people keep on building all these houses and roads. This used to be my land but now you all move here. What are you going to do to help me?"here.

JEAN DESMARAIS

Carcross/Tagish First Nation (2021)

SOUTHERN LAKES CARIBOU MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Recognising the importance of celebrating the Recovery Program's successes, we also acknowledge that a cautious approach is now needed. When the Southern Lakes Recovery Program started in the 1990s, a population recovery objective of 2000 animals (later expanding to 2500) was established for the Ibex, Carcross, and Laberge herds combined. If we look only at population abundance, this recovery objective has been met, but does this mean that recovery has been achieved? Despite the encouraging and substantial growth in the caribou herds, we are likely still well short of historic abundance. There has been a marked increase in human population size and development in the Southern Lakes since the recovery program was initiated, and the future holds many unforeseen changes. In setting our expectations, we understand that the herds may never recover to their previous numbers.

We must take a new approach to population recovery, remembering to learn from the past, and allow ourselves and caribou the ability to adapt to changing conditions in the future. Our focus should be ongoing stewardship and relationship building so that we can strengthen the resilience of the Southern Lakes Caribou. Therefore, rather than setting numerical population targets, our new objectives focus on maintaining what we have gained through the Recovery Program, providing for future herd growth, and building relationships in the future. This allows the Plan to focus on maintenance and relationship-building, rather than the strict recovery measures prominent in the original Recovery Plan.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE:
MAINTAIN CARIBOU NUMBERS AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AMONG PEOPLE AND CARIBOU IN SOUTHERN LAKES

Herd	Most Recent Population Estimate	Herd-Specific Objective
Carcross	~ 850	Growth
Laberge	~ 750	Growth
Ibex	~ 1750	Growth
Atlin	~ 1550	Growth

Photo: Paul Dabbs

"Even if we've done that, we'll never get it back to the way they were, with thousands and thousands and thousands like they told me. My grandfather used to tell me 'You see that hill, it used to be just black.' Only thing you can do now, for what's there, is give it a helping hand. It would involve everybody, schools, everybody."

NORMAN ADAMSON

Ta'an Kwäch'än Council (2020)

"The Aishihik interpretation of a caribou tail hanging down; if a caribou tail is still down, they are not aware of you. Would like to see them with a tail hanging down because their tails must be up right now. Hopefully they can have their tails down again."

RON CHAMBERS

Champagne-Aishihik First Nation (2021)

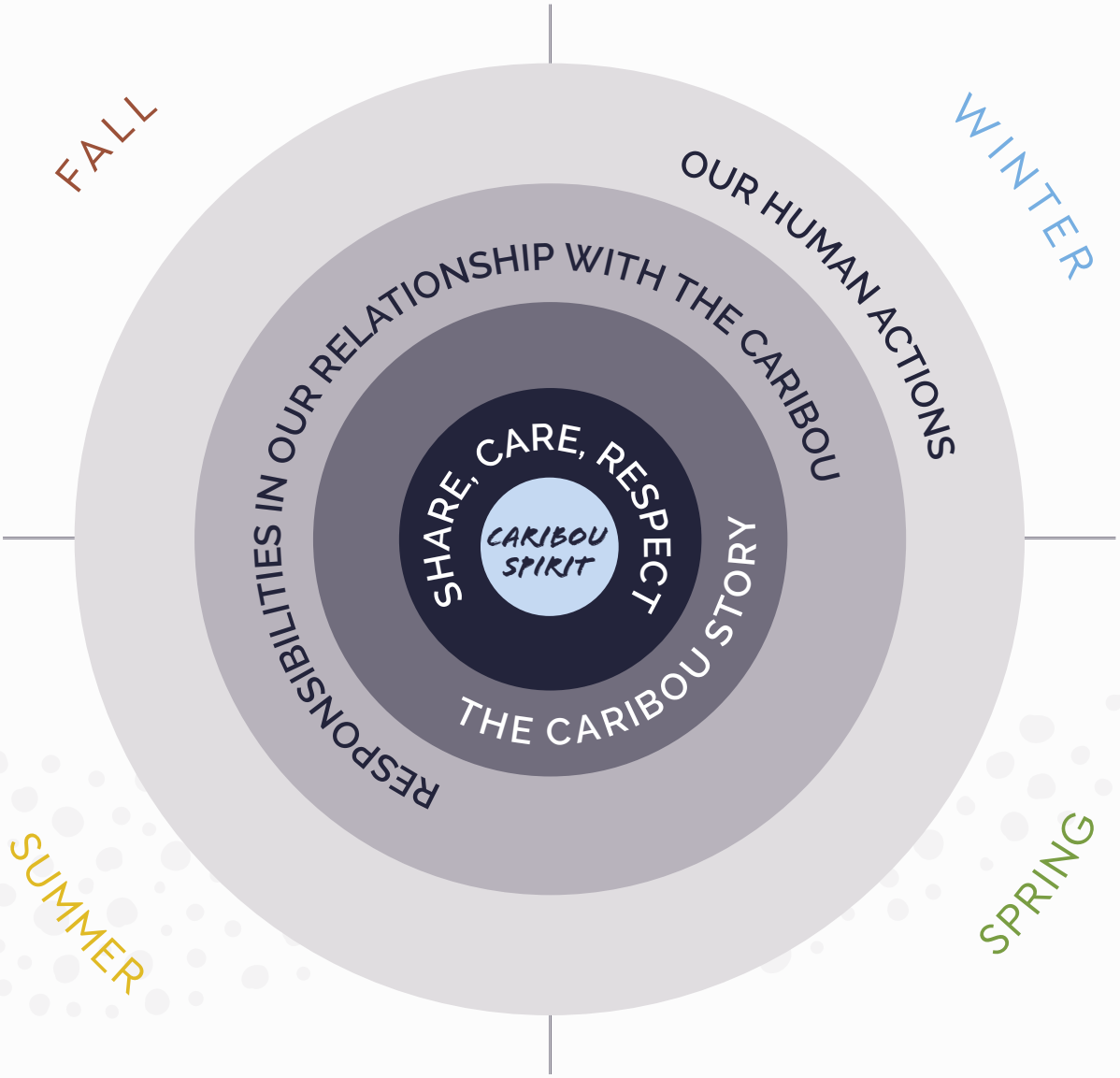
"Everything depends on us. And it's not just us. I don't understand why they focus...maybe because the First Nations are the caretakers of the land, and we take it a little more seriously. And people think that we are trying to hinder progress, and that's not it. We're not only looking out for our own kids and our own families, we are looking out for everybody that lives here, because that's our job. This is our land, that is our job. If we weren't that way, the people that live in this country would not be alive today."

ART JOHNS

Carcross/Tagish First Nation (2012)

THE CARIBOU SEASONAL ROUND

The Steering Committee created a visual and conceptual guide for readers of the Plan, the Southern Lakes Caribou Seasonal Round. The Plan uses the Seasonal Round as a framework for story telling, acknowledging that our relationships are not static, they change through the seasons, and progress over time. With this knowledge, we can better understand our responsibilities to the caribou, and have clarity on the actions that governments and individuals can take to build our relationship with caribou.



At the centre of the Seasonal Round is **the Caribou spirit** and our spiritual connection to caribou. This is the foundation for our relationship with caribou, the land, and the water. Having this at the core of the Plan is representative of our effort to give the caribou a true voice in the Plan. It incorporates traditional stories and ceremony. We understand and recognize the close familial relationships and responsibilities people have with our caribou relatives.

Share, Care, and Respect are pillars of traditional law that guide Tagish, Tlingit, and Southern Tuchone interactions with the land, all living things, and each other. We look to these as guiding principles informing commitments and recommended actions proposed in this Plan. This is about sharing our knowledge, observations, and experiences of caribou. It is about caring for the caribou and each other. It is about respecting the lands, waters, and all their inhabitants. We take a holistic view, in the spirit of relationship and reciprocity.

Here we reflect on **the Caribou's story.** Throughout the year, caribou must move between their seasonal ranges, avoid predators and human disturbances, find their preferred foods, and adapt to weather conditions and natural landscape changes like wildfire. Caribou enjoy peace and quiet in the spaces they inhabit. Caribou must work harder today to find areas that are not disturbed or being used by people. We share the land with caribou. As we plan for a healthy relationship with caribou, we ask: what do the caribou need? The caribou's story through the seasons informs the remaining rings of the Seasonal Round and is used as context within which the "Responsibilities to Caribou" and "Our Human Actions" are placed.

As humans we have **responsibilities in our relationship with the caribou**. We acknowledge that our actions may impact caribou, both negatively and positively, and we have a responsibility to understand and manage these impacts. Our responsibilities are seasonal, shifting as caribou move through their world. Our actions create ripples in the lives of the caribou, whether the caribou are tromping through deep winter snow to avoid disturbance or swimming a narrow portion of the lakes to get to rut range. There are many things we can do to understand and acknowledge our responsibilities, which are explored through the Seasonal Round.

The outer ring of the Seasonal Round symbolizes the **human actions** we can take to improve our relationship with caribou and help them thrive long into the future. Our actions reflect the spirit of caribou, the guiding principles of Share, Care, and Respect, the Caribou's story, and our collective responsibilities. What steps will we take? How will we conduct ourselves with the knowledge we have?

SPIRIT & CARIBOU

Photo: John Meikle

Ceremony is an important action people can take to maintain and express our relationship with caribou. Ceremony does not need to be lavish or grand, it is often individual; however, it requires intention. The primary role of ceremony is to honour, give thanks, and acknowledge a connection and relationship.

Some examples of ceremony:

- Offering a prayer or words of thanks when seeing caribou on the land or prior to harvesting
- Welcoming/inviting the caribou to return along their migration
- Providing an offering when altering or using a habitat
- Sharing caribou's story
- Traditional dances and songs
- Using all the parts of the caribou without waste

> "I mean, I think, you know, walking with nature, you know, you feel bad about your lot in life, you go for a walk, and you listen to the birds, you feel the wind, or the sun, it has an effect on you. And, to me, all of this, the stewardship, the relationship, the connections, to me, above all of that, is the spirit. That's something that our ancestors practiced. They lived with virtue.

CHARLOTTE HADDEN

Carcross/Tagish First Nation (N.D)

> "We need to start in schools and teach how to approach harvest. Start with ceremony... Caribou are hurting now. We need to use ceremony to help the caribou come back.

MARK WEDGE

Carcross/Tagish First Nation (2022)

Commitments

1. Include ceremony, spirit, and relationship with caribou in public documentation, education, and outreach developed by the Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee.
2. Provide Caribou a seat at the table of any meetings held by the Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee.
3. The member governments of the Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee acknowledge we are here for caribou and their existence on the landscape forever.

> We respect the land. My mother used to tell me that when they went to the Taku, they would offer a prayer for guidance. Way of life has to be complimentary to all the species that the land holds. Very important to us, especially in relation to land.

ANDY WILLIAMS

Carcross/Tagish First Nation (2022)

> Just like the medicine wheel it's hard to explain because we grew up on it, respecting it intrinsically, living with it and from it. Others don't have the same relationship because they are not connected to how it is sustaining them.

RUSSELL BURNS

Kwanlin Dün First Nation (2021

> We respect the land. My mother used to tell me that when they went to the Taku, they would offer a prayer for guidance. Way of life has to be complimentary to all the species that the land holds. Very important to us, especially in relation to land.

GEORGINA SYDNEY

Teslin Tlingit Council (2021)

THE MAN WHO WENT WITH THE CARIBOU

AS TOLD BY TOMMY PETERS
TESLIN, 1951

Once a man had the caribou for his yéik (Tl., spirit helper).

And he went with his caribou. He was following some.

And all of a sudden he met two young girls.

And he forgot all about the caribou. He forgot about the caribou he was hunting.

And he began to go with the girls.

A long time afterwards, it was like he woke up.

He found that he really was with the caribou, and that he was digging away the snow and pulling up grass to eat just like a caribou.

When he realized that he was going around with a caribou out in the bush, he wanted to get away.

But he didn't know how to do it.

He had another yéik. It was an eagle.

And after a while he began to think about it all the time.

Pretty soon a big eagle flew over the herd.

When it went low it whispered to the man to be ready the next time.

Those two girls must have guessed that the man was trying to get away.

They stuck close to the man, one on each side.

But when the eagle flew over again, it managed to get that man and fly away with him.

He went back near his home.

But for a whole year he didn't going into his camp.

When a man has been with the animals like that, nothing is worse than a woman.

It is the worst thing for him, they say.

Sometimes the wind blew so that he could smell the women in his camp.

And the odor made him so sick, he almost could not stand it.

They say that he had hair on his arms and legs, just about like a caribou.

This is a true story.

It happened to a man down the river. A man from that place told me.

And he told me about the hair on the man's arms and legs.

I guess it was because that man tried to get too strong a caribou yéik (Tl., spirit helper) that the caribou took him.

Photo: Government of Yukon

SHARE, CARE, RESPECT

Photo: Government of Yukon

Share, Care, and Respect are pillars of traditional law that guide Tagish, Tlingit, and Southern Tuchone interactions with the land, all living things, and each other. We look to these as guiding principles informing commitments and recommended actions proposed in this Plan. This is about sharing our knowledge, observations, and experiences of caribou. It is about caring for the caribou and each other. It is about respecting the lands, waters, and all their inhabitants. We take a holistic view, in the spirit of relationship and reciprocity.

> If you don't look after the land, don't expect it to look after you. I was brought up with all these teachings about respect. Respect the land and the wildlife.

PATRICK JAMES

Carcross/Tagish First Nation (N.D)

> Respect my culture by teaching it to the people and the children. How to honor our practices and ways that honour the spirit and the land and the animals. Show my respect for the culture by teaching it. When you care for your culture, you take care of your land.

ALLAN CARLICK

Taku River Tlingit First Nation (2021)

Commitment

4. The values of Share, Care, and Respect will guide any commitments, recommendations, plans, and actions that are developed or taken by the Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee.

"We used to live off of the plants and animals and had to harvest them ourselves, so we would never destroy it or pollute it. Respect has to be learned through showing and doing, not talking and lecturing, the importance of what we are taught when we are young.

RUSSELL BURNS

Kwanlin Dün First Nation (2021)

"Respect that you give to the Caribou and any animal. Equal respect to all creatures. Respecting them all, regarding them all. Help them from the trouble we have caused them. Respect!

JEAN DESMARAIS,

Carcross/Tagish First Nation (2021)

"You never know it all. You can always learn from another, no matter what age or circumstance. Humility. You never know it all, you can learn every day."

TIM DEWHURST

Teslin Tlingit Council (2021)

THE MAN WHO JUST TOOK ANIMAL SKINS, AS TOLD BY JIMMY SCOTTY JAMES

CARCROSS, 1950

There was one man, an Indian, and he was killing lots of game. And he just used to take the skins off the animals and throw them the meat and let it spoil. That man is doing it all the time.

Finally he sees a bull caribou—a great big one comes up to him along the draw.

And the man is waiting at the head of the draw. He is waiting there for that caribou to come to him. And that man watches the caribou come closer.

When he hit him, he said the arrow fell off that caribou each time. That caribou just has nothing but bone all over. And that's the one that is going to eat the man.

The Indian tries to hit him but he can't do it. The caribou puts his horns under the man and picks him up from the ground. And then that caribou starts to walk away to where the sun sets. He keeps on going day and night. The man is on his horns.

I don't know how many days the caribou travels with him. The man runs around on the caribou's back. He walks around, and he feels around all over him to see which way he is going to tell someone to hit the caribou if he sees someone. The caribou has bone all over, but just right in from here [Jimmy pointed to the base of his neck] he's got a hole.

Finally one day the man sees somebody sitting there, peeping out at the caribou.

The man [who was watching] sees him. The caribou keeps walking. And that man is coming closer. And then that man 'tells' [the hunter]: he puts his hand all around [the man gestures] and says that he [the caribou] is just like that [bone] all over. He never tells [the hunter] out loud though, he just motions. Then he tells [indicates through gestures] the man, "Just right here!" He points to the caribou's throat. "Hit him right here!"

And then the man comes close enough, and he hits the caribou. By gosh, he hits him in the right spot, just like a gun shot. And by gosh, he kills that caribou!

And that [hunting] man asks the first man where he has come from, where the caribou has packed him from. "Oh," he says, "a long ways. I'm a long ways from here" And that [second] man tells him, "Come to my camp. I'll give you some grub to get to your home."

So the man goes home with him. And [then] he packs the food home, and he gets home.

And he stays around there for a little while. The other people tell him. "It's no good for you just to take the [animal] skins off. It's bad luck for you!"

And he doesn't listen. He just keeps on doing it. He keeps killing game and [just] taking the skins off.

Finally, I think it was the same woman who came to him, the one who tried to fill the snowshoes, I think that's the one. [Jimmy is referring to "Animal Mother", no.75.] Then the man kills a bunch of sheep, and he just takes the skins off. And he just takes a little meat, just enough to live on. He takes it to his camp, and he camps there alone below.

When it is nighttime and he is going to go

Illustration: Heidi Marion

to sleep, he looks up where he has killed the sheep. By gosh, he sees a big fire come out of the first sheep, a big light, and then the next one. It goes through every sheep, that big light. Maybe they are burning up. [Jimmy may have meant to convey that their bodies were being cremated, as was proper for humans. Or did he imply that their souls were leaving for the after world?]

And that man sits down. He has no way to do anything. He is too far from camp. And then, when it gets to the last one, the big fire comes out again. And it starts down towards the man, and he says [to himself?], "That's going to be the end of the ride this time!"

Then he hears somebody talking. "Now here you are, you're sitting down," she says. "You're making my children suffer without their clothes! You take their clothes off!" And that man never says anything. She is just looking at him – that's the way she talks to him. And that woman asks him where his home is.

And that man says, "It's over this way."

"Soon in the morning, you have to go home. And you tell your people which way I tell you!" And then she is gone. He is going to go home.

She has said, "Tell your people when they kill the sheep, tell them to get the meat out of the body!"

And then he tells them all the stories that the woman has told him. But that is all for that. He just falls back then, just like a gunshot. He is dead, that man. That's all.

THE CARIBOU STORY

Commitment

5. Caribou's perspective will be considered in all commitments, recommendations, plans, and actions that are developed or taken by the Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee.

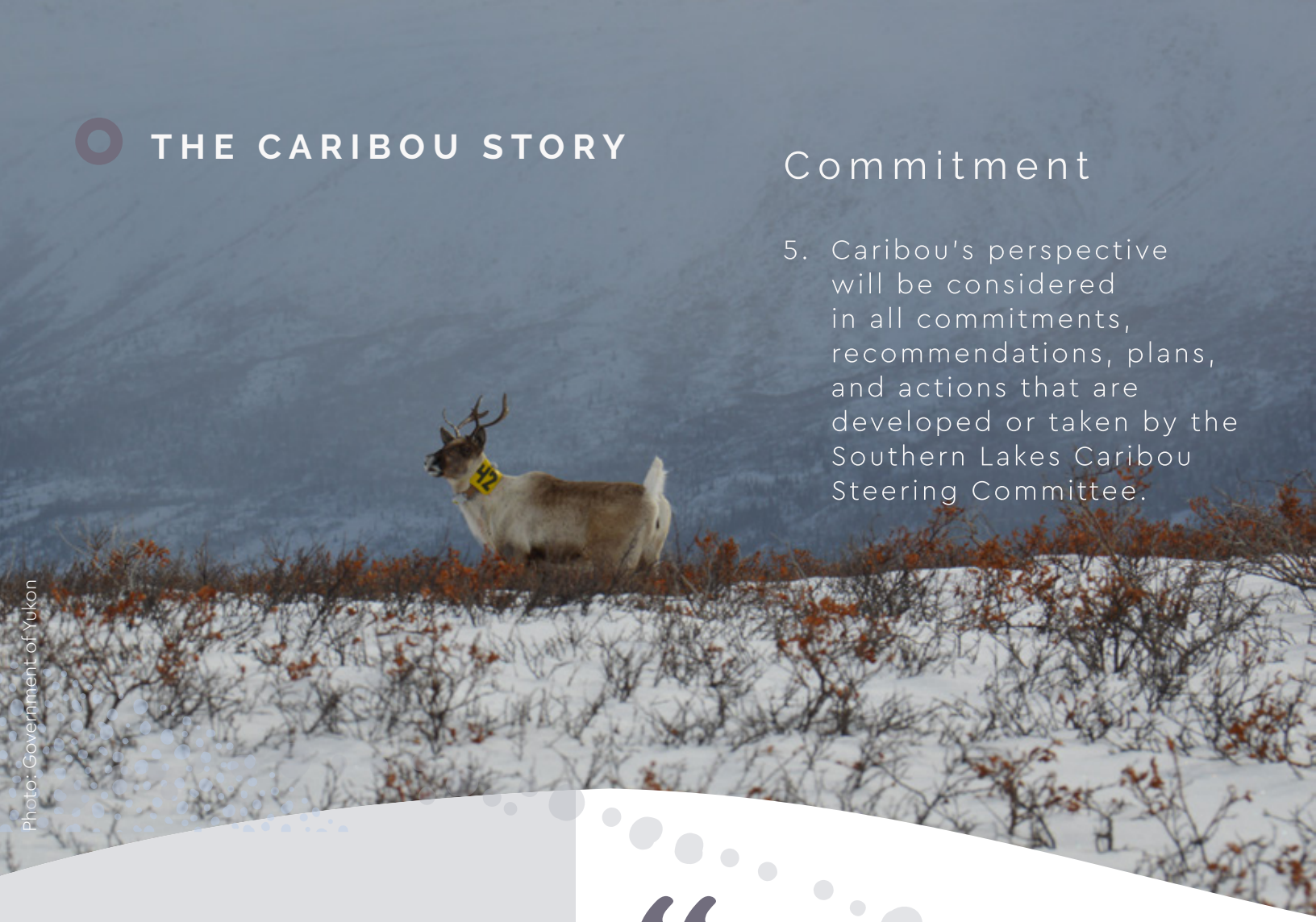


Photo: Government of Yukon

Here we reflect on the **Caribou's story**. Throughout the year, caribou must move between their seasonal ranges, avoid predators and human disturbances, find their preferred foods, and adapt to weather conditions and natural landscape changes like wildfire. Caribou enjoy peace and quiet in the spaces they inhabit. Caribou must work harder today to find areas that are not disturbed or being used by people. We share the land with caribou. As we plan for a healthy relationship with caribou, we ask: what do the caribou need? The caribou's story through the seasons informs the remaining rings of the Seasonal Round and is used as context within which the "Responsibilities to Caribou" and "Our Human Actions" are placed.

"The natural ways of life were the only hardship. Life was once simple and good for the Caribou. Most people have forgotten the real inherent value of the Caribou, and nature itself. This place is so hard on them now, their corridors are all clogged up with fences, buildings, hay fields. We need to show much more respect. Caribou would say you are destroying my home. You should be looking after it. The story of the Caribou is a lot like it is for every other animal. Not being able to travel freely and take care of themselves the way they once would have been able to.

WILLIE ASP

Ta'an Kwäch'än Council (2021)

"We are moving in on their land. We are the visitors. They were here first. We have overrun their land. The tunnels under the roads, or over the roads that allow them to move more freely. Don't fence me in, stop building roads everywhere. Tell my story, don't forget about me. I'm a part of the Yukon. I am part of your culture. Don't forget about me.

SHIRLEY BEATTIE

Ta'an Kwäch'än Council (2021)

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE CARIBOU

As humans we have **responsibilities in our relationship with the caribou**. We acknowledge that our actions may impact caribou, both negatively and positively, and we have a responsibility to understand and manage these impacts. Our responsibilities are seasonal, shifting as caribou move through their world. Our actions create ripples in the lives of the caribou, whether the caribou are tromping through deep winter snow to avoid disturbance or swimming a narrow portion of the lakes to get to rut range. There are many things we can do to understand and acknowledge our responsibilities, which are explored through the Seasonal Round.

"Respecting animals means, with Elders teaching the way, have to find a way to teach respecting the animals. Don't go out on the land and destroy everything. We were taught that. We do share our land, somewhat, today, but we are still on different regulations, different governments. We are having a tougher time with the governments. We are not educating them enough to understand our capabilities and our love for the land."

ALLAN CARLICK

Taku River Tlingit (2021)

"Ha Kus'teeyi' talks about our responsibility as well, not just our rights and protecting them, it talks about looking after everything for future generations.

GEORGINA SYDNEY

Teslin Tlingit Council (2021)

"Seeing animals come to people is a sign that something is in trouble. They don't come to people unless they are in trouble. We might need to revive their food stocks until the underlying problems are in better balance. We need to fix what we have caused as issues. We have to recognize the problems that the animals are showing us. We need to see the problems so we can do something about them."

CHARLIE BURNS

Kwanlin Dün First Nation (2021)

"There are large-scale societal costs to mitigating caribou population declines through major recovery projects. To "not go there" in the first place will require revising management strategies that need active population monitoring and regulation of human activity relative to vulnerable herds. Additionally, communication strategies need to emphasize the need for people to moderate their caribou harvest expectations. The implications of our past experience highlight the importance of focusing our perspective on complex and long-term interactions rather than focusing instead on simple short-term explanations and solutions.

RICHARD FARNELL

from Farnell (2009), *Three Decades of Caribou Recovery Programs in Yukon: A Paradigm Shift in Wildlife Management*

OUR HUMAN ACTIONS

Photo: John Meikle

The outer ring of the Seasonal Round symbolizes the **actions** we can take to improve our relationship with caribou and help them thrive long into the future. Our actions reflect the spirit of caribou, the guiding principles of Share, Care, and Respect, the Caribou's story, and our collective responsibilities. What steps will we take? How will we conduct ourselves with the knowledge we have?

"There was no separation between us, our lives, and the life of the land. Today we have to make a different set of rules because we don't get out on the land as much as we used to, and so we don't know as much about what is going on as we used to."

ALLAN CARLICK

Taku River Tlingit First Nation (2021)

"We need more enforcement. This should be a top priority for protection and management."

ANDY WILLIAMS

Taku River Tlingit First Nation (2021)

"Ya, everything they need was there. They just have to figure out how they're going to work at it. No matter what it is. There was lots of game and how to respect the game. They know how to protect the game. One time up here on Montana Mountain, wanna go up there skiing, everything we did we always ask old people. So we asked some of the old people around Carcross, we wanna go up the Mountain up there Montana go skiing up on the mountain, that's what we want to do. And the old people tell us, no, you shouldn't go up there because that is caribou, that's caribou habitat, caribou live there, you don't want to disturb them, you gotta have respect for the game. They tell us not to go up there, because we're gonna abuse them, see? And we didn't go up there because we had to listen to the old people. And everything we do, we gonna go camping somewhere, we gonna go hunting, we always ask the old people. They always tell us where to go and how to go about when we get there."

NORMAN JAMES

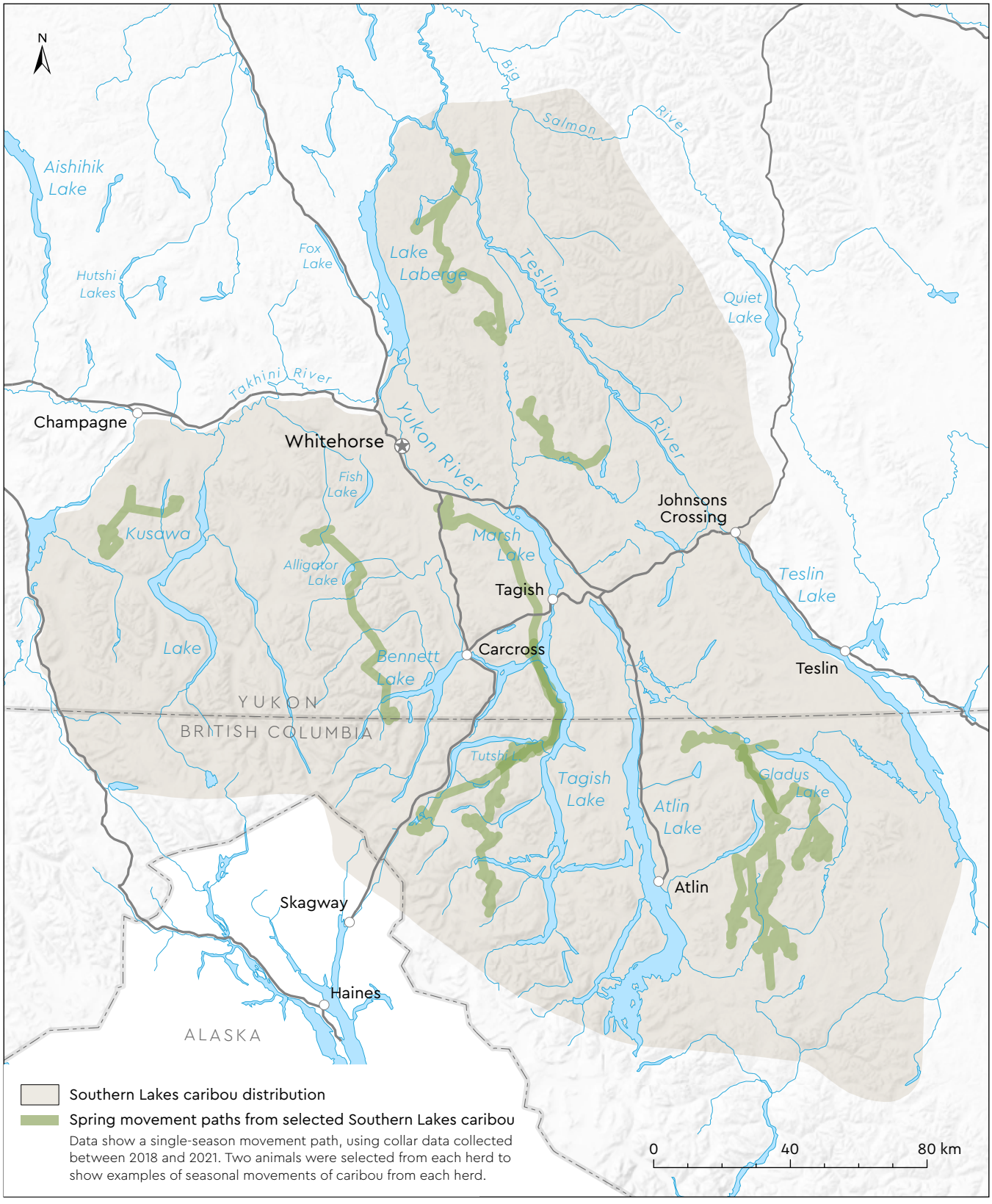
Carcross/Tagish First Nation (2013)

"We shouldn't be using game trails for ATV or other recreation. We shouldn't be using game trails. We should use vehicles recreationally. This is their home–the caribou--and we are visitors. We need to respect that. It's their home!"

GEORGINA SYDNEY

Teslin Tlingit Council (2021)

MAP 2: Spring Movements of Southern Lakes Caribou



SPRING

THE CARIBOU STORY

Spring is a time of renewal and rebirth. When the days are becoming longer and the snow is melting, we start to move toward the mountains. Pregnant cows are the first to move, driven by a desire to reach their favoured calving areas in time for the calving season. The bulls and younger animals might spend several more weeks in the winter range prior to making their movement to summer range. We sometimes must cross man-made or natural obstacles in our path. We make use of the narrows and shorelines of the large Southern Lakes and avoid the open ice, because if the ice is thin, we might fall through. Fences, gravel pits, roads, subdivisions, and other human developments often lay across our path, and we must adapt, sometimes taking a longer route. We want a home without fences where we can escape predators and live the right way.

Our calves are usually born toward the end of May or early June. Some of us make substantial movements south into the large coastal mountains to find places to calve. Others make shorter migrations from lowland winter ranges to nearby upland calving areas. Many of us will return to the same locations year after year. We have our calves on rugged alpine ridges or in the alpine fir and shrubs. This is a dangerous time for the cows because the predators seek out our calves. We space out from one another, so wolves, grizzlies, coyotes, wolverine, and eagles have a harder time finding us during this vulnerable period. Cold and wet weather can also be dangerous for the small calves. Most calves that are born will not live to see the end of their first summer.

OUR RESPONSONSIBILITIES TO THE CARIBOU

Spring is a time of new beginnings. It is our responsibility to ensure caribou have safe places to have their calves, where they are left alone without human disturbance. We can care for the caribou by developing plans that identify and protect these areas and maintain connection to other seasonal habitats so that caribou can access them. Many old fences were removed during the 1990s and 2000s to improve caribou's ability to move across the land, and we should continue to minimize fences in the herd ranges. It is important to monitor human activities and how they may affect the caribou and their ability to freely move through their ranges. It is important to educate people by sharing the Traditional Knowledge and scientific data describing caribou's seasonal needs through community engagement and communication.

It is important to understand the impacts of predation on calving success and survival. Investigations of collared cow caribou mortalities in Southern Lakes between 2019 and 2022 revealed that 67% were killed by predators (33% by wolves, 20% by grizzly bears, and 13% by unidentified predators). Of the mortalities due to predation, 90% occurred during the spring and summer (Environment Yukon, unpublished data).

Working together on behalf of the caribou is an important lesson shared by Elders and gained through our experience in the Recovery Program. People are responsible not only for caribou, but also to themselves and their communities. It is part of our

Photo: John Meikle

responsibility to work together to develop solutions that will help meet our vision and goals. We must work collaboratively to make informed decisions. This means all the SLCSC Parties working together with Boards and Councils, communities, stakeholder groups, and the public to support caribou.

Throughout this planning process, the Parties have recognized the importance of the SLCSC to facilitate the collaborative approach to caribou management beyond Plan completion. Recognizing the importance of formal collaboration and looking back on the previous successes of the Steering Committee (1994–2007), the Parties suggest this model carry forward into Plan implementation.

OUR HUMAN ACTIONS

Springtime is a traditional time for people to gather, celebrate, and discuss what they are seeing out on the land. Following in these footsteps, spring is a time for us to bring together the Parties, individuals, and organizations involved in caribou stewardship to discuss monitoring, research, and harvest information that has been compiled over the seasons. The SLCSC is recommending an Annual Gathering as a forum for sharing information and perspectives, supporting informed and collaborative decision making.

This is also a time for sharing information more broadly, gathering additional information, connecting with Traditional

SPRING

Commitment

6. The Parties maintain the Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee as the organization to collaboratively implement the Relationship Plan and ongoing caribou management and relationship activities. This should include mechanisms to acknowledge and enable First Nations leadership in implementation.

teachings and skills, and continuing to reduce human impacts to caribou. An annual newsletter should be published to share information about caribou recovery efforts with a broader audience. Important movement and migration corridors need to be maintained (SLWCC Recommendation 2.18), while disturbance to caribou in calving areas should be minimized. While woodland caribou do not traditionally have "calving grounds", they habitually use the same areas and information collected over the past several decades should be used to learn what we can of potentially important calving areas and the routes caribou utilize to travel to and from them.

THE ANNUAL GATHERING

The Annual Gathering is envisioned as a multi-day co-management process to facilitate implementation of the Relationship Plan and ongoing caribou and habitat management[13]. The gathering is intended to build relationships and trust between the Parties, learn together, and use shared knowledge to guide collaborative decision-making. The process mirrors traditional seasonal gatherings and methods of communication and relationship building.

Conceptual framework of the Annual Gathering structure and process, including the potential attendees, information sources and indicators to be discussed and used in making recommendations, and the outcomes of the gathering.

Who will attend?	What will be discussed?	What will be the outcome?
• Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee • Government representatives, including managers, biologists, and land guardians/monitors • Elders and youth • Renewable Resources Councils (Carcross/Tagish, Laberge, Alsek, and Teslin) • Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board • BC Regional Wildlife Advisory Council • Hunters, trappers, and other local knowledge holders • Educators	• Elders' direction • Land guardian/monitor knowledge • Monitoring results • Caribou range use • First Nation cultural health • Local knowledge (local knowledge survey results, testimonials from residents, etc.) • Caribou body condition and health • Cultural hunt and culture camp updates • Hunter reports and harvest data • Vehicle collisions • Population modeling • Predator abundance • Moose population status • Recreation and human impact monitoring • Human disturbance monitoring and update • School program updates	• Herd status reports or updates • Implementation tracking updates • Recommendations to governments • Actions for Parties to the Plan

13 The SLCSC Protocol and Procedures includes the Goal to "Produce a management plan for the Southern Lakes caribou herds (Ibex, Laberge, Carcross, Atlin) that will…Develop a co-management process for implementation of the management plan."

Photo: Andrew Serack

Recommended Actions

1. The Parties complete a Terms of Reference for the Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee, allowing for: • the implementation of the Relationship Plan as well as support for ongoing engagement, education, and coordinated management of Southern Lakes Caribou and their habitats • membership consisting of one representative from each participating government, a seat for caribou (see Commitment #2), as well as potential for Elder and/or youth membership • regular meetings of the Steering Committee (e.g., quarterly) • involvement of co-management boards and councils • exploration of long-term funding and administration solutions to ensure the longevity of the SLCSC	IMMEDIATE PRIORITY
2. The Steering Committee will host an Annual Gathering as a forum to support collaborative decision-making and joint implementation of the Relationship Plan.	INAUGURAL GATHERING SPRING 2025
3. An annual public newsletter will be produced by the Steering Committee to share information on Southern Lakes Caribou and the implementation of the Relationship Plan.	ANNUALLY
4. Update mapped caribou range information. • Identify commonly used calving areas, the habitat characteristics of these sites, and the timing of calving activity. • Identify high-use caribou summer areas and the characteristics of these sites. • Update important rut range areas. • Update important winter range areas. • Map important movement routes between seasonal habitat patches and migration routes between seasonal habitats.	HIGH PRIORITY
5. Continue to opportunistically remove old fences and support policies that minimize the creation of new fences or other obstacles to movement and migration.	ONGOING

MAP 3: Summer Movements of Southern Lakes Caribou

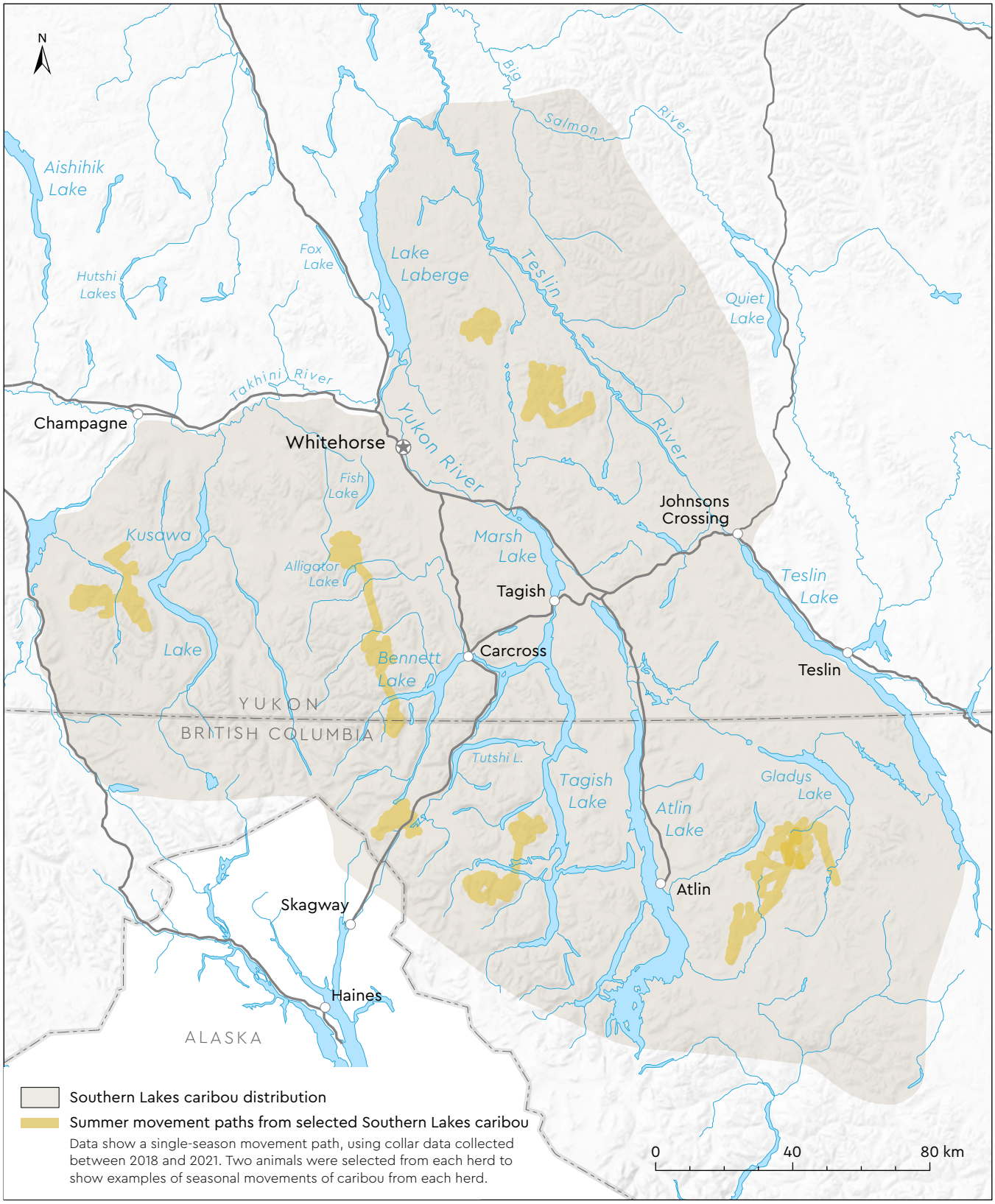


Photo: John Meikle

> We need to stop complicating the matter for them. Less intervention more prevention. Everything great and small is being affected. We will have to start being creative in order to do anything about climate change.

CHARLIE JAMES

Carcross/Tagish First Nation (2021)

> Need to do some planning around hiking because of the impacts on wildlife, but also on our hunting and gathering activities. Trails are often made public knowledge, some of these are traditional trails and areas.

CTRRC LOCAL KNOWLEDGE SURVEY PARTICIPANT

from Jessup and Larsen (2022), Local Knowledge Survey of the Southern Lakes

> We have to respect the whole environment, all wildlife, we have to conduct ourselves and remember that the habitats don't belong to us. It's their home and if we are always there we are disturbing them. Caribou are up in the mountains in the summertime, and there is a lot of human activity going on at that time, everyone getting out on the land, and that pushes the caribou farther away and causes them a lot of stress. Those places were their homes before we ever showed up, but we don't act like it's their home.

GEORGINA SYDNEY

Teslin Tlingit Council (2021)

SUMMER

THE CARIBOU STORY

Once the calves are strong enough and summer comes, we begin to come together in small groups and move higher on the mountains. We use ice patches, glaciers, and windy places to stay cool and escape pestering insects. We like to eat fresh greenery during these times, such as grasses, sedges, shrubs, small flowering plants, and mushrooms if we can find them. We might also visit mineral licks, especially during the early summer. This time is very important for the cows who need to provide milk for their growing calves as well as put on weight for the coming rut and winter.

While our calves are growing over the summer, they remain vulnerable to predation. The mountains are our refuge, and while we sometimes move between mountains, we often remain in the same mountainous areas for the duration of summer. When we do move from one such area to another, we would like to do so safely.

OUR RESPONSONSIBILITIES TO THE CARIBOU

Summer is a busy time when people spend more time on the land. For the caribou, they are moving into the mountains to seek respite from the heat, insects, and predators. While many hikers and other travellers in the mountains may encounter curious caribou, it is important to be mindful of the potential impacts of disturbance, and the importance of these mountain refuges. It is important that the cows obtain enough nutrition to provide for their nursing calves.

The summer period has often been overlooked in past management or planning processes and important summer habitats have not been mapped. We have a responsibility to ensure that caribou continue to have access to their summer refuges in the mountains, especially since these areas are themselves becoming at risk.

Caribou have habitually used the same ice patches for thousands of years, but these are rapidly disappearing. Research in the Southern Lakes has shed light on the important relationship between ice patches and caribou, as well as the people who rely on them. The ice patches have been integral to caribou lifestyle and survival, and over millennia humans have taken advantage of this predictability to access caribou for their own survival. There are many potential concerns related to a warming climate, potentially affecting caribou throughout the seasons, such as loss of summer ice patches, increased insect harassment, potentially increased winter snowfall, or increased winter thawing events[14]. We have a responsibility to help caribou have the resilience to adapt to future changes. Ensuring the connectivity between remaining habitats and the interconnectedness of the herds may be important factors to provide resilience in the face of an uncertain future[15].

OUR HUMAN ACTIONS

This is the season when we have opportunity to conduct alpine research, including on ice patches and the ancient relationship between caribou and the alpine. The importance of summer habitats should be highlighted. This includes mapping important summer habitats and improving our understanding of their importance within the Seasonal Round. We should work to understand the impacts of changing climate on caribou and how this might affect caribou during the summer as well as other seasons. Outreach materials should be developed to help teach people about the role of summer habitats and how they can minimize their potential impacts when sharing these spaces with caribou.

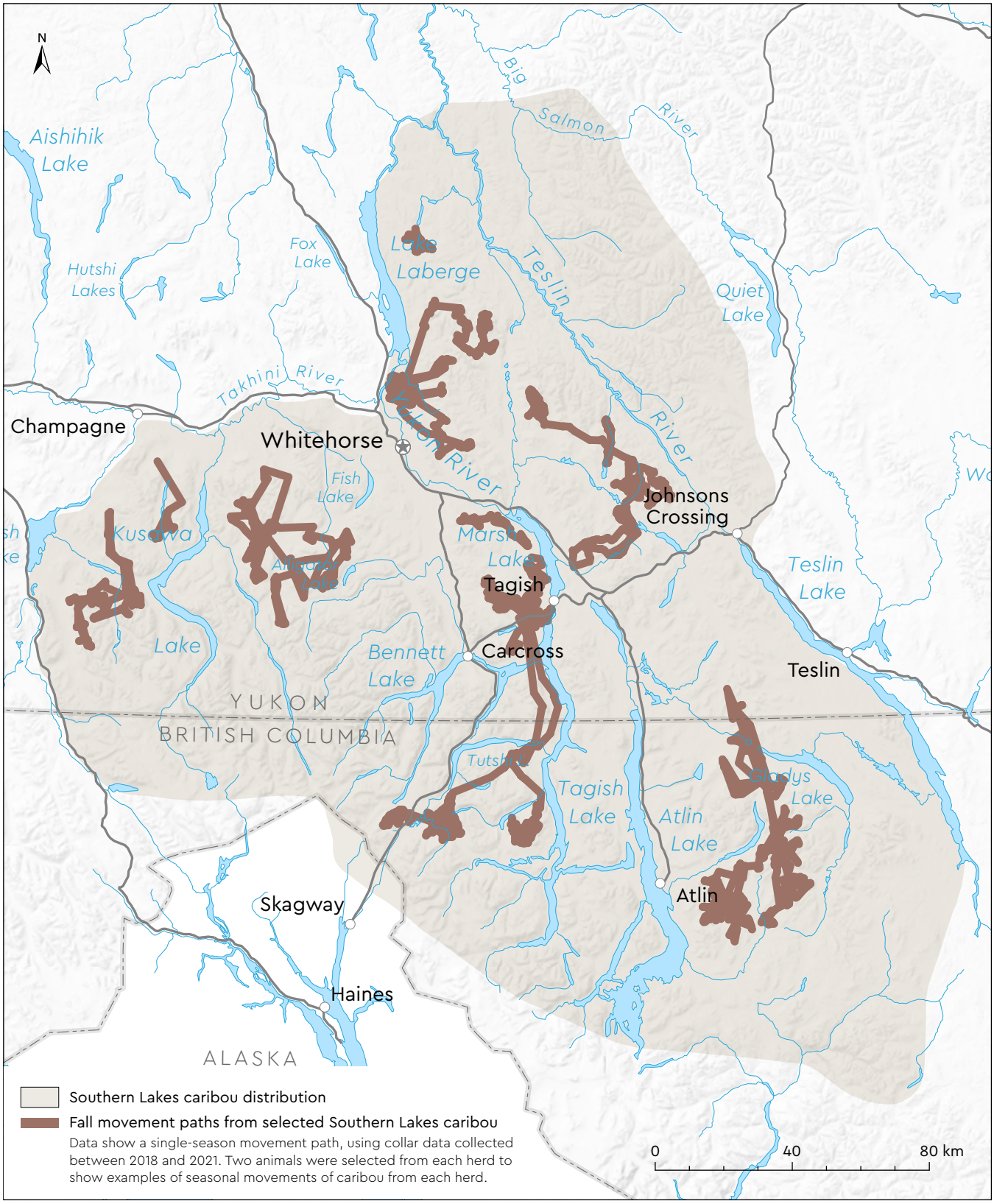
14 Kuhn et al. (2010).
15 Kuhn et al. (2010).

Recommended Actions

6. The Steering Committee and the Parties continue to support and be involved with ongoing ice patch research and help share the knowledge with the public.	ONGOING
7. Incorporate climate change and climate adaptation research into monitoring programs for Southern Lakes caribou.	AS NEEDED

Photo: John Meikle

MAP 4: Fall Movements of Southern Lakes Caribou



FALL

THE CARIBOU STORY

The early fall is the time of year that we sacrifice ourselves to our human relations. We offer them many gifts of food, medicine, clothing, and tools. Later in September, when the days begin to get colder, we begin to gather into larger groups for the mating season, or rut. Hundreds of us may group together at this time of year on wide alpine plateaus. The bulls fight for the chance to mate, and the strongest will try to prevent other bulls from mating with any cows in their 'harem'. Bulls experience significant physical demands that result in the loss of much of the weight they put on through summer. They become exhausted and are occasionally injured, making this a dangerous time of year for them when they are more susceptible to predation.

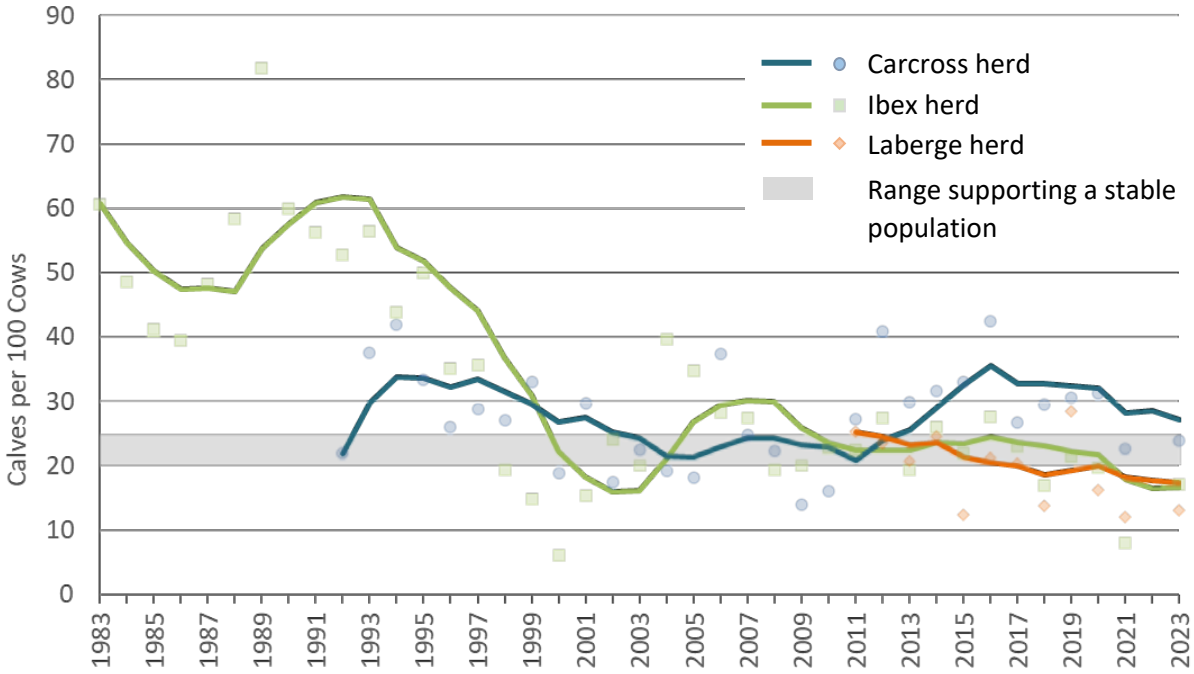
Following the rut, we need to rest and recover and will stay in the alpine areas until the snow begins to build up. When the snow becomes too deep, we begin to move into the valley bottoms.

OUR RESPONSONSIBILITIES TO THE CARIBOU

This is the time for harvesting in preparation for winter. Hunting is an integral part of the relationship between people and caribou. The people of the Southern Lakes have not hunted the caribou for the past thirty years out of respect for the challenges the herds have been facing. However, both the voluntary and licensed harvest restrictions have caused a disconnect in the relationship between harvesters and caribou. There is an entire generation of hunters who have not had the opportunity to develop this relationship with caribou in Southern Lakes. It is important that new generations of hunters receive education on respectful and responsible hunting protocols. For example, caribou meat becomes strongly flavoured as the rut approaches, so harvest was traditionally done in the early fall. This seasonality should be reflected in future hunting protocols to ensure meat is not wasted. Many Elders also warn against taking too many large, prime bulls as these animals are leaders and knowledge holders within the herds.

Fall is also a time when our youth return to school, providing more opportunity for us to share Traditional Knowledge, science, and caribou's story with them. Teaching and sharing knowledge are important responsibilities. Education needs to occur at multiple levels, including through hunter education, school curriculum, and public information-sharing. Information needs to be shared in different and engaging ways to reach the most people; there should be a particular focus on youth, as they are future knowledge holders. The Caribou in the Schools Program was a popular and key component of the Recovery Program in the late 1990s and early 2000s. A revised version of the Caribou in the Schools program was completed in 2023 and aims to engage students in understanding and respecting Southern Lakes Caribou through experiential education.

Scientific monitoring programs, such as aerial composition surveys or population estimates, contribute important information to caribou recovery and often occur during the fall. These programs provide valuable information on population sizes and trends. There is a record of composition survey data for Southern Lakes herds going back to the early 1990s, and the early 1980s for the Ibex herd. This long-term data tells a story of caribou recovery through the years and can be used to look at impacts from changing weather, climate, or other factors, and should be built upon in the future.



Calf /cow ratios from fall (rut) composition surveys, represented as the number of calves observed for every 100 cows, for the Ibex, Carcross, and Laberge herds. The lines represent the 5-year running average, which smooths out some of the annual variability and is a better representation of the long-term trend. Note that Laberge herd results only began to be assessed separately from the Carcross herd in 2011. The gray shaded area represents the range needed to maintain a stable population.

Population census surveys are also now typically flown in the fall, using a mark-resight method. This was last done in the Southern Lakes herds in 2019 for the Ibex, Carcross, and Laberge herds, and in 2018 for the Atlin herd. Population surveys require a larger investment in time and resources, and have higher impacts, so should only be done as necessary.

OUR HUMAN ACTIONS

This is a time when on-the-land knowledge sharing can be delivered through culture camps. The process of re-establishing relationship with, and respect for, the land, water, and caribou will occur through these opportunities. The Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee recognized the importance of education to help build support for the Recovery Program and its activities (RECOMMENDATION 2.21). THIS is also true more broadly and was reflected in the Key and Supporting Recommendations (Recommendations 1.9 and 2.7). In 2019, during the planning process, the SLCSC prepared a communications strategy to help implement its education and communication-related objectives. The SLCSC should keep the communication strategy up to date and continue to implement it. A variety of communication methods and tools can be utilized, such as the Southern Lakes Caribou website (southernlakescaribou.com), the Caribou Story Map (Southern Lakes Caribou (arcgis.com)), newsletters, videos, and branded clothing, mugs, or stickers.

THE CARIBOu in the Schools program was a popular and important component of the Recovery Program, and the updated version will continue to be supported by the Parties

with the SLCSC playing a leadership role in its implementation.

The long-term data set of the annual fall composition surveys provides a valuable timeline of the herds through the recovery years, and these surveys should continue (SLWCC Recommendation 2.17). However, as the herds recover, reducing the frequency of surveys (and associated disturbance) might make sense if important trends in calf numbers and sex ratios are still captured. Flying aerial composition surveys every other year may be appropriate and should be tested. Population census or inventory surveys require a larger investment in time and resources and should be done every 10 years, or as otherwise required.

Commitments

7. The Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee will work collaboratively to advance caribou education, including the Caribou in the Schools program.

Photo: Lars Jessup

CARIBOU HUNTING

The Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee recommended that we "develop and implement a managed harvest for caribou" (SLWCC 2012, Recommendation 2.19). Caribou hunting in the Ibex and Carcross herd ranges was closed in 1990 for licensed hunters in Yukon, with an additional closure in the northern part of the range (Squanga area) in 1996. British Columbia closed caribou hunting for licensed hunters in the BC portion of the Carcross range in 2020. Licensed caribou hunting opportunities are still available in the Atlin herd range in British Columbia (Limited Entry Hunt system) and in the northwest portion of the Laberge herd range (General Open Season). In 1993, the Southern Lakes First Nations implemented a voluntary harvest moratorium to support caribou recovery. This was one of they key components of the Southern Lakes Caribou Recovery Program, and a key feature of its success. Each Nation continues to ask their citizens to respect this harvest closure in Southern Lakes caribou range, although some subsistence harvest is known to occur.

Thirty years of harvest restrictions have had profound impacts on First Nation traditions, culture, and communities. Caribou is no longer a central component of the local diet and traditional tools and clothing made from caribou are seldom seen in the communities. Many young people have never had the opportunity to hunt caribou in their own territories. In some ways, the cultural relationship to caribou was sacrificed for the caribou recovery. Now that the herds are recovering, there is an opportunity to responsibly hunt caribou again. However, many people are apprehensive about beginning a hunt because we do not want to lose what we have worked so hard to gain through 30 years of recovery. We need to learn from past mistakes, as unsustainable hunting practices from all hunters contributed to past declines.

The harvest moratorium was a significant sacrifice and took many years to gain momentum. Returning to a caribou hunt is a milestone in the recovery program, one which should be honoured and celebrated, but patience and care are required. It will take time to re-establish this important relationship and move towards a caribou hunt based in reciprocity and respect. We need to take small steps.

A first step is to appreciate that the Southern Lakes caribou have been recovering thanks to the sacrifices and efforts of many. The recovery successes should be celebrated with ceremony to acknowledge these efforts and welcome the caribou home.

The Steering Committee understands that re-establishing the First Nation relationship with caribou is a priority. A successful cultural hunt will become the foundation supporting future conversations about caribou hunting. The following principles have informed the approach towards caribou hunting described in this Plan:

- We are guided by First Nation ways such as Dän k'e/ Kwa day Kwa dun/ Haa Kusteeyí / A Káa Kududziteeí and traditional laws of Share, Care, and Respect, as well as scientific harvest management principles.
- Intergenerational knowledge transfer is of critical importance, and action must be taken so that this knowledge is not lost.
- There is much work to be done together in the spirit of sharing and respect. Traditional laws and practices with respect to hunting caribou must be recorded and put into practice.
- There is a delicate balance to maintain, and the health of the caribou must be considered alongside the health of the people, in the spirit of reciprocity. Hunting the caribou strengthens the relationship, but it must be done in the right way, in alignment with cultural values.

Leaving females alone to reproduce more Caribou. We have to learn about the cows and bulls and the roles they play. How to manage and take care of the Caribou is essential and it isn't really taught. I try to think of what the Elders would do. They would talk about leaving the Caribou alone for a few years and let it get strong and build up its numbers. This is how we used to care for them a long time ago.

RUSSELL BURNS

Kwanlin Dün First Nation (2021)

Thus far we have simply treated caribou as numbers without regard to population structure and social balance, particularly in small caribou herds like Chisana. Relationships between social well-being and caribou population composition need to be quantified. Does social structure influence reproductive timing? Does changing adult sex ratio influence timing and success of reproduction within a caribou herd? How important is the maintenance of 'prime bulls' in a herd? How important are bulls as alternate prey to cows? Lacking knowledge about the behavioural and physiologic mechanisms that regulate them denies understanding caribou as individuals and populations of discrete entities.

RICHARD FARNELL

Yukon Government Caribou Biologist (2009) from *Three Decades of Caribou Recovery Programs in Yukon: A Paradigm Shift in Wildlife Management*

The herd has to be very healthy before hunting begins again. If and when they start, it should be First Nations people who do the harvesting. Highly regulated and managed by the First Nation. Should be up to those whose territory it is and whose traditional harvest it is. Otherwise, we might end up with the same problems we have today. The First Nations People of the Southern Lakes should be the ones that make this decision. It's their land and their harvest

JAMES ALLEN

Champagne and Aishihik First Nation (2021)

We have made a commitment, the people. It goes to show if you have nine governments working together for one goal, anything can be accomplished. We want to teach this in the schools, so the young people know exactly how we got to where we are, how to protect the Caribou, how to work with them, and that at one time they were in jeopardy. With everyone working together we can solve the problem.

CHARLIE JAMES

Kwanlin Dün First Nation (2021)

We have made a commitmWe are connected to the land and the animals in everything we do and everywhere we go. So we think about that when we harvest so we take care of the other species around and the food they need. Take care of your game take care of your culture

ALLAN CARLICK

Taku River Tlingit First Nation (2021)

Recommended Actions

8. The Steering Committee work actively with partners (e.g., Renewable Resources Councils, First Nations, schools, First Nation school boards, Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, Wildlife Viewing Program, Rivers to Ridges, etc.) to promote the School Program and provide support to schools, such as getting Elders, game guardians, biologists, and others involved.	IMMEDIATE/ HIGH PRIORITY
9. Implement the Communications Plan to improve the public's relationship, knowledge, and appreciation of caribou and their habitats and improve engagement with Southern Lakes Caribou.	HIGH PRIORITY
10. Monitor herd composition and demographics (numbers of calves and bulls relative to adult cows) every two years through aerial composition surveys.	ONGOING
11. Monitor population size through aerial mark-resight (or other appropriate method) surveys every 10 years, or as needed.	2028/2029, OR AS NEEDED
12. Respecting the autonomy of each First Nation, each Nation take steps towards implementing a cultural hunt and education on traditional hunting practices, informed by the principles described above. • Explore planning of joint cultural hunts between First Nations. • Associated education materials are developed together and shared within each community, clearly identifying the purpose of the cultural hunt, how it is being carried out, ways to get involved, and the principles being followed. • The First Nations collaboratively develop a culture camp program with youth, Elders, land guardians, and others to support the cultural hunt, ensuring that opportunities are shared and that teachings are passed to youth.	IMMEDIATE/ HIGH PRIORITY
13. The First Nations continue to ask subsistence hunters to uphold the voluntary caribou hunting moratorium while the initial step of a cultural hunt/education is implemented.	THROUGHOUT PLAN
14. First Nation governments develop harvest reporting strategies to support tracking of cultural and future subsistence caribou harvest to inform caribou management.	WITHIN THE NEXT 5 YEARS
15. The Parties collaboratively develop a hunter education program to teach respectful and ethical hunting practices, including traditional and cultural laws, to all caribou hunters in Southern Lakes.	WITHIN THE NEXT 5 YEARS
16. Based on the successful implementation of the cultural hunt, the Steering Committee facilitates the development of harvest sharing protocols, describing how First Nation subsistence harvest and licensed opportunities will be shared. Future discussions regarding licensed hunting opportunities should be informed by plan principles and commitments, and traditional laws, where appropriate, and prioritize licensed resident hunters and local opportunities, where possible.	WITHIN THE NEXT 5 YEARS
17. Specific considerations are needed for areas where licensed caribou harvest still occurs (i.e., northwest portion of the Laberge herd range and the Atlin herd range in British Columbia). These discussions will occur between the concerned governments, guided by the principles outlined in this Plan.	AS NEEDED

Photo: Minnie Clark

"How do we take it one more step, with respect, and do this in a good way, not in a way that will be detrimental to us. We need to do it in a good way with a lot of thought.

PATRICK JAMES

Carcross/Tagish First Nation (2022)

"They kept us alive for a hundred years, along with the fish, and that's what we're fighting for right now."

RON CHAMBERS

Champagne-Aishihik First Nation (2022)

"This is one of the only caribou recovery programs in North America that has worked, because it has our First Nations working together...it is our values that is our foundation and our strength...our land claims past leaders and Elders are visionaries...many changes in education happening in the Yukon now and the goal is to empower our young people.

SEAN SMITH

Kwanlin Dün First Nation (2021)

"A bull caribou standing. You ever see the collar, he's got a white collar, all fluffed out? That's a thing that people used to know a long time ago, saying when that's really thick and white it shows he's ready for harvest. Kind of like your calendar. There were lots of different beliefs.

NORMAN ADAMSON

Ta'an Kwäch'än Council (2020)

MAP 5: Winter Movements of Southern Lakes Caribou

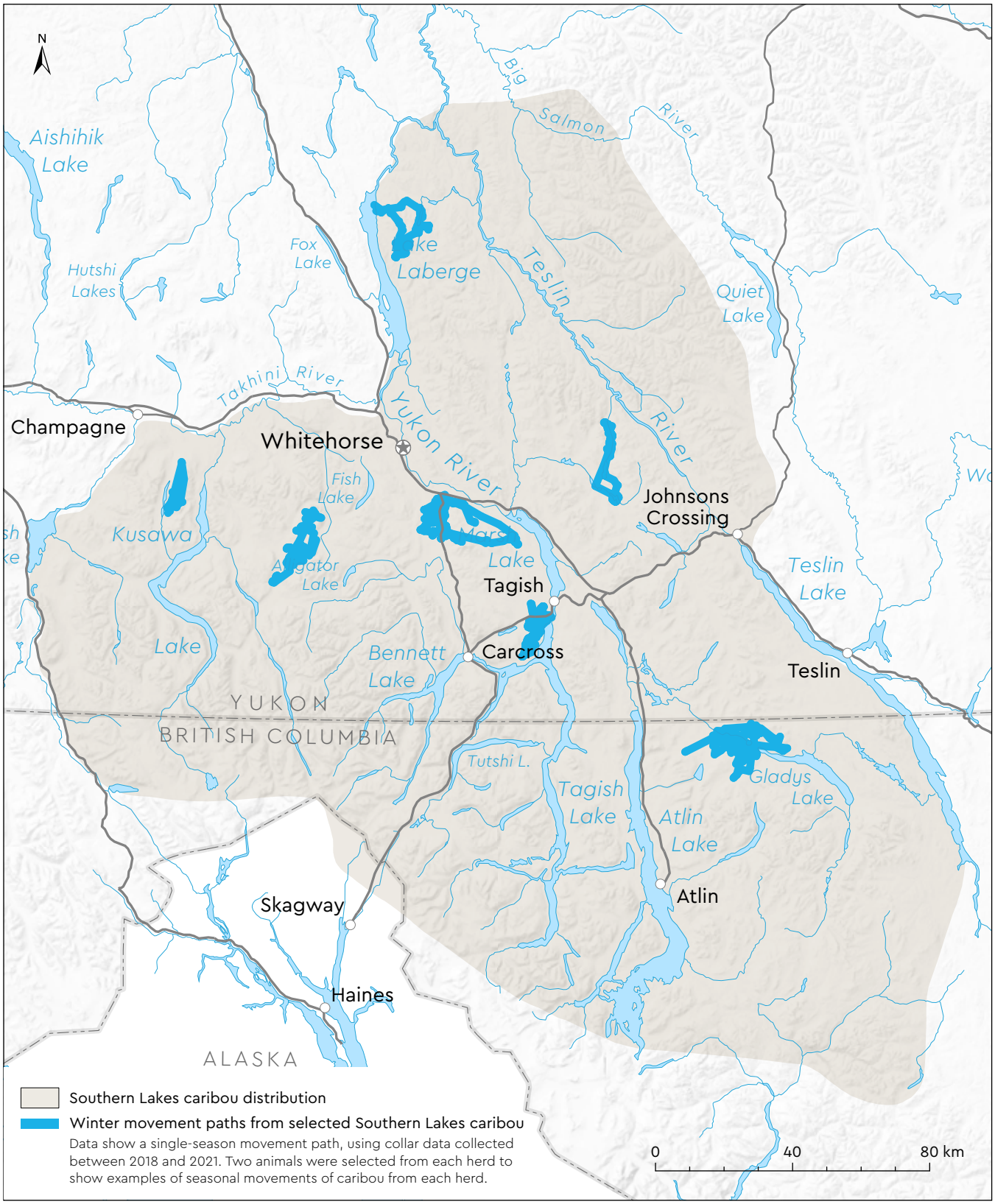


Photo: John Meikle

WINTER

THE CARIBOU STORY

When the snow becomes deep, we descend to the valley bottoms. Highways, thin ice, and areas that block our passage are dangerous for us at this time of year. Some of us will stay in the alpine among the rolling plateaus if strong winter winds keep the lichens exposed, which is common in the Ibex range. We rely on pine and mixed forests where we can find lichens, our preferred winter food, but we will also forage on other plants for food and medicine, such as labrador tea and dry sedges. We can smell lichen under the snow and dig down to find our favourite types. We love the ability to move between the pine forests and lakes or meadows where we can see approaching predators. We can often be observed digging down to the ice surface to get water and important minerals from the ice or slushy overflow. Sometimes finding food is hard. When the snow gets too deep and it becomes difficult to dig, we will move to find areas with shallower snow. Deep snow in the winter can make it more difficult to move and forage and make us more vulnerable to predation and disturbance.

Elders from our herd have taught us where to find food, but many of the places we use are being taken up by human developments like subdivisions or agriculture. Forest fires can also shrink our winter range and it takes

many decades for our favourite lichens to grow back. We move throughout our range, searching for food, and avoiding predators and other disturbances like snowmobiles, skiers, or dog teams. Adult cows are usually devoting energy to the growing calves in their wombs and are easily disturbed. These disturbances can use up energy that would otherwise be devoted to nourishing our fetus and can contribute to poor calf survival the following spring.

In some places, roads and highways cross our winter range. Speeding drivers, slippery conditions, and poor visibility contribute to vehicle collisions which kill or injure too many of us during the winter. We worry about the future of our children; where will their home and food be if these disturbances continue to grow?

OUR RESPONSONSIBILITIES TO THE CARIBOU

Winter is a time for reflection, a time to repair our tools, and a time to prepare for the coming spring. As part of our responsibilities, we should review the tools that we use to protect the caribou and their habitat. During winter, caribou are working hard to access food and the cows are working even harder to grow their calves. The cumulative impact of our human developments and associated disturbances are placing more pressure on caribou during this sensitive time of year.

Human development has occurred disproportionately within the Carcross herd range[16], while occurring more at the edges of the Ibex, Laberge, and Atlin herd ranges. It was recognized early within the Recovery Program that most of the Yukon's human population lived within the Carcross winter range, leading to the Carcross herd being dubbed the "urban caribou herd". In 2007, Regional Biologist Rob Florkiewicz and colleagues proposed a "no net loss" concept to protect remaining Carcross Caribou herd winter range . In 2015, the "Range Assessment as a Cumulative Effects Management Tool: Assessment of the Carcross Caribou Herd Range in Yukon" recommended no new developments in important caribou winter habitats, and that new developments should be limited to the current human "Zone of Influence" (Habitat Strategies 1.1 and 2.1, respectively)[17]. The Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee recommendation 2.18 recognized the importance of human impacts on caribou habitat, with a focus on mapping and protection of important habitats.

The Range Assessment described the Carcross herd as having "low ecological resilience", highlighting its vulnerability due to a combination of permanent human developments, expanding trail networks and growing levels of motorized and non-motorized trail use, vehicle collisions, changing climate, and risk of severe wildfire. These conditions persist and are growing worse. The other herds are equally vulnerable to many of these factors, particularly disturbance from increasing recreational activities in the Ibex and Atlin herd ranges. Uncertainty related to future climate conditions across all seasons is cause for concern for all the herds. Caribou as a species have incredible resilience, but they need the space to be able to adapt to future changing conditions. If we continue to take up more space on the land, encroaching on important habitats and taking up key movement and migration routes, we risk losing the herds we have worked so hard to save.

The growing human population in the Southern Lakes area of Yukon and British Columbia is increasing the disturbance impacts felt by all the herds. These impacts are growing concern of long-time area residents[18]. Research into the impacts of human recreation on caribou, with a focus on the impact of snowmobiles on the Ibex Caribou, was undertaken in 2002[19]. Research

16 Florkiewicz et al. (2007).

17 Francis and Nishi (2018).

18 Jessup and Larsen. (2022).

19 Powell (2004).

continued in 2019 in the Ibex and Carcross herd ranges, expanding the scope of recreational activities, but results from this study are not yet complete. Another project monitoring effects of human recreation is also ongoing in the Atlin herd range. Sharing information about the impacts of human recreation and land use are very important. In the 1990s and 2000s, the Game Guardians delivered key Caribou Recovery messages to people they encountered while in the field. The Game Guardian program employed passionate community members who were able to educate land users about ways they could support caribou recovery. This contributed to the level of buy-in and support for recovery efforts necessary to achieve the results we see today.

The impacts of wolf predation on caribou in the winter is a long-standing local concern. During winter, caribou can often be found in areas close to moose, which are the preferred prey of many wolves in Yukon. Predation of caribou may be affected by the size of the moose or wolf populations, snow depth, or human activities (e.g., wolves will use roads and trails to improve their hunting efficiency). In the 1980s, when the caribou population was very small, caribou comprised a negligible portion of the wolves' diet in the Southern Lakes[20]. As the caribou populations recover, they will become a more important contributor to the wolves' diet, and this may in turn limit population growth. Responding to these concerns, research into the prey composition and population size of wolves in the Southern Lakes was undertaken in 2019. This research found that moose remain the most important component of wolves' winter diet, but not all packs were the same. Wolves in the Ibex herd range, where there are more caribou, were found to prey on caribou more than other wolf packs in the study area. We should continue to try to understand the relationship between the recovering caribou, moose, and wolves, and provide support to local wolf trappers, where appropriate.

20 Hayes et al. (1991).

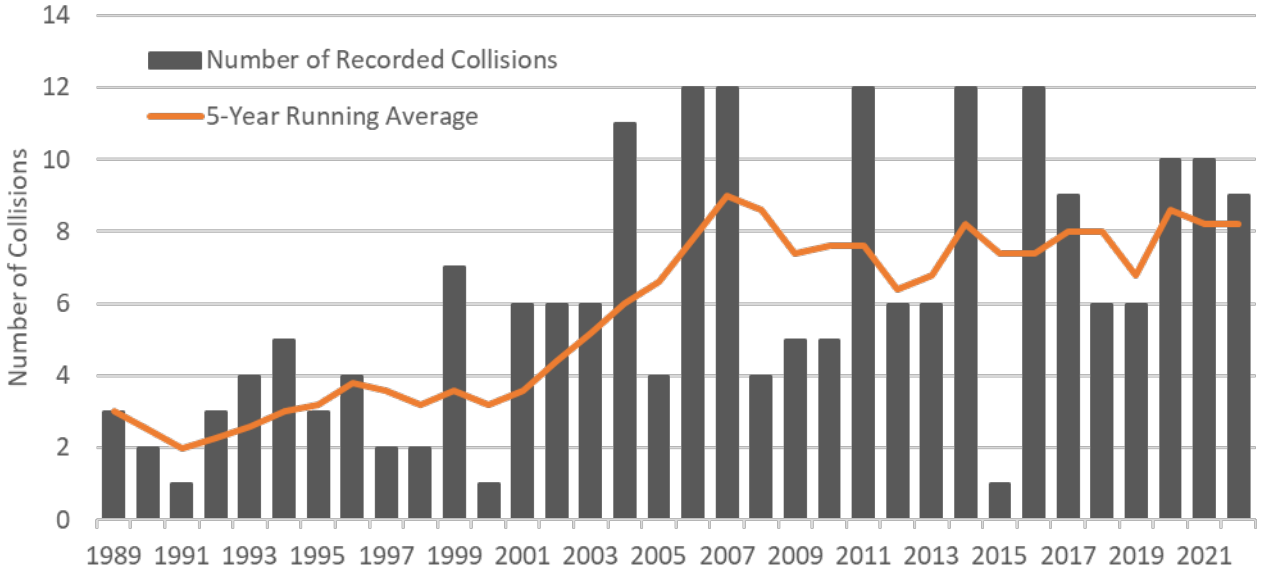
Throughout the years of the Recovery Program, the number of caribou killed on the highways started to increase, particularly in the late 1990s and early 2000s. While vehicle collisions have remained relatively stable over the past 15–20 years, as the human population and associated highway traffic grows, vehicle collisions may once again increase. More than half of the collisions involve cow caribou, which has a disproportionate effect on the population. Of mortalities of collared Southern Lakes caribou that were investigated between 2019 and 2022, 13% were killed in vehicle collisions. These impacts are disproportionately felt by the Carcross and Laberge herds.

Many of the highways and roads in the Southern Lakes pass through important caribou habitats. The herds need to be able to cross these highways to keep the herd ranges connected. The Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee recommended that we "develop and implement measures to reduce loss of caribou due to highway traffic collisions" (SLWCC Recommendation 2.20). Over the past number of years these efforts have focused on improving signage, local public service announcements, and mowing brush in the ditches, but the effectiveness of these measures is unclear. New and more effective ways should be sought to reduce these impacts.

It is our responsibility to ensure that there continues to be habitat available to the caribou now and into the future. We must consider the potential effects of natural wildfire, changing climate and a growing human population, so that we can take actions that help the caribou have resilience to adapt to changing conditions. Additionally, we must look at the effects of predation and vehicle collisions and mitigate these effects where possible.

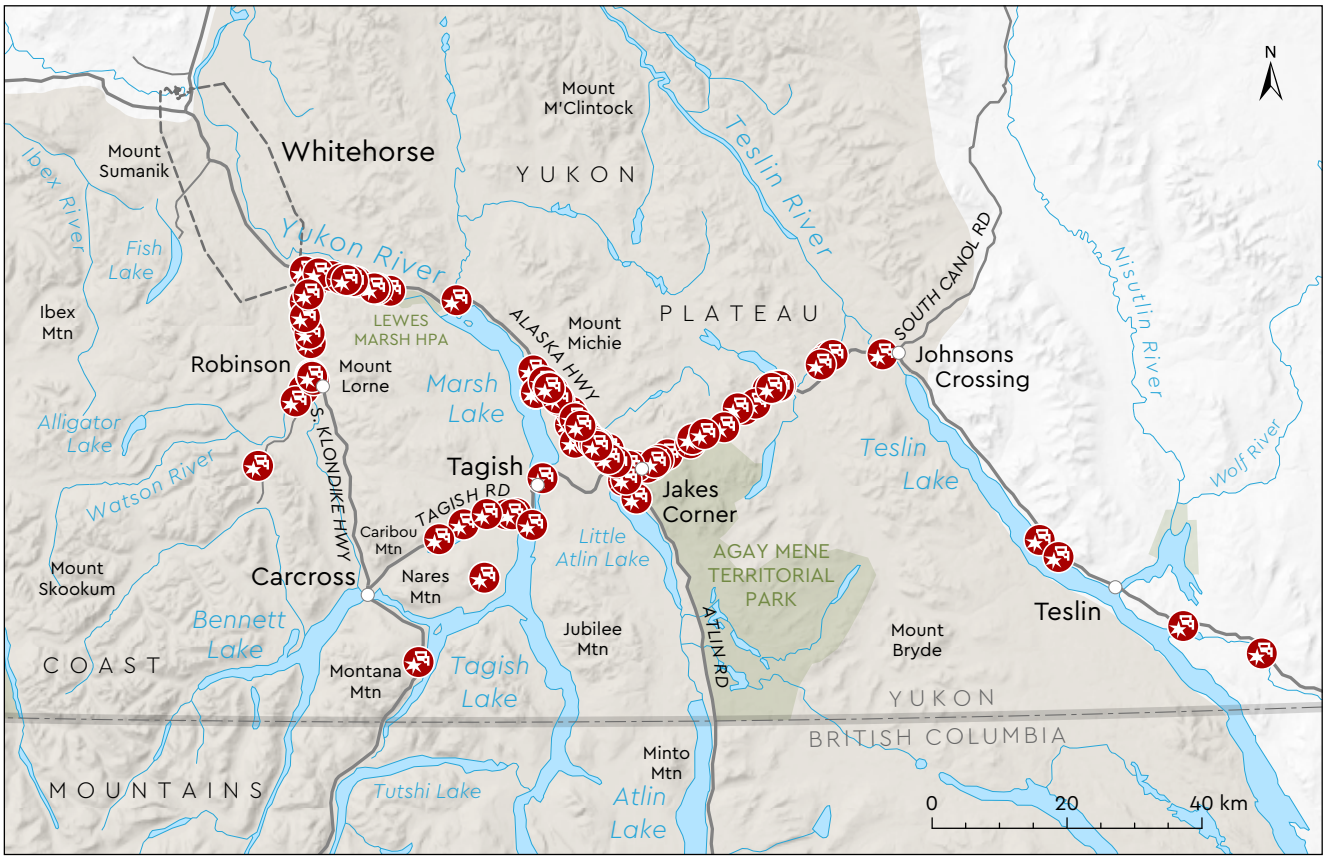
OUR HUMAN ACTIONS

Addressing the cumulative impacts of human development and associated activities is a key action. The importance of other seasonal habitats should not be downplayed; however, winter is a critical time for actions addressing



Number of recorded caribou-vehicle collisions within the Southern Lakes Caribou herd ranges from 1989 to 2022. Note that only collisions resulting in a confirmed caribou mortality are represented in the chart and many collisions go unreported, so this should be considered a minimum number of caribou-vehicle collisions.

MAP 6: Recorded Caribou-Vehicle Collisions in Southern Lakes



human impacts since most development in Southern Lakes has occurred in winter range. Remembering the recommendation made by the Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee, we must ensure that the future of Southern Lakes caribou is considered in all future land development assessments and regional land use planning (SLWCC Recommendation 2.18).

Range assessments, like the 2015 assessment of the Carcross herd range, are valuable tools to inform these processes, but must incorporate local and Traditional knowledge in addition to scientific information. They should build upon important concepts identified in previous work, such as no-net-loss of caribou winter habitat, no new permanent developments in critical winter range, and maintenance of migration corridors. Future range assessments should also take a Seasonal Round approach, expanding from a winter-centric focus while not losing sight of the importance of protecting critical winter habitats. This increased scope of the range assessment tool should be applied to all the herds.

Action also needs to be taken to mitigate the impacts of human disturbance on caribou, especially given the concerns and observations of long-time residents and the continued human population growth. These actions will rely heavily on education, as no current legislative or regulatory tools exist to limit non-commercial human access in wilderness areas in Yukon. Development of such tools was recommended by the SLWCC (Recommendation 2.18), but in their absence, education remains the best available mechanism for reducing the impacts of disturbance. Coordinated education programs on the impacts of disturbance and human recreation into important caribou habitats must be developed and disseminated to the public (SLWCC Recommendation 2.21). The importance of the Guardian program in this capacity was recognized by the SLWCC: "Use a coordinated Game Guardian program to help deliver key messages about caribou management and recovery in the region." (from Recommendation 2.21). The public in the Southern Lakes have a history of being very receptive and supportive of caribou recovery, including groups like the Klondike Snowmobile Association, which in the 2000s worked with the Recovery Program to encourage its members and other snowmobilers to respect caribou while out on the trails. The success of these initiatives should be built upon and expanded.

We have opportunities in the winter to care for caribou by monitoring the herds (SLWCC Recommendation 2.17). Over the past decades, monitoring programs have included aerial counts, radiotelemetry and GPS collaring, diet analysis, ground-based track counts, local knowledge collection, and lichen research. These projects provide valuable information related to population numbers, herd health, calf survival, contemporary herd range use, diet, and food availability. Traditionally, information was gathered by on-the-land observations. Much of our scientific monitoring knowledge, including important habitats and range definitions, have been learned from radiotelemetry and GPS collars applied in the winter. These programs are invasive, requiring the capture and handling of caribou, but yield highly valuable information. The collar data to date has been collected almost exclusively from cow caribou. Bulls use different areas or display different patterns of habitat use and so future collaring programs should consider bulls. During the 1990s and 2000s, public information was collected using the "Wildlife Hotline"; new ways for the public to contribute their knowledge and observations should be developed. Our monitoring should include Traditional, local, and scientific forms of knowledge and guide our actions allowing us to make informed decisions in our relationship with caribou. All Parties benefit from having access to quality and up-to-date monitoring information.

The winter is traditionally a time for sharing knowledge and skills related to traditional crafts that respect the caribou by using all of parts of the animal. Traditionally, caribou provided for many needs and were a critical component of the traditional economy. The

hide was used to make tents, rope, and blankets, while the bones were used for tools and needles. Nothing was wasted, not even the hooves, which were made into rattles and floats for nets and beaver hunting. Caribou meat is high in protein and low in fat, providing a healthier choice than most store-bought food. Partly digested food in caribou stomachs and intestines provided unique forms of nutrition. Caribou hide and antlers are used in many traditional arts, crafts, and clothing. Today, caribou are valued just as much in First Nations communities, though the relationship has changed.

> The old timers used to say when you need a caribou from up the mountain (Montana) there... just go up and get what you want. And get off the mountain and bring your caribou back, your meat back and don't monkey around up there. They used to stop us from going skiing up there, when we were just young fellers... they used to tell us not to go up the top of the mountain because you going to disturb those caribou

NORMAN JAMES

Carcross/Tagish First Nation (1996) from *Southern Lakes Caribou Recovery Program: Progress Report 1992–1996*

> When the animals are up high and the skidoos get up there early, then the animals get pressed before they want to come down. They get chased out of there, moving before they want to, wasting energy.

CTRRC LOCAL KNOWLEDGE SURVEY PARTICIPANT

from *Local Knowledge Survey of the Southern Lakes*, 2022

> This Deisheethaan man he went down to the creek and he set net in this creek, and long time ago the people used to use everything when they catch anything, and he had caribou hooves, or moose hooves, and they dried it and they tied it up and they, they make a bell out of it.

IDA CALMEGANE

Carcross/Tagish First Nation (2018)

> Caribou are of an ancient design – their fossil record goes back 1.6M years at Ft. Selkirk, YT. There's a good chance that they will still be here long after human civilization has adapted or is gone

RICK FARNELL

Caribou Biologist, Yukon Government (2009) from *Three Decades of Caribou Recovery Programs in Yukon: A Paradigm Shift in Wildlife Management*

WHAT IS A RANGE ASSESSMENT AND WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

"A range assessment is a structured process intended to assess risk to population viability, define management objectives and identify actions to meet the objectives for focal wildlife species. Conducting a range assessment is similar to a land use planning process but socio-economic considerations are not formally evaluated and integrated. Range assessments result in an integrated package of reports and maps that can be used by assessors and decision-makers to evaluate and manage the effects of proposed and ongoing multiple land use activities.

The relative lack of identified landscape-level management objectives for much of the territory (i.e., planning) creates challenges for effective CEA (Cumulative Effects Assessment) and CEM (Cumulative Effects Management). While processes to establish landscape-level objectives exist, such as Chapter 11 regional land use planning, or integrated resource management planning initiatives, these processes are progressing slowly and will not be in place in all areas of Yukon in advance of development pressures. Focal wildlife species range assessments are intended to establish species-specific landscape level management objectives and management strategies that would benefit project-level assessment and mitigation. For Environment Yukon, a major benefit of this approach is that it can initiate and manage the range assessment process within its existing mandate."

FRANCIS ET AL.

from *Range Assessment as a Cumulative Effects Management Tool: A Recommended Approach for Environment Yukon*

Commitments

8. The Parties will work to ensure land management activities, including regional land use planning, in the Southern Lakes respects and prioritizes caribou and accommodates their needs now and into the future.

Photo: Minnie Clark

Recommended Actions

18. The Steering Committee coordinate preparation of Range Assessments for each herd, building upon previous efforts but taking a more holistic approach, considering all seasons, and incorporating local, traditional, and scientific information. • Update important information in the Southern Lakes herd ranges needed to support the Range Assessments and land planning, including seasonal ranges and habitat maps, disturbance mapping, human "Zone of Influence" modeling, and important caribou movement and migration corridors. • The Steering Committee prioritize creating a Scope of Work to engage a contractor to complete this work.	IMMEDIATE/HIGH PRIORITY
19. The Steering Committee provide support to land planning initiatives (e.g., Regional Land Use Planning, How We Walk with Land and Water, community wildfire protection planning, forestry planning, local area planning, etc.) to consider the current and future needs of caribou on the land and our relationship with them.	ONGOING
20. Develop and administer a collaborative monitoring program with a focus on ground-based track counts, observations of caribou habitat use, human use of caribou habitats, game guardian reports, ongoing collar monitoring, and incorporation of public information.	MEDIUM PRIORITY
21. Encourage public participation in monitoring and management through a variety of means and incorporate this information into the collaborative monitoring program.	ONGOING
22. Bring back the Southern Lakes Caribou Game Guardian program, with a focus on on-the-land education, information sharing, and knowledge gathering. • The Steering Committee develop an updated program with associated messaging • Seek funding to hire two game guardians to run the program in the field.	HIGH PRIORITY
23. Work with partner governments, Renewable Resources Councils, and public interest groups to develop educational materials to inform recreational land users of their potential effects on caribou throughout the seasons and ways to mitigate them.	ONGOING
24. Work with partners to mitigate wildlife-vehicle collisions, including the appropriate placement and timing of warning signs and investigating the feasability and effectiveness of alternative mitigation options.	ONGOING
25. Collaboratively develop programs and incentives for producing traditional materials using caribou, including beading, sewing, hide tanning and preparation, snowshoe making, hoof rattles, antler carving, and others.	MEDIUM PRIORITY
26. Consider further predation research, including monitoring of wolf populations and activity, investigating impacts of bear predation, and supporting community-based trapping initiatives.	AS NEEDED

SUMMARY OF COMMITMENTS AND RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Commitments

1. Include ceremony, spirit, and relationship with caribou in public documentation, education, and outreach developed by the Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee.
2. Provide Caribou a seat at the table of any meetings held by the Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee.
3. The member governments of the Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee acknowledge we are here for caribou and their existence on the landscape forever.
4. The values of share, care, and respect will guide any commitments, recommendations, plans, and actions that are developed or taken by the Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee.
5. Caribou's perspective will be considered in all recommendations and plans developed by the Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee.
6. The Parties maintain the Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee as the organization to collaboratively implement the Relationship Plan and ongoing caribou management activities. This should include mechanisms to acknowledge and enable First Nations leadership in implementation
7. The Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee will work collaboratively to advance caribou education, including the Caribou in the Schools program.
8. The parties promote the needs of caribou in land management activities in the Southern Lakes.

Recommended actions

SPRING

1. The Parties complete a Terms of Reference for the Southern Lakes Caribou Steering Committee, allowing for: • the implementation of the Relationship Plan as well as support for ongoing engagement, education, and coordinated management of Southern Lakes Caribou and their habitats • membership consisting of one representative from each participating government, a seat for caribou (see Commitment #2), as well as potential for Elder and/or youth membership • regular meetings of the Steering Committee (e.g., quarterly) • involvement of co-management boards and councils • exploration of long-term funding and administration solutions to ensure the longevity of the SLCSC	IMMEDIATE PRIORITY
2. The Steering Committee will host an Annual Gathering as a forum to support collaborative decision-making and joint implementation of the Relationship Plan.	INAUGURAL GATHERING SPRING 2025

3. An annual public newsletter will be produced by the Steering Committee to share information on Southern Lakes Caribou and the implementation of the Relationship Plan.	ANNUALLY
4. Update mapped caribou range information. • Identify commonly used calving areas, the habitat characteristics of these sites, and the timing of calving activity. • Identify high-use caribou summer areas and the characteristics of these sites. • Update important rut range areas. • Update important winter range areas. • Map important movement routes between seasonal habitat patches and migration routes between seasonal habitats.	HIGH PRIORITY
5. Continue to opportunistically remove old fences and support policies that minimize the creation of new fences or other obstacles to movement and migration.	ONGOING

SUMMER

6. The Steering Committee and the Parties continue to support and be involved with ongoing ice patch research and help share the knowledge with the public.	ONGOING
7. Incorporate climate change and climate adaptation research into monitoring programs for Southern Lakes caribou.	AS NEEDED

FALL

8. The Steering Committee work actively with partners (e.g., Renewable Resources Councils, First Nations, schools, First Nation school boards, Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, Wildlife Viewing Program, Rivers to Ridges, etc.) to promote the School Program and provide support to schools, such as getting Elders, game guardians, biologists, and others involved.	IMMEDIATE/HIGH PRIORITY
9. Implement the Communications Plan to improve the public's relationship, knowledge, and appreciation of caribou and their habitats and improve engagement with Southern Lakes Caribou.	HIGH PRIORITY
10. Monitor herd composition and demographics (numbers of calves and bulls relative to adult cows) every two years through aerial composition surveys.	ONGOING
11. Monitor population size through aerial mark-resight (or other appropriate method) surveys every 10 years, or as needed.	2028/2029, OR AS NEEDED
12. Respecting the autonomy of each First Nation, each Nation take steps towards implementing a cultural hunt and education on traditional hunting practices, informed by the principles described above. • Explore planning of joint cultural hunts between First Nations. • Associated education materials are developed together and shared within each community, clearly identifying the purpose of the cultural hunt, how it is being carried out, ways to get involved, and the principles being followed. • The First Nations collaboratively develop a culture camp program with youth, Elders, land guardians, and others to support the cultural hunt, ensuring that opportunities are shared and that teachings are passed to youth.	IMMEDIATE/HIGH PRIORITY
13. The First Nations continue to ask subsistence hunters to uphold the voluntary caribou hunting moratorium while the initial step of a cultural hunt/education is implemented.	THROUGHOUT PLAN IMPLEMENTATION
14. First Nation governments develop harvest reporting strategies to support tracking of cultural and future subsistence caribou harvest to inform caribou management.	WITHIN THE NEXT 5 YEARS
15. The Parties collaboratively develop a hunter education program to teach respectful and ethical hunting practices, including traditional and cultural laws, to all caribou hunters in Southern Lakes.	WITHIN THE NEXT 5 YEARS
16. Based on the successful implementation of the cultural hunt, the Steering Committee facilitates the development of harvest sharing protocols, describing how First Nation subsistence harvest and licensed opportunities will be shared. Future discussions regarding licensed hunting opportunities should be informed by plan principles and commitments, and traditional laws, where appropriate, and prioritize licensed resident hunters and local opportunities, where possible.	WITHIN THE NEXT 5 YEARS
17. Specific considerations are needed for areas where licensed caribou harvest still occurs (i.e., northwest portion of the Laberge herd range and the Atlin herd range in British Columbia). These discussions will occur between the concerned governments, guided by the principles outlined in this Plan.	AS NEEDED

WINTER

18. The Steering Committee coordinate preparation of Range Assessments for each herd, building upon previous efforts but taking a more holistic approach, considering all seasons, and incorporating local, traditional, and scientific information. • Update important information in the Southern Lakes herd ranges needed to support the Range Assessments and land planning, including seasonal ranges and habitat maps, disturbance mapping, human "Zone of Influence" modeling, and important caribou movement and migration corridors. • The Steering Committee prioritize creating a Scope of Work to engage a contractor to complete this work.	IMMEDIATE/HIGH PRIORITY
19. The Steering Committee provide support to land planning initiatives (e.g., Regional Land Use Planning, How We Walk with Land and Water, community wildfire protection planning, forestry planning, local area planning, etc.) to consider the current and future needs of caribou on the land and our relationship with them.	ONGOING
20. Develop and administer a collaborative monitoring program with a focus on ground-based track counts, observations of caribou habitat use, human use of caribou habitats, game guardian reports, ongoing collar monitoring, and incorporation of public information.	MEDIUM PRIORITY
21. Encourage public participation in monitoring and management through a variety of means and incorporate this information into the collaborative monitoring program.	ONGOING
22. Bring back the Southern Lakes Caribou Game Guardian program, with a focus on on-the-land education, information sharing, and knowledge gathering. • The Steering Committee develop an updated program with associated messaging • Seek funding to hire two game guardians to run the program in the field.	HIGH PRIORITY
23. Work with partner governments, Renewable Resources Councils, and public interest groups to develop educational materials to inform recreational land users of their potential effects on caribou throughout the seasons and ways to mitigate them.	ONGOING
24. Work with partners to mitigate wildlife-vehicle collisions, including the appropriate placement and timing of warning signs and investigating the feasability and effectiveness of alternative mitigation options.	ONGOING
25. Collaboratively develop programs and incentives for producing traditional materials using caribou, including beading, sewing, hide tanning and preparation, snowshoe making, hoof rattles, antler carving, and others.	MEDIUM PRIORITY
26. Consider further predation research, including monitoring of wolf populations and activity, investigating impacts of bear predation, and supporting community-based trapping initiatives.	AS NEEDED

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SOUTHERN LAKES STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP:

Government	Representative	Alternate	Elders, youth, and Game Guardians
Kwanlin Dün First Nation	Brandy Mayes	Emma Hoogland	William Carlick, Bruce Wilson
Ta'an Kwäch'än Council	Brandon Crawford		Joe Jack, Tesloa Smith
Carcross/Tagish First Nation	Amaya Cherian-Hall	Tyler Obediah	Patrick James, Charlie James, Scottie James, Darian James
Champagne and Aishihik First Nation	Josée Lemieux-Tremblay		Levi Graham
Teslin Tlingit Council	Jennifer Clark	Hannah Turner	Richard Dewhurst
Taku River First Nation	Shannon Whelan	Jared Gonet	Trevor Williams
Yukon	Kelsey Russell	Colleen Arnison	
British Columbia	Conrad Thiessen		
Canada	Ian McDonald	Morgan Conrad	

PAST MEMBERSHIP (2018–2024)

Mark Connor, Tami Grantham, Deborah Fulmer, Dave Sembsmoen, Kate Andre, Gillian Rourke, Karlie Knight, Ryan Lapointe, Michael Jim, Melina Hougen, Monica Krieger, Kristina Beckmann, Cheyenne Bradley, Tyler Ross, Anna Schmidt, Matt Clarke, Jaylene Goorts, Jake Bradshaw, Mark Wong, Samantha Widmeyer, Lars Jessup

PLANNING AND PROJECT SUPPORT

Lars Jessup, Jessica Norris, Anna Schmidt, Jared Gonet, Dennis Zimmerman, Amy Ryder, Jen Herkes, Jen Edwards, Richard Vladars

SOUTHERN LAKES CARIBOU RECOVERY PROGRAM (1993 – PRESENT)

Art Johns, Larry Bill, Art Smith, Patrick James, Ray Quock, Charlie James, Rob Florkiewicz, Dan Cresswell, Janet McDonald, Rick Farnell, Don Toews, Karen Clyde, Kathi Egli, Carol Foster, Brian Pelchat, Paul De Ruiter, Sean Smith, Dave Bunbury, Dave Sembsmoen, Brian Bell, Matt Larsen, Jamie McLelland, Kyle Russell, Ray Craft, Phyllis Copeland, Michael Jim, Pearl Callaghan, Richard Erhardt, Mark Williams, Geraldine Pope, Sandy Smarch, Andy Williams, Josh Smith, Michael Svoboda, Barney Smith, Emmie Fairclough, Albert James, Ralph James, Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council, Teslin Renewable Resources Council, Laberge Renewable Resources Council, Alsek Renewable Resources Council

ELDERS AND KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS

Albert James, Allan Carlick, Andy Williams, Anne-Marie Miller, Annie Austin, Ida Calmegane, Art Johns, Bill Good, Charlie Burns, Charlie James, Charlotte Hadden, Georgina Sydney, James Allen, Jean Desmarais, Jim James, Kitty Grant, Bill Grant, Mark Wedge, Norman Adamson, Norman James, Pat Joe, Patrick James, Rob Chambers, Russell Burns, Sam Johnson, Shirley Beattie, Tim Dewhurst, Willie Asp, Edward Jack, Sylvester Jack, Elizabeth Nyman, Dora Wedge, Robert Jackson, Ted Hall, Clara Schinkel, Mary Ann Roy, Borden Smith, Margaret Breton, Jane Bond, Winnie Atlin, William Atlin, Harry Carlick, Susan Carlick, Jackie Williams, Richard Johnson, Evelyn Jack, Arnold Edzerza, Edna Helm

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APPENDICES – 2012 SLWCC RECOMMENDATIONS

During the relationship planning process, the Parties viewed implementation of the SLWCC recommendations as an objective of the Relationship Plan. The SLWCC provided the following Caribou Recommendations, as well as Key, Supporting and Habitat recommendations relevant to the management of caribou:

Caribou Recommendations:

2.17 Monitor status of caribou populations.

- Caribou monitoring programs should focus on collecting scientific data and local information that will contribute to tracking changes in their population size and age-sex structure, adapting harvest regulations, and providing recommendations on development proposals, where appropriate
- While annual monitoring is important to determine herd status, an accurate estimate of the population is needed for any discussion on sustainable harvest, and to evaluate the success of conservation initiatives. The Carcross herd is the priority for the next census, followed by the Atlin and Ibex herds. All three herds should be inventoried within 5 years.
- Annual recruitment surveys for the Atlin, Carcross and Ibex herds are necessary to track population changes.
- Caribou monitoring would benefit from continued participation by Game Guardians.
- Sensitive traditional knowledge should be protected.

2.18 Carefully manage human use of caribou habitat, with a particular focus on limiting access, development, and human disturbance in important caribou habitat.

- Mapping the areas needed for caribou recovery is essential. The map should include scientific, traditional, and local knowledge about important moose habitats in the Southern Lakes area.
- A zone of influence map should be updated as necessary, to be used to evaluate land use applications and proposals with respect to important caribou habitat. Caribou habitat can be directly or functionally lost through land use and developments and human activity. Zone of influence mapping considers the actual development site in addition to the adjacent area that is impacted by things such as noise and increased human activity.
- Protection of important caribou habitats (winter and calving areas, and travel corridors) needs to be a key consideration in land use decisions, as well as land use planning processes.
- Mechanisms capable of managing or regulating human access into important caribou habitats should be developed and implemented. The aim is to reduce human disturbance to caribou, particularly in winter or during the calving season.
- The effects of cumulative impacts and climate change should be incorporated into caribou habitat management initiatives.

2.19 Develop and implement a managed harvest for caribou.

- Development and implementation of a managed harvest for caribou is a priority.
- A managed harvest for caribou would include the collection and sharing of all information from licensed hunters and First Nations on area-specific population size and trends, and the number and age-sex composition of the harvest.
- This information would provide the basis for a coordinated approach to the recovery and sustainable use of caribou in the Southern Lakes.
- Governments will need to collaborate and assist one another to implement a managed harvest, but implementation would be done by each responsible government.

2.20 Develop and implement measures to reduce loss of caribou due to highway traffic collisions.

- Traffic collisions are a key concern for Southern Lakes caribou.
- Efforts to reduce caribou mortality from traffic accidents needs to continue.
- Continue to improve roadside vegetation management practices, deploy caution signs, and educate drivers about the threat posed to local caribou populations.
- Explore and evaluate aversive measures, such as the application of alternative road de-icing compounds.

2.21 Promote continued development and implementation of education and outreach programs and materials that further caribou conservation goals and public appreciation of caribou and caribou management.

- Community support is essential for a successful caribou recovery program.
- Current information on the status of, and recovery initiatives for, caribou should be made available to the public in different ways. Communication initiatives for Southern Lakes caribou recovery should be a priority.

- These initiatives should specifically address key caribou recovery goals, such as a managed harvest framework, careful management of important caribou habitat, reducing new access into important areas for caribou, and human disturbance.
- Use a coordinated Game Guardian program to help deliver key messages about caribou recovery and management in the region.
- Engage with groups such as the Klondike Snowmobile Association to share information related to human disturbance.

Key Recommendations:

1.1 Continue to advance cooperative and coordinated management of wildlife and their habitats among responsible governments.

1.2 Develop and implement complementary legislation, policies, guidelines, and standards to manage wildlife and their habitats.

1.3 Develop and implement a managed harvest framework that integrates rigorous and verifiable information on licensed and subsistence harvest to ensure long-term sustainability of all harvested species, with an immediate focus on caribou and moose.

1.4 Identify, map, and carefully manage key wildlife habitats. The focus should be on ecologically significant areas (e.g. wetlands, riparian, sand dunes, salt flats, older forests), and sensitive habitat for traditionally used species and species at risk that require a higher duty of care with respect to human development and disturbance.

1.5 Work collaboratively towards developing significant tools and products to be used in land use and resource management planning that takes into account wildlife and their habitats in the Southern Lakes area.

1.6 Develop, implement, and coordinate effective monitoring protocols for traditionally used species and species at risk to ensure their long term conservation, using scientific, local, and traditional knowledge.

1.7 Develop a coordinated Game Guardian program that would enhance wildlife monitoring, stewardship and education in the Southern Lakes area.

1.8 Continue to develop and implement outreach and education materials and programs to reduce human-wildlife conflicts (e.g., road collisions, disturbance to calving ungulates, and carnivores in communities).

1.9 Continue to develop and implement education and outreach programs and materials aimed at increasing knowledge and appreciation of wildlife and their habitats, with a focus on furthering management and conservation objectives. An emphasis should be placed on youth and schools, where appropriate.

Supporting Recommendations:

2.1 Collaboratively prioritize key recommendations in this Regional Wildlife Assessment.

2.2 Develop and implement complimentary legislation, policies, guidelines, and standards to manage wildlife and their habitats.

2.3 Communicate on reviews of key development proposals to the extent possible.

2.4 Communicate better on the rationale and rules for harvest regulations for various species.

2.5 Coordinate cooperative and complementary compliance and outreach programs.

2.6 Continue to develop and implement cooperative and complementary monitoring programs.

2.7 Continue to develop and implement cooperative strategies to better engage the public in wildlife management decision-making.

2.8 Develop and implement programs to share expertise and build capacity among the Parties.

Habitat Recommendations:

2.9 Identify and map key wildlife habitats, with a focus on ecologically important areas (wetlands, riparian, sand dunes, salt flats, older forests) and sensitive habitats requiring special protection for traditionally-used species and species at risk.

2.10 Develop and distribute a database (map) of key wildlife habitats in the region for use in environmental assessment and resource management.

2.11 Promote studies on the effect of landscape change on wildlife habitats, with a focus on impacts from climate change and land developments.

2.12 Evaluate the current network of conservation lands to identify gaps related to the maintenance of sensitive habitats, including connectivity among these areas.

2.13 Work collaboratively towards developing significant tools and products to be used in land use and resources management planning that takes into account wildlife and their habitats in the Southern Lakes area.

2.14 Develop and implement policies, guidelines, or best management practices for securing sensitive habitats, including the management of access and mitigation of development, including cumulative effects.

2.15 Address gaps in the securing of sensitive habitats, through protective measures by First Nation, territorial, or federal governments, where feasible.

2.16 Develop and implement means to keep alien and invasive species from becoming established.

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