

**Wolf Conservation and Management Plan Review**  
**Community Meeting - Old Crow**  
March 8, 2011

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The following summary sets out key points discussed at a public meeting of the Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan Review Committee and community members in Old Crow. Major points or themes were also reviewed by the facilitator in an oral summary at the conclusion of the meeting.

The discussion focused on proposed changes to the 1992 Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan and current issues associated with Yukon wolf conservation and management.

**1992 Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan**

- The review of the plan is long overdue. A lot has changed since 1992 including the introduction and implementation of Self Government Agreements.

**Management context – roles and responsibilities and current conditions**

- A long way up the Porcupine River (150 miles or so) there were lots of moose in the past, but people were not hunting there and recently the moose are declining and there are always a lot of wolves. Moose numbers are low when the caribou are around: perception that wolves are killing the moose. Certainly, the wolves follow the caribou and have a negative effect on the moose.
- A lot of the moose that used to be up the Porcupine River have been killed by wolves: witness of six wolf kills on the way up the river towards Fish Lake in fall 2010. A lot of the moose are moving up north with the caribou and the wolves that remain around the town are killing the moose the community would be hunting.
- Even when entire packs have been trapped (one report of trapping all nine in a pack), wolf numbers rebound.
- The packs are small – five to six animals. There are less moose here now and the wolves are hitting them hard.

- Some wolves that follow the caribou have remarkably large ranges, while those that prey on moose do not have such extensive ranges.
- Everyone here likes to see wildlife of all kinds, but when you don't see a moose for two years you start to wonder what the impact wolves are having on the populations. This is not a balanced situation and our role is to try and keep the balance.
- There is not a lot of information on wolf population dynamics for the traditional territory.
- Overall the wolf, moose, caribou picture is complicated by the presence of bears and other predators.
- There is no local CO stationed in Old Crow which creates a challenge for the community: tendency to be reactive and not proactive. This is not good for local management.
- Yukon First Nations governments can make laws in their traditional territories that affect their citizens.
- Need to keep respect in mind and acknowledge that the trappers and the people out on the land know what is going on out there. It is important to pay attention to what people say when they are on the ground and it is important to keep the RRC and First Nation in mind throughout all aspects of this review.
- First Nation Final Agreements and RRC's need to be heavily reflected in the new plan.

### **Wolf conservation and management – general approach**

- Respect for all animals and all species is very important and it is important that is identified and recognized in Old Crow, where people depend on the land to survive. People still practice traditional knowledge in hunting and trapping.
- Need to be respectful and acknowledge that people can only control what we “can” control and be respectful. We cannot alter the relationship of respect between species including humans and wolves.
- There are spiritual beliefs to consider and these must be considered in the review of the plan. People will not raise this often, but this is something that has to be considered.
- Spirituality exists around wolves and is factored into community decisions: last year when a wolf remained around the community, the community took time and care to arrive at a management decision. Historically in years past the Yukon government would have just dispatched a wolf; this is a huge improvement.
- There are ways – if you consider TK - to respect the spiritual aspects of wolves and wolf management. Trapping indiscriminately is not condoned.
- There is a strong trapping community in Old Crow, and as there is an intact traditional territory and people are out on the land why bother surveying wolves if nobody is going to take management actions. Instead rely on the local people and

local knowledge for the decision making. There is no need for costly programs if there is no likelihood of management actions.

- Need a process in place with local people involved and local knowledge considered before decisions are made. Traditional Knowledge and science together should be fully considered so no management decisions are imposed on the community by the Yukon government.
- The Vuntut Government is developing a wildlife act. It will be an important part of how wildlife is management in the traditional territory but a lot of work remains to do and there is no timeline for its completion.
- A process to establish a harvest management plan for the Porcupine Caribou herd was challenging and took a long time to develop. But it is important and in the end it recognized the importance of good information and local and tradition knowledge in harvest management decisions. This is a process and a plan that is worth considering in the review of the wolf conservation and management plan.
- Traditional knowledge and information from trappers is essential to making good management decisions. In all deliberations and dialogue about wildlife conservation there is a need to consider TK as a priority and the focus has to be keeping a balance between people and wildlife and between species of wildlife.
- Many people commented to the effect that: “Our way is to keep the balance, and in order to do this you have to talk to the experts in the community and consider TK so local people are making decisions in the traditional territory.” Local people can provide good advice on what should be done and how to accomplish it.
- There is a need to manage people and not just wolves.

### **Management of hunting and trapping of wolves**

- Need to look at the needs of the community. Old Crow has caribou; Teslin has moose and needs an incentive program to help with moose numbers. Old Crow may not always have caribou. Wolves here are migratory in nature when they hunt the caribou.
- Hunting and trapping wolves in the North Yukon is difficult and trappers have to use local and traditional knowledge, as well as science. Old Crow hunters and trappers know that there are wolves and moose on the North Slope and not much snow creating good conditions for moose and for the wolves that hunt moose. Caribou migrate and this affects the wolf populations and this in turn can affect the moose populations.
- One individual observed that “travelling up north on a dog team, I saw many wolf trails and the wolves were going up north to den and they are hard to locate which makes traditional measures challenging such as pupping... These wolves in turn make their way back to the Porcupine River and raise challenges for the moose.”
- Based on YTG work it appears that there are two groups of wolves – the migratory

ones that follow caribou and the non- migratory ones that people believe are killing moose. The wolves kill 29 caribou per year and five moose and that is a lot of wildlife. People see them on the land, and agree it is expensive managing wolves and difficult to survey them. However, in Alaska where they actively manage wolves there are a lot more moose like in Anchorage where many people are living and there are a lot of moose close-by.

- The most important species are marten and rats; they are the best “money species”. Wolves are a lot of work and don’t pay.

### *Surveys*

- Surveys are helpful in establishing baseline information for the proper management of wolves and all wildlife in the traditional territory. These should be conducted on a collaborative basis with the FN and YG so that the best available information can be organized and managed to establish a holistic picture.
- The Old Crow trappers association has done some wildlife survey work. It is expensive. Their work on protecting a local area has worked to some degree.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has done a good job of surveying caribou, but nobody is counting wolves. If the caribou are high in number then the wolves will also be doing well and they will be very difficult to control.
- Concern was expressed about the absence of current population numbers of wolves or even moose for the traditional territory and how this handicaps wildlife management decisions.
- It is hard to survey wolves without radio collars, and collaring is expensive. Areas in the southern Yukon require collars especially because of the dense timber. Surveying wolves by flying tracks is less accurate and very time consuming. It takes a lot of years to get good at counting wolf tracks and estimating numbers and particularly trends.

### *Incentives*

- Need incentive programs at the very minimum as a relatively low cost approach.
- Need to be creative with incentives as they can be more than just incentive, they can be a manner in which to achieve multiple goals at the same time such as increasing trapping, providing incentives to trappers and involving youth so younger people participate into trapping rather than just giving incentives to the older trappers.
- Need to think longer term. In addition, we can do local trapper training and can work hard to support local management of wildlife as an incentive... if you get out of the land, you have a say because you know what is going on out there... There has to be some incentive for the people getting out on the land and bringing back the critical information we cannot afford to get through other means like surveys or radio collaring etc.

- Favor was expressed for incentive programs rather than a bounty, and interest was expressed in the GNWT's \$600/wolf incentive program.
- An incentive program would help trappers, however it may not be enough to encourage more trapping.
- Studies have shown that wolves are resilient and thus trapping will not hurt the survival of wolf populations given they are so resilient. Incentive will help trappers skinning wolves, which is time consuming.
- Trappers take every species of animals, but the caribou are harvested by wolves. If trappers who are harvesting wolves are targeted for incentives to increase the harvest of wolves this would improve moose and caribou numbers.
- Use incentives in an experimental design to see if they work.

#### *Trapper training*

Rather than spending money on surveys, allocate money towards local people who can provide trapper training and provide local knowledge at a lower cost.

#### **Management of ungulates**

- There is general concern about climate change which is going to cause a lot of potential problems. Moose are seen now along the coast (near the ocean); this was never the case in the past. Question if the arctic moose are breeding with the Old Crow Flats moose. Is climate change going to disrupt the natural balance that people here believe in and try to achieve?
- What are the impacts of harvesting big bulls on breeding and productivity. These are matters that should be considered in a broader approach to ungulate management.
- Have to choose between moose and wolves – a balance is needed

#### **Wolf – human conflict**

- In the last few years there have been at least three wolves that have come around the communities and these wolves were mingling with the dogs and then killing them, this is something that needs to be on the radar all the time.
- Usually there are at least one or more wolves in the community during the winter.
- A pack of wolves that are used to eating dogs pass this along to the young members of the pack.

#### **Conditions for wolf population reduction**

- Concern was expressed about how to avoid the wolf kill situations that happened in the past. Killing wolves from planes is not an approach that people here are comfortable with: it is not “our way and we do not see the balance in this approach.”
- Non-lethal control was also perceived as not cost effective: “How is it going to be cheaper to fly around trapping wolves and sterilizing them than flying around and

shooting them. Its kind of the same thing.”

### **Education and Outreach**

- Education is very important and should be a part of management. There are traditional ways and it is important to respect the history of how things were done. For example: pairing elder trappers with young trappers; sending government COs and biologists out with elder trappers; sharing the knowledge and getting everyone engaged.