

Wolf Conservation and Management Plan Review
Watson Lake Community Meeting
March 2, 2011

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The following summary sets out key points discussed at the two-hour meeting of the Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan Review Committee and community members in Watson Lake. 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.

Management context – roles and responsibilities and current conditions

- It's hard to get people interested in going into the bush. No one goes out anymore.
- It is projected that the human population in Yukon will increase dramatically. Need to think about how to address management issues in the future.
- At the point where the rights of other groups are more important than our own. We enjoy moose meat, want a healthy lifestyle, enjoy the hunt, feel comfortable ? moose.
- The Teslin Tlingit Council contributed 15K for a wolf study in the Nisutulin area. YG contributed 15K as well. They learned there are lots of wolves out there.
- Public opinion is very powerful and terminology is a sensitive matter (e.g. bounty vs. incentive vs. pelt handling).
- There may be different strategies in Watson Lake because there is no RRC. Needs to be a local voice about wolf and other wildlife, management. Suggestion of organizing a hunters and trappers association, similar to NWT communities. There were attempts in the past to establish an RRC. There was no funding and other issues affected why an RRC-type organization didn't work.
- The COs in Watson Lake are hunters and know what it's like to be out on the land. This is a great benefit for local wildlife management.

- There is lots of traditional and local knowledge in the room (and not in the room) could complement survey information. This should be part of the management regime. The 1992 plan relied only on science and research.
- Need to consider how to give a voice to the region to harness all the information and knowledge in the absence of an RRC.
- There is a strong interest in local approaches to wolf management.
- Recommendations should come from the community.
- Cost-sharing of wildlife surveys and other management initiatives has worked.
- Need timely management responses. Local management responses are important. There needs to be a way to address local wildlife management issues than typically has been the case.

Wolf conservation and management – general approach

- The rationale expressed expressed by different individuals for wolf management included the importance of wolves to trappers and hunters, wolves as competitors for moose, and that wolves have an intrinsic value.
- The focus here is on wildlife conservation, not wolf eradication.
- Overall conservation and healthy ecosystems is most important. Can't lose sight of the importance of large tracts of undisturbed habitat. This is the big picture.
- Research shows that it is not possible to significantly reduce wolf populations without a long-term, major effort. If wolf numbers are reduced by a small increment, it may make some modest differences locally or in select areas to ungulate management. Subtle or small differences can be important.
- There should be a balance reached between managing hunting pressure and managing wolves.
- There should be a balance between local harvest needs and those of others from outside the region and a balance between ungulate and wolf management, recognizing there is too much hunting pressure from Whitehorse.
- Need to manage the whole ecosystem complex of animals.
- Management should be done "in parallel" or as a package, not just focused on one component.
- These predator – prey systems are very complicated and don't necessarily go in cycles.
- There is a consensus locally that there is an abundance of wolves in the area.
- Management should be tapping local knowledge and relying on local expertise and local initiative.

Management of hunting and trapping of wolves

- Consider a \$500 incentive for local trappers and hunters if the wolf is trapped or killed with a license. If the wolf only brings \$250 at the market the government would make up the difference. The individual would keep the pelt.

- Consider incentives for local people instead of government funded wolf control.
- In 2009 – 2010 there were 117 wolves trapped and 80 wolves shot in the Yukon.
- Liard region – in 2009 there were 49 wolves hunted and 20 wolves trapped. That was the highest number in last 10 years. Lowest number was in the mid 30s as combined total (hunted and trapped).
- Access to trap lines as assistant trappers is difficult and needs to be improved..
- Trapping wolves is very difficult.
- Incentives are needed to get trappers out on the lines and to stay out longer for more success.
- 212 wolves harvested over the whole Yukon is not a very big number.
- Wolves are hard to skin and they smell. Most people are prepared to commit 8 – 10 hours work to skin wolves.
- Watson Lake has more snow than anywhere, making it very difficult on machines and equipment to get out wolf trapping
- Extend the wolf season into the spring or fall before the snow gets too deep.
- Targeted hunting and trapping of wolves can have a positive local effect on ungulates.
- Outfitters have financial reason and incentive to be out there managing wolves and bears (to maintain ungulate populations, etc.). It is not worth it for normal trappers who are not subsidized and how do not enjoy the same level of financial return for their efforts.
- The outfitters association provides pelt handling incentive for wolves that are trapped or snared (\$150). The YOA needs a receipt that tanning, fur buyer, or auction has received the wolf.
- There are incentives offered by other First Nations and RRCs, but there is no RRC in Watson. Liard FN were going to offer an incentive for wolves but it's unknown if that has become a policy.
- Teslin Tlingit Council offers similar incentive of \$150 for trapped or hunted wolves.
- Most of the incentives are tied to proper handling of pelts. TTC does an inspection on the pelt and they reserve the right to reduce the amount on the pelt.
- Money paid out to trappers should not be limited to \$500 for a wolf pelt. Whatever a trapper sells it for, it should be supplemented with a \$500 "top-up". When a trapper only receives \$500 total for a wolf it is not worth trapping them. Until a trapper receives approximately \$1000 for a wolf pelt, it won't be financially worth trapping them.
- There was a workshop in Teslin on pelt handling – turning eyes, ears, lips. It was well attended but it is a lot of work to properly handle a wolf for the average person.
- YOA, YG, and the FN should all contribute to an incentive program in a partnership arrangement.
- There are constraints through seasonal restrictions and bag limits that are barriers to hunting and trapping wolves.

- For a big game animal the hunting season is to March 31. Hide start to slip in the spring so a late season doesn't help. Bring in a late spring season for wolves to correspond to the spring bear season.
- You can shoot a wolf anywhere in Yukon as long as you do not disturb a trapper's sets.
- Should be trapping when wolves are at their prime. In the spring the pelts are better.
- There are many restrictions on harvesting wolves (e.g. non residents can only take two, specific season to hunt, can't harvest them in the spring – the best time).
- As far as a spring season for wolves, some pelts will be not quality from a selling point of view for a trapper; but for a sportsman hunter they would be fine for a trophy. A spring hunting season would facilitate a wolf harvest and there would not be pelt wastage.
- It is important to get more trappers out on the land. Most of the trappers are too old or have passed on. A training course on trapping at the jail for inmates who are interested may enhance participation.
- Not much incentive to trap wolves if there are no other furbearers that can be trapped at the same time.
- There are quite a few lines in the area, many are not active.

Management of ungulates

- Tremendous hunting pressure in some areas (e.g. Frances Lake, Tungsten Road).
- Harvest pressure comes from outside the community, mostly Whitehorse.
- Local preference should be given to local hunters if permit conditions apply.
- Don't want to end up in a draw system for moose – no one wants to travel to Haines Junction (example) for moose or caribou.
- Moose numbers are way down.
- Lots of people didn't get a moose last fall and had to buy beef.
- The available habitat for moose in the area is not known.
- Government has encouraged people to harvest in areas where wolf control was conducted (Finlayson). Two years later pre-control conditions have been restored.
- Thousands of moose are lost in the Yukon every year from wolves.
- Concern that you can't shoot off the highway or roadway. Once you get off the roadway you're into deep bush.
- There are more side roads and cut lines in BC so hunting is easier. In Yukon roads are deactivated making off-road access more difficult.
- Not as many signs of moose in the area; wolf signs are abundant.
- Moose populations are just holding their own at present levels of hunting and wolf predation.
- Harvest effort that targets boar grizzly bears and wolves results in a noticeable difference in the moose population.

- Consider managing wolves with the upper limit of a 6% harvest rate for wolves (well within the limits (as high as 30%+ according to some) of a sustainable wolf harvest). Currently the sustainable harvest of moose is 3-5%. Remove just enough wolves from the system to increase the moose harvest to 6%. That would satisfy hunter's needs for more moose.
- Currently 3 – 5% harvest rate for moose is thought to be sustainable.
- Important hunting areas should be targeted more than other areas for wolf management.
- Teslin is harvesting moose at about 10% because of a couple of trappers removing wolves in a local area. There are also “feeder” moose coming into the area.
- There is hunting pressure coming from other places in the territory where there are area closures in place.
- There is interest in managing wolves to produce more moose close to town for hunters.

Wolf – human conflict

- Trapping (through the participation of assistant trappers) has proven effective in managing wolves that have been eating dogs around the town.

Conditions for wolf population reduction

- What is the number of wolves that should be harvested to enhance local moose populations.
- Need a bounty to reduce wolf numbers. In BC wolves are controlled to increase moose and caribou populations.
- Alaska and BC are both doing wolf control. Alaska has had four to six active wolf control programs for a dozen years.
- Not much interest in wolf sterilization.
- Wolf removal in one area may not have the same affect as in another area. The system is complicated and weather has an effect on calf survival.

Education and Outreach

- Elders are very active and in the school teaching young kids.
- Schools should be taking kids into the bush. It is hard to compete with video games
- Lots of kids don't know what to do in the bush – it's a different lifestyle.

Wildlife Viewing and appreciation

- Leave wildlife on road corridors for wildlife viewing opportunities.

Other issues

- Bears are huge predators on moose and caribou calves in spring and need to be part of this discussion.

- Bears have slow reproductive rates therefore caution should be applied in reducing numbers. Wolves can bounce back quickly from population declines.
- Need to be look more broadly at other predators especially black bears. Baiting of black bears should be considered.
- There are more predators (lynx, marten) now; therefore more trappers are needed to balance things out.