

On the Land Gathering – Southern Lakes Caribou Relationship Plan

June 5, 2024

Proceedings and Insights Report



Hosted by the Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council
Facilitator and Report Prepared by: Dennis Zimmermann – Big Fish Little Fish Consultants

On the evening of June 5, 2024, over twenty participants gathered outside of Carcross, Yukon at Skookies Camp for the annual Carcross/Tagish Renewable Council (C/TRRC) *On the Land Gathering*. The theme this year focused around the release of the new DRAFT *Southern Lakes Caribou Relationship Plan*.

The project manager, Lars Jessup and members from the Steering Committee brought copies of *Southern Lakes Caribou Relationship Plan- Summary draft for public review*. It was explained that this was their first engagement with a public document and that they will continue to work on this in the fall of 2024 and the document signed off in the winter of 2025.

Lars provided a general overview of the project and the document in general. This included the vision, the objective, the ranges of the four herds (Ibex, Carcross, Atlin and Laberge), and a historical overview of the initial recovery program established in 1993 to today. Surveys were handed out to be filled out after the meeting and submitted with a chance to win a beautifully crafted axe from Niko Helm, the late Elder Edna Helm’s grandson and prominent C/TRRC member and advocate for Southern Lakes caribou.

The overall objective as presented in the document: maintain caribou numbers and build relationships among people and caribou in Southern Lakes.

The caribou seasonal round was presented as a visual and conceptual guide for readers and those at the workshop. This was presented in greater detail with the acknowledgement that the relationship is not static and changes throughout the seasons. This will provide clarity that governments and individuals can take to build the relationship with caribou.



Featured prominently in the summary and the plan are quotes from Elders and those involved in the recovery of the herds. With that approach in mind, quotes from participants at the June 5th workshop are also featured within this proceedings and insights report. Quotes are presented in italics and in green.

It is important to bring this back to the communities to show we have been listening – quotes will be an important component of the plan
June 5, 24 On the Land Gathering Participant

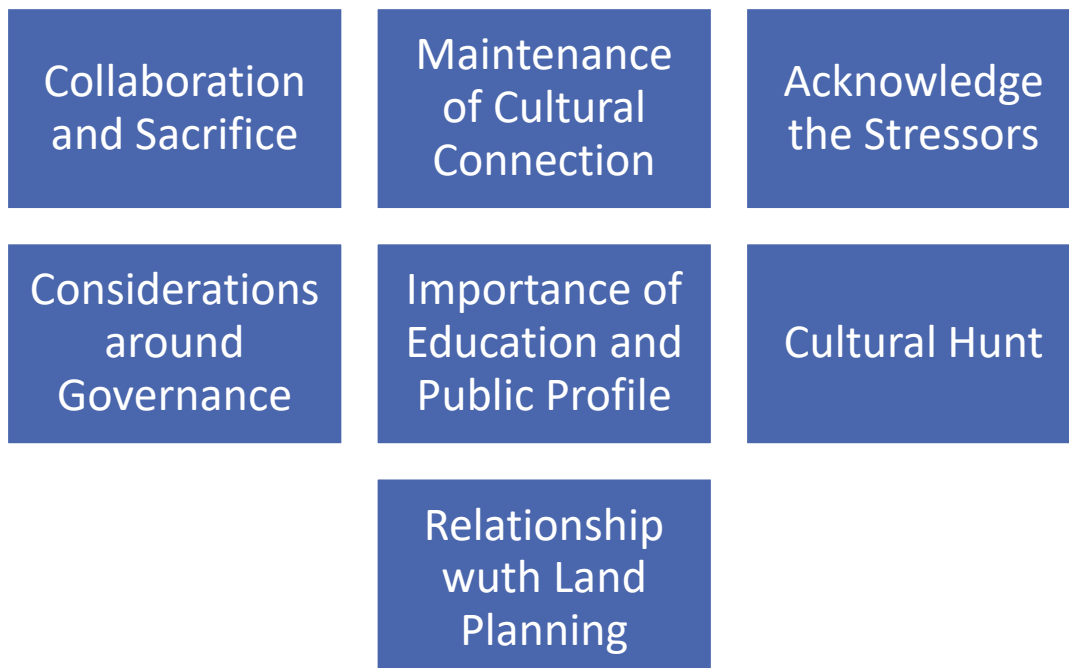
It has been 30 years of recovery and now moving into a relationship plan.
June 5, 24 On the Land Gathering Participant

Feedback from participants on the OBJECTIVES AND THE SEASONAL ROUND:

- Many people don't want to lose what was gained
- Highlight the First Nation relationship with caribou and with each other
- This group is a trial run to share the plan and see if it resonates

- the braiding of both sides of western/indigenous knowledge was highlighted as a key feature.
- The plan is not going to be final, it will continue to be built upon, and should be renewed every five years.

Based on the feedback provided at the *On the Land Gathering* there were seven themes that emerged. These were:



Collaboration and Sacrifice

- Have been involved since 1991 when the Yukon First Nations first started working to protect the dwindling caribou herds.

This is a miracle for woodland caribou and did not happen by accident. Elders said that it is more important to see caribou on the landscape rather than hunt. June 5, 24 On the Land Gathering Participant

- After 20-50 years they are back on the landscape. In 2016 C/TRRC held an Elder's workshop where they clearly stated that they were not ready for hunting. If anything was to be considered it would be a cultural school hunt.
- Proved you need everyone along with you and a long-term plan. The population crash of the 40-mile caribou proves this.

One of the greatest successes is the caribou in the schools program, younger generations need to be taught and not to take it for granted. June 5, 24 On the Land Gathering Participant

- A credit to people like Art Johns. The rebuilding can be undone really easily. We need need to keep: protection for old growth forests and winter caribou grounds as well as the keeping the public engaged.



Maintenance of Cultural Connection

- Question as to whether there will be a cultural harvest? This might occur through the schools.

Used to take bull caribou in the spring to make dry meat as it would dry easy and then would use the hide for moccasins and foot fillings. June 5, 24 On the Land Gathering Participant

- I remember talking to the Elders and listening to them as they spoke about protecting caribou habitat. Regret not sitting and listening to them for longer. Many have passed now.

Like the salmon culture, need to keep the caribou culture alive. Have ceremony and a day of celebration and prayer. June 5, 24 On the Land Gathering Participant

- The older caribou blinds and ice patch work is really important and needs protection from future staking.
- Very pleased this plan draws upon traditional knowledge and is showing the way for other caribou herds in the Yukon.

Acknowledge the many Stressors for Caribou

- Was not aware of how large the herd was before, need to appreciate the impacts that humans and wolves had on the herd.
- There are challenges still with mining companies (Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation Traditional Territory).
- Saw my first caribou in 1983 and did not know what it was. The impacts from settlers on caribou has been drastic.
- There are concerns over dog teams and the associated land-use planning happening on Marsh Lake. Have heard that caribou will walk 5 kms to circumvent dog teams.
- Tourism in the Southern Lakes is a big deal and impacts caribou.

Mining impacts caribou, there is one documented caribou fence in the region, trying to protect it. Need to keep the pressure on the Minister, especially RRCs. June 5, 24 On the Land Gathering Participant

- Climate change is making things harder for caribou.
- Forest fires, and old growth in particular are vulnerable.
- Is there a relationship with moose populations and wolves. If there are low moose populations, there are fewer wolf packs. As moose increase, wolves increase. Given studies say that wolves eat 75% moose and 25% caribou, more wolves will inevitably mean more predation on caribou.
- Is there an interest in building a relationship with dog mushing and the recreational community on caribou? It was stated the plan did not want to single out specific user groups.
- Tourism impacts are something that need to be considered

Need to protect their food source too – the controlled burns can have a negative effect on them. There are numerous types of lichen and caribou only eat some of them. June 5, 24 On the Land Gathering Participant

Considerations Around Governance

- There is a need to have clarity on the specific parties on the steering committee moving forward. There needs to be a term of reference that states who needs to be part of the steering committee moving forward. Must also brief up to leadership.

Need to keep the parties together, this speaks to the importance of implementation. June 5, 24 On the Land Gathering Participant

- Resolutions to keep this plan alive. May wish to consider a resolution from the RRCs to support.
- Where does funding fit into the management plan and First Nations need to take it to leadership.

Importance of Education and Maintaining a Public Profile

- Caribou in the Schools program implementation is really important. There is a booklet for each First Nation/community focused on their priorities.
- Stress the importance of educating school-aged kids and them presenting messages to their parents. Connect the Elders to the school projects and keep them involved.

Keep up the efforts, need to let those new to the Yukon know so that the importance of this herd and the rebuilding is not lost. June 5, 24 On the Land Gathering Participant

- Continue to raise the profile and cast a wide net to communicate.



Considerations Around a Cultural Hunt

- Use the word “hunt”, rather than “harvest” so as to not associate with expectations around the provision of food for the family.
- How can we approach hunting with 9 Governments? We are also losing Elders that could hunt with youth and the intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Next five years focus will be a carefully considered cultural hunt and a respectful plan. Take small steps and be careful. June 5, 24 On the Land Gathering Participant

How can you manage how many caribou will be taken between communities? Also, an opportunity to give the Game Guardians some more authority. Will I see a harvest management plan in my future? June 5, 24 On the Land Gathering Participant

Relationship with Land Planning

- Range assessments and important for habitat connectivity. Also reflected through the regional land use planning processes.
- The *How We Walk With the Land and Water* also works into this as well.

There is a concern that small regional planning efforts might infringe upon a large scale conservation plan. June 5, 24 On the Land Gathering Participant

- Caribou habitats are important and carry weight.
- Consider human interactions within the range assessment tools. Need to have regulators such as YESAB or EMR to accept them.

Finally, there was much gratitude expressed for all those that have contributed to the recovery and the gathering including Elders, citizens, contractors, First Nation Governments, and to the C/TRRC for hosting.



Participants June 5, 2024:

1. Tim Dewhurst – Teslin RRC
2. Lars Jessup - Contractor
3. Don Toews – Public/Former C/TRRC
4. Lorraine Graham - CRRC
5. Joseph O-Brien – Carmacks RRC
6. Sebastian Jones – YFWMB
7. Kelsey Russel – Yukon Gov.
8. Andrew Serack – C/TRRC
9. Miles Johnson – C/TRRC
10. Bryce Bekar – C/TRRC
11. Alberta Sam – KDFN
12. Emma Hoogland – KDFN
13. Brandy Mayes – KDFN
14. Steve Hossack – YFWMB
15. Colleen Arneson – Yukon Gov. Neil Salvin – LRRC
16. Shannon Statyn – Yukon Gov. Matt Clark – Yukon Gov. Marc Cattet – Yukon Gov.
17. Zena McClean – C/TRRC
18. Kim – Carmacks RRC
19. Kate Andre – Ta’an Kwäch’än Council
20. Dennis Zimmermann – Facilitator/Contractor

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