

NUNATUKAVUT ENCOURAGED BY INCREASING CARIBOU POPULATION; CONTINUES IMPLEMENTATION OF MORATORIUM ON HUNTING

HAPPY VALLEY-GOOSE BAY, LABRADOR, October 15, 2020 – The NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) today welcomed the positive news from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador about an increase in the George River Caribou Herd (GRCH) population. An aerial survey conducted by the provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec in July 2020 estimated there are 8,100 caribou in the herd, a 47 per cent increase since the last survey in 2018.

While these latest population results are an encouraging sign of improvement in the health of the GRCH, NCC is recommending that all NunatuKavut Inuit hunters continue to adhere to the community-driven moratorium on hunting. The NCC feels that this is a very necessary measure to help ensure the protection and conservation of the herd. The need for Indigenous peoples to exercise their own responsibility for the protection of the caribou led to the establishment of the Ungava Peninsula Caribou Aboriginal Round Table (UPCART) in 2013. NCC remains committed to the critical work of UPCART and its ground-breaking caribou management strategy called “A Long Time Ago in the Future: Caribou and the People of Ungava.”

NCC also continues to monitor the Mealy Mountain Caribou Herd (MMCH), whose habitat is within NunatuKavut. It is currently listed as a threatened species under federal and provincial legislation. While population estimates from 2019 suggest that the herd is stable, these estimates come with uncertainty around caribou density in some areas and a decline in group size observed since 2012. NCC strongly encourages its people to avoid harvesting of this herd until further monitoring and recovery efforts are undertaken.

NunatuKavut Inuit have always had a fundamentally important relationship with caribou. To maintain this connection, NCC continues to pursue the possibility of a cultural harvest. NCC’s approach has always been one that respects caribou, as well as other Indigenous peoples and their relationship with caribou.

Quotes

“I am so pleased that the latest survey results are indicating a strong increase in the population of the George River Caribou Herd. The past decline of the herd has had significant impacts on NunatuKavut Inuit culture and way of life. We acknowledge our many hunters who have been observing the community-driven moratorium put in place over the past number of years. Until we are certain that the herds are consistently healthy and well, we are asking that our hunters continue to refrain from taking caribou. We have a responsibility as Inuit, as do other Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, to do all we can to help protect the caribou and their habitat. We want future generations to know about caribou and to always have it be a part of our culture.”

- *Todd Russell, President of NCC*

“I was encouraged to hear that the population of the George River Caribou Herd is on the rise, which I understand is the first increase in 25 years. I have hunted that herd for years and have seen it at its peak. I have really good memories of those days. I fully support a continued moratorium so the caribou can more fully recover and be healthy again. We have a long way to go before we should promote hunting of the herd. Now is not the right time.”

- *James W. Holwell, long-time hunter, elder and NCC Councillor for Area 5 (Central/Northern Labrador)*

Quick Facts

- The population of the GRCH was estimated at approximately 800,000 about 20 years ago.
- The population of the GRCH was estimated to be 8,900 in 2016, 5,500 in 2018 and 8,100 in 2020. This year is the first population increase in over 25 years.
- In 2003, NCC developed its first Caribou Harvesting Plan, as well as interim conservation and safety guidelines for its hunters. In 2012, NCC initiated a community driven hunting moratorium on the GRCH based on traditional knowledge and science.
- UPCART was established in 2013 to unite all Indigenous groups and Nations in the Quebec-Labrador Peninsula in conserving migratory caribou herds. In 2017, a caribou management strategy called “A Long Time Ago in the Future: Caribou and the People of Ungava.”
- NCC is the representative governing body for approximately 6,000 Inuit of south and central Labrador, collectively known as the Inuit of NunatuKavut.
- NunatuKavut means “Our Ancient Land” in Inuttitut and is the traditional territory of the NunatuKavut Inuit.
- In July 2018, NCC entered into talks with the Government of Canada on the recognition of its Indigenous rights and self-determination.

Associated Links

- To read the news release from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador on the population increase of the GRCH, please visit <https://www.gov.nl.ca/releases/2020/ffa/1015n06/>.
- For further information on NCC, please visit www.nunatukavut.ca. Please also join in the conversation at Facebook.com/nunatukavut and Twitter @nunatukavut.

Contact

Kelly Broomfield
Director of Communications, NCC
T: 709-280-5965
E: communications@nunatukavut.ca