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To: Wolf Conservation and Management Plan Review Committee

Re: Comments for consideration of Review Committee

Thank you for your hard work and time spent on your meetings and consultations. You do not need (another) meddle-some retired biologist to wax on, but here are a few ideas that may not have been raised.

Issue: Implementation of this iteration of the WCMP will require substantial and controversial work by FN Chiefs and Councils on trapline rights, and special attention to their needs is important in the process of consultation and the design of the plan.

Background:

1. In the 1992 plan, CYI biologist Ray Quock visited every Chief and Council and explained the key aspects of the plan. They mostly discussed the mandatory 2 years of no hunting prior to the govt spending money on aerial control, realizing this would be a hard sell to citizens.
2. In the 1992 plan, greater trapping was encouraged. FN leaders wanted bounties but were told no govt money for this because it was difficult to administer as low-price wolves taken from other areas would be submitted as being taken in the bounty area. The efforts to expand trapping were largely fruitless except in Teslin, despite lots of effort in places like Ross River.
3. Expanding trapping will require very difficult and unpopular decisions for FN leaders. Trapline rights are extremely wicked problems for FNs. Many powerful families will not tolerate any erosion of rights that would cede control over who can trap on lines from the owner. FN families perceive that line ownership as a cultural connection to traditional family hunting areas, and the monopoly to harvest furbearers is part of this.
4. Most of the areas where RRCs will recommend reduced wolf numbers have mostly FN-owned trap lines. In many areas these lines are very lightly trapped or not at all. Increasing wolf harvests will require skilled trappers working in portions of these lines. If the FN line owner will not permit this, there is a serious problem (e.g. southern lakes).
5. The FN line owners may prefer incentives and training for youth in the family to take the wolves.

6. If the new WCMP recommends wolf reduction by trapping without a legislative process to address this conflict, FN Chiefs and Councils will be blamed failing to take action to address ungulate declines.

Suggestions:

1. The WCM Plan draft be explained to Chiefs and Councils at individual meetings where they can understand needs for action on FN trap lines. They may request these briefings be extended to their general assemblies.
2. As part of implementation of the new WCMP, a very high priority and funding should be placed on the Parties or FNs starting and completing a process to tease apart cultural, economic and conservation rights associated with trapline concessions and propose appropriate legislative changes. This is long overdue.

Issue: Implementation of this iteration of the WCMP will require work by FNs on documenting Moose and Caribou Harvest Management Systems appropriate to their citizens and cultures.

Background

1. Moose harvests by non-natives are now about one-third what they were in the 1980s and FNs in most TTs take about two thirds or more of the moose harvest. Non-native and native resident hunters likely hunt the same areas in the fall season.
2. FN harvesting is organized by undocumented rules of who hunts where and when, understandings of where moose harvests are too high, changing patterns of access and equipment, seasonal meat needs, preferences for fat animals, and meat collection and distribution systems. Young hunters may not follow all the culture laws.
3. The cultural framework for this hunt is completely different than the 'maximizing recreation' and 'maximizing hunt quality' goals of the non-native hunt management system. This framework values 'maintaining family hunting traditions', 'giving elders priority', and other values.
4. As areas are identified as having declining moose numbers, people throughout the Yukon will pay attention to how FNs are managing the harvest by their residents in these areas. "We have no system" is not an option.
5. Chiefs and Councils of FNs may find this topic and even the potential that they might influence who hunts where as a very controversial matter.
6. Gradual efforts are bearing fruit where many FN harvesters are now willing to tell their FNs about their harvests, and this information is shared within narrow trust circles. Where there is broad understanding of how many are being taken in particular areas by the FN hunters of that FN, some hunters are willing to hunt elsewhere.

7. Ten to twenty years now after claims were signed, there is growing impatience that FNs take responsibility for harvesting. Indeed there will be the sentiment “no action on wolves till your own harvesting is sustainable”.
8. In fact, no harvest management systems are perfect because there is never enough information, people with empty freezers hunt strategically, there is a wide range in opinions on the importance of legislation and education, and hunters have ample reason to be cautious about sharing information on moose and their hunting.

Suggestion:

The WCMP recommend documentation of each FNs Harvest Management Systems as a precondition for action on wolves in their TT. It is time.

Issue: The 1992 plan had laudable recommendations related to guided viewing of wolves (at dens and elsewhere) that should be continued and implemented in the new plan.

Background

1. Opportunities to experience wolf howling and to see wolf dens and to see wolves at dens are extremely important in framing how people learn and experience these animals.
2. This recommendation was an important tradeoff made by conservationists during the preparation of the 1992 plan. They were prepared to stomach aerial gunning if there was corresponding effort spent on education, interpretation and appreciation. The govt only implemented this for a few years.
3. This is not a wolf control plan, it is a conservation plan as well.
4. Residents who have participated in managed, guided opportunities to watch large carnivores highly value these experiences. These are powerful learning experiences.

Suggestion

Include recommendations in the plan insisting on govt spending on guided viewing and interpretation related to wolves, and continued school units on wolves.

Issue: Wolf snares left open in the summer will lead to suffering and slow death of animals.

Background:

1. If each snare set uses 10-20 snares, and each trapper sets half a dozen sites, (and the govt gives out free snares to encourage this), we can end up with a situation where one trapper is responsible for 60 to 120 snares. Near a community there can be hundreds of snares if several trappers are working.
2. While trappers are skilled and careful, there are many reasons why a trapper may not close or retrieve every snare, such as overflow, illness, or uncertainty

about where the snares were set as the snow depth increases, etc. The risk of this happening may be higher where an expert designs the snare site and sets the snares and they are monitored by others.

3. Open snares in the summer pose a risk to many large mammals. The narrow wire cuts deep into legs and there is considerable suffering, even if the animal is able to break the wire. The stops are designed to be difficult to release.

Suggestion:

The plan should have very clear call for ethical snaring and failsafe procedures that identify individual snare locations, verify that all snares were collected or closed and promote snaring procedures that are designed to prevent this.

Issue: There are some situations and landscapes and times where efforts to recover target species can be predicted in advance to not be wise, responsible, or successful, despite the situation being described as a “crisis”.

Background

1. Conditions under which reducing wolf numbers would be considered were an important part of the last plan. They mostly dealt with information and hunting levels.
2. Moose and caribou have evolved with wolves and bears, and have instinctive, learned and biological strategies to avoid predation that work best in landscapes with particular characteristics. We should not try to recover target species by removing wolves in landscapes where their anti predation strategies will not work well.
3. It is a big deal to ask and expect a community to not hunt in an area and to trust the narrative “if we all curtail our hunting now and for a few years, and if we work hard to reduce wolves, moose will become abundant again”. There are landscapes where this will not be possible.
4. Is wolf control a tool to address the decline of a small population of sheep/caribou/muskox/bison on a remote range that has had a succession of small cohorts due to bad spring weather? Our experience has been that the department diverts a lot of effort and funding from ongoing inventory and management efforts when recovery efforts get underway because of a “crisis”. I worry that “crises” are going to come at us more frequently as the climate changes, and we need some rules about what kinds of crisis that we deal with and which ones we consider dealing with wolves.

Suggestion:

1. The plan should speak to the general need to design moose and caribou recovery programs to complement the natural strategies moose and caribou use to shield their new born calves from predation.
2. The plan should list some general landscape features that we can predict will and will not lead to successful recovery. We have this experience. Participants in earlier recovery programs should be consulted to identify this list.

3. We have the experience to talk about and map and protect “nursery landscapes” as the engines of regional moose populations, for example. Elders, trappers, outfitters and pilots (and Regional Biologists and FN RR Managers) know these places. In fact one RRC and FN has protected one calving area already. We should not divert limited survey funds to studies that verify this. The point is that these landscapes are good places to invest in moose (recovery).
4. The wolf plan needs to be explicit if wolves will be managed to help prey populations that are at-risk mainly as a result of changing climate.

Thank you. I look forward to reading your draft.