

**Wolf Conservation and Management Plan Review
Dawson Community Meeting**

April 19, 2011

The following summary sets out key points discussed at a three hour meeting of the Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan Review Committee and community members in Dawson, Yukon. 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.

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Review Committee: Karen Clyde, Frank Thomas, Doug Larsen, Harvey Jessup, Wayne Jim, Mark O'Donoghue

Staff: Lindsay Staples (facilitator), Will Young

Management context – roles and responsibilities and current conditions

- The plan should reflect local issues and the role of renewable resources councils (RRCs).
- RRCs now have wildlife management responsibilities and can manage their own areas. Every area is different, and RRCs with management responsibilities can each respond so as to meet the needs in their respective areas. The UFA provides for more proactive management by local RRCs. The Yukon Wildlife Act needs to be amended to recognize their role and responsibilities in this regard.
- There are not too many countries left in the world with pristine areas – don't make the same mistakes as made in other countries.
- The Forty Mile caribou herd is closer now to Dawson City. Seeing more wolves lately in the Forty Mile area generally. Lots of moose being taken.
- Canada is forgoing the harvest of Forty Mile caribou while Alaska takes a harvest. Different strategies.
- People are accessing more areas (jet boats are able to get further up creeks where moose haven't been harvested before).
- Are seeing less moose tracks lately. Usually see a wolf pack's tracks. Now just see a lone wolf.

- Placer miners (particularly old-timers) are seeing more wolves. More wolf encounters have happened on Kirkman Creek in the last two years.
- Historically, the number of wolves harvested hasn't changed annually. There has been no overall change to the wolf population.
- There has been an increase in the number of coyotes recently. Coyotes are coming into placer claims. Perhaps more mule deer has meant more coyotes?
- What is the situation of wolves and fleas/mange/lice in YT? In AK there are some areas with lice outbreaks, and there has been some wolves observed in YT coming in from AK border with similar looking symptoms. This could become a serious problem. It results in hair-loss in the winter, scar tissue on the hide and suffering for wolves. This is expected to affect Yukon wolves within 10 years.
- In the past 5-10 years, wolf packs of 6-10 are now 12-18.
- Warmer winters may be having an effect on wolves and their prey.
- The ecosystem is complex. Just reducing wolf numbers may not solve low numbers of moose. Grizzly bears are important predators, and climate change may be influencing ungulate habitat.
- Need to look at the plan sooner than every 20 years.

Management of hunting and trapping of wolves

- There needs to be more people out trapping on traplines and they need to be targeting wolves. For example, if there are unutilized or underutilized lines, perhaps could allow assistant or special permission for people to specifically trap wolves.
- One trapper travels 186km (one way) to access his trapline – he travels past unused traplines to get to his.
- A program to trap wolves needs to be strategic about which trappers to engage (not just 'any' trapper but those who will trap wolves) and where to do the work to be effective.
- Any program needs to be proactive and make sure that it is being used effectively. It should target skilled hunters and trappers.
- Yukon Outfitters' Association pelt handling incentive program currently requires that a trapper must sell the pelt to a tannery or buyer; this prevents people from keeping the pelt. (note: update that this will change next year- trappers will be eligible for the incentive by providing proof of sealing the pelt, and will be able to keep the pelt).
- It is hard to get trapper courses; they are often offered during freeze-up and break-up.
- Need more (community-based) opportunities to train trappers.
- Local experts should teach community-based training programs. This is especially important when starting to trap a new area with 'naïve' wolves. They're smart and get smarter the more you trap them so a new program in a new area needs to be effective right off the bat or the wolves will learn and they're harder to catch.

- Wolves may be coming into Yukon because of wolf control occurring in Alaska to support the Forty Mile caribou herd. The herd is growing which supports more wolves, which disperse into Yukon.
- Only need to manage wolves around communities where there is a problem. Wolves manage themselves.
- When moose and caribou are at low numbers, don't wolves die off as well?
- If moose and caribou are harvested, we need to take from the other (predator-wolf) side as well. Finding and achieving a balance is difficult. Harvest rates to conserve moose populations range from 3-5%, wolf harvest rates could be as high as 30% and still conserve wolf populations. We don't even come close to taking 30% of the wolves however it's easy to get close or exceed 3% of the moose.
- Change the wolf harvest season to September through April. Pelts in August are not in their prime and here in the north, it's still winter and pelts are still prime in April.
- Have a different season for wolves on the Dempster.
- Need to find a way for hunters to give wolf hide to someone to skin. This would result in more wolves harvested as most people don't know what to do with the hide.
- RRCs have been talking (about the need for wolf management) for a long time. Alaska is currently involved in aerial wolf control, and the public pressure is off the Yukon; it's time to do something in the Yukon.
- Have to take a high number of wolves to make a difference to moose populations.
- Efforts to reduce wolf numbers may not be effective as even small packs will take a lot of moose. Trapping may not be effective.
- Do not do a government cull. Bad PR seems to worsen the situation. Very few people need to harvest moose and caribou for subsistence needs (very few are that poor). Should control human (harvest). Need more permits for moose. History has shown that (ecological) systems will regulate themselves. The last thing we want is a government kill program - it's better to limit our moose harvest [where there are problems with low moose numbers].
- Don't agree with big packs taking more ungulates. They will take adults, not just the young and weak. Wolves are opportunistic.
- Regulations should allow Yukon government to share information with wolf hunters about where moose kills are happening. It was noted that this would be difficult to change in regulations – perhaps allow after big game season?.
- Wolves are very difficult to hunt.
- At Henderson Corner “we share our neighbourhood with a pack”.
- We want to see wolves managed.
- In the past 60 years the number of wolves taken annually has remained constant, indicating wolves' resilience.
- Not hearing as much now about non-consumptive values of wolves as in 1992, perhaps because the conversation then was so heated.
- People want wolves out there.

- Many hunters who see wolves will not take them.
- To affect prey species, we need to take at least 30% of the 5,000 wolves in Yukon = around 1,700 wolves per year. Is it feasible to increase wolf harvest that much? Trappers should be given the tools to work at it.
- Tools required to obtain more community-based wolf management:
 - a summer season, knowing pelts are not prime [to deal with 'problem wolves' in camps]
 - extended spring season
 - ability to communicate pack locations from air without having 48 hour no-hunt period
 - ability to hunt predators in no-hunting corridors- eg. Dempster Highway.
 - Ability to give hides to someone. Often people don't shoot wolves because it's too much work. Should be able to give the wolf to someone who will skin them.
- Just as we do with moose, we need to put consistent steady pressure on wolf hunting and trapping. Current regulations are too restrictive and programs periodic.

Management of ungulates

- Alaskans harvest both Forty Mile caribou and wolves adjacent the Dawson area; Yukoners don't harvest these caribou and have minimal harvest of wolves.
- Have to look at hunting as a source of pressure as well as wolves. The increase in hunting pressure has been exponential.
- Hunters (often from Whitehorse) with sophisticated equipment (e.g. jet boats) means that they have a higher success. It is difficult for local hunters to compete with them for access to moose. So why not focus on managing these hunters and their activities?
- ATVs are providing access to previously un-harvested pockets of moose.
- Publishing results of moose surveys invites people to hunt in these areas.
- Humans are the only predator to self-regulate and they should do so.
- Hunting is a luxury. Need to reduce the number of hunters.
- Wolves have been observed making a moose/caribou kill, eating the tongue and liver, and abandoning the carcass.
- Need to manage people and focus on managing harvest, not wolves.
- Need to control Whitehorse hunters. They will have a bigger effect on moose than wolf reduction.
- All areas of Yukon are hunted (for ungulates). No areas are left undisturbed. The "balance" has now been offset.
- People should have to take a wolf to get a moose.
- Moose are important culturally to (my) family. Wolves are an important part of (my) life in the bush. I don't ever want to see wolves removed.
- Subsistence harvest is important, and for First Nations, it is important to the sustainability of First Nations culture. This importance cannot be overstated.

- Newcomers (non-First Nations people) have enjoyed moose and caribou since they arrived.
- Yukon is a wild country. (I) would give up hunting moose to keep the country wild.
- What was the effect of the blight on willows for moose last year? This occurred in Alaska as well last year.
- We cannot allow us or our effect on wildlife get to the point where we need to eliminate predators.

Wolf reduction

- Don't want large scale government-controlled wolf reduction programs via helicopters and aerial shooting. This approach simply worsens the management situation with a lot of bad publicity and considerable public expense. The focus should be on more modest measures that include measures to facilitate trappers and hunters increasing the harvest of wolves through improved opportunities, improved participation and improved trapping techniques. This likely will require regulation changes.
- Is wolf control the best use of public funds at \$30,000 per wolf? Needs to be put into the hands of trappers and hunters, not using public money, benefits locals.
- It's key to make sure it's wolves and not other predators that are in fact the primary predator [in low ungulate populations]. These are complex systems.
- Would need to harvest a huge number of wolves for wolf control to be effective. It is just not practical.
- Wolf reduction only warranted around communities. Otherwise let them manage themselves.
- Don't wait until there is a conservation concern. Reduce wolves now.
- Not sure if we can realize a balance because to take 30% of the wolves in the Yukon, that's 1700 wolves. This is not practical.
- Not many places like the Yukon in the world. We need to control ourselves, not wolves.

Education and outreach

- Community-based trapper training would greatly assist local trappers and individuals interested in getting into trapping.
- Need to educate hunters to take wolves.

Other considerations

- Bears take calves in the spring
- Bears have a higher profile than wolves so we aren't going to reduce bear numbers.
- These are complex systems. Don't just point the finger at wolves.
- Need to consider changing climate, vegetation and other predators.