

Concern

Shared population needs management.

Traditional knowledge indicates that muskoxen may have been in or near VGFN traditional territory within living memory. One elder recalled that his grandfather heard of one being killed but that was the only instance he knows of. Another elder gave the Gwich'in name as *Digun Cho* referring to its hunched back. Community opinions are divided about whether this is a good animal to have around (as a meat source if caribou decline) or a bad one (due to competition with caribou). Muskoxen were re-introduced to northeastern Alaska in 1969-1970 and began showing up on the Yukon North Slope shortly after that. The population has grown and, since the early 1990s, there have been about 150 in the Yukon at any time (individuals move back and forth across the border). Muskoxen used to show up mainly on the North Slope but they are being sighted more often in VGFN traditional territory in recent years so that the population is now shared among Alaska, Yukon and the NWT. Muskoxen in the Yukon are a specially protected species under Section 19(3) of the *Yukon Act*. Currently, it is illegal to hunt muskoxen on the North Slope because that section has not been repealed there yet. It is technically not illegal for VGFN people to hunt them in their traditional territory since the protection previously provided by Section 19(3) of the *Yukon Act* was rescinded following implementation of the VGFN Final Agreement. A management plan for this population is being drafted by the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope).

Solution Coordinate management of muskoxen.

The muskoxen management plan being prepared by the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope) needs to be expanded to include the Gwich'in Tribal Council and the VGFN.

Actions

Responsible parties, Time line

**YG/VGFN
WMAC(NS)
2001/02**

Encourage development of a joint muskoxen management plan. It was agreed that a workshop would be held in Inuvik in the fall of 2001 to create a management plan involving all governments using the WMAC(NS) plan as a starting point. WMAC (NS) is doing this. [2001-NY-AI-15]

**VGFN/YG
2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05**

Keep track of muskoxen sightings. A variety of methods might be employed here. Sightings could be recorded by the Game Guardian as part of the monitoring interviews. A map could be put in a prominent location (VGFN office foyer? community centre?) and people could mark their sightings on it. The Yukon government could document sightings from a variety of sources (Conservation officer patrols, other fieldwork, Tombstone Interpretive Centre, etc.). [2001-NY-AI-16]

**YG/NYRRC
2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05**

Provide information on muskoxen for VGFN people. Such information could include summaries of sightings, updates on health and diseases, etc. It would be up to the Yukon government and the RRC to decide the best means of preparing and presenting such information for the community. (*See also Community Education*) [2001-NY-AI-17]

continued...

Concern

Are they healthy?

Some hunters are concerned about whether muskox meat is safe to eat. The NWT government is concerned that Yukon/Alaska muskoxen carry one parasite that muskoxen populations across the Mackenzie River don't have, and muskoxen east of the Mackenzie River have another parasite that Yukon/Alaska muskoxen don't have. If the two populations came into contact they could transfer these parasites.

Solution Keep track of muskoxen health.

This can be accomplished in conjunction with muskoxen studies and samples from dead animals that are reported.

Actions

Responsible parties, Time line

YG
2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05

Keep track of muskoxen health with other governments. Whenever opportunities arise through studies or reported deaths, governments will take whatever samples are appropriate to monitor the general condition and diseases of muskoxen from this population. Since these opportunities may be infrequent, each government agency must inform the others of any findings and perhaps offer to take samples for other agency work. [2001-NY-AI-18]

Concern

Are radio-collars necessary?

Information from muskoxen distributions comes from two sources: a) scientific studies involving radio-collaring and aerial surveys and b) reported sightings. However, only the radio-collar information shows where individual animals go. Thus it is known that males travel much farther than females and that muskoxen move back and forth across the Alaska/Yukon border and in and out of the survey area. The question for the community is how necessary is the information that only collars can provide? This must be weighed against the discomfort some people feel about collaring animals.

Solution Evaluate importance of collars.

Community concerns about the ethics of collaring muskoxen must be compared with the value of the information this provides to management.

Actions

Responsible parties, Time line

YG
2002/03

YG
2002/03

Collar one muskox on Porcupine River. This project was approved by the elders at the planning session. [2001-NY-AI-19]

Review muskoxen-collaring program. This could be undertaken by the Yukon government prior to the muskox collaring project and it would illustrate the type of information that radio-collaring provides and how this informs management. [2001-NY-AI-20]