

U.S.-Canada International Porcupine Caribou Board

Bulletin

International Porcupine Caribou Board Visits Venetie, Alaska *Other visits to user communities in the range of the herd in Alaska and Canada are expected in the future*

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The International Porcupine Caribou Board (Board) recently held its annual meeting, which began in Fairbanks, Alaska on November 30 and ended in Venetie, Alaska, on December 1. The Board conducted its regular business in Fairbanks and then headed to Venetie for a special public session with local community members and distinguished officials from the Native Village of Venetie. The Board shared with the community the latest scientific findings related to the status of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and received comments and questions from village residents and officials regarding the importance of conserving the herd. The attendees in Venetie expressed their appreciation for the Board's visit and its cooperation on this shared international resource.

During the regular session, the Board recognized the need to improve its outreach and communication efforts and set a spring 2017 timeframe to finalize a five-year report of the Board's work accomplished since the Board was reconstituted in 2011. The Board was pleased to learn that a recent upgrade by the State of Alaska to the photo-censusing technique for monitoring caribou will provide an improved and more cost-effective assessment of the herd's abundance. The Board also supported the ongoing efforts of the Porcupine Caribou Technical Committee to better understand the health and distribution of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, which includes monitoring and reporting of herd movements and health using GPS radio-collars.

The Government of Canada spoke to the generally declining state of other caribou herds in Canada's north and expressed concern that the Porcupine Caribou Herd, which is currently in an abundant state, might be at risk of a similar decline if threats to the herd aren't recognized and managed accordingly. Canada also spoke to its own Porcupine Caribou Harvest Management Plan, which is maturing into an effective model for cooperative management of the herd in Canada.

Mitch Ellis, Alaska Chief of Refuges of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and incoming Board Co-chair for the U.S., welcomed the opportunity to work closely with partners in Canada for the long-term sustainability, use and conservation of the Porcupine Caribou

Herd. Mr. Ellis told attendees at the meeting in Venetie of the Board's intention to directly involve native users, and include visits to villages throughout the Porcupine Caribou Herd's range, during future meetings.

“Given the observed declines in abundance of Canadian Arctic caribou herds, which share a biology and landscape with our sister U.S. herds, we need to be cautious about activities that might impact the well-being of Arctic caribou herds” said Barry Smith, Regional Director, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service, and Canadian Co-chair of the Board. “The Board is very conscious of the importance of these herds for northern communities, and particularly for our Indigenous users. We must become as knowledgeable as possible about the factors impacting Arctic caribou, including the Porcupine Caribou Herd”.

The Porcupine Caribou Herd is one of the largest herds of migratory caribou in North America, last estimated in 2013 to consist of about 197,000 caribou. It roams over approximately 250,000 km² or 96,526 mi² of Northern Alaska, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories. These caribou are the primary traditional resource of the Gwich'in Alaska Native people, who have built their communities around the caribou's migration patterns. The animals are also an important traditional resource for other native peoples, including the Inupiat, Inuvialuit, Hän, and Northern Tutchone.

The objectives of the Board are to conserve the Porcupine Caribou Herd and its habitat through international cooperation and coordination, to ensure opportunities for customary and traditional uses, to enable users of Porcupine Caribou to participate in the international coordination of the conservation of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and to encourage cooperation and communication among governments, users of Porcupine Caribou and others to achieve these objectives.

The Board will meet next by teleconference/videoconference in April, 2017.

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