Location: MS Teams Meeting
Date: Weds, Feb 27, 2023
Time: 1300-1430 h Pacific

RCCSCTWG- translocation and process discussion

ATTENDEES:

Brent Davidson
Bruno Delesalle
Cailyn Glasser
Caroline Feischl
Lindsay Heller (Center for Dialogue)
Colin Bergeron
Corey Bird
Dave Nordquist
Leo DeGroot
Bevan Ernst
Hunter Lampreau
Christine Friedrichsmeier
John Krebs
Genevieve LaChance
Deb MacKillop
Marc Steynen
Jean Polfus
Carlie Quinn
Aaron Reid
Rhiannon Kirton
Robert Daum (center for Dialogue)
Leah Philips
Kathi Zimmerman
Alison Pagett

SUMMARY

Parks Canada, ECCC, Indigenous communities/organizations, and the BC Caribou Recovery Program met to discuss the possibility of translocating a lone, 9-year-old, female caribou in the South Selkirks herd range. Everyone agreed that it is a complex decision, and not one easily made. Parks Canada had put forward a plan earlier in the week for the caribou's translocation to Columbia North.

The options discussed by the group were:

1. No action: leave her where she is
2. Soft release: move her to the maternity pen in the Central Selkirks
3. Hard release: move her to Columbia North

- Bruno, from Parks Canada, apologized for the letter and gave the group the background on need for a quick decision and how it had come about.
- The group discussed the three options, as well as risks associated with the extirpation of the Columbia South herd.

- The group also discussed the benefits to the individual animal versus the benefit to the genetics of the Columbia North and Columbia South herds (should caribou move back into the herd range).
- The First Nations demanded that the BC and Federal Governments take responsibility for the decline of the caribou populations in the area.
- They also requested access to the raw data used to make the recommendations, in the light of transparency.
- The group acknowledged that there were differing opinions on what should be done with her and that they needed to determine a decision-making process.

No consensus recommendation or decision was made at this meeting. There will be further meetings to address the gaps in information that the Nations need to make their recommendation.

NOTES (dialogue as it occurred):

1. Genevieve introduced the purpose of this meeting
2. Round of introductions
3. Bruno Delesalle:
    a. This female caribou has been moving around a lot, several times near the Trans Canada Hwy.
    b. Miller Lake now at higher elevations.
    c. Columbia North seems the best option – stable, increasing population, good quality ecosystem/habitat – similar to what she's used to
    d. Key mitigations:
        i. Food
        ii. If the weather impedes her translocation, then she would be moved to the mat pen
4. Aaron Reid:
    a. Sensitive issue, no clear answer
    b. Any decision will not be suitable for everyone
    c. Extirpation of any herd is emotional
5. Rhiannon – not been many hard releases before, usually the mat pen. Who made the decision to move to Columbia North instead of the mat pen?
    a. Aaron –Mixed results. No hard data on either side
    b. Bruno – decision based on biologists. Soft release could be more gentle. Hard release based on linkages between the herds.
6. Cailyn – acknowledge Aaron, Bruno, email – and pulling this meeting together so quickly. Our position was that she should go to Columbia North. Want to share in the decision, even though the results were the same

7. Kathi – appreciates the info that was captured that led to the decision, so that the decision can be defended

8. Caroline – status quo option, is it still on the table?

    a. Genevieve – from previous discussion the group said they did not want the animal to be left, but we can revisit if needed

    b. Bruno – benefit of moving this caribou. Has been collared for several years. Mostly moving around Glacier NP, but now that she's near the highway and avalanche control it puts her in danger. If we left her, yes, it's natural, but we've put her in unnecessary danger. She's also at high risk of predation.

    c. Caroline – council hasn't heard the arguments, so the options need to be clear.

    d. Kathi – detailed and short-notice info, but there is a table we can go through.

    e. Colin presented the decision table to the group, based on discussion with this group, biologists

        i. Leaving her where she is, is a disadvantage in the long term for her contribution to caribou recovery

        ii. Challenges for resources in moving her

    f. Rhiannon – attitude of extirpation; need to consider proportion of contribution (genetic) to a smaller herd, versus the larger Columbia North

        i. Cailyn – Rob sent info this morning, good to consider. Risks either way, but seems like higher chance of success in Columbia North

    g. Corey – will be having this conversation for other herds like Frisby-Boulder, which are functionally extirpated. Preference to go to Columbia North. Support long-term recovery of Central Selkirks. The Revelstoke mat pen didn't go well, traumatic. Splatsin doesn't support mat pens. Would prefer to send her to Columbia North; happy to support Parks' proposal. No certainty, but we should do something and there will be lessons learned either way. How do we come to decision for these kinds of things? Need a democratic process.

    h. Bruno – a nearly impossible decision, but vet recommended mitigating the risk of the overall conservation objective. LPUs are important; factor into the decision.

        i. Kathi – genetics are becoming more important in these decisions, as well as the fragmentation of the landscape/habitat

    i. Cailyn – Corey's comment on the long-term objectives, genetics – if there are 9 imperiled animals in Frisby-Boulder – is there any benefit of the Columbia South animal going to Frisby-B and re-locating all of them to Columbia North

        i. Kathi – also talking with Jasper, and the reintroduction, eventually, of animals to the extirpated herds

9. Rhiannon – no transparency in where the herds are at, and all the data the experts apparently have, that haven't been shared

    a. Bruno – herd-planning process needs transparency and dialogue. Not on Provincial land, Parks Canada has been protecting her. Once she moved, then we had to make a decision. How does

this process dovetail with the land use planning process. It happened very fast! Thought being proactive is better, but now running into a few snags with the transparency of the process

b. Cailyn – Rhiannon, what other evidence do you need to be comfortable with a decision?

c. Rhiannon – will run out of time before we can make a good decision. Central Selkirks should have been part of another option. Main issue with Central Selkirks being "inevitably extirpated, so we should avoid them" attitude. The framing of Central Selkirks is biased. ECCC assumes the Central Selkirks can be recovered . Need to have all the FACTS, not opinions, and outside conversations.

d. Corey – pragmatically, we are very close to the functional extirpation of Central Selkirks, on an "island", therefore we need to make decisions with that in mind. Does putting her in the pen bring the population above the threshold of extirpation?

e. Kathi – we can recover that herd, if there is a will (like Klinse-Za). We do need to make the decision on THIS female this week.

f. Bruno – do agree on transparency in general, etc., but we have a tight deadline with numerous permits, helicopters, contracts etc. And if we don't get a decision on her ASAP, then she will just have to stay put.

g. Colin – data are from BC survey data. Central Selkirks herd is not increasing. Columbia North has a better chance of keeping the Columbia South herd lineage going.

h. Cailyn – her wellbeing needs to be considered first

i. Rhiannon – similar to Cailyn's point. Parks Canada vet team – did they talk to BC vet? BC vet wanted the pen/soft release. Vet's opinions should supersede biologists and ecologists. Brian didn't have a call with the Provincial Vets, but they would going forward.

j. Aaron – last time Aaron talked to Brian (Parks vet), he wasn't keen on hard release.

k. Bruno – Brian shifted his opinion based on habitat, but wanted to mitigate risk with feeding. Herd-level benefits important.

10. Hunter – "old, dry" cow – will die anyway. Status quo didn't generate a buzz, will be a translocation anyway. Need to acknowledge that FN communities are bound to caribou decline even though they didn't cause it. If there's a consensus among the rights and title holders then the message must be co-developed, and the onus on the agencies for the cause of the decline.

11. Genevieve – how do we proceed? Opinions still on all sides; we don't have consensus.

    a. Rhiannon – are we making the decision based on individual versus herd benefit? Individual welfare is mat pen; herd is Columbia North. But if she's an old, dry cow that the mat pen is best.

    b. Bruno – not actually sure she's "dry" – that is the assumption. She likely has a year or two of breeding potential, and that needs to be considered

12. Jean – need to consider process. There are experts in moving groups into a consensus, but biologists aren't them. Process may require ceremony and know the role of council in their decision-making process. Transparency is the most important. When groups were combined, the process got muddied. Wildlife decisions are about people. This is only one caribou – it's a big deal, and high-stakes, but we don't have the time. Will support as much as she can.

13. Genevieve - many documents have been provided to review, and the table will be made less-biased
14. Robert – appreciated the capacity to listen. They don't facilitate but acknowledged that everyone involved were trying to keep the decision-making open and meaningful. Also acknowledged that the exploitation of the relatives of humans on the land has happened over many generations.
    a. What kind of data are needed for a decision? Raw or summarised?
    b. Biases?
    c. What is the path of how decisions are made?
    d. Perspectives from the vets, and how Brian's thoughts were changed – that information needs to be heard by everyone
    e. Governments of BC, Canada need to acknowledge their responsibility to caribou decline
    f. Walk the talk of reconciliation, govt-to-govt work, co-management, etc.
    g. Invite your partners to think about the wicked problems with you, and have difficult conversation
    h. What does it mean to be a relative? What is my responsibility?
15. Genevieve thanked everyone for their time and mentioned the call tomorrow as well as the meeting March 6th.