

Wolf (dìga) management

Update

Actions to support the recovery of Bathurst and
Bluenose-East caribou 2019-20

August 2020

In 2019, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and Tłıchǫ Government initiated a joint pilot program for wolf management (dìga) in the North Slave region to help address significant declines in the Bathurst and Bluenose-East caribou (ekwò) herds.

Reducing wolf predation, together with ongoing caribou harvest restrictions and other management actions, can help increase caribou survival and give these herds a better chance to recover.

Our approach

Enhanced support for wolf (dìga) harvesters and the traditional economy

Actions taken in 2019-20:



Increased payments under the
**Enhanced North Slave Wolf
Harvest Incentive Program**



Tłıchǫ Government's
**Community-based Dìga Harvest
Training Program**



Workshops on best practices for
wolf harvesting and pelt preparation



New incentives for Nunavut
hunters harvesting in their
traditional area in the NWT



No fees for wolf tags

In 2019-20, NWT and Nunavut harvesters received approximately \$58,400 under the Enhanced North Slave Wolf Harvest Incentive Program.

How can reducing wolf (dìga) populations help caribou?

Wolf (dìga) management is one of many actions being taken by the GNWT, Tłıchǫ Government, and our co-management partners to help support our declining caribou herds.

Wolves are the main predator of barren-ground caribou. Reducing wolf predation, together with ongoing caribou harvest restrictions and other management actions, can help increase caribou survival rates and support population recovery.



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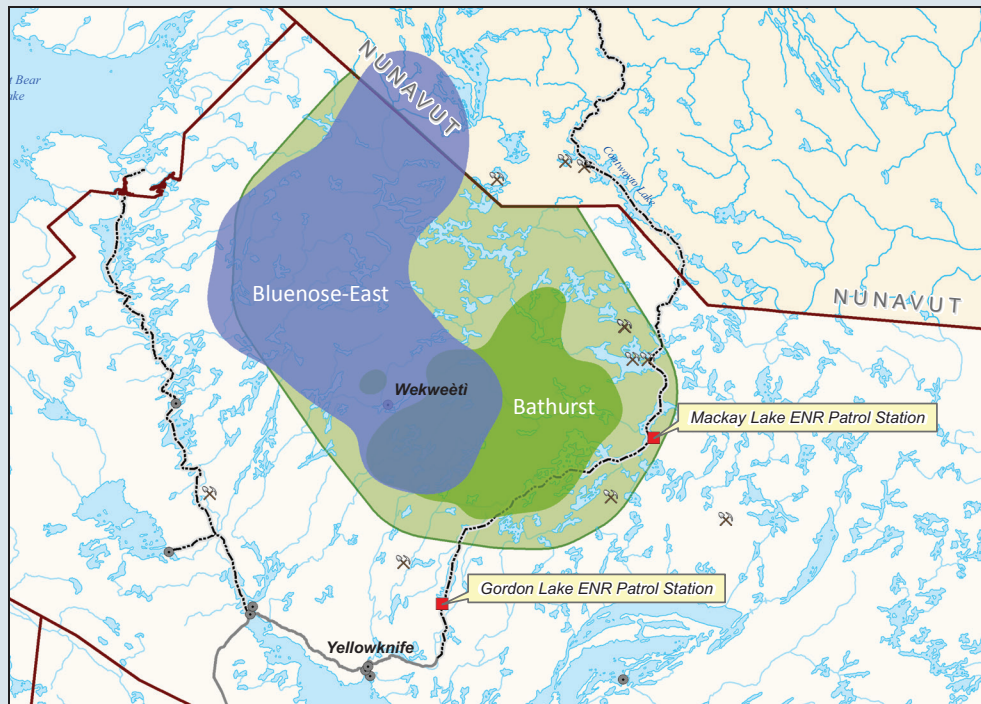


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Learn and adapt

To give caribou the best chance at recovery, we are prepared to adapt our approach using the best available scientific, local and traditional knowledge.

The GNWT and Tłıchǫ Government will conduct a full program review every year to assess the effectiveness of wolf management actions and determine, with the Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board (WRRB), whether wolf reductions should continue or if changes are needed.



- North Slave Wolf Harvest Incentive Area 2019-20
- Caribou winter ranges 2019-20 (Dec to Mar)

2019-20 Wolf (dìga) reduction

Experience elsewhere shows that sustained wolf removal of 60-80% can help increase caribou survival and give herds a better chance to recover.



Bathurst:
31 wolves removed
Target: 29-39 wolves



Bluenose-East:
54 wolves removed
Target: 73-97 wolves

Wolf (dìga) reduction

In addition to ground-based wolf (dìga) harvesting, some aerial removals were required in 2019-20 because the number of wolves harvested by hunters was less than removal targets.

Aerial removals were carried out:

- Safely**, away from winter road traffic and communities, by a crew that specializes in aerial removals following approved health and safety measures
- Respectfully**, by handling carcasses carefully and avoiding removal near communities

Monitoring, research and assessment

Learning more about wolf (dìga) movements, their diet and how they interact with caribou will help us understand the impact our actions are having on wolves and caribou recovery.

Actions taken in 2019-20:

- Wolf carcasses were examined to learn about diet, health and sex-age composition
- Wolf harvester questionnaires provided information about numbers and locations of wolves
- 11 collars were deployed on wolves in the North Slave Region
- New caribou collars were deployed to increase total number to 70 for each of the Bathurst and Bluenose-East herds

Successes and lessons learned

- COVID-19.** The 2020 pilot program was hampered significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic, which delayed the start of the aerial program and required crews to be based out of Yellowknife. This resulted in more travel time, less time spent on removals, and increased costs. Wolf assessments (diet, condition and welfare) were also delayed.
- Removal rates.** The number of wolves removed from the Bathurst caribou winter range met the removal target to help support herd recovery. Removal levels from the Bluenose-East caribou range were lower, but should still have a meaningful impact on predation.
- Harvester support.** Analysis of hunter questionnaires indicates that some harvesters would like further training and support to access wolves away from major travel corridors and to document harvest efforts.

Next steps

The Wek'èezhì Renewable Resources Board (WRRB) will review the joint proposal submitted by the GNWT and Tłıchǫ Government and provide recommendations.

