



Mackenzie County

REQUEST FOR DECISION

Meeting:	Regular Council Meeting
Meeting Date:	August 9, 2016
Presented By:	Byron Peters, Director of Planning and Development
Title:	Caribou

BACKGROUND / PROPOSAL:

See attached summary.

OPTIONS & BENEFITS:

See attached.

We will need to carefully consider our approach moving forward. As big as the current caribou conservation strategy is, I feel this is less than half of what we can anticipate within the next five years. How we approach this now will directly impact how, and with whom, we participate in the future.

COSTS & SOURCE OF FUNDING:

Current budget is currently sufficient.

SUSTAINABILITY PLAN:

Highly applicable.

COMMUNICATION:

As required.

Author: BP Reviewed by: _____ CAO: CG

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Simple Majority Requires 2/3 Requires Unanimous

That Mackenzie County initiates the creation of a caribou working group for communities impacted by the provincial government's announcement to protect 1.8 million hectares for caribou protection.

Simple Majority Requires 2/3 Requires Unanimous

That Mackenzie County enters into an agreement with Northern Rockies Regional Municipality, and other impacted inter-provincial/territorial communities, to engage in discussions and information sharing, with an end goal of engaging the federal government regarding the implications of the Species At Risk Act on our communities.

Author: _____ Reviewed by: _____ CAO: _____

Caribou Update as of 3:00 pm, Monday, August-08-16

Summary of previous activities:

Tuesday, August-02-2016

- Meeting with Mackenzie council in the afternoon
- Meeting with elected officials in the evening – attendance by High Level, Rainbow Lake, Northern Lights – presented what we know, draft letter to premier, and first discussions about a caribou working group

Wednesday, August-03-2016

- Tri-council meeting in the evening, received support from all municipalities for letter to premier

Thursday, August-04-2016

- Met with Dene Tha lands department in Chateh – Fred Didzena & Baptiste. They were not engaged by the province, announcement surprised them as much as it did us. Took a letter to their council on August 8th for consideration – have agreed to be a part of the group as long as it is not considered ‘consultation’ – which has legal implications, versus engagement/collaboration.

Friday, August-05-2016

- Met with Little Red lands department in High Level – Harvey Sewepegaham, Lindee Dumas, Jim Webb. They have been actively involved in caribou conservation discussion with the province for the last 20+ years, and have been working on establishing their role and compensation, etc. for many years already.
- Phone call with Northern Rockies planning/lands department (Mike Gilbert, Jack Stevenson) out of Fort Nelson. They are concerned about the BC government approach to caribou protection, and are asking their council (August 8th meeting) to sign an MOU to further engage with us and any of our initiatives/activities.

Scientific Support:

We have also engaged several private scientists/biologists to gain their perspective of the Denhoff report. Jim Rettie (Paragon Wildlife) and Michael Preston (Stantech) have committed to providing quotable material for us, and assist in any other technical ways, as needed.

General, relevant information from the scientific community:

- We have spoken to: Dr. Schneider – UofA, various members of CPAWS (Canadian Parks & Wilderness Society) including director Alison Ronson, NACWG (Northwest Alberta Conservation Working Group), and several provincial caribou planning team members, including Brendan Hemens and George Duffy.
- Scientific community frequently repeated items:
 - Of the understanding that the boundaries for the conservation areas in NW Alberta are set in stone.
 - Widely agree that forestry was the only economic land use considered (Denhoff has allegedly made that statement to some of his peers).
 - At the Alberta level, NW Alberta is the most resilient to climate change and its impacts on caribou/habitat
 - NW Alberta has the most contiguous, undisturbed habitat in Alberta, best suited for caribou habitat protection through avoidance (land use restrictions that limit disturbances)
 - At the provincial level, our oil & gas sector is considered low priority
 - At the provincial level, our forestry sector is considered high priority
 - That the province has largely ignored good planning in every respect once it comes to the identified protection areas for NW Alberta
 - That the large, contiguous areas for conservation in NW Alberta are largely a political statement.
 - That the province has the mentality that there is nothing up there anyway – Hayley was specifically told this from one of the leading provincial caribou planners.
 - That the designation of 1.8 million hectares of land for conservation is done apart from the regional plan is ‘ludicrous’

Forestry:

My understanding, the forest industry has largely gone quiet on this issue because they are taking a new approach. The new government has allowed them to start over in their lobbying efforts, and they have decided to engage First Nations first, then municipalities, and then approach the province collaboratively. Also, based on the current details we know about caribou conservation in NW Alberta, it probably can't get better than this for the local forest industry.

Current Goals:

1. Send letter to premier from NW Alberta voicing our concerns – this week
 - a. Contact additional municipalities to join our cause
2. Follow up with a press release – this week
3. Council resolution to enter into a MOU (or something similar) with Northern Rockies, and other jurisdictions

4. Review/revise resolution for AAMDC zone meeting
5. Council resolution agreeing to create a Caribou Communities of Alberta ad-hoc committee, and that the TOR can be circulated via email, and invitations extended based on that.
6. Obtain data sharing/use agreements in order to proceed with Silvacom mapping
 - a. This would take CPAWS, NACWG & Tolko/DMI data and overlay it all, showing a combined map of areas of highest conservation importance.
7. Finalize wolf bounty details – leaving this to Grant/ASB

Current Strategy:

I surmise that our current strategy can be summed up as follows:

Raise as much noise as possible while educating ourselves on the methodology of the current plan, while emphasizing the need for a socio-economic impact assessment of the proposed conservation strategy.

At the core of the intention is the need to ensure that oil & gas is protected/remains economically viable into the future.

The mentality to date has been Mackenzie County lead, and we may need to agree to disagree with others at a later date. But that's ok, because that means the province is listening.

Proposed Strategy, based on learnings from the week:

I strongly feel that we need to closely align with the forestry sector and First Nations if we hope to succeed in our objective. This will allow short term objectives to stay essentially unchanged, but will impact the method instantly, and the entire game plan moving forward. It can be summed up as follows:

Establish relationships with neighboring communities, providing a strong platform from which to engage the province, emphasizing the need for a socio-economic impact assessment of the proposed caribou conservation strategy along with additional pending land use objectives.

At the core of the intention is the need to build a maintainable relationship. I feel that if we don't, we will end up kicked to the curb. Even like this I do believe we will be kicked in the teeth on occasion, but we can recover from that.

Because the Caribou Recovery Strategy is just one of many pieces that we know will be coming in regards to land use in the short/medium term, I strongly feel that we need to already be thinking/working for the big picture. As big as this 1.8 million hectares is, I hear people talk about a proposed 4 – 5 million hectares of conservation in NW Alberta. How we proceed now will directly impact our ability to influence the rest of land use changes that are coming in the next few years.

To this end, I feel that we need to slow down, and take the time to do a road tour to other communities within the Lower Peace Regional Plan area and build and/or strengthen relationships between both administrations and council. I believe that this relationship building needs to be done internally, without a consultant leading the charge.

We can extend out of that for now as it relates to caribou, but I strongly feel that we NEED to build a relationship with all communities in NW Alberta if we want life as we know it to continue 10 years from now.

Proposed Goals:

1. Reach out to all impacted communities – Dale currently making connections
 - a. I feel this needs to transition to an in-house activity, but need the time to do it.
 - b. Coincide with the CCoA committee meetings? This can/should be the platform where we build these long lasting connections. I think it needs to be more than this though.
2. Draft MOUs for inter-provincial/territorial connections – Northern Rockies, other BC & NWT
3. Draft TOR for Caribou Communities of Alberta working group
4. Initial NPV (Net Present Value) calculations for an assortment of specific areas
 - a. Each area needs to be calculated separately so that if we get to negotiate with the province, we know which areas we need to focus on economically
 - b. Determine current asset values in corresponding areas
5. Socio-economic impact assessment
 - a. To be bigger than just caribou – consider cumulative effects of recently announced and anticipated announcements (carbon tax, caribou conservation, regional plan, etc.). Need to ensure though that each item is considered individually and cumulatively.
6. _____