
International Boreal Conservation Science Panel

June 13, 2012

To the Nunatsiavut Government, and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador regarding the final draft of the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area land-use plan:

As scientists who have contributed to scientific understanding of conservation issues and opportunities around the world, we congratulate the Regional Planning Authority for the completion of the final Regional Land Use Plan for the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area (LISA).

This land use plan deserves major praise as a global model that balances opportunities for resource development with protection of Inuit cultural values and key ecological areas including conserving the 14,000 km² calving ground of the George River caribou herd.

We believe that this land-use plan deserves broad public support, and in particular, we urge you to adopt its recommended *Special Policy Area-2 - George River Caribou Calving Area* designation to protect the calving grounds of the George River Caribou Herd.

As scientists, we are aware of the ecological, scientific, and cultural significance of the George River Caribou Herd. This herd is of vital importance to Aboriginal people in both Labrador and Quebec. Those communities have been linked to caribou for countless generations. We note that the George River caribou were once the largest herd in the world, numbering more than 800,000 individuals in the early 1990s, and we are concerned that the current population estimate of 50,000 animals represents a decline of more than 90%. The calving grounds for this herd have shifted over time and over the last decade only a small portion of the calving grounds in Quebec or Labrador have received any habitat protection.

Protecting the calving grounds is extremely important given the herd's present vulnerability, and this zoning will help ensure the herd has the room to recover. Given that the land-use plan will be reviewed every 5 years, protection for calving grounds could also incorporate future spatial changes over time. Given the history of calving ground shifts, documented at least since the 1970s, we also encourage you to consider these calving grounds in their broadest extent to ensure protection for George River caribou in the coming decades.

We recognize that there are other values on the landscape, and that governments must balance conservation and development opportunities, while safeguarding Inuit cultural and environmental values across a vast, roadless 72,500 km² of boreal forest, taiga, and tundra in Northern Labrador. We note that the plan designates 52% of the settlement area as general use

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where most types of development are permitted, while the remaining 48% is under varying management guidelines, allowing for traditional use with some discretionary development in parts and stricter conservation rules in more sensitive areas, such as the 14,000 km² George River caribou calving area. We acknowledge that the *Special Policy Area-2 George River Caribou Calving Area* zone will protect the herd's calving grounds from mining, hydro and other industrial development but still allow for low impact uses such as traditional hunting and fishing, tourism, and outfitting. On this basis, we believe that the plan accommodates resource development in ways that may avoid conflict and provide certainty to companies and communities, while protecting important wildlife habitat.

Protecting the herd's calving grounds may not guarantee the herd's recovery, but we believe a precautionary approach should be cornerstone of managing this globally-significant herd. By giving the herd room to recover, government can provide the space for science, planning and co-management to occur. The Nunatsiavut Government and the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador have until June 30, 2012 to review the LISA land-use plan and decide whether to accept, reject, or modify the final draft. We recommend that both governments give priority to protecting the George River Caribou calving area, and to accept and endorse the Regional Planning Authority's recommendations in this regard. By taking this action, Nunatsiavut and the province of Newfoundland and Labrador will demonstrate world class leadership in conservation and sustainable development.

Respectfully,

The International Boreal Conservation Science Panel

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