



COMPENDIUM OF CANADA'S ENGAGEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS

Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States on the Conservation of the Porcupine Caribou Herd

SUBJECT CATEGORY:

Biodiversity / Ecosystems

TYPE OF AGREEMENT / INSTRUMENT:

Canada – United States

FORM:

Legally-binding treaty

STATUS:

- Signed by Canada July 17, 1987
- Ratified by Canada July 17, 1987
- In force in Canada July 17, 1987
- In force internationally July 17, 1987
- Ongoing

LEAD & PARTNER DEPARTMENTS:

Lead: Environment and Climate Change Canada

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Web Links:

[Treaty Text – Canada Treaty Information web site](#)

Contacts:

[ECCC Inquiry Centre](#)

COMPENDIUM EDITION:

October 2018

PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY

The Porcupine caribou herd migrates annually between Canada and the United States. The International Porcupine Caribou Agreement is important to Canada because First Nations in the Yukon and Northwest Territories rely on this caribou herd for sustenance. The agreement coordinates conservation efforts by the two countries and ensures opportunities for customary and traditional uses of the herd by rural residents of the Yukon and Northwest Territories, and of Alaska.

The agreement established an international board with equal representation by Canada and the U.S. The board recommends actions to conserve sensitive habitats; and its management activities include harvest plans and data collection activities designed to maintain the health of the herd. Monitoring shows that the herd population is in good shape.

OBJECTIVE

The objectives of this agreement are:

- To conserve the Porcupine Caribou Herd and its habitat through international cooperation and coordination so that the risk of irreversible damage or long-term adverse effects as a result of use of caribou or their habitat is minimized;
- To ensure opportunities for customary and traditional uses of the herd by rural Alaska residents, Yukon and Northwest Territories, Native users as defined by sections A8 and A9 of the Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement (1985);
- To enable users of Porcupine Caribou to participate in the international coordination of the conservation of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and its habitat;
- To encourage cooperation and communication among governments, users of the Porcupine Caribou and others to achieve these objectives.

The International Porcupine Caribou Agreement provides for the coordinated conservation of the Porcupine caribou herd, which migrates annually between Canada and the United States.



KEY ELEMENTS

The agreement requires that an international board be established with 4 members appointed by Canada and 4 appointed by the U.S.

The Board advises on and recommends:

- programs for monitoring herd status;
- actions for the collecting and sharing of harvest data;
- overall harvest allocation and harvest limits for each country;
- actions for monitoring and conserving the habitat of the herd;
- ways of ensuring opportunities for customary and traditional uses of the herd;
- ways to enable user groups (recreational hunters, First Nations and Alaska Indian Tribes) participation in the international coordination of Porcupine caribou conservation;
- ways to encourage, and to facilitate, communication among governments, users and others.

Identify, advise on and recommend actions to conserve sensitive habitats for the Porcupine caribou herd.

EXPECTED RESULTS

This agreement is expected to achieve coordination in the conservation of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and its habitat. The Board has established a technical committee comprised of Canadian and US experts from the participating jurisdictions that actively monitor and track the health of the Herd and its habitat. Monitoring information is used to set harvest management strategies and make management decisions related to habitat and harvest by jurisdictions with land management authority within both Canada and the United States.

CANADA'S INVOLVEMENT

This agreement is important to Canada because the Porcupine Caribou Herd is a trans-boundary species that First Nations in the Yukon and Northwest Territories rely on for sustenance. Recognition of First Nations' harvest rights associated with this Herd is well established in Land Claims dating back to the Inuvialuit Final Agreement. In Canada, the Vuntut and Ivvavik National Parks protect habitat for the Porcupine Caribou Herd and are managed by Parks Canada Agency.

The Canadian Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement was signed in 1985, established initially in the Inuvialuit Land Claim Agreement, and has since been incorporated into subsequent land claim agreements in the Yukon and Northwest Territories. A [Porcupine Caribou Management Board \(PCMB\)](#) was set

up as an advisory board to this domestic Agreement, made up of Canadian representatives from the governments of Northwest Territories, Yukon and Canada as well as all the First Nations that have traditionally used the herd.

Following signature of the Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement, the International Porcupine Caribou Agreement was established to allow for international cooperation for the conservation of this trans-boundary herd.

Canada is the co-chair of the International Porcupine Caribou Board (IPCB). Duties include the following:

- organize and attend meetings;
- facilitate the appointment of Canadian members to the board;
- carry out the activities set out in the agreement (see actions required).

The three other Canadian members represent the Yukon Territory, the Northwest Territories and First Nations.

RESULTS / PROGRESS

Activities

Canada provides ongoing leadership as the Co-chair of the board and attended the last face-to-face meeting of the Board in Fairbanks and Venetie, Alaska in November 2016. At the meeting in Venetie, the Board shared the latest scientific findings and received comments from village residents and officials regarding the importance of conserving the herd. During the regular Board meeting, the Board recognized the need to improve its outreach and communication efforts, were pleased to receive a presentation on an upgraded photo-censusing technique and voiced their on-going support for the work of the Technical Committee.

Canada is also a co-chair of the Technical Committee (PCTC) responsible for monitoring the health of the herd and its habitat. The Committee's work plan outlines key activities and priorities for research and monitoring of the Herd over the next 5 years.

The Board was reactivated in 2012 following the U.S. bringing its appointments into good standing. The face-to-face meeting alternates annually between Alaska and Canada.

The IPCB formally recognized a Porcupine Caribou Technical Committee (PCTC), made up of representatives of management agencies and University of Alaska researchers. The committee has been meeting informally since 1978. The first task of the



PCTC was to produce a report on sensitive habitats which was approved in 1993.

The IPCB approved an international conservation plan in 1995. The Yukon government took the lead on developing and drafting the plan. The IPCB was co-sponsor of a workshop on harvest reporting for the Porcupine herd. As a follow-up, user representatives on the board agreed to form a sub-committee to recommend a protocol for monitoring the harvest between the two countries. The IPCB does not formally coordinate research, but does provide a forum to discuss and report on current research and monitoring activities within the range of the herd.

The IPCB has produced five “annual” reports since its inception. The last report was produced in 1998.

Each country agreed to table a consultation plan for its respective country. Canada tabled a plan in 1998 (lead Porcupine Caribou Management Board). The United States has not tabled their plan to date.

Rules and procedures have been adopted by the board, with revisions as necessary and last updated in 2015.

The Canadian PCMB meets in February of each year with Parties to the Porcupine Caribou Harvest Management Plan meet to determine the management status of the herd, including a public meeting to share information on the current status of the herd.

Reports

The Board plans to publish an annual report in 2017 and to establish a web presence.

Historical documents and reports have been collected by Canada and the U.S. and are available from the Canadian Wildlife Service, Whitehorse office. Once a web presence is agreed to and established, it is anticipated all historical documents will be digitized and made available online.

Results

Canada uses the Board to influence its US counterparts to continually improve the collection of harvest data from Alaskan Native communities to improve management of the herd.

Canada uses the Board to highlight the importance of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, including the so-called “1002 area”, as a caribou birthing and rearing area for the well-being of the herd and its Canadian user groups.

Management activities led by the Board include harvest plans and data collection activities designed to maintain the health of the herd. Surveys done and analysed cooperatively between the US and Canada have shown that the population of the herd is in good shape. According to a [July 2017 population survey conducted by The Government of Yukon and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game](#), the population has grown from an estimated 198,000 in 2013 to 218,000 caribou. The herd has grown annually at a rate of 3.7 per cent since the 2010 estimate of 169,000.