



December 15, 2020

Carl Sidney, Chair
Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board
Box 31104
Whitehorse, YT Y1A 5P7

Dear Mr. Sidney:

RE: 2020 Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board Recommendations for Moose Adaptive Management Regulation Changes 1, 2 and 3

Thank you for the Board's recommendations regarding the Department of Environment's moose proposals 1, 2 and 3 which I received on July 10, 2020 (letter dated June 19, 2020). I appreciate your patience with the necessary length of time it has taken to provide this response.

As stated in your summary of the public engagement, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and Teslin Tlingit Council are in support of adaptive moose management, as they understand it should alleviate hunting pressure in their Traditional Territories and allow their local Renewable Resources Councils to make community-specific recommendations to the Minister. In my response, I have also considered additional correspondence that was not summarized in the Board's letter, including:

- Selkirk First Nation provided a letter on November 22, 2019 in support of adaptive moose management, so long as decisions are made jointly.
- The Northern Tutchone Renewable Resources Councils (Carmacks, Mayo and Selkirk) submitted collaborative comments on December 5, 2019 in support of adaptive management of moose harvest if councils and First Nations have a strong voice in making decisions about where and how harvest is limited.
- The First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun provided a letter on January 7, 2020 in support of adaptive moose management generally (not including using antler configurations), so long as it is grounded in government-to-government collaboration.
- Champagne and Aishihik First Nations and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in provided letters (November 8, 2019 and May 8, 2020, respectively) detailing their position on many of the adaptive management tools under consideration, some of which were favorable. They stated they needed additional opportunities to discuss this subject.

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Given the complexity of the topic, I have provided reasoning for my responses to your recommendations. My responses to the Board's three recommendations are as follows:

Proposal 1: Adaptive Moose Management in Yukon

1.1 The Board recommends the Minister set aside this proposal.

I **accept** this recommendation.

My review of the responses to the adaptive proposal confirm an appetite for more flexible, responsive moose management tools. In accepting this recommendation, I leave the door open for the development of future regulation proposals that use tools such as threshold hunts, registration hunts, and other instruments where management needs cannot be adequately addressed using our existing tools.

1.2 The Board recommends the Minister establish a comprehensive moose management plan.

I **vary** this recommendation and commit to supporting moose management planning at regional and/or traditional territory scales, within timeframes that are community-driven. This planning should include First Nations and transboundary Indigenous groups, Renewable Resources Councils, stakeholders, and the public. I recognize the Board's interest in this initiative and your territory-wide mandate, and also understand that the most appropriate scale for moose planning is much more localized. The outcomes of the moose planning work will inform future regulation change proposals that will go through the Board's process. Early in the planning efforts, we anticipate identifying priority Moose Management Units where moose harvest is currently approaching sustainable limits for consideration with Renewable Resources Councils and First Nations.

The Board's recommendation would delay regulatory amendments to manage moose populations more adaptively until a territory-wide plan is in place. From the department's experience in creating species management plans, the multi-year timeline for such an approach will leave moose populations at risk of over-harvest while the plan is in development and consultation conducted. A territory-wide moose management plan is also unlikely to provide direction on specific harvest management tools or management objectives.

The varied approach, to commit to moose management planning at a regional scale, is intended to provide a meaningful compromise. This approach is also clear in its intent for collaborative decision-making, which was advocated for in many of the responses we received.

Proposal 2: Sustainable Harvest Management of Moose in the South Canol Moose Management Unit

- 2.1 The Board recommends the Minister set aside this proposal, deferring it to the next regulation cycle.
- 2.2 The Board recommends the department conduct a new survey in the area.
- 2.3 The Board recommends the department reconfigure the Moose Management Unit.

I **vary** these recommendations and commit to drafting regulations to put the South Canol Moose Management Unit (Game Management Subzones 8-19, 8-20, 8-22, 10-01, 10-02, 10-03) on permit, allowing for ministerial discretion to adjust permit numbers. The department will not conduct a new survey or reconfigure the Moose Management Unit at this time.

As stated in your summary of the public engagement, there was little support for adaptive measures for this area and strong concerns about antler configuration as a management tool. This approach limits the regulation change to only instating a permit hunt and no other "new" adaptive tools. This is an immediate response to a moose sustainability issue in the South Canol Moose Management Unit, and there could be additional future changes recommended under the new regional planning approach for the territory.

There is enough evidence to support immediate changes to ensure sustainable harvest of this moose population. We commit to working with the Board and the public to improve understanding of how and when we perform moose population estimates to improve confidence in the data used for decisions.

Moose survey results are a snapshot in time and are only one type of data used to inform the need for management actions, as described in the 2016 Science-based Guidelines for the Management of Moose in Yukon. These Guidelines are informed by data from 70 moose surveys previously conducted in Yukon, and survey data from a specific Moose Management Unit enable the department to evaluate harvest pressure given the population dynamics of Yukon moose, including natural mortality by predators.

Due to the high cost of surveying and the number of areas to survey, there is frequently more than seven years between successive moose surveys in any one area.

While true that the licenced moose harvest has been relatively consistent for many years, the data from the 2013 survey indicated that a sustainable harvest (10% of bulls) would be a total of 15 animals for both licenced and subsistence hunters. From 2014 to 2018, licenced harvest alone accounted for between 10 and 18 animals per year. This does not include estimates of subsistence harvest. When licenced harvest numbers are combined with estimates of subsistence harvest, it is evident that the moose population has been repeatedly overharvested and that licensed harvest has been taking a disproportionate amount of the sustainable harvest. We believe putting this area on permit is clearly warranted based on the analyses and that the considerable expense of a survey (\$100,000 – \$150,000) is better directed towards other areas where we have emerging conservation concerns. Consequently, the department will not commit to a moose survey in this area at this time.

As indicated above, the department will not reconfigure the Moose Management Unit. This is because doing so will not address the issue. Moose Management Units are meant to encompass, to the best extent possible, biologically distinct moose populations. Boundaries are based primarily on natural geographical features (e.g. lakes, watersheds, topography), roads, and in some cases on radio-collared moose movement patterns. Moose Management Units are groupings of Game Management Subzones to reflect the legislated scale at which harvest data is collected. Therefore, reconfiguring a Moose Management Unit involves adding or subtracting Game Management Subzones. Currently, the South Canol Moose Management Unit encompasses six Game Management Subzones equaling more than 4,800 square kilometres, and all six subzones are highly accessible because they border the South Canol Road. In this case, adding subzones will incorporate backcountry, inaccessible areas, which will artificially reduce the harvest rate in accessible subzones. It may also result in management implications for neighboring Moose Management Units, which will be reduced in size accordingly, thus potentially artificially inflating harvest rates.

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Proposal 3: Sustainable Harvest Management of Moose in the Sifton-Miners Mountain Moose Management Unit

3.1 The Board recommends the Minister accept this proposal.

I **accept** this recommendation and commit to drafting regulations to put the Sifton-Miners Mountain Moose Management Unit (Game Management Subzones 5-48, 5-49, and 5-50) on permit, allowing for ministerial discretion to adjust permit numbers.

Additionally, I will commit department resources to conducting additional moose population studies for the Sifton-Miners Moose Management Unit in the upcoming fiscal year to ensure our permit allocations are within sustainable harvest limits. The department will continue to encourage our First Nations partners to provide reliable harvest data and I look to the Board to assert the need for this information.

The Board did not indicate which option within Proposal 3 it recommends accepting. However, as with Proposal 2, I see this as an immediate response to a moose sustainability issue in the Sifton-Miners Mountain Management Unit. Therefore, we will proceed only with a permit hunt at this time and no additional adaptive tools. I note the possibility of future changes recommended under the new regional planning approach for the territory

I am pleased that we are working to take action on concerns raised by the Laberge Renewable Resources Council and Southern Lakes First Nations.

Conclusion

Pursuant to section 16.8.3 of the Final Agreements, these recommendations will remain confidential at this time. Upon receipt of the final recommendations from the Board, I will respond within 45 days, as per Section 16.8.6 of the Umbrella Final Agreement. I want to convey my sincere appreciation for the Board and for the time and energy put into the proposal review and public engagement period. I look forward to receiving your final recommendations.

Mahsi,



Hon. Pauline Frost
Minister of Environment

cc: Ryan Hennings, Director, Fish and Wildlife Branch