

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM FOR THE DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE AND PARKS

DATE: May 15, 2018

FROM: Greg Sheehan, Principal Deputy Director, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 202-208-4545

SUBJECT: U.S. and Canadian Cooperative Efforts to Conserve the Porcupine Caribou Herd

I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The International Porcupine Caribou Board (IPCB) was established through signing of the July 17, 1987 International Conservation Agreement by representatives of the governments of Canada and the United States. The purpose of the IPCB is to conserve the herd and its habitat through international cooperation and to ensure continued opportunities for traditional uses by local Arctic residents. The IPCB relies on a team of biologists that make up the Porcupine Caribou Technical Committee (PCTC) who provide advice on the herd's biological status and habitat use. In 1989 the IPCB passed a resolution which recognized this joint committee that had been functioning for many years prior to the establishment of the IPCB.

II. BACKGROUND

The Porcupine Caribou Herd is the largest herd of migratory mammals shared between the U.S. and Canada. The IPCB is charged with making recommendations and providing advice on those aspects of the conservation of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and its habitat that require international coordination so the risk of long-term adverse effects is minimized. The Agreement has stimulated significant cooperation between our two countries, including shared research, monitoring, and management activities in the State of Alaska and Yukon Territory.

Each country is responsible for appointing four members on the IPCB. Both countries made their first appointments to the IPCB in 1988. The IPCB has been co-chaired by a member of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and Canadian Wildlife Service. In 2018, the U.S. chose to appoint a more senior Department of the Interior official as the U.S. co-chair (Steve Wackowski, Senior Advisor for Alaska Affairs). Other U.S. IPCB members have been from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and Gwich'in and Inupiat representatives who are leaders from their villages who wish to continue the hunting heritage of their peoples. The Board was active from 1989 to 2000, and again starting in 2011.

The PCTC provides technical advice and recommendations to the IPCB, the Porcupine Caribou Management Board, and their constituent governments on the conservation, management, and sustainable use of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and its habitat. In order to reflect the major land and wildlife managers and funding agencies within the range of the herd, the PCTC at any given time may include a tenured member appointed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; U.S.

Geological Survey; Alaska Department of Fish and Game; Canadian Wildlife Service; Parks Canada; Environment Yukon; and Environment and Natural Resources, Government of the Northwest Territories. One PCTC member from Canada and one from the U.S. co-chair the PCTC. Members of the PCTC must have current technical knowledge and abilities relevant to Porcupine Caribou biology and management. Tenured and invited observers and specialists also may participate with consent of the co-chairs.

III. DISCUSSION

Conservation of the porcupine caribou herd and providing the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents are two of the purposes for which Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) was established by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). In 2015, the FWS updated the Revised Arctic Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), the document that guides Refuge management activities. The CCP reiterates the Refuge's goals of protection for the Porcupine Caribou Herd and its habitat throughout the Refuge.

The international conservation community is keenly interested in all issues related to the Porcupine Caribou Herd. The Canadian Wildlife Service and Governments of Yukon and Northwest Territories have a significant interest in the health of the Porcupine Caribou Herd in order to ensure customary and traditional uses continue. The herd is also depended on by certain rural residents in Alaska for customary and traditional purposes.

Activities associated with oil and gas exploration and extraction have the potential to impact the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

IV. NEXT STEPS

The Department of the Interior's Senior Advisor for Alaska Affairs is in the process of filling the vacant G'wichin and Inupiat positions on the IPCB.

A two day workshop is being held in mid-May in Whitehorse, Yukon in to address current issues related to the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

The U.S. and Canada should continue to work together on issues of mutual concern regarding the Porcupine Caribou Herd as per the terms of the 1987 International Conservation Agreement.