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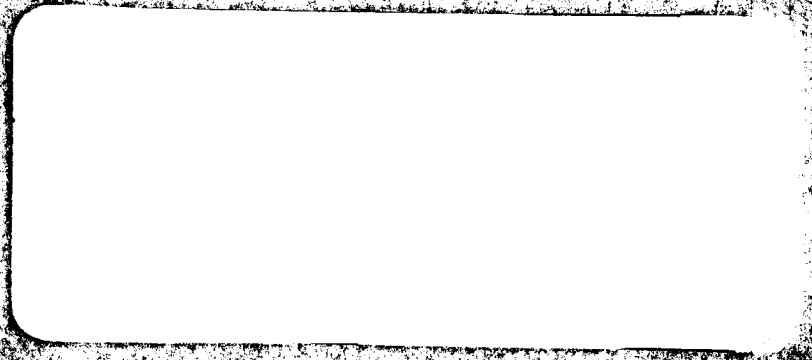
***Report on Commercial Cariboo Harvest At  
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REPORT ON COMMERCIAL CARIBOU HARVEST  
AT INUVIK, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Sector: Wildlife Products

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Analysis/Review





REPORT  
ON COMMERCIAL CARIBOU HARVEST PROJECT  
AT INUVIK, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

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Submitted by: RENEWABLE RESOURCE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In February 1986, the Renewable Resource Economic Development Project applied for and received financial support from the Economic Development Agreement to conduct a pilot project with respect to developing an organized caribou harvest on the Bluenose Herd. The purpose of the project was to **test** various techniques and methods of slaughtering and dressing caribou that would be acceptable under the Meat Inspection Act. More specifically the objectives of the project **were:**

- o to develop a cooperative approach of harvesting caribou
- o **to** improve efficiency
- o to reduce wastage
- o to increase profitability to hunters

The report that follows addresses the approach and methodology **em-**ployed at the harvest. **This** includes use of equipment, provision of facilities, and attention to procedures now considered essential should a federal meat inspection be carried out.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND

In the past, caribou were commercially hunted **either** by individuals or small family groups out of **Inuvik or Tuktoyaktuk** who had received an allocation of the commercial game tags distributed by **their** respective Hunters and Trappers **Association**. The tags are generally issued (10 to each hunter) on a **first come first serve basis with** those whose primary income **is derived from hunting, fishing and trapping** having priority over others. Except for **this** small group of subsistence hunters the majority of people supplying meat changes from year to year. As a result of this situation coupled with the limited personal quota, it **is** virtually impossible to implement improved handling and dressing techniques that **will** reduce **spoilage** and wastage **of** the meat. It was not uncommon, for example., to receive a caribou carcass at **Ulu Foods** of **which** only a portion would be **acceptable**.

The **single** largest reason for the spoilage was contamination from spillage of the gut contents. It was found that meat contaminated **in this** way was not edible and had to be discarded. Hair and other debris were also a problem however they could be removed and **did** not affect the quality of the meat. Blood shot **meat** as well as some meat that was improperly butchered was also rejected because **it** was not merchantable. In the case of the latter, **if** a **loin** was split to one **side** rather than **in the middle** only the **side** with the bone-in would be accepted. The **loin is** the most valuable cut of meat on the carcass from a retailers **point** of view however when **it is** incorrectly cut **it is** only usable for hamburger.

The **Ulu** Foods store purchases between two hundred and two-hundred and **fifty** carcasses each year which is about one-quarter of the annual allowable commercial quota on the Bluenose caribou herd. Some meat is sold locally by the hunters - usually meat which **Ulu** Foods has rejected - but the store represents the largest consumer. The majority of the meat sold **by Ulu** Foods is on a wholesale **basis** to hotels, dining areas and institutions in **Inuvik** and **Yellowknife**. The retail market in **Inuvik** is marginal with visitors to the area probably accounting for one-half the sales depending upon the season. The summer season is the most active on both the retail and wholesale level. Some meat is sold to non-residents. However because the meat is not federally inspected, only small quantities for personal consumption may be exported. In some cases, the meat is served at special events **in** other jurisdictions **which** requires a permit or other form of dispensation.

The combination of a limited market place and lack of expertise **in** harvesting caribou are the **major** impediments to achieving full utilization of the resource and consequently enhancing the benefits of people living **in** the region. **In** an effort to overcome these problems, we approached Agriculture Canada **with** the concept of a meat inspection on caribou. The result of these discussions was **this** pilot project **which** tested the feasibility of some of the methods and procedures Agriculture Canada deemed essential that had never been tried and tested on caribou. We had hoped however that Agriculture Canada would consent to **having** a meat inspector present during the harvest and that we would be successful at getting the meat inspected and approved. Unfortunately, we were **not able to persuade**

them to attend but as a **result** of this project and our discussions . . .  
with their **officials** we are now confident that we can achieve a meat  
inspection.

### 3.0 OPERATIONS

In preparing for this project, like all feasibility studies, we found it necessary to make certain assumptions. Since several of the major issues regarding a meat inspection were still being discussed with officials from Agriculture Canada, we decided to proceed with the harvest on the assumption that there would **not** be a **meat** inspection. However, a Herman-Nelson heater was purchased as well the **abattoir** and meat railing used in the muskox harvest were flown into Inuvik from Sachs on the assumption that a workable solution to **the** issues might be forthcoming. The outstanding issues were:

- 1) Is an anti-mortem required?
- 2) Is a dressing facility (**abattoir**) necessary?
- 3) Can the caribou be gutted in the field away from the **dressing** facility?
- 4) What sanitation and hygiene measures are required?

We were notified on the same day that the harvest commenced that an anti-mortem was not required for caribou because of a recent amendment to the Meat Inspection Regulations. Consequently, it was not necessary to make an effort at holding the caribou prior to killing as had been planned for the pilot project. A solution to the other questions was not as prompt however and an understanding was not reached between Agriculture Canada and ourselves until after the project was completed.



### 3.1 Participants

Initially, we had considered having both the Tuktoyaktuk and **Inuvik HTA's** participate jointly in the project since **they both utilize the** same herd although in distinct areas. The simple fact that they hunted in different areas however, proved to be the stumbling block as they both exercised a certain **territorialism** and neither party was willing to consent to allowing the other into their respective region. They preferred two separate harvests but this was not practical from an economic stand point. In the end, the harvest was done in conjunction with the **Inuvik** HTA at a site approximately fifty miles east of the town.

### 3.2 Harvesting Agreement

In addition to the Project Manager, a professional meat cutter, was hired under contract to demonstrate and supervise the dressing of the animals. A Field Supervisor (member of the **HTA**) **was also** contracted to organize and co-ordinate the field operations. The HTA selected **eight** people from **their** membership who were all paid an equal share of the revenue. In turn, some of the hunters would **hire** a friend or relative to **assist** them at **their** assigned job.

An agreement was drawn up whereby the HTA was paid \$1.50 per pound for each carcass FOB **Inuvik**. They were required to pay for their shipping costs (air **charter**) and for their snowmobile fuel and oil, while the capital costs (equipment & supplies) and other

associated expenses (administration/management) acrid survey's, ammunition, etc. were paid for through the project. It was also the HTA's responsibility to select the workers from **their** membership and **assign** them **their** tasks whether **it** be skinning, **gutting**, shooting, hauling" and loading the meat.

### 3.3 Slaughtering

An acrid reconnaissance was carried out a couple of days in advance of the hunt to locate the caribou and to select a camp site with a good landing strip. The female caribou had started their northern migration to the calving grounds so only the males, which we were interested in, remained in the general area. The workers travelled to the site by snowmachine with their personal belongings such as tents, stoves and so forth. The **snowmachines** were later used for hunting and hauling the dead animals to the dressing site. Because of the amended regulations the hunters were able to shoot the caribou wherever and whenever they found them.

They were directed however to shoot the animals either in the head, neck or in the lungs and heart to avoid bloodshot and/or damaged meat. They also, as a part of our agreement with them, had to bleed the animals as soon as they were killed. This was done simply by cutting their throats directly behind the lower jaw where the large arteries to the head are readily accessible. A persistent problem we had in the past is that when a caribou is shot low in the neck and it is not properly bled, the blood has a tendency to migrate toward the shoulder forming large blood clots under the blade causing the meat

to rapidly deteriorate. **This** problem only becomes evident much later when the shoulder is butchered and prepared at the store.

Once the caribou had been bled they were loaded on sleighs and moved to the dressing area for **skinning** and **gutting**. The **issue** of whether or not the caribou could be **gutted in the field** was **still** undecided therefore we chose to bring the carcasses to the dressing area for gutting as **this** seemed to be Agriculture Canada preference. We, on the other hand, were concerned about the gut bag breaking open at the dressing **site** and contaminating the meat as a result of the bumping and banging the carcass receives when **it** was moved from the kill site to the dressing area. In many cases the distance between the two sites was up to ten miles and the dead animals had to arrive at the dressing site still warm to facilitate the gutting and in particular, skinning.

#### 3.4 Dressing

At the dressing area each carcass was hoisted up on a portable tripod. The winch cable was attached to a gam hook which was inserted between the tendon and femur of each back leg. As the carcass was slowly raised it was skinned. Once the skin, shanks and neck were cut away the viscera and organs were removed. The carcass was then cut in half between the second and third rib, keeping the loin intact. The hinds were allowed to freeze before packaging while the fronts were packaged in carcass bags and shipped to **Inuvik** before freezing. At **Ulu Foods** the fronts were boned out as they arrived at the store in **Inuvik** while the frozen

hinds were split on the meat saw and **re-packaged** to prevent freezer burn. The fronts were boned out for two reasons: First, there **is** a very limited market for frozen cuts (steaks & roasts) from the front shoulder because of the **high** proportion of bone **to** meat. The boned out meat is generally prepared as stew meat, ground, boneless rolled roasts and sausages. Secondly, the meat separates from the bone much **easier** if it has not been frozen and not as much meat remains on the bone.

### 3.5 Packaging & Shipping

As previously mentioned the carcasses were cut in-half between the second and **third** rib while it was still hanging. We chose to split the carcasses **in this** fashion rather than **into sides** to **avoid** damage to the **loin** which could **easily** happen **with** an inexperienced meat cutter. Additionally, an electric splitting saw **with generator** are required to split the carcass as opposed to a knife and hand saw.

Since the meat railing was not used the halves were placed on tarps where they were allowed to dry and harden. Once dry the fronts were packaged in poly bags in preparation for shipping. The bags must be left open to prevent the meat from sweating. The hinds on the other hand were allowed to freeze before packaging. The meat was flown daily via air charter to **Inuvik**. At the store the boned out meat was placed in freezer boxes with liners, while the hind quarters were wrapped in carcass **covers** and cheese cloth. This must be done

RACK : To prevent gut spillage and contamination a rack must be used for gutting and partially skinning the carcass. Since the caribou will probably be killed at a considerable distance from the dressing area the gut bag may become damaged **while** in transit resulting in spillage of the carcass if gutted in a vertical position. The rack, on the other hand, facilitates the gutting and skinning of the animal in a horizontal position. It **will** not be necessary to have a gut table for inspection of the viscera as it can be inspected on the rack.

HEAD STAND : A head stand is required for inspection of the heads.

SANITATION & HYGIENE:

- ° a sanitation facility with chemical toilet and **warm** water for washing.
- ° **an** ample and continuous supply of water at **180°** F must be available at the abattoir.
- ° equipment, tools and clothing must be kept clean.
- ° inedible and human waste must be disposed of away from any water bodies.

CLOTHING: meat cutters should be equipped with rubber pants and coats which are easy to clean.

PACKAGING: once the meat is dry and frozen it must be packaged either **in** stockinette or a carcass cover and stockinette.

HAIR CONTAMINATION: prior to inspection loose hair must be removed from the carcass by burning it with a propane torch.

#### 4.0 MEAT INSPECTION REQUIREMENTS

The following is based upon: discussions with officials from Agriculture Canada, findings from the caribou pilot project, and experience at slaughtering muskox to meat inspection standards. It is important to understand however that the approach to date has simply been one of trial and error and what is perceived to be acceptable now may not be acceptable the next time round. Furthermore, a caribou inspection has never been carried out so there is no **guarantee** that the method and procedure being considered will result in an approved product even though it may be inspected.

**ANTI-MORTEM:** An anti-mortem is not required therefore the caribou do not have to be **corraled** or held by some other means before being killed. However care should be taken such that diseased and/or sick animals are not taken to prevent cross-contamination.

**KILLING:** the animals should be shot in the head or neck to avoid damage and contamination to the meat.

**BLEEDING:** As soon as the animal is killed it should be bled by cutting its throat from ear to ear and moved to the dressing area.

**ABATTOIR:** An **abattoir** or shelter with meat railings is mandatory for the skinning, gutting, dressing and **inspection**. The facility must also be kept warm to prevent **steam and icing**. The meat **railing** should be of sufficient length and strength to hold at least one days kill .

to prevent spoilage from dehydration. The meat was taken from the - store and placed in a storage freezer on wooden pallets.