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DRAFT  
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STRATEGY

Department of Renewable Resources  
Government of the Northwest Territories  
Yellowknife, NT CANADA

DRAFT - March, 1994

Draft Northwest Territories Fur Strategy

I am pleased to release the Draft Northwest Territories (NWT) Fur Strategy for public consultation. We believe this is an important initiative needed to support and expand the NWT Fur Industry and harvesters.

Comments on the draft NWT Fur Strategy should be sent to:

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We would appreciate receiving comments by 31 May 1994.

Sincerely,



Stephen Kakfwi

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## Northwest Territories Fur Strategy

### 1.0 Overview

The *Renewable Resource Development Strategy (7994)*, "Tradition and Change", establishes the approach that the Government of the Northwest Territories will take in managing and promoting the use of renewable resources. A separate strategy will be prepared for each of the six renewable resource sectors (fur, wildlife, fisheries, forests, marine mammals and agriculture),

This document, the Northwest Territories (NWT) Fur Strategy, expands on the initiatives contained within the Fur Sector of the *Renewable Resource Development Strategy*. The Department of Renewable Resources has provided programs to support fur harvesters and the fur industry for over three decades. This document commits the Department of Renewable Resources to continue managing and promoting the use of territorial fur resources,

The harvest of furs has made a significant contribution to the needs, cultures, societies and economy of Arctic residents for thousands of years. Harvesting furs is a seasonal occupation that can generate income and fulfil subsistence needs. Processing, manufacturing and retailing of wild fur products offers additional part-time or full-time occupations. These occupations provide other non-monetary but valued benefits, such as an active, healthy way of life and the use of traditional skills and knowledge.

About 15,000 territorial residents hold trapping licences in the Northwest Territories. This represent one quarter of the population. However, in 1992-93 only 10% were active and earned an average of \$700 each. In the mid 1980's, when wild fur prices were high, about 3,500 residents harvested wild fur and earned an average of \$1,700 each.

The harvest and value of wild furs fluctuate in response to many factors. Historically, these have included the state of the economy, consumer fashion trends and the natural fluctuation of furbearer populations. More recently, anti-harvest activities and competition from fur farms caused wild fur prices to decline. The results from fur auctions in 1993-94 suggest that demand for and value of wild fur is again increasing.

### 2.0 Purpose

The primary purpose of the NWT Fur Strategy is to increase subsistence and economic opportunities for territorial residents relating to the NWT fur industry. The Strategy will continue to promote fur harvesting as a seasonal occupation and manufacturing and retail participation as part-time or full-time occupations.

#### 2.1 Objectives

- Ensuring that the harvest of furbearers is sustainable
- Providing incentive programs for fur harvesters
- Promoting the use of humane harvesting methods
- Providing information and training programs for fur harvesters
- Increasing the value and demand for NWT wild fur
- Increasing manufacturing opportunities for fur and leather products for residents
- Reducing market barriers
- Developing legislation and policy to support the NWT Fur Industry



### 3.0 *The NWFurStrategy*

#### 3.1 Strengths

The NWT Fur industry will build on the following strengths:

- Furbearer populations in the Northwest Territories are healthy and productive
- Wild fur from the Northwest Territories is regarded by major fur retailers and manufacturers as some of the highest quality fur in the world
- Residents of the Northwest Territories wish to maintain fur harvesting as an occupation, especially in smaller communities where few other choices exist
- Harvesting furs uses traditional skills and knowledge of residents.

#### 3.2 Initiatives

initiatives for 1994-95 and 1995-96 are described under the following five headings:

- furbearer and trapline management
- training and income support programs
- manufacturing and retailing opportunities
- legislation and policy

Initiatives relating to hide or leather products from the other renewable resource sectors will be contained in the appropriate sectoral strategy (e.g. sea skins will be discussed in the Marine Mammal Strategy; muskox and caribou hides in the Wildlife Strategy).

### 4.0 *Furbearer and Trapline Management Initiatives*

4.1 Trapline management is needed for a sustainable harvest. Trapline management involves applying traditional and scientific knowledge to develop guidelines that harvesters can use. In general, guidelines will be developed to encourage the harvest of fur when it is prime and to prevent overharvesting. Initiatives for 1994-95 and 1995-96 are:

- Monitor the fur harvest in the Northwest Territories
- Implement a system to obtain data on harvest levels and values (new in 1994-95)
- Prepare trapline management guidelines based on information collected from studies and fur harvesters
- Discuss concept of fur management protocols with land claim renewable resource boards (new in 1994-95)

4.2 Partnerships with local people are required for co-management to occur, The Department of Renewable Resources supports local and regional involvement. Initiatives for 1994-95 and 1995-96 are:

- Discuss ideas with local wildlife committees and renewable resource management boards to increase the involvement of local fur harvesters in research and management programs



- Increase employment opportunities in management studies
- Incorporate traditional knowledge in study design and interpretation by developing research and management initiatives with communities
- Include furbearer management as an objective of any community or regional resource management plans
- Respond to requests from resource management boards and communities

4.3 The fur industry must be based on sustainable harvests from healthy and productive populations. Fourteen species of furbearers are harvested primarily for income in the Northwest Territories -- marten, lynx, mink, beaver, muskrat, squirrel, fisher, otter, ermine, arctic fox, red fox, wolverine, wolf and coyote. Several other furbearers are harvested primarily for local purposes -- snowshoe hare, ground squirrel. None of these species currently is endangered or threatened.

Furbearer populations fluctuate naturally. Usually, these fluctuations relate to each furbearer's primary food supply. For example, lynx numbers follow the ten year population cycle of the snowshoe hare while fox numbers follow the population cycle of small mammals such as mice.

The purpose of monitoring furbearers and their primary food species is to be able to predict how much trapping can be sustained during various years of the population cycle. This is known as the "tracking" strategy of harvesting wildlife. With cooperation from local fur harvesters, traditional knowledge and scientific techniques are used to monitor population trends and productivity of some furbearer populations,

Territorial residents are involved in furbearer management through community hunter and fur harvester associations and renewable resource management boards that have been established through land claim agreements. Such boards make recommendations on management issues and information needs directly to the Minister of Renewable Resources. This helps to ensure that management initiatives reflect the priorities of those who use and benefit from the resources.

Since not all populations can be monitored due to fiscal resources, priorities are set for selected species and areas of concern. Currently, studies focus on marten, lynx, beaver, mink and wolverine. Initiatives for 1994-95 and 1995-96 are:

Marten

- Collect marten carcasses from cooperating fur harvesters in Fort Smith region (Ft. Smith, Ft. Simpson) and Sahtu region (Deline, Ft. Good Hope) to monitor sex and age of harvest. An increase in the proportion of older animals and females in a harvest indicates poor reproduction or overharvesting. When such a trend is observed in an area, specific fur harvesters will be advised to decrease harvesting efforts to allow recovery of the population



- Conduct small mammal (mice/vole/lemming) monitoring in 15 areas in the NWT. Changes in small mammal populations affect the productivity of marten (and mink) populations. Monitoring the small mammals will enable biologists to predict changes in marten populations for fur harvesters, who may then alter their trapping practices accordingly
- Investigate how far young marten travel in the fall. From this information, recommendations can be developed for spacing traplines to ensure the harvest is sustainable. In the past, marten were overharvested in parts of the Northwest Territories and elsewhere when trap density was too high (new in 1994-95)

#### Lynx

- In cooperation with members of the Ft. Providence HTA, continue to investigate lynx population cycles in relation to snowshoe hare numbers. Currently (1994), hare and lynx populations in the western NWT are low and lynx are not reproducing. Fur harvesters are being advised to shorten their trapping season and decrease trapping effort for lynx. This study will monitor the impending increase in lynx reproduction, and will enable the Department of Renewable Resources to predict when lynx populations can withstand increased harvesting. This intensive study will continue into the recovery in hare and lynx populations (by 1996-97 or 1997-98)
- Collect lynx carcasses from several cooperating fur harvesters and also measure pelts across the western NWT to monitor sex and age of harvest. This research will track the lynx cycle on a regional basis across the western NWT. It is important to do this regionally because information from tagged lynx has shown they move very long distances. The Department of Renewable Resources will document the increase of lynx populations and fur harvesters will be advised harvesting may be increased without threatening long term yield
- Monitor population levels of snowshoe hares in seven areas of the western NWT. The hare is the primary food of lynx and an important food for other furbearers, especially marten. Knowledge of changes in hare numbers will enable fur harvesters to predict increases in the size of many of the furbearer populations

#### Mink

- Collect mink carcasses from fur harvesters in the western Northwest Territories to monitor levels of contaminants, organochlorines and heavy metals. This study is examining levels and sources of contaminants as high levels can reduce reproduction. Although these contaminants are present, no high levels have been documented. In addition, age and sex ratios of the harvest are examined (as per marten) and in areas of suspected poor reproductions or overharvest, fur harvesters will be advised to decrease harvesting efforts
- Monitor muskrat and mink population levels in certain areas and review historical harvest levels to assess influence of muskrat population cycles on mink population levels. Mink populations appear to cycle to some degree with muskrat numbers. Mink harvest efforts may need to be adjusted at various periods in the cycle which will affect fur harvester harvest efforts and return (new in 1994-95)





### Beaver

- Conduct fall surveys of beaver lodges in selected areas to monitor population levels. These surveys will identify areas where harvesting efforts may be increased, and monitor long-term population trends

### Wolverine

- Collect wolverine carcasses from hunters in the Kitikmeot region (Coppermine, Bay Chimo and Bathurst Inlet) to determine harvest levels, monitor sex and age composition of harvest and investigate growth rates and productivity. Wolverine fur is highly prized by local residents. Local hunters are also being interviewed to increase the knowledge of the ecology of wolverines on the tundra

### Habitat Management

- Investigate effects of forest fires on marten population levels. These studies will help fur harvesters understand how marten (and their prey) recolonize burned areas, and will determine when areas can be harvested after a wildfire. This study is part of an integrated program looking at the effects of fire on habitat and the wildlife species that live there
- monitor furbearers and their prey near Ft. Liard as part of the community resource management initiative. information gathered can be used to look at the effects of fire and logging on local biodiversity
- Discuss with renewable resource management boards potential cooperative habitat management projects to enhance furbearer populations and harvest (e.g. water level manipulation to increase muskrat habitat) (new in 1994-95)

## 5.0 *Training and Income Support Initiatives*

5.1 The involvement of local people is essential for effective management. Fur harvesting requires an initial investment in equipment, However, income cannot be derived until after the harvest and the amount of income is not predictable because fur prices and harvest fluctuate annually. The following initiatives are proposed for 1994-95 and 1995-96 by the Department of Renewable Resources to augment and stabilize income from selling furs and assist harvesters to purchase equipment:

- Provide Fur Advance Program
- <sup>A</sup> Provide Fur Harvester Incentive Grant
- Provide fur harvesters with option of receiving incentive grant for under-utilized species when they sell fur or as a lump sum grant the following fall
- Consider options for alternative support to fur harvesters when weather and other natural factors prevent a successful fur harvest
- Provide grants through the Community Harvester Assistance Program (CHAP)
- Develop options to establish guaranteed minimum prices as an alternative to the Fur harvester Incentive Grant Program (new in 1994-95)



- Investigate options for establishing a grant that can be used to purchase equipment. To develop options, a database on the costs and benefits of fur harvesting will be developed from surveys or fur harvesters (new in 1994-95)
- Investigate options for establishing targets for maximum number of active fur harvesters (new in 1995-96)
- Advise fur harvesters of support available through the Workers' Compensation Board and assist fur harvesters with any applications

5.2 In addition to support programs provided by the Department of Renewable Resource, other GNWT departments and organizations provide support programs that may be accessible for training or other purposes. The Department of Renewable Resources will investigate the potential for coordinating harvester support with the following initiatives:

- Investigate options for accessing employment training programs provided through the Department of Education, Employment and Culture and the Department of Economic Development and Tourism (new in 1994-95)
- Investigate options for jointly funding harvester support programs with land claim organizations, for example, the Nunavut Harvester Support Fund (new in 1995-96)
- Coordinate fur harvester support initiatives with the Income Reform Program once it is developed (new in 1995-96)

5.3 The Government of the Northwest Territories has made a commitment to the use of humane trapping techniques in order to maintain markets (especially the European market) and to respond to consumer demands. The following initiatives for 1994-95 and 1995-96 will promote the use of humane trapping techniques:

- Conduct Year 5 and 6 of the Trap Exchange Program
- Provide Year 5 and 6 of the Fur Harvester Training Program throughout the Northwest Territories
- Conduct field tests of new types of quick kill traps as they are developed
- Conduct a harvester survey to assess quick kill trap for Arctic fox (new in 1994-95)
- Work with the Department of Economic Development and Tourism to promote manufacture of quick kill traps in the NWT (new in 1994-95)

5.4 The highest prices for furs are paid for top quality, prime furs that are in demand that year. Fur harvesters need to know the best ways to harvest each species, how to handle fur pelts, what species are in demand in the market, etc. Harvesters will be provided with such information and training through the following initiatives for 1994-95 and 1995-96:



- Provide notice at the beginning of each trapping season of incentive payments available for under-valued or under-utilized species
- Provide Years 5 and 6 of the Fur Harvester Training Program throughout the Northwest Territories
- Produce a quarterly Newsletter that advises harvesters on fur harvesting, fur grading techniques, fur harvester training courses and manufacturing opportunities
- Investigate training opportunities for first-time fur harvesters, aged 15-25 years of age, such as an apprenticeship program involving classroom studies and field studies with experienced fur harvesters (new in 1994-95)

#### *6.0 Manufacturing and Retailing Initiatives*

Many stages are involved between the harvest of a raw fur pelt and a finished product. At each stage, the value of the pelt increases. By increasing the number of stages that occur within the Northwest Territories, residents can receive more benefits and employment and business opportunities. This section outlines initiatives that will be taken at the various stages.

**6.1** The price of raw furs increases as market demand for products from those furs increases. NWT raw wild furs are recognized as some of the highest quality wild fur available. To maximize demand and prices for NWT raw wild furs, the following initiatives will be undertaken in 1994-95:

- Work with Revillon on Year 2 of three year agreement to promote the market of northern wild furs
- Evaluate impact of Revillon promotional campaign (new in 1994-95)
- Conduct a cost/benefit analysis of marketing and promotion options
- Work with the Department of Economic Development and Tourism to investigate other marketing and promotional projects for NWT furs
- Establish eastern and western NWT Fur Grading Centres. These centres will promote the image of NWT wild fur pelts as an exclusive product. The centres develop a supply of pelts suitable for the NWT arts and crafts industry as well as for the high fashion industry. The centres will eventually be expanded to provide grading services for other raw hides (e.g. seal, muskox, caribou) (new in 1994-95)

**6.2** To produce most fur products, tanned fur is required. The type of tanning process used depends on how the tanned fur will be used. Tanned furs sold in NWT retail outlets or used by NWT residents to make fur products are, for the most part, exported to southern Canada to be tanned and then imported back for production. The following initiatives will be undertaken in 1994-95 and 1995-96 to reduce the need to export furs that require tanning:



- Work with the Department of Economic Development and Tourism to adapt the Tutshi tanning process, which produces a tanned pelt suitable for use in the arts and crafts industry, for use in the Whale Cove tannery and other communities in the Northwest Territories
- Work with the Science Institute of the NWT to address environmental concerns of for commercial tanning processes, such as that used in the Broughton Island tannery

6.3 Residents, especially women, are involved in the manufacture of fur products, These products are usually sold at local retail outlets. The following initiatives will be undertaken in 1994-95 and 1995-96 to promote this cottage industry:

- Conduct a survey of NWT retailers to identify fur products that could be manufactured and sold in the NWT and develop options for advising NWT manufacturers accordingly (new in 1994-95)
- Describe the make-up of NWT cottage industry involved with making fur products and identify requirements for raw or processed wild fur (new in 1994-95)
- Investigate options for educational and financial programs to support the NWT cottage industry involved with making fur products (new in 1995-96)
- Investigate options of cost sharing community-based, manufacturing ventures with land claim organizations (new in 1995-96)

6.4 To promote the market of fur products, market barriers must be minimized. The following initiatives will be taken in relation to reducing potential market barriers in 1994-95 and 1995-96:

- Continue monitoring the implementation of the European Community Regulation 3254/91 and take action, as required, with other government agencies or aboriginal organizations, to ensure that the European market for NWT wild furs remains
- Continue monitoring initiatives of anti-harvest organizations and respond as required
- Work with the Department of Economic Development and Tourism to review existing markets and identify options to increase these and develop new markets (new in 1994-95)

#### *7.0 Legislation and Policy Initiatives*

Legislation and policy allow users and managers to establish rules for fur harvesting. In the Northwest Territories, the primary objectives of those rules are to ensure that fur harvesting is sustainable, that only prime fur is harvested, that humane trapping methods are used and that access rights to harvesting areas are respected.



7.1 All fur harvesting legislation is enacted through the *Wildlife Act*, usually as Trapping Regulations. Other pieces of legislation that are sometimes applied usually relate to environmental protection (for example, to ensure that tanning processes do not contaminate the environment). In 1994-95 and 1995-96, the following legislative initiatives will be undertaken:

- Publish a summary of trapping regulations each year
- Consult with Renewable Resource Management Boards on any proposed regulation changes
- Enact a new regulation to require all first time fur harvesters to take a training course (new in 1994-95)
- Consult with harvesters on whether to modify fur harvesting seasons in relation to when fur is prime (new in 1994-95)

7.2 The NWT Fur Strategy will guide the NWT Fur Industry. Policy initiatives for 1994-95 and 1995-96 are:

- Conduct consultation on the NWT Fur Strategy with renewable resource management boards, regional aboriginal organizations (including regional councils, Aboriginal Women's Association, etc.), federal and territorial agencies. Written comments on the draft NWT Fur Strategy will be requested by the end of May 1994. The Department of Renewable Resources will be available to attend meetings upon request
- In conjunction with the Science Institute, develop guidelines, as required, on environmental protection measures for tanneries (new in 1994-95)

#### 8.0 *Review and Evaluation*

After two years of implementation, the NWT Fur Strategy will be evaluated and revised accordingly. The objectives of the evaluation will be: “

- to determine the extent to which the goals and objectives are still valid;
- to assess the impacts and effects of the programs and services;
- to determine the degree to which objectives were achieved; and
- to suggest and assess alternative program and service designs and delivery mechanisms.