

Working Together for Caribou



Draft Nunavut Caribou Strategy Framework Summary Document March 2010



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Department of Environment

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About This Document

The Government of Nunavut (GN) has made it a priority to create a strategy that will lay the foundation for future programs and decisions affecting caribou and people whose lives are affected by caribou in Nunavut. In developing this strategy, the GN is seeking to gather input from Nunavummiut, and others interested in caribou, by conducting public consultations across Nunavut. As part of these consultations, the GN has prepared a draft of the Nunavut Caribou Strategy which has been released for public comment.

This overview document has been prepared to provide you with an introduction to the Strategy; to summarize its contents and highlight important features. Its purpose is also to guide you towards parts of the Strategy about which you would like obtain more information concerning the GN's proposed actions or provide your input.

Having reviewed this overview of the Nunavut Caribou Strategy, you can seek more information by referring to the Strategy itself copies of which can be obtained from your local Hunters' & Trappers Organization, or from your local GN Conservation Officer.

Reasons for Creating the Nunavut Caribou Strategy

Three reasons for creating this Strategy:

- (1) Caribou are important;*
- (2) There are concerns regarding the current state & future of some herds;*
- (3) There are uncertainties about the way forward;*

Caribou Are Important For:

- **The Environment** – In helping to maintain the natural balance in ecosystems.
- **The Health and Well-being of Nunavummiut** – In providing a nutritious, reliable, and affordable food source. In supporting social activities that build strong relationships within families and communities. In maintaining Inuit culture and values and in transferring knowledge from one generation to the next.
- **The Economy** – In contributing the equivalent of more than \$22 million each year in replacement food value¹ to Nunavut households. In generating income from tourism, outfitting, commercial harvesting, arts and crafts.

¹ The Nunavut Wildlife Harvest Study: Final Report. 2004. Nunavut Wildlife Management Board. 822pp.

- **The Future** – As a renewable resource, the importance of caribou is the sum of current and future contributions. If herds continue to thrive in Nunavut, their true value is immeasurable in all of the above respects.

Concerns Regarding the State of Some herds

- **The State of Herds is Changing -**

Fact:

According to government surveys and the observations of hunters, each of the three largest caribou herds in Nunavut have decreased in size by 30 to 95 % over the last 15 years. What amounted to a total more than 1.1 million caribou in 1995 has decreased to less than 0.4 million today. Many other herds have similarly declined across Nunavut.

Inuit traditional knowledge and scientific evidence both indicate that caribou herds go through long cycles of abundance and scarcity in response to environmental factors. These are natural cycles that have occurred for millennia.

In recent history man-made disturbances may have influenced caribou cycles. Currently, caribou numbers in many parts of Nunavut are declining. The size of some herds is much lower than recorded in previous decades. The cause of these declines is not well understood but there is concern that human influences may be contributing. There is also concern that some communities may have limited access to caribou in future.

- **Human Influence on Caribou and Their Habitat is Increasing**

The Trends in Nunavut:

Land Use – *Increasing mineral exploration and development in caribou habitat*

Harvesting – *More people and the effectiveness of new technologies leading to increased hunting pressure.*

Climate change – *The natural cycle of caribou abundance is thought to be linked partly to the effect of climate on caribou food sources. Human-caused changes in climate will have uncertain effects on caribou.*

The on-going use of caribou and their habitat is both desirable and necessary for the cultural, social and economic well-being of Nunavummiut. As human use of caribou and caribou habitat increases, however, so too do the risks. With herds numbers already low, increased pressures from development, unmanaged harvest, as well as the possible impacts of global climate change, have the potential to cause unwanted effects on the health of herds; perhaps permanently.

It is not feasible or desirable to alter natural cycles in the abundance of caribou and attempts to do so may have unintended ecosystem-wide consequences. However, if current declines

in the size of some herds are due in part to the disruption of natural cycles by human activities, these activities can and should be managed to ensure the recovery of herds and continued access to caribou by future generations of Inuit. At same time, we also face the challenge of avoiding limitations on the use of caribou or caribou habitat which are contrary to the long-term economic, social and cultural interests of Inuit.

➤ **Caribou Are a Shared Resource and Shared Responsibility**

Fact:

Some of Nunavut's largest caribou herds range into the Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan and Manitoba where they are also affect by human activities.

The right to use and the responsibility to manage caribou and their habitat is shared by many organizations and individuals both in and outside Nunavut. Governments, wildlife management boards, Inuit and other aboriginal organizations, industry and the public all have roles to play. At times, there may be competing interests amongst these various stakeholders. To avoid conflict and prevent over-exploitation, the GN and its partners must face the challenge of working together to coordinate the use and management of caribou and habitat.

Uncertainties about the Future

There are many uncertainties surrounding caribou and the actions required to address the concerns described above.

For example:

How will the size and productivity of herds change in the future?

How much are human activities really affecting caribou? How much is too much?

What are the most important habitats needed to support viable herds?

How can we manage human activities to ensure caribou remain abundant?

How can we promote the continued development of Nunavut's society and economy whilst avoiding conflicts with caribou?

These uncertainties create risks; risks that the decisions we make concerning land-use, environmental protection and harvest management will stifle economic and social development, reduce investment in Nunavut, unnecessarily limit peoples' rights to hunt, cause irreversible damage to key habitats and ultimately threaten the long-term viability of herds. The ultimate challenge facing the GN and its partners with respect to caribou management is therefore to resolve uncertainty and manage risk within acceptable limits.

The Need to Address Concerns and Uncertainties

These concerns and uncertainties surrounding caribou in Nunavut can be addressed through:

- **Collecting the information** we need to make confident risk-free decisions; information that allows us to monitor herds during periods of dramatic change, deepen our understanding of things responsible for these changes and determine what can or should be done to influence these changes.
- **Working together** as resource users and managers to set priorities, lay plans and take actions.
- Improving the **way decisions are made** and implemented.
- Implementing rationale measures to **manage development** in caribou habitat, especially that most sensitive to impacts.
- Supporting the **on-going use of caribou** as a renewable resource and working with communities to adapt during periods when access to caribou is limited.

These needs are the **5 Key Components** of the *Nunavut Caribou Strategy*.

Purpose of the Strategy

The *Nunavut Caribou Strategy* has been created to address the needs of caribou and people whose lives are affected by caribou. The Strategy touches on numerous areas of the GN's mandate including wildlife management, land-use planning, environmental protection, economic & social development, and human health and well-being.

The Strategy is intended to provide a broad framework to guide caribou management. Its relevance encompasses all 23 known caribou herds in Nunavut, including feral reindeer. The entire Strategy will not necessarily be implemented in every part of Nunavut. Some sections will be relevant to certain herds or regions but not to others. It is intended to complement, not replace, herd-specific management plans, recovery plans or regional land use plans which may also contain important measures affecting caribou.

The Strategy supports the fundamental role and rights of Inuit with respect to caribou harvesting and management as set forth in the NLCA. It reflects and works within the co-management system established under the NLCA. As a result, the success of the Strategy is dependent on the participation of the many organizations and individuals in and outside Nunavut that share responsibility for the use and management of caribou.

Guiding Principles

The Strategy is based on a set of guiding principles that were used in its development and will guide its implementation in future.

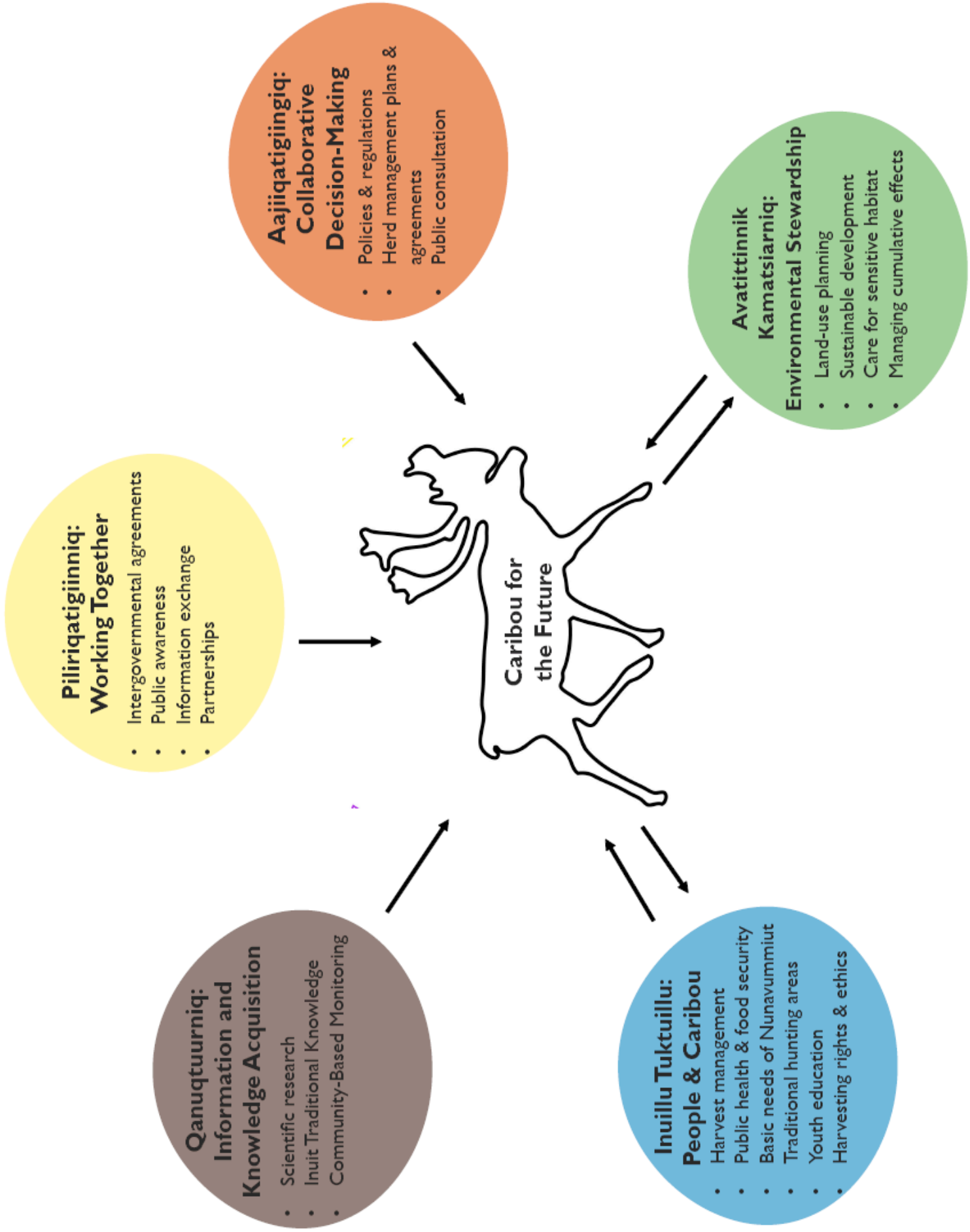
Guiding Principles of the Strategy:

- ***Inuit societal values and knowledge*** are an important part of wildlife and habitat management in Nunavut
- ***A precautionary approach***; when in doubt there is a need to err on the side of caution when considering caribou management measures and the risk of serious or irreversible harm.
- Caribou management should as a priority serve and promote the long-term social, economic and cultural ***interests of Inuit***.
- Decisions will be based on the best available information using ***science and Inuit traditional knowledge***.
- The ***combined (cumulative) effects*** of all human activities affecting caribou must be taken into account when making decisions.
- ***Communication and education*** are means to improve the management of caribou and our relationships with one another.

Key Components

The Strategy has 5 Key Components each intended to address one of the needs identified above. For each Key Component, a series of objectives have been established; things the GN would like to achieve during the life of the Strategy. Under each objective is a set of policies and actions that the GN is proposing to undertake to meet the objectives.

Below you will find a brief summary of the 5 Key Components including examples of the types of actions proposed. For more details, please refer to the Strategy itself.



(1) Qanuqtuurniq (Information and Knowledge Acquisition)

Here the Strategy focuses on making a renewed investment in research to ensure that future decisions are based on the best possible information. This information will allow us to track changes in the size and condition of caribou herds, understand the causes of change, determine the impacts of human activities and, when necessary, identify opportunities for intervention that will benefit caribou and people.

Meeting the objective of gathering relevant, reliable & up-to-date information, requires actions such as:

- *Setting short and long-term **priorities** for research to **fill important gaps** in knowledge and provide on-going monitoring;*
- *Using both **Inuit traditional knowledge and science**;*
- ***Increasing capacity** within the GN and communities to conduct research in-order to keep pace with the growing demand for information;*
- ***Engaging communities** in collecting and using harvest data and hunter observations to track caribou health and distribution;*
- *Developing **new research methods** compatible with Inuit values & scientific principles;*
- *Creating **partnerships** amongst communities, governments, educational institutions, Inuit organizations, industry and others to best utilize resources available for research.*

(2) Piliriqatigiinniq or Iqqanaijaqatigiit (Working Together)

Caribou management in Nunavut is a complex process involving many stakeholders. The complexity of the process itself will be a barrier to success unless the stakeholders work together. Here the Strategy focuses on the need to build strong relationships between the GN and its many partners². In doing so there is a need to achieve a common understanding of the concerns surrounding caribou and the actions required to address them.

² The list of partners includes Hunters' & Trappers' Organizations (HTO's), Regional Wildlife Organizations (RWO's), the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB), Nunavut Planning Commission (NPC), Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB), Regional Inuit Associations (RIA's), Nunavut Tunngavik Inc (NTI), the Beverly Qammanirjuaq Caribou Management Board (BQCMB), neighbouring provinces and territories, the federal government, non-government environmental organizations, the mining sector and other private sector interests.

Meeting the objectives of building relationships and increasing cooperation amongst partners in and outside Nunavut requires actions such as:

- *Establishing **agreements with neighbouring provinces and territories** for the management of shared herds;*
- *Supporting existing **caribou management boards** and (where necessary) the creating new boards to provide the GN and partners with advice on herds shared by Nunavut and its neighbours;*
- *Setting **joint priorities**, developing plans and creating partnerships for research and management activities;*
- *Raising **public awareness** of issues affecting caribou through regular consultation and the development of educational programs;*
- *Creating opportunities and building capacity within **communities** to monitor and manage caribou;*
- *Working with the **Elders Advisory Committee** when considering caribou management actions;*
- *Increasing the **flow of information** from the GN to other partners through regular communication and ready access to government data on caribou.*

(3) Aajiqatigiingiq (Collaborative Decision-Making)

Here the Strategy focuses on improving the way decisions affecting caribou are made and implemented by the GN. To promote understanding and public confidence, decisions must be based on good information made freely available for all to review. Decisions must be respectful of the need for conservation, and considerate of the long-term economic, social and cultural interests of Inuit. Decisions must be guided by clear policies, regulations and plans to ensure they are made in a consistent way each time rather than being subject to personal bias or the special interests of a particular group. The process of making decisions requires effective consultation and open debate. Finally, in today's rapidly changing world, there is a need to make decisions fast enough to respond when action is required.

Meeting the objective of improving the way decisions are made and implemented requires actions such as:

- *Creating **new policies and regulations** needed to address key issues affecting caribou such as industrial development within caribou habitat;*
- *Ensuring **programs and resources** are in place to implement these policies and regulations;*
- *Increasing **industry and public compliance** with rules designed to protect caribou and their habitat;*
- *Supporting the development of **herd management plans** and intergovernmental agreements to ensure decisions are made with reference to the 'big picture' rather than in isolation;*
- *Using the **best available information** to make decisions (IQ & science);*
- *Ensuring open debate before decisions are made by means of **proper consultation** and sharing of information;*
- ***Monitoring and reporting** on the effectiveness of GN decisions and management actions.*

(4) Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq (Environmental Stewardship)

Here the Strategy focuses on development in caribou habitat. Development and caribou can co-exist and both contribute to the on-going cultural, social and economic well-being of Nunavummiut. However, if too much land is altered by activities such as the construction of mines, roads, and tourism facilities, or if development occurs in areas most important for caribou, the capacity of the land to support herds will diminish, perhaps permanently. Human activity on the land, for whatever purpose, can also affect the behaviour of caribou and their use of habitat which in turn can affect herd health. Caribou are adaptable and can tolerate human presence. However, there are limits to this tolerance and adaptability. Frequent interruptions may stress animals over time, reduce body condition, and lower calving rates. Finally, long-term changes in environmental conditions such as climate, the scope of which extends well beyond Nunavut's borders, have the potential to affect caribou and habitat within Nunavut. Individually, each of these human interactions with caribou may or may not have detectable effects on the status of herds. However, when combined their cumulative effects may lead to dramatic impacts.

In managing development, there is a need to implement the principles of conservation and proceed cautiously to ensure these activities do not threaten the long-term health of herds. This can be achieved through careful research and monitoring, land-use planning and environmental impact assessment. In circumstances where impacts cannot be mitigated or managed within

acceptable limits, the maintenance of healthy herds capable of meeting the basic needs of Inuit is the priority.

Meeting the objective of managing development in caribou habitat requires actions such as:

- *Strengthening **GN participation in land-use planning & environmental assessment processes**;*
- *Investing in **research and monitoring** to meet the growing information needs identified through land-use planning, environmental assessment and the Nunavut General Monitoring Program;*
- *Making **GN information** about caribou readily available for land-use planning and environmental assessment;*
- *Developing new **guidelines and standards** for monitoring and mitigating development impacts on caribou.*

Caribou habitats such as calving grounds and post-calving areas require special attention. Meeting the objective of managing development in these sensitive caribou habitats requires actions such as:

- *Gathering available information and conducting new research to **identify and raise awareness** of sensitive habitat within the range of each herd.*
- *Investing in **research** to determine the impacts of development in these areas and assess the effectiveness of protection and mitigation measures.*
- *Adopting a set of revised caribou **protection and mitigation measures** specifically to manage human activities in sensitive habitat for application in land-use planning and environmental assessment.*
- *Placing priority on habitat management efforts in **areas of mutual interest** to caribou and mineral resource potential.*

(5) Inuillu Tuktuillu (People and Caribou)

Managing caribou in Nunavut is not just about ensuring that herds remain abundant and healthy. It is also about protecting and enhancing the important relationship between Nunavummiut and caribou. Here the Strategy focuses on the use of caribou as a renewable resource, which if carefully used and managed will provide benefits to future generations of Inuit.

There are many uses of caribou and there will be times when it becomes necessary to place priority on these uses to avoid conflict or the over-utilization of this valuable resource. There may also be times when peoples' access to caribou becomes limited; for example when herds undergo major reductions in size or changes in range use. There is a need to anticipate these events; to develop plans that will reduce hardships, offer alternatives and support those most affected by this loss of access.

Meeting the objective of ensuring the wise use and sustainable harvesting of caribou requires actions such as:

- *Working with HTOs, RWOs and the Elders Advisory Committee to create a **code of conduct** for caribou harvesting, drawing on traditional hunting practices;*
- *Introducing programs targeted at **educating youth** on hunting rights and responsibilities, and harvesting ethics;*
- *Monitoring and **managing caribou harvesting** when needed;*
- *Monitoring the presence of diseases and contaminants within herds to protect **public health** & maintain **public confidence** in caribou as a safe and secure food source;*
- *Placing priority on research and other activities that will support the on-going use of caribou by Inuit to meet their **basic needs**;*
- *Protecting **traditional hunting areas** and the habitats necessary to maintain healthy caribou herds by means of land-use planning and environmental impact assessment;*
- *Working with communities to deal with **social and economic problems** that arise when caribou are scarce.*

Next Steps

Implementing the Strategy

The strategy outlines the things we need to do for caribou management in Nunavut but it does not specify how or when each action will be taken. These details will be provided in an Implementation Plan that will be developed to accompany the Strategy. Given limited resources and other considerations, it is not practical to contemplate that all of the actions set out in the Strategy will be taken at the same time. Instead, the Implementation Plan will describe a schedule for taking actions in a series of logical stages starting with the highest priorities.

Monitoring Our Success

At least once every 5 years, the GN will review and evaluate progress that has been made in implementing the Strategy. This review will be made public and published as part of the GN's Statutory Report on Wildlife Management that is required under the *Nunavut Wildlife Act*. We will determine not only our success in taking the actions called for under the Strategy but also the effectiveness of those actions in maintaining healthy caribou herds that coexist alongside socioeconomic development.

Updating the Strategy

At least once every 5 years, the Strategy will be updated to take into account changes in the status of caribou herds and the economic, social and cultural interests of Nunavummiut. Actions under the Strategy will be removed, modified or added to meet the changing needs. It will be an inclusive process involving consultation with all stakeholders.