Aboriginal leaders of Québec and Labrador unite to protect the Ungava caribou

Kuujjuaq and Nain, April 26th 2013 - It is with great pride that the Aboriginal governments and Nations of Québec and Labrador stand together and formerly announce the creation of the Ungava Peninsula Caribou Aboriginal Round Table, a united and powerful voice that will endeavor to preserve caribou and the deep relationship that aboriginal people have long held with it.

Following an initial historic meeting in Kuujjuaq in January, the Inuit, Innu and Inuit/Metis living in Labrador as well as the Inuit, Innu, Naskapi and Cree living in Quebec gathered together again in Uashat mak Mani-Utenam last week to formalize the Ungava Peninsula Caribou Aboriginal Round Table. The Round Table has been created to respond to the decline of the migratory caribou and will strive to develop a conservation and management system in a way that respects all cultures and traditions. This gathering is a strong step towards aboriginal leadership and responsibility towards the preservation of the land and animals on which they depend.

The Round Table has elected two Co-chairs, Ms Sarah Leo, (Government of Nunatsiavut), and Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku, (Makivik Corporation) as well as an executive committee composed of representatives from each Nation namely Réal McKenzie (Innu of the Québec region), George
Guanish (Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach), Todd Russell (NunatuKavut Community Council), Prote Poker (Innu Nation) and Isaac Masty (Grand Council of the Crees of Eeyou Istchee/Cree Regional Authority (GCCEI/CRA) as well as the Co-chairs.

A technical Committee has also been assigned to support the activities of the Round Table and initiate the development of a Conservation Plan for the Ungava Caribou Herds including a process for recommending the sustainable sustenance and cultural allocation of caribou while respecting the sovereignty and independence of each member nation.

“The caribou has brought us together; we are united and committed to preserving caribou and our relationship with it for our present and future generations” says Sarah Leo, President of Nunatsiavut and co-chair of the Round Table.

As stated in a joint declaration (http://www.makivik.org/aboriginal-leaders-come-together-to-protect-the-george-river-and-leaf-river-caribou-herds/), caribou is central to the Aboriginal Peoples of the Ungava Peninsula. It is an integral part of the Aboriginal cultural, physical and spiritual well-being, as well as the food security of our nations. All members of the Round Table share deep respect and responsibility towards the caribou, and agreed that actions must be taken to respond to this critical decline of the George River Caribou Herd and the uncertain future of the Leaf River and Torngat Caribou Herds.

“The Round Table is a true testament of the respect for the individual realities and sovereignty of each participating aboriginal nations.” says Adamie Delisle Alaku of the Makivik Corporation and co-chair of the Round Table. “I have great faith in the power of our unity, and that we will achieve our goal of preserving caribou while protecting our cultural well-being” he added.

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About the Ungava Peninsula Caribou Aboriginal Round Table

The Ungava Caribou Aboriginal Round Table membership is: the Inuit of Nunavik, the Inuit of Nunatsiavut, the NunatuKavut Community Council, the Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach, the Grand Council of the Crees of Eeyou Istchee/Cree Regional Authority (GCCEI/CRA), the Innu Nation of Labrador and all the Innu communities from the Québec region. The Round Table will be developing a website in the near future.

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Aboriginal leaders come together to protect the George River and Leaf River Caribou Herds

Emergency Aboriginal Caribou Summit
January 16-17, 2013
Kuujjuaq, Nunavik

FORWARD

“Intimate relationship with the land’ is a dimension far from being a mythical one, but certainly real, present and essential to the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of an individual and a society as a whole. For thousands of years we have depended on the land and lived within the natural cycles of life. Understanding and respect of the land and animals was and is fundamental for our survival. Respect for the animal is an important component throughout the process of hunting and the life of a hunter. It is shown in many ways, but most importantly respect is shown by sharing, harvesting only what is needed and what the population can handle, and ensuring that all parts of the animal are used. These principals are the foundation for our use and management of the land.”

STATEMENT

The Emergency Aboriginal Caribou Summit held in Kuujjuaq on January 16th and 17th, 2013 was truly a historic event uniting for the first time, under our leadership, the Inuit of Nunavik, the Inuit of Nunatsiavut, Nunatukavut, the Innu Nation, six Innu communities from Québec, the Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach, and the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee. This gathering marks the beginning of our united and powerful voice coming together to protect the George River and Leaf River Caribou Herds.

Caribou is central to our people. It is an integral part of who we are, our culture, our spiritual and physical well-being. We all share deep respect and responsibility towards the caribou. Many concerns, knowledge and emotions were shared between the participants and all agreed that actions must be taken to respond to the critical state of the George River Caribou Herd (GRCH).
All participants recognized that;

The George River Caribou Herd is in serious decline.

There is a need for an open discussion between concerned Aboriginal Peoples to better understand and reduce the impacts of our collective harvest on the herd and the food security of our people.

The Leaf River Caribou Herd is also in decline, and that the critical state of the George River Caribou Herd and the unavailability of the caribou for subsistence hunting will bring added pressure on the Leaf River Caribou Herd.

The land is changing and the impacts of climate change, industrial development, and the growing human population and easier accessibility of the herd cannot be ignored in the management actions to be put forward. With the exponential rate of development, the protection of caribou habitat is greatly deficient and needs to be addressed seriously.

The governments of Québec and Newfoundland and Labrador need to take responsibility and significant and immediate actions need to be put in place to ensure as a priority:

- the full protection of the calving grounds from any exploration and development activities; and;
- that priority of harvest be given for the aboriginal subsistence hunt in accordance with aboriginal rights and existing treaty rights, and that non-aboriginal harvesting of the GRCH and the sport hunt of the LRCH be closed at this time.

The Government of Nunatsiatvut has already taken leadership in recommending the establishment of a protection zone for the George River caribou calving grounds by designating a 14,000 km² protection zone under the Regional Land Use Plan for the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area. The aboriginal leaders fully supported the Regional Land Use Plan for the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area and urged the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to adopt it.

Summit participants also endorsed the immediate establishment of a permanent Aboriginal Leadership Round Table for the management of caribou and called on the governments of Newfoundland and Labrador and Québec to create a co-management board that would include meaningful and significant participation of all Aboriginal Peoples connected to the herds.
Given the critical state of the George River Herd and the declining state of the Leaf River Herd, participants stressed the need to put in place close monitoring and research programs for the herds with a meaningful and active engagement of the Aboriginal groups and their knowledge.

Each Aboriginal group has responsibilities to find solutions respecting the concerns and needs of all communities. Participants recognized the critical state of the herd and the difficulties that this will bring to the future of our people and our children. Some groups have already made important sacrifices and each will act immediately to fulfill their obligation to properly inform their respective communities about the urgency of this matter and the need to take appropriate actions. The Leaders recognize and respect the independence and sovereignty of each participating Nation and community.

The Nunatsiavut Government reaffirmed its position that Beneficiaries cease harvesting from the George River Caribou Herd for two years. Nunatukavut has asked its membership to cease harvesting from the George River Caribou Herd for one year.

The caribou have been plentiful for us to harvest for many years. Now it is our responsibility to work together and make sure that we do all that is necessary to respect and preserve this important animal. We have agreed to reconvene in early April to make decisions on collective actions and measures for the protection of the George River and Leaf River caribou herds.