



GWICH'IN RENEWABLE RESOURCE BOARD

STRATEGIC PLAN

2008—2013



GWICH'IN RENEWABLE RESOURCE BOARD

2nd Floor, Alex Moses Greenland Building

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PREFACE

The Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board is the main instrument of fish, forestry and wildlife management within the Gwich'in Settlement Area. Established as a result of the *Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claims Settlement Agreement* in 1992, we are now entering our 16th year of operation.

The Board met from February 25-28, 2008 in Inuvik to map out our strategic planning priorities for the coming 1-5 years: 2008 through to 2013.

The Board members met for a facilitated discussion about the decision-making challenges we face with representatives of each of the four Gwich'in Renewable Resources Councils (RRCs), the Gwich'in Tribal Council and with the participation of other governmental stakeholders. We participated in a roundtable dialogue about roles, relationships and responsibilities. We explored together the complex environmental, social and economic changes facing the Gwich'in settlement area and its people, and we discussed each of the main areas of our mandate:

- ◆ Research activities;
- ◆ Community consultation and communications activities;
- ◆ Public outreach and public engagement requirements; and
- ◆ Harvest planning, allocation and regulatory activities.

This planning session greatly helped us move forward to map out a new five-year plan for the Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board, a plan that is set out in this document. The Strategic Plan is an “evergreen” document: it will be updated and released annually after dialogue and consultation with all our partners and stakeholders. The Strategic Plan is not a work plan. It is an overall strategy or framework to guide management and staff in their task of planning more detailed actions to implement the plan. Detailed work plans will be developed as needed for each goal and objective.

Chairman: Robert Charlie

Board Members

- Robert Alexie Sr.; GTC, Fort McPherson
- James Firth; GTC, Inuvik
- Elizabeth Hansen; GNWT, Inuvik
- Paul Latour; Environment Canada
- Eugene Pascal; GTC, Aklavik
- Dan Topolniski; DFO Canada

Alternate Members

- Johnnie Charlie; GNWT, Fort McPherson
- Victoria Johnston; Environment Canada
- George Low, DFO
- (three GTC positions vacant)

Our vision for the plan is “*to work together today for our resources tomorrow.*” We hope that our Strategic Plan for the coming five-year period will contribute to achieving that vision.

See Appendix for a complete list of attendees.

Executive Director: Melody Nice-Paul

Angela Horbatch; Office Manager
 Amy Thompson; Fisheries Biologist
 Linda Wright; Communications Coordinator

Kristen Callaghan; Wildlife Biologist
 Nicole Lights; Environment Biologist



MANDATE

Our mandate is to be the main instrument of wildlife and forest management in the Gwich'in Settlement Area. We act in the public interest, representing all the parties to the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claims Settlement Agreement – the Gwich'in, the people of the Northwest Territories, and all Canadians.

Our vision is that we believe the people in the Gwich'in Settlement Area are responsible for using, protecting and conserving their resources, as well as, active partners with the Gwich'in Renewable Resource Board in managing their resources.

Our mission is to conserve and manage renewable resources within the Gwich'in Settlement Area in a sustainable manner to meet the needs of the public today and in the future.

We have been provided a wide range of powers and responsibilities to:

- establish policies and propose regulations concerning
 - harvesting of wildlife (including fish, birds, plants and animals) by any person within the Gwich'in Settlement Area;
 - commercial harvesting of wildlife;
 - commercial activities relating to wildlife, including processing, marketing and sale of wildlife, guiding and outfitting and hunting, fishing or naturalist camps and lodges; and
 - forest management.
- develop and approve plans for the management and protection of wildlife and wildlife habitats, including conservation areas, territorial parks and national parks in the settlement area;
- approve the designation of conservation areas and species at risk;
- approve interim management guidelines, park management plans and policies;
- approve government regulations;
- establish rules and procedures for consultations;
- review any matter referred to us by government;
- provide government with timely advice on draft legislation, land use policies or provincial or international agreements that might impact wildlife or wildlife habitat, and on the creation of new national or territorial parks in the settlement area;
- advise government on public education plans on wildlife, harvesting and habitat, on policies concerning research and research evaluation; and on plans for cooperative management and research on species and populations not wholly within the settlement area; and
- advise government on plans for training Gwich'in in management of wildlife and related economic activities.

Main Activities:

- Research Activities
- Community consultations and communication
- Public Outreach and public engagement
- Harvesting planning allocation and regulatory activity



CONTEXT

The Gwich'in Renewable Resource Board (GRRB) was established under the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement to be the main instrument of wildlife management in the Gwich'in Settlement Area (GSA). The powers and responsibilities of the Board are detailed in Chapters 12 and 13 of the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement and in the Gwich'in Land Claim Settlement Act (1992, c. 53).

The GRRB held its third strategic planning session in Inuvik February 25-28, 2008 in a two staged process of dialogue. In the first stage a facilitated roundtable was held to canvass the views of Board members and of representatives of the four Gwich'in Renewable Resources Councils and from the Gwich'in Tribal Council on issues, priorities and action-oriented goals that will guide the Board into the coming five-year period. We greatly appreciated the honest and informed contributions made by all the 20-25 people who participated.

A second phase involved a two-day Board meeting in which we deliberated on the key priorities for the coming year and made decisions to re-allocate the human and financial resources we have at our disposal to achieve the new challenges that face our mandate of managing and conserving the wildlife and habitat of the Gwich'in Settlement Area.

Another key outcome of the strategic planning session – this Strategic Plan – is intended not as a static or fixed plan for the next five years, but rather as a rolling plan that will be adapted and changed on an annual basis by the Board, and in consultation and dialogue with our partners and stakeholders.

This Strategic Plan builds as well on two earlier strategic planning exercises – from 1997 and from 2005. The goals, objectives and strategies or action-plans mapped out in these earlier sessions are still quite valid today and inform the revised Strategic Plan for 2008-2013.

The new Strategic Plan is somewhat more defined and operational than earlier plans. This greater detail and clarity about our forward direction reflects a range of pressures and challenges – environmental, social, legislative and economic – that face the wildlife and habitat of the Gwich'in Settlement Area. It is these pressures and challenges that set the context for our Strategic Planning Session, and for this Strategic Plan.

Environmental Challenges

The Chairman of the Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board, Robert Charlie, noted in his review of the Board's mandate that at least two and potentially more species – Dhik'ii (Dolly Varden Char) and Vadzaih (caribou) – need to be managed in the face of climate change and the likely development of the Gwich'in Settlement Area as a result of the Mackenzie Gas Pipeline project.

The environment and climate is changing. This is validated not only by researchers at Universities and in government around the world, but by Gwich'in elders and people on the land. In the past 16 years of the GRRB's existence, we have yet to be faced with the need to carry out our mandate to formally set Gwich'in Minimum Need Levels or overall harvesting allocations for any species.

As one Board Member noted during the 2008 Strategic Planning Session, the “land of milk and honey” is coming to an end, not only for migratory species like Dhik'ii and Vadzaih, but also for more localized species such as Shih (grizzly bear) and Dinjik (moose). As several Gwich'in participants in the session added, a good deal of change – much of it disturbing – is occurring for yet other species of importance, including Chehluk (loche, burbot), Luk Zheii (whitefish) and Treeluk (herring) as well as expanded northern ranges for more southern species, including Tsee' (beaver) and otter.

Environmental change is happening: whether through general trends in global warming or created by more regional and local industrial developments that are expected as a result of the Mackenzie Gas Project. These



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will create increased pressures on the GRRB to conserve wildlife and wildlife habitat and will almost certainly mean as well that the Board will be required to recommend regulations to limit harvesting of some species. To date, wildlife management and harvest planning has been handled by the Board, in close cooperation with the Gwich'in Renewable Resources Councils, on the basis of voluntary compliance. This has taken place with both Dhik'ii (Char) and with Shih (grizzly bear). In addition, Gwich'in have recently experienced formal restrictions of access to the Bluenose West caribou herd, based on Territorial regulations and the advice of the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (WMAC), the Sahtu Renewable Resources Board and of the GRRB.

GRRB research has shown that there is more pressure on key species – although the real causes are often unknown or un-proven, as in the case of Dhik'ii decline in Rat River. In the face of declining resources, particularly caribou, there has been a growth of demand for more harvest-based and traditional Gwich'in needs assessments.

The guiding objectives of the GRRB is to protect for the future the right of the Gwich'in to gather, hunt, trap and fish throughout the settlement area at all seasons of the year, to conserve and protect wildlife and wildlife habitat, and to apply conservation principles and practices through appropriate planning and management. We are also charged with working with other co-management boards and agencies of government to integrate planning and management of wildlife and habitat with all types of planning and management, and to ensure that all people who hunt, trap, fish or conduct commercial wildlife activities are treated fairly and equitably. Achieving these guiding objectives – as set out in the GCLCA – will increasingly require the Board to be more active, more formal, and make more decisions and recommendations for the government to implement harvesting plans and allocations.

While the GRRB's mandate is confined to the Gwich'in Settlement Area, many of the environmental challenges we face in wildlife management have origins and influences far beyond Gwich'in borders. It is true to say that the Gwich'in and their traditional lands are very much at the centre of changes or influences that begin or end elsewhere. The largest Caribou herd on which Gwich'in rely – the Porcupine herd – has its calving grounds on the North Slope of Alaska and the Yukon and its winter range includes both southern (Peel river basin) and northwestern areas within the Gwich'in Settlement Area. Similarly, Dhik'ii (Dolly Varden Char) spawn within the GSA (particularly in the Rat River) but annually migrate back to the Beaufort Sea and along the coast of the North Slope which is within the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. Management of these species within the GSA must and will rely upon cooperation and coordination with other management authorities – in the NWT, in the Yukon, in Nunavut and internationally.

Social and Economic Change

The Gwich'in Settlement Area has experienced considerable growth and expanded economic activity in the past fifteen years. At present, there are over 2,500 Gwich'in, most living within the settlement area. However, the overall population within the settlement area is approximately 5,000, meaning that the Gwich'in are now only about 50% of the total. While over 60% of people in Inuvik are Aboriginal, approximately 1,000 (or about 30% of the total population) are Gwich'in, with many of the remainder being Inuvialuit. Inuvik has also grown by 8% over the past five years, and can be expected to grow much more in the next decade if the Mackenzie Gas Project is approved, mostly as a result of non-Northerners relocating to the area for work on the pipeline and refinery projects. Of the other Gwich'in communities, only Fort McPherson has grown (and only by 2% since 2001); with Aklavik and Tsiigehtchic having declined in population by 6% and 10% each. In the case of Tsiigehtchic, less than 50% of the Gwich'in/Métis members of the community now reside there permanently. At the same time, Gwich'in remain very much the majority in both Fort McPherson (at over 92%) and in Tsiigehtchic (at over 88%). In Aklavik, the Gwich'in



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population is now about 50 of the total. There has been considerable mobility between the traditional Gwich'in communities, and from the land, to urban centres, notably Inuvik and Yellowknife. This mobility will place increasing demands on both the Board and on the Gwich'in Renewable Resources Councils to ensure that Gwich'in people – as well as non-Gwich'in – are not only informed about wildlife and habitat issues and management plans, but are also consulted and contacted to obtain their views about their needs for access to wildlife.

Changes To Legislation, Policies and Management Plans

The GRRB has a special mandate to give advice to the federal and territorial governments, as well as to the Gwich'in, in relation to any proposed legislation, policies or plans that might affect the wildlife and wildlife habitat in the settlement area.

The Board has been engaged in discussions, through a working group, on a new proposed Species at Risk Act for the NWT. A number of concerns remain to be sorted out over the coming months and years – including the mechanics and funding required for the Board to assess and review any new proposed designation of species at risk. However, the Board remains confident that the newly proposed legislation will fully respect and greatly enhance the involvement of co-management boards and Aboriginal peoples in the process, and the draft legislation sets a model for southern jurisdictions to follow. The Strategic Plan takes this initiative into account.

The Board is also discussing how to better coordinate looming federal legislative, regulatory and policy change in relation to climate change and species at risk. One of the consequences of further development in the Gwich'in Settlement Area and in the North generally will be more attention being paid by the Federal Government to these matters. A memorandum of understanding between the Board and the relevant federal agencies (Environment Canada and the Canadian Wildlife Service, Fisheries and Oceans and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada) has been added to the Strategic Plan as an objective as a result.

Other legislative and policy-based change is looming. Most recently, the federal government tabled a revised draft Fisheries Act (Bill C-30), in which a number of changes are proposed that could have impacts on how fisheries management decisions and harvesting allocations are made within the Gwich'in Settlement Area, whether by the Board or by Gwich'in Renewable Resources Councils. Similarly, under the federal Oceans Act and Canada's Oceans Strategy, the federal government has led in the establishment of the Beaufort Sea Partnership. The GRRB has participated at a technical level to date on one of this initiative's various working groups. We will be seeking a more central role in the governance over this initiative in light of its critical importance to fisheries management within the GSA.

Include a paragraph on management plans such as the Dhik'ii (Dolly Varden Char) or Dall Sheep plans.

Devolution by Canada of natural resource ownership and jurisdictions to the Government of the NWT has been an ongoing topic for many years, but accelerated discussions have occurred recently. The implications of such change on the work of the GRRB will be largely indirect, but no less real. Experience suggests that all governments that receive direct control over resource management tend to increase resource extraction in order to increase resource revenues. Mining and forestry, as well as petroleum exploration and transportation projects, will place demands for increased monitoring, research and management planning on the Board and on our partners in Government and in the Gwich'in communities.

In conclusion, the environmental, socio-economic and emerging policy context for the work of the GRRB is changing. The Strategic Plan for 2008-2013, of which this is the first edition, is an effort to reflect these changes and to guide the day-to-day work of the Board, management and staff in adapting to these new and emerging challenges.



GOALS

The following lists the seven broad goals of the Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board as we progress into our 16th through 21st years of operations. Each of these goals is to be achieved through the objectives and action-plans detailed in the next section. The goals are drawn from previous strategic planning efforts of the Board, and have been adapted to the growing need to plan our activities in light of our formal mandate, including the introduction of harvesting plans and allocations (see Annex 1 for a diagram of the regulatory process):

1. *Establish and maintain strong, positive relationships with all partners and stakeholders*

This goal triggers a wide range of objectives and action-plans. At its core, this goal is all about creating and maintaining close collaboration with Gwich'in communities and institutions, with Government agencies and with third parties (universities, industry) whose activities might contribute to or impact on wildlife and wildlife habitat management in the Gwich'in Settlement Area (GSA).

2. *Complete, update and maintain as a public file the Settlement Area Harvest Study in order to provide necessary information for the Board and Government to effectively manage wildlife; and to establish Gwich'in Minimum Needs Levels.*

Section 12.5.6 of the *Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement* requires the Board to complete a Harvest Study and use the information from that study to set Gwich'in Minimum Needs Levels. This is the core mandate for the GRRB's research agenda, and it needs to be met and kept up to date in case there is a conservation requirement to establish or modify total allowable harvesting levels for a species or population. This goal is sustained as well by the Board's other research activities, including research that will help determine sustainable harvest levels and the needs of conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitat.

3. *Where required, establish or amend total allowable harvest levels for species of concern, and allocate any allowable harvest amongst user groups in excess of the Gwich'in Needs Level.*

This is one of the most important mandates of the Board, and requires considerable planning and implementation activity. The Board may not limit Gwich'in harvest levels unless a total allowable harvest has been set for conservation reasons and where the Gwich'in needs levels are greater than the total allowable harvest. In addition, the Board has the power to establish the Gwich'in Needs Level at any level that is higher than, or at, the Gwich'in Minimum Needs Level – a level that is determined on the basis of harvesting information from the first five years of the Settlement Area Harvest Study.

4. *Ensure an effective capacity to develop wildlife management plans and to respond to proposed Federal or Territorial plans, guidelines, regulations and designations concerning wildlife, conservation areas and parks for Board approval.*

The Board, together with the RRCs, is the main instrument of wildlife management in the GSA. We have considerable autonomy in how to exercise our management authority, but we require an equally considerable amount of cooperation from all partners and stakeholders involved amongst the Gwich'in, the public generally, and in government. We are also provided a range of approval powers over government proposals for management plans, interim guidelines, regulations and designations—of parks and concerning endangered species. This goal is to ensure that the Board has the capacity to conduct required management planning and to consider governmental regulatory, planning or designation proposals.



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5. *Strengthen the Gwich'in role in renewable resource management, ensure the use of traditional knowledge in management planning and decision-making, and facilitate community-based management of renewable resources in the GSA.*

The GRRB's mandate, to be achieved, relies on the collaboration and cooperation of Gwich'in people and institutions at all levels. This is especially the case with the community representatives who serve on the Gwich'in Renewable Resources Councils. The Board also has a mandate to advise on and advance the case for training and support of Gwich'in in the management of wildlife and related economic activities. The Board must also work with Gwich'in institutions, including the Gwich'in Tribal Council and the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute, in the essential task of renewing the application of traditional knowledge to the job of wildlife and habitat management.

5. *Provide responsive advice to Government agencies and to the Gwich'in Tribal Council on legislation, policies or plans that might affect wildlife or wildlife habitat in the settlement area.*

The GCLCA sets out a long list of initiatives on which Government (Federal or Territorial) is required to consult with the GRRB – laws, regulations, plans for research, training proposals, etc.. The goal is to ensure that the Board has the ability and resources in place to respond in an effective and timely way to government requests for advice.

5. *Provide quality public service in wildlife and wildlife habitat management.*

This goal speaks to the quality of how the Board and its management and staff provide services to the Gwich'in and to the public, and how to make sure that we deliver a high level and quality of service.

STRATEGIC PLAN IN DETAIL: FIRST (2008) EDITION

The Strategic Plan itself is not a work plan. It is an overall strategy framework to guide a more detailed action planning. The management and the staff will develop detailed work plans as needed for each strategy under each objective and goal. The work plans will be updated regularly to allow for maximum flexibility.