

Reviewer Comments and Proponent Responses

Project: Digaa Wood Ops

Board: GNWT - Environment and Climate Change

Organization: Digaa Enterprises Ltd.

Organization	ID	Topic	Reviewer Comment	Reviewer Recommendation	Proponent Response
GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	1	Table 1-2 Legislated requirements that protect wildlife and wildlife habitat	<p>It is important that staff and contractors working on the project be aware of the specific regulations associated with the different sections of the NWT Wildlife Act described in Table 1-2. For example, prescribed birds for the purpose of paragraph 51(1) (c) and section 52 of the Wildlife Act are birds of prey (raptors) as set out in Schedule B of the Wildlife General Regulations. Paragraph 51(1) (c) of the Wildlife Act thus protects raptor nests, even when they are unoccupied. The following document provides a summary of the pertinent Wildlife General Regulations that are associated with the sections of the Wildlife Act outlined in Table 1-2 of the WMMP:</p> <p>https://www.gov.nt.ca/ecc/en/statutory-requirements-wildlife-nwt</p>	<p>Update the WMMP to ensure that the requirements of the Wildlife General Regulations associated with sections 51, 52, 57, and 58 of the Wildlife Act are captured. Consult the following document for further information:</p> <p>https://www.gov.nt.ca/ecc/en/statutory-requirements-wildlife-nwt</p>	Table 1-2 has been updated.
GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	2	Section 2.2.1 - Resource Selection Functions [boreal caribou]	<p>The following statement downplays the importance of the permit area for boreal caribou during the calving and summer period for boreal caribou: "Visual inspection of the seasonal RSFs in DeMars et al. (2020) suggest that the permit area is generally avoided during summer and calving, and functions primarily as fall and winter habitat." The seasonal predictive RSF maps for boreal caribou are now available for viewing on the NWT Species and Habitat Viewer [see the Boreal Caribou tab] (https://www.maps.geomatics.gov.nt.ca/Html5Viewer/index.html?viewer=NWT_SHV), and inspection of the calving and summer season RSF maps indicate that the project area overlaps with highly selected habitat during both of those seasons. In fact the project area overlaps with highly selected habitat in all seasons.</p>	<p>Please review the seasonal boreal RSF maps on the NWT Species and Viewer and revise the statements in Section 2.2.1 of the WMMP to reflect that the project area overlaps with highly selected habitat by boreal caribou in all seasons.</p>	<p>Digaa has reviewed the seasonal boreal RSF maps on the NWT Species Viewer as well as the original modeling outputs in DeMars et al. (2020). Only 2nd order selection has been made available on the NWT viewer platform. Second order selection refers to the selection of a home range, which is often driven by limiting habitat. It is apparent in the modeling outputs that calving and summer habitat is not limiting in the southern NT range planning area. Inferences based solely on 2nd order selection may be misleading in the absence of the context provided by the functional response often captured by 3rd order selection processes. While it is not incorrect to suggest that calving and summer habitat may be present in the project area relative to the types of habitat used for these purposes across the range, 3rd order selection patterns indicate that caribou are not using or selecting this area for those purposes. Generally, RSF bins during calving and summer fall in the 4-7 range, indicative of no definitive selection pattern. RSF bins increase to 6-9 during the winter seasons. It is this pattern that lead to our conclusion that the area likely functions more as winter habitat. This conclusion is also supported by discussions with a local trapper, who has a cabin at km214, hwy 1, and operates along seismic lines both north and south of Highway 1. This trapper informed Digaa that he only sees caribou during the winter months, and only on his south line (towards Kakisa Lake). TK information indicates that caribou do not use the area during the summer months. There have not been any known sightings of caribou along the Hwy 1 corridor within the FMA boundary for many years.</p> <p>Not discounting the possibility for calving, the presence of a major road, other linear features such as seismic lines, and the prevalence of open and sparse coniferous cover types likely makes the project area less suitable for calving as these features are typically inconsistent with predator avoidance strategies.</p> <p>While not ignoring 2nd order results, seasonal 3rd order selection processes may be more informative for project mitigation planning as they indicate when animals are more likely to be encountered. Given Digaa's plans for winter harvest, Digaa has committed to increased vigilance and project stoppages when caribou are encountered to mitigate the risk to caribou during an energetically stressful season for these animals. As the project area is previously disturbed and less likely to be used during calving and summer even without the project, it is not anticipated that the project will result in a significant reduction in this habitat type relative to the southern NT planning range. Given the low density of NT boreal caribou, the overall likelihood of encountering caribou is very low.</p> <p>The section has been revised to reflect the context of both 2nd and 3rd order selection processes.</p>

GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	3	3. Potential Impacts and Mitigation Measures	Section 3 contains the statement that "Many of these will likely be mitigated by limiting harvesting activities throughout the winter months when most wildlife species are not engaged in particularly sensitive activities...". What species specifically are not engaged in sensitive activities in the winter?	Suggest including in the WMMP a table outlining species and their activity periods throughout the year. For example, include the general date ranges for the nesting season of migratory birds and raptors, denning season for bears, late-winter and calving period for boreal caribou, etc. Sensitive periods for boreal caribou in the southern NWT are outlined in the GNWT's draft boreal caribou guidelines available at: https://www.gov.nt.ca/ecc/sites/ecc/files/resources/nwt_caribou_guidelines_bilingual_feb24_final_2_2_0.pdf	Thank you for the suggestion. A table has been included.
GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	4	Table 3-1 - Characterization of potential impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat and overview of mitigations	Sometimes the species listed in the second column of the table do not match up well with the Pathway and Mitigations in the adjacent columns. For example, in the second row of Table 3-1, the species listed are "Predators, Northern Myotis" and the Pathway is "Road works and timber harvesting could directly or indirectly impact protected areas and buffer zones.", but the link between the two is not at all clear and neither is the associated mitigation.	Revise Table 3-1 to ensure that the Pathways and Mitigations are more clearly linked to the Species listed in each row of the table.	Table has been revised.
GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	5	Table 3-1 Direct loss or removal of habitat, dens, or nests	The WMMP should be more explicit about the types of legislatively protected willdife features field crews should be looking for, whether pre-clearing surveys will be conducted to look for these features, and what methods would be used. These features include: dens, hibernacula, beaver dams or lodges, muskrat push-ups, occupied and unoccupied raptor nests, occupied migratory bird nests, bat summer marternity roosts.	Add a section to the WMMP describing the types of wildlife features that are protected under territorial or federal wildlife legislation that may be encountered within proposed cutblocks or within road alignments that need to be cleared for the project.	Additional information has been provided in Section 3.2. Please also see response to comment 6. As operations will be conducted during the winter months, migratory bird nests and bat summer maternity roosts will not be surveyed.
GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	6	Table 3-1 Direct loss or removal of habitat, dens, or nests	Table 3-1 states that "If field crews observe wildlife features, (e.g., bear dens, bat hibernacula, mineral licks) or species of concern, the supervisor will immediately halt operations and notify the Digaa Manager who, in turn, will report the finding to ECC and collaborate with them on an appropriate action plan (e.g., no-harvest buffers; operational timing windows).", which suggests that these instances would be reported incidentally while crews are carrying out timber harvesting operations. Will there be any surveys done ahead of time to look for wildlife features in the project area?		<p>Commercial Timber Harvest Planning and Operations Standard Operating Procedures Manual (The Manual) requires an approved Annual Operating Plan prior to the commencement of harvesting operations (i.e.; road construction, harvesting, deactivation). The long-term development plan (LTDP) ..."must be in a form approved by the Supervisor and must include the following, where applicable" [FMR s. 13(2)]:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. A map of the areas to be logged; b. An outline of proposed roads and buildings to be constructed, and materials and equipment to be placed within the licence area; c. Timing and sequence of logging operations; d. Mill sites; e. A fire control plan, as per the Government of the NWT Forest Fire Prevention and Suppression Guidelines for Industrial Activities; f. A reforestation plan; g. A restoration plan; h. An environmental protection plan; and, i. Other details required by the Supervisor. <p>As part of the LTDP, there will be a survey process that includes wildlife features. The Commercial Timber Harvesting Planning and Operations Standard Operating Procedures Manual includes provisions for the identification of wildlife features as part of the "Pre-Harvest Ecological Assessment" (PHEA). A PHEA is required for proposed cutblocks [FMR para. 36.1(j)]. A PHEA is a detailed report of site factors that may affect the operability and regeneration of a block. Position of a block in the landscape, local topography and site-specific conditions are assessed. Details of the plant community, soil and moisture characteristics of the site are collected. Evidence of use by people or wildlife is also noted. Harvest blocks must be inspected and assessed for sensitive features prior to harvest. Specific wildlife features identified during the PHEA at field level and requirements for implementation of landscape objectives for wildlife management at the operating level must be coordinated with the Manager of Forest Resources and the Manager of Wildlife at the regional office. The PHEA will be part of the harvesting field layout that is conducted to establish road and landing locations, water bodies and riparian areas, wildlife tree patches, setbacks, and harvesting boundaries.</p>

GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	7	Table 3-1 Noise impacts	Row 6 of Table 3-1 on page 22 states "Where required, the Digaa Manager will work with ECC to develop action plans to address specific noise impacts to wildlife before operations commence."	Please clarify or provide examples of when Digaa might need to work with ECC to address specific noise impacts, and describe the process for doing this when it is required. For example, was this statement intended to apply to when a wildlife feature such as an active den is discovered and needs to be protected from noise impacts?	Correct. The discovery of an active den would require advice from ECC on how best to proceed and minimize noise impacts, including the application of setbacks. Please see also response to Comment 6. It is anticipated that the PHEA for each harvest block will identify potential wildlife concerns that may require additional collaboration with ECC.
GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	8	Table 3-1 - Disturbances to key lifecycle stages: breeding, feeding, nesting, staging	The second row on page 12 of the WMMP states that there will be "Pre-clearing surveys to confirm the absence of bear dens."	Please add a section to the WMMP that describes the methods for pre-clearing surveys for bear dens. Please describe the timing of the surveys and the survey effort that will take place based on the size of each area that will be cleared or logged during the winter season. To detect active bear dens, surveys should typically take place in late fall shortly after the first snowfall in order to detect bear tracks or signs of excavation around suspected den sites.	Please see response to Comment 6. Pre-clearing surveys for bear dens will be part of the PHEA for each cut block. Survey timing and methods will be based on a desktop evaluation of the suitability of the area for denning. Note that ECC Forest Resources requires that a PHEA is conducted during "snow-free" conditions; therefore, survey timing and methods may be submitted to both ECC Forest Resources and Wildlife for review.
GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	9	Table 3-1 Direct loss or removal of habitat, dens, or nests	"Access restrictions (Section 3.1), Reclamation (Section 3.2), Reforestation (Section 3.3)" Incorrect section numbers (3.2, 3.3). This is throughout the table.	Update section numbers	Updated.
GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	10	Table 3-1 Effects on population abundance	"Maintain safe speed limits"	Please clarify the speed limits that will be implemented on project roads.	Table updated. The planned roads are low end, Class 5, winter roads, with speeds up to 50 kph. The main access road into the Axe Point area may have sections of road that may safely allow speeds up to 60 kph.
GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	11	Table 3-1 Changes to migratory movement patterns	"Not anticipated to occur with the application of appropriate mitigations."	Please expand on this and clarify what appropriate mitigations you are referring to to mitigate this impact pathway.	Should state: Mitigated through long-term landscape-level strategic planning. For example, access restrictions, reclamation, and reforestation. Table updated.
GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	12	Table 3-1 Human-wildlife conflicts	This whole section could be expanded upon. What are you training workers to do? What waste management are you implementing?	Please clarify the process and timing to "Work with ECC to develop action plans to address identified wildlife before harvesting commences." Would this occur through ECC review of Annual Operating Plans or if and when a potential wildlife conflict occurs?	Table updated. Section 3.2 has been expanded. Action plans would be developed with ECC both during the review of Annual Operating Plans and should wildlife conflicts occur despite the implementation of best practices. Wildlife conflicts or incidents resulting in wildlife harm or death will be reported to ECC within 24 hours to develop appropriate mitigation actions.
GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	13	Table 3-1 Other - Behavioural changes, species at risk	"Report all observations of species at risk to ECC" How often will you be reporting?	Please clarify who will be responsible for recording, compiling and submitting these observations to ECC.	Table updated. All personnel will be responsible for reporting wildlife sightings and or identified wildlife features to the Digaa Environmental Supervisor (DES). The DES will compile all sightings and submit to ECC at the end of each annual harvest period. It should be noted, as per response to comment 12, wildlife conflicts or incidents will be reported to ECC within 24 hours to develop appropriate mitigation actions.

GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	14	Table 3-1 Other - Behavioural changes, Northern Myotis	Will Digaa be doing any surveys before operations to look for these features: dens, hibernacula, mineral licks?	Please see earlier recommendation regarding adding details about pre-harvest/pre-clearing surveys.	Yes. For example, please see responses to comments 6, 7, and 8. Details will be provided in the PHEA for each cutblock as part of the Annual Operating Plan.
GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	15	Table 3-1 Other - Behavioural changes, Big-game displacement	This row of Table 31- states that Digaa will "Assess each new harvest opening on the ground to determine if these species are actively utilizing the area." but there is no detail provided about the timing, methods or intensity (survey effort) for these assessments. If operations are suspended, how will you determine when to resume operations again?	Provide more detail in a separate section of the WMMP about how new harvest openings will be assessed on the ground to determine if relevant species are actively using the area. Provide criteria for when operations could resume if they were suspended (e.g. a pre-specified distance for the animal to have moved away, or far enough that there is no threat of physical injury to the animal).	Updated Section 3.2. Details will be provided in the PHEA for each cutblock as part of the Annual Operating Plan.
GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	16	3.1 Access Restrictions	This section only focuses on restrictions for aircraft, and doesn't address access issues such as use of project roads by non-project vehicles.	Consider re-naming this section to "Aircraft Restrictions" or add further details about how non-project vehicle use of project roads (excluding existing public highways) will be managed and monitored.	<p>Digaa cannot control ATV use from the public sector on Crown land. Digaa can certainly discourage winter snowmobile access in active harvesting operating areas, for safety reasons, but not on any non-active areas, or during other seasons. Digaa cannot in any way contravene Indigenous harvesting and access rights to their Traditional Land Use Area.</p> <p>This was discussed in a letter to the MVLWB March 06, 2017. "1. ACCESS MANAGEMENT DISCUSSIONS</p> <p>Concern: Hunter access from Hwy 1 needs to be minimal.</p> <p>Action 1: Continue with concentration of annual Harvesting to minimize immediate access during harvesting operations.</p> <p>Action 2. End the "Loop Rd" access by eliminating the connection. End the Axe Rd access at Block 3613. End access from km 200 at Block 3611.</p> <p>Action 3. Digaa will have a "No Firearms" policy with Digaa personnel, Contractors, and truckers in active logging areas.</p> <p>Action 4. Digaa hopes to have a monitor present on active haul road junctions with Hwy 1 to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Keep tourists out for safety to prevent vehicle incidents. ii) Keep Workers safe from firearms discharges. iii) And to advise people of the caribou concerns and to discourage hunting in the area. <p>Action 5: Deactivation planning to curtail summer/fall access by hunters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Digaa establish a Deactivation Plan specific to its Annual Operating Plan and its Land Use Permit requirements. Refer to Appendix 1 Deactivation. ii) Block roads with signage, debris scatter and digging out the road at key locations near Hwy 1 to discourage off-hwy vehicles. iii) Note cannot block DOT infrastructure without their consent.
GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	17	3.2 Monitoring	This section should be more descriptive to show how the WMMP follows mitigation monitoring as set out in the WMMP guidelines. For example, how are you monitoring to identify the presence of bird nests for setbacks? If you find a den, what is your process other than contacting ECC Wildlife? This section should also address how you're going to assess whether mitigative measures are effective.		Section expanded. Details will be provided in the PHEA for each cutblock as part of the Annual Operating Plan.

GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	18	3.2 Monitoring	"The Digaa Manager will maintain a record of all incidents where wildlife species of concern are observed and where specific measures were taken to mitigate impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat or feature"	Please clarify procedures for this. Who will be filling out the Wildlife Sightings Form provided in Appendix 3? If a wildlife sighting is reported over radio by an equipment operator or driver, who will record the sighting on the Wildlife Sightings Form? What data forms will be used for den surveys and pre-harvest assessments of new harvest openings?	All personnel will be responsible for reporting wildlife sightings and or identified wildlife features to the Digaa Environmental Supervisor (DES). Field personnel will be trained to fill out the Wildlife Sightings Form. If reported by radio, the DES will complete the form. Data forms for den surveys and pre-harvest assessments will be developed as part of the PHEA, with assistance from ECC Forest Resources and Wildlife.
GNWT - Environment and Climate Change - James Hodson	19	5 Adaptive Management	This section would benefit from a bit more detail. The Annotate Table of Contents (https://www.gov.nt.ca/ecc/en/annotated-table-contents-wmmp) on the GNWT-ECC WMMP webpage provides some examples of the use of action levels to trigger adaptive management.	Please expand on this section. For example, what types of wildlife incidents might trigger an immediate review by Digaa of the mitigations included in the WMMP? The annual report could also include a summary of if and how any engagement with GNWT-ECC or ECCC led to changes in mitigation approaches in the WMMP.	Any incident that injures either a human or an animal with a vehicle will trigger both an immediate report to ECC and a review.