Traditional Knowledge of Caribou and Caribou People

APPENDIX E:
Reviewing, Sorting and Weaving Traditional Knowledge

Once Traditional Knowledge of caribou from the various pathways was reviewed, the next step was to identify key themes, sort them accordingly, and then weave them into the Plan.

First, a one-word summary descriptor was assigned to emergent themes throughout each source, broken out by "TK tidbits" and entered into a database management system called Trailmark. As the spreadsheet was populated, the summary descriptor list emerged. In this way, a "weight of evidence" type analysis was possible. For example, some of the summary descriptors were population, guardianship, spiritual, habitat, migration, calving ground. Where relevant, a second summary descriptor was added to indicate more detail such as with trends (e.g. increasing, decreasing) or specifics related to cultural, ecological, or socio-economic variables (e.g. threats, concerns, mitigation). For example, the first summary descriptor might be "caribou population" whereas the secondary summary descriptor might be "decreasing."

Moving this example forward, the next step was to assemble the Traditional Knowledge tidbits related to each summary descriptor (e.g. "caribou population" and "decreasing") and to explore whether these were mentioned numerous times by individuals or researchers in various sources. Where this was the case, the repeatability provided a strong foundation for asserting an understanding grounded in Traditional Knowledge. With this example, given that "caribou population" and "decreasing" were one of the most prolific summary descriptor combinations in the sources reviewed, the assertion that the population of Bathurst caribou has recently decreased according to Traditional Knowledge could then strongly inform the Plan goal aimed to support the recovery of the Bathurst herd. In this example, scientific data affirms what Traditional Knowledge holders assert and so both Traditional Knowledge and science came together to inform the goal.

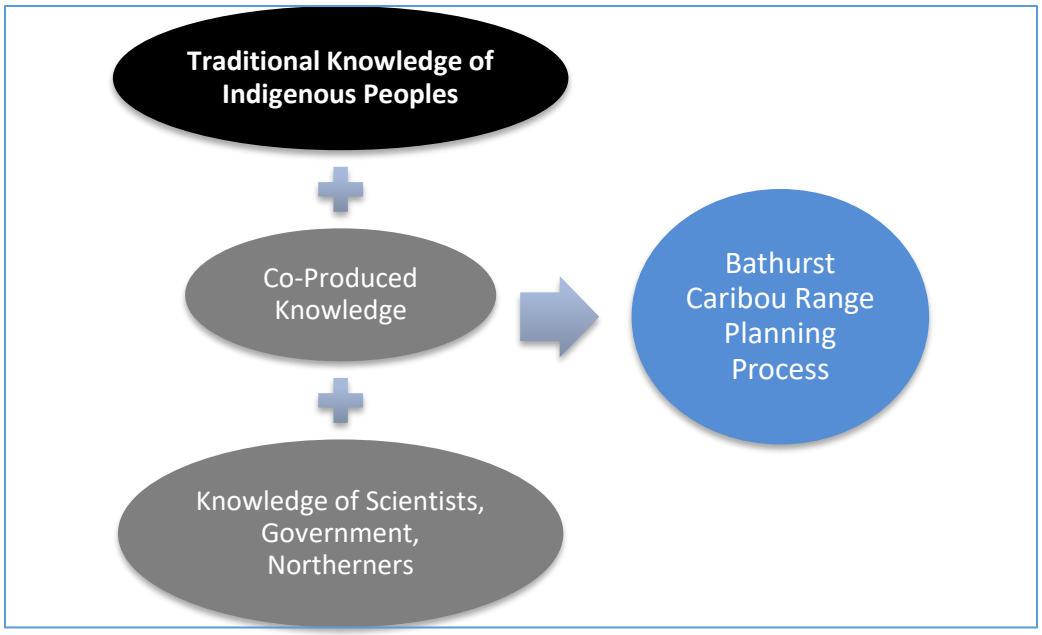
Another illustration of the ways in which Traditional Knowledge informed the Plan pertains to the importance of "respect" for caribou. In addition to discussions at the workshops and meetings, review of community reports and Traditional Knowledge literature consistently speaks to the centrality of respect in how people must be in relationship with caribou. Traditional laws and rules around caribou are all firmly planted in the practice of respect. So important is this concept that "Respect Caribou" became one of four main principles of the Plan. From there, this key principle carried through all four planning steps of the Plan, informing all of the management tools and recommendations. Indeed, as each management tool and recommendation was contemplated, the authors asked the question: Does this align with the importance of respecting caribou? Again, with this particular example, both Traditional Knowledge and scientific sources came together to honour the importance of respect. Whereas actualizing respect within a Traditional Knowledge versus scientific perspective may differ, the principle remains the same and was thus integrated into the Plan.

While there was strong repeatability in many cases (such as the ways respect for caribou is discussed), sometimes an assertion or understanding was not common throughout all sources reviewed: perhaps an understanding reflected the unique experience of the knowledge holder or possibly knowledge differed owing to regional differences. For example, some community members speak of mines as a place that

attracts caribou for refuge (Golder and KAA 2011) whereas others say that caribou avoid mines and have shifted their migration routes accordingly (TRTI 2016). Another example that shows regional differences is that the Athabasca Denesǫłiné contributed much understanding related to the impact of fire on caribou and caribou habitat given the location of their territory is south of the treeline where wildfires are common. Their ongoing concerns about the impact of fires helped lead to wildlife and fuels management as one of the management objectives within the Plan. In addition, whereas earlier drafts of the Plan did not account for habitat disturbed by forest fire, feedback from the Athabasca Denesǫłiné and other Indigenous members of the Working Group resulted in the inclusion of wildlife as a major factor considered in the model and assessment.

The original vision of the Plan was to weave together Traditional Knowledge and science such that both would be seamlessly applied; however, both informal discussion and formal feedback from the Working Group members led to a revised approach whereby each way of knowing was identified separately. Henceforth, the Project Team responded by more clearly differentiating which knowledge system informed what understanding: Traditional Knowledge of Indigenous peoples; knowledge of scientists, governments or northerners; or co-produced knowledge (see figure below). Despite this attempt, multiple ways of knowing often converged: both ways of knowing informed the development of the goals, principles, objectives, management tools and recommendations – only in different ways. Each of the seven management tools and nine management recommendations was grounded in both science and Traditional Knowledge and stronger because of this convergence. In the case of the interim cumulative land disturbance framework, even when it appeared to be entirely related to modeling and science, the concepts of thresholds based on numerical values of total human-caused land disturbance ultimately set out to answer the question asked by community members across the range: how much disturbance is enough?

Where differences existed, these were highlighted such that one way of knowing was not deemed any more important than another. For example, scientific tools and concepts were more relevant when considering absolute numbers for a zone-of-influence (e.g., number of kilometres) or population level (e.g., numbers of caribou based on aerial survey) whereas Traditional Knowledge provided insight about long-term trends in population (e.g., cycles) as well as range expansion or contraction patterns (e.g., or general movements eastwards). While science and government knowledge was more useful in defining policy relevant outcomes, Traditional Knowledge informed thinking about designing community guardianship and watching (monitoring) programs, or recommending research to heal the relationship between caribou and people.



References

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