

BATHURST CARIBOU RANGE PLAN SUMMARY



Background

Bathurst caribou travel thousands of kilometres every year, crossing the traditional territories of at least seven Indigenous groups. The herd's traditional range extends from southern and central Northwest Territories (NWT) to Bathurst Inlet in Nunavut. In some years, they have wintered as far south as northern Saskatchewan.

Caribou may encounter human or natural disturbances along their route, including roads, communities, mines, camps and burned forests. These disturbances, along with the effects of a changing climate, can have impacts on caribou habitat that can affect the size and health of the herd.

Today, the Bathurst caribou herd is much smaller than it once was. It has dropped from a high of about 450,000 caribou in the mid-1980s to a current low of about 8,200 animals. Community members worry about such low numbers of caribou and the amount of disturbance across the range, and have called for action to help the herd recover.





Why a Range Plan?

A range plan is a guide for decision-makers, developers and communities to help manage activities on the land in a way that supports the recovery of the Bathurst herd. It's needed for several reasons:

- Numbers of caribou have declined rapidly in recent years
- Human activities have increased across the range
- The size and strength of wildfires may be growing
- The relationship between people and caribou has fundamentally changed

The Bathurst Caribou Range Plan is a response to calls for action to help the herd recover and make sure its habitat remains healthy. It is also an attempt to balance these recovery efforts with the potential benefits that industrial development can provide. Human activities and land use need to be managed carefully, particularly when caribou numbers are low and more vulnerable to disturbance.

How was the Bathurst Caribou Range Plan developed?

The Bathurst Caribou Range Plan is based on knowledge sources and perspectives grounded in both traditional knowledge (TK) and science. It aims to balance the diverse interests of all governments, communities and stakeholders across the range in Nunavut, NWT and northern Saskatchewan.

The range planning process brought together a working group made up of representatives from federal, territorial and Indigenous governments and organizations in the NWT, Nunavut and Saskatchewan, as well as industry and non-government organizations. Working group members represented their organizations' perspectives and interests in discussions and contributed their caribou expertise.

Goals and guiding principles

The Bathurst Caribou Range Plan recognizes the role of northerners as caribou guardians and the shared responsibility for managing development to support the recovery of the herd.

Four main principles guided development of the Range Plan:

1. Respect caribou
2. Bring together traditional, local and scientific knowledge
3. Practice guardianship, stewardship and management to care for caribou
4. Achieve balance



The **Bathurst Caribou Range Planning Area** is based on local, traditional and scientific knowledge about how caribou use the land throughout the year.

What's in the Range Plan?

Making sure the Bathurst caribou herd is healthy now and into the future depends, in part, on our ability to manage and maintain the land in a way that will continue to support caribou. That includes making choices about how we manage disturbance to caribou and caribou habitat. The Bathurst Caribou Range Plan suggests four main ways to do that:

- Objective 1** Ensure the integrity of important habitats
- Objective 2** Ensure connectivity between seasonal ranges
- Objective 3** Ensure the amount of human-caused land disturbance is kept below certain levels
- Objective 4** Ensure the development, design and use of roads is managed with consideration to caribou

The Range Plan includes guidance for managing the overall amount of disturbance on the land, as well as seven management tools to reduce and manage impacts to caribou and caribou habitat.

The Disturbance Framework

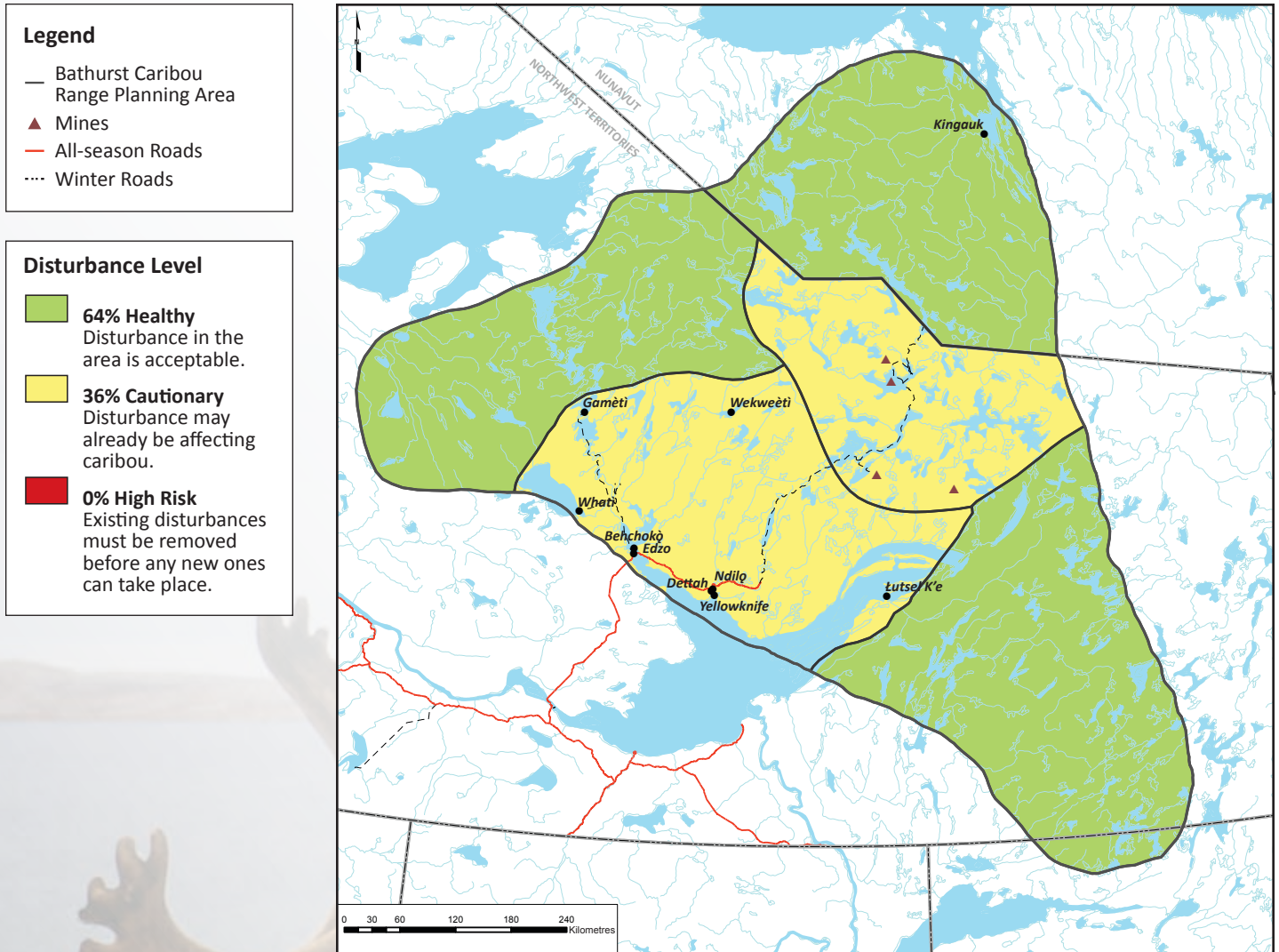
One of the ways to make sure caribou have enough healthy habitat is by managing the amount of **human disturbance** on the land. Disturbance can include buildings and roads, as well as noise, dust, light and any other activity that might affect caribou.

The Range Plan proposes three categories of disturbance on the range of the Bathurst caribou in a **Cumulative Land Disturbance Framework**. These categories are based on how much area has already been disturbed and tells decision-makers how any new disturbances in the area need to be handled. In areas where there is more disturbance, the Range Plan recommends stricter rules for new development.

Amount of disturbance (Status of range)	Management response
High (High Risk)	Land activities resulting in new disturbances are advised only when active disturbances are minimized, removed or reclaimed.
Moderate (Cautionary)	Disturbance may already be affecting caribou and requires increased management.
Low (Desirable)	Disturbance in the area is acceptable. Basic management is required.

The herd's sensitivity to disturbances varies throughout the year. For instance, caribou are more sensitive when they are in their calving grounds than in their winter range. This means the effects of disturbances in an area vary according to the time of year. So, the status of an area is based on the amount of disturbance, as well as how sensitive the caribou are when they are in that area.

Disturbance Levels



The range of the Bathurst caribou herd is divided into five areas under the Range Plan. Three of the areas are currently considered **Desirable** (green), while two areas are in the **Cautionary** category (yellow). The goal is to keep disturbance below the **High Risk** level (red).

How do we manage disturbance?

The Bathurst Caribou Range Plan proposes seven management tools to reduce impacts on Bathurst caribou and their habitat. Some of these tools are already being used for development projects. The Range Plan provides guidance for how these tools can be used to manage disturbance in an integrated, coordinated and consistent manner across the entire range.



Community Guardianship

As guardians who have always cared for caribou, Indigenous peoples across the range have a critical role in charting the best path forward for Bathurst caribou. The Range Plan calls for the establishment of **guardian programs** that build on generations of careful observation and understanding of the land, the people and the natural cycles of the caribou.

Guardian programs already in place for the Bathurst caribou are “made in the north” approaches built on generations of “watching” the land, and are grounded in traditional laws and values. Expansion of existing guardian programs would support and promote respectful practices and help monitor caribou well-being, movements, environmental conditions and the ongoing relationship between caribou and people.



Water and Land Crossings

Water and land crossings are important areas for Bathurst caribou. They allow caribou to migrate from summer to winter areas of their range.



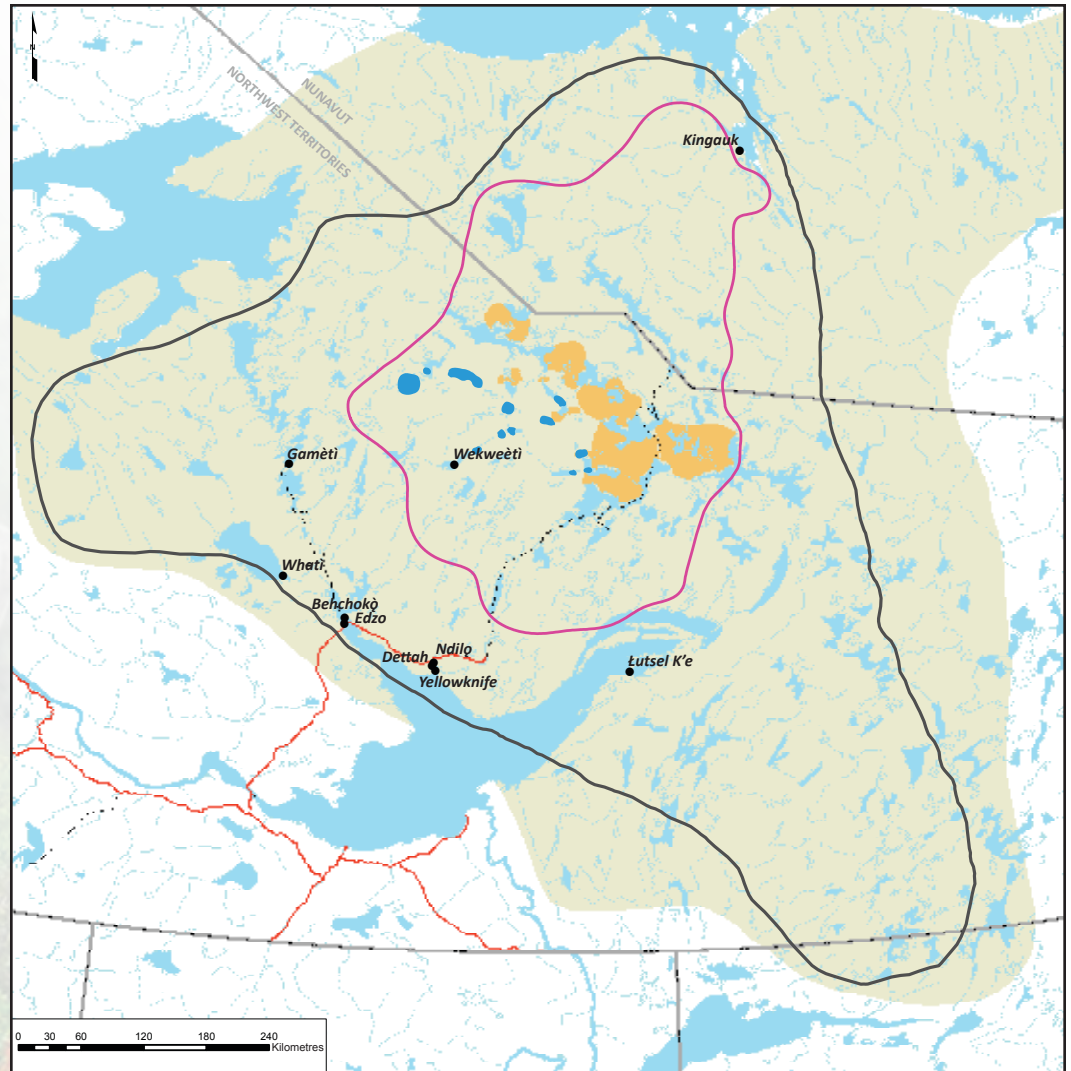
Calving and Post-calving Grounds

The areas where caribou choose to give birth are considered to be the most important part of the range. This is where caribou are at their most vulnerable to disturbance. The Range Plan recommends protection be considered for Bathurst caribou calving and post-calving areas.

Bathurst Caribou Range

Legend

- Bathurst Caribou Range Planning Area
- Core Use Area
- Priority Water Crossings
- Land Crossings
- All-season Roads
- Winter Roads



What do we mean when we talk about the “range” of a caribou herd?

The range describes the area where caribou live throughout the year. For the Bathurst herd this extends from the forest to the tundra, across Nunavut and the eastern NWT, and down into northern Saskatchewan.



Mobile Caribou Conservation Measures

As their numbers decline, the area Bathurst caribou use throughout the year (centre of habitation or core use area) has gotten smaller. The Range Plan recommends land users operating in the core use area restrict activities when caribou are nearby.



Road Planning and Management

The Range Plan recommends best practices be used when planning and developing new roads in the Bathurst caribou range to minimize impacts on caribou. When range status is at the Cautionary level, manage vehicle traffic.



Compensating for Impacts

The Range Plan recommends improving habitat or compensating for impacts when all possible actions have been taken to minimize impacts on caribou. When range status is at the Cautionary level, increase amount of compensation.



Wildfire and Fuels Management

The Range Plan recommends important caribou winter habitat (older forests) be prioritized when making decisions about how to respond to wildfire.



Online Map Staking

The Range Plan recommends staking mineral claims on computers rather than using aircraft to reduce disturbance to caribou.



Range Plan vs. Harvest Restrictions

A range plan does not set rules for harvesting – it is a way to reduce impacts of land activity and disturbances to caribou.

How will the Range Plan be used?

To apply the Bathurst Caribou Range Plan successfully in decisions about land use will require a genuine commitment from governments, organizations, industry, communities and individuals across multiple jurisdictions. The principles and recommendations in the Range Plan should be applied to:

1. Land use planning
2. Community guardianship programs
3. Wildlife management recommendations and actions (governments and renewable resource boards)
4. Environmental assessments
5. Regulatory processes
6. Industry protocols and best management practices

It is important to note that the Range Plan itself is advisory and all recommendations are non-binding. All management recommendations must respect the legislated co-management processes in place and under development in each jurisdiction.

The Bathurst Caribou Range Plan is not a static document, and will continue to evolve over time. The same groups that helped develop it will continue to assess it going forward, recognizing that as conditions change we must observe, learn and respond.

Read the full Bathurst Caribou Range Plan:

www.enr.gov.nt.ca