

Caribou in the Barrenlands



Protecting the environment and working cooperatively with local communities are two of De Beers' fundamental principles and both of these were reflected at the caribou workshop recently hosted by De Beers at Snap Lake.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss with Aboriginal elders and representatives ways to minimize and monitor the potential impacts on the caribou of a mine at Snap Lake.

It seems ironic that an area labeled the "Barrenlands" can be home to vast herds of caribou, but this is indeed the case in the Slave Geological Province which is also home to our Snap Lake project.

The well being of caribou is a subject close to every northerner's heart. Snap Lake falls within the range of the 350,000 strong Bathurst herd. These animals do not just represent an important source of food and clothing, but are of fundamental cultural and ecological importance. The vast caribou herds of Arctic Canada are an integral component of the environment, and a symbol of its wilderness. Mass migrations of the caribou herds - north to their calving grounds in spring, south in fall towards the treeline - remain one of nature's spectacles.

The workshop was conducted in a spirit of hard work and humour, and was attended by representatives from De Beers, Dogrib Treaty 11, Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation, and the North Slave Metis Alliance. Dr. Anne Gunn, caribou biologist for the Government of the Northwest Territories, also attended.

Caribou Particulars

This species is among the most migratory of all animals.

They feed on lichens, mushrooms, grasses, sedges and other green plants in the summer and twigs, horse-tails, and willow in the winter.

They are great swimmers and run at speeds of up to 50 mph.

The contribution made by the elders was inspiring. Their knowledge of the area and the wildlife is extensive and their concern for the environment genuine. They are enthusiastic to share their knowledge and contribute to developing systems which will ensure that future generations have access to caribou.

Many recommendations were forthcoming during the workshop, for instance:

- ◆ It was noted that new roads should be built to a similar profile as those on site now. Elevating roads above the tundra to prevent drifting snow can be a barrier to migrating caribou and cause injury.
- ◆ The elders pointed out that the largest numbers of caribou moving through the region would probably be closer to Mackay Lake and Camsell Lake, but that De Beers should be prepared in the event that many thousands of caribou do move through the site.
- ◆ Techniques for herding caribou from the airstrip were discussed, and areas requiring fencing to keep wildlife away from potential hazards were identified.
- ◆ The importance of community participation in wildlife monitoring was also highlighted.