

**Management of the Mushuau Atik (George River caribou herd):
The Innu and Naskapi Nations show their leadership**

Uashat, February 11, 2013 — In the context of the Government of Newfoundland-and-Labrador's position announced on January 28¹ wherein it prohibits the hunting of the Mushuau Atik caribou (George River caribou herd) in Labrador, the Innu and Naskapi Nations of the Quebec Region reiterate their intention to take measures to ensure the Mushuau Atik's (George River caribou herd) recovery and wish to express their disapproval of the Government of Newfoundland-and-Labrador's interference in this process.

Indeed, following the Government of Newfoundland-and-Labrador's announcement, the Innu and Naskapi Nations of the Quebec Region held a two-day emergency meeting on the caribou entitled "*Atik^u uauinakanu – Let's talk about caribou*", in Uashat on February 7 & 8, 2013. Over 250 people (hunters, elders, youth, women) attended and took part in the meeting, which was broadcast live on the *Société de communication Atikamekw-Montagnais*.

Nearly 25 political representatives from nine communities took part in this emergency meeting, which resulted in the following joint statement on behalf of the Innu and Naskapi Nations of the Quebec Region:

1. *The Innu and Naskapi Nations of the Quebec Region have millennial and sacred ties with the caribou and rules of life ensure the continuity of this sustainable relationship between the Innu and Naskapi Nations and the caribou;*
2. *The Innu and Naskapi Nations of the Quebec Region will take all necessary measures to protect and preserve the caribou;*
3. *The Innu and Naskapi Nations of the Quebec Region have ancestral rights, including the Indian title, and Nitassinan treaty rights in Quebec and Labrador;*
4. *The Innu and Naskapi Nations of the Quebec Region cannot be held responsible for the current situation, i.e. the decline of the Mushuau Atik herd, and denounce the poor management of the caribou by the Governments of Quebec, Newfoundland-and-Labrador, and Canada;*
5. *The Innu and Naskapi Nations of the Quebec Region are very much concerned by the current situation because this decline is emphasized by the significant pressure by the mining, hydroelectric and forestry development projects in the last decades, the climate change and sports hunting;*
6. *Finally, the Innu and Naskapi Nations of the Quebec Region will take part in the Roundtable that will bring together leaders from the 7 Quebec and Labrador First Nations and Inuit groups concerned by the Mushuau Atik (George River caribou) to be held beginning of April 2013.*

Delegations supporting the statement:

Kawawachikamach Naskapis

Ekuanitshit

¹ <http://www.releases.gov.nl.ca/releases/2013/env/0128n08.htm>

*Matimekush - Lac John
Pakua Shipi
Unamen Shipu
Nutashkuan
Uashat mak Mani-utenam
Pessamit
Mashteuiatsh
Essipit (not present but supports this press release)*

It may be recalled that at the time of the February 7 & 8 meeting, Chief Jean-Charles Piétacho from the Innu Nation of Ekuanitshit had declared that they have *“this particular relationship with Atik (caribou) which has allowed the Innu people to survive in Nitassinan for millennia. Therefore, the Innu have the duty to ensure its protection. We must also, by ourselves, identify the means we will take to maintain our subsistence hunting, our food safety and the transmission of our cultural and spiritual knowledge”*.

Chief Mckenzie had noted *“the protection of our political and territorial rights is essential. We are analyzing all the options presently offered to us in order to defend our connection with the caribou”*.

Finally, Vice-Chief Mike Mckenzie of Uashat mak Mani-utenam had declared that *“the governments have failed in their efforts to manage the caribou and protect our ancestral rights; today, it is time that the First Nations take back their rightful leadership role in the management and protection of the territory and the caribou. Once again, non-Aboriginal governments make decisions that affect Aboriginal peoples without consulting them, which is in violation of their obligations towards them under the Constitution and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”*.

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