Dagdick, Elise (CON)

From: Kaita, Adara (CON) on behalf of +WPG1212 - Conservation_Circulars (CON)
Sent: August-29-12 11:55 AM
To: Dagdick, Elise (CON)
Subject: Review Bipole III Transmission Project - MB Hydro response to request for Additional Info - File: 5433.00 - update to Caribou Technical Report
Attachments: Bipole III Supplemental Caribou Technical Report_comments from NE Wildlife_Aug2012.docx

The Lands Branch provides the following attached comments. The Sustainable Resource and Policy Management Branch have no concerns.

Comments from NE Region Wildlife on the
Supplemental Caribou Technical Report submitted by Hydro for Bipole III

Executive Summary, ¶ 2, pg ii
"The ROW does not bisect any unfragmented winter core use areas in Wabowden as it follows existing linear development and therefore will not contribute to winter core use habitat loss: however it will impact 3.43% of the potential calving habitat as predicted through revised modelling."

And

Section 5, ¶ 2, pg 86
"In the Wabowden evaluation range, where new ROW will be constructed, no portion of the FPR bisects unfragmented winter core use areas, with 100% of the area contained in winter core use areas following existing linear development."

And

Map Series, Map 4

The statements above provide good argument for **not** routing Bipole III through the Wabowden range as indicated by the FPR. Routing Bipole III through **already disturbed core winter areas** could increase fragmentation enough that caribou cannot migrate into traditional life requisite areas and cause further range abandonment.

Caribou in the Wabowden range are already disconnected from neighbouring ranges due to forest fires and industrial and linear developments. Wabowden caribou traditionally migrated to Rock Island Lake for the calving, post-calving and rutting periods, as described by a previous collaring study conducted between 1995 and 1999. Since that time, major aggregate and forest harvesting has taken place along provincial highway #373 creating a wide enough barrier that has caused the majority of caribou to abandon the northern portion of the range. Forestry cut blocks, forest fires and large water bodies have created movement barriers on the east, south and west sides of the range. Historical and current collaring studies show limited movement of caribou to the north across the railway and PTH #10.

Wabowden caribou continue to travel east/west across PTH #6 and the paralleling transmission line. However, if Bipole III is routed paralleling PTH #6 south of Ponton, this may create a wide enough corridor, similar to the one created along highway #373 that caribou may not be able to migrate across to their traditional winter and calving areas.

Bipole III should be routed along existing linear features that do not intersect the Wabowden caribou range. This means that portions of the FPR between Wabowden and Ponton should follow PTH #6 as indicated as proposed as an original Alternate Route. The current FPR placement was never proposed to Conservation and Water Stewardship as an option and should not be considered given its potential negative impacts to caribou and their core habitat in the Wabowden range.

Executive Summery, ¶ 7, pg iv AND Section 5, ¶ 9, pg 88
"Overall the results of this updated analysis support the conclusion that the residual effects...are expected to be negative in direction, small in magnitude, short-term and medium-term in duration, regular to continuous in frequency and reversible after Project decommissioning, and therefore not significant."

Bipole III has the potential to have unknown effects on caribou in areas along the FPR. Therefore, stating that the residual effects are "not significant" along the entire FPR seems to draw the wrong conclusion based on the study results described in this report and concerns raised to date. Please see comments given in above section.

Section 1.1, pg 2
This section states that coastal forest-tundra ecotype caribou are genetically similar to boreal woodland caribou. This is not definitively known at this time. Although this is the general hypothesis, studies are currently being conducted to determine genetic lineages (mitochondrial) of coastal caribou and current (microsatellite) genetic relatedness of coastal caribou to boreal woodland and barren ground caribou subspecies.

Table 1, pg 4
This table identifies the threat of range fragmentation to caribou as a result of Bipole III as "Low". This may not be the case for the Wabowden caribou range if the section of Bipole III near Ponton is constructed as currently indicated by the FPR. The core wintering area directly south of Ponton is already bisected by PTH #6 and a hydro transmission line running north/south. Paralleling Bipole transmission line with two existing paralleled linear features could create a wide enough clearing that caribou may not migrate across causing fragmentation and potentially abandonment of portions of their core winter range.

Table 2, pg 6
Collars were also deployed in Harding Lake, Naosap and Charron Lake (control area) evaluation ranges and are missing from the table.

Table 16, pg 28
The table indicates that only 9 calving areas were identified in 2010 for the Wabowden range. There were approximately 20 caribou collared at that time. Is this a typo or is there a particular reason only a portion of the calving areas during this year could be ascertained?

Table 31, pg 47
It is understood that Charron Lake is being used as a "control" area with limited development and disturbance for comparison with other evaluation ranges with more significant disturbance. Effects of various disturbance levels on recruitment and growth rates can then be determined. Charron Lake is far outside the Bipole III project study area. It is suggested that Hydro consider using Harding Lake evaluation range as a "control" area given it is on the west side of the province and in the project study area and it has also experienced limited development and disturbance.

Section 4.4.1, ¶ 2, pg 75
The Pen Island and Cape Churchill collaring project was initiated through the Split Lake, Fox Lake and York Factory Resource Management Boards. In future documents please reference studies related to this project accordingly giving recognition to the RMBs.

Section 4.4.2.2.1, ¶ 1, pg 81
Correction: The Pen Island caribou were not collared until 2010, **not 2009** as indicated in the first sentence of this section.