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December 15, 2008

Leslie Payette
Manager Environmental Administration
Nunavut Impact Review Board
P.O. Box 1360
Cambridge Bay NU X0B 0C0

NIRB File No. 08EN037 – Uravan Minerals Inc. Garry Lake Project Proposal

Dear Ms. Payette:

On behalf of the Northwest Territories Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS-NWT), I am submitting comments in response to NIRB's request of 20 November 2008 for comments on the *Draft* Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Guidelines for the Uravan Garry Lake Project. CPAWS-NWT is part of a national non-profit conservation organization dedicated to protecting Canada's wilderness. Our chapter's mission is to conserve the land, water and wildlife in the NWT for current and future generations, by working with NWT residents, governments, communities and organizations. Nationally, we have membership of approximately 15,000 individuals, and 13 regional Chapters across the country, each with a local volunteer Board of Directors. More information about CPAWS is provided in an attachment to this letter.

Recommendation

We understand that you have requested comments on the content of the draft EIS guidelines that NIRB has prepared and intends to provide to Uravan for preparation of their EIS. However, based on recently-released information about the status of the Beverly caribou herd, it is clear to CPAWS-NWT that no further mineral exploration or development should be allowed on the Beverly caribou calving ground. Therefore our primary comment at this time is that NIRB should recommend to the Minister that Uravan's application be rejected.

In the specific terminology of the NLCA (Sec. 12.4.7), the proponent should be advised to ***abandon the project***. This is one of the stated possible outcomes of the Part 5 Review process; the *Guide to the NIRB Review Process* states that one of the purposes of the review is “to determine, on the basis of its review, whether Project Proposals should proceed. . .” (p. 2). We advise that this project should not proceed.

Background

Three weeks ago the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) released disturbing information about the status of Beverly barren-ground caribou herd. According to the GNWT, results of 2007 and 2008 surveys of Beverly caribou show that the numbers of adult female caribou (cows) seen during June surveys on the calving ground were significantly lower than in past years, and the number of calves seen during the survey in 2008 was very low (15 calves for every 100 cows).

Although the 2007 and 2008 surveys did not provide an estimate of the total size of the herd, these surveys indicate that ***the Beverly caribou herd has experienced a significant decrease***. This is of great concern to CPAWS-NWT, given that this is the 6th caribou herd in the NWT for which declines have been documented, following recent declines for five other barren-ground caribou herds to the west of the Beverly range (Porcupine, Cape Bathurst, Bluenose West, Bluenose East, Bathurst). We are concerned both about the health and sustainability of this once large caribou herd (estimated at 276,000 in 1994) as well as the potential hardship this decline may cause for northern communities that depend on the Beverly herd as an essential food source. Three NWT communities (Lustel K’e, Ft. Resolution, Ft. Smith) and communities in Nunavut and northern Saskatchewan traditionally harvest the Beverly herd.

Evidence that the Beverly herd was likely declining has been mounting for a number of years, but the 2008 surveys make it clear that a serious decline has occurred. During this period of population decline, the federal government has continued to issue mineral tenures to companies allowing mineral exploration to increase on the Beverly calving ground, despite calls from various groups - including the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board, delegates at the 2007 Caribou Summit, and the Dene Nation - to protect caribou calving grounds.

We may never know why the Beverly herd’s population has decreased, but it likely results from a combination of natural factors and impacts from human activities. What is clear is that we should not allow activities that will cause additional stress to the Beverly herd while the population is in such a vulnerable state. This means that mineral exploration should not be allowed on the Beverly caribou calving ground.

The results of the NIRB's review of the proposal by Uravan will be precedent-setting. It is of utmost important that further disturbance and habitat loss that may result from mineral exploration and development, particularly on key habitats such as the Beverly caribou calving ground, be prevented.

Please let me know if you require further information or have any questions about these comments from the CPAWS-NWT.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L Cooke', with a stylized, cursive script.

Lani Cooke
Executive Director
CPAWS-NWT

Attachment

cc: Ellen Adelberg, Acting National Executive Director, CPAWS
CPAWS-Saskatchewan

Information about CPAWS

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society is a non-profit, membership-based, conservation organization. Originally established in 1963 under the name The National Provincial Parks Association of Canada, we have since expanded our mandate to include other similar wilderness areas. Over the years CPAWS has helped permanently protect over 40 million hectares of land.

Mission of CPAWS-NWT

The mission of CPAWS-NWT is to conserve the land, water and wildlife in the NWT for current and future generations, by working with NWT residents, governments, communities and organizations.

By “conserve the land, water and wildlife” we mean helping to protect the dynamic natural and cultural heritage of the NWT on a long-term basis, in a manner that fosters a healthy relationship between humans and the natural world. Our mission includes protecting both natural and cultural values of the NWT because of the close ties between nature and culture. Nobody knows better than NWT residents which lands and waters are essential to sustaining cultures, values and economies.

We refer to both current and future generations because we believe in “intergenerational equity”. This means that conservation of our land, water and wildlife upholds the right of future generations of NWT residents to inherit the same diversity in natural and cultural resources enjoyed by previous generations, as well as equitable access to the use and benefits of these resources.

We will carry out our mission by:

- establishing new protected areas¹ that conserve ecological integrity² and protect the health of natural ecosystems and cultural values;
- safeguarding existing protected areas for the continued functioning of natural ecological processes; and
- promoting ecologically sound natural resource management between protected areas.

¹ We define protected areas broadly, and include legislated permanently protected areas, as well as conservation zones in land use plans, where no industrial resource development is permitted.

² Ecological integrity: a condition where the structure and function of an ecosystem are unimpaired by stresses induced by human activity and are likely to persist (Parks Canada: Guiding Principles and Operating Policies, 1994).