



INDEPENDENT ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING AGENCY

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17 March 2009

Andrew Nichols
Environment Advisor – Wildlife
BHP Billiton Diamonds Inc.
#1102 4920-52nd Street
Yellowknife NT
X1A 3T1

Re: Proposed changes to the Wildlife Effects Monitoring Program for 2009

Dear Andrew

We would like to take this opportunity to comment on your letter of 10 March 2009 regarding proposed changes to the Wildlife Effects Monitoring Program (WEMP) for 2009. As was discussed in the caribou sub-group meeting on 12 March, these proposed changes are for 2009; further discussions and thought are required to address long-term changes to the program.

Upland Breeding Bird Study (UBBS): The Agency supports your proposal to not conduct the UBBS in 2009, and your commitment to produce a stand-alone report that contains a comprehensive and thorough analysis of the data obtained to date (1998 to 2008). The report should form the basis for considering any discussion of further changes to the UBBS but the Agency has gone on record in the past suggesting that this monitoring could take place every second year. As a contribution to continent-wide and long-term monitoring of UBBS, we trust that you will continue the North American Breeding Bird Survey at Ekati (a one day effort).

Aerial Caribou Surveys: Although we are not yet clear on the details, we are in general support of the proposed modifications to the aerial surveys. These will include adding Diavik's transects on to BHPB's current study area, and combining/sharing resources and personnel for the flights to increase the efficiency of the surveys. This should result in reduced helicopter use and decrease potential disturbance to animals, which we strongly support. As we understand it, this will likely mean that Diavik will drop its spring (northern migration) surveys.



Diavik's current (2007) aerial survey study area extends south of the Ekati study area to the south of Lac de Gras. To provide better coverage of this area south of the lake, we suggest that the new combined study area should incorporate both study areas (in effect adding a small area to what BHPB is currently using), but aligning on the 8-km spaced transects that Ekati has flown since 2006.

We strongly support your proposal to ensure that both Ekati and Diavik staff involved in the surveys are fully trained. To further increase the quality of the data obtained, we suggest that the number of people participating in the surveys be kept to a minimum, and that a single person (or one person from each mine) be in charge of ensuring that the data obtained and entered into the database are consistent and accurate.

Caribou Behavioural Studies: Although design and logistics need to be worked out, we support your proposal to work with Diavik to improve the collection of behavioural data. We suggest you or Diavik consult with John Virgl (Golder) and other experts in the design for this work. We would be pleased to assist with or, through Kim Poole whenever possible, participate in any of these discussions. There was a suggestion during the March 12 subgroup meeting that BHPB (with Diavik) should consider carrying out lichen sampling in conjunction with behavioural observations away from the mine site. We note that BHPB has committed to new and more comprehensive lichen sampling as part of the air quality monitoring program and there may be opportunities to combine monitoring activities at these site.

Grizzly Bear Studies: The Agency supports your proposal to discontinue the grizzly bear sign plot this year. However, it is essential that discussions commence soon on alternative designs (perhaps DNA hair-snagging at a broader scale) that will address the objectives of the bear monitoring program. Any new program should be in place for the 2010 field season.

Wolverine Studies: We note that wolverine monitoring was not discussed in your letter and that BHPB has not conducted wolverine monitoring for several years. As you are aware, the Agency is disappointed that DNA monitoring is not being conducted this spring, especially after receiving a verbal commitment that it would take place in 2009. We believe that this design is far superior to track counts at addressing monitoring objectives, but the utility of the design as trend monitoring drops rapidly with longer time since survey. We want to see a strong commitment by BHPB to conduct the wolverine hair-snagging in spring 2010 even if other mining companies do not participate, although our strong preference would be for mine collaboration.

Traditional Knowledge: We see a benefit of many of these programs (e.g., wolverine, grizzly bear, caribou behaviour) as an opportunity to involve Aboriginal peoples and their Traditional Knowledge in wildlife monitoring at Ekati. We look forward to your suggestions in this regard.

Please contact us if you wish to discuss any aspects of the WEMP.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Ross". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Bill Ross
Chairperson

cc. Agency Society Members
Sue Fleck, GNWT—ENR
John McCullum, EMAB
Dave White, SLEMA