Tracking Caribou by Satellite in the James Bay Lowlands, Ontario

Caribou are found across northern Canada in a wide variety of habitats. Most people have seen photographs or film of the large herds of barren ground caribou that migrate large distances in the north. Less well known are the woodland caribou that occur in the boreal forests and generally move small distances during the year.

The James Bay lowlands are sparsely populated with small isolated communities largely along the coast. The First Nations peoples have depended on hunting and fishing for hundreds of years and the Victor Diamond Project (Ontario's first diamond mine) is located approximately 90 km inland from the community of Attawapiskat. As part of ongoing studies to measure the potential effects of the De Beers Victor Project on the local and regional environment, a study of woodland caribou was initiated. Traditional ecological knowledge indicated that caribou are important to the community of Attawapiskat. During the environmental assessment process, it was agreed that AMEC and De Beers would investigate the movement of caribou using GPS collars with the Argos satellite system uplink to monitor movements of caribou and determine whether they were influenced by the mine development.

Ten female caribou were collared in December 2004 at representative locations around the Victor site up to 60 km away. Once the collars were operational, data was downloaded via satellite every week and the locations plotted on maps. Analysis of the movement data shows that some animals may travel at least 500 km from Victor during the year. The majority of females returned to calving locations scattered across the peat lands and there are no communal calving grounds such as are found with the barren ground caribou. The most obvious trend in the movement patterns of these woodland caribou occurs in the late fall when the majority of collared animals move north-west into more heavily treed areas in northwestern Ontario. In the late winter and spring they move back onto the peat lands confirming information provided in the Attawapiskat TEK study. The minimum annual distances covered for the caribou ranged between 900 and 1500 km which are much greater than boreal woodland caribou in other parts of Ontario. The radio-collars were recovered in 2007 and 11 new ones have been placed on caribou to continue the monitoring of caribou during the operational phase of the mine.

For more information, please contact Mark Taylor (mark.taylor@amec.com).

Mining website and AMEC.COM to be redesigned

The amec.com website is currently going through a review which will lead to a new redesign of the site. Nicki Brett, who was previously with the Mining and Metals Vancouver group, is the project manager. For the past few months, the team has been soliciting feedback from various stakeholders that visit the site such as investors, clients, AMEC staff and those looking for a career with the company. The next step is to begin the new design. Michael Davies has been selected as a member of the web advisory group and his advice will be sought as the new site develops. Other Earth & Environmental sector leaders have also been consulted such as Steve Hunt (transportation) and Brian Boose (U.S. Army). The design may take at least until June for completion. However, there will be significant improvements to the site and it will be "worth the wait!" If you have specific ideas or suggestions, feel free to contact Nicki Brett (nicki.brett@amec.com).