

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
5TH COUNCIL, 32ND SESSION

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL
NO. 15-32

TABLED ON JANUARY 25, 1966



18th January, 1966.

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for release before
tabling during the
32nd Session of
Council.

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL NO. 15
(First Session, 1966)

PLANTING OF FEED FOR MUSKRATS

DISPOSITION

Accepted as Read.....
Amended.....See Text
Rejected.....See Text
Deferred.....See Text
Not Considered.

PLANTING OF FEED FOR MUSKRATS

Council at the June, 1965 Session requested the Administration to look into the possibility of planting feed in the lakes in the Mackenzie Delta in an effort to increase the muskrat population. (Debates, 30th Session, Page 287).

Research

The matter was referred to the Canadian Wildlife Service, whose research does not support the view that food is limiting muskrat numbers. The recent drastic reduction in that species followed a high population which was inadequately harvested, and indications are that it came about from a physiological response to overcrowding and stress. Over-population did not deplete annual food supplies since declines occurred in areas with plentiful food as well as in areas with heavy siltation and in untrapped as well as in trapped areas. The decline was comparatively less in areas which had been harvested every year (e.g. Norris area south of Inuvik).

The Canadian Wildlife Service finds that plants in the Delta do not suffer from siltation. The fact is that lakes that receive a periodic silt load are the ones that represent the best habitat for muskrats. Lakes that are flooded only infrequently tend to become sterile with dark organic stain in the water and have fewer submerged and shoreline food plants. Muskrats generally avoid such lakes and resort to those in earlier successional stages. Silt does eventually fill in the lakes so that they freeze to the bottom in winter - but at the same time river-borne silt seals off old channels to form new lakes and the whole dynamic process of delta building goes on.

In his 1948 report Dr. Ian McTaggart-Cowan noted biologist of the University of British Columbia said that we "should be alert for under-harvesting as well as for the reverse condition. Both are equally destructive if continued over several years". We believe that records will bear out the fact that trapping efforts have been reduced in the last few years, thus under-harvest is a more probable reason for the decline than over-harvest, as suggested by Dr. McTaggart-Cowan. The decline can be looked upon as temporary in nature, but does serve to remind us that more intensive management of the muskrat resource in the Mackenzie Delta is necessary.

Recommendation

The Commissioner, therefore, recommends that no action be taken in respect to the proposal to plant feed in the lakes in the Mackenzie Delta area.