

Dilemmas caribou style

(Adapted from *Project WILD's* Ethi-reasoning activity)

Objectives

Students should be able to:

1. Examine their values and beliefs related to wildlife and other elements of the environment.
2. Evaluate possible actions they might take that have an impact on wildlife and the environment.

Method

Students read, discuss, make judgements and write about hypothetical dilemmas concerning wildlife and/or natural resources.

Background

This activity is designed to give students the opportunity to examine their values and beliefs as they relate to wildlife and other elements of the environment. It is not the intent of this activity to prescribe 'right' and 'wrong' answers for the students, except with respect to legislation.

Laws affecting wildlife and the environment vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Each jurisdiction has a wildlife agency that is legally responsible for caring for most wildlife within the province or territory. Students can contact the agency in their province or territory to request general information about laws affecting wildlife in their area. For example, it is legal to hunt and fish for some animals in all areas; however, which animals can be hunted, and under which conditions, are specified by laws and regulations for which the government wildlife agency is responsible.

There are also federal laws and regulations affecting wildlife. Students can contact the Canadian Wildlife Service for information about such laws. For example, federal law protects non-game migratory birds from shooting or any other intentional cause of death, injury or harassment. It is also generally illegal to possess nests and eggs of game birds—even those found lying on the ground. Threatened and endangered species are protected by law in some jurisdictions. It is also against the law to intentionally harm songbirds.

Caribou, like other wildlife, are affected by the guidelines and laws enacted by governments and management agencies. There are many laws, and they are complex. Again, it is useful and important to contact local authorities about the laws protecting and affecting wildlife in your area.

Whether or not students agree with certain laws and regulations, questions of law can be separated from questions of ethics. An individual's choices as to what seem right or wrong for him or her in terms of values and behaviours may be described as a personal code of ethics. Hunting,

Age

Grades 5 – 12

Subjects

Social Studies, Science, Language Arts

Skills

Analysis, application, discussion, evaluation, problem solving, synthesis, writing

Duration

One 30 – 45 minute period

Group size

Any, but small groups of two to four students are recommended

Setting

Indoors or outdoors

Materials

Copies of caribou dilemma cards
(photocopy masters supplied in this guide)



Caribou do not jump fences.

for example, is controversial for some people from an ethical point of view. Some people say that even though hunting is legal, it is unethical, because a human being is taking the life of a wild animal. Others believe hunting to be a responsible and ethical practice, whether as a form of recreation, for the purpose of acquiring food, or in order to control animal populations. These differences of belief may be sincerely held. Whether or not a person chooses to hunt is a personal choice dictated by one's personal ethics. Conflicts arise, however, when a person motivated by one set of ethics tries to force his or her ethics on others through activities such as arguments, harassment or legislative action.

It is the purpose of this activity to provide students with an opportunity to come to their own judgments about what they think are the most responsible and appropriate actions to take in situations affecting wildlife and the environment.

Procedure

1. Photocopy and cut up the dilemma cards on pages 80 - 83. You will need one card per student.
2. Divide the class into groups of four, and give each group four different dilemma cards. Place them face down in the centre of the group.
3. Ask a student in each group to draw a card from the top of the stack. The student studies the situation, decides what he or she should do about it, and formulates his or her reasons.
4. When the student is ready, typically in less than two minutes, the student reads the situation and the options aloud to the rest of the group. The student gives the decision he or she has chosen and briefly describes the reasoning involved. In turn, each of the other members of the group is invited to comment on the dilemma and state what he or she would do in the situation. Group discussion of each dilemma should take about five minutes. The student whose dilemma is being discussed should have the opportunity to ask questions of the other members of the group and to offer clarification about his or her decision. The discussion gives the students experience in having ideas examined by peers and is intended to remind the students of the need to take personal responsibility for decision-making. It is not necessary and may not be desirable for the students to reach consensus; there are legitimately differing views of the most appropriate and responsible actions to take in many situations. The purpose is to provide students with an opportunity to examine, express, clarify and take responsibility for their own reasoning.
5. The card is then returned to the bottom of the stack and the next student selects a card from the top of the stack. This process continues until all students have had the opportunity to make and defend their decisions about the various dilemmas.

Variations

1. Have students make up their own dilemma cards.
2. Adapt the discussions to a debate format.
3. Have the students play various roles during the discussions. Role playing possibilities include conservationist, hunter, government worker, person who lives in a city, person who lives in a small town, etc. How do these roles change the way students look at ethical dilemmas?

Extensions

1. Have students choose issues affecting caribou and then attempt to create management guidelines that can be accepted by a wide variety of interests.
2. Have a policy maker from a local wildlife agency or First Nation organization come into the classroom and discuss the way policy decisions are made.

Evaluation

Ask students to choose a dilemma concerning caribou and write a short paragraph on the positive and negative effects of all the options listed for that dilemma. Students should identify what seems in their judgment to be the most responsible decision and explain their reasoning. Students should also indicate what additional information, if any, is needed in order to make a responsible and informed decision.

Adaptations for different ages

Primary: Using simplified versions of the dilemmas, have the students discuss how they feel about them. Ask the students to think about where their opinions on these issues come from. Have the students think about possible sources they could go to for more information about wildlife issues.

CARIBOU DILEMMA CARD #1

You are a member of an environmental group that supports animal rights. However, the caribou population in your area is so high that it is eating all of the food resources very quickly. The data that researchers have collected suggests that if nothing is done, the population will crash in less than 10 years due to a food shortage. Wildlife managers have suggested that the number of caribou must be reduced in order to protect the entire population from starvation in the future. However, some members of your group have argued that killing is not a suitable way to limit the population. Your group must vote to decide how to deal with this problem. Do you:

- Vote to allow hunters to kill more caribou?
- Vote to leave the caribou population alone to regulate itself naturally?
- Take some other course of action?

CARIBOU DILEMMA CARD #3

You are a wildlife biologist. One of the most southerly woodland caribou populations in North America is located on an island several miles offshore in an inland lake. There are no predators on this island. This area has the highest known density of woodland caribou in the world, specifically because there are no wolves. During a recent severe winter, the lake froze from the mainland to the island, and two wolves travelled to the island. The sex and age of these wolves is not known, but it is possible that they will breed, increase in number, and dramatically reduce the caribou population over time. Do you:

- Consider this a natural situation and monitor the establishment of the wolf population and the expected negative impacts on the caribou population, then publish your results?
- Try to kill the wolves before they can breed and increase in number, so that this unique caribou ecosystem will remain?
- Establish a committee to study the question?
- Do nothing?
- Take some other course of action?

CARIBOU DILEMMA CARD #2

Two years ago you bought and began using a cottage located near a lake. Recently, researchers have determined that a local caribou herd has stopped using the area around your cabin because your presence is scaring them away. They have found that this is an important area during the time that the calves are being born because the lake has many islands which wolves cannot reach. Do you:

- Keep using your cabin and hope the caribou will get used to you?
- Try to keep quiet when at your cabin to minimize the disturbance?
- Sell your cabin and find one somewhere else to go?
- Move your cabin out of the area?
- Take some other course of action?

CARIBOU DILEMMA CARD #4

You are a hunter out searching for a moose during hunting season. You spot one and shoot it, but when you get up close to it, you realize that it is actually a woodland caribou, which cannot be legally hunted in this area. Do you:

- Bury the caribou in the snow?
- Inform the conservation officer that you found a caribou carcass that someone shot?
- Tell the conservation officer that you shot a caribou by mistake?
- Take the caribou home to eat?
- Take some other course of action?

CARIBOU DILEMMA CARD #5

You are a wildlife biologist who has been contracted by the government to conduct research on barren-ground caribou. One of the projects important to your research involves capturing animals and outfitting them with satellite collars. This will allow you to track their locations with a high degree of accuracy. When seeking project support you discover two conflicting views. Many elders feel that this practice shows great disrespect to the animals and are morally opposed to it. On the other hand, a majority of hunters is in support because it will help them better understand the caribou and allow them to travel directly to the herd, saving a great deal of time and money. Do you:

- Abandon plans to satellite-collar caribou?
- Work with the community to find alternate ways of collecting the data you need?
- Ignore the views of the elders and side with the majority?
- Try to convince the elders to let you tag one animal as a demonstration in hopes of gaining their support?
- Take some other course of action?

CARIBOU DILEMMA CARD #7

You are a wildlife biologist. An all-weather road is being built to give northern communities road access to communities in the south. This road cuts through the main migration route of a large herd of barren-ground caribou. Local hunters now have easy access to the caribou. First Nation elders are worried that the hunting pressure keeps the leaders of the herd from migrating to their traditional areas. They say that shooting the leaders is disrespectful to the caribou and that herd knowledge will be lost. Conservation officers have seen the herd turn back and take an alternate route when hunting pressure on the highway is great. Do you:

- Ignore the concerns of the elders as most animals still cross the road at some point?
- Close the highway for a period of time when the main herd approaches to allow the leaders to go to traditional areas undisturbed by hunters?
- Try to institute an educational program and ask hunters not to hunt caribou when the main herd approaches?
- Take some other course of action?

CARIBOU DILEMMA CARD #6

You are a young woman living on a caribou range. Since graduating from high school you have worked in part-time, temporary jobs and are currently unemployed. Just when you think you may have to leave community to find work elsewhere, you hear that a large corporation is proposing a diamond mine in the area, promising many jobs for young northerners. This development may have a negative impact on the caribou upon which most of your family depends. You know that the caribou have not travelled through that area for many years, but you also know from your relatives that caribou migration patterns change over time. In the future the caribou may come in contact with the development. Do you:

- Support the proposal and apply for a high paying job?
- Campaign to prevent the mine from going ahead?
- Move to Edmonton and look for work?
- Support the mine as a source of employment for your friends but not work there yourself?
- Remain in the community, live a traditional lifestyle and earn extra money working part-time at the band office?
- Take some other course of action?

CARIBOU DILEMMA CARD #8

You are a young native man who lives in a remote northern community. Your community depends on a herd of barren-ground caribou for much of its food, crafts and clothing. Your culture has depended on the caribou for thousands of years. Your community has worked for many years to keep the range of the herd free from any development. However, there is little local employment. An oil company wants to start oil development in the winter range of the herd and has offered young people from your community jobs and training. A job would give you money and a sense of worth but would go against the wishes of your community. Do you:

- Take the job and live a good 'southern' style of life?
- Take the job and try to make sure the company follows all environmental regulations?
- Take the training and then quit, as the training might help you get a job within your community?
- Stay in your community and try to get odds jobs when you can?
- Take some other course of action?

CARIBOU DILEMMA CARD #9

You are a scientist who has discovered that there is a chemical in the noses of caribou that can be used to make a cure for the common cold. You are all set to patent your idea when you realize that many caribou must be killed in order to obtain the chemicals. Do you:

- Keep working to come up with a cure that doesn't need caribou noses?
- Patent your idea and make a huge fortune?
- Sell your idea to someone else and make a small fortune?
- Take some other course of action?

CARIBOU DILEMMA CARD #11

You are the chief executive officer of a large oil company that wants to drill exploratory wells in the calving grounds of a caribou herd. Local First Nation people depend on the herd for food and clothing. The oil is needed to serve the growing demand for fuel by southern interests, but the cost of finding oil and transporting it may outweigh the environmental cost. Do you:

- Proceed to drill with environmental safeguards in place to protect the caribou?
- Drill for oil regardless of the environment and give royalty payments to the native people to compensate for damages?
- Decide to drill for oil in less environmentally sensitive areas and recommend protection of the calving grounds?
- Take some other course of action?

CARIBOU DILEMMA CARD #10

You have lived and worked in a small northern community for 20 years. A PhD student from a southern university has contacted you about doing a study of traditional knowledge about caribou in a northern native community. The student has never been to the north and wants to know how to get started with her project. Do you:

- Tell her to forget it because you sense that people are fed up with southern researchers?
- Send her some relevant literature about doing research in the north and/or advise her to contact a First Nation government directly?
- Advise her that traditional knowledge is a touchy subject for research and that she had better make a trip to the north and talk to a lot of people before she decides to pursue this as a thesis project?
- Take some other course of action?

CARIBOU DILEMMA CARD #12

You are a wildlife manager. In your area, woodland caribou occupy a large portion of the landscape at some times during the year, but are never found in high densities. Moose also occur in the area. People hunt moose but are not allowed to hunt caribou. Current logging practices improve the habitat for moose, but are clearly not beneficial to caribou populations. Scientists believe that changes in forestry practices will allow the caribou to continue to occupy their range, while also allowing forestry to continue. However, moose habitat will not improve to the same degree, and the forest industry will not be able to harvest as much wood every year. Do you:

- Continue with current logging practices to maintain wood harvest and improve moose hunting?
- Change logging practices to ensure the survival of caribou, and accept reduced wood harvest and moose populations?
- Change logging practices to ensure the survival of caribou, and restrict moose hunting to protect the diminished moose population?
- Take some other course of action?

CARIBOU DILEMMA CARD #13

You are a biologist responsible for wildlife viewing in your area. A large barren-ground caribou herd is not crossing the highway that crosses their winter range. Regulations are in place which prohibit hunting along the highway. Local business owners are concerned that with the restrictions on hunting, there will be fewer hunters and thus fewer benefits to the local communities. Wildlife viewing opportunities exist, but there is some concern that the increased traffic caused by wildlife viewers could cause even greater disturbance by increasing road traffic. Local businesses are beginning to exert political pressure to remove the corridor restriction. Do you:

- Advertise the wildlife viewing opportunity in hopes that it will increase education and awareness of the herd?
- Monitor the situation to see how the herd is reacting to the highway with the new corridor in place?
- Allow some hunting from the highway?
- Close the highway altogether when the herd is passing by?
- Take some other course of action?

CARIBOU DILEMMA CARD #15

You love to ride your snowmobile. You hear that a local snowmobiler's association is planning to construct a series of trails in a beautiful wilderness area. This area is within the range of a local woodland caribou herd. A meeting is planned to discuss the trail construction. Do you:

- Get ready to experience some new snowmobile thrills?
- Attend the meeting and tell the association to scrap its plans because of possible effects on caribou?
- Ask a biologist to do a study on the area before the trail plan goes ahead?
- Attempt to educate snowmobilers on methods to avoid disturbing caribou during sensitive parts of their breeding cycle?
- Take some other course of action?

CARIBOU DILEMMA CARD #14

You are a farmer who has just received an agricultural permit to grow potatoes on your land, which is located 50 kilometres from the nearest small community. After planting your crops, you receive a letter from a conservation organization telling you that your fences pose a threat to a local woodland caribou herd. The herd's movement within its range is restricted by the fences, and several caribou have become entangled in the wire. Do you:

- Look for safer ways to construct your fences?
- Remove the fences and allow wild animals to tramp through your fields?
- Relocate your farm to another area?
- Leave your fences the way they are and hope the caribou will learn to use another route?
- Take some other course of action?

CARIBOU DILEMMA CARD #16

You are a community health worker. A local study has determined that there are toxic levels of cadmium in the kidneys of caribou and has calculated that eating a certain amount of kidneys from older female caribou is a health risk. The results of this study have been sensationalized by the media and people have stopped eating caribou kidneys altogether. Do you:

- Assume that kidneys are not very important to northern diets and so there is no need to intervene?
- Consult with the communities about the importance of kidneys to local people and then decide if this needs further work?
- Consult with local people about the importance of kidneys to local diets and try to figure out how many kidneys of what age caribou could be consumed?
- Investigate the source of the health standard on cadmium to see if it is relevant to northern diets and lifestyles, make a judgment about the likelihood of anyone becoming seriously contaminated by cadmium in kidneys, and then make a statement about the risk as you see it?
- Take some other course of action?