



Industrial Activity within Woodland Caribou Range

AWA Position:

Alberta's woodland caribou are in a state of precarious decline throughout their respective ranges. The Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is of the opinion that exploration and development of new industrial operations must be deferred in woodland caribou ranges where populations fall within AWA Areas of Concern and/or are considered to be at "**immediate risk of extirpation**," under **Alberta's Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan** or are listed as "**threatened**" under the **Alberta Wildlife Act** and **Federal Species at Risk Act***. Research must be undertaken prior to industrial exploration to assess specific herd population viability including short term and long term population trends and distribution and habitat quality and supply constraints, the location of key habitats, and the parameters of present and historic caribou ranges in the area. On lands adjacent to these caribou ranges, the AWA expects that special management considerations be researched, developed and implemented to ensure no net loss of habitat and population numbers.

Background:

Industrial exploration and development, including oil and gas and forestry and certain recreational and tourism activities and developments, can result in permanent loss of caribou habitat through fragmentation, alteration and alienation. Human activity within prime woodland caribou habitat has impacted the species to the extent that it is listed as "**threatened**" under both the **Alberta Wildlife Act** and the **Federal Species at Risk Act**. Of Alberta's 18 recognized caribou herds, 3 are ranked by the **2004 Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan**, as at "**immediate risk of extirpation**." These include the North Banff, Slave Lake and Little Smoky herds.

The Little Smoky Herd:

Oil and gas exploration and development and associated motorized recreation are and will continue to be detrimental to the survival of this caribou herd. The population of this herd is considered to be one that is at greatest risk in Alberta, with numbers totaling between 60 to 80 individuals. Characteristics that contribute to their vulnerability include their small herd size, a high level of adult mortality and low calf survival. The Little Smoky herd is non migratory. Their range has the highest level of industrial development of any caribou range in Alberta. Eighty-five percent (85%) of the habitat in the Little Smoky range is within 250m of a linear corridor. Cumulatively, the impacts of oil and gas, forestry and recreational activities now threaten the existence of the Little Smoky caribou herd through habitat loss and fragmentation and increased access to the herd by natural predators and humans.

Points of Emphasis:

* This federal designation applies to all woodland caribou populations in Alberta.





Literature shows that industrial exploration and development negatively impact Alberta's habitats and the wildlife they support. An inverse relationship has been demonstrated between the degree of industrial development and the viability of Alberta's caribou populations, i.e. the greater the disturbance, the lower the population viability. The precautionary principle must be applied to industrial activities contemplated for all public lands prior to industrial exploration in order to maintain Alberta's biological diversity and wilderness. The "*threatened*" status of all 18 woodland caribou herds in Alberta indicates the need to restrict new industrial developments from critical habitats and reduce both short-term and cumulative impacts on all lands adjacent to these habitats.

- Habitat fragmentation due to linear disturbance is one of the greatest threats to maintaining biodiversity. It is most important that new linear disturbance is significantly reduced and the mitigation and reclamation of old disturbance is escalated on public lands.
- Protected areas must be established within caribou ranges.
- The "*threatened*" status of Alberta's caribou herds shows there is a need for a moratorium on new industrial exploration and development slated to overlap critical caribou habitats until full cumulative impact assessments are conducted and recovery plans implemented.
- If assessments indicate industrial activity will, in all likelihood, further reduce the viability of a herd, including jeopardizing long-term habitat requirements, then it must not be undertaken.

Action:

AWA expects all related industrial users, government departments and others to:

- Defer development within woodland caribou ranges where populations fall within AWA Areas of Concern and/or are considered to be at "*immediate risk of extirpation*" under Alberta's Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan or are listed as "*threatened*" under the Alberta Wildlife Act and Federal Species at Risk Act.
- Defer development until populations have achieved stability and/or have recovered and studies show that development can proceed with no negative impact on the overall caribou population.
- Implement full cumulative impact assessments of all industrial activities planned on public lands overlapping critical caribou habitats.
- Defer industrial activities where assessments indicate they will further reduce the viability of a herd.
- Expedite the recovery and delisting of caribou herds from their present "*threatened*" status.
- Reduce the impact of activities by re-routing pipelines, roads and transmission lines to less sensitive sites outside these ranges.
- Improve environmental assessments, monitoring, mitigation standards, recovery and restoration policies.
- Mitigate and reclaim existing linear disturbances within and adjacent to caribou ranges to minimize cumulative impacts on the populations and habitat.





References:

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