



*Parks, Protected Areas and ACFN's Proposed Protection and Stewardship Zones.*

### **Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Presents Innovative Caribou Co-management Plan**

In the absence of any provincial government leadership in caribou recovery in Alberta, the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) has showed its willingness to step up to the plate. In an innovative new report, ACFN lay out a “stewardship strategy” for the management of caribou and wood bison in a huge area of northeastern Alberta. The report - *Nih boghodi: We are the stewards of our land. An ACFN stewardship strategy for thunzea, et'then and dechen yághe ejere (woodland caribou, barren-ground caribou and wood bison)* – was released in April 2012.

The primary goal of the newly proposed strategy is to “provide a concrete vision and tool for sustaining the way of life of our Nation, particularly in relation to ACFN Homelands, and in the face of anticipated or proposed development.” This includes proactive protection and restoration of habitat for all local populations of caribou and bison within their historical range in ACFN Homelands.

The strategy proposes two distinct zones (see map):

#### **Protection zone**

The Protection zone would extend from the Firebag River corridor north to the Alberta/ Northwest Territories border, including the Birch Mountains and Lake

stewardship zone not to exceed 20 percent.

- No industrial footprints to exceed one hectare per square kilometre in any given square kilometre.
- No industrial water withdrawals from lakes, streams, wetlands, or muskeg.
- A maximum linear disturbance (e.g., roads, pipelines, transmission lines, seismic lines) threshold of 1.5 km/km<sup>2</sup> in any given square kilometre depending on the ecological context.
- A maximum linear disturbance threshold of 0.4 km/km<sup>2</sup> within the stewardship zone as a whole.

In both the Protection and Stewardship zones, the strategy calls for “a program to establish trails and access corridors to reduce impacts from ATVs and quads, and minimize linear disturbance in the backcountry.”

The AFCN intends to introduce its strategy for “comments, refinement, and support by other First Nations, researchers, government agencies, industry, and NGOs.” AWA will be lending its support to these proposals, which could go a long way towards addressing the caribou habitat protection that the Alberta government has avoided for so long.

- Nigel Douglas

Athabasca. The strategy makes it clear that “current levels of habitat destruction have exceeded a level sustainable for the protection of caribou and for the protection of ACFN rights and interests.” It calls for mandatory objectives in this zone including:

- No new industrial developments.
- No licenses, leases, authorizations or permits on the land without ACFN’s written consent.
- Provincial and federal governments should fund and work with ACFN to implement a program of habitat reclamation where habitat has already been degraded.

### **Stewardship zone**

The Stewardship zone would extend from the Firebag River corridor south to Calling Lake. In this zone, the strategy stresses that “(m)aintaining a close and respectful relationship of interdependence between humans and both caribou and bison throughout their historical range, including sustainable harvesting, is integral to our way of life and culture.” The Stewardship zone is intended to “ensure that this relationship of interdependence can continue into the future.” Objectives in this zone would include:

- Total disturbance area within