

MEDIA RELEASE

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Environmental groups echo First Nations call for caribou protection

Ecojustice files application for emergency protection, calls for suspension of industrial activity in critical habitat areas

CALGARY — Three environmental groups have joined with four Alberta First Nations to urge the federal environment minister to provide emergency protection for caribou herds in northeastern Alberta, Ecojustice said today.

Ecojustice, acting on behalf of the Alberta Wilderness Association, the Pembina Institute and the Sierra Club of Canada Prairie Chapter, filed a letter today (see www.albertawilderness.ca/issues/wildlife/caribou/archive) to Environment Minister Jim Prentice, demanding that he use emergency protection provisions in Canada's *Species at Risk Act* to protect caribou habitat in northeastern Alberta.

The letter calls for a halt to further industrial activity in caribou ranges until a recovery plan and habitat protection measures — mandated by species legislation — are in place.

Today's letter supports a demand made by local First Nations in July, when the Beaver Lake Cree Nation, Enoch Cree Nation, Chipewyan Prairie Dene First Nation and Athabaskan Chipewyan First Nation demanded that the minister provide emergency protection for herds on their traditional lands.

"With the province failing to protect caribou habitat and the federal government three years behind on preparing a caribou recovery strategy, it is imperative the minister provide emergency interim protection for caribou habitat," said Barry Robinson, Ecojustice staff lawyer.

To date, the provincial government has refused to implement a recommendation in its own caribou recovery plan, prepared in 2005, which calls for a moratorium on further mineral and timber allocations in certain caribou ranges.

"Caribou herds in northeastern Alberta are in serious decline, and expanding industrial development in that area threatens their survival and recovery" said Cliff Wallis, vice-president of the Alberta Wilderness Association.

“We do not have the luxury of time. The government’s own research clearly indicates that caribou populations are in decline and unsustainable,” added Simon Dyer, oilsands program director for the Pembina Institute.

The coalition of environmental groups also recognizes First Nations right to hunt and use caribou for cultural and spiritual purposes.

“Those rights will be meaningless if caribou are lost from northeastern Alberta,” Robinson said.

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