

Jasper's Caribou Need Stronger Access Management as Conservation Breeding Plan Advances



Jasper caribou. Photo © John E. Marriott.

Conservation groups are calling Parks Canada's plans to advance a proposal for caribou conservation breeding in Jasper National Park a tragic yet necessary interim recovery measure within the Rocky Mountain national parks.

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA), Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) and CPAWS Northern Alberta Chapter, Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y), and the David Suzuki Foundation (DSF) urge Parks Canada to commit to further improve existing management of caribou habitat in the park, as recommended by experts in the scientific review of conservation breeding earlier this year.

The federal government is committing \$24 million to design a potential conservation breeding facility and to consult with Indigenous communities and the public about the proposal. The groups call on Parks Canada to adopt a more precautionary approach to manage human access in south Jasper caribou ranges. An important first step would be the extension of access restrictions in caribou ranges to ensure safer habitat conditions for the near-term survival of as many caribou as possible. Measures such as these must occur while the conservation breeding proposal is further reviewed.

From January to April 2021, Jasper National Park convened a scientific review involving more than 40 experts, which concluded that a conservation breeding

program is necessary to recover Jasper's critically low numbers of caribou. In May 2021, Jasper Park officials also broadly announced that they will review winter-time human access in caribou ranges to focus "on what is most effective" by winter 2021/22.

Declining populations of south Jasper caribou and [other scientific evidence](#) indicate that Parks Canada's access management must be further strengthened to support caribou survival and re-occupancy. A costly captive breeding program only makes sense if caribou have high quality, secure habitat to occupy once they are released.

"Experts in the 2021 scientific review repeatedly emphasized the importance of reducing disturbance from people, improving connectivity to other herds and habitat, and reducing habitat loss outside the park as part of recovering caribou in Jasper National Park," said Dr. Aerin Jacob, Y2Y conservation scientist, who participated in the scientific review.

"Parks Canada has to set a good example for Alberta and other jurisdictions by managing access in caribou ranges based on the best available evidence," says Carolyn Campbell of Alberta Wilderness Association. "Even though the habitat situation in Jasper National Park is better than on provincial public lands, Jasper still needs to reduce winter, summer and fall recreation pressures so as many wild caribou as possible remain and can re-occupy their ranges."

"We've already seen the tragic loss of one caribou herd in Jasper, the Maligne herd, a few short years ago," says Gillian Chow-Fraser of CPAWS Northern Alberta. "The final nail in the coffin for the herd was poorly managing human access into caribou core habitat. We don't want to repeat history."

If you can, AWA asks that you write Parks Canada President and CEO Ron Hallman (ron.hallman@canada.ca) and Jasper Superintendent Alan Fehr (alan.fehr@canada.ca). Consider letting them know that:

- it's important to you that as many wild caribou as possible remain in Jasper's Tonquin and Brazeau ranges and can re-occupy the prime Maligne caribou range; and
- Jasper National Park should reduce recreation pressures in caribou ranges while conservation breeding is further reviewed, including closing access into the Tonquin backcountry for the entire snow season.

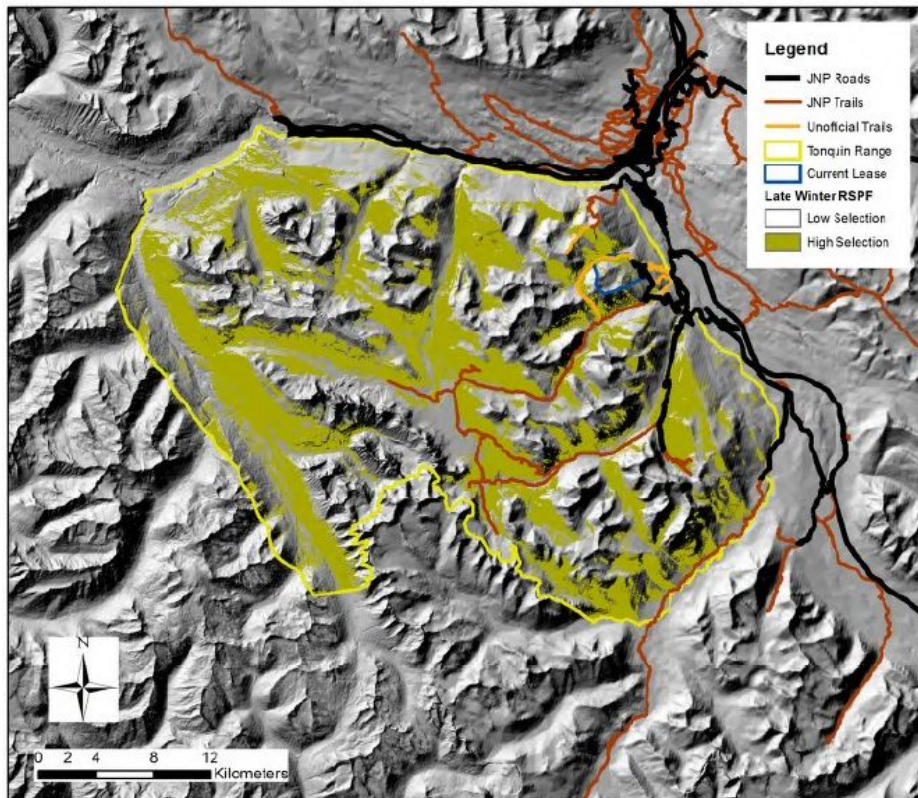
And please copy AWA (ccampbell@abwild.ca). Thank you!

For more information:

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Gillian Chow-Fraser, CPAWS Northern Alberta, 289-775-3250

Dr. Aerin Jacob, Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, 403-609-2666 ext. 124



Map 1. Tonquin Valley area, Jasper National Park. Ski and snowmobile supply routes (in red) make paths far into high quality 'late winter' caribou habitat (shaded yellow/green areas). This brings the double problems of more human activity, which stresses caribou during the difficult winter season and can cause displacement, and snow-packed routes for wolves to more easily hunt caribou through deep snow. (Source: [Czetwertynski and Schmiegelow, Tonquin Caribou Risk Assessment Final Report, 2014](#))



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