

Alberta leads Canada on woodland caribou protection

Mediator's report details strategies for caribou range protection in North and Central Alberta, including permanently protecting an additional 1.8 million hectares, for a total of 4.9 million hectares provincewide.

“Our government inherited a policy logjam and a looming federal deadline to file our plan to recover the caribou and manage critical habitat for caribou throughout the province. Rather than admiring the problem, as had been done for two decades, our government took action. We rolled up our sleeves and looked for solutions. Eric Denhoff engaged every voice on this file, and provided us with a path forward. His recommendations are based on collaboration, science and protecting jobs.”

- Shannon Phillips, Minister of Environment and Parks

Caribou are a threatened species federally and provincially and their populations are declining. Under the federal Species At Risk Act the federal government requires the Province of Alberta to manage 65 per cent of critical caribou habitat by October 2017. Government is taking action to provide economic certainty for industries and workers who make their living in the north and to do what's right to protect this iconic animal.

Mr. Eric Denhoff, a seasoned mediator with government, First Nations and the private sector experience, was retained to engage stakeholders and provide advice and recommendations on a made-in-Alberta caribou protection strategy. The Alberta government has accepted Mr. Denhoff's recommendations and used them as a basis to complete the first draft range plan for the Little Smoky and A La Peche ranges.

Key highlights of the mediator's recommendations include:

- In co-operation with industry, ensuring the restoration of over 10,000 kilometres of legacy seismic lines to caribou habitat in the Little Smoky and A La Peche caribou ranges;
- Increasing the Little Smoky population and reducing reliance on wolf control through a caribou-rearing facility; and
- Providing permanent protection to an additional 1.8 million hectares of caribou range in the Chinchaga, Bischo, Yates and Caribou Mountains ranges, for a grand total of 4.9 million hectares provincially.

With this move, Alberta becomes Canada's leader in permanent protection of woodland caribou ranges, providing more permanent protection than any other province or territory in Canada, both in absolute area and percentage of provincial caribou range area.

"It is encouraging that the Government of Alberta has engaged with stakeholders to hear our ideas and work together to conserve caribou. Moving forward together, a successful plan must conserve the caribou and support the 70 communities and 45,000 jobs in Alberta that depend on forestry."

- Paul Whittaker, President & CEO Alberta Forest Products Association

"Our industry is encouraged to see the government take action by releasing a caribou range plan for the Little Smoky and A La Peche Ranges. We anticipate the mediator's report and range plan will provide clarity for stakeholders operating within these ranges. The innovative funding approach will enable significant restoration activity in the near term while recognizing the challenges industry is facing in the current economic downturn. While the timeline set forth by government for range restoration is ambitious, the oil and natural gas industry is committed to doing its part to achieve this goal."

- Brad Herald, Vice President, Western Canada Operations, Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers

"This announcement signals some much-needed action on the Alberta caribou file. I look forward to seeing implementation of the bold actions outlined in the Denhoff report. This is a good day for caribou in the province of Alberta."

- Stan Boutin, PhD, University of Alberta professor of population ecology and Alberta Biodiversity Conservation Chair

The Little Smoky and A La Peche draft plan is being released first as those ranges are the most challenging landscapes for caribou management in Canada. When

implemented, the draft range plan will create hundreds of jobs related to range restoration.

“CPAWS welcomes the Government of Alberta's announcement of new protected areas covering 1.8 million hectares in northern Alberta. Protection of the forest in these areas is significant to the viability of some of Alberta's struggling boreal woodland caribou herds and shows that the government is committed to being a leader in caribou conservation in Canada.”

- Alison Ronson, Executive Director, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Northern Alberta

“We can't turn back the clock for the caribou, but we can choose to make the right decisions for them now and for their future. Our community has been concerned about caribou for more than 40 years and involved in research projects and consultation on the Little Smoky and A La Peche herds for the last 20 years, most recently the process led by Eric Denhoff. We look forward to a meaningful role in the implementation of the range plan and working in close collaboration with key stakeholders to ensure caribou remain a part of the traditional landscape.”

- *President of Aseniwuche Winewak Nation of Canada*

With this announcement, the public is encouraged to provide comment until August 5, 2016 through the [Environment and Parks website](#). Government is committed to meaningful engagement and consultation with First Nations and this process is not designed to replace this commitment.

To ensure Alberta is on the path to caribou recovery, government will be establishing an Expert Committee on Implementation of the Little Smoky and A La Peche Caribou Range Plan, comprised of experts on key implementation topic areas, including Indigenous traditional knowledge. This committee will provide advice and oversight on recovery actions, research and monitoring, with independent recommendations to government annually.

The primary cause of caribou mortality is wolf predation; however, wolves and caribou have co-existed for millennia. The hypothesis with the most scientific support is that increased development and destruction of habitat has allowed wolves to increase their predation of caribou beyond sustainable levels. Caribou have receded from large parts of their historical range in the province. Currently it is estimated that 3,500 remain in Alberta.

Related information

Mediator's Report

Draft Range Plan

Alberta's Caribou Action Plan

Draft Caribou Range Plan Survey

Recovery Strategy for Woodland Caribou in Canada

Caribou Management in Alberta

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