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### **North America awaits Alberta's leadership on legislatively protected areas for boreal caribou**

*On the morning of Canadian federal deadline, international community anticipates delivery on commitment for permanent legislative protection of 1.8 million hectares of land for caribou*

(Calgary, Edmonton, Washington DC, Seattle, Vancouver, Toronto) - This week, all Canadian provinces and territories are expected to deliver protection plans for each boreal woodland caribou range to meet the federal government's October 5 deadline under the Species At Risk Act. Each province has been working since October 2012 to meet its obligation to develop plans that conserve caribou herds by protecting and recovering 65% of critical caribou habitat. With the deadline approaching, Canadian and international environmental groups alike are looking to the Alberta government to legislate its previous announcement to permanently protect 1.8 million hectares within caribou ranges – an area approximately three times the size of Banff National Park.

Alberta's June 2016 announcement was widely lauded by forestry, oil and gas, and environmental groups as one of the largest conservation announcements in recent history. The proposed areas contain little industrial activity and represent a path forward to meet some of Alberta's federal species at risk obligations while minimizing impact to adjacent communities.

"CPAWS applauded the government's 2016 commitment to establish these Wildland Parks for caribou, and we encourage the Government of Alberta to establish protected areas in the core of each caribou range in Alberta with the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous communities in the region" said Kecia Kerr, Executive Director of CPAWS Northern Alberta.

Leadership by Alberta to protect habitat is one essential piece needed for the recovery of caribou as Alberta's caribou ranges are the most heavily impacted in the country. The first provincial plan for boreal caribou was released in 1978, yet no meaningful action has yet been taken by any previous Alberta government. In the meantime, some caribou herds in Alberta have declined by more than 80 per cent over the past 15 years.

"After decades of inaction, Alberta has an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to sustainable development by following through with its promise to permanently protect critical boreal caribou habitat," said Anthony Swift, Director of the Natural Resources Defense Council's Canada Project.

The 2016 commitment from the provincial government to protect 1.8 million hectares of land would be one important piece to meet the federally required caribou range planning requirements, and would move Alberta towards the agreed upon goal of increasing its protected areas to 17% of Alberta's land base by 2020.



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