



FEDERATION OF ALBERTA NATURALISTS

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WILDLIFE KILLED TO MAKE WAY FOR ENERGY EXTRACTION -- WOLVES AND CARIBOU SUFFER IN ALBERTA'S LITTLE SMOKY

The Government of Alberta and the energy industry's stated commitment to wildlife conservation and rescuing woodland caribou has suffered another fatal blow. During January and February, the provincial government will be conducting a sale of oil and gas land leases in and adjacent to the habitat of the Little Smoky Woodland Caribou herd.

A desperate but misguided attempt to save the caribou by shooting wolves is also underway by Alberta Fish and Wildlife. This is being done despite having been advised by members of the Alberta Caribou Committee (ACC) that the culling of wolves to protect caribou cannot be done without significant areas being off limits to industrial activities like oil and gas and forestry operations. Killing predators is a last-resort option where caribou populations are in a crisis situation.

"There is no point in killing wolves to save caribou if habitat necessary for caribou survival is being wiped out at the same time," says Cliff Wallis, an ACC member and Past-President of the Alberta Wilderness Association. "Caribou need secure habitat in which populations can be restored. Alberta and the resource industries are ensuring that both wolves and caribou will die to make way for resource extraction. They have absolutely zero credibility on wildlife conservation."

"The government, by its actions to shoot wolves, is acknowledging that the Little Smoky Woodland Caribou herd's population is in a deep crisis. Instead of deferring industrial activity in key caribou habitat as recommended by the Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan, it is paving the way for increased resource extraction activity and habitat loss," says David Samson, AWA Conservation Specialist. "They are whistling past the graveyard and taking the laziest and most ineffectual route to caribou conservation."

"The government has stated that it wants to do what is necessary to keep woodland caribou in Alberta," says Helene Walsh with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society in Edmonton. "The reality is that they have not made a single significant commitment to caribou habitat protection. The proposed energy land sale and wolf kill are outrageous evidence of energy industry and Alberta government complicity in the destruction of the Little Smoky's wildlife."

The Minister of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Hon. David Coumts, who is responsible for protecting Woodland Caribou, believes there is no crisis. The minister stated recently in the legislature, "We're promoting industry best practices more widely so that companies can operate on all caribou ranges." This is alarming when considering the prospects for caribou recovery, not only for the Little Smoky herd, but for other threatened herds in Alberta.

"Albertans will be incensed by this betrayal of the public trust," says Glen Semenchuk, Executive Director of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists and another ACC member. "The provincial government continues to state its commitment to wildlife conservation, but actively encourages increased oil and gas development and the destruction of key caribou habitat while eliminating wolves. It is sad news for wildlife enthusiasts but confirms the governments earlier position that stated they were loath to protect land for wildlife."

For more information, please contact:

David Samson, Alberta Wilderness Association, (403) 283-2025

Glen Semenchuk, Federation of Alberta Naturalists, (780) 427 8124

Cliff Wallis, Alberta Wilderness Association, (403) 271-1408

Helene Walsh, CPAWS Edmonton, (780) 922-0908

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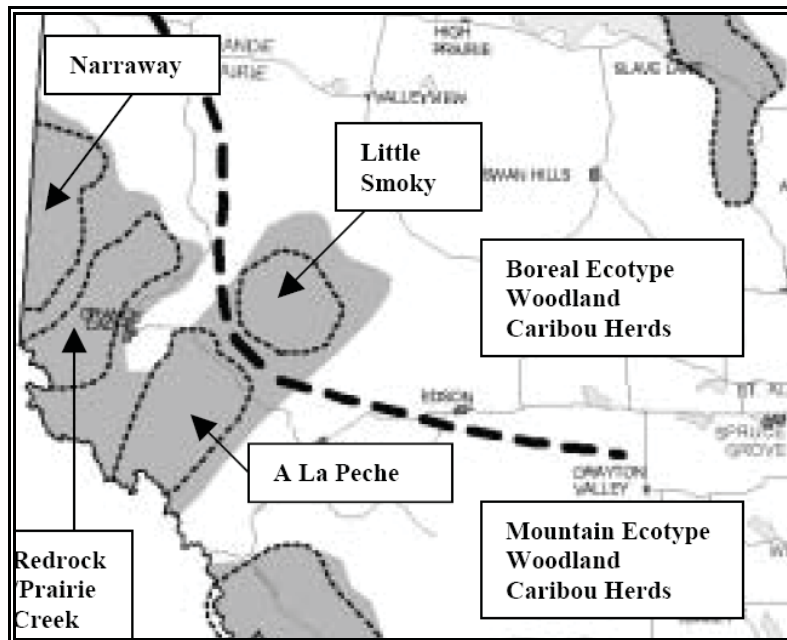
“Woodland caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) is listed as *Threatened* under Alberta’s *Wildlife Act*. This status reflects continuing declines in caribou population size and distribution, small population size, the dependency of woodland caribou on older forest, and the sensitivity of this species to human activities. The southern mountain and boreal populations of woodland caribou have been listed as *Threatened* within Canada. While recovery of woodland caribou in Alberta is feasible from a biological and technical standpoint, commitment, collaboration and action by government and involved stakeholders are paramount to successfully recovering this species” (Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan 2005).

Human activities such as timber harvesting and oil and gas exploration and development remove vegetation cover and lichens important for caribou habitat. Research has also shown that caribou reduce their use of suitable habitat in proximity to seismic lines, roads and well sites and roads become a physical barrier (Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan 2005).

The Little Smoky herd was identified in the recovery plan as being at “immediate risk of extirpation.” The plan notes that there are “exceedingly high levels of geophysical exploration lines, moderate roadway development, and several new major corridor routes, and some areas of intensive oil/gas well site development, as well as low to moderate levels of oil/gas well site development throughout the remainder of the range.” There are “high to very high levels of timber harvest around the periphery of the range (both within and outside of the range) and harvest within the central portions of the range is increasing.”

For herds in “Immediate Risk of Extirpation,” the recovery plan recommended: “A moratorium on further mineral and timber resource allocation (sales) should be put in place until a range plan is completed, evaluated, and implemented.” This recommendation was not agreed to by Minister Coutts.

Both Mr. Semenchuk and Mr. Wallis voiced their strong opposition to the wolf cull at the December meeting of the Alberta Caribou Committee and reiterated their call to identify areas that will be made off-limits to industrial activities in the Little Smoky caribou range. The groups will continue to pursue their petition (see Dec 21, 2005 news release) to the federal government to step in under the auspices of the federal Species at Risk Act due to the failure of Alberta to act responsibly for caribou recovery.



Location of Little Smoky Woodland Caribou Herd