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### **Government breaks policy to allow industrial use of Little Smoky caribou range**

"The new sale of oil and gas land leases in the heart of habitat for the Little Smoky Woodland Caribou herd, and logging by West Fraser are contrary to the government's own policy," says Helene Walsh of CPAWS: The 1996/1997 Operating Guidelines for Industrial Activity in Caribou Ranges in West Central Alberta state: *Industrial activity can occur on caribou range provided the integrity and supply of habitat is maintained to permit its use by caribou.*<sup>1</sup>

In 2004 an assessment of the caribou habitat in the Little Smoky was published by the logging companies active in the ranges, and the Alberta Government.<sup>2</sup> It concluded that the Little Smoky range "...does not currently provide habitat conditions sufficient to maintain stable caribou population growth..."

"Therefore, the industrial development that the government is allowing in the Little Smoky range is a complete disregard of their own policy that was intended to conserve caribou in west central Alberta," says Walsh. "The government, West Fraser and the petroleum industry involved in the lease sale are all acting against government policy. Canfor, on the other hand, has deferred their logging activity in the Little Smoky range for two years to allow planning by the new Alberta Caribou Committee to precede more development. That is the kind of progressive action we are expecting from other industry," she says.

The Little Smoky herd has been designated by government committee as at "immediate risk of extirpation," and the newly established Alberta Caribou Committee is supposedly focusing first on the recovery of this and adjacent herds. Meanwhile the government is blatantly undermining the efforts of this committee by permitting logging and new petroleum leasing in a caribou range that is already inadequate for caribou.

"It is this kind of failure by the Alberta government that supports the conservation groups petition to the federal government asking them to step in under its Species at Risk Act and ensure the survival of the Little Smoky herd and others in Alberta," says Glen Semenchuk, Executive Director of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists.

"The new lease sale is just one more indication that the Alberta government is out of step with the public on the environment," says Cliff Wallis past president of the Alberta Wilderness Association. "In the *Its Your Future* survey, Albertans ranked environment almost as high as education and health in priority. The government promised to listen to Albertans, but it seems they are not," says Wallis.

1. West Central Alberta Caribou Standing Committee. 1996. 1996/1997 Operating Guidelines for Industrial Activity in Caribou Ranges in West Central Alberta.

2. ANC Timber, Canfor, Weldwood, Weyerhaeuser, Alberta Fish and Wildlife. 2004. Caribou Habitat Assessment in the Little Smoky/A La Peche Region, West Central Alberta. 43 pp.

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