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Precaution and Protection Needed to Thwart Ecological Nightmare in Alberta's Forests

A new study by Global Forest Watch ranks Alberta as having the lowest amount of intact forest of all the provinces save the Maritimes. Cumulative effects from multiple industries have left Alberta's forests increasingly fragmented, threatening the habitat, and therefore survival, of species such as caribou, grizzly bears and many migratory birds. AWA agrees with Global Forest Watch that a precautionary approach needs to be taken in managing our remaining wild forests and supports goals that sustain our natural forest ecosystems.

"The study supports what AWA has been saying for decades. It is critical that there be an immediate halt to new industrial activities in our most sensitive wildlife habitats and protected areas," says Cliff Wallis, AWA Past-President. The study, *Canada's Forest Landscape Fragments*, shows that only 4% of Alberta's forests have intact forest sections larger than 10,000 hectares.

"The Little Smoky area is a good example of how the government's failure to manage the cumulative effects of industry has led to the near extinction of caribou in this formally prime habitat," says David Samson, AWA Conservation Specialist. The northern foothills area is increasingly fragmented by logging and oil and gas activity. "The Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan identifies habitat change from industrial activity as key factors in declining caribou populations."

Although the government has made some progress in recognizing the importance of ecosystem-based management in its draft forest management planning standard, there are key deficiencies that must be addressed. AWA recommends using the FSC National Boreal Standard, which was developed with broad national input, as a minimum, and that all sectors coordinate their activities so that these standards are maintained. AWA also recommends establishing large interconnected protected areas as ecological benchmarks to protect critical wildlife habitat.

"The ministers responsible for energy and forestry clearly have a different agenda that includes wolf culls, massive clearcuts and an exponential increase in fragmentation by oil and gas development, including coalbed methane," says Wallis, a member of the FSC National Boreal Standard Working Group.

"Albertans have been lulled into a false sense of security by their oil riches. We still have time to save some of the best wildlands if we wake up from our petroleum induced dream and see the ecological nightmare that is happening around us," he adds.

AWA supports ecosystem-based forest management which maintains natural structure and patterns in the forests, particularly large patches of old-growth, reduces fragmentation and linear disturbance, preserves biodiversity, protects watersheds, has effective monitoring systems and meaningful and broad public participation.

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