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Request to Revoke Park Status for Caribou Mountains Disgraceful

The Advisory Committee for the Caribou Mountains Wildland Management Plan wants the park status for this protected area revoked. AWA is asking Community Development minister, Hon. Denis Ducharme, to rebuke the Committee's request to disestablish the Wildland Park. AWA is also asking the minister to allow representation, on the committee, from provincial environmental groups.

"We are puzzled by their motivations," says Cliff Wallis, AWA Board of Directors. "This demand is coming from a committee responsible for recommending management for this protected area. The committee should work on park protection, not lobby to have park status revoked. Those members who want park status revoked should resign immediately."

The committee's request would override the public's desire under the Special Places program to see this area protected. It would leave the door open to uncontrolled commercial development and unrestrained motorized recreation, both of which are incompatible with wildland protection. In poll after poll, Albertans have expressed strongly their desire to see these places protected.

"This shows what can happen when you place all the power in the hands of special interests within one local community," says Wallis. "These wildlands belong to all Albertans. Local committees are entrusted with the responsibility to act on behalf of all Albertans, not just their local or personal interest."

The boreal Caribou Mountains Wildland Park, adjacent to the western border of Wood Buffalo National Park, is the largest provincial wildland park at 5,910 km² and was established in 2001. The area protects provincial Environmentally Significant Areas which include sensitive wetlands, unique permafrost features, rich breeding bird habitat, and is a core refugium for woodland caribou.

The Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan states the park's herd is declining with a population drop of greater than 40% since 1995. Motorized access will further stress this endangered species.

"This may be the last pristine area in Alberta for the endangered woodland caribou," says David Samson, AWA Conservation Specialist. "The last thing this herd needs is more disruption from industry or motorized recreation."

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