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Alberta's War on Wolves: First it's Sterilization; Now it's Poisoning

As if the recent proposal to sterilize wolves in central Alberta were not enough, the Alberta government is now reportedly using strychnine to poison wolves in areas of northern Alberta.

This comes hot on the heels of an enormous public outcry into a recent "research project" which proposed sterilizing wolves near Rocky Mountain House, as a management tool to increase numbers of common ungulates such as deer and elk. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is calling for the Alberta government to stop using easy scapegoats such as wolves, and to deal with real issue affecting wildlife: habitat destruction.

"This latest wolf control program is nominally targeted at recovering populations of threatened woodland caribou," says Nigel Douglas, AWA conservation specialist. "But it is being done in the complete absence of any measures to deal with the loss of habitat, which is the real cause of the troubles for caribou."

Wolf control has been carried out in the territory of the Little Smoky caribou herd, north of Hinton, for the past three winters (155 wolves were killed between 2005 and 2007). Initially, wolves were shot from helicopters and left to rot where they fell. Now the cheaper option of poisoning is also being used, bringing with it the additional risks of incidental poisoning of other species, particularly predators such as eagles which feed on the wolf carcasses.

The Alberta government's own *Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan* (2005) made it clear that killing wolves will not recover caribou: "Ultimately, habitat conservation and management is the fundamental tool to reduce undue predation on caribou...Predator control will not succeed as a sole, or predominant, tool for caribou recovery."

The Little Smoky caribou herd was listed as "at immediate risk of extirpation" in the *Caribou Recovery Plan*. "While the government has leapt at the opportunity to kill wolves, they have continued to sell mineral leases in the habitat of woodland caribou, such as the Little Smoky herd," say Douglas. "They refuse to deal with the real issue, choosing instead to pick on their scapegoat of preference, the wolf."

AWA is calling for a moratorium on new industrial development in caribou habitat, and an immediate implementation of the provincial caribou recovery plan in its entirety.

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