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**Killing Wolves to Save Caribou**

*By Nigel Douglas*

Ted Morton, Minister for Sustainable Resource Development (SRD), has temporarily suspended the use of strychnine to kill wolves in northern Alberta until SRD staff have produced a report detailing where and how strychnine is being used throughout the province (including for ground squirrel control).

This follows a public outcry after details were leaked about the government's poisoning of wolves as part of its ongoing wolf-control program in the territory of the Little Smoky woodland caribou herd.

In the winters of 2005-06 and 2006-07, 155 wolves were killed in the Little Smoky region northwest of Hinton, principally by being shot from helicopters. This past winter, according to the *Hinton Parklander* (April 7), another 62 wolves were killed, though it is not clear how many of these were poisoned.

AWA opposes the use of strychnine for wolf control. Poisoned bait is buried in the snow in the winter, but there is little to prevent other carnivore species from taking the bait, and animals that may feed on the poisoned carcasses are also at risk.

Through its involvement on the Alberta Caribou Committee, AWA has argued for many years that if the government is serious about trying to recover endangered woodland caribou, it must address the issue of habitat destruction, which is what has pushed this species to the brink. 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 herd was defined in the 2005 Recovery Plan as at "immediate risk of extirpation." Unfortunately, killing wolves is much easier than reducing industrial impacts in woodland caribou habitat, and so the prospects for future caribou recovery look grim.

