



## CARIBOU AND WOLVES IMPERILED BY GOVERNMENT IMPOTENCE

By Christyann Olson, AWA Executive Director

In 1978, provincial biologists in conjunction with AWA and other Alberta conservation groups wrote the “*Caribou Management Outline for Alberta*”. That report’s major recommendations included:

- funds and resources must be allocated to ensure the protection of woodland caribou;
- wolf control must not be considered until a recovery program focusing on the cause of the caribou decline has been enacted;
- the government must no longer delay action that would reverse the long-term causes of caribou decline;
- a province-wide ban on hunting caribou must be initiated;
- a regional access management plan for industry and recreation must be created.

It is fair to say that despite the ongoing commitment and tenacity of AWA and others, thirty-one years later, we have not made much progress on these ideas and recommendations. While we no longer have a hunting season for caribou, we have been culling wolves,

and plans for the protection and now recovery of caribou have stalled. The situation seems to be one characterized by government impotence, inaction, or inertia – take your pick.

Lindsey Wallis’ article “Caribou herd set to disappear” appeared in Calgary’s *fast forward weekly* on July 2, 2009.

There she reveals the most recent assault on efforts to protect caribou and exposes a hard-hitting reality. When it comes to caribou protection the provincial government has been inactive, impotent.

Wallis reported that with the 80 member Little Smoky herd on the verge of extirpation the government agreed to implement a recommendation from the Alberta Caribou Committee. It will map intact caribou habitat that needs protection. But environmentalists quoted in the article warn that this piece of good news (alas, unless you are a member of the Little Smoky herd) is not as promising as they would like it to be. They claim industry drew the map to exclude large tracts of intact pine forest. Helene Walsh, boreal campaigner for CPAWS Northern Alberta speculated that “the province is using the ‘faulty map’ to approve a

20-year logging plan in the intact pine forest in the Little Smoky.”

Dave Ealey, a spokesperson for Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, acknowledged to Wallis that the map is deficient and said there needs to be “further refinements.” “We need a model we can use with all parties so they can play a part in restoration,” he said. “I can sense the frustration and I appreciate the concern. But we want to get this right. It’s a very complex process, we have a lot of things to do.”

Caribou in Alberta, like many of their global cousins, are in trouble. As Nigel Douglas reported in the June issue of the *Advocate* the North Banff caribou herd likely was wiped out by an April avalanche. What the Alberta government needs to do with respect to helping caribou recover was clearly presented in the 1978 recommendations. Such clarity should not have produced the years of impotence we, and Alberta’s caribou, have suffered through. How much longer will it be before Alberta does what Mr. Ealey says needs to be done?

In light of this arguably tragic record of impotence AWA refuses to support further wolf control measures. Any support for some wolf control action always was conditional on the government acting on the habitat protection front. To continue to offer some support for wolf control while Edmonton refuses to act on the habitat front would be tantamount to supporting a scenario threatening to two species – wolves and caribou.

Please take a few minutes to phone or write Premier Stelmach and the Honourable Ted Morton, the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, to let them know that our threatened caribou herds deserve immediate action. Urge them to take a political version of Viagra or Cialis to deal with this very sad case of government impotence. 🐾



*Caribou face a multitude of stressors and threats. Little has been done to measure the cumulative impacts of forestry, oil and gas, coal mining and motorized recreation. Serious legislated protection is needed for woodland caribou to recover. PHOTO: R. SLOAN*