
MEDIA RELEASE

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Environmental groups name feds in filing for caribou protection

*Groups demand Minister of Environment issue emergency protection order,
halt industrial and oilsands development in habitat areas*

EDMONTON — Environmental groups took steps today to ramp up pressure on the federal government to protect the province’s precious and declining caribou herds.

Ecojustice, on behalf of the Alberta Wilderness Association and the Pembina Institute, filed an application this morning for a federal judicial review, which asks the court to order Environment Minister Jim Prentice to issue emergency protections for seven caribou herds in northeastern Alberta.

The application alleges that Prentice has, to date, failed to meet legally-binding protection requirements for woodland caribou, a threatened species under Canada’s *Species at Risk Act*.

“Without immediate protection from industrial activities, these herds will disappear,” said Barry Robinson, Ecojustice staff lawyer. “This application is the next logical step to force some sort of response. We are hopeful that the court will require the Minister to do what he is legally required to do — to protect a threatened species.”

Meanwhile, Woodward & Company, a law firm based in Victoria, filed a similar application today on behalf of the Beaver Lake Cree Nation, Enoch Cree Nation and Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation.

Today’s filings follow letters sent from both camps demanding that Prentice enact emergency protections for these herds and halt industrial development in the caribou’s critical habitat.

Environment Canada and the Minister have yet to acknowledge and respond to these letters.

The federal government has committed to proposing a national caribou recovery strategy by summer 2011, but it could take another three to five years to put that strategy in motion.

In the meantime, urgent action is necessary. Caribou herds in northeastern Alberta are in serious decline — some herds have fewer than 100 members. Industrial expansion in caribou habitat poses a constant threat to their survival and recovery.

For more information, please visit: ecojustice.ca

“The federal government’s own science report in 2008 showed that these herds need immediate protection from further oilsands expansion and other activities,” said Simon Dyer, oilsands program director for the Pembina Institute.

At the provincial level, Alberta has refused to implement a recommendation in its own caribou recovery plan, prepared in 2005. The plan calls for a moratorium on further mineral and timber allocations in certain caribou ranges.

“The province has not done anything to protect these herds and the federal government is three years behind in preparing a recovery strategy for woodland caribou,” said Cliff Wallis, vice-president of the Alberta Wilderness Association. “It is essential that we get emergency protection for these herds while waiting for that strategy.”

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