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Alberta Ignores Caribou Scientists Again. Caribou Betrayed by Government Inaction

Alberta's long history of failed recovery of woodland caribou took another downwards lurch this week, when the Alberta government admitted that it would be ignoring the advice of its own scientists to downgrade this charismatic species from threatened to endangered. Despite clear evidence that caribou numbers continue to decline, twenty-four years of inaction look set to continue.

"The government's own scientists are sounding the alarm here," says Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist. "So why is it that everything gets dragged through this industry-based politicized process that ends up with nothing being done. The losers are the caribou in the end."

The government's Endangered Species Conservation Committee (ESCC) makes recommendations to the minister of Sustainable Resource Development on the status of Alberta wildlife. The ESCC is a 'stakeholder' committee, including representatives from the Alberta Forest Products Association, Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and the Western Stockgrowers' Association. As a non-expert committee, they often take scientific advice from their own Scientific Subcommittee. But when the Subcommittee recommended in December 2010 that the plight of woodland caribou was so dire that they should be downgraded from threatened to endangered, their advice was ignored.

The Alberta government is refusing to publish the recommendations of the Scientific Subcommittee, and so the reason why the ESCC decided to ignore the advice of its own scientists is unclear.

"The woodland caribou was first designated under Alberta's Wildlife Act in 1987," says Cliff Wallis, AWA President. "In the twenty-four years since then, despite endless reports and surveys, nothing meaningful has been done to keep industrial development and motorized access out of caribou habitat. The caribou's disappearance seems assured."

The plight of Alberta's imperiled woodland caribou is not in doubt. According to the government's 2010 updated report, Status of the Woodland Caribou in Alberta, "More provincial caribou populations are now in sustained population decline than was the case when the first edition of this status document was prepared in 2001."

AWA is asking for the Minister to release the Subcommittee documents or it will initiate a request under the *Freedom of Information and Privacy Act*. "This is a further betrayal by the Minister, the Hon. Mel Knight, and the Deputy Minister of SRD, Eric McGhan, who as recently as November 2010 promised action on caribou habitat protection to the Alberta Caribou Committee," notes Wallis.

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