



**Release Date:** August 17, 2011

## **Golden opportunity for caribou protection lost as Alberta inks secret 20 year forestry deal**

With a long overdue federal recovery strategy for Alberta's critically threatened woodland caribou anticipated to be only weeks away, the Government of Alberta has quietly signed a new 20 year Forest Management Agreement (FMA) with Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries (Al-Pac) that closes the door on protecting caribou habitat in northeastern Alberta. The agreement seems to ignore the protection scientists say is critical for woodland caribou and other wildlife affected by forestry and oil sands industries in the FMA's 58,000 km<sup>2</sup> swath of north central and northeastern Alberta.

"Losing this one-in-20-year opportunity is one more nail in the coffin for Alberta's woodland caribou which are now rapidly dwindling to oblivion," says Cliff Wallis of Alberta Wilderness Association. "Alberta seems to squander every conservation opportunity in order to fast-track and sew up deals with private interests. Such irresponsible behavior is counter to what Albertans have told government that they want—more forest protection, not less."

In an astonishing reversal of responsibility, a new provision in the FMA says the government can maintain and enhance fish and wildlife in these public forests "provided the Company's right to establish, grow, harvest and remove timber is not significantly impaired."

"These forests belong to Albertans, not to Al-Pac," says Carolyn Campbell of Alberta Wilderness Association. "Producing timber is one possible use, but we have longstanding international obligations to maintain species diversity there. To make wildlife protection subject to a multinational forestry company's bottom line is a huge step backward for wildlife protection on public lands in this province."

The FMA area overlaps Alberta's Athabasca oil sands deposit and is home to eight threatened woodland caribou herds. The Alberta Wilderness Association and the Pembina Institute, represented by Ecojustice, were recently in Federal Court seeking protection for those herds. As a [result](#) of that proceeding, the federal Minister of Environment's decision not to recommend emergency protection for those herds has been quashed and the Minister has been ordered to reconsider whether emergency protections are required in light of the evidence of the herds' significant declines.

"This newly approved FMA highlights why the federal Minister of Environment needs to step in and order emergency protections for the woodland caribou," says Melissa Gorrie, staff lawyer with Ecojustice. "Since the Alberta government is clearly unwilling to implement any meaningful protections for woodland caribou, federal intervention is essential if the herds are going to have any chance of survival."

### **For more information:**

Carolyn Campbell, conservation specialist, Alberta Wilderness Association, (403) 283-2025

Melissa Gorrie, staff lawyer, Ecojustice, (780) 428-0033

Cliff Wallis, vice president, Alberta Wilderness Association, (403) 607-1970 (mobile)