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## **New Road in Little Smoky Caribou Range Mocks Alberta Policy**

A new road built in the last several weeks by Tourmaline Oil Corp. within critical habitat of the threatened Little Smoky caribou herd in west central Alberta shows the Alberta government is not following its own 2011 caribou policy. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) calls on the Alberta government to protect threatened caribou in this and other ranges in Alberta.

“Tis the season to improve survival chances of ‘Alberta’s reindeer’, the threatened woodland caribou,” says Carolyn Campbell, AWA conservation specialist. “Instead, Alberta is allowing more roads and forest clearings to threaten the Little Smoky herd, which is at immediate risk of dying out. This is counter to Alberta’s pledged policy and counter to the federal government’s recent recovery strategy.”

Alberta’s 2011 woodland caribou policy states, “Immediate action is required to ensure the long-term presence of naturally thriving woodland caribou populations in Alberta... Actions will be undertaken to address caribou habitat needs, including achievement of these requirements in land-use planning and approvals.” The federal caribou recovery strategy states that a minimum of 65% undisturbed area of each caribou range is the critical habitat necessary to achieve recovery objectives.

Scientists estimate that the Little Smoky caribou herd’s range is already 95% disturbed (applying a 500 m buffer), meaning that every relatively intact site is important to retain. A new road was recently built into a peat wetland area that floods in spring, close to a creek just south of the Little Smoky River, displacing a sub-herd of about 15 animals. Another road and well site is slated for a nearby caribou breeding area north of the Little Smoky River.

A wolf kill program has killed over 650 wolves in the Little Smoky caribou range since 2005. The root cause of higher wolf predation on caribou remains unchecked, namely intensive forestry and energy industry fragmentation of the intact boreal forest which the caribou need to separate themselves from wolves. Scientists have warned that without urgent actions to protect and restore caribou habitat, this sentinel species will only last a few more decades in Alberta in the Little Smoky and in the Athabasca oilsands region. By ensuring a future for the woodland caribou in Alberta, other wildlife such as migratory birds that depend on intact boreal forest will also benefit.

**For more information:**

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

**Background:** Maps (below) of Little Smoky caribou range and disturbance levels





**Alberta Caribou Range Map**

Source: Government of Alberta (2010). *Status of the woodland caribou (Rangifer tarandus caribou) in Alberta*, page 3.

<http://www.srd.alberta.ca/FishWildlife/SpeciesAtRisk/DetailedStatus/Mammals/documents/Status-WoodlandCaribou-inAlberta-Jul-2010.pdf>

Note that the Little Smoky caribou population's range is in the foothills west of Edmonton.

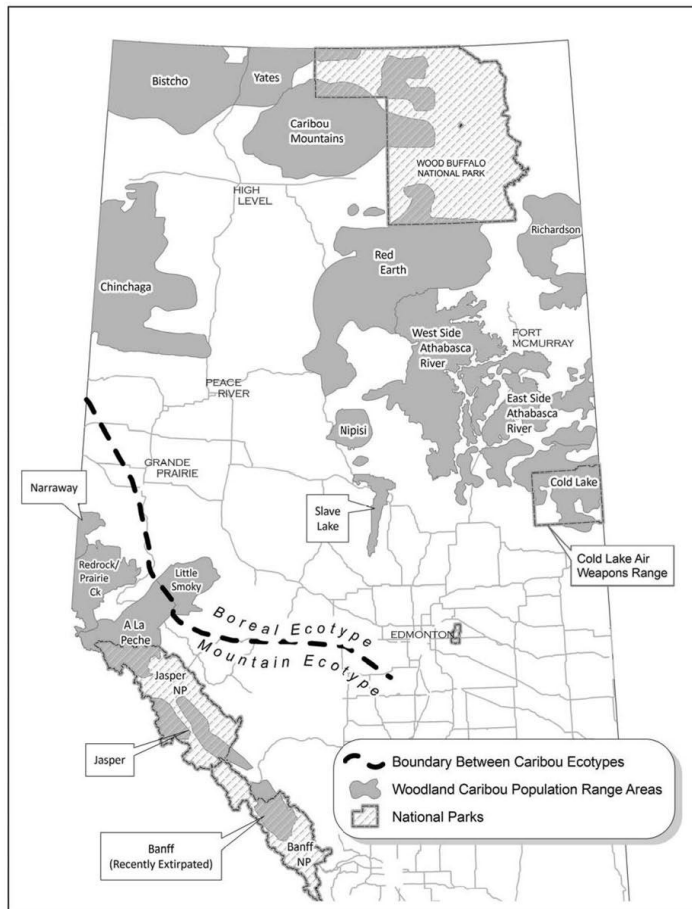


Figure 2. Woodland caribou population names and approximate current range areas in Alberta.





**Little Smoky Caribou Critical Habitat Maps – Identification and Disturbance**

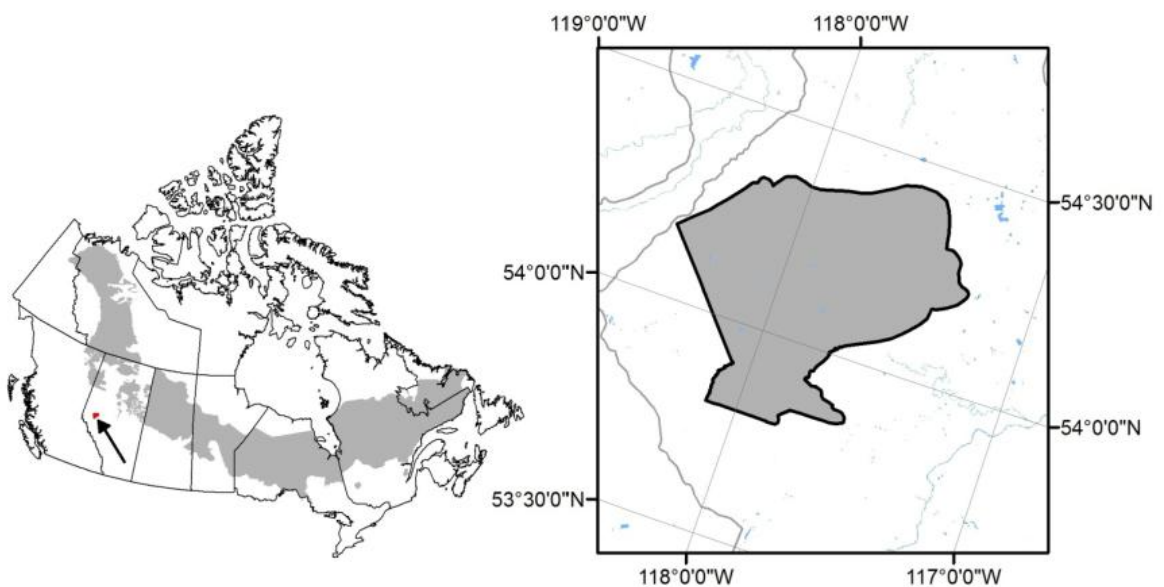
Source: Environment Canada (2011). *Appendix F-3a: Critical habitat factsheets for remaining, non self-sustaining local populations [Proposed]*, pages 16 and 18.

[http://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/virtual\\_sara/files/plans/rs\\_appendix\\_3\\_eng.pdf](http://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/virtual_sara/files/plans/rs_appendix_3_eng.pdf)

**Critical Habitat Identification: Little Smoky (Alberta)**

*The identification of critical habitat for boreal caribou is described by three factors for each local population: i) Location of habitat; ii) Amount of habitat; and iii) Type of habitat.*

A) **Location:** Where critical habitat is found.



**Figure 1: Keymap of the general location of the local population (in red).**

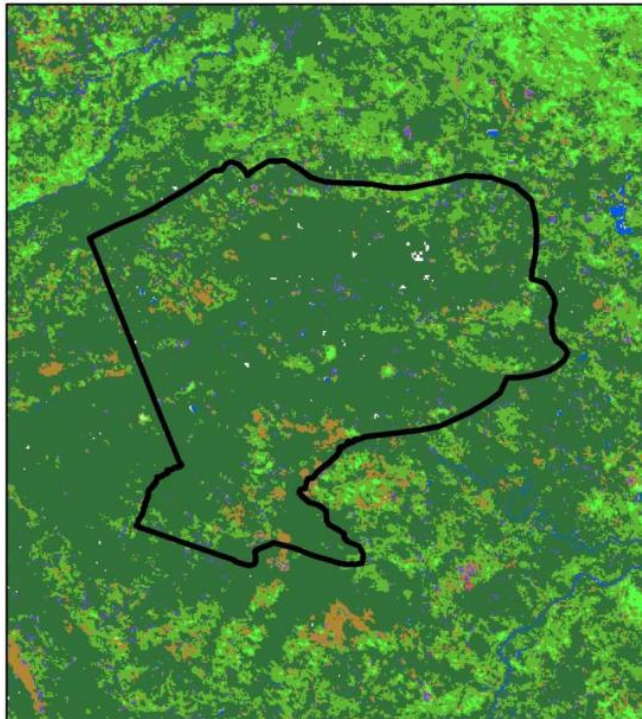
**Figure 2: The geographic boundary within which critical habitat is located (in grey).**





**Critical Habitat Identification: Little Smoky (Alberta)**

**D) Additional Information:**



**Landcover**

- |                   |            |              |
|-------------------|------------|--------------|
| Water             | Shrub      | Rock Outcrop |
| Coniferous Forest | Herbaceous | Recent Burn  |
| Deciduous Forest  | Wetland    | Old Burn     |
| Mixed Forest      | Cropland   | Built-Up     |

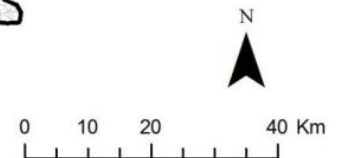
MODIS 2005 Landcover (250m Pixels) (Generated by CCRS)  
Legend reclassified by EC  
With NTDB 1:250,000 Hydrology Layer

**Disturbances Across Caribou Range**



**Legend**

- Burned Areas (1970-2010)
- Polygonal Disturbances
- Linear Disturbances



\*Based on fire data provided by jurisdictions

**Disturbance Type and Amount:**

Burned Areas = 0.2%  
Buffered<sup>3</sup> Anthropogenic (no reservoirs) = 95%  
Total Habitat Disturbance = 95%<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Buffered means a 500m buffer is applied to linear and polygonal disturbances.

<sup>4</sup> Total Habitat Disturbance is non-overlapping which means anthropogenic disturbances and burned areas that overlap are not counted twice in the total.

