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## **March 2013 Energy Lease Sales Break Alberta Caribou Policy**

The Alberta government is selling new petroleum and natural gas lease sales in five threatened caribou range areas in March 2013, including in an auction that closes today, despite already unacceptably high industrial disturbance of caribou habitat in those areas. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) calls on the Alberta government to cease new surface leasing and new disturbance permits in Alberta caribou ranges and to make good on its promises to maintain and restore caribou habitat.

“These new leases violate Alberta’s 2011 woodland caribou policy that places an immediate priority on maintaining caribou habitat”, says Carolyn Campbell, AWA conservation specialist. “If Alberta is sincere about responsible energy development, the provincial government should defer new leasing and disturbance until enough caribou habitat can be restored to recover the populations.”

According to Environment Canada, woodland caribou need at least 65% undisturbed habitat to have even a 60% chance of being self-sustaining. Alberta’s 2011 caribou policy states “The Government of Alberta is committed to achieving naturally sustaining woodland caribou populations.” In January 2012, Global Forest Watch Canada reported that the eight Alberta caribou herds in the oil sands development areas already had 64% industrial disturbance. Alberta’s existing project-level operating guidelines are woefully inadequate to address cumulative impacts of industry’s footprint, and have been recognized as such by the Alberta government and industry via Alberta Caribou Committee work. New protected areas announced for northeast Alberta will only cover 20% of caribou ranges and will allow conventional oil and gas leases that were already sold to be developed in those new parks.

In the Little Smoky range in west central Alberta, where over 95% of the caribou’s habitat is disturbed by industry, 3 new leases affecting 1300 hectares were sold March 6. In this caribou range, the Alberta government conducts massive wolf kills using helicopter shooting and poisoning to keep the herd of 80 caribou from dying out – 650 wolves had been killed as of spring 2012. Yet the government is ignoring the root cause of caribou declines: industrial disturbance that raises deer and moose prey populations, draws in wolves, and makes it very difficult for caribou calves to survive.

Energy leases selling today are in ranges of the Chinchaga caribou population (which already has 74% industrial disturbance) and the Redrock-Prairie Creek herd (which has 31% industrial disturbance). Other March 6 sales were within the ranges of the West Side of Athabasca River caribou (with 68% industrial disturbance of habitat), Bistcho caribou (61% industrial disturbance) and Chinchaga caribou populations (74% industrial disturbance).

**For more information:**

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