



**ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION**

*"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"*

May 7, 2013

Hon. Ken Hughes  
Minister of Energy, Government of Alberta  
#404 Legislature Building  
10800 - 97 Avenue  
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6  
Sent via e-mail: [Minister.energy@gov.ab.ca](mailto:Minister.energy@gov.ab.ca)

Dear Minister Hughes:

Thank you for your letter of May 2, 2013. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is pleased that you have placed a temporary hold on the sale of new mineral rights leases in the Little Smoky and A La Pêche caribou ranges, effective May 1, 2013. We are also pleased that the hold will be in place until Cabinet approves range plans for these caribou populations, which are expected in 2014. These are both important steps to increasing the survival chances of two of Alberta's fifteen caribou populations on provincial lands.

As you know, AWA issued a news release, attached, praising the government for these decisions. The story was carried widely on provincial and national media on May 3 and May 4.

We understand Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD) is leading caribou range plan development and we will engage with them on that. Because Alberta Energy will greatly influence the energy industry aspect of range plans, we ask that you support these elements of range plans:

- Measurable habitat land disturbance limits to work towards within specific time frames, including near-term progress requirements.
- Modifications to the required proof of mineral rights productivity to achieve no new surface disturbance of mostly intact or restored habitat. For example, trackless seismic, together with horizontal drilling from clustered well pads located outside intact habitat, would significantly help to maintain habitat.
- Modifications of how development of validated leases typically proceeds to achieve no new disturbance of mostly intact or restored habitat, for example, using horizontal drilling from clustered well pads located outside intact habitat.

- Development of a government-industry funding mechanism to identify and conduct highest-impact reforestation/restoration work of legacy seismic lines, roads and other disturbance. Current restoration work is limited, far outpaced by new disturbance and lacks secure funds.
- Formal protection of more caribou habitat from industrial development

Because mineral rights leases in very important remaining intact habitat areas have been sold in the last few years and months, including in the April 24, 2013 rights auction, we ask that Alberta Energy support protocols to greatly reduce surface disturbance resulting from proving and developing existing mineral rights. Particularly for the 95% disturbed Little Smoky range, it is critical to manage these few remaining intact areas to avoid new surface disturbance.

Beyond the Little Smoky and A La Peche caribou populations, many Alberta caribou populations are in serious decline and need similar measures if they are to survive in their home ranges. We request that Alberta Energy defer leasing in other caribou populations and support measures, such as those outlined above, to considerably reduce new and legacy surface disturbance in their ranges. We believe that available technology and planning tools make these measures practical, and Alberta would be applauded for leadership in this area.

We look forward to hearing whether you are supportive of these measures to continue to move towards responsible energy development in Alberta.

Sincerely,  
ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION



Carolyn Campbell  
Conservation Specialist

cc:

Hon. Diana McQueen, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development  
Hon. Robin Campbell, MLA West Yellowhead  
Jennifer Steber, Acting Deputy Minister, Alberta Energy

Attachment:

May 3, 2013 AWA News Release: Alberta Defers New Energy Leasing in Two Caribou Herd Ranges



Release Date: May 3, 2013

## **Alberta Defers New Energy Leasing in Two Caribou Herd Ranges**

For the first time, Alberta is deferring the sale of new mineral rights across the entire range of two of its fifteen caribou herds until Cabinet first adopts range plans describing how critical habitat will be protected to recover those two populations. In a letter yesterday to Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA), Alberta Energy Minister Ken Hughes stated that effective immediately, new mineral rights sales will be halted across the Little Smoky and A La Peche herd ranges northeast of Jasper National Park until range plans are approved in 2014. AWA welcomes this decision by the Redford government as a good first step in the survival chances of these two caribou herds.

“We greatly appreciate the Redford government’s leadership in taking a step that previous Alberta governments have not taken, to stop adding new lease pressures to these caribou when they are already far past the levels they can tolerate,” says Carolyn Campbell, conservation specialist at Alberta Wilderness Association. “This is an important first step in maintaining habitat necessary for these two herds’ survival. We look forward to additional positive steps by government and industry as we work towards restoring caribou populations and their ranges in Alberta.”

The federal government’s boreal woodland caribou strategy, finalized in October 2012, mandates that provinces will develop range plans for woodland caribou survival. Caribou range plans will describe how critical habitat will be protected to attain a minimum of 65% undisturbed habitat over time, and provide a range-specific path forward for the recovery of that caribou population.

Industrial disturbance of caribou habitat is recognized as the underlying driver of steep declines in Alberta’s caribou populations. The Little Smoky range currently has less than 5% undisturbed habitat. This rights sale deferral decision affects two of the fifteen Alberta caribou populations on provincial lands.

**For more information:**

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

