



ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

May 8, 2013

Hon. Diana McQueen
Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, Government of Alberta
#204 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6
Sent via e-mail: Esrd.minister@gov.ab.ca

Request to Defer Forestry Plan Approvals in Little Smoky and A La Peche Ranges to Complement Mineral Rights Lease Deferrals

Dear Minister McQueen:

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) was pleased to learn in a May 2, 2013 letter from Alberta Energy Minister Hughes that Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD) is leading caribou range plan development in the Little Smoky and A La Peche caribou ranges that are anticipated to be completed and approved by Cabinet in 2014. We are also pleased that, effective May 1, 2013, new mineral rights sales will be placed on hold in these two caribou ranges until Cabinet approves these range plans.

These are both important steps to increase 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.

Forestry-related disturbance continues to be a very significant source of habitat loss for the Little Smoky and A La Peche caribou populations. To be consistent with deferral of new mineral rights sales, we therefore request as a matter of high importance that forestry plan approvals in Little Smoky and A La Peche caribou ranges also be deferred. We also urge ESRD to work with FMA and quota holders to stop imminent logging in these ranges ahead of range plan development.

In addition to managing forestry to steadily restore caribou old growth forest and peat wetland habitat to at least the 65% undisturbed level, we also ask that ESRD include these elements in range plans:

- Measurable habitat land disturbance limits to work towards within specific time frames, including near-term progress requirements.
- Modifications to proving and developing mineral rights 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.
- 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

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. This is an urgent matter, as calf survival rate is already very low in some ranges. We request that ESRD move to implement plans and actions for increasing intact habitat in other caribou 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 will defer new forest plan approvals in the Little Smoky and A La Peche ranges to continue to move towards responsible resource development in Alberta.

Sincerely,
ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION



Carolyn Campbell
Conservation Specialist

cc:
Hon. Robin Campbell, MLA West Yellowhead
Dana Woodworth, Deputy Minister ESRD
Bruce Mayer, ADM Forestry
Matthew Machielse, ADM ESRD Operations
Shannon Flint, ADM ESRD Policy
Bev Yee, ADM Integrated Resource Management Planning
Rick Blackwood, ADM ESRD Strategy

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:

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