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Time for Alberta Forest Industry to Stop Logging in Critical Caribou Habitat

As the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement (CBFA) marks its three year anniversary at the end of this week, companies are still logging in threatened Alberta caribou habitat. CBFA promised to accelerate protection of caribou and other boreal species at risk, but even though it was signed by most of Alberta's forest industry, it has not delivered in Alberta. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) and Keepers of the Athabasca call on the forestry industry to stop logging in Alberta critical caribou habitat until sustainable populations are attained.

"The Alberta Government is not acting to protect our caribou populations in spite of commitments to do so," said Helene Walsh with Keepers of the Athabasca. "Therefore, we ask forestry companies to step up and at least temporarily stop logging of critical caribou habitat as an urgent and first step in halting caribou decline in Alberta."

"Alberta Pacific Forest Industries and Millar Western continue logging in critical caribou habitat in the oil sands region, even though they are both signatories to the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement," said Cliff Wallis, AWA vice-president. "Ideally, some oil sands industry profits could be directed to the forest industry to protect caribou range from logging and increase caribou survival. That would be a much needed good environmental story for our industry, caribou and Alberta," said Wallis.

While progress under the CBFA in other provinces has also been slow, caribou populations in northeast Alberta will disappear in a few decades, according to scientists, unless urgent actions to maintain and recover habitat begin now. "The steep decline of caribou in the oil sands region clearly illustrates that Alberta environmental practices are irresponsible. This makes it extremely difficult for our Premier to argue that we are sustainably managing industrial development," said Carolyn Campbell, AWA conservation specialist. "It is urgent for companies that have committed to protect caribou habitat to actually do it. Taking action will not only help the caribou but also help our international reputation."

All caribou ranges in Alberta are already considered by Environment Canada to be too disturbed to maintain caribou. In west central Alberta's Little Smoky caribou range which is over 95% disturbed by industry, new mineral rights sales were recently deferred by government; yet Canfor, and West Fraser's joint venture Alberta Newsprint Company, continue logging critical habitat inside the Little Smoky range.

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