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Impending Alberta Energy Leasing in Endangered Mountain Caribou Habitat Counter to New Federal Recovery Strategy

The federal southern mountain caribou recovery strategy finalized yesterday sets a goal to increase all populations, maintain current distribution and restore habitat in core and buffer areas in and around ranges. The strategy confirms that Alberta's upcoming new energy lease sales of 900 hectares in June and July (and sales of 1000 hectares in May) allowing more surface disturbance in crucial caribou winter range will further undermine survival of its endangered caribou. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) calls on the Alberta government to stop energy leasing, including the 500 hectares planned for sale June 11, until range action plans are developed to ensure the recovery of these mountain caribou.

"The new mountain caribou recovery strategy authorized under federal law, combined with remarkable support across Alberta regions, groups and the political spectrum to save these caribou and their habitat, confirms that Alberta's ongoing energy leasing in endangered caribou habitat is on the wrong side of science, public opinion, and its own caribou policy," says Carolyn Campbell, conservation specialist at AWA. "Stopping new lease sales to work out real surface disturbance limit rules that replace the current ineffective guidelines is a crucial first step for these caribou's recovery."

Alberta's mountain caribou need to migrate to the foothills for suitable winter range food and cover, but less than 2% of Alberta's foothills region is protected, far below international standards recommending 17% or more of natural regions be protected. Industrial disturbance and human footprint within caribou habitat is recognized as the underlying driver of steep declines in their populations, robbing them of the ability to minimize overlap with predators.

The federal government's southern mountain woodland caribou strategy, finalized yesterday, commits to action plans within three years that describe how critical habitat and buffer areas will be restored to reduce predator numbers and recover self-sustaining caribou populations. Scientists confirmed in the new strategy that recovery of mountain caribou populations is both biologically and technically feasible. "Solutions are within reach if energy operators are required to use available technology for trackless seismic and directional drilling to reduce the existing footprint, and if forestry jobs shift to restore habitat in range, and share wood fibre outside range," says Campbell. "The expanding footprint enabled by Alberta's current weak guidelines just makes this more difficult."

Alberta halted new energy lease sales in the Little Smoky boreal and A La Pêche mountain caribou range in May 2013 until range plans are developed, but continues to deepen the crisis in other mountain caribou ranges by selling new leases with no overall footprint limits. Over 500 hectares are planned for sale June 11 in Redrock-Prairie Creek range, and over 200 hectares on June 25 in the Narraway range.

For more information:

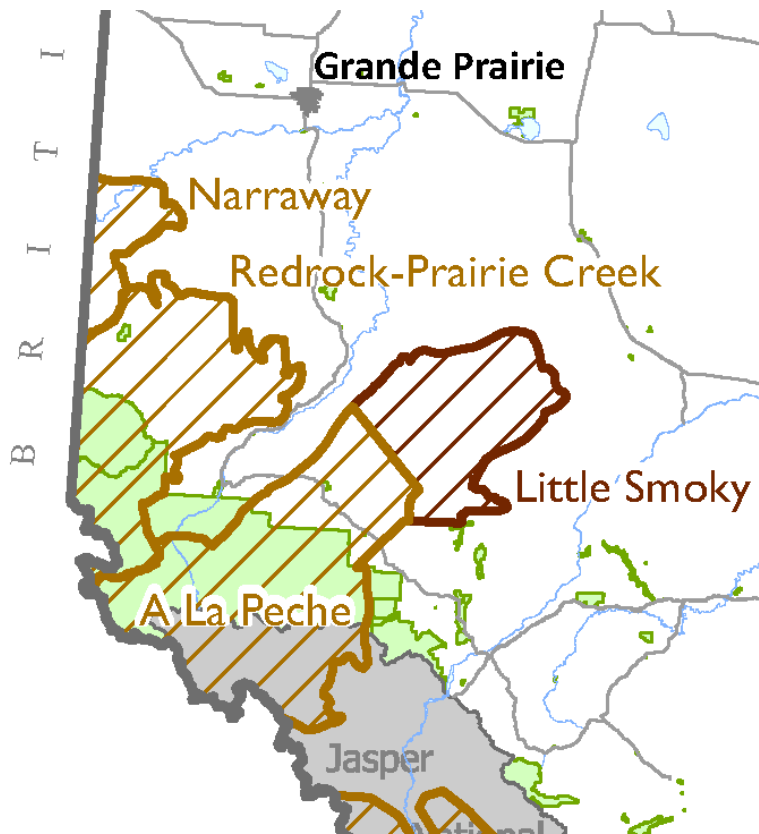
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Attachment: Map of Alberta's endangered mountain caribou range areas





Map 1 - Ranges of endangered Alberta mountain caribou populations in west-central Alberta



Source: Excerpt of provincial map of Caribou Ranges, Alberta Government, 2013.

