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Alberta Selling Endangered Caribou Habitat to Produce Its Oil and Gas

This week, Alberta's Energy Minister visits crude oil customers in Delaware, Philadelphia and New York City while endangered caribou habitat is slated to be auctioned June 11 for new oil and gas leases. The leases allow new surface disturbance, making survival chances even worse for the caribou. The Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) wants American consumers of Alberta crude to know that halting new energy leasing in endangered caribou ranges is critical.

Alberta Energy Minister Diana McQueen visits refineries in Delaware City (June 9) and Philadelphia (June 10). She will attend the 2014 North American Energy Summit in New York June 11. On June 11, 1300 acres of new oil and gas leases will be auctioned off in mountain caribou ranges, and 650 acres in boreal caribou ranges.

"Alberta's project-level 'guidelines' are far too weak for caribou survival, as shown by their widespread population declines," says Carolyn Campbell, AWA conservation specialist. "Lease sales should halt until real rules to reduce surface disturbance are put in place."

Since mountain caribou populations were assessed as 'Endangered' in early May, Alberta's two major daily newspapers, wilderness and fish and game groups, and a broad spectrum of political leaders have called for a halt to auctions in these ranges. Alberta's mountain caribou populations (living in the province's western mountains) have decreased by more than 60% since 2002 and its boreal herds to the north are in equally dire straits.

Industry disturbance levels in these caribou ranges already far exceed limits the caribou can tolerate, robbing them of their ability to minimize contact with wolves and other predators. Scientists have stated that recovery of these caribou is technically and biologically possible: under Canada's *Species at Risk Act*, Alberta must develop range plans outlining how habitat will be maintained and restored, yet the new energy lease sales will result in even more habitat disturbance.

"Solutions are within reach if energy operators are required to use directional drilling technology to reduce the existing footprint," says Campbell. "The expanding footprint enabled by Alberta's current weak guidelines further endangers the caribou."

For more information on caribou in Alberta see <http://albertawilderness.ca/issues/wildlife/caribou>

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