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Alberta Oil-Gas-Oilsands Footprint Grows in Endangered Caribou Habitat Despite Viable Alternatives

An area the size of Prince Edward Island (over 560,000 hectares) has been auctioned for new oil and gas leases in threatened Alberta woodland caribou ranges since October 2012. There are no meaningful surface disturbance limits on these leases even though the federal government directed provinces in October 2012 to reduce industry footprint within their caribou ranges.

A further 35,000 hectares of oil and gas lease sales in caribou range are planned from mid-October to early December 2014. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) calls on the Alberta government to develop meaningful, enforceable rules to reduce industry's footprint in caribou habitat. Provincial range plans required under the federal boreal caribou recovery strategy should provide tools to achieve this step; Alberta's first plans are expected soon for two endangered west central Alberta populations.

"Caribou desperately need the Alberta government's upcoming caribou range plans to reverse habitat loss by actually reducing industry footprint," says Carolyn Campbell. "Will the Prentice government preside over Alberta caribou extinction, or choose solutions for caribou that can also work for industry?"

Oil sands development drives caribou habitat destruction several ways. Over 80% of caribou ranges in northeast Alberta had bitumen leases as of 2011, and population rates for caribou there have declined by an estimated rate of 5-15% per year over the past two decades. Demand for liquids-rich gas to produce 'diluent' used to ship bitumen by rail and pipeline accounts for much of the intensive energy activity in caribou ranges in northwest and west central Alberta.

Significant energy extraction is possible while steadily recovering caribou habitat. Alberta could place total surface disturbance limits within caribou ranges and give companies alternatives to prove tenure, to motivate longer-distance directional drilling and pooling of leases. In that way, energy companies could still extract very significant resources while aggregating and reducing their surface footprint.

Premier Prentice pledged during his leadership candidacy: "if we're serious about becoming a global leader in energy, then we need to become a global leader in environmental performance. Under my leadership, we will establish Alberta as a world leader in the advancement of conservation and the protection of the environment." AWA looks forward to Alberta's upcoming range plans for the Little Smoky and A La Peche herds to fulfill that pledge by requiring total habitat disturbance levels to fall.

Energy and forestry footprint in caribou ranges stimulates deer, moose, and predator populations, robbing the caribou of their ability to minimize overlap with predators. Provincial scientists assessed Alberta woodland caribou as 'endangered' in 2010, though the province has not yet updated their listing from 'threatened'. Caribou recovery is both technically and biologically feasible, according to scientists.

For more information:

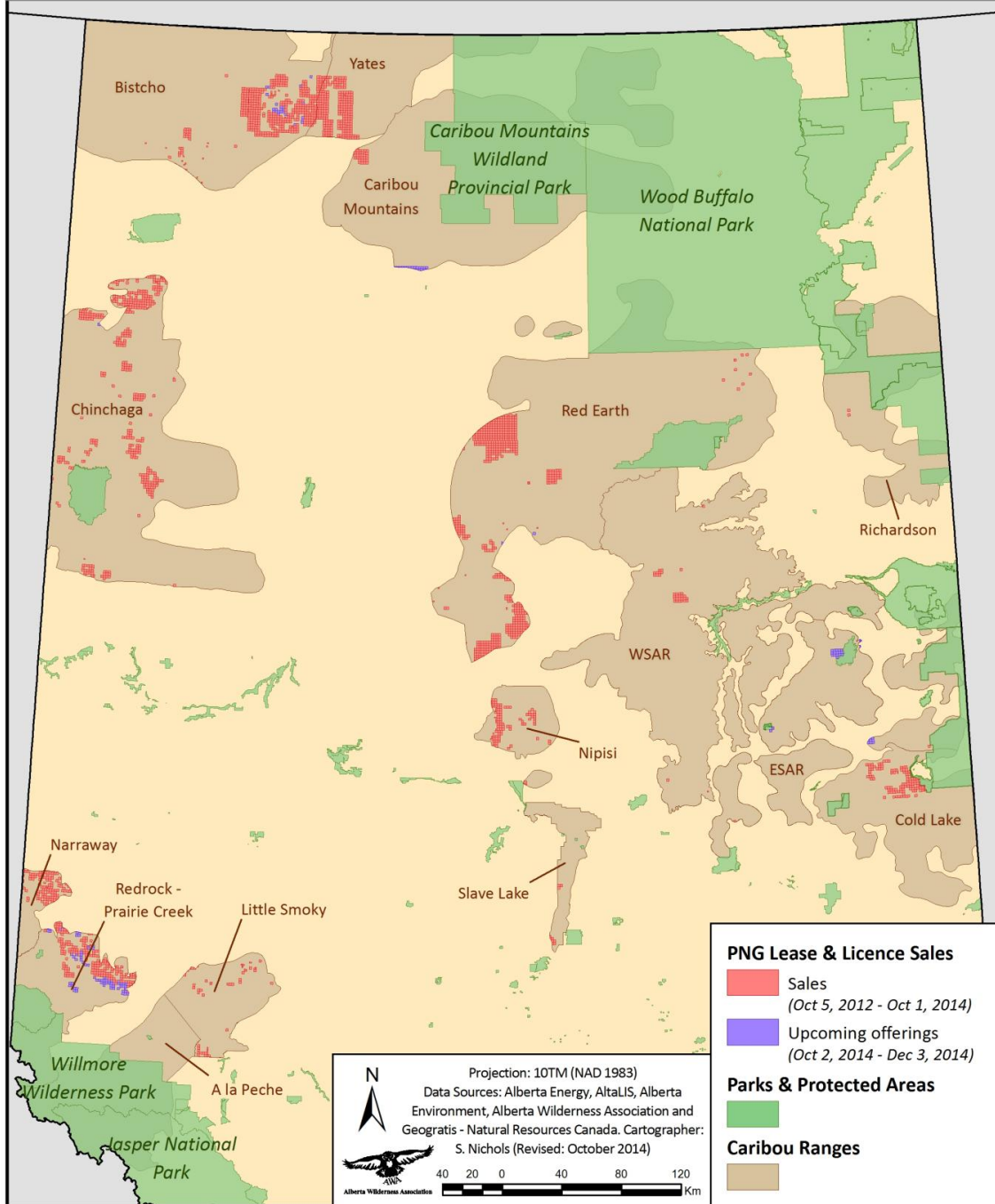
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Attached: Map and chart of recent and planned oil and gas leasing in Alberta caribou ranges





Alberta Oil and Gas (PNG) New Lease-Licence Sales in Caribou Ranges since Federal Boreal Caribou Recovery Strategy





Alberta New Lease-License Sales in Caribou Ranges since Federal Boreal Caribou Recovery Strategy

AB Caribou Population	Total Disturbed Habitat %	Auctioned since federal boreal woodland caribou recovery strategy, Oct 5 2012 (surface area – ha)	Upcoming auctions Oct 15 2014 to Dec 3 2014 (surface area - ha)
A La Peche	n/a	0	0
Narraway	81% ¹	27,416	0
Jasper (is within National Park)	n/a	0	0
Redrock-Prairie Creek	48% ¹	48,850	17,631
Total AB Mountain Caribou		76,266	17,631
Bistcho	71% ²	111,189	6,316
Caribou Mountains	57% ²	8,383	3,507
Chinchaga	76% ²	98,145	216
Cold Lake	85% ²	27,728	0
ESAR	81% ²	452	6,622
Little Smoky	95% ²	9,816	0
Nipisi	68% ²	22,161	0
Red Earth	62% ²	131,931	415
Richardson	82% ²	532	0
Slave Lake	80% ²	2,162	0
WSAR	69% ²	8,753	0
Yates	61% ²	63,073	0
Total AB Boreal Caribou		484,325	17,076
Total Alberta Caribou		560,591	34,707

1. Estimated by Global Forest Watch Canada using 2010 human footprint data.

2. Reported 2011 by Environment Canada.

Note: The federal boreal woodland caribou recovery strategy requires provinces to develop range plans outlining how at least 65% **undisturbed** habitat will be achieved and maintained over time in that range.

