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Caribou Worse Off After 10 Years of Alberta Recovery Plan

Ten years after Alberta's 2004-2014 woodland caribou recovery plan began, habitat disturbance keeps increasing far past limits caribou can tolerate, and populations have significantly declined. Data compiled by Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) reveals that an area 2/3 the size of Nova Scotia (over 33,000 km²) has been auctioned for new oil and gas leases in ranges across Alberta since the plan started, with no meaningful surface disturbance limits. Similarly, oil sands leases cover over 80% of northeast Alberta caribou ranges with no meaningful surface disturbance limits. AWA calls on the Alberta government to adopt rules that steadily reduce industry's net footprint in its first two caribou range plans expected under the 2012 federal recovery strategy.

"The past 10 years have been a failure for Alberta caribou recovery," says Carolyn Campbell, AWA conservation specialist. "Caribou desperately need Alberta's imminent range plans to reverse habitat loss by actually reducing industry footprint. Will the Prentice government preside over Alberta caribou extinction, or choose solutions for caribou that can also work for industry?"

Alberta's first plans are expected for the endangered Little Smoky and A La Peche populations in west central Alberta. Demand for liquids-rich gas to produce 'diluent' to transport bitumen by rail or pipeline accounts for most current energy activity in caribou ranges in northwest and west central Alberta. The entire foothills ranges of the Little Smoky and A La Peche is also leased to forestry companies that continue logging within range and in critical buffer zones surrounding the small ranges.

It is possible for energy companies to aggregate and reduce their surface footprint in caribou habitat while extracting resources: Alberta could place total surface disturbance limits within ranges and provide companies alternatives to prove tenure, to encourage longer-distance directional drilling and pooling of leases. Alberta could also require forestry companies to share fibre quotas outside ranges to fairly share the burden of ending in-range logging, and could require extensive reforestation crews financed by energy companies to cushion impacts to municipalities.

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:

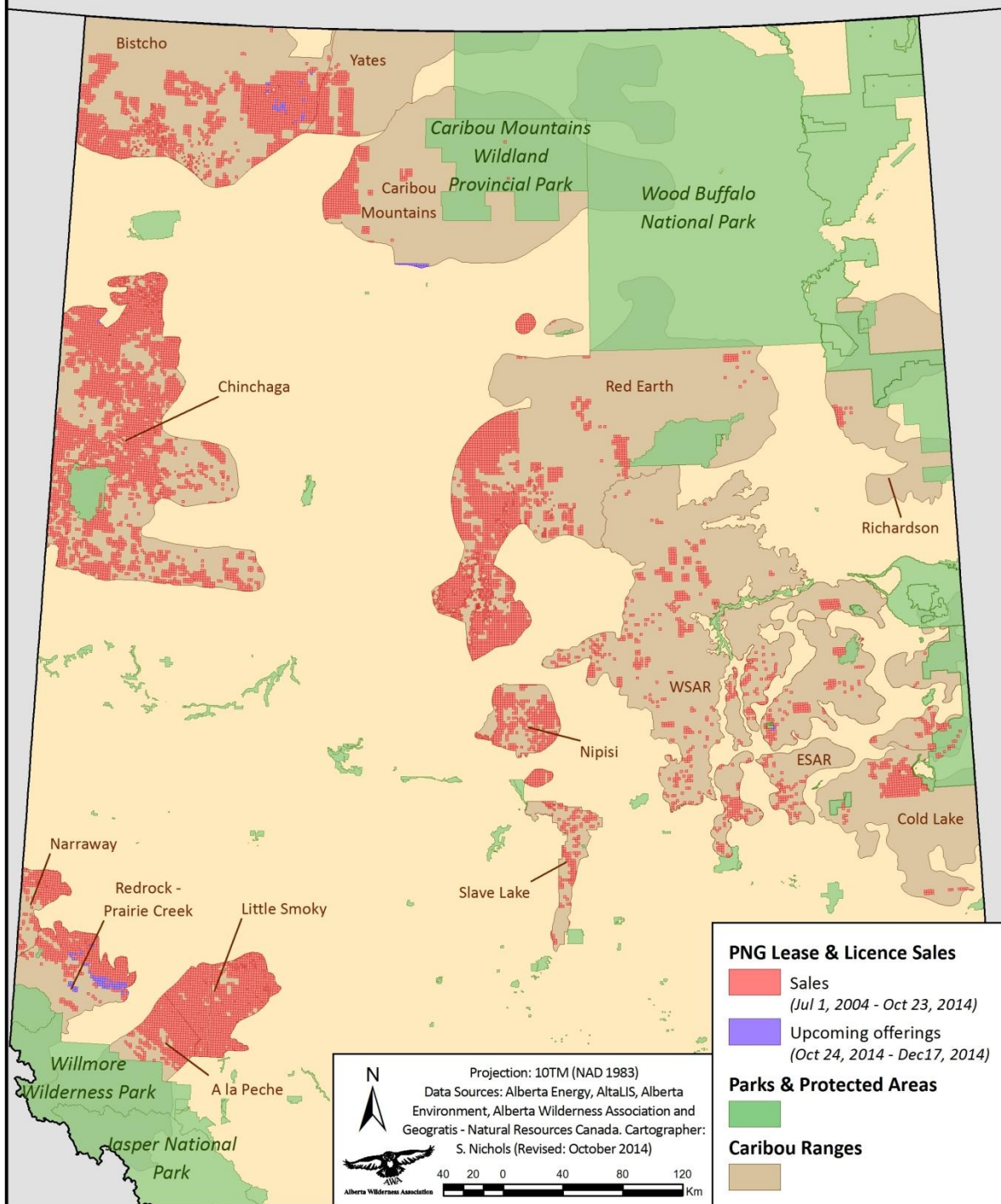
Carolyn Campbell, Alberta Wilderness Association, (403) 283-2025

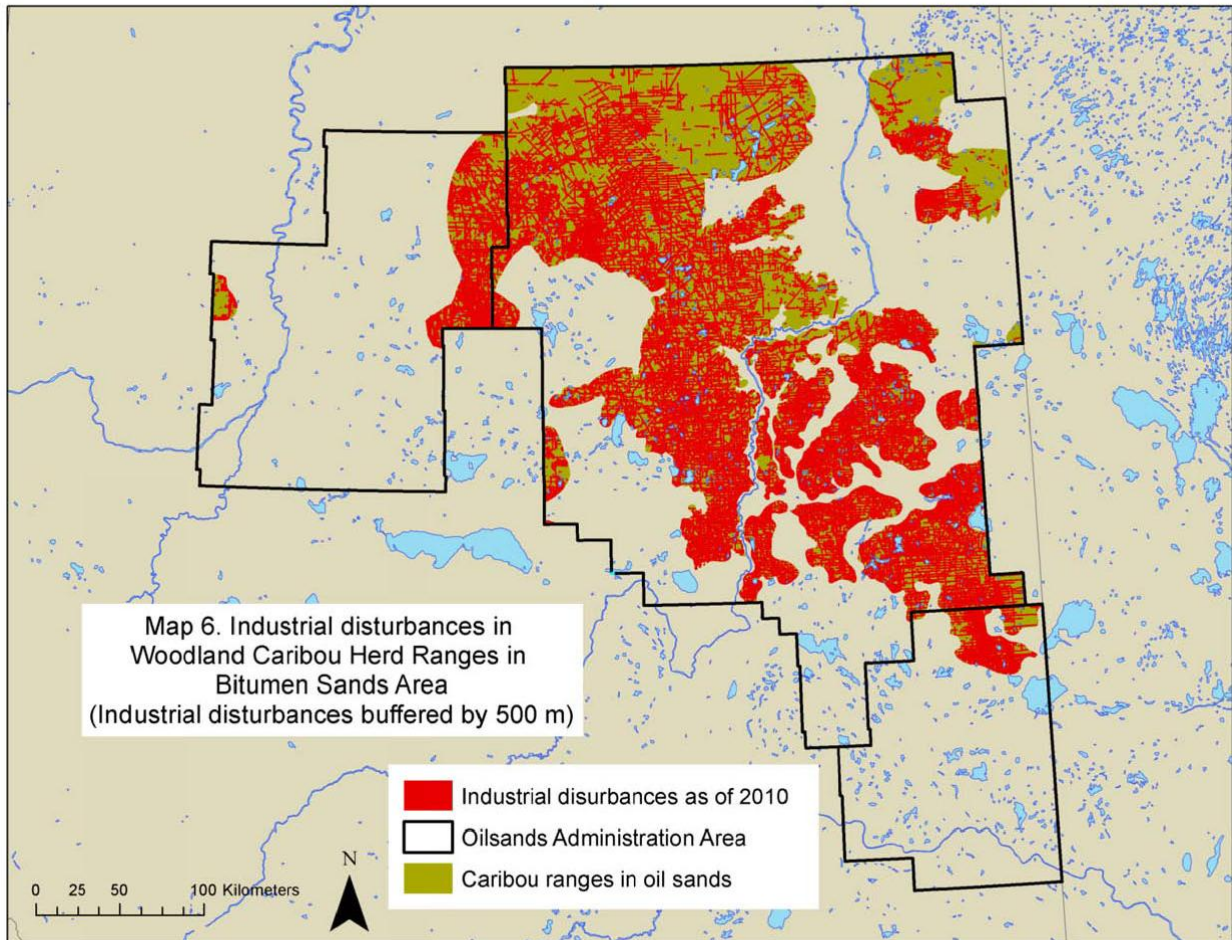
Attached: Map and chart of oil and gas leasing in ranges, 2004-2014, plus caribou population trends;
Map of oil sands disturbances in Alberta caribou ranges, 2010 footprint data.





Alberta Oil and Gas (PNG) New Lease-Licence Sales in Caribou Ranges since July 1, 2004 Start of AB Caribou Recovery Plan





Source: Global Forest Watch Canada, 2012.





**Alberta New Oil-Gas Lease-License Sales (excludes Oilsands) within Caribou Ranges
since Alberta Caribou Recovery Plan 2004-2014 start date**

AB Caribou Population	Total Disturbed Habitat %	Estimated Pop'n. (2009 or otherwise noted)	Estimated Cumulative Population Change, 1994 - 2012	Auctioned since AB recovery plan start date, July 1, 2004 (surface area, ha)	Auctions planned Nov 19 - Dec 17, 2014 (surface area, ha)
A La Peche	n/a	88 ³	-56%	112,256 ⁴	0 ⁴
Narraway	81% ¹	96 ³	-36%	73,993	0
Jasper (within National Park)	n/a	51 ³	n/a	0	0
Redrock-Prairie Creek	48% ¹	127 ³	-80%	166,953	20,247
Total AB Mountain Caribou		362³		353,202	20,247
Bistcho	71% ²	195	-58%	452,446	6,316
Caribou Mountains	57% ²	315-394	-76%	79,888	0
Chinchaga	76% ²	250	-70%	970,806	216
Cold Lake	85% ²	150	-87% in AB	62,369	0
East Side of Athabasca River	81% ²	90-150	-78%	127,320	525
Little Smoky	95% ²	78	-33%	314,297 ⁴	0 ⁴
Nipisi	68% ²	55	n/a	117,560	267
Red Earth	62% ²	172-206	-84%	616,423	153
Richardson	82% ²	150	-5%	7,539	0
Slave Lake	80% ²	65	n/a	37,599	0
West Side of Athabasca River	69% ²	204-272	-71%	114,249	0
Yates	61% ²	350	0.5%	74,078	0
Total AB Boreal Caribou		2,074-2,315		2,974,574	7,478
Total Alberta Caribou				3,327,777	27,725

1. Estimated by Global Forest Watch Canada using 2010 human footprint data.
2. Reported 2011 by Environment Canada.
3. Population estimates for 2012, extrapolated by Environment Canada from 2009 estimates.
4. New Lease-license sales deferred as of May 1, 2013 until range plans are approved by Alberta Cabinet.

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.

