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## **Major New Energy Lease Sales Imminent in Endangered Alberta Caribou Habitat**

On March 11, the Alberta government plans a major auction of new oil and gas leases on 21,000 hectares (212 square kilometers) of endangered mountain woodland caribou habitat, without rules to reduce surface disturbance below current excessive levels. Nearly a year after scientists assessed Alberta's mountain caribou as in imminent danger of extinction, the new leases in Redrock-Prairie Creek mountain caribou range, in the Kakwa region of west central Alberta, will encourage more new seismic lines, well sites and roads and make survival chances even worse for these caribou. The Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) calls on the Alberta government to defer energy lease sales in endangered caribou ranges until effective rules to protect the herds are in place.

"More energy lease sales under today's weak caribou guidelines must stop," says Carolyn Campbell, AWA conservation specialist. "Counter to Premier Prentice's pledge to make Alberta a world environmental leader, the government continues to violate its own caribou policy and the federal *Species at Risk Act* mandate to protect and restore caribou habitat. Caribou will soon disappear without strong habitat protection, whereas energy resources can be extracted with a greatly reduced footprint compatible with caribou."

Excessive human disturbance within caribou range stimulates populations of deer, moose and the wolves that prey on them. Seismic lines and roads that fragment older forests and wetlands provide predators with easy access to caribou, resulting in higher predation than caribou can tolerate. The Redrock Prairie Creek population is estimated to have declined from 212 animals in 2009 to 127 in 2012, a 40% decline. This population was rated as 'Stable' in 2004 when Alberta's ineffective 10 year caribou recovery plan was put in place. Alberta's focus on aerial gunning and poisoning of wolves to try to stabilize the Little Smoky caribou population east of Redrock-Prairie Creek, while allowing ongoing habitat loss from industrial activities, has recently attracted widespread criticism.

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 to at least a 65% undisturbed level.

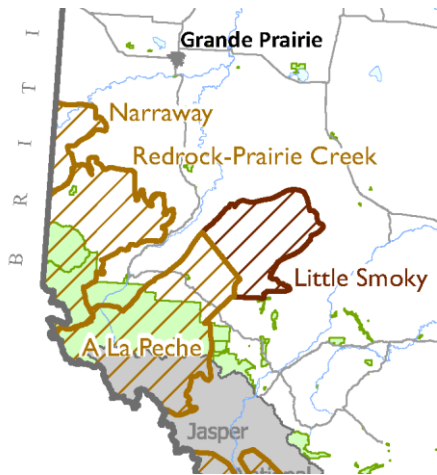
For more information: Carolyn Campbell, Alberta Wilderness Association, (403) 283-2025

**Attachments - Map of West Central Alberta Mountain Caribou Ranges;  
Table of March 11 Auctions, Habitat Disturbance and Population Data by Range**





**Map of Endangered Mountain Caribou Ranges in West Central Alberta**



Note: Protected areas, shown in green and grey, overlap with some caribou range summer habitat but do not include important lower-elevation foothills winter habitat on Alberta public lands.

**Alberta New Oil-Gas Lease-License Sales (excludes Oilsands) within Caribou Ranges  
Planned for March 11, 2015**

AB Caribou Population	Total Disturbed Habitat %	Estimated Pop'n. (2009 unless otherwise noted)	Estimated Cumulative Pop'n. Change, 1994 - 2012 <sup>4</sup>	Auctions planned March 11, 2015 (surface area, ha)
Redrock-Prairie Creek	48% <sup>1</sup>	127 <sup>3</sup>	-80%	21,248
<b>Total AB Mountain Caribou</b>		<b>362<sup>3</sup></b>		<b>21,248</b>
Bistcho	71% <sup>2</sup>	195	-58%	128
Chinchaga	76% <sup>2</sup>	250	-70%	512
Red Earth	62% <sup>2</sup>	172-206	-84%	768
<b>Total AB Boreal Caribou</b>		<b>2,074-2,315</b>		<b>1,408</b>
<b>Total Alberta Caribou</b>				<b>22,656</b>

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. Population rate estimates in Hervieux et. al. (2013). *Widespread declines in woodland caribou (Rangifer tarandus caribou) continue in Alberta.* Can. J. Zool.

