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Alberta Could Choose Habitat Recovery Plan, Instead More Lease Sales in Endangered Mountain Caribou Ranges are Planned

The Alberta government has posted new energy leases for sale in the same endangered mountain caribou range in west central Alberta where it cancelled lease sales on March 6. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) asks the Alberta government for consistent decisions to recover Redrock-Prairie Creek and Narraway mountain caribou, and to adopt the principles of the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) 2012 proposal for Redrock-Prairie Creek caribou range management.

“For caribou to survive, it is urgent to stop energy lease sales under today’s weak guidelines,” says Carolyn Campbell, AWA conservation specialist. “The Alberta Conservation Association’s innovative 2012 Redrock-Prairie Creek range proposal that envisions energy development with greatly reduced surface disturbance, compatible with caribou recovery, is a great example of an approach the Alberta government should choose.”

Alberta has posted 9 square kilometers (896 hectares) of new oil and gas rights in Redrock-Prairie Creek for auction on April 29. In the adjacent Narraway caribou range, it plans to auction 256 hectares on April 8 and another 256 hectares on May 13. The new leases will encourage more new seismic lines, well sites and roads and make survival chances even worse for these caribou.

ACA’s 2012 proposal, by contrast, envisions continued long-term timber harvest deferral, with compensation for the affected leaseholder, plus rules for oil, gas, and coal development that would greatly reduce surface disturbance, compatible with caribou recovery. “With a new Premier and changes in the ministers responsible for public lands and energy, we wanted to ensure this promising conservation approach is back on the government radar,” says Campbell.

Excessive human disturbance within caribou range stimulates populations of deer, moose and the wolves that prey on them. Predators have easier access to caribou in fragmented forests and wetlands, 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 wolf cull in the Little Smoky caribou range east of Redrock-Prairie Creek, while habitat destruction from industrial activities continues to expand, has 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

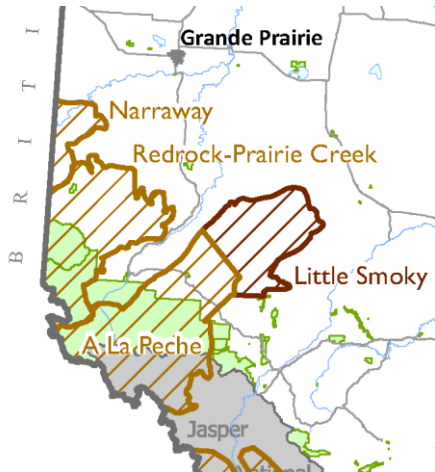
Link to ACA’s proposal: [summary](#) and [slide presentation](#) (slide file is 5 MB).

Attachment - [Map of West Central Alberta Mountain Caribou Ranges](#);





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.

