



New maps highlight ongoing habitat destruction in threatened caribou ranges

Federal government report illustrates increased disturbance in more than half of caribou ranges since release of recovery strategy

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TORONTO — Today the federal government reported that the quality of caribou habitat continues to decline across Canada. The David Suzuki Foundation, Ontario Nature and Alberta Wilderness Association have identified critical habitat destruction “hot spots” in the ranges of threatened caribou in Alberta, Ontario and Quebec.

The groups are calling on the three provincial governments to convene Indigenous and stakeholder groups to develop range plans that protect critical caribou habitat, as required under Canada’s five-year-old recovery strategy for boreal caribou. No province or territory has fully met the timeline established in the Recovery Strategy for the development of range plans, due on October 5, 2017.

“Our Chinchaga range maps strikingly illustrate the lack of progress to save Alberta’s iconic caribou populations,” said AWA conservation specialist Carolyn Campbell. “We need Alberta to produce collaborative range plans that include protected areas, restored areas and smaller, clustered areas of disturbance, so that caribou can recover and communities can thrive.”

The federal report is consistent with the mapping work done by Ontario Nature, the David Suzuki Foundation and Alberta Wilderness Association, which highlights the ongoing expansion of the industrial footprint.

“We have decades of science to guide planning for boreal caribou recovery,” said Ontario Nature boreal program manager Julee Boan. “We need the political will to apply the science and manage boreal forests, so that maintaining critical caribou habitat is linked to long-term prosperity.”

“It’s five years since the release of the recovery strategy and caribou continue to decline across Canada. The provinces must quit stalling and advance caribou habitat protection and recovery,” said David Suzuki Foundation Ontario science projects manager Rachel Plotkin. “If they fail to do so, then it’s time for the federal government to step up and protect this threatened species. The Species at Risk Act provides a safety net. Let’s use it.”

A backgrounder detailing caribou habitat destruction in Ontario, Alberta and Quebec, including the maps, is available at <http://caribou4ever.ca/nr-backgrounder/>.

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About boreal woodland caribou protection in Canada:

Boreal woodland caribou need large, intact forest ecosystems to survive and thrive. The ultimate cause of caribou decline across the country is habitat loss and fragmentation associated with industrial resource extraction activities and the increase in predation triggered by these disturbances. To date, boreal woodland caribou have lost more than half of their historic distribution area, and the federal recovery strategy identified that 37 of 51 populations (72 per cent) are not self-sustaining.

Under the federal Species at Risk Act, the federal government was mandated to identify caribou “critical habitat” — the habitat caribou need to survive and recover — in a recovery strategy. It did so in 2012. A team of North America’s leading experts established a strong relationship between the levels of habitat disturbance and whether a local population increases, declines or remains stable. The federal government then directed provinces to manage forests so there is at least 65 per cent undisturbed habitat in each caribou range, to give caribou at least a 60 per cent chance to self-sustain.

These finalized range plans were due on October 5, 2017. No province or territory has fully met the timeline established in the Recovery Strategy for the development of range plans.