
Caribou Range Decisions Approaching

Woodland caribou in Alberta are in real trouble. But, the next few months could produce a crucial, positive turning point. In late April and early May (as reported in the last *Wild Lands Advocate*), Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) issued several important findings under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). The findings cover both types of Alberta's woodland caribou. For *boreal* woodland caribou, ECCC concluded that Alberta's existing laws do not protect critical habitat. For *mountain* woodland caribou, which migrate between summer alpine and winter foothills ranges in both Alberta and B.C., ECCC Minister McKenna declared in a separate report that there was an imminent threat to their recovery.

The two findings oblige the ECCC Minister under SARA to recommend to the federal cabinet that it issue a safety net order to protect that crucial habitat. Federal officials have indicated that one path provinc-

es could take to avoid a protection order is to negotiate conservation agreements that commit to timely, effective protection of habitat. With the next federal progress report on boreal caribou recovery due in late October, Alberta must demonstrate and commit to protecting caribou habitat and promote self-sustaining populations.

AWA believes the ongoing habitat destruction associated with years and years of ineffectual 'talk and log/drill' discussions must end. We believe an interim federal habitat protection order in one or several ranges is needed to spur the completion of Alberta range plans. The order could last for several weeks or months, and be removed once a binding range plan is in place.

AWA and other ENGO colleagues have met with federal and provincial officials to urge *interim* protection measures and swift completion of enforceable range plans. We have provided concrete suggestions for solutions that optimize economic activity in caribou ranges, consistent with the minimum 65 percent undisturbed habitat threshold caribou need to survive and recover. For example, energy surface footprint can be clustered in corridors using longer distance directional drilling, tenure extensions, reversions and pooling, and shared infrastructure are all options that facilitate, not shutter, industrial activity on the land. Unsustainable forestry surge cuts must end and regional timber allocations can be shared and optimized to protect jobs. Caribou habitat restoration can provide both an economic stimulus to communities and environmental benefits to forests. The energy industry can fund reclamation of legacy seismic lines, redundant roads, and abandoned oil and gas wells. Pipeline and transmission line operators can narrow today's wide corridors.

To underscore this point, a new report commissioned by AWA, David Suzuki Foundation and Harmony Foundation, authored by expert economic consultants, has

found that caribou conservation and continuation of existing economic activities are *not* mutually exclusive for the Bistcho and Yates ranges in northwest Alberta. The Caribou4ever.ca website will have all the details, including a shareable fact sheet. Please use the quick letter template on that website to let the Premier know why saving caribou and their habitat is important to you, and encourage your conservation-minded friends to do the same. Citizens' voices are really needed now; this is a decisive time for our caribou.

For decades, Alberta governments have allowed too much industrial disturbance to destroy and fragment the older forests and wetlands caribou need to reduce their contact with predators. Our federal and provincial elected decision makers can now choose to embrace a restoration economy – an economy where optimal solutions are identified to provide forest-based jobs while maintaining and restoring the habitat our caribou need.

- Carolyn Campbell
