



Alberta Wilderness Association
"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

September 9, 2020

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson
Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada
ec.ministre-minister.ec@canada.ca

Alan Fehr
Jasper National Park Superintendent
alan.fehr@canada.ca

Re: Emergency Measures Needed for Jasper's Few Remaining Caribou

Dear Minister Wilkinson and Superintendent Fehr:

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is writing you with urgent concern to prevent the extirpation of the very small remaining populations of southern mountain woodland caribou populations managed by Parks Canada in Jasper National Park.

AWA, founded in 1965, works throughout Alberta towards more representative and connected protection of the unique and vital landscapes that are the source of our clean water, clean air and wildlife habitat. With over 7,000 members and supporters in Alberta and across Canada, AWA remains committed to ensuring protection of wildlife and wild places in Alberta for all Canadians.

AWA has learned from a Jasper National Park [website](#) that:

- Jasper's Maligne caribou are now considered officially extirpated;
- Each of the remaining two caribou populations managed by Parks Canada - the Tonquin and Brazeau populations - are now too small to recover on their own; and
- it appears that the Maligne caribou range lands will be considerably retracted by Parks Canada, by undoing seasonal access closures now that the range is 'unoccupied'.

We request that Parks Canada take these population and habitat actions:

- transparently conclude its lengthy 'consideration' of an emergency population augmentation program for Tonquin and Brazeau caribou, and if viable, proceed with urgency to stabilize and recover populations;
- consider further access measures in Tonquin and Brazeau habitat to support caribou recovery;
- retain hard-won winter access limits in the Maligne range to prevent range retraction.

We further urge Parks Canada to effectively communicate with the public about the status of caribou inside the Park:

- to better inform citizens how past Park and adjacent land-use decisions have worked against caribou survival, and how valuable 'protected areas' can be for caribou recovery
- that recovery of mountain caribou in Jasper Park is possible, positive and an urgent responsibility

Recent [communications](#) by Parks Canada suggest that a promising caribou population augmentation program was very close to being launched in the past year. If this is viable, it is urgent to move forward.

It is very positive that Jasper Park's wolf population monitoring suggests that wolf density for the past five or six years has been suitably low for caribou survival and recovery. Our understanding is that the continued decline in caribou populations in the past several years is mainly because access and habitat measures came too late, when populations were too small to withstand unpredictable setbacks – for example, the birth of almost all male calves in one recent season. That should remove some major concerns about the effectiveness of population augmentation.

That said, AWA believes that access measures should continue to be reviewed in the Tonquin and Brazeau, for example, extending ski trail closures further into spring. We recall that in 2002, a 'pilot project' for winter closure of Maligne Lake Road from November until May was approved by Jasper's superintendent, based on extensive evidence. It was immediately overturned by Parks Canada's CEO as 'unnecessary'. Keeping the Maligne Lake winter road open every subsequent winter to recreation traffic, up to today, was a death sentence for Maligne caribou, giving wolves easy predation access as caribou numbers spiraled down. The 'four month per year' ski trail closures since 2016 were overdue measures that unfortunately proved too late to recover the tiny remaining population.

If at all possible, Parks Canada must not let the remaining magnificent caribou under its care in Jasper be lost to future generations of Canadians. And it certainly should ensure that its communications about the demise of its own populations act to support, rather than jeopardize, efforts elsewhere in Alberta and Canada to improve caribou habitat management for woodland caribou survival and recovery.

Thank you for considering these requests. We look forward to your reply at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,
ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION



Carolyn Campbell
Conservation Specialist
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