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Where is Parks Canada's Plan for Jasper's Disappearing Caribou?

One month after Jasper National Park quietly posted news that its Maligne caribou are officially extirpated and that two other caribou populations are drastically low in numbers, Parks Canada has still not revealed to Canadians how it plans to prevent the demise of its Tonquin and Brazeau caribou populations and re-occupy the Maligne range with caribou. Today Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is:

- releasing an access proposal to support Jasper caribou survival and re-occupation, and
- calling on Parks Canada to release information on the conservation breeding proposal it has been preparing for years.

"Parks Canada needs to tell Canadians about its caribou breeding plan, and show that it's managing caribou ranges better for their recovery, re-occupation and ability to thrive," says Carolyn Campbell, AWA conservation specialist. "Given the lead time involved in breeding, every month matters to recover the caribou under Parks Canada's care for future generations of Canadians."



One of Jasper National Park's Tonquin caribou, observed in 2014. Photo: G. Gruenewald.

AWA recognizes that Jasper Park has lowered wolf predation risk to caribou in recent years by reducing and refocusing elk and wolf activity into valley bottoms, and by closing backcountry skiing in caribou ranges until mid-February or March 1, depending on the range.

However, AWA believes downward spiraling caribou populations and [other scientific evidence](#) indicate that Parks Canada's access management must be further strengthened to support caribou survival and re-occupancy. A captive breeding program only makes sense if caribou have high quality, secure habitat to occupy once they are released.

The disappearance of the Maligne herd and the perilous state of the Brazeau and Tonquin herds belies this claim from Jasper's 2017 species at risk action plan: "Species at risk, their residences, and their habitat are therefore protected by existing national park regulations and management regimes."





AWA Access Proposal for Tonquin and Brazeau Caribou Survival and Maligne Re-Occupancy

Tonquin (10 or less breeding females)

- close 'Tres Hombres' ski runs at Marmot Basin ski resort. Parks Canada's 2017 approval of these runs disregards [expert scientific findings](#) that these runs affect Whistlers Creek caribou habitat and are inconsistent with Tonquin caribou recovery.
- find ways to further reduce Marmot Basin's current caribou range-shrinking impacts.
- reduce Tonquin backcountry trail and lodging impacts that limit caribou range use and survival. Backcountry trails and lodgings are currently open from mid-February to mid-October in prime caribou calving, summer, and winter habitat, and should be re-assessed.

Maligne (recently extirpated, prime Jasper National Park caribou range for re-occupation)

- maintain the hard-won backcountry skiing restrictions from November 1 to Feb. 28.
- stop snow clearing of Maligne Lake Road beyond Maligne Canyon. Prime winter-spring caribou habitat includes Medicine Lake and Bald Hills along the Maligne Lake Road (see Figure 1). Road plowing and backcountry skiing may inhibit potential caribou dispersal from adjacent Tonquin or Brazeau ranges, and supports opportunistic wolf travel.

Brazeau (less than 10 breeding females)

- maintain back-country skiing restrictions from November 1 to Feb. 28.
- find ways to reduce road impacts and other human-caused range retractions.

Canadians may see Jasper Park as a pristine area for caribou, but human land-use decisions in Jasper failed them. Artificially high elk populations were encouraged, eventually leading to a boom in wolf numbers. Many decisions in the latter 20th century creating and maintaining human access on winter roads, trails and ski hills in key caribou areas reduced caribou range occupancy and robbed caribou of their natural ability to avoid overlap with wolves. Access and wildlife management changes were too little, and came too late to stop downward spiraling caribou numbers.

AWA encourages all those who are concerned to write Environment and Climate Change Canada Minister Jonathan Wilkinson (ec.ministre-minister.ec@canada.ca), and Jasper Park Superintendent Alan Fehr (alan.fehr@canada.ca), copying AWA's ccampbell@abwild.ca, and request that Parks Canada:

- release details of the caribou conservation breeding proposal it has been preparing for years;
- close 'Tres Hombres' downhill ski runs, and reduce other human impacts in Tonquin and Brazeau ranges to support caribou survival and recovery; and
- maintain hard-won Maligne backcountry skiing limits and stop snow plowing the Maligne Lake Road beyond Maligne Canyon, to support caribou re-occupancy of the prime Maligne range.

For more information:

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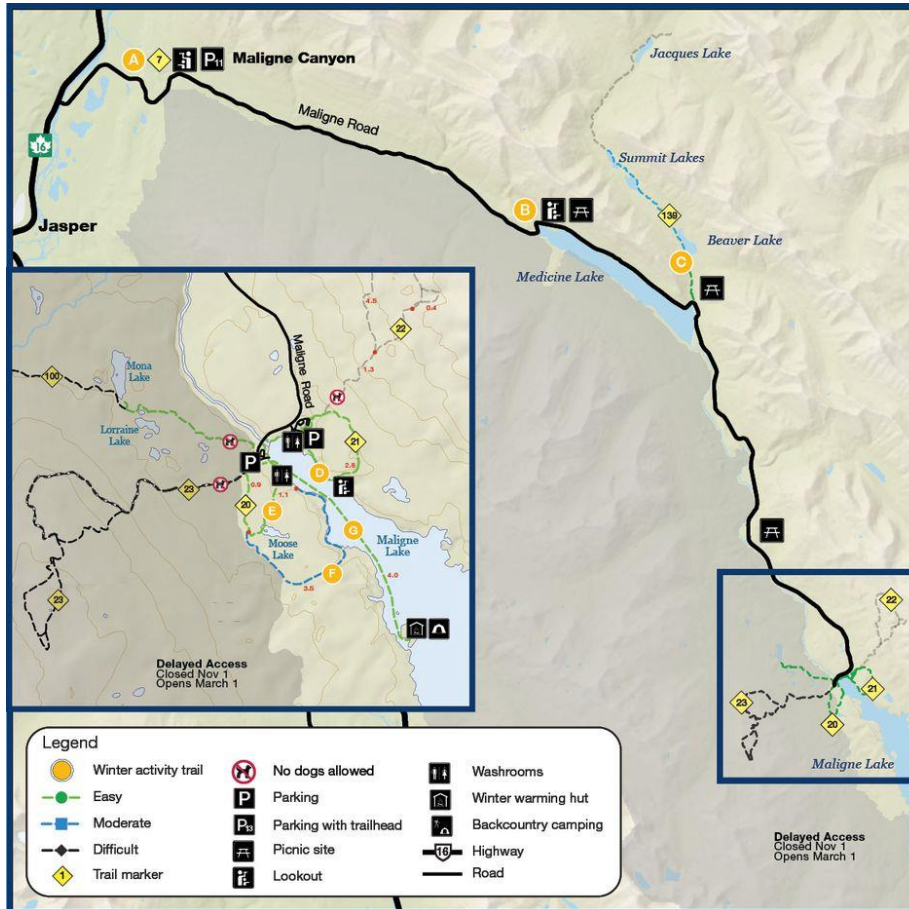


Figure 1. Maligne Lake Road is currently plowed all winter to Maligne Lake. To support Maligne caribou range re-occupancy, AWA requests that Parks Canada maintain hard-won backcountry skiing limits to March 1 (including Bald Hills, the Inset looped trails), and stop snow clearing Maligne Lake Road beyond Maligne Canyon. Map Source: Parks Canada.



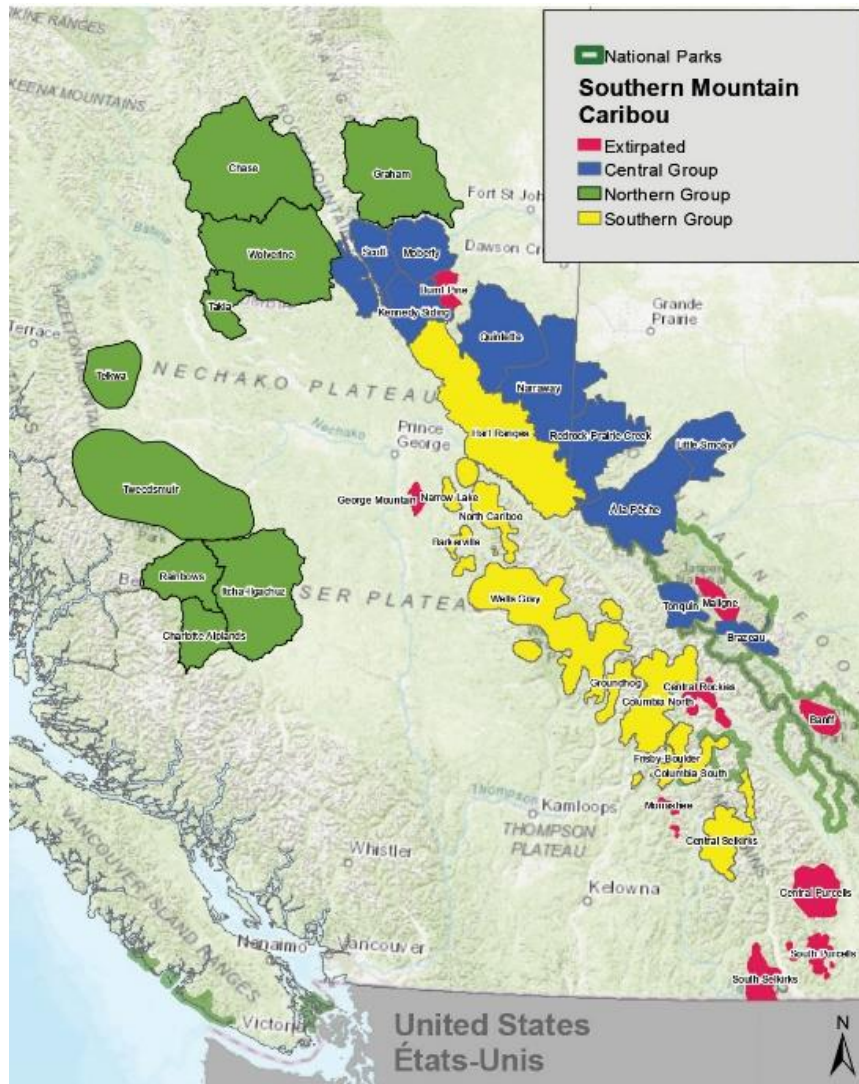


Figure 2. Official Extirpation of Maligne caribou in Jasper National Park.
Map Source: Parks Canada, Sept. 2020.

