

## Jasper National Park Caribou are Almost Extirpated

- Access Management Changes are Urgent
- Move Faster on Conservation Breeding if Viable and Ethical

Despite the fact that southern mountain caribou are SARA-designated and a ‘pan-Canadian approach’ priority species, caribou in the three Jasper ranges managed by Parks Canada are becoming extirpated, right before our eyes. Parks Canada’s September 2020 update on the three populations reported:

- Tonquin – 45 total, 10 or less breeding females, cannot recover on their own;
- Brazeau – fewer than 15 total, 10 or less breeding females, cannot recover on their own;
- Maligne – officially extirpated as of Sept. 2020, last sighted 2018.

It’s not only lingering ‘Small Population Effects’ from poor Parks’ policies before 2006 that threaten Jasper’s caribou. **Jasper Park’s current access management decisions continue to fail caribou.**

Jasper managers agree that survival of Tonquin caribou, the highest remaining population, is crucial. Yet risky ‘compromise’ access measures continue. To suit a few local interests, Parks Canada:

- is planning to lift Tonquin winter backcountry restrictions February 15 as usual, despite the overlap of snowmobile and ski trails with ‘high value’ late-winter habitat (Figure 29, Schmiegelow 2014);
- is allowing, since 2017, a Marmot Basin downhill ski run extension area (‘Tres Hombres’), against expert recommendation (Schmiegelow 2014);
- is allowing intensive summer-fall backcountry access in Tonquin, despite caribou preferred habitat areas being highly transected by trails, and despite habitat-reduction effects of trails, backcountry lodges and campgrounds (Figure 30, Schmiegelow 2014).

Figure 29. Tonquin caribou selection for distance to Marmot during the late winter season (January 22<sup>nd</sup> to May 22<sup>nd</sup>) using the full final dataset (2002-2009).

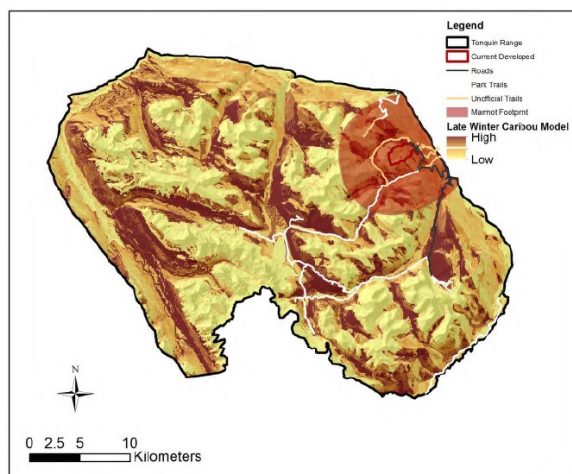
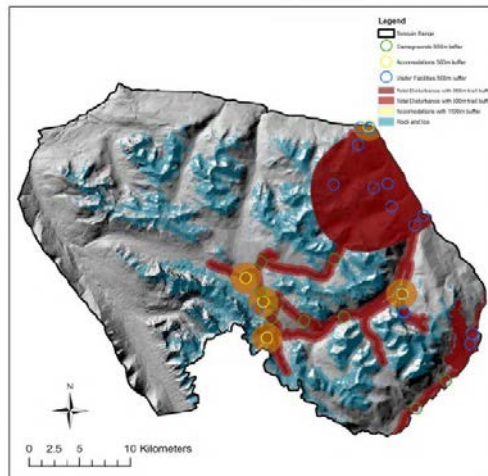


Figure 30. Total disturbance (fires within 50 years and anthropogenic) and habitable areas in the Tonquin range. Total disturbance includes a 5 km around Marmot Basin.



Jasper managers agree that the Maligne range is prime caribou habitat. However, to suit a few local interests, Parks Canada:

- removed its early-winter backcountry ski restrictions in two Maligne areas beginning November 2020, signaling it will, in effect, retract important range areas when inconvenient caribou die off;

- continues to snowplow the Maligne Valley Road past Maligne Canyon, facilitating wolf access and re-occupancy.

These actions set a very poor example for other jurisdictions to manage their much larger caribou ranges, with more complex land-use issues, in accordance with the federal *Species at Risk Act (SARA)*.

### What Must Be Done?

#### Conservation Breeding

- conclude Parks Canada's many years of considering caribou conservation breeding; in that time, Maligne caribou have been extirpated and the Tonquin population has spiraled down;
- let Canadians know promptly what the upcoming January 2021 external scientific review finds;
- if it's a viable and ethical plan, proceed quickly while as many caribou as possible remain in these ranges.

#### Access Management

- reduce current harmful human access impacts in Jasper caribou ranges, to buy survival time;
- the dire approach of conservation breeding doesn't make sense without taking all possible access measures to support occupancy of the introduced caribou in prime habitat areas.

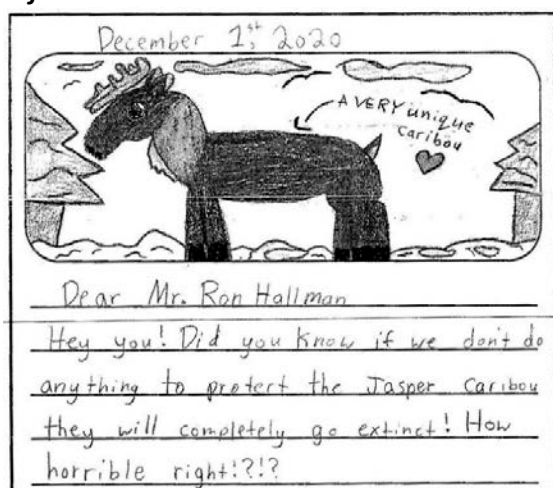
#### In Tonquin:

- starting this winter, extend backcountry restrictions throughout the late winter;
- urgently re-assess and reduce current habitat impacts of summer-fall backcountry access;
- revoke Tres Hombres 2017 ski run approval, and take other actions to reduce the caribou habitat-impairing impacts from Marmot Basin ski hill.

#### In Maligne:

- minimize wolf re-occupancy chances and ensure this prime caribou range is ready to be safely re-populated by caribou as soon as possible:
  - o stop snow plowing Maligne Valley Road past Maligne Canyon;
  - o restrict Maligne backcountry winter human access.

#### Jasper caribou have no time left to lose.



One of thirty letters by Grade 4 students of Hugh A. Bennett School, Calgary, to Parks Canada's CEO, copied to AWA

'Schmiegelow 2014' referenced above is: Czetwertynski, S. and Schmiegelow, F. (March 2014). *Tonquin Caribou Risk Assessment Final Report*. Commissioned for Parks Canada's assessment of Marmot Basin Ski Area Guidelines and Development.