



Alberta Wilderness Association

First Nations, environmental groups launch lawsuit to protect at-risk boreal caribou

January 24, 2019



Photo © AWA

CALGARY — Ecojustice lawyers, acting on behalf of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Mikisew Cree First Nation, Alberta Wilderness Association and David Suzuki Foundation, have filed a lawsuit against the federal minister of environment and climate change for her failure to protect the critical habitat of five boreal caribou herds in northeastern Alberta.

Populations of boreal caribou, the species famously depicted on the tail-side of the Canadian quarter, are in decline across the country, largely due to

widespread loss and fragmentation of their habitat.

In northeastern Alberta, the combined impact of multiple forms of industrial development critically threatens boreal caribou survival.

In the absence of adequate measures from the province, the groups argue the federal minister must step in and recommend federal protections for the five herds under the *Species at Risk Act*.

Under the Act, the minister has the responsibility to recommend Cabinet issue what is known as a “safety net order” if she finds that a province is not doing enough to protect habitat of an at-risk species. In this case, an order could pave the way for much-needed protections for boreal caribou in northeastern Alberta and their critical habitat.

Representatives from the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Mikisew Cree First Nation, Alberta Wilderness Association, David Suzuki Foundation and Ecojustice released the following statements:

Chief Allan Adam, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation

“ACFN has a special relationship with caribou because they have sustained our people for thousands of years. This relationship is supposed to be protected by our treaty rights. However, we no longer hunt woodland caribou in our territory because of the impacts of industrial development and the failures of Alberta and Canada to protect them. We have been trying to make Canada follow its own endangered species laws for over 10 years; this is just the next step to make sure that our heritage – Canada’s heritage – is preserved into the future.”

Chief Archie Waquan, Mikisew Cree First Nation

“Woodland caribou are an important part of Mikisew culture and deeply linked to our treaty rights. While we rely on caribou for the practice of our treaty rights, it is becoming increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to hunt them. Mikisew is concerned that the government isn’t taking the steps necessary to ensure the survival and recovery of this species. Mikisew’s ability to hunt caribou has been diminishing for quite some time and may be eliminated entirely if the federal government continues to do nothing.”

Cliff Wallis, Alberta Wilderness Association

“Decades of federal and provincial inaction mean interim habitat protection is urgently needed for these Alberta boreal caribou. Protection is possible and can be done in a way that also allows compatible economic activity.”

Rachel Plotkin, Ontario Science Campaigns Manager, David Suzuki Foundation

“Industrial expansion into the habitat that caribou need to survive continues despite the fact that science and Indigenous knowledge agree it must be controlled. We see no indication of change. If we do not use the tools at hand to protect and restore the habitat that caribou need to survive and recover, then we collectively, as a country, must bear the responsibility of standing by while caribou herds begin to blink out.”

Melissa Gorrie, lawyer, Ecojustice:

“When provinces aren’t willing to do what it takes to protect a species at risk, the federal government has a responsibility to step in and provide a safety net to protect this species and its habitat. We are taking the minister to court to make sure she meets her legal responsibility to protect boreal caribou for generations to come.”

About

Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN), located in northeastern Alberta, is a signatory to Treaty No. 8 and has constitutionally protected treaty rights. ACFN has practiced land uses in the area that is now part of Northwest Territories, and northern Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba for thousands of years.

Mikisew Cree First Nation, located in northeastern Alberta, is a signatory to Treaty No. 8 and has constitutionally protected treaty rights. The largest band in the Athabasca region, Mikisew Cree First Nation have resided in northeastern Alberta since time immemorial.

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is the oldest wilderness conservation group in Alberta dedicated to the completion of a protected areas network and the conservation of wilderness throughout the province. AWA has a proven history of being an effective, credible and independent advocate for wildlife and

wild places in Alberta.

The David Suzuki Foundation (davidsuzuki.org) is a leading Canadian environmental non-profit organization, collaborating with all people in Canada, including government and business, to conserve the environment and find solutions that will create a sustainable Canada through evidence-based research, public engagement and policy work. The Foundation operates in English and French, with offices in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal.

Ecojustice, Canada's largest environmental law charity, goes to court and uses the power of the law to defend nature, combat climate change, and fight for a healthy environment for all.

For media inquiries

Allan Adam, Chief, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation
780-713-1220

Melody Lepine, Director, Government and Industry Relations |
Mikisew Cree First Nation
melody.lepine@mcfngjr.ca, 780-792-8736

Cliff Wallis | Alberta Wilderness Association
403-607-1970

Stefanie Carmichael, Communications Specialist |
David Suzuki Foundation
scarmichael@davidsuzuki.org, 437 997 2568

Melissa Gorrie, lawyer | Ecojustice

To arrange an interview, please contact Emily Chan at echan@ecojustice.ca,
604-685-5618 ext. 277



communities to care for Alberta's wild spaces through awareness and action.

[Donate](#)

Copyright © 2019 Alberta Wilderness Association, All rights reserved.

Want to change how you receive these emails?
You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).