



Where are Alberta's Caribou Range Plans?



Alberta caribou. Photo © P. Sutherland.

The Alberta government has missed a 2021 deadline to finalize its first two caribou land-use plans. Under the 2020 caribou conservation agreement it signed with Ottawa to avoid a federal habitat protection order, Alberta should already have completed enforceable land use plans covering the Bistcho range in northwest Alberta and the Cold Lake-Christina ranges in northeast Alberta.

“Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) calls on Alberta to release enforceable plans to achieve habitat requirements for self-sustaining Bistcho and Cold Lake caribou populations,” says Carolyn Campbell, AWA conservation director.

AWA believes these plans may deliver significant benefits, including:

- supporting Indigenous rights and land uses;
- enhancing the ability of boreal wetlands and forests to store soil carbon, provide habitat for multiple fish and wildlife species, and buffer floods and fire;

- enabling a transition to environmentally sustainable, diversified regional economies.

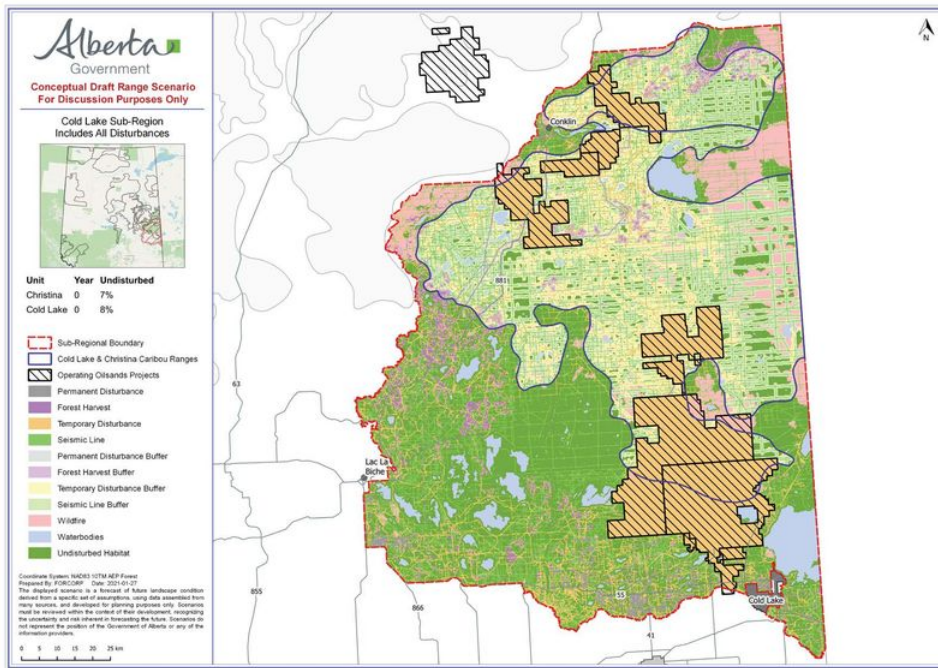
AWA participated in advisory caribou sub-regional task forces convened by Alberta in 2019-20, composed of rights holders and stakeholders. When Alberta released draft Bistcho and Cold Lake plans for public comment in March 2021, AWA supported the landmark shift to limit and reduce all land users' access and infrastructure impacts within an integrated plan. An integrated plan would enable the pursuit of economic and social priorities within important wildlife habitat thresholds.

AWA also believes the overdue land-use plans must address several large gaps in the draft plans. They should include:

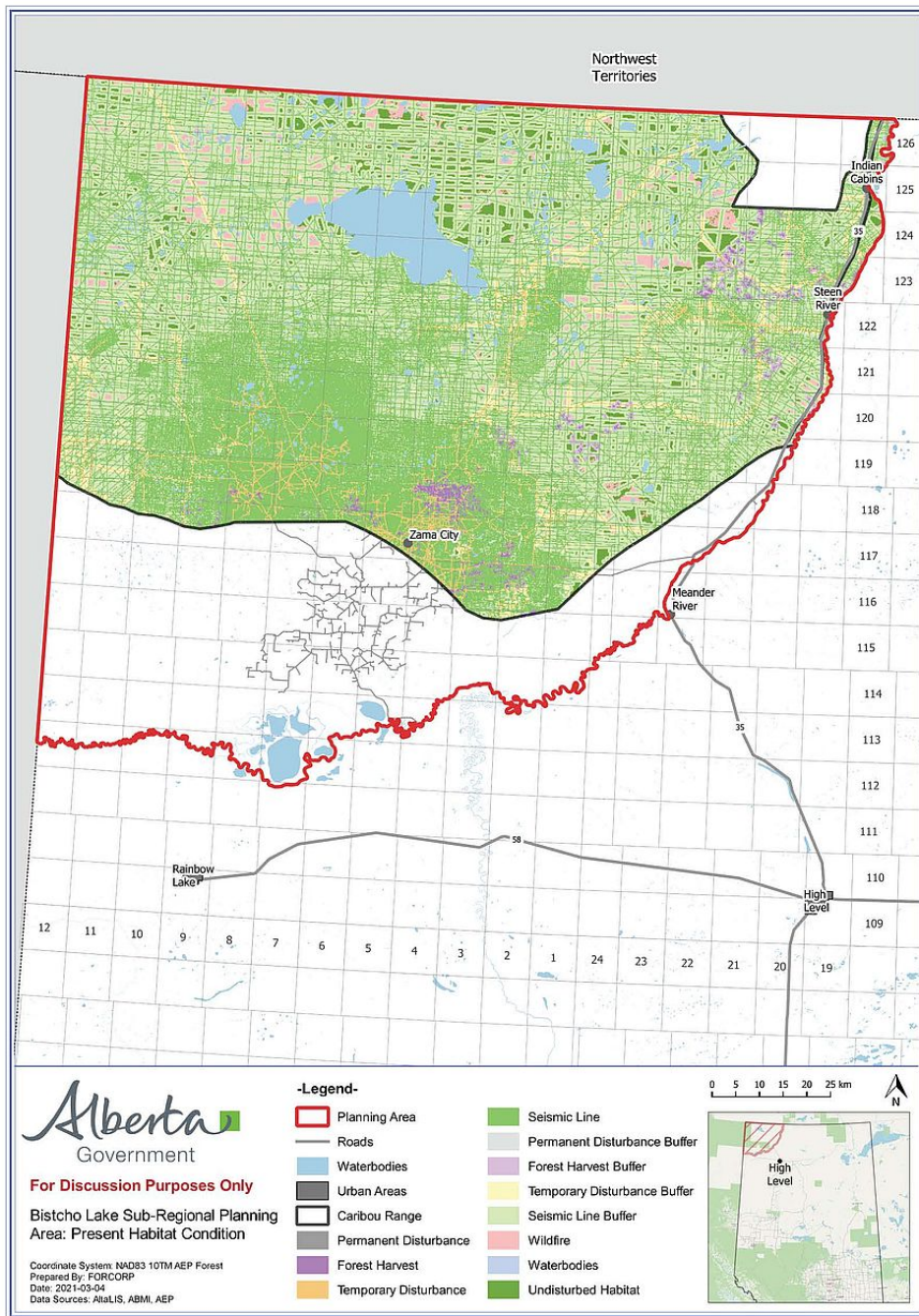
- a strong commitment to a process of collaborating with Indigenous communities to support their rights and land-use goals;
- specific near-term targets in the crucial upcoming decade to reduce the footprint of industries and roads. This footprint must be set on a trajectory to reach 'undisturbed' caribou habitat conditions in the coming decades; and
- a wildfire forecast.

For more information:

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Map 1. Only 8% of Cold Lake-Christina caribou ranges in northeast Alberta are considered undisturbed; self-sustaining caribou need at least 65% undisturbed habitat. Map source: Government of Alberta, 2021.



Map 2. Only 6% of Bistcho caribou range in northwest Alberta is considered undisturbed; self-sustaining caribou need at least 65% undisturbed habitat. Map source: Government of Alberta, 2021.



Dedicated to the conservation of wilderness and completion of a protected areas network, AWA inspires communities to care for Alberta's wild spaces through awareness and action.

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