



Release Date: January 7, 2022

Where are Alberta's Caribou Range Plans?

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.

AWA encourages all those who are concerned about the future of caribou to write Alberta Environment and Parks Minister Jason Nixon (aep.minister@gov.ab.ca), copying federal Environment and Climate Change Canada Minister Steven Guilbeault (ministre-minister@ec.gc.ca) and AWA's ccampbell@abwild.ca, and request that:

- Alberta release overdue final land-use plans for Bistcho and Cold Lake caribou, and
- the plans meet evidence-based habitat requirements for caribou survival and recovery, per the 2020 Alberta-Canada caribou conservation agreement.

For more information:

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