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Alberta's Upper Smoky Caribou: Time for a Strong Land-Use Plan

A year-end deadline is approaching for Alberta to finish its crucial Upper Smoky land-use plan, for two of Canada's most at-risk caribou populations. To support timely measures that enable caribou recovery and responsible development, Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is releasing a compelling [new portrait](#) of the caribou, lands, peoples and industries of the Upper Smoky sub-region of west central Alberta.

"While Redrock-Prairie Creek and Narraway mountain caribou have lived in the Upper Smoky area for millennia, their survival now depends on Alberta government decisions that citizens need to be consulted on very soon," says Carolyn Campbell, AWA conservation director. "Although many Albertans have never visited this beautiful region, we want them to have a better idea of its lands and peoples, and the opportunities to recover these magnificent caribou."

[The Clock is Running out for Caribou](#) describes setbacks and solutions for Upper Smoky, including:

- 40 years of Alberta ignoring knowledge and warnings that cumulative habitat loss from its project-by-project approvals system would bring intolerable predation pressures to caribou;
- the current annual cull of hundreds of wolves to prop up Redrock-Prairie Creek and Narraway caribou until they can benefit from more responsibly managed habitat;
- industry players still resisting efforts to curtail operations, including forestry giant Weyerhaeuser which now logs almost half its annual cut for its Grande Prairie sawmill within critical habitat of Redrock-Prairie Creek and Narraway caribou;
- Indigenous connections to Upper Smoky lands and caribou; and
- inspiring land-use solutions for caribou recovery that are being championed by First Nations elsewhere in Alberta and BC.

In 2018, the federal government determined that Alberta's Redrock-Prairie Creek and Narraway mountain caribou faced 'imminent threats' to their recovery because of unsustainable predation due to habitat loss. To sustain mountain caribou, at least 65 percent of their winter range needs to be 'undisturbed'; by 2017, industrial activity had disturbed 71 percent of Redrock-Prairie Creek winter range and 84 percent of Narraway winter range. In October 2020, to avoid a federal habitat protection order, Alberta committed to finish long-overdue caribou range plans, including one by 2022 for these Upper Smoky caribou.

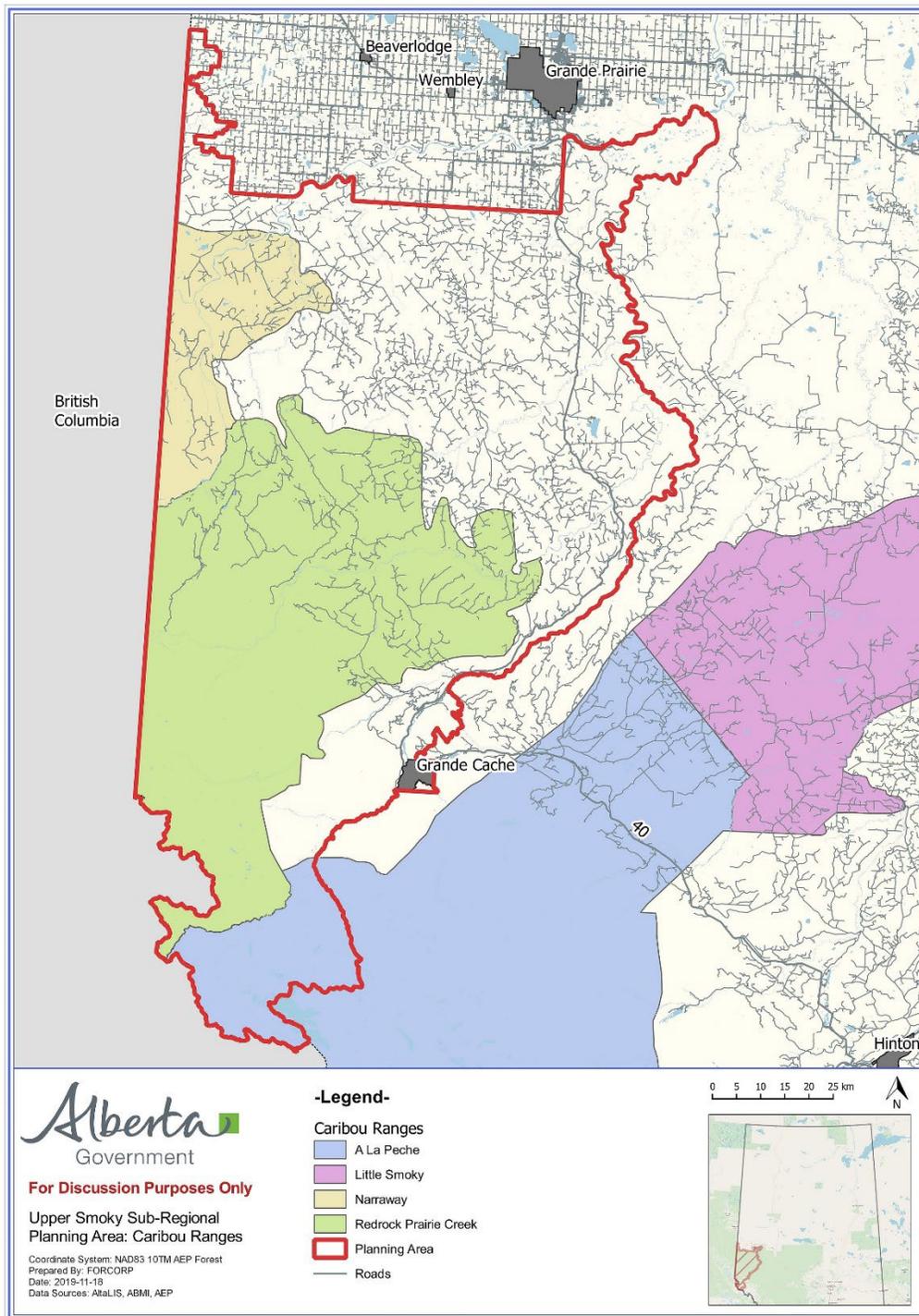
AWA commissioned distinguished journalist Gillian Steward to write [The Clock is Running out for Caribou](#). AWA believes that the Upper Smoky caribou land-use plan is the best opportunity to reduce unsustainable development impacts so caribou can thrive, as well as communities.

For more information:

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Attachments: Map of Upper Smoky Sub-region; Mountain caribou photo by John E. Marriott.





Alberta's Upper Smoky sub-region (outlined in red) includes home ranges of two caribou populations facing imminent threats to their recovery: Redrock-Prairie Creek (shaded green) and Narraway (shaded yellow). Map source: Government of Alberta, 2019.





The clock is running out, but Alberta can act now so Upper Smoky caribou, and communities, can thrive.
Photo © John E. Marriott.

