



## Jasper National Park Buys Out Tonquin Valley Leases to Help Caribou Survive



Jasper caribou. *Photo © John E. Marriott.*

January 5, 2023 - Conservation groups welcome Parks Canada's recent difficult decision to buy out two horse-based backcountry lodges in Jasper National Park's Tonquin Valley and to rule out new licenses of occupation in the valley.

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA), CPAWS Northern Alberta Chapter and Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y) support these steps to improve the survival prospects of Tonquin Valley caribou, which are on the brink of extirpation, and now require emergency measures to recover.

A history of poor management decisions in the Park and compromises to competing recreational interests have contributed to the near-extirpated state of the herds. In recent years, it seems the tides have turned, as Parks Canada continues to make evidence-based decisions for the benefit of caribou in Tonquin Valley.

“We strongly support these measures to reduce recreation and habitat pressures upon the remaining Tonquin caribou population, based upon Parks Canada’s obligations to protect species at risk and ecological integrity,” says Carolyn Campbell of Alberta Wilderness Association.

“We wish these kinds of decisions did not have to be made, but caribou herds in Jasper are so dangerously small that they require drastic measures to recover,” says Gillian Chow-Fraser of CPAWS Northern Alberta. “The lodges have provided tremendous backcountry winter experiences for years, and they will continue to play an important role in Tonquin valley by taking a step back to ensure caribou survive for many generations to come.”

“This is a significant step in prioritizing the long-term recovery of the Tonquin caribou herd. By securing and connecting key habitats within and beyond park borders, we can give at-risk mountain caribou and other sensitive wildlife species the space they need to survive and thrive long into the future,” says Hilary Young of Y2Y.

In October 2021 these conservation groups welcomed Parks Canada’s decision to close backcountry access for the entire snow season, to prevent predator access via packed trails into Tonquin and Brazeau caribou ranges. The groups applauded the Alpine Club of Canada for leading by example and voluntarily suspending bookings at its Tonquin backcountry Wates-Gibson hut for the entire winter since the 2020-21 season. Tonquin backcountry summer accommodation remains available at the many campgrounds and the Wates-Gibson hut.

Parks Canada is expected to decide soon if it will proceed with a conservation breeding program for Jasper caribou. These conservation groups believe that a costly captive breeding program only makes sense if caribou have high quality, secure habitat to occupy once they are released.

In the 1960s, southern Jasper National Park was home to hundreds of caribou. Today there are only about 60 of them left. The Maligne herd was declared extirpated in 2020, while the Tonquin and Brazeau herds are at such low numbers that they might not last much longer. The Tonquin herd is the largest herd left; it only has about 50 caribou, including only 9 breeding females.

### **Take Action**

If you can, AWA asks that you write Parks Canada President and CEO Ron Hallman ([ron.hallman@pc.gc.ca](mailto:ron.hallman@pc.gc.ca)) and Jasper Superintendent Alan Fehr ([alan.fehr@pc.gc.ca](mailto:alan.fehr@pc.gc.ca)). Consider letting them know that you:

- Support Parks Canada’s decision to buy out the two horse-based backcountry lodges in Jasper’s Tonquin Valley and rule out new licenses of occupation in the valley; and
- Ask them to also manage the prime Maligne caribou range for caribou re-occupation as soon as possible, as a key part of their responsibility to recover Jasper caribou.

And please copy AWA ([ccampbell@abwild.ca](mailto:ccampbell@abwild.ca)). Thank you for being a voice for Jasper caribou!

### **For more information:**

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