

Engagement Guide for the Upper Smoky Subregional Plan Survey

Southern mountain caribou, an icon of Alberta's Rocky Mountains, have experienced significant declines in population, in distribution across their range, and in their annual migration. They are listed as Threatened under the Alberta Wildlife Act and Canada's Species at Risk Act due to habitat loss and habitat disturbance from industrial activities.

The draft Upper Smoky Sub-regional Plan was released at the end of March 2025. The stated intent, defined by the Government of Alberta, of sub-regional planning is to outline land use provisions to enable caribou recovery. However, the draft plan's proposals for industrial development will eliminate the ability of the Redrock-Prairie Creek and Narraway caribou populations to survive and recover.

Albertans have an opportunity to share their feedback on the plan. To help we prepared this summary with our take on the survey's questions as a starting point for you.

Your personal responses and contributions to the survey are highly encouraged!
The survey is open until June 25th, 2025.



**Government of Alberta
Engagement Webpage**



**Government of Alberta
Public Survey**

1. Please place the outcomes in the order of priority (1 is your top priority) that you feel should be addressed by the management approaches proposed within the Upper Smoky Sub-regional Plan.

Grow economic opportunities and maintain investor certainty

Manage anthropogenic footprint

Manage caribou habitat

Support traditional land uses

Attract sustainable recreational pursuits

2. Is there anything you would like to share regarding how you prioritized these outcomes?

Our take

The stated intent of this sub-regional planning process is to outline land-use provisions to enable caribou recovery. Managing caribou habitat therefore needs to be the number one priority of the Sub-regional Plan.

We have only filled in the first priority here as we believe the prioritization of the other outcomes may be more subjective.

However, we would rank ‘traditional land uses’ and ‘manage anthropogenic footprint’ above ‘attract sustainable recreational pursuits’ and would rank ‘grow economic opportunities and maintain investor certainty’ last.

Our take

We prioritized ‘manage caribou habitat’ because without sufficient critical biophysical habitat and critical undisturbed habitat within summer and winter ranges, southern mountain caribou populations won’t survive. The plan should aim to retain and expand both undisturbed and biophysical habitat now, not decades into the future. Currently the plan continues to eliminate remaining biophysical and undisturbed habitat in caribou winter ranges. Habitat does not recover in the next 100 years.

Additionally, caribou survival and recovery should be included as an objective of the plan. The intent of the subregional planning process originally was to recovery caribou populations until they could become naturally self-sustaining. This must be included as a policy objective for the subregional plan.

3. In your opinion, how effective would this plan be in growing economic activities and maintaining investor certainty in the sub-region?

- ☐ Very effective
- ☐ Somewhat effective
- ☐ Neither effective nor ineffective
- ☐ Somewhat ineffective
- ☒ Very ineffective
- ☐ I'm not sure

4. Do you have additional considerations you would like to share about how the plan supports the outcome of growing economic activities and maintaining investor certainty in the sub-region?

Our take

The plan does not meet species at risk recovery requirements, which may continue to cause uncertainty in the ability to sustainably use the landscape and cause controversy over what types of development and activities are and are not permissible. A plan that achieves caribou (and other species) habitat outcomes will provide better investor and economic certainty across the region.

Our take

While this plan aims to support economic development, it does so by undermining long-term ecological stability, destroying critical habitat for a species at risk. This creates uncertainty for investors.

A healthy environment is the foundation for sustainable economic activities, especially in forestry, tourism, and traditional land use.

5. In your opinion, how effective would this plan be in managing anthropogenic footprint in the sub-region?

- ☐ Very effective
- ☐ Somewhat effective
- ☐ Neither effective nor ineffective
- ☐ Somewhat ineffective
- ☒ Very ineffective
- ☐ I'm not sure

Our take

The subregion already contains considerable amounts of anthropogenic (human) footprint. Restoration of existing footprint is necessary, and we are supportive of the focus on restoration of seismic lines, roadways, and pipelines. However, not enough is being done to minimize new human disturbances across the region, especially within caribou ranges.

The draft plan proposes to allow logging in nearly all of caribou winter ranges, and increase oil and gas, mining, and other human industrial uses across the entire subregion. It does not adequately manage human footprint. The 'slow go-zone' does not do enough to limit forest harvest and will result in the acceleration of anthropogenic footprint across the region. Additionally, by conducting business as usual in the 'go-zone' there is a missed opportunity to better manage public land for multi-species across the entire subregion.

6. Do you have additional considerations you would like to share about how the plan manages anthropogenic footprint in the sub-region?

Our take

The subregion already contains considerable amounts of anthropogenic (human) footprint. Restoration of existing footprint is necessary, and we are supportive of the focus on restoration of seismic lines, roadways, and pipelines. However, not enough is being done to minimize new human disturbances across the region, especially within caribou ranges.

The draft plan proposes to allow logging in nearly all of caribou winter ranges, and increase oil and gas, mining, and other human industrial uses across the entire subregion. It does not adequately manage human footprint. The 'slow go-zone' does not do enough to limit forest harvest and will result in the acceleration of anthropogenic footprint across the region. Additionally, by conducting business as usual in the 'go-zone' there is a missed opportunity to better manage public land for multi-species across the entire subregion.

7. In your opinion, how effective would this plan be in managing caribou habitat in the sub-region?

- ☐ Very effective
- ☐ Somewhat effective
- ☐ Neither effective nor ineffective
- ☐ Somewhat ineffective
- ☒ Very ineffective
- ☐ I'm not sure

8. Do you have additional considerations you would like to share about how the plan manages caribou habitat in the sub-region?

Our take

This plan does not address caribou habitat requirements and does not manage for caribou habitat.

Our take

Southern mountain caribou have clear habitat requirements for survival and recovery including sufficient biophysical habitat (mature conifer forests over 80 years old) and 65% undisturbed habitat within their winter ranges. Neither population of caribou within the subregion have sufficient habitat for survival and recovery, and yet, the plan will result in continued destruction of habitat for the next 50+years. Caribou within the subregion are unlikely to survive the proposed habitat loss within the plan.

Specifically, the proposed forestry harvest timing sequence in the plan will remove nearly all remaining biophysical and undisturbed habitat in the winter range for caribou and overlaps with remaining areas of caribou occupancy. This is not effective for caribou habitat management and will result in their extirpation.

Existing conservation areas and the proposed Nature First conservation areas are beneficial for managing summer range habitat for both caribou populations and should be retained.

9. In your opinion, how effective would this plan be in supporting traditional land uses in the sub-region?

- ☐ Very effective
- ☐ Somewhat effective
- ☐ Neither effective nor ineffective
- ☐ Somewhat ineffective
- ☒ Very ineffective
- ☐ I'm not sure

Our take

While our organizations do not speak for Indigenous people, we understand that traditional land uses require functioning and intact ecosystems to support the plants, wildlife, water, and landscapes utilized by Indigenous people. The policy objectives for ‘traditional land use’ do not include functioning ecosystems or self-sustaining wildlife populations and therefore may not be effective in supporting traditional land uses, despite identifying ‘traditional land use’ as an objective of the plan.

10. Do you have additional considerations you would like to share about how the plan supports traditional land uses in the sub-region?

Our take

The rate of forest harvest and the objectives to increase natural resource extraction may conflict with ‘traditional land use’ at a landscape scale.

11. In your opinion, how effective would this plan be in attracting sustainable recreation pursuits in the sub-region?

- ☐ Very effective
- ☐ Somewhat effective
- ☐ Neither effective nor ineffective
- ☒ Somewhat ineffective
- ☐ Very ineffective
- ☐ I'm not sure

12. Do you have additional considerations you would like to share about how the plan supports attracting sustainable recreation pursuits in the sub-region?

Our take

Access to nature, pristine viewscales, and wildlife viewing are all motivations for people seeking out sustainable recreation opportunities. While the addition of Nature First areas will be attractive for sustainable recreation pursuits, the significant impacts that the timber harvest and resource extraction activities will have on this subregion may not. We do not believe the intensity of these disturbances will add to the attraction sustainable recreation pursuits in the subregion.

Our take

We are supportive of the policy objectives and requirements for ‘recreation and tourism’ in the plan. Specifically, we support the need for designated trail management, improved education, and alignment of trail management with ongoing restoration of linear features across the subregion.

Trail management should be undertaken with regards to ecological and habitat needs for species that are sensitive to linear disturbances and recreation impacts, such as grizzly bears, caribou, bighorn sheep, and mountain goat. Trail management and seasonal or temporal restrictions can help achieve these objectives and we support their inclusion in the plan.

13. Do you understand the intent of the regulatory details to be incorporated into the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

Our take

Yes, we understand that subregional plans need to be incorporated under a regional plan and that the objectives of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan may align best with the Upper Smoky Subregional plan.

14. Do you think the regulatory details to be incorporated into the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan are clear?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ I'm not sure

Our take

Yes.

15. Please explain your response.

16. Do you think the regulatory details align with the proposed policy direction in the Upper Smoky Sub-regional Plan?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ I'm not sure

Our take

Yes.

17. Please explain your response.

18. Are there any other thoughts you wish to share on the draft Upper Smoky Sub-regional Plan, the regulatory details and the associated specific targeted amendments to the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan?

19. What are the first three characters of your postal code?

Maximum 3 characters

0/3

20. Are you completing this survey as a representative of your company, organization or community?

☐ yes

☐ no

21. Please list your company, organization or community.

Maximum 255 characters

0/255

22. Do you identify as Indigenous?

☐ First Nations

☐ Metis

☐ Inuit

☐ None of the above

☐ Prefer not to answer

23. How did you hear about this survey?

☐ Social media

☐ Government of Alberta website

☐ Other media (radio, television, newspaper)

☐ Word of mouth

☐ Other (please specify)

24. How was your experience sharing your input today?

☒ Poor

☐ Acceptable

☐ Good

25. Why was your experience poor?

Maximum 255 characters

0/255

Our take

Feel free to add additional details.

Answer the remaining questions in the way that are most appropriate to you

Want to do more?

Send an email to:

EPA.SRPRegDetailsRP@gov.ab.ca

Minister of Environment and Protected

Areas: epa.minister@gov.ab.ca

Minister of Forestry and Parks:

fp.Minister@gov.ab.ca

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