

# A PARTNER IN CARIBOU RECOVERY

The B.C. Government and the forest industry have taken unprecedented action to sustain caribou herds in British Columbia, but populations continue to decline. The causes for the decline are multi-faceted, and vary between herds and geographic regions. Possible reasons for population decline include predation, low recruitment (number of calves born), amount of high quality habitat, forage/nutrition, hunting, disease and pathogens, and climate change. As a world leader in sustainable forestry, the B.C. forest sector has a role to play in supporting caribou recovery and survival.

## CARIBOU IN B.C.

B.C. is home to four populations of Woodland Caribou – Boreal, Northern Mountain, Central Mountain, and Southern Mountain. Southern Mountain Caribou occur in the southern two-thirds of B.C. and in west-central Alberta and are listed as threatened under the federal Species at Risk Act (SARA).

The Government of B.C. developed the Mountain Caribou Recovery Implementation Plan (MCRIP) specific to the Southern Mountain Caribou. This Plan was developed by the Province's leading caribou biologists. It called for six key actions to be implemented simultaneously to achieve caribou survival, including habitat preservation, predator control, primary prey management, augmentation, the management of human recreation to limit interactions, and adaptive management and research.

The B.C. Government also announced funding of \$27 million over three years toward caribou recovery, including the support of two maternity penning projects to reduce the mortality of caribou young.



## MORE THAN HABITAT PRESERVATION

The forest sector has been actively involved in caribou management for many years. In addition to supporting MCRIP, COFI members have invested in inventories, studies and surveys, undertaken research, hired external expertise, and participated in augmentation trials. The information from these actions has been incorporated into forest management and operational plans to minimize any impacts from forest activities on caribou survival.

The forest sector has worked in collaboration with government to achieve the habitat protection objective by increasing the amount of fully protected high-suitability winter mountain caribou habitat from 65 to 95 per cent, successfully protecting a total of 2.2 million hectares within mountain caribou range.

However, caribou recovery is predicated on much more than habitat preservation, as evidenced by declining caribou populations in Wells Gray Provincial Park and Jasper National Park. Furthermore, caribou herds have been completely extirpated from Banff National Park, which has been protected as a National Park since 1885 and has never had any industrial activity.

## A MULTI-SPECIES APPROACH

Predation is a major factor in caribou recovery. Wolves are often the primary predator of caribou, and in some herds the leading cause of mortality. Cougars, bears and wolverines may also pose a threat in certain regions. As climate change evolves across the landscape, we can expect more ungulates moving into traditional caribou territory. Predators will follow, resulting in increased interactions with caribou and likely a further decline in their population.

The most effective approach will be multi-species and ecosystem-based in order to support biodiversity in our forests, rather than focusing exclusively on caribou.

## A SUCCESSFUL RECOVERY PLAN

COFI has provided policy submissions to the Canadian Wildlife Service and the Government of BC advocating for the use of evidence to develop recovery plans. We have encouraged additional research on why some herds are faltering, assessing all factors in caribou decline including human and natural disturbance, climate change, predation, pathogens and disease. The forest sector will continue to support these efforts. We have strongly encouraged governments to look at the effectiveness of potential strategies, and balance these with assessing social and economic impacts of proposed plans on industry, jobs and the economic well-being of many BC communities. We have also asked that communities and industry be adequately consulted.



- COFI supports efforts by the provincial government to develop and enact provincial species at risk legislation, as the responsible jurisdiction for caribou protection and recovery.
- Additional research should be undertaken to determine why some caribou herds are faltering, including assessing all causes of caribou decline including human and natural disturbance, climate change, predation, pathogens and disease.
- Research-based recovery strategies that are focused on achieving successful outcomes are required, rather than the simple measure of habitat protection to determine success.
- COFI asks that governments consider all values across the landscape including socio-economic impacts in assessing caribou recovery and protection strategies. These impacts include the constraints that would be placed on the timber harvesting land base that would ultimately impact the viability of local mills, jobs, and the communities that rely on our forest sector for their well-being.

## BC GOVERNMENT PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

On March 26, 2019, the Government of BC released two draft agreements: a draft partnership agreement between BC, Canada, West Moberly and Saulneau First Nations proposing habitat protection and restoration measures for the central group herds of southern mountain caribou, and a draft agreement between the provincial and federal government for co-operation to recover southern mountain caribou. A consultation process has been set for the month of April 2019 with public meetings announced for Williams Lake, Prince George, Mackenzie, Quesnel, Revelstoke, Nakusp, and Nelson. Online and written submissions are also accepted. We encourage full and transparent fact-sharing and engagement. More information can be found here: <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/caribou/section11agreement/>



The BC Council of Forest Industries (COFI) is the voice of the B.C. forest industry. B.C.'s forest industry is adapting, evolving and innovating, and continues to be one of the most significant economic drivers in the province and the largest producer of softwood lumber in Canada.