

# 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. They are currently seeking public input on their draft recovery plan at <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/caribou/>



## 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

In January 2018, COFI provided a submission to the Canadian Wildlife Service on the draft Section 11 Conservation Agreement for Southern Mountain Caribou [LINK].

COFI's submission highlights that a successful recovery plan must be evidence based, and not rely on the measure of habitat protection. There must be additional research into why some caribou herds are faltering, assessing all causes of caribou decline including human and natural disturbance, climate change, predation, pathogens and disease. This approach should be tailored to a provincially-focused mandate for the survival of caribou herds in B.C. It should also include socio-economic impacts, and the constraints that would be placed on the timber harvesting land base that would ultimately impact the viability of local mills, jobs, and the 140 communities that rely on B.C.'s forest sector for their well-being. A successful approach will require collaboration between the federal and provincial government, as well as industry and stakeholders in managing natural resources and wildlife where caribou are found.

The B.C. forest sector believes we can play a supporting role in caribou recovery and survival.

- 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. This approach would allow for a provincially-focused mandate for the survival of caribou herds in B.C.
- 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.



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.