

Backgrounder

The Survival of Boreal Woodland Caribou in Alberta

What are the specific concerns in Alberta?

Thirteen boreal caribou ranges are found in Alberta's heavily fragmented boreal forest. The majority of these ranges are found in the northeast or extreme northwest of the province. The Little Smoky range is the southernmost of these ranges, found near the foothills. Nearly all of Alberta's caribou ranges are in population decline. Presently, none of these ranges are of adequate quality or extent to be considered self-sustaining.

What is the extent of habitat already disturbed by humans?

Second only to British Columbia, the extent of caribou habitat disturbed in Alberta is extremely high. On average, 47% of the total area of boreal caribou ranges is disturbed by humans. A total of 54,115 km² of caribou habitat in Alberta is directly impacted by humans. Disturbances from oil and gas production, such as seismic lines and well sites, have caused extensive habitat loss in Alberta.

What proportion of caribou range is in Alberta?

An estimated 2,935 boreal caribou live in Alberta, though precise values are not available for some ranges. Boreal caribou range covers approximately 120,491 km² of Alberta's land base.

What is the extent of restoration efforts needed?

Extensive restoration efforts are required for all but the Richardson range, as the current range quality is insufficient to support self-sustaining caribou populations.

What extent of habitat maintenance is required to sustain populations?

The present extent and condition of the Richardson range is considered adequate to maintain a self-sustaining population, but the trajectory of this population is unknown.

What extent of disturbance would be permissible and still enable caribou to survive?

The extent of disturbance within Alberta's caribou range is already high and, considering that no caribou populations in the province are self-sustaining, additional human disturbance will further accelerate the demise of these herds.

How great is the probability that boreal caribou will survive in Alberta, given the current situation?

None of the local Alberta caribou populations are self-sustaining with a very low probability of persistence under current range conditions.

What are the implications of the report's findings for decision makers in Alberta regarding:

Protected area planning and establishment

- New protected areas should be established in the caribou ranges with the lowest human footprint (i.e. Richardson, Caribou Mountains) to prevent further range fragmentation and population loss
- Establishment of protected areas in highly disturbed areas are less likely to be successful in stemming further caribou decline unless accompanied by wide-scale habitat restoration

Current industrial practices and woodland caribou recovery planning

- Support of government and industry for a moratorium on further industrial development within Alberta's caribou ranges will help "buy time" for much-needed, extensive habitat restoration to occur
- While all ranges in Alberta require restoration, habitat restoration efforts should be prioritized for ranges with the greatest extent of disturbance, namely, the Little Smoky, Slave Lake and Deadwood ranges
- Additional population trend data are required for the Bistcho, Steen River/Yates, Deadwood, Richardson, Nipisi and Slave Lake ranges but, as a precautionary measure, these populations should be deemed at high risk for further decline, given the extent of human disturbance within their ranges
- It is very clear that industrial development in Alberta has far exceeded the threshold compatible with caribou persistence; consequently, experimental testing of disturbance thresholds should not be attempted until caribou populations have stabilized

For more information including media release, map, national summary, images and B-Roll visit:
www.caribouandyou.ca

Contact:

Helene Walsh, Boreal Campaign Director, CPAWS NAB, 780 922 0908