

Backgrounder

The Survival of Boreal Woodland Caribou in British Columbia

What are the specific concerns in British Columbia?

Five boreal caribou ranges are found in British Columbia's extreme northeast, where the boreal forest is highly fragmented by anthropogenic disturbance. The population trends of these ranges are generally unknown. Range extent and quality are generally low in British Columbia, and 4 out of 5 ranges are not self-sustaining. The Maxhamish range cannot be assigned with certainty to either category.

In addition, the federal government needs to address the Species At Risk Act's requirements for all caribou herds at risk in BC. This is necessary to protect northern mountain caribou that are in danger in the Y2Y landscape.

What is the extent of habitat already disturbed by humans?

British Columbia has the greatest proportion of human footprint within its boreal caribou ranges. On average, 51% of the area of caribou ranges in this jurisdiction is directly impacted by human disturbance. In total, 13,089 km² of caribou range have been disturbed by humans. Disturbances from oil and gas production, such as seismic lines and well sites, have caused extensive habitat loss in BC.

What proportion of caribou range is in British Columbia?

British Columbia has the lowest boreal caribou population in Canada. Approximately 1,040 boreal caribou live in the province. Boreal caribou range covers 25,193 km² of British Columbia's land base.

What is the extent of restoration efforts needed?

Extensive restoration efforts are required for three caribou ranges in British Columbia, as the current range extent and condition are unable to support self-sustaining caribou populations.

What extent of habitat maintenance is required to sustain populations?

The current extent and condition of the Maxhamish (46% human disturbance) and Parker (31% human disturbance) are considered sufficient to maintain self-sustaining caribou populations should no further human disturbance occur, although the population trends for these ranges are unknown.

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

The extent of human disturbance within British Columbia's caribou ranges is already high and, considering that the majority of caribou populations in the province are not self-sustaining, additional human disturbance will accelerate the decline of these herds.

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

Chinchaga

- Not self-sustaining
- 20% probability of attaining self-sustainability under current range conditions
 - Very low probability of long-term persistence

Maxhamish

- Cannot be definitely designated as self-sustaining or not-self sustaining
- 50% probability of attaining self-sustainability under current range conditions

- Calendar
 - Moderate probability of long-term persistence
 - Not self-sustaining
 - 40% probability of attaining self-sustainability under current range conditions
 - Low probability of long-term persistence
- Snake-Sahtaneh
 - Not self-sustaining
 - 20% probability of attaining self-sustainability under current range conditions
 - Very low probability of long-term persistence
- Parker
 - Not self-sustaining
 - 40% probability of attaining self-sustainability under current range conditions
 - Low probability of long-term persistence
- Prophet
 - Not self-sustaining
 - 30% probability of attaining self-sustainability under current range conditions
 - Low probability of long-term persistence

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

Management for caribou in the future

- British Columbia's boreal caribou ranges must be managed in a way that maintains all existing intact areas over time, as well as corridors of sufficient width between them, in order to prevent further degradation of range quality
- Consultation of Aboriginal traditional knowledge may assist in identification of these corridors and intact core areas

Current industrial practices and woodland caribou recovery planning

- Support of government and industry for a moratorium on further industrial development within British Columbia's caribou ranges will facilitate extensive habitat restoration to occur within the most highly impacted ranges, namely, the Prophet, Snake-Sahtaneh, Chinchaga, and Calendar ranges
- Population trend data are required to gauge the population health of the Maxhamish, Calendar, Parker and Prophet ranges, but as a precautionary measure, these herds should be presumed to be in decline, given the intensity of human disturbances within these ranges
- Industrial development in British Columbia has clearly surpassed the threshold compatible with caribou persistence and, 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

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