

Backgrounder

The Survival of Boreal Woodland Caribou in Quebec

What are the specific concerns in Quebec?

Five distinct boreal caribou ranges are recognized in Quebec: Charlevoix, Manicouagan, Manouane, Pimpuacan and Val d'Or. Other distinct ranges within Quebec's boreal forest have not yet been delineated.

Range condition is variable; 50% of the ranges are considered "self-sustaining" and 50% are "not self-sustaining."

What is the extent of habitat already disturbed by humans?

On average, 36% of the area of these ranges is disturbed by humans. In total, 96,395 km² of boreal caribou habitat in Quebec has been impacted by human disturbance.

What proportion of caribou range is in Quebec?

Extrapolating from regional studies of caribou density, an estimated 8000 to 12000 boreal woodland caribou live in Quebec - a more conservative estimate is 2000 to 3000. Boreal caribou ranges cover approximately 680,433 km² of Quebec's boreal forest.

What is the extent of restoration efforts needed?

Currently, the Val d'Or range requires restoration efforts. It is the second-smallest boreal caribou range in Quebec and 50% of its area is disturbed by humans. The extent and condition of this range must be improved for this population to become self-sustaining.

What extent of habitat maintenance is required to sustain populations?

Current range extent and condition is sufficient to maintain self-sustaining caribou populations in Quebec. While current habitat should be maintained in all ranges, failure to maintain the ranges currently regarded as "self-sustaining" will likely lead to caribou population decline. In particular, maintenance of current habitat is necessary within the remainder of Quebec's boreal forest, since little is known about the local habitat use of caribou populations in this area.

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

Within Quebec, two caribou ranges (Manicouagan and Manouane local populations) and are deemed sufficient in quality to accommodate additional disturbance without adversely affecting the ranges' sustainability.

While large population size is generally considered an asset in absorbing the impacts of human activity, both of these ranges have relatively small caribou populations. However, the human footprint within these ranges is low in comparison to that of Quebec's other boreal caribou ranges.

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

With the exception of the southern, small, isolated local populations, Boreal caribou in Quebec are considered self-sustaining under the current range conditions. Charlevoix, Pimpuacan and Val D'or populations are not self-sustaining and have a low probability of longterm persistence under the current range conditions.

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

Protected area planning and establishment

- Traditional knowledge of Aboriginal Canadians should be consulted to identify core areas of caribou use, particularly where discrete population ranges have not been delineated.
- Protected areas are needed most within ranges considered “not self-sustaining,” namely Pimpuacan and Val d’Or. The Charlevoix population already resides within the Charlevoix Biosphere Reserve.

Current industrial practices and woodland caribou recovery planning

- All existing caribou habitat should be maintained, given the absence of critical thresholds regarding human disturbance and caribou persistence
- Further human disturbance should not take place in the Val d’Or range, which currently has the lowest probability of achieving self-sustainability, given the extent of human footprint already present
- Although the report suggests the Manicouagan and Manouane ranges may accommodate further industrial activities, expanding industrial activities within these ranges should be considered risky, given their small population sizes
- Ongoing population monitoring is necessary to assess and adjust management strategies

CPAWS recommendations for Québec:

1. The Québec government must release its recovery plan (2005-2012) for the boreal woodland caribou, a plan it has refused to release for the past three years. The primary objective of this plan is to maintain current distribution of boreal caribou in the province.
2. Québec must move immediately to fill gaps in protected areas in the province's "caribou belt". Two areas of high conservation value are proposed as priority sites for large protected areas: the Assinica-Broadback-Evans region, and the Vallée des Montagnes Blanches.
3. The Québec government should undertake the research necessary to fill gaps in knowledge of caribou populations and trends. Several ranges have not yet been delineated. Québec's recent commitment to map the habitat of boreal woodland caribou (calving and rutting sites, winter feeding grounds) is insufficient - habitat mapping should be done at the range level, as per the findings of the federal science report.
4. Québec must pause logging, road building and other development in intact areas of the commercial forest until appropriate measures - including those listed above - are in place to “anchor” self-sustaining caribou populations.

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

www.caribouandyou.ca

Contact:

Patrick Nadeau, CPAWS Quebec, 514 278 7627 x226