

INPUT SOUGHT ON BRITISH COLUMBIA'S BOREAL CARIBOU RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

A draft of the Boreal Caribou Recovery Implementation Plan for British Columbia is now available for public review for a period of 60 days. All comments will be received, compiled and provided to the government at the end of the review period. At that time, the government will decide what changes are required and where further consultation and engagement is appropriate.

British Columbia's boreal caribou population is in decline, and is listed as "threatened" under the federal *Species at Risk Act*. By acting now, before the numbers decline further, the province expects to help herds recover to sustainable levels. Achieving that will require an integrated, cooperative, science-based program implemented over several years. Work has been underway for some time, following the 2011 Boreal Caribou Implementation Plan. With new information now available resulting from research from our 2011 plan, the government has decided to revise our planning documentation.

The provincial cabinet has set two primary goals for our boreal caribou recovery efforts:

1. Maintain a positive habitat trend across each boreal caribou range, and;
2. Stabilize and achieve viable populations across each boreal caribou range.

These goals will be supported by specific objectives including objectives for managing the impacts to habitat from industrial activity, and by specific targets for each range, as described in the Plan appendices.

This draft Plan proposes a variety of techniques, such as predator control, maternal penning, and other intensive measures to enable recovery. Perhaps the single most important factor for success will be protection of high valued habitat for the caribou herds, which the plan refers to as their "core habitat". Unlike some other species that thrive in recently disturbed or young forest, boreal caribou require large contiguous areas of old forest. Part of the work completed under the 2011 Plan has been to collect more detailed information about what habitat caribou are using (ranges), and within that what are the areas of habitat of highest use by boreal caribou (core). Much of this information was gathered by tracking the movement of individual animals using radio-collars and telemetry. The results have been mapped, showing (five) distinct ranges, with one or more, smaller core areas in each.

While it is paramount that we do what is necessary for survival of the species, it is also understood that these habitat areas are valued for other resources important to communities, such as the oil and gas and forestry resources. This draft Plan is aimed at achieving sustainable boreal caribou populations with the least possible impact to these economic opportunities. However, there will be some areas where industry is excluded or significantly constrained.

There are two main types of habitat alterations that can affect Boreal Caribou populations. These are: 1. disturbances that increase the amount of early seral stage or young forest; and 2. the creation of linear corridors such as roads and pipelines. In addition to their direct effects, these habitat alterations increase predation.

The best available science currently suggests that boreal caribou habitat can be protected by limiting the area of habitat in a younger forest condition (i.e. early seral habitat) to a percentage across the landscape to less than six percent. Presently the amount of early seral habitat area varies from a low of 0.2% in the Calendar Range to a high of 4.7% in the Westside Range. Future work may inform different, more specific targets within individual ranges. In the meantime, a maximum of six percent forestry-created early seral habitat will apply across all. This means that there is room for some timber harvesting in every range, subject to application of the appropriate practices and restrictions.

Wildfire managers will be engaged to ensure investments in wildfire suppression are, as best possible, aligned with caribou recovery efforts. Oil and gas activities, which predominately create linear corridors, will be subject to firm mitigation and restoration requirements (i.e. the 4:1 habitat restoration ratio).

Further assessment is required to determine the condition, and protection requirements for habitat in core areas within each range, as well as the socio-economic impacts of limiting access to the that timber supply. Until then the default objective for core areas is 0% new forestry-created early seral stands. One exception is the Milligan Core area, within the Chinchaga Range (Fort St. John Timber Supply Area), where it has been determined that caribou recovery objectives can be met while accommodating some timber harvesting.

Other exceptions to the default will be considered where there is sufficient new information to suggest a similar or better balance can be achieved by allowing limited harvesting. Portions of core areas in the Westside Fort Nelson and Maxhamish Ranges have been identified as potential candidates. Consideration of exceptions may include a requirement for the industry to employ special harvesting and mitigation practices to minimize the impact on caribou and habitat, and for the province to undertake predator management or other suitable population enhancement measures. This will be part of the adaptive management process.

The government believes we can protect boreal caribou while continuing to meet the essential economic, social, and cultural needs of communities. Input from those with the greatest interest in the land and resources will help ensure that happens.

Individuals and organizations are invited to provide comments on the draft Boreal Caribou Recovery Implementation Plan between now and May 31, 2017. The province is interested in receiving comments on specific aspects of the plan, as well as perspectives on balancing interests and adapting the plan as we move forward.