Overview of the Draft Partnership Agreement between British Columbia, Canada, West Moberly First Nations and Saulteau First Nations to Recover the Central Group of Southern Mountain Caribou

A Primer to Support a Conversation with British Columbians
Introduction

The governments of British Columbia and Canada are committed to caribou recovery while seeking to meet the social and economic needs of British Columbians. To help this iconic species recover, we need an approach grounded in the best available information, including science and traditional knowledge, partnerships with leaders in caribou recovery and informed by engagement with all stakeholders and Indigenous peoples. To this end, B.C. has been working with the federal government, West Moberly First Nations and Saulteau First Nations to develop a caribou recovery agreement focused on the Central Group of Southern Mountain Caribou.

Overview of Partnership Agreement

British Columbia, Environment and Climate Change Canada, West Moberly First Nations and Saulteau First Nations have developed a draft Inter-Governmental Partnership Agreement for the Conservation of the Central Group of the Southern Mountain Caribou (“Partnership Agreement”). This draft Partnership Agreement applies to the Central Group (orange area on map) of Southern Mountain Caribou in British Columbia.
The purpose of the Partnership Agreement is to set out the actions the parties will take to immediately stabilize and expeditiously grow the population of the Central Group to levels that are self-sustaining and support traditional aboriginal harvesting activities, consistent with existing Aboriginal and Treaty rights.

The West Moberly and Saulteau First Nations have been leading recovery activities in collaboration with the provincial government for the Central Group, including imposing a voluntary moratorium on hunting caribou, establishing and managing a maternal pen, implementing traditional predator management programs, establishing a restoration social enterprise and native plant nursery, and monitoring and mapping caribou habitat.

**Partnership Agreement Context - Central Group Population Status**

West Moberly and Saulteau Elders remember a time when caribou were so numerous that the Peace region was described as being covered by a “sea of caribou”. Populations have dramatically declined following the combined effect of industrial development and other human activities over the last 50 years. The South Peace (Central Group) region now includes six caribou herds (within three Local Population Units) that have declined from about 800 animals in the early 2000s to about 220 animals today. The B.C. government initiated the implementation of a predator management program for Central Group herds in 2015. This program, in combination with West Moberly and Saulteau First Nations’ maternity pen, has resulted in recent increases in the Klinse-Za, Kennedy-Siding and Quintette herds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Herd</th>
<th>2018 Count</th>
<th>Early 2000 Count</th>
<th>Federal Status</th>
<th>Provincial Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Klinse-Za</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>Threatened</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy-Siding</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Threatened</td>
<td>Extirpated</td>
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<td>Quintette</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>Threatened</td>
<td>Red</td>
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<td>Narraway</td>
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<td>120</td>
<td>Threatened</td>
<td>Red</td>
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<td>Mackenzie</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>200</td>
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<td>Red</td>
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<td>Chetwynd</td>
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<td>Tumbler Ridge</td>
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The *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) is federal legislation designed to encourage and enable the conservation and protection of Canada’s species at risk, including caribou. Southern Mountain Caribou was listed as a threatened wildlife species on Schedule 1 of the SARA in 2003. The federal recovery strategy was posted on the Species at Risk Public Registry on June 3, 2014. The federal recovery strategy identifies unsustainable predation as the most significant, immediate, direct threat to Southern Mountain Caribou. Broadly, these unsustainable levels of predation are the result of habitat changes, which have led to changes to predator and prey communities and direct disturbance and displacement of individual caribou.

Under the *Species at Risk Act*, the federal Cabinet has the ability to enact orders that would protect caribou and their habitat from further development and disturbance. The federal government has received multiple submissions from private citizens, Indigenous peoples, and environmental organizations requesting that the federal government implement an order. In May 2018, the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change determined that Southern Mountain Caribou are facing imminent threats to their recovery. The Minister’s finding highlights that immediate actions are needed to allow for eventual recovery.

The *Species at Risk Act* also enables Canada to enter into agreements to benefit species at risk, such as Southern Mountain Caribou. Such agreements must include conservation measures, such as those contained in the draft Partnership Agreement. This Agreement can be considered by the federal government when making decisions related to federal orders.

The draft Partnership Agreement reflects Canada’s willingness to work collaboratively with B.C., Indigenous peoples, local communities and interested stakeholders to develop solutions grounded in the best available information on caribou recovery and to carefully consider the economic context of the necessary recovery measures.

Caribou are critically important to Indigenous peoples in northeastern British Columbia. The negotiation of this agreement was initiated as a result of ongoing leadership in caribou recovery demonstrated by Saulteau and West Moberly First Nations and the shared interests of the federal and provincial governments and West Moberly and Saulteau First Nations to proactively develop caribou recovery measures that are consistent with the purposes and outcomes of the *Species at Risk Act*. West Moberly and Saulteau First Nations are leading efforts to recover caribou in the Central Group to levels which could once again sustain traditional harvesting consistent with existing Aboriginal and Treaty rights.

West Moberly and Saulteau First Nations have been actively involved in caribou recovery efforts within Treaty 8 territory, starting with a self-imposed ban on hunting caribou in the 1970s. These First Nations led the establishment of a successful maternity penning program that has contributed to the recent population increases in the Pine LPU. These First Nations also operate a native plant nursery (Twin Sisters Native Plant Nursery) and a restoration social enterprise (Twin Nations Restoration) that provide job and training opportunities for local people, while reconnecting natural habitats for caribou and other wildlife. In addition to on-the-ground recovery measures, West Moberly and Saulteau First Nations have been leading planning efforts and developing mapping for critical habitat based on science and traditional knowledge. Measures proposed as part of the Partnership Agreement will complement First Nations recovery efforts in this area.
Partnership Agreement – Overview of Content & Key Recovery Measures

The proposed area for the Partnership Agreement is depicted on the map below. The overall area is divided in zones that will be subject to new management designations and directions. These zones are divided into proposed sustainable activity areas, protection, restoration and conservation areas, and a potential First Nations woodland license.
SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE ACTIVITY AREAS (ZONES A1, B1):

These areas will have continued ongoing economic development activities, and opportunities for new development projects. New applications may be subject to a review by the Caribou Review Committee. This committee will consist of representatives from federal and provincial governments and West Moberly and Saulteau First Nations. The Committee will be responsible for making consensus-based recommendations and providing those recommendations to Government decision-makers. New Land use objectives, developed by a technical working group, will be developed to support the management of these zones and decision making.

AREAS OF RESTORATION AND CONSERVATION FOCUS (ZONE B4)

Zone B4 will have continued development activities similar to zone A1 and B1, with the possibility of additional prescriptions based on the restoration and conservation focus of this particular area. New applications will be subject to a review by the Caribou Review Committee. Additional land use objectives may be considered for this area, that are consistent with the restoration and conservation focus.

PROTECTION, RESTORATION AND CONSERVATION AREAS (A2, B2, B3)

Management of Zone A2 and B2 will be subject to an interim moratorium on statutory decision making for applications for all resource development activities, except for applications or requests related to emergencies, public health and safety concerns, habitat restoration, and construction and work to maintain existing infrastructure. A long term plan for habitat protection will be developed through engagement with Indigenous peoples and stakeholders during this moratorium.

Zone B2 and B3 propose an expansion of the Klinse-za Park to establish a designated protected area. Zones B2 and B3 will be protected through an interim moratorium while the protected area boundaries and preferred type of protected area is confirmed by the Parties.

ADDITIONAL HABITAT PROTECTION AND RESTORATION MEASURES

Proposed Habitat Recovery and Restoration

B.C to develop a plan outlining measures to decrease the percentage of disturbed critical habitat in the Central Group.
Canada and B.C. will support the habitat restoration projects undertaken by West Moberly and Saulteau First Nations within the Pine local Population Unit.

**Habitat Mitigation and Offsetting**
B.C. to develop a habitat mitigation and offsets program applicable to any resource development activities for improving caribou habitat quality and availability within the Central Group.

**Motor Vehicle Management**
B.C. to engage with stakeholders regarding motorized winter recreation to inform decisions.

**Indigenous Guardian Program**
West Moberly and Saulteau First Nations will take the lead in planning for and initiating an Indigenous Guardian Program.

**Maternity Penning**
Canada and B.C. commit to providing long-term support for the maternity penning program delivered by Saulteau and West Moberly.

**Predator Management**
B.C. will implement an effective predator management program to support timely caribou recovery.

**Managing Impacts and Supporting Local Communities**
The implementation of the Partnership Agreement and the proposed measures could have impacts on industry sectors such as forestry, energy, mining and the tourism and recreation sectors. The governments of Canada, B.C., West Moberly and Saulteau First Nations are collectively committed to minimizing the social and economic impacts associated with caribou recovery efforts. To fully understand the potential impacts and how to minimize and mitigate impacts, the province and the federal government have been conducting an impact analysis. Focused engagement on the draft Partnership Agreement will take place with communities, Indigenous peoples and stakeholders to understand the potential impacts on communities and workers before the draft agreement is finalized. Information on potential impacts and benefits of the Partnership Agreement will be developed in collaboration with communities as part of the engagement process.

**Benefits of the Partnership Agreement**
The Partnership Agreement proposes measures to protect and restore important caribou habitat, while also introducing and continuing population management measures that will support caribou recovery. This Agreement represents a new approach to managing a species at risk through government to government collaboration and partnership. It establishes a framework to support Indigenous peoples that play a leadership role in caribou recovery and provides opportunities for local jobs in the fields of restoration and stewardship. It also support the cultural vitality of local Indigenous communities and can become a national, provincial and local point of pride as we work together to recover this iconic species.

**How to Give Your Feedback**
We want to hear from everyone interested in this important issue. We will be hosting meetings and teleconferences and have information available online at engage.gov.bc.ca/caribou. All feedback received will be summarized into a "what we heard" document that will be made publicly available. All input will help inform all Parties' decision-making regarding the finalization and signing of the Agreements.