Predator reduction for caribou recovery

Caribou in BC background

BC is home to 55 herds of caribou.

Despite significant investments aimed to increase the population of many herds, caribou populations have continued to decline and are considered "threatened" by the federal *Species at Risk Act.*

The reasons for caribou population declines are complex, with multiple factors (e.g., habitat loss, predators, climate change, stress and displacement by human activities, etc.).

Human-caused landscape change has altered relationships between caribou, primary prey, and their predators.
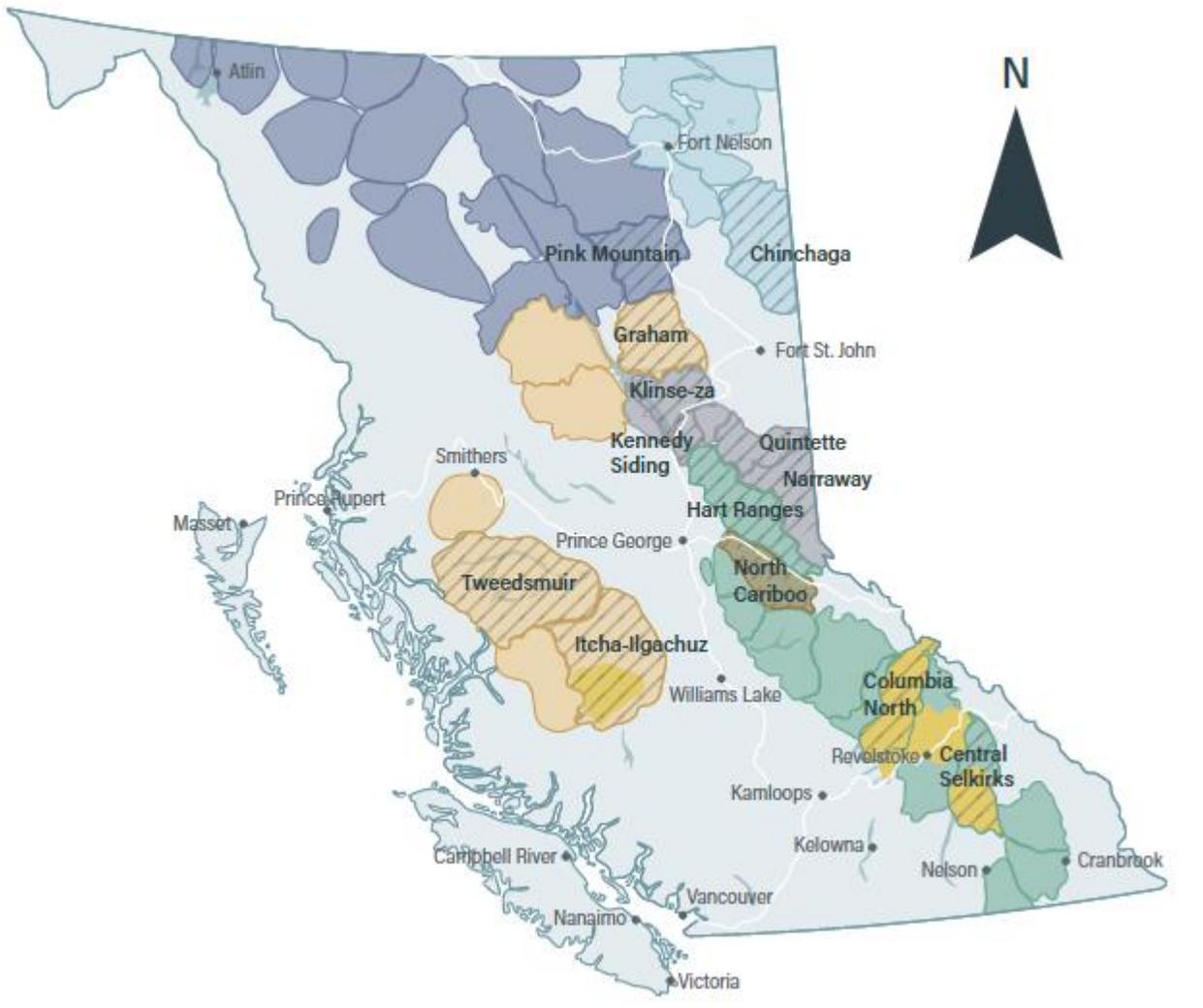
Herds are recommended predator reduction if…

The herd is below population objectives.

Data and/or Indigenous knowledge indicates wolf predation is a limiting factor on the caribou herd.

Ground based hunting and trapping activities alone cannot achieve desired wolf densities.

There is high certainty that the herd is recoverable, including planned or implemented habitat protection measures.
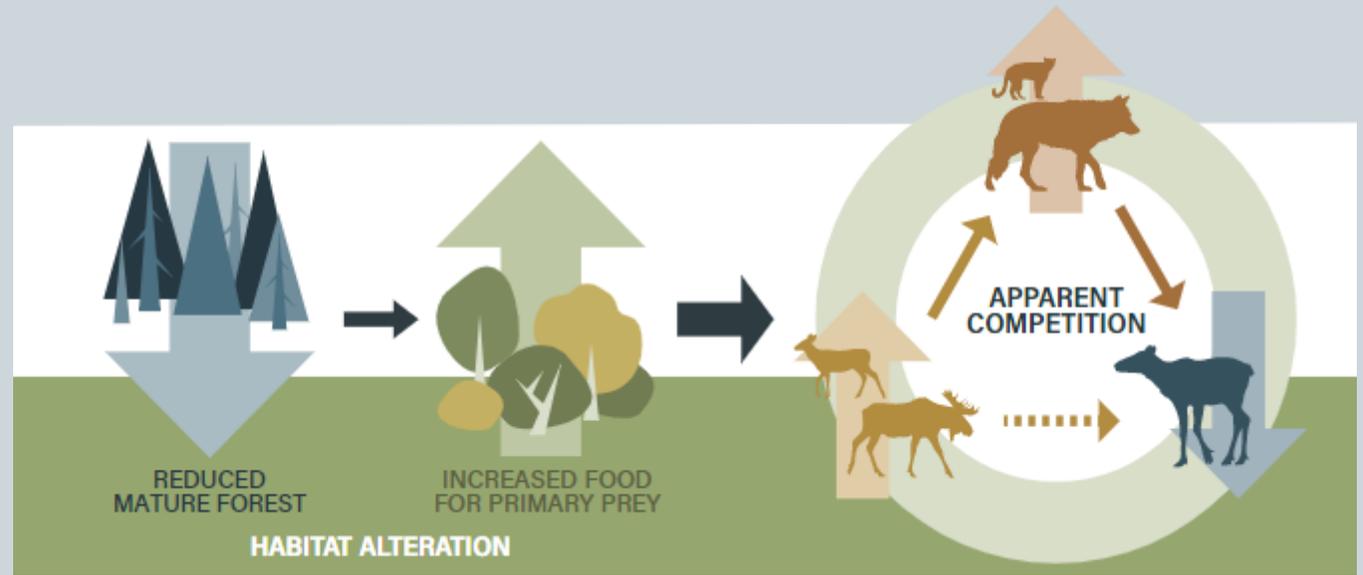
Why?

Predator (wolf) numbers on the rise in BC.
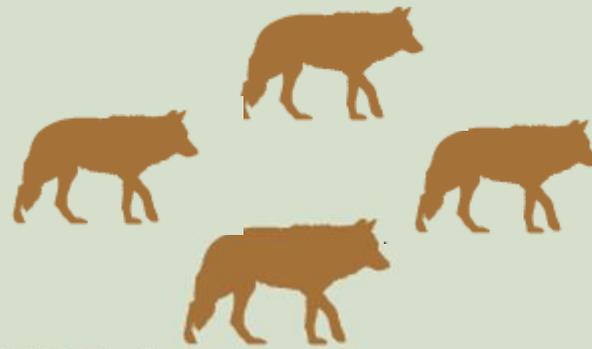
High prey numbers (moose, deer, elk) resulting from past and current forest harvesting, roads, utility corridors, mines, agriculture, etc..

APPARENT COMPETITION

REDUCED MATURE FOREST

INCREASED FOOD FOR PRIMARY PREY

HABITAT ALTERATION

How?

Wolf packs are removed proactively to reach objective of less than 3 wolves per 1000 km^2 .

In areas of high cougar density individual animals are removed.

Cougar Reduction:
Only individual cougars likely to pose high risk to caribou are targeted for removal. This is done via ground-based methods using hound handlers.

Wolf Reduction:
Wolves are shot in the winter from helicopters. This is the most effective method available to reduce wolf populations across broad, remote landscapes. The Province of B.C. has also collaborated with four Indigenous communities to support ground-based wolf hunting and trapping, in concert with aerial-based efforts.
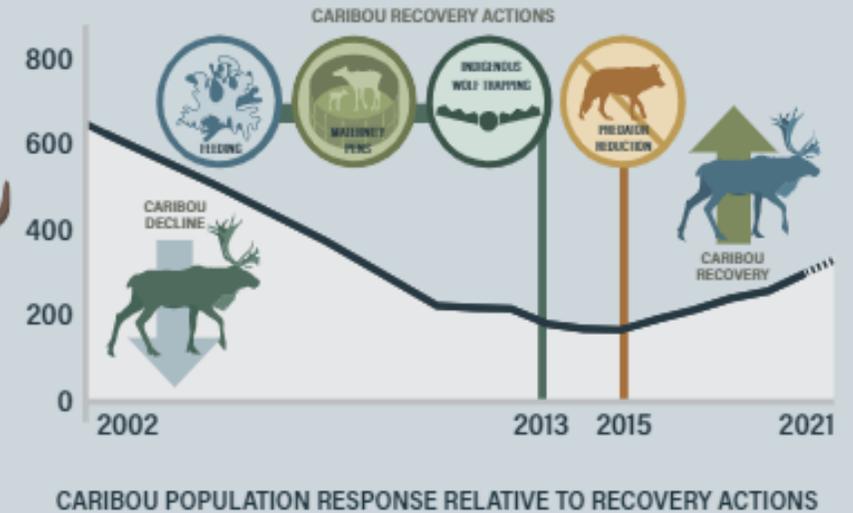
Findings

Since 2015 1,429 wolves have been removed.

Monitoring shows this to be an effective tool for stabilizing caribou herds.

A short-term solution while habitat is recovering through protection, management, and restoration.

Used in concert with other recovery actions.

CARIBOU RECOVERY ACTIONS

800
600
400
200
0

CARIBOU DECLINE

CARIBOU RECOVERY

2002   2013 2015   2021

CARIBOU POPULATION RESPONSE RELATIVE TO RECOVERY ACTIONS

Predator reduction is part of a multi-lever approach to recover caribou

The strongest increases in caribou numbers occur where and when multiple recovery actions are occurring, including short-term actions like predator reductions.

EXAMPLES OF SHORT TERM RECOVERY ACTIONS   EXAMPLES OF LONG TERM RECOVERY ACTIONS

SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING   MATERNAL PENS   PREDATOR REDUCTIONS   CHANGES TO INDUSTRY PRACTICES   RESTORATION   HABITAT PROTECTION

Adaptive management is key to caribou recovery

An adaptive management approach will be utilized to monitor how caribou, primary prey, and predator populations respond to different recovery actions.

Predator reduction alone will not recover caribou herds and is not proposed as the sole recovery action.

Research has shown that enacting multiple management actions concurrently is the most effective means of recovering caribou populations in the long-term and this is the approach the Government of BC is taking.

Future predator reduction programs may be adapted based on results.
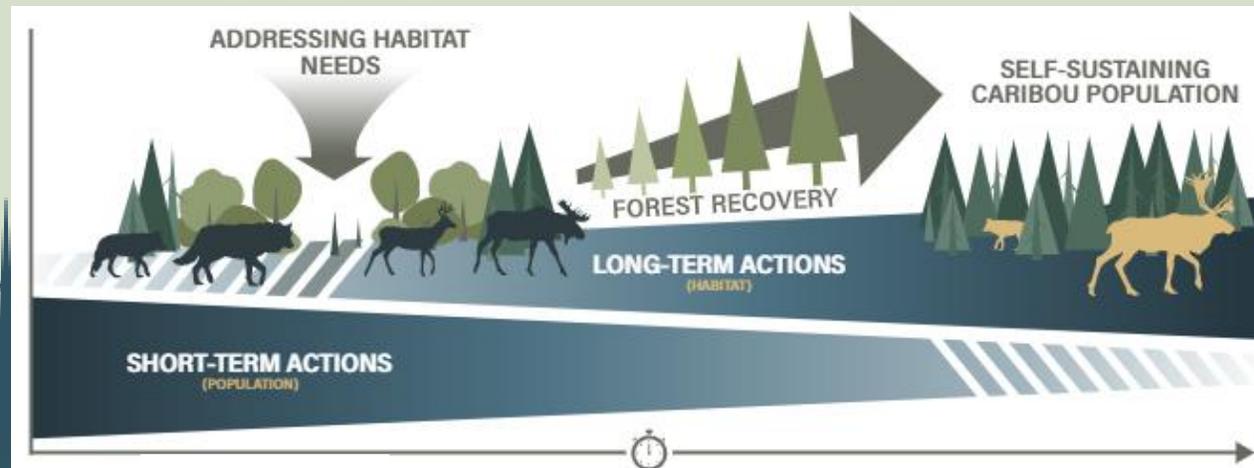
In summary

Predator reduction is scientifically shown to be effective.

Predator reduction is used in concert with other recovery actions.

Without this action herds will continue to decline.

Predator reduction is a short-term solution while habitat is recovering through protection, management, and restoration.

For more information visit:
www.gov.bc.ca/caribou