

Valhalla Wilderness Society

Box 329, New Denver, British Columbia, Canada V0G 1S0
250-358-2333 (phone) 250-358-7950 (fax)

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CRISIS FOR THE WILDLIFE OF SOUTHEASTERN BC

It has been three years since the federal and provincial governments initiated a recovery process for mountain caribou under the *Species at Risk Act*. Recently the BC government released a report by its Mountain Caribou Science Team. The scientists did not recommend any particular recovery program. Instead they offered the government five management options and evaluated the prospects for saving the mountain caribou under each one.

One option is doing nothing, which, they advised, would quickly lead to extinction. The next three options are based primarily upon increased killing of the predators and competitor species of the mountain caribou, with little or no new protection of habitat. All species whose photographs appear on this page are on the list to be considered for increased killing. The methods would be increased “bag” limits for hunters, possibly with bounties that would pay hunters for each pelt, and government control programs for cougars, wolves, and possibly even moose, elk and/or deer. Some of the known methods of “control” are shooting from helicopters and trapping followed by shooting.

The scientists offered a fifth option that would provide significant new protection for the habitat of the mountain caribou. However, this approach sets the stage for government to negotiate the usual “compromise,” choosing a “middleground” option mostly based upon killing other species. The government has invited public input on the options and has singled out the Council of Forest Industries, the Tourism Action Society in the Kootenays (TASK) and several heli-skiing companies as the major stakeholders. These are all vested interests which benefit financially from the destruction of mountain caribou habitat, or the use of it for activities such as heli-skiing and snowmobiling that displace the caribou. The government apparently means only to hold backroom consultations with selected interests.



Wayne McCrory

Wolf



Larry Moats, USFWS

Cougar



Craig Pettitt

Grizzly Bear



Craig Pettitt

Black Bear



US National Park Service

Moose



Craig Pettitt

Deer



Craig Pettitt

Elk



Wolverine

The Science Team's report gives the impression that mountain caribou herds can be maintained at current or increased numbers, based primarily upon these killing programs. Some of the scientists who belong to the government's Mountain Caribou Science Team have authored many reports published in scientific journals stating that the chief reason for the decline of mountain caribou is the excessive loss or fragmentation of old-growth forest. However, the report released by the government fails to point out that while predators and competitive species are being killed, in many areas the mountain caribou's last remaining old-growth habitat would be logged. Thus the endangered species at the centre of so much wildlife slaughter might go extinct anyway.

Until the science panel's report was released, some of the scientists were also saying that killing blue-listed grizzly bears and wolverines to save mountain caribou was not under consideration, since these animals are in decline and they reproduce slowly. It has sent shock waves across BC that they have now given the go-ahead to shoot these species ("if necessary"). The scientific team has carefully avoided recommending any of the options (so far as we can see in its report), but they are endorsing this as a *valid* option for the government to consider. From another perspective, it looks shockingly amiss to have a species at risk recovery program shooting members of two species at risk to save a third. The scientists have also endorsed the killing of black bears, even though black bears are predominantly herbivorous and only a minor predator of mountain caribou.

These desperation options give the misleading impression that there is no hope of saving the mountain caribou, short of these drastic actions. Actually, there is considerable hope if the government would recognize the fundamental necessity of protecting and restoring habitat for endangered species. Most of the grassroots environmental groups working in the range of the mountain caribou have signed a declaration recommending the following measures to protect habitat:

- Substantially more protected areas and wildlife travel corridors
- Reduce the allowable annual cut
- Full protection for all old-growth forest 140 years or older, including low- and mid-elevation Interior Cedar-Hemlock
- Remaining intact areas must be identified for full protection or other conservation zoning
- Protection for all subpopulations of species at risk (small subpopulations must not be "written off")
- Restrict motorized recreation, including snowmobiles, ATVs and helicopters
- Open public process
- Recovering areas already logged
- No logging adjacent to critical caribou habitat until the forest recovers to natural early seral levels

For more information please see the Valhalla Wilderness Society's website at www.vws.org.

Please write a letter expressing your opinion to:

Mark Zacharias
Species at Risk Coordination Office
Ministry of Agriculture and Lands
P.O. Box 9353 Stn. Prov. Gov.
Victoria, BC V8W 9M1
mark.zacharias@gov.bc.ca
(250) 387-5727 (phone) (250) 953-3603 (fax)