

SCIENTISTS' PETITION TO SAVE B.C.'S MOUNTAIN CARIBOU

WHEREAS

- ❖ The mountain caribou is a globally unique ecotype of the woodland caribou that is dependent on old-growth temperate forests at both low and high elevations for survival. Most of these forests are in the Interior Wet Belt of British Columbia, which has 98% of the world's surviving mountain caribou. In recent decades mountain caribou have suffered catastrophic declines to less than 2,000 animals largely because of extensive clearcut logging of old-growth critical habitats. Over-hunting, poaching, and uncontrolled motorized recreation are other causal factors. The southern mountain caribou ecotype is now listed as "threatened" federally and "endangered" (red list) provincially. Many other species of plants and animals found in the Interior Cedar-Hemlock Forest are also at risk.
- ❖ A recent Conservation Area Design by the Craighead Environmental Research Institute of the Interior Wet Belt (Inland Temperate Rainforest) using mountain caribou as one of the focal species found that protection such as in provincial and national parks needed to be increased significantly.
- ❖ The 2006 Draft Mountain Caribou Recovery Strategy by the B.C.'s Species at Risk Coordination Office (SARCO) is deficient. Firstly, it fails to reflect 30 years of scientific research demonstrating that fragmentation and loss of old-growth forest are the primary reasons for the demise of the mountain caribou. Secondly, it fails to address the implications of climate change on mountain caribou habitat including the increased risk of large, catastrophic wildfires. Thirdly, it places far too much emphasis on predator control including grizzly bear, wolverine and other species at risk as a course of action which, based on experience in other jurisdictions, is unlikely to maintain populations except in the very short term. Implementation of the current SARCO recovery plan options will not save the mountain caribou. Only one course of action will avert the loss over most or all of their current range: protected status for high-elevation and low-elevation old-growth forest.

PRIORITY CONSERVATION MEASURES SHOULD INCLUDE:

OLD-GROWTH PROTECTION

- A. An immediate moratorium on all logging in old-growth caribou habitat.
- B. As a first priority, legislated full protection of all mountain caribou old-growth forest 140 years or older through new provincial and national parks, fully protected caribou old-growth management reserves, and wildlife sanctuaries.

- C. Habitat recovery for caribou range already logged will take at least a century. No logging adjacent to critical caribou habitat can be permitted until recovery and then a retention of a higher percentage of old-growth forest is required when timber is harvested in surrounding areas. Forests in southern mountain caribou range should be managed to recruit old-growth forest in current and potential caribou habitat.
- D. Retention of some beetle-killed pine forests as future lichen-feeding areas for caribou.
- E. Recognition that such protection of old-growth “caribou lichen” forests will help save many other endangered species in British Columbia’s Interior Wet Belt as well as help to reduce global warming through carbon sequestration.

INCREASED MANAGEMENT of ACCESS

- A. Much more aggressive restrictions on motorized recreation in caribou habitat including snowmobiles, ATVs and helicopters.
- B. Restrictions on commercial recreation developments and activities in caribou habitat including lodges, ski hills and so on.
- C. Decommissioning of roads in caribou habitat to help reduce predator and human access.

We, the undersigned scientists/biologists believe that only stronger protection of old-growth habitats will save the mountain caribou and hundreds of other endangered Wet Belt species.

As with climate change, both the federal and provincial governments need to take immediate action to protect the mountain caribou old-growth habitat across their range.

Sincerely,*

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