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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FORTY-TWO SCIENTISTS URGE FULL PROTECTION OF OLD-GROWTH FOREST TO SAVE MOUNTAIN CARIBOU

Forty-two biologists and botanists have signed a petition urging British Columbia and Canada to fully protect old-growth forest across the range of the endangered mountain caribou. The scientists say that protecting old-growth forests should be the first priority of the recovery plan to save the mountain caribou. The protected old-growth will also help save many other endangered species, as well as help reduce global warming by carbon sequestration.

The scientists have submitted the petition to a joint federal-provincial recovery process under Canada's *Species at Risk Act*. By law, the recovery plan must be posted on the federal government's Species at Risk registry by June, 2007.

The petition states that the draft strategy released by BC's Species at Risk Coordination Office (SARCO) in 2006 puts too much emphasis on killing the mountain caribou's predators, and not enough on protecting habitat for the caribou. Biologist Paul Paquet says: "One can kill animals quickly with a gun, or slowly by destroying their habitat. The mountain caribou are on the slow road to extinction and we are killing them. Their best chance and only chance of survival is to protect the last remaining old growth."

The mountain caribou is a globally unique ecotype of caribou that is dependent on old-growth forest at both low and high elevations. In recent decades the population has declined to less than 2,000 animals, largely because of extensive clearcut logging of old-growth critical habitats. Overhunting, poaching and uncontrolled motorized recreation are other causal factors.

The scientists' petition lists priority conservation measures for the mountain caribou, including:

- An immediate moratorium on all logging in old-growth forest that is current or potential mountain caribou habitat.

- Legislated full protection of all old-growth forest 140 years or older within that area.
- No logging adjacent to critical habitat until the population has been recovered.
- Retention of some beetle-killed pine forests in or adjacent to mountain caribou habitat.
- Much more aggressive restrictions on motorized recreation, including snowmobiles, ATVs and helicopters.
- Restrictions on development including lodges and ski hills.
- Decommissioning of roads as a nonlethal means to reduce predator and human access into mountain caribou habitat.

The petition is continuing to circulate through the scientific community. “The BC governments’ own Conservation Data Centre lists 1,364 species that are endangered or threatened in BC,” says wildlife biologist Wayne McCrory. “Most of these species are endangered because the plant and animal communities that provide their food and living space are being destroyed or fragmented by human activities. Until humans are willing to set aside sufficient living space for wildlife, we have no basis on which to claim we are trying to protect them.

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The petition can be viewed on the website of the Valhalla Wilderness Society at www.vws.org.