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CENTRAL SELKIRK MOUNTAIN CARIBOU ASSIGNED CLEARCUTS WHILE INDUSTRY LOGS THE OLD-GROWTH

Backgrounder

Very little is left of the old-growth forest habitat of the Central Selkirk Mountain Caribou. If logging of it continues, this important herd will disappear forever. VWS estimates that all remaining intact habitat could be irreparably fragmented within five years. Logging must stop now. The BC government's recent plan to protect mountain caribou habitat for this herd is in serious trouble. See the Valhalla Wilderness Watch Press Release at www.inlandtemperaterainforest.org. The following is detailed information.

Planning to Protect the Central Selkirk Mountain Caribou herd is part of the BC's Government's Mountain Caribou Recovery Plan announced on October 16, 2007.

- 380,000 hectares of new forest protection throughout Mountain Caribou range.
- Of the 380,000 hectares, only 77,000 hectares, can come from the Timber Harvesting Land Base.
- 20,000 hectares, or 26% of new THLB protection, has been assigned to the Central Selkirk herd, Planning Unit 2B.
- Intense planning is now going on to identify where the 77,000 hectares of protection will be located. What has happened to other 80% of the 380,000 hectares, no one seems to know.

About the Caribou

- The Mountain Caribou is in danger of extinction chiefly because of logging. Most logging occurs on the Timber Harvesting Land Base. This area contains critical low- and mid-elevation forest needed by the caribou in spring and early winter. The THLB is where the Mountain Caribou is endangered, and that is where the protection must be focused.
- The Central Selkirk herd is more endangered than herds to the north, but more viable than herds to the south, and it has more old growth forest left to save.
- Numerous scientific reports state that mountain caribou habitat is intact forest 140 years or older. The planning was to protect 95% or virtually all high value winter and early winter habitat.

- Planning Unit 2B has been assigned the most THLB protection south of Wells Gray Park; if it fails, we could be left with no caribou south of that park, which would render the mountain caribou extinct over an area comprising more than 50% of its home range.

The first maps identifying THLB protection in the Central Selkirks

- The initial mapping identified only 60% of the 20,000 hectares. The caribou Herd Expert, Dennis Hamilton, believed that not all of the 20,000 hectares was needed.
- Further, the maps did not identify specific geographical areas for protection. The caribou Herd Expert believed there was insufficient information to tell where the caribou habitat was, and that it would require more field work (this after five years of planning under the current project alone, not to mention previous years of planning.) But in addition, the Herd Expert argued that protection should remain *aspatial*, meaning that it never would be geographically identified, the logging companies would just leave a certain percentage of trees as they went along fragmenting critical caribou habitat.
- The Herd Expert believed that past planning dating from the 1994 Kootenay-Boundary Land Use Plan and the 2002 Higher Level Plan was so good that it should be continued rather than implement a new program.
- Due to these problems, the mapping had to be redone, putting the Central Selkirks planning much later than other planning units. The other seven planning units had their mapping completed promptly and definitively.

The revised maps and report

1. OVER HALF THE PROTECTION IN THE NEW MAP IS CLEARCUTS AND BURNS.

- The Ministry of Environment, in its review of the revised maps and report, stated:

“We ... do not support the fully spatialized map for planning unit 2b as it currently stands. Significant areas have been removed from caribou management and there has been a significant reduction in the targets for retention of age classes 8 and 9 (140 years +) as compared to the status quo. Of the 20,000 hectares of proposed incremental habitat, approximately 12,000 hectares falls into age classes 0-3.”

Age class 0-3 means forest 0-60 years old, or clearcuts and burns. 12,000 hectares is over half of the THLB protection for the Central Selkirk herd. *What the MOE review says is that under such a proposal, the Central Selkirk herd would have LESS old growth protected than it had before, under the Kootenay-Boundary Land Use Plan.*

- The Second Progress Report by the Kootenay Local Habitat Team (March, 2008) acknowledged this problem: “There is other evidence that the fully spatialized mapping product for Planning Unit 2b contains approximately 12,000 hectares of early seral (age class 0-3) THLB. It is well known that early seral forest does not benefit caribou significantly, instead early seral stands are more often a detriment to caribou, as they support alternate prey ... and associated predators, which will also

prey on caribou as the opportunity arises.” Age class 0-3 is forest 0-60 years old: clearcuts and burns. This is hardly high-value habitat.

- These clearcuts and burns exist in areas heavily fragmented by logging, which landscapes are known to be associated with high Mountain Caribou mortality. In addition, some of the areas proposed did not have Mountain Caribou even before they were logged.

2. MAJOR AREAS OF OLD-GROWTH FOREST WERE EXCLUDED FROM PROTECTION

- Ministry of Environment: “Approximately 6,000 hectares of age class 4-9 forest within the THLB is not included.”
- The Kootenay Local Habitat Team 2nd Progress Report: “Significant area of age class 4-9 forest that is currently used by caribou has not been included in the fully spatialized mapping product.”
- The Ministry of Environment and the Valhalla Wilderness Society identified major areas of intact old-growth forest that were excluded from protection in the Upper Halfway – Upper Kuskanax – Bremner Creek – Asher Creek and numerous other drainages.

3. SPATIAL VERSUS ASPATIAL PROTECTION

The new map now shows forest proposed for protection geographically. However, the Herd Expert continues to propose *aspatial* protection. All environmental groups involved in the process are against aspatial protection. The Valhalla Wilderness Society has stated that it:

- is an empty shell of moveable percentages that allows the most profitable timber in caribou habitat to be logged while the least valuable poorer habitat is retained for caribou.
- robs the public of the ability to over see caribou habitat management as there are no definable boundaries for reference.
- can continue the current detrimental fragmentation of habitat as long as the retention percentages are met.
- retention is subject to the interpretation of the biologist and his bias to who is paying him.
- is not being considered for core habitat protection for any other herd in this process nor by any other biologists. It is substandard protection.

The plan agreement negotiated by the government, the logging companies, the winter recreation interests and ten environmental groups put the new protection in the hands of the logging companies.

- The 77,000 hectares is less than 1% of the Timber Harvesting Land Base.
- Notwithstanding, the new protection must not reduce the Allowable Annual Cut for 5 years.
- It must not affect mill viability.

The logging companies took bows in the media for agreeing to the plan. Instead, in the Central Selkirks, they are sabotaging the plan with claims of economic damage. They do not demonstrate even partial acceptance of the new plan.

1. Logging has been going on in the Central Selkirks for 40 years. Very little intact old-growth is left. Many of the old clearcuts are not ready to log again. The issue is whether we are going to let the logging companies log it all, at the expense of wiping out mountain caribou and many other old-growth dependent species such as lichens. Valhalla Wilderness Society forest technician estimates that within five years all remaining accessible mountain caribou habitat in the THLB could be gone. Every cutblock in critical mountain caribou habitat is now contributing to disaster.
2. Pope & Talbot is the major logging company in the Central Selkirks. It went bankrupt in 2007. It is not working in the Central Selkirks right now. We understood the mill and its license had been sold to Interfor. The government could have taken back this forest to protect the Mountain Caribou, but it didn't. Now, according to the Arrow Boundary District (Kootenay Local Habitat Team, 2nd Progress Report, Appendix):

“P&T ... believe it is extremely important for them to provide comments as there are potentially very large impacts to their licence. They are looking for the correct avenue to express this concern and would like it known that they still intend to respond.”

3. Logging Company claims:
 - Losses of timber supply volume from 5 - 23.5% in first ten years due to new caribou protection. They want compensation. These claims must now be evaluated by the government. They should be weighed against the fact that overcutting has already drastically depleted their timber supply and threatens mill viability with or without extra caribou protection.
 - The Interior Lumber Manufacturer's Associating objects to preserving 77,000 hectares of the THLB; they say it is incompatible with the government promise of “No Net Loss.” Yet this 77,000 hectares was part of the agreement announced by government and the timber industry did not object at that time.
 - Claims the plan will render two mills economically unviable.
 - Demands that the government trade off land in parks for logging. Wants Lasca Creek and West Arm Park to be abolished and logged.

This review is based upon:

Hamilton, D., “Full Spatialization of the Timber Harvesting Land Base Target in Mapping Mountain Caribou Habitat in the Central Kootenay Planning Unit (2B),” March 20, 2008.

Kootenay Local Habitat Team, "Second Progress Report for Planning Units 1A, 1B, and 2B,"
March 2008

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