

# OPEN LETTER TO B.C. PREMIER GORDON CAMPBELL ON THE KILLING OF WOLVES AND COUGARS TO SAVE MOUNTAIN CARIBOU

May 3, 2010  
BY FAX AND E-MAIL

Premier Gordon Campbell  
PO Box 9041 STN PROV GOVT  
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1  
Fax: (250) 387-0087  
[premier@gov.bc.ca](mailto:premier@gov.bc.ca)

Dear Premier Campbell:

The undersigned organizations are strongly opposed to the killing of large carnivores (wolves, cougars, bears, wolverines) to save the mountain caribou. Wolves and cougars are currently being trapped and shot as part of the Mountain Caribou Recovery Plan. The government has proposed to escalate the elimination of wolves by shooting them from helicopters. We oppose all these practices for the following reasons:

## **1. Predation did not cause the decline of mountain caribou populations.**

Human activities that destroy or intrude into critical habitat are the main causes of the decline of mountain caribou populations. This includes the logging of old-growth forest, roads, mining development and dams, as well as snowmobiling and heli-skiing. Increased predation is a side-effect of these activities, especially where roads create easy access lanes for predators into formerly pristine caribou range.

## **2. Killing top predators will not save the mountain caribou.**

Scientists have advised that the continuation of logging and mining, as well as snowmobiling and heli-skiing, in mountain caribou habitat will be fatal to the species. The Recovery Plan is allowing all of these activities to continue extensively.

The plan is to eliminate large carnivores in the vicinity of the smallest, most threatened herds. These herds are small because they have lost habitat on a massive scale. Even if we could kill all the predators, these herds could still be wiped out by incidents such as automobile accidents, avalanches, stress from snowmobiles and fluctuating winter conditions unfavourable to their survival.

## **3. Top predators play critical roles in maintaining healthy ecosystems.**

The negative effects of removing top predators cascade down through the whole food chain. It has been known to cause the failure of forests to produce young trees, the loss of riparian vegetation, causing the serious erosion of streambanks, the extirpation of many species of small animals, and the brutal starvation of herds of deer, elk and other ungulates due to overgrazing. Young forests such as those being created by too much clearcutting in mountain caribou habitat need top predators to protect them from overgrazing by prey species.

**4. Predator control practices include the killing of the majority of wolves over large areas for many years or decades. The undersigned have grave concerns about the long-term survival of wolves due to the cumulative effects of such programs, which are periodically undertaken in BC.**

The theory says that wolves always recover quickly after the “program” ends, but similar practices eliminated wolves in the lower United States, requiring the U.S. to import wolves from Canada to correct serious ecological imbalances. Some wolf experts point out that east of the Columbia Mountains in the Rockies proper, and west on the Okanagan Plateau, wolf population recovery has been spotty, incomplete or non-existent, even in the mountain national parks. Many poorly understood environmental conditions may influence the ability of wolf populations to recover. Underlining this concern is a lack of data to refute the possibility that wolf populations are already fragile in the Columbia Mountains Region. The province has not provided data on the population density or any demographics that would indicate that wolves or cougars, can withstand added killing. This short-sightedness belies a total lack of an ecosystem-based management perspective that underpins more enlightened wildlife management.

**5. Sporadic predator control programs in BC have been driven by politics, not science. Increasingly they incorporate science to legitimize political objectives.**

Claims that predator control is needed for one reason or the other have been used to achieve other objectives such as benefitting hunters or scapegoating predators for the damage done by humans. The truth of what really what goes on in the woods during predator control is often withheld from the public or not even monitored by the government. Seemingly benign activities such as wolf-collaring and wolf-sterilization have at times been used as tools to assist the more thorough elimination of wolves, as when collared wolves are tracked to locate home ranges and dens, and then killed; or the sterilization of mating pairs is accompanied by the slaughter of all the other pack members.

**6. Large carnivores are intelligent animals with amazing family relationships. They have an intrinsic value in and of themselves, and a right to life.**

**7. Lastly, the undersigned declare that the following methods of predator control are cruel and unbecoming to the dignity and principles of the human race.**

- Chasing wolves to exhaustion with helicopters and shooting them from the air, which is now being considered in BC;
- Leghold traps and snaring, followed by killing, which is currently happening in BC;
- The use of poison, which occurred in BC in the past and is currently occurring in Alberta.

In view of these factors, we urge the BC government to cease killing large carnivores immediately and undertake scientific studies of the ecology of these animals. We recommend the following steps to protect mountain caribou without doing further ecosystem damage:

1. Stop clearcutting and road building in all mountain caribou habitat; the continuation of these practices only increases habitat for moose and wolves.

2. Stop snowmobiling and heli-skiing in historical mountain caribou wintering areas. The current snowmobile closures are too few and too small, and they are not being enforced.
3. Habitat restoration in clearcut areas is crucial, including the decommissioning of old roads.
4. Reduce the speed limit on the Salmo-Creston Highway, where a number of animals in a critically imperiled herd have been killed by passing vehicles.

Sincerely,

Alberta Wilderness Association  
Applied Ecological Stewardship  
Animal Alliance Environmental Voters Party of Canada  
Animal Alliance of Canada  
Canadian Wolf Coalition  
Earthroots  
Friends of Nemiah Valley  
Northern Lights Wildlife Wolf Centre  
Pacific Wild  
Purcell Alliance for Wilderness  
Raincoast Conservation Society  
Respecting Aboriginal Values and Environmental Needs (RAVEN)  
Save-the-Cedar League  
Valhalla Wilderness Society  
Wilderness Committee  
World Temperate Rainforest Network