

Valhalla Wilderness Society

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PRESS RELEASE

Proposed BC-Canada Agreement to Protect Mountain Caribou Is Toothless

If a draft agreement between the BC government and Environment Canada on the endangered mountain caribou is approved, it will make a laughing stock of both governments and the Species at Risk Act", says the Valhalla Wilderness Society (VWS). The agreement is for the Central Mountain Caribou, which are centered in BC's South Peace region. The BC government's commitment under the draft agreement is to identify and reserve "all untenured, winter and summer, high-elevation caribou range."

"This is a hollow shell of a commitment," says Anne Sherrod, spokesperson for the Society. "Most of the central caribou core habitat is covered by multiple overlapping tenures of one kind or another". Forty-five percent of the core range is under tenure to coal development. Twenty-two percent is under tenure to mineral development; virtually the entire core range is under tenure to oil and gas production, 60% to logging, 11.4% to wind and water power, 43% to recreational tenure, and 6% for "other purposes". (Canada-BC Protection Study for Southern Mountain Caribou [Central Group] in BC, pg. 97)

"The BC government has irresponsibly granted tenures without adequate consideration for the known habitat requirements of these critically endangered mountain caribou," says Sherrod. "Protecting only untenured land means very little to protect and no loss to the industries, but no gain to the caribou. These caribou are dwindling towards extinction, and they will soon be gone unless destruction of their habitat is stopped."

BC committing to protect only high-elevation habitat is even more of a joke, because most of the habitat destruction takes place at low and middle elevations. The government says this draft agreement may be extended to the Southern Mountain Caribou of the Interior Wetbelt. But the Southern group already has a plan which protects a small but significant amount of lower elevation, tenured forest. Unfortunately, it has no protection from mineral, energy development or heli-skiing, and little protection from snowmobiling.

"If this draft agreement is applied to the southern group, it could be used to revoke current no-logging Ungulate Winter Range (UWR) areas on tenured and lower elevation lands, and turn them over to further clearcut logging and roading that has led to these mountain caribou becoming critically endangered in the first place," says Craig Pettitt, a VWS director. "The southern group is also declining rapidly towards extinction. If federal intervention under the Species at Risk Act doesn't provide more protection of lower elevation, tenured forest, it is completely meaningless."

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Environment Canada is asking for public input on the draft agreement. It can be found at http://registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/document/default_e.cfm?documentID=3202. Please send comments to ec.ep.rpy-sar.pyr.ec@canada.ca.

See VWS's 4-page submission to government at <https://www.vws.org/>.

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