

Valhalla Wilderness Society

Box 329, New Denver, British Columbia, Canada V0G 1S0
Phone: (250) 358-2333, E-mail: vws@vws.org, www.vws.org

July 16, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FLAWED SCIENTIFIC STUDY APPARENTLY LED BC GOVERNMENT TO ACCELERATE WOLF KILLING AND DENY HABITAT PROTECTION TO ENDANGERED DEEP-SNOW MOUNTAIN CARIBOU

A multi-disciplinary team of six scientists from three universities, led by a former Environment Canada biologist and caribou expert, has just published a stinging rebuttal of previously published research by ten co-authors, most of them BC or Alberta government caribou managers or advisors, headed by Dr. Robert Serrouya. Dr. Serrouya and co-authors had carried out a statistical analysis on wolf culls, maternal pens, habitat condition and caribou population data. They had concluded that protecting habitat was not important for recovery of mountain caribou, when compared to killing predators like wolves and using fenced-in maternal pens to rear newborn young for release into the wild.

Approximately six months after publication of the analysis, Forests Minister Doug Donaldson announced that there would be no more habitat protection for the caribou of the Interior Wetbelt (also known as the “Deep-Snow Mountain Caribou”). He claimed that the government’s analysts had determined the caribou already had enough protection.

Since then, many British Columbians have pleaded with the government to stop logging in the habitat of the endangered Central Selkirk, Columbia and Hart Ranger herds of Deep-Snow Mountain Caribou. The logging has continued. Simultaneously, the government more than tripled the number of wolves killed per year for mountain caribou, with 498 wolves killed last winter.

Now the re-analysis by Dr. Lee Harding and his colleagues, which was just published in the peer-reviewed journal *Biodiversity and Conservation*, has revealed that the earlier study was seriously flawed.

“To those of us who have been working for decades to save BC’s rare and unique Deep-Snow Mountain Caribou, this new study is a bombshell,” said Anne Sherrod, a caribou campaigner with the Valhalla Wilderness Society. “The 2019 analysis by the government advisers was published at a very sensitive time for public involvement and government decision-making. It had powerful influence on the media coverage, public perception, and government policy.

In mid 2018 Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) declared an imminent threat to the recovery of BC’s endangered mountain caribou. The federal government said that habitat protection had been inadequate. It urged immediate new protection and threatened that the federal government could order BC to protect more habitat. But nearly a year later, the study published by the Serrouya group went in the opposite direction. It said that predator culls and maternity pens should be increased, whereas new habitat protection would make no difference because it was too slow.

In April last year a panel of federal and provincial biologists toured the province holding public meetings to present plans for new caribou protection and take public input. Just three weeks before the meetings began, headlines across Canada heralded the analysis by Dr. Serrouya’s team. The articles inferred that the caribou could be saved by intensified predator culls and maternity pens, without additional habitat protection.

“No wonder the government hasn’t protected any new habitat for the Deep-Snow Mountain Caribou,” says Wayne McCrory, a registered professional biologist and grizzly bear expert who is also chair of the Valhalla Wilderness Society.

Ironically, re-analysis of the data by the new scientific team showed that most of the improvements from wolf culls and maternal pens were in herds of the Central and Northern Mountain Caribou in the Peace River Region. The journal article by the Harding team explains that the Deep-Snow ecotype is more dependent on old-growth forest than their northern cousins, and thus more vulnerable to the impacts of logging. Also the major cause of verified predation mortalities for the Deep Snow Caribou is cougars, not wolves.

The Deep-Snow caribou are the only caribou in the world that spend winter in three to four metres of snow in the subalpine regions of rugged mountains. Scientists say they are genetically unique and irreplaceable.

It is now two years since the Environment Canada and Climate Change Minister directed immediate habitat protection. Yet to date the Deep-Snow Mountain Caribou have not received one iota of new habitat protection. Logging continues to ravage their remaining habitat at this time.

-30-

For more information on the context of these events, see VWS’s background report at <http://www.vws.org>.

Contact: Anne Sherrod, 250-358-2610
Wayne McCrory, 250-358-7796

