

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S WOODLAND CARIBOU

Special Management for Woodland Caribou

Woodland Caribou are a species of deer associated with northern, cold and snowy climates. There is a focus to protect Woodland Caribou in British Columbia (B.C.) due to their declining populations.

B.C. laws conserve wildlife habitat and the Province is working on strategies to enhance caribou survival including using maternity pens to enhance nutrition and safeguard caribou from predators during the calving period. Successful recovery of the Woodland Caribou will require cooperation and the continued commitment of stakeholders to both short and long-term management actions.





CARIBOU ARE AT RISK ACROSS CANADA



Caribou distribution in British Columbia by Ecotype

- Boreal Caribou
- Mountain Caribou
- Northern Caribou
- Caribou low density
- Caribou historical range
- National species at risk designation: eg. endangered, threatened or special concern

Produced by: Ecosystem Branch, Ministry of Environment

Caribou in Canada and B.C.

Caribou are found across northern North America, Europe and Russia. There are three major subspecies of caribou in Canada including Woodland, Peary, and Barren-ground Caribou. Only Woodland Caribou live in B.C. and include three distinct ecotypes: Boreal Caribou, Mountain Caribou and Northern Caribou. All three types are considered “at risk” of disappearing from Canada due to declining populations. Although B.C. caribou do not migrate long distances, some populations travel seasonally to higher or lower elevations.

Boreal Caribou are found in the extreme northeastern corner of the province. They live in low elevation, open forests and boggy sites next to wetlands. They depend on ground lichens as their source of

food in the winter. Management activities to protect Boreal Caribou can benefit many other species that live in the boreal forest.

Mountain Caribou are found in east-central and southeast British Columbia. Mountain Caribou depend on lichens that grow on trees as their primary source of food in the winter and spend winters in higher elevation, old growth forests.

Northern Caribou are the most common type in B.C. with populations extending from west-central to northern British Columbia. Like Boreal Caribou, they also depend on a winter diet of ground lichens. Northern Caribou move between alpine areas during calving season to low elevation pine forests or wind-swept ridges in the winter.

WHY ARE CARIBOU AT RISK?

Caribou populations have been impacted by roads, recreational winter activities, utility corridors and disturbed areas including oil well sites and forestry cut blocks. Each B.C. caribou population has its own set of challenges, but all face pressure from loss of habitat due to human activities as well as increased predators. Management of important caribou habitat and the cooperation of industry and recreation stakeholder groups are vitally important to the survival of caribou.

Top Left: Woodland Caribou in northern B.C. Photo: Leon Lorenz of Canadian Wildlife Productions.
 Top Right: Woodland Caribou Photo: Garry Beaudry.



Woodland Caribou Recovery Planning

Governments, scientists, researchers, registered biologists and caribou experts are involved in the development of caribou recovery planning. These recovery plans are mandated by federal legislation. Long-term protection and management of sufficient, suitable habitat is the key to caribou survival. Short-term actions to enhance caribou survival are also vital.



Identifying Threats to Caribou in B.C.

Habitat loss and predation are the key factors for caribou population declines in British Columbia.

Examples of threats to caribou species in B.C. include:

HABITAT LOSS AND DISTURBANCE

- Oil and gas development
- Forest harvesting
- Roads and urban development
- Winter recreation (heli-skiing, snowmobiles)
- Changes to habitat due to climate change

IMPACTS TO SURVIVAL

- Expansion of moose and deer into caribou habitat
- Increased predators
- Increased avalanches
- Vehicle and train collisions

Recovery Planning	Boreal Caribou	Mountain Caribou	Northern Caribou
Population Size	< 1,000	< 1,300	< 20,000
Conservation Status	Threatened	Threatened	Special concern, with the South Mountain group Threatened
Population Goal	In 50 years: self-sustaining local population throughout Canada, to the extent possible.	Recover and sustain a population of 2,500 animals.	For the populations of “special concern”, prevent them from becoming threatened or endangered, with a goal for the South Peace sub-group to achieve a population of at least 1,200 by 2034.
Priority Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat protection • Mitigation and restoration of habitat • Management of predators and deer, moose, and elk populations that attract predators • Boreal caribou habitat research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat protection • Management of human recreation activities • Management of predators and deer, moose, and elk populations that attract predators • Enhance caribou survival and augment populations in threatened herds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of high elevation winter habitat • Management of predators • Management of industrial activities to sustain habitat suitability

Threatened: Species which are likely to become endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to their extirpation or extinction.
Special concern: Species which may become threatened or endangered due to a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.¹

Management Actions Underway in B.C.

PROTECTING HABITAT FOR CARIBOU

B.C. is protecting caribou habitat using a variety of approaches including parks, protected areas and legal orders to protect habitat and winter ranges from resource activities.

B.C. has more than 14.1 million hectares (34.8 million acres) of parks and protected areas. National parks, B.C. provincial parks and protected areas across the province include habitat for caribou. In addition to these protected lands, B.C. has a significant amount of area designated for special management where other values such as wildlife habitat, biodiversity or recreation take precedence.

In addition to parks and protected areas, under B.C.'s *Forest and Range Practices Act*, a total of 7.8 million hectares (19.3 million acres) of Wildlife Habitat Areas and Ungulate Winter Ranges have been established, specifying legal requirements for special management practices to protect and conserve caribou habitat, including maintaining critical habitat features such as winter habitat, undisturbed travel corridors, calving, or rutting areas.

B.C. also uses protected reserves in combination with areas where industrial practices are modified to protect caribou habitat. For example, in northern B.C., the provincial Muskwa-Kechika Management Area protects 6.4 million hectares (15.8 million acres) for wilderness and wildlife. This area is equivalent to the size of Ireland.

STRENGTHENING HABITAT MANAGEMENT AND EFFECTIVENESS

Successful habitat protection depends on effective management. Measures to protect caribou

habitat are increasingly focused on monitoring and enforcement of regulations to ensure that protection measures address land use effectively and protect and sustain suitable habitat. Research continues to refine our understanding of how caribou select habitat to help us enhance, maintain and restore habitat suitability for future caribou.

MANAGING HUMAN RECREATION

Approximately one million hectares (2.5 million acres) of Mountain Caribou range have been closed to recreational snowmobile use to help protect caribou from human disturbance. Recreational snowmobile clubs in three regions of B.C. are supporting recovery efforts by signing Stewardship Management Agreements. Major heli and cat-ski operators are submitting data and caribou monitoring information to government. There is also a moratorium on new commercial recreation tenures.

ENHANCING SURVIVAL

Pilot projects are looking for new ways to improve Mountain Caribou survival by placing females in fenced pens during the sensitive calving period. Fences exclude predators and caribou are fed both lichen and food pellets to enhance their nutrition.

MANAGING PREDATORS

Wolves are a threat to Woodland Caribou survival. Several Northern and Mountain Caribou herds in particular are at risk of local extinction in the South Selkirk and the South Peace regions with loss to wolves a key factor in their declining populations. In January 2015, the B.C. government made the difficult decision and took the extraordinary action to remove wolves from two areas as part of a five year wolf control project to increase caribou survival.



Mountain Caribou. Photo: Garry Beaudry

THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change increases risks to caribou by altering suitable habitat, affecting avalanche risk, and by changing the frequency and severity of snowfall which can make travel more difficult. Climate change also favours expansion of other deer species into caribou habitat, which in turn increases predator numbers and the risk of predation on caribou.

WORKING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Actions taken by stakeholders in B.C. and beyond are important to caribou conservation. Government and the forest industry are helping to fund caribou research in order to maintain healthy caribou populations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

B.C. MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT www.env.gov.bc.ca
Caribou in British Columbia
Identified Wildlife Management Strategy

B.C. MINISTRY OF FORESTS, LANDS AND NATURAL RESOURCE OPERATIONS www.for.gov.bc.ca
Forest and Range Practices Act
Fish and Wildlife Branch

About 50% of wood products exported from Canada come from British Columbia's sustainably managed forests. This publication is part of the 'Forest Facts' series, published by Forestry Innovation Investment, the Government of British Columbia's market development agency for forest products.

To learn more about sustainable forest management in B.C. and other forest facts, visit:

naturallywood.com

Cover photo: Woodland Caribou. Photo: Leon Lorenz of Canadian Wildlife Productions
The wood grain featured at the top of this factsheet is subalpine fir.

Endnote: ¹The Species at Risk Act and You, Environment Canada: <https://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca>