



**Mountain Caribou Recovery
Progress Board**

2010/11 Annual Report

Photo: Chris Pasztor

Prepared by
Mountain Caribou Progress Board
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Background

On October 16, 2007, government announced the Mountain Caribou Recovery Implementation Plan (MCRIP) with the support of the forest industry, commercial and public recreation sectors, environmental sector representatives, and First Nations. The goal of the Plan is “to halt the decline of mountain caribou within seven years for each planning unit and recover the mountain caribou population to the pre-1995 level (2,500 animals) across the mountain caribou range within 20 years. This recovery will be distributed among those planning units with greater than 10 animals in 2007”.

This goal will be achieved by implementing the following management actions:

1. Protect 2.2 million hectares of mountain caribou range from logging and road building, capturing 95% of the caribou’s high suitability winter habitat.
2. Manage human recreational activities in mountain caribou habitat in a manner that ensures critical habitat areas are effectively protected.
3. Manage predator populations of wolf and cougar where they are preventing the recovery of mountain caribou populations.
4. Manage the primary prey of caribou predators.
5. Boost caribou numbers in threatened herds with animals transplanted from elsewhere to ensure herds achieve critical mass for self-sufficiency.
6. Support adaptive management and research and implement effective monitoring plans for habitat, recreation and predator-prey management.
7. Institute a cross-sector progress board in spring 2008 to monitor the effectiveness of recovery actions.

Government delivered on the commitment to establishing a cross-sector Progress Board to monitor the progress of government’s implementation of the MCRIP. The Board was formally established in spring 2008 and has been kept apprised of recovery efforts through regular newsletters, meetings and updates, including access to the minutes of the MCRIP Directors’ Team meetings. The Board consists of key sector representatives from the Association of British Columbia Snowmobile Clubs, British Columbia Snowmobile Federation, Tolko, Council of Forest Industries, Heli-Cat Canada, Interior Lumber Manufacturers’ Association, the Mountain Caribou Project (a consortium of non-government environmental organizations) and First Nations representative (see Appendix A for membership).

Progress Board

The Progress Board is governed by a Terms of Reference (ToR) that requires the Board to:

- annually review the progress and quality of implementation activities, marked by deliverables set out in the respective ToR for each component of the MCRIP, and;
- define the scope and content of annual reports as well as reports for the general public, as set out in section 6.0 (Deliverables).

The Deliverables component of the ToR, states the Progress Board will develop “an annual public report to be submitted to the Directors’ Team by December 31st of each year, reporting on the state of recovery implementation for all components of the MCRIP. The report will include a non-technical section to inform policy-makers and the general public.”

On March 23, 2011, the Progress Board convened to produce an annual report for MCRIP activities implemented in 2010/11 fiscal year. Forestry and environmental sectors had

representation at this meeting. Members representing other sectors unable to attend subsequently contributed to this report. The Board was presented with the key accomplishment for each of the management actions delivered in the 2010/11 fiscal year. The Board members considered the activities and results conducted in 2010/11 and evaluated performance. Board members provided specific examples where performance was either good or poor and made recommendations for future MCRIP effort. This discussion was recorded and distilled into a report that was reviewed and endorsed by the Board. This document represents the 2nd annual report completed by the Board. Similar to previous year(s) report, this report will become public information posted on the mountain caribou recovery website www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/speciesconservation/index.html.

Progress Board Evaluation

General Observation

The Progress Board expressed qualified satisfaction with performance by government delivering the MCRIP. Similar to 2009/10 report, the Board emphasized that the MCRIP be endorsed as a package of complimentary management actions. Failure to deliver a well balanced and adequately funded program of activities will erode public, stakeholder, and Progress Board support. This position was reiterated to Ministers of Environment and Natural Resource Operations at a meeting held with the Progress Board in February 2011. Some of the MCRIP activities require significant fiscal resources (e.g., augmentation), and/or long-term commitment and political will. The Progress Board expects to see government support the MCRIP through adequate resourcing (e.g., operational and staff budgets) and “political will”.

Habitat Protection

General opinion of the Progress Board is that measures implemented to manage mountain caribou habitat met expectations for the 2010/11 fiscal year. Potential improvements noted by the Board include:

- 1) Making completed exemptions, including the rationale, available to the Progress Board, agency staff and the public. This will contribute to Progress Board and public awareness on activities to conserve mountain caribou. It will also allow decision makers to be informed of other decisions and facilitate more efficient reporting of activity in that area.
- 2) An update report or presentation on government’s progress towards developing a mechanism to mitigate un-anticipated impacts to the forest industry from MCRIP measures. The Progress Board did not feel adequately informed on the mitigation proposal to be able to explain it to their constituents.
- 3) In anticipation of completion of GWMs for forest health, work with the forestry sector to create an information bulletin to describe what a net benefit to caribou means in the context of considering an exemption to address forest health issue. This will assist proponents and decision makers to a make informed submissions and decisions.

Public Recreation

General opinion of the Progress Board is that progress continues to proceed well on managing public recreation, but there still needs to be improvement. Potential improvements noted by the Board include:

- 1) Providing more enforcement resources. While enforcement of closures and Stewardship Management Agreement (SMA) areas has improved, government needs to provide sufficient financial resources and qualified staff to actively and effectively enforce the closures.

- 2) Implementing the management actions in Revelstoke approved by the Director's Team.
- 3) Continuing to provide educational materials (eg signage, brochures) to clubs to enable their membership to inform club and non-club snowmobilers alike on the importance of compliance with closures. This information distribution should include large signs on main highway routes from Alberta and the United States. In conjunction with the distribution of information, encourage public reporting of contraventions (eg via Report All Poachers and Polluters (RAPP)).
- 4) Legalizing the existing voluntary closure areas in the Cranbrook West Recreation Agreement. There is considerable support from committees within this area. Legalizing these closures will permit enforcement.
- 5) Requiring snowmobile clubs to produce and submit annual reports from clubs holding SMAs. This is a requirement of SMAs.
- 6) Re-examining the lack of snowmobile closure areas in the Central Selkirk area. The Mountain Caribou Science Team did not recommend closures in this area because of perceived low risk due to current low snowmobile use. Recent monitoring work suggest this is no longer the case, and that there may be the need to assess closures and/or SMAs.

As was reported in 2009/10 Progress Board Annual Report, the Progress Board recommends that government demonstrate leadership in developing a provincial licensing and registration program for off-road vehicles. Legal registration accompanied by a highly visible decal or license enables more effective enforcement as an enforcement official can legally identify a vehicle that is subject to an offence. Registration also provides an additional avenue to distribute information.

Commercial Recreation

General opinion of the Progress Board is that considerable measures have been implemented by government, HeliCat Canada, and Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing to manage the impact of their activities on mountain caribou, (e.g. signing of revision and sign-off of MOUs by Heli-Cat Canada and Mike Wiegele Heli-skiing, completion of the Implementation and Effectiveness Monitoring Program and implementation of operating practices and reporting). However, the Board is not comfortable with availability of information on the management of this sector. More information on management practices and refinements would enable a more meaningful evaluation of this sector's contribution to supporting the MCRIP. Potential improvements noted by the Board include:

- 1) Ensuring that all background documents relating to the sector's efforts are made available to the Progress Board.
- 2) Receiving an update on results from the MSc thesis project involving Thompson River University and Mike Wiegele Helicopter.
- 3) Progress to develop and implement the independent 3rd party audit. Now that the compliance monitoring procedures are at the operational stage, this is the last component in the compliance continuum.
- 4) Examining the implementation of the Section 16 Tenure Moratorium. The objective of the moratorium is to prevent expansion of commercial recreation tenure that would have an adverse impact on mountain caribou. Is the moratorium effective at achieving MCRIP objectives? An assessment of the content and application of the Section 16 would be helpful prior to the end of its term in 2013.

Predator Management

General opinion of the Progress Board is that government has made efforts to manage predators through amendments to hunting and trapping regulations. However, the Progress

Board expects government to consider more effective measures such as an aerial wolf removal program. The Progress Board recognizes that government will need to know the level of support that this type of decision will receive from the Progress Board. Some members felt that predator management actions to date have lacked a clear rationale which in some cases may make matters worse in terms of garnering support. Other members expressed concern that not enough effective habitat protection measures have been implemented which is adding to opposition to implementation of predator controls. An improvement in the communication of the rationale and any plans for predator management would be a welcome improvement. Potential improvements noted by the Board include:

- 1) Committing to implementing the Mountain Caribou Science Team recommendation on predator management.
- 2) Requiring consistent reporting of all wolf kills (hunting, trapping, control actions). At a minimum in management units where MCRIP is active, but ideally province wide. This information will provide better information on wolf numbers and accurately account for any effort to control their density for caribou conservation.
- 3) Similar to 2009/10 Progress Board Annual Report, an assessment of the efficacy of existing management tools (ie trapping and hunting) to achieve MCRIP objectives. The results of this assessment would determine whether such measures were used in the future.

Prey Management

General opinion of the Progress Board is that there has been good progress and are encouraged by results to date on prey management, which indicate that reducing moose can reduce wolves. This “socially acceptable” method to reduce wolf numbers should be fully implemented where this tool will have the greatest benefit with the mountain caribou recovery area.

Augmentation

General opinion of the Progress Board is they are encouraged that there has been considerable progress with government moving forward with transplanting caribou to the South Purcell herd.

Adaptive Management

General opinion of the Progress Board is there has been some progress on adaptive management, but that this management lever needs to receive continued attention. Potential improvements noted by the Board include:

- 1) Expectation that government will maintain or increase resources assigned to the adaptive management and monitoring component of the MCRIP to enable consistent application across management actions and through time.
- 2) Reporting mechanism for all developments in identified (UWR, WHA) habitat (including those incursions authorized through exceptions) to permit a periodic assessment of overall habitat status.

Progress Board

The general opinion of the Progress Board is optimism, that they can have a meaningful role in delivering the MCRIP. A review and confirmation of the ToR may be timely to ensure the Board is focussed and productive. This review will affirm the extent of members’ participation and commitment noted in the existing ToR. While remaining optimistic, the Progress Board is somewhat disappointed by the pace of delivery of some MCRIP products and initiatives.

Examples of slow pace are noted above. As indicated at the recent meeting with Ministers and follow-up letter, the Progress Board expects to see on-going commitment and resourcing of the MCRIP. Potential improvements noted by the Board include:

- 1) Using the Progress Board to assist Ministers and senior officials to respond to petitions or requests from any sector or group. Most sectors and interest groups have representation on the Progress Board. This membership should be used to help inform their sector on how a request to government or a Minister supports or detracts from the MCRIP objectives.

Recommendations for reporting

The Progress Board made several recommendations to improve the update report it receives in preparation for the annual review. These include:

- 1) Having a summary of progress completed in previous years on management action discussed in the annual update. A reader will need to access the previous annual updates for a complete description.
- 2) Having citations or references to reports or web addresses containing information referenced in the report.

Terms of Reference Revised

The Progress Board expressed concerns about how members interpret the difference between the views expressed by the Board and views expressed by their sector. The Progress Board sees value in all members speaking with a single voice when expressing advice and/or concerns to government on the MCRIP. The Board will not limit any member who chooses to independently express their concerns to government, but the Board wants members to understand that they do so as an independent not representing the Board. A member will identify a “dissenting” view to the Chair and arrange to discuss this issue with other board members. Any deviation from Progress Board messaging should be expressed independently to government as they would be acting not as a member of the Board, but as a sole constituent representing their sectors perspective. The ToR governing the roles and responsibilities of the Progress Board will be revised to reflect this understanding.

Conclusion

The general opinion of the Progress Board is that they remain optimistic that they can have a meaningful role in government’s MCRIP. A review and confirmation of the ToR may be timely to ensure the Board is focussed and productive. This review will affirm the “extent of members’ participation and commitment noted in the existing ToR. The Progress Board notes good progress in several management areas (habitat protection, public recreation) and improvement over last year in others (e.g. augmentation). While remaining optimistic, the Progress Board has identified opportunities for improvement in some management.

Appendix A: Mountain Caribou Recovery Implementation Plan Progress Board Membership

Les Austin, British Columbia Snowmobile Federation

John Bergenske, Wildsight, Mountain Caribou Project

Dave Butler, Director of Sustainability, Canadian Mountain Holidays Inc., Heli-Cat Canada

John Dunford, Manager, Forestry & Sustainability, Tolko Industries Ltd.

Jim Hackett, President, Interior Lumber Manufacturers' Association

Al Hodgson, Association of British Columbia Snowmobile Clubs

Archie MacDonald, Council of Forest Industries

Sam Phillips, Simpcw First Nation

Lawrence Redfern, Mountain Caribou Project

Barry Smith, (Ex officio member) Environment Canada