
BACKGROUND

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Ministry of Agriculture and Lands
Integrated Land Management Bureau

MOUNTAIN CARIBOU RECOVERY ACTIONS

British Columbia's Mountain Caribou Recovery Implementation Plan is a collaborative approach with conservation organizations, First Nations, the forest industry and outdoor recreation groups in restoring the mountain caribou population to pre-1995 levels of more than 2,500 animals throughout their existing range.

Recovery will be achieved by:

1. Protecting mountain caribou habitat from logging and road building

- Habitat loss and fragmentation has been identified as the underlying cause of mountain caribou population declines since 1995, with mortality by predators as the secondary cause. Halting and reversing habitat loss is central to the plan's success.
- This will be achieved by increasing fully protected high-suitability winter mountain caribou habitat from 65 to 95 per cent by spring 2008, protecting a total of 2.2 million hectares within mountain caribou range. Accommodations will be made to protect the viability of key resource sectors and to address isolated or otherwise ineffective habitat by increasing protection elsewhere, ensuring future recruitment of high suitability habitat.

2. Responsibly managing human recreational activities in habitat areas

- Activities like snowmobiling, heli-skiing and cat-skiing can displace mountain caribou from their preferred habitat. The plan commits government to work with users to manage their activities so as not to displace mountain caribou. The Association of British Columbia Snowmobile Clubs, British Columbia Snowmobile Federation, and Heli-Cat Canada all have memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with the Province to reduce impacts on mountain caribou through training, best practices, monitoring, and information sharing.
- Areas where activities threaten to displace mountain caribou will be legally closed to those activities in spring 2008. Consultations with users are currently underway and agreements on both legal and voluntary closures for mountain caribou have already been reached with snowmobile clubs in the Cranbrook and Creston Valley areas. Government will also provide up to \$75,000 to develop snowmobiling opportunities outside of mountain caribou herd areas as well as additional funding to monitor compliance within legal and voluntary closure areas.
- On March 22, 2007, the Province provided \$50,000 to the British Columbia Snowmobile Federation (BCSF) and \$11,000 to the Association of British Columbia Snowmobile Clubs (ABCSC) to develop best management practices, education and outreach materials, implement a snowmobiler awareness campaign, purchase and install signage, monitor snowmobile use and compliance with closures and provide snowmobilers with mountain caribou movement and location information.
- The current moratorium (section 16, Land Act reserve) on new commercial backcountry recreation applications in southern mountain caribou habitats will be extended for five years to allow time to implement and monitor the effects of best practices by the commercial backcountry recreation sector. A second moratorium on new commercial recreation tenures over the balance of the mountain caribou range will be enacted for one year until habitat and backcountry recreation planning is completed.

3. Managing predator populations of wolf and cougar where they threaten caribou recovery

- Although habitat loss was identified by the Science Team as the underlying cause of mountain caribou population declines, high predator populations and unsustainable predation rates on mountain caribou are secondary contributors to mountain caribou population decline.
- Habitat protection alone won't reverse negative population trends. The plan commits government to a variety of measures addressing unsustainable predation rates on caribou. These include changes to hunting regulations increasing cougar and wolf harvests, supporting non-lethal control measures such as wolf sterilization, and the targeted removal of individuals or packs where there is a scientific determination of immediate threat to recovery of mountain caribou herds.

4. Managing the prey of mountain caribou predators to re-balance the predator-prey system

- The Recovery Implementation Plan commits government to research and implement actions to reduce moose and deer populations in key areas through habitat management and hunting regulations to rebalance the predator-prey system.
- These include changes to hunting regulations to increase harvest of deer and moose in or adjacent to core mountain caribou habitats to reduce opportunistic predation on mountain caribou by wolves and cougars.

5. Boosting caribou numbers in small herds by transplanting caribou

- Augmenting small mountain caribou populations of 10-50 individuals with animals transplanted from elsewhere can increase population growth rates and more quickly reduce the demographic risks associated with small populations.
- The plan commits government to augmenting the southernmost mountain caribou herds as well as working co-operatively with First Nations to develop maternity pens for the southernmost herds, protecting mountain caribou newborn and calves from predators.

6. Supporting adaptive management and developing effective monitoring plans for habitat, recreation and predator-prey management.

- Implementation of the recovery plan will be monitored closely to determine whether the strategy needs to be modified in order to meet the recovery goals. In addition, research addressing knowledge gaps will be supported.
- The Recovery Implementation Plan includes the development of adaptive management and effectiveness monitoring plans for habitat, recreation and predator-prey management both within core mountain caribou habitat areas as well as other areas that contribute to connectivity and predator reduction.

7. Establishing a cross-sector Progress Board by spring 2008 to advise government on the Recovery Implementation Plan

- Implementation of the recovery plan will be periodically reviewed by government and key sector representatives from the Association of British Columbia Snowmobile Clubs, British Columbia Snowmobile Federation, Council of Forest Industries, Forest Ethics, Heli-Cat Canada, Interior Lumber Manufacturer's Association, the Mountain Caribou Project and other stakeholders.

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