

Mountain Caribou Recovery Implementation Plan Progress Board Update April 29, 2008

Integrated Land Management Bureau, Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Forests and Range, Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources, Ministry of Tourism, Sports, and the Arts

1.0 Habitat Management Activity

The five habitat teams (Revelstoke-Shuswap, Wells Gray Thompson, Cariboo Chilcotin, Kootenay and Prince George) have been working diligently to fulfil government's October 16, 2007 commitment to protect 77,000 ha of incremental habitat within the timber harvesting land base (THLB) as well as the mountain caribou habitat outside of the THLB in a manner that protects key resource sectors. Incremental habitat maps have been finalized for all planning units except for planning units 2B (Central Kootenays) and 4A (Wells Gray Thompson).

By the end of May 2008 government will have developed draft legal orders under Forest and Range Practices Act (FRPA) that will protect these areas from timber harvesting and road building. These areas are referred to as incremental habitat. Consultation on these legal orders is expected to commence in June 2008. In addition, government staff is currently bringing forward to senior government compensation and mitigation options to ensure no forest licensee is rendered non-viable as a result of the incremental habitat protections for mountain caribou.

Prince George (Units 5A/6)

Government has identified approximately 6230 hectares (ha) of incremental habitat in units 5A and 6, in contrast to the habitat target of 6132 ha.

Quesnel Highlands (Unit 5B)

Habitat planning is complete for unit 5B after successfully identifying approximately 27,800 ha of incremental habitat based on the productive forest land base compared to a budget of 25,000 ha. The existing Ungulate Winter Range (UWR) order is being revised.

Government will refer to herd experts and science team members, once the results from the matrix habitat analysis are complete and the adaptive management framework is implemented, to determine whether incremental habitat protection in unit 5B is sufficient to meet the recovery objective. .

Revelstoke (Unit 3A)

Government is working with science team members and local herd experts to map an additional 1000 ha of age class 2 habitat to meet the 10,000 ha THLB target for unit 3A. This additional habitat will assist in helping to secure contiguous polygons and reduce the fragmentation within planning unit 3A.

Kootenays (Unit 2B, 1A and 1B)

The Kootenay habitat team has been responsible for units 2B, 1A, and 1B.

Central Kootenay (unit 2B)

Government will be considering the following three options to resolve the final habitat plan for unit 2B:

- 1) A 2-zone system consisting of a no-harvest area and an attribute management zone; or
- 2) A fully spatialized no-harvest zone; or
- 3) One of two fully spatialized options

All options are expected to be complete by April 30, 2008 where they will be brought forward to government for decision by May 30, 2008.

Southwest Kootenay /Southeast Kootenay (1A/1B)

Habitat planning is nearly complete in units 1A and 1B with only some minor mapping errors left to correct. The incremental habitat targets of 3803 ha for Unit 1A and 5984 ha for Unit 1B are currently on track for being met.

Wells Gray Thompson (4A)

A conceptual agreement was reached between Integrated Land Management Bureau (ILMB), licensees and Ministry of Environment (MOE) on the final conservation design and general objectives for unit 4A. The design included a no-harvest area and an attribute management zone. Objectives for the attribute management zone will be drafted when the non-THLB process is complete (please see below).

Non Timber Harvesting Land Base Exercise

The most recent operability line from all planning units has been compiled and operationally reviewed. ILMB is currently analyzing the distribution of mountain caribou habitat above the operability line to determine the extent to which the non-THLB area contributes to government's habitat commitments. Government staff is currently assessing the operational impacts of protecting non-THLB below the operability line. Completion of this portion is expected by the end of May 2008. It is anticipated that the objectives being drafted as legal orders for the incremental habitat under FRPA will also apply to the non-THLB.

Timber Risk Assessment Process

Government has developed a model, termed the Economic Risk Assessment, which compares scale data with annual allowable cut (AAC) through time (2001-2007) to determine whether incremental habitat protection for mountain caribou reduces wood flow below any period experienced between 2001 and 2007. Government staff met with forest licensees and environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) on April 10/11, 2008 to outline the operation of the model and answer questions. The final results will be completed by May 30, 2008 and progress board members will be asked whether they would like to meet with government staff to discuss the final results and next steps.

Forest Health Assessment Process

The Forest Health Committee, comprised of forest health experts from around the province, completed the initial forest health report March 9, 2008 which was then sent out for comment by various stakeholders. The report generated good comments which are currently being reviewed by the committee to be incorporated into the final draft by May 9, 2008. The final report will be sent to the Directors committee for approval by May 15, 2008. Appropriate language from the report will form part of the objectives within the legal order.

2.0 Predator-Prey Management Activities

MOE is following a two-stage process in implementing the predator-prey management actions endorsed by government.

The first phase was to develop and implement an interim management strategy to move forward on actions that were both feasible and likely to result in immediate, positive benefits to critically endangered mountain caribou herds. These activities included:

- Extensive radio-collaring and ground-tracking of wolves and cougars throughout most of mountain caribou range;
- Changes in hunting seasons for wolves and cougars;
- Continuation of the wolf reduction programme in Quesnel Highland;
- Trapping of wolves in Narrow Lake and the South Purcells;
- Planing for removal of two packs at den sites in Revelstoke;
- Issuance of additional cougar permits to guide-outfitters; and,
- Aerial surveys of mountain caribou and moose in selected areas.

MOE invested over \$700,000 in the first phase activities during the second half of fiscal 2007-2008. The outcomes include:

- Twenty-two wolf packs are now collared, representing approximately 70% of the packs located between Williams Lake and Revelstoke; location of most of the other packs as well as the packs in the Kootenays is now known;
- Removal of 5 wolves in Quesnel Highland, 2 in Narrow Lake and one in the South Purcells;
- Six males and 6 females were sterilized in Quesnel Highland, and as a result, the 6 targeted packs have all failed to den this season;
- Results of wolf trapping were poor, but attempts will continue into the summer in Quesnel Highland, South Purcells and Revelstoke, using different trapping methods (padded leg-holds as opposed to snares);
- Removal at den sites will be attempted in Quesnel Highland and Revelstoke, and First Nations in the Cariboo have endorsed a plan to provide pups to a captive breeding facility in Minnesota;
- Moose surveys were completed in some parts of Quesnel Highland and in the Central Selkirks; the number of moose in the Central Selkirks was surprisingly low;
- Caribou surveys were completed in the South Selkirks (population increasing slightly), Central Selkirks (also increasing), Revelstoke (North Columbia stable, South Columbia down to 20 animals from 38), Wells-Gray Thompson (results not yet compiled), part of Quesnel Highland (only 10% calves), Narrow Lake (stable), and the Parsnip portion of the Hart Ranges (down significantly with low calf numbers).

The second phase of MOE's strategy is the development of a multi-year predator-prey strategy. This strategy is currently being drafted and will be available for full peer and stakeholder review in June 2008. In addition, there is a range-wide mountain caribou census being planned for March 2009.

Augmentation

The progress on augmenting critically endangered mountain caribou herds has been stalled on several fronts; relations with First Nations in both donor and receiving areas continue to be a challenge, survey results of mountain caribou from the Itchez-Ilgachuz Range have been low, and there hasn't been sufficient resolution of predators in most planning areas. MOE is holding a meeting on May 22, 2008 to discuss transplanting, penning and captive breeding options, and to develop a strategy for augmenting critically endangered herds.

3.0 Recreation Management Activities

Public Recreation (snowmobiling)

The Science Team provided government with recommendations for closing areas to avoid displacement of mountain caribou due to the effects of snowmobiling in preferred mountain caribou habitat. Government committed to providing snowmobile clubs an opportunity to develop Stewardship Management Agreements (SMAs) as an alternative to legal closures.

A decision framework was developed to aid in the assessment of any proposed SMAs. The principles considered in the application of the decision framework include:

- Are the proposed closures supported by scientific literature?
- Are the proposed closure data driven?
- Are the proposed closures expert calibrated?
- Are the proposed closures peer reviewed
- Would the proposed closure be legally defensible;
- Is the decision based on opportunities (i.e. local teams have made efforts to identify alternative riding areas);
- Has the existing infrastructure investment been considered;
- Is there an alignment with the incremental habitat closures

The framework then considers the likelihood of further displacement of mountain caribou by snowmobiles by looking at the capacity of the club to implement the proposed SMA, and the current and anticipated future level of snowmobiling use in the proposed SMA area

SMAs are being developed by snowmobile clubs in most planning units across the mountain caribou range. ILMB anticipates receiving draft SMAs for consideration by the beginning of May 2008. Received draft SMAs will be made available to First Nations and stakeholders for review and comment. Those comments will be included as information in the recommendations forwarded to the Director's Committee. The Director's committee will review the recommendations and decide on implementing the SMA or going forward with legal closure. Recommendations from the Backcountry Recreation Manager to the Director's Committee are expected by June 2008.

Commercial Recreation (Heli and Cat Skiing)

Through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with HeliCat Canada, government has committed to manage tenured commercial recreation activities through the implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs). A workshop will be held May 2008 to develop an effectiveness monitoring program for the BMPs. Outcomes from the effectiveness monitoring workshop will include:

1. Guidance for the adequate implementation and ongoing monitoring of BMPs;

2. Identification of indicators to effectively measure the response by mountain caribou to following BMPs; and
3. Future research needs for heli and cat-ski operations in caribou habitat.

To ensure that the management actions for winter recreation are effective the BMPs and the SMAs will be monitored through adaptive management (please see below).

4.0 Adaptive Management Strategy

Adaptive Management is a process where by decisions are made based on what was learned by the evaluation of results. The Mountain Caribou Recovery Implementation Plan has committed to effectiveness monitoring of all management strategies and to continually improving the application of the management strategies. The Adaptive Management Terms of Reference are currently under development, with expected completion by July 2008. The adaptive management process will assess all the management strategies to determine which additional actions may need to be implemented in order to achieve the objective of mountain caribou recovery.

5.0 Other Management Activities

Mineral Exploration

Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources (EMPR) will enact either No Registration Reserves (NRR) or Conditional Registration Reserves (CRR), where appropriate, over the incremental habitat areas. The NRR or CRR will be put in place after the final incremental habitat areas have been finalized for legal protection.