

Purcells-South caribou herd augmentation project

2nd Quarterly report

September 14, 2012

Introduction:

As part of the BC Government's commitment to recover mountain caribou to pre-1995 levels by 2017, 19 caribou were translocated from the Level-Kawdy herd in north-western British Columbia to the Purcell Mountains in south-eastern British Columbia in March 2012. This is the first phase of a two year project to move 40 caribou to the Purcells-South herd.

Prior to the transplant, the Purcells-South mountain caribou herd in the Kootenay Region had a population estimated at only 14 animals and was identified as a priority for augmentation (Kinley 2010).

Refer to the June 21, 2012 first quarter report for additional information on this project.

Further information on mountain caribou in British Columbia can be found at:

<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/speciesconservation/index.html>

Monitoring of translocated and resident caribou:

The movements of collared caribou in the Level-Kawdy and Purcells-South herds continue to be monitored remotely via a weekly download of data from Iridium GPS collars.

At the time of this report, 12 of the 19 caribou transplanted into the Purcell Mountains have died:

- 4 due to cougar predation
- 2 due to wolf predation
- 3 due to accidents
- 3 from unknown causes

Without exception, all of the predation mortalities have been caribou that wandered into low elevation areas, outside what is considered to be suitable caribou habitat in the Purcell Mountains.

In spite of the number of mortalities that have occurred post-release, a transplant remains the best hope to avoid extirpation of the Purcells-South herd.

The GPS movements of the collared caribou appear to indicate that calving occurred in early June. Helicopter surveys were curtailed to avoid disturbance to the caribou at this sensitive time so it is unknown how many calves were born.

Currently, one of the remaining live caribou is in Montana and is being monitored in cooperation with US Fish & Wildlife Service staff.

.../2

At the time of this report, the transplanted caribou have not linked up with the resident caribou.

Refer to Appendix 1 for a map showing the general movements of the transplanted caribou and locations of mortalities.

COMMUNICATIONS

As part of ongoing public outreach and fund-raising efforts, Leo DeGroot, Steve Gordon, and Mark Williams led a Conservation North-West “webinar” August 15, 2012. The webinar can be viewed at: <http://greatnorthernlcc.org/event/243>

PLANNING FOR 2013

Logistical planning is underway for the second phase of the transplant project in 2013.

The technical team is reviewing all aspects of the project and has sought advice from the B.C. Mountain Caribou Science Team and other experts to ensure that the choices made give transplanted caribou the greatest chance for survival. The source population (donor herd) is being reviewed and a tentative decision has been made to use a soft release method. A site has been chosen for construction of a temporary holding pen to include a component of some resident South Purcells caribou and increase the probability that transplanted caribou will bond with resident animals. It is hoped this will minimise the wandering of transplanted animals that occurred in 2012 and encourage caribou to use high elevation habitats.

RESEARCH

Predation-risk research is ongoing through the University of Victoria’s Laboratory for Landscape and Wildlife Ecology, Department of Geography. Ongoing health testing is being conducted through the University of Calgary’s Faculty of Veterinary Medicine.

Next scheduled report:

The next quarterly report for this project will be available Dec. 2012.

References:

Kinley, T. 2010. Augmentation Plan for the Purcells-South Mountain Caribou Population. Prepared for: B.C. Ministry of Environment, Ecosystems Branch. 43pp.

Report prepared by:

Steve Gordon, MSc. R.P.Bio.
Strategic Resources Manager
Resource Stewardship Division
Steve.gordon@gov.bc.ca

(250) 751 7126