

Groundswell continues to grow as groups demand conservation in place of management

Edmonton, August 3, 2016: The groundswell of conservation organizations and concerned citizens uniting across Canada to oppose Alberta's draft range plans for caribou continues to grow.

In response to criticism, Alberta Environment Minister Shanon Phillips stated to CBC that "inaction" by the previous Conservative regime forced the NDP government to move quickly to come up with its own solution. The Minister went on to state: "*Protecting this iconic species is not only the right thing to do, it's mandated by the federal government*".

Liz White, director of Animal Alliance of Canada says "Deflecting blame on previous governments for their inaction does not justify the current leadership's choice to allow ongoing destruction of caribou range land or wide-scale killing programs for other species. "

Lesley Sampson, Executive Director of Coyote Watch Canada, refuses to accept that the federal Species At Risk Act was intended for such bloodshed, "Such mass killing--spanning decades and under the guise of conservation--is nothing short of absurd and shameful. Causing harm to hundreds of intelligent and sensitive animals in a vain attempt to maintain small herds of caribou in degraded habitat is simply unacceptable from both animal welfare and conservation perspectives".

In a recent statement provided to CBC News, Stan Boutin, a biology professor at the University of Alberta who helped develop the draft provincial government plan said, "*It may seem like it's not good enough, (But) if you don't do the predator control, we would not have a Little Smoky caribou herd at all right now.*"

"Arguing that Little Smoky caribou would be gone if wolf killing stopped is ecological blackmail. I worry that it might take losing this herd of at-risk caribou for the public to wake up and realize that western governments are continuing to use absurd fencing and wolf killing experiments as distractions from the luke-warm commitments to protect caribou habitat, all the while letting industry carve it up," states Hannah Barron, wildlife conservation director at Earthroots and also a director of Wolf Awareness.

"The government of Alberta has stated that there are no conservation issues in relation to the lethal management of wolves, conveniently ignoring the adverse biological effects that occur when the communal and reproductive behaviour of a highly social animal are disturbed, as well as the community wide ecological repercussions that accompany mass killing of an apex predator," says Sadie Parr, executive director of Wolf Awareness. "Between 2005 and 2012, 10 wolves were killed for each caribou that makes up the Little Smoky herd, where forestry, oil and gas continue in 95% of critical caribou habitat. The numbers equate to approximately 78 caribou alive and 780 wolves killed over seven years. Wolves were destroyed violently using killing snares, multiple bullets, or toxicants. Since 2012, that death toll has risen to well over 1,000 wolves. It is absurd that Alberta proposes to keep killing for another 50 years when this massacre has already failed to increase caribou numbers significantly."

There have also been scores of unintended casualties from non-selective poison and killing snares. According to voluntary submissions made by trappers, between 2000 and 2012 a bare minimum of 676 non-target animals were killed within caribou range areas, mostly by snares, including two caribou. Other victims included 163 mountain lions, 70 lynx, 3 grizzly bears, 12 black bears, 38 wolverines, 3 foxes, 73 otters, 173 fishers, 12 moose, 62 deer, 40 eagles (golden and bald), 12 owls, 1 goshawk, and 12 small mammals.

"The Little Smoky caribou herds' population is limited by the carrying capacity of their diminished habitat, which has been so reduced and impoverished that predator kill programs are unlikely to result in even a temporary population response," states Dr. Paul Paquet, senior scientist for Raincoast Conservation Foundation. "There is a need to start thinking more creatively about the complexity of our ecosystems, and consider strategies that seek to build resilience instead of reducing complexity into zoo-like corrals".

"We trust that our input and all other comments in regards to ongoing wolf kill programs submitted during this period will also be considered as public input on Alberta's Wolf Management Plan, which is expected to be completed in draft form at the end of this fiscal year," states Parr. "We will continue to engage an informed public in the government's decision-making processes involving the management and policies of wildlife as a public trust."

NOTE: The coalition is finalizing comments to be submitted collaboratively, based on many of the concerns outlined here: <http://wolfawarenessinc.org.s176301.gridserver.com/points-for-commenting-on-albertas-draft-caribou-protection-plan/>.

Groups working together to increase awareness about the proposed plan:

- Animal Alliance of Canada
- Animal Alliance Environment Voters Party of Canada
- Bear With Us Inc
- Born Free
- Cochrane Research Institute
- Coyote Watch Canada
- Earthroots
- The Fur-Bearers
- Humane Society International/Canada
- Raincoast Conservation Foundation
- Valhalla Wilderness Society
- Wolf Awareness Inc

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- Earthroots: Hannah Barron - ph: 647-567- 8337, email: hannah@earthroots.org
- HSI/Canada: Christopher Paré – ph: 438-402-0643, o: 514-395-2914 x 206, email: cpare@hsi.org
- Raincoast Conservation Foundation: Dr Paul Paquet ph: 306-376-2015, email: ppaquet@baudoux.net, or Chris Genoali ph: 250-888-3579, email: chris@raincoast.org
- Wolf Awareness: Sadie Parr – ph: 250-272-4695, email: wolfawareness@gmail.com

Background documents:

- "Maintaining ethical standards during conservation crises": https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272153185_Maintaining_ethical_standards_during_conservation_crises
- "Cry Wolf, An Unethical Oil Film" by DeSmogBlog: <http://www.desmogblog.com/cry-wolf-unethical-oilstory>

