



Time for Nature



Finding solutions for a species at risk

Planning a woodland caribou recovery in Jasper National Park of Canada

It's a familiar story. Wild animals that live in populated areas don't have an easy time of it. The woodland caribou are no exception. The southern mountain population, which includes the caribou of Jasper National Park of Canada, is in decline. They need immediate help. But when wild animals are in decline, it isn't easy to determine exactly what the solution will be.



Jasper National Park is one of the few areas where habitat for the southern mountain population of woodland caribou is protected. © Parks Canada, Grant, T., 1976.

Not all caribou are alike

Woodland caribou, which are the largest sub-species of caribou, live in boreal forests from coast to coast. They have suffered more from human activity than their cousins, the northerly barren ground caribou.

The biggest problem for the southern mountain population is land development. Woodland caribou move seasonally. Caribou that live in the mountains of western Canada pass the winter on forested slopes, but spend the summer in high alpine regions. As more and more land is developed, their range is fragmented.

What is the biggest problem for the caribou?

As the range is fragmented, individual herds have been isolated, and small, isolated animal populations are vulnerable. The potential for inbreeding is high, and the herd has a limited ability to replenish its numbers when individuals die.



Woodland caribou are the largest of four caribou sub-species. © Parks Canada.

Why is Jasper a vital refuge?

Because Jasper does not allow residential or industrial development, the park is one of the few areas where the animals' habitat will survive relatively undisturbed. In fact, in northern areas of Jasper, populations of the woodland caribou seem stable.



Where is the problem most acute?

In southern parts of the park, however, where caribou habitat is more often disturbed, numbers have fallen. Parks Canada had to take action.

Researching, debating, discussing

The southern mountain population has been legally designated as threatened, and is thereby protected under the *Species at Risk Act*. To help the caribou in south Jasper, Parks Canada brought local residents and recreation and tourism representatives together to form a caribou recovery team.



First the team did some digging to learn about caribou ecology and conservation. They combed the literature and interviewed biologists and park wardens. Experts from across Canada shared their knowledge in public meetings.

The caribou move down from high alpine areas to lower slopes in winter.
© Parks Canada.

Listing the threats

Then, the team listed potential threats, and there were many. Not only were people disturbing the habitat in many ways, but their ski trails and ploughed roads also gave predators like wolves better winter access to the herds.

Then each team member rated the risk factors by priority. The top risks: people disturbing female caribou (cows) with calves, helicopters disturbing the animals, and road salt attracting caribou to highways where there is a high risk of death in collisions.

Recommending solutions

What could be done? The team considered a long list of recovery measures, which they voted on according to their preferences. The resulting recommended measures include:

- developing ski trails in non-habitat areas,
- increased enforcement of dog leash laws,
- trail user education, and
- new speed limits to reduce caribou-vehicle collisions.

The team worked to balance the needs of caribou and park users. And the plan provides a comprehensive approach to improve the caribou's chances in south Jasper.

For more information visit www.pc.gc.ca/jasper