

Report Card on Federal Government's Proposed Boreal Woodland Caribou Recovery Strategy

Graded by CPAWS (Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society), October 17, 2011

CATEGORY	GRADE E: Excellent G: Good S: Satisfactory N: Needs Major improvement	RATIONALE	HOW TO IMPROVE THE GRADE
Overall Assessment	Remedial work required.	Major improvements are needed in 6 out of the 8 categories.	Incorporate CPAWS recommendations into the final version of the Recovery Strategy.
Identifies sound science	G	<p>Environment Canada has made a considerable investment in scientific research to inform the process of Critical Habitat identification. This science, as detailed in the <i>Scientific Assessment to Inform the Identification of Critical Habitat for Woodland Caribou (Rangifer tarandus caribou), Boreal Population, in Canada: 2011 update</i>, provides a good basis for developing a strong recovery strategy for boreal caribou, which are in steep decline across the country.</p> <p>The recovery strategy acknowledges the strong scientific evidence that habitat disturbance is the key factor in the decline of Boreal woodland caribou populations, and that securing vast areas of intact critical habitat is essential for their long term survival.</p>	N/A
Identifies the main threats to caribou	G	The strategy acknowledges scientists' findings that habitat loss from industrial development is the principle threat to Canada's Boreal woodland caribou.	N/A
Policy direction based on sound science	N	The Species at Risk Act requires that recovery strategies be based on the best science and Aboriginal Knowledge, with socio-economic considerations to be considered at the next phase, which is action planning. However, the proposed caribou recovery strategy appears to allow socio-economic considerations to influence its policy direction, compromising its scientific rigour.	As directed in the Species at Risk Act, address socio-economic concerns in the action planning stage, which follows the development of the scientific recovery strategy.
Focuses on caribou recovery for all	N	The Species at Risk Act requires that ALL threatened caribou herds be given the opportunity to recover, yet the proposed	Meet the objective of ensuring all local caribou populations are self-sustaining over the

populations		strategy aims to achieve recovery within 50 years for only 29 (50%) of the 57 local populations across Canada. For the remaining 28, the strategy would allow provinces to ‘stabilize’ populations already in decline through unsustainable interventions like predator control, rather than protecting their habitat.	“medium term” of less than 50 years, as well as the longer term.
Identifies critical habitat	N	The strategy fails to designate all of the areas where Canada’s remaining Boreal woodland caribou are found as critical habitat. This approach leaves a considerable amount of land within existing caribou ranges largely unregulated, including for those local populations that have very low probabilities of survival, putting them at much greater risk of extinction.	Designate the entirety of the local caribou population ranges as critical habitat, within which some anthropogenic disturbances are allowed but regulated.
Protects adequate critical habitat	N	<p>The strategy potentially opens up a considerable amount of intact forest where caribou live to anthropogenic disturbance. This runs contrary to the precautionary principle required in SARA and has no scientific grounding.</p> <p>The strategy also contains a dangerous loophole that allows for the destruction of critical habitat for 28 herds (of 57 total) already at grave risk by requiring that only 5% of their range remain undisturbed. This is not recovery.</p> <p>Rather than protecting the habitat for these 28 herds, the strategy would allow expensive and unsustainable approaches of predator and alternate prey control or other types of “active management” (e.g. penning caribou) in half of the populations in Canada.</p>	<p>Develop policies to limit the expansion of the industrial footprint into intact forests within caribou ranges.</p> <p>Close the loophole that allows for the destruction of critical habitat for 28 of the 57 caribou ranges.</p> <p>To successfully achieve self-sustaining populations of caribou in the long term habitat protection must be the cornerstone of recovery for all herds.</p>
Offers high probability of success	N	In the strategy, the federal government is proposing to accept 60% as reasonable probability of a caribou population’s long term survival. Based on this probability, the strategy permits human disturbance of 35% of those populations’ ranges. A 60% probability of long term survival is simply too low, putting caribou at too high a risk of extinction.	Establish 80% as the target probability that a local population will remain stable or increase, which equates to a more acceptable disturbance threshold of ~20% total disturbance within a range.