

CANADIAN PARKS AND WILDERNESS SOCIETY
SPEAKING NOTES ON THE FEDERAL *SPECIES AT RISK ACT* (SARA)
5-YEAR REVIEW
TO THE FEDERAL STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
For presentation on April 27, 2010

Éric Hébert-Daly, National Executive Director, CPAWS (eric@cpaws.org)

Aran O'Carroll, Legal and Regulatory Affairs, CPAWS (aran@cpaws.org)

Introduction:

Good afternoon, and thank you for this opportunity to share the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society's experience and views during your 5-year review of Canada's *Species At Risk Act* (SARA).

My name is Éric Hébert-Daly, National Executive Director, CPAWS, and with me is Aran O'Carroll, National Manager, Legal and Regulatory Affairs, and CPAWS national lead on our Boreal Campaign - www.caribouandyou.ca.

Our presentation will focus on the challenges and opportunities of implementing the *Species At Risk Act*, based on our longstanding interest in conserving Canada's great national Boreal forest, and our work to protect the iconic but threatened Boreal woodland caribou.

CPAWS is Canada's pre-eminent, community-based voice for public wilderness protection. We've played a lead role in establishing over two-thirds of Canada's protected areas since 1963, including the massive expansion last year of the iconic Canadian Boreal protected area - Nahanni National Park Reserve.

We were founded in 1963. With 13 chapters in nearly every province and territory

and the active support of 40,000 Canadians, we're one of the largest grassroots conservation organizations in Canada. Our vision is to keep at least half of Canada's public land and water wild forever. It's a vision shared by our partner in "The "Big Wild" --Mountain Equipment Co-op, and for Canada's Boreal – by our colleagues on the Boreal Leadership Council who include First Nations, oil and gas and forestry companies and other conservation organizations.

CPAWS played a supportive role in establishing SARA. We're a member of the Minister's Species At Risk Advisory Committee (SARAC). In fact my colleague Aran O'Carroll co-chairs the National Advisory Group on the Recovery Strategy for Woodland Caribou. Across Canada, CPAWS staff have been instrumental in developing recovery plans and gaining habitat protection for woodland caribou in their regions.

We agree with our SARAC colleagues in their presentation to this committee that the fundamental architecture of SARA is well designed. It is the implementation of SARA that has proven to be the challenge. (We have a more detailed description of our experience with SARA that we have left with the clerk.)

We would like to put three recommendations before you today:

- Ensure that you get SARA implementation right in the next steps on the file for Boreal woodland caribou;
- Adopt a bold new federal leadership role in wilderness conservation; and,
- Take immediate action as a new national park is established in the NWT to ensure that federal conservation tools work together – in this case – SARA and new parks establishment.

The Challenge – Habitat Conservation

Critical habitat is defined under SARA as “the habitat necessary for the survival or recovery” of a species at risk. The Minister is responsible under the Act for approving Recovery Strategies for species that identify critical habitat, to the extent that it is possible to do so, based on the best available information and describing measures to conserve this habitat.

Woodland caribou present an excellent example of why we need to have a more coordinated approach to conservation in Canada. With a vast range, woodland caribou in the Boreal are listed under SARA throughout the country, with the exception of the populations on the island of Newfoundland - although those population trajectories have been recently confirmed to be dire.

An umbrella species signaling the health of our Boreal forests and wetlands, woodland caribou require large intact wilderness areas to survive. If their habitat is fragmented by roads, farming, logging, mining and/or energy development, predator-prey dynamics change, tipping the balance against the caribou, which can disappear within a few decades.

After 7 years of attempts to address the plight of Boreal woodland caribou under the Act, we are only too aware of the problems there have been to date with its implementation. The good news is that this effort has resulted in a state of the art scientific assessment of the critical habitat needs of this species. The bad news is that we still await a Recovery Strategy under the Act, which we're told is now expected in the fall of 2011. Meanwhile caribou populations continue to decline.

Our learning from this experience is that the *Species At Risk Act* has great potential as a federal tool to conserve the habitat of species at risk. But on its own, it's insufficient. Conserving wilderness on the grand scale required by wide-ranging species, such as the woodland caribou, demands concerted action by many parties who are intimately affected.

The Opportunity - Federal Leadership in Conservation:

As a country, we need to apply our collective abilities to become a global conservation leader. That means bringing together governments' legislative powers to protect species and establish protected areas, industry's ability to adopt more sustainable practices, Aboriginal people's traditional knowledge of our ecosystems, scientists' growing understanding of conservation biology and the citizenship of conservation organizations such as our own.

A First Step – Working Together for Conservation:

We recommend that the federal government kick start a new era of integrating the nation-wide and federal government-wide initiatives for conservation. Work collaboratively with provincial and territorial governments, Aboriginal groups and major industrial and conservation groups to forge a path ahead to create a world-leading conservation vision for Canada that will protect our natural heritage.

An important part of this would be the development and implementation of a joint strategy --involving all of these parties -- to conserve the critical habitats of Boreal woodland caribou. Given the caribou's vast range, such a plan would secure healthy resilient ecosystems that will provide a future for generations of Canadians.

Immediate Action - Nahanni Headwaters, Nááts'ihch'oh ["Nah-tseen-cho"]

Last year, with the support of the Dehcho First Nations, the Government of the NWT and CPAWS, Parliament unanimously approved a massive expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve in the southern portion of the South Nahanni River Watershed.

Now Parks Canada is planning to establish Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve in the headwaters of the South Nahanni Watershed. This area includes critical calving and breeding grounds for woodland caribou that winter in the adjacent Nahanni National Park Reserve. With the right boundary for Nááts'ihch'oh, virtually the entire range of a woodland caribou herd would be protected within these two adjacent national parks.

But the current proposed boundaries for the park all leave out parts of the South Nahanni watershed that are vital to the future of woodland caribou in the Nahanni.

By ensuring that the boundaries of this latest national park protect critical woodland caribou habitat, the federal government would, in a real way, demonstrate how a coordinated approach to conservation can achieve real outcomes for wildlife, on the ground.

In summary, we urge your committee to:

- Show SARA works with the national recovery strategy for Boreal woodland caribou
- Adopt a bold new federal leadership role in wilderness conservation; and,
- Take immediate action as a new national park is established in the NWT to ensure that federal conservation tools work together – in this case – SARA and new parks establishment.

Thank you. I welcome your questions.