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## **Majority of Caribou in Ontario to see Increased Risks with draft Federal Recovery Strategy**

### **CPAWS Wildlands League calls for fixes to eliminate critical flaws**

Toronto-CPAWS Wildlands League is worried that the federal government has issued a draft recovery strategy for Boreal woodland caribou that could see increased risks to 8 out of 9 caribou populations in Ontario. The public interest group is calling for critical fixes to prevent healthy populations from declining, to keep populations that are hanging by a thread from being written off and to close loopholes that could undermine the species' survival.

Boreal woodland caribou are listed as nationally "threatened" within Canada, requiring the federal government under the *Species At Risk Act* to develop a recovery strategy for them. The draft strategy was released on August 26<sup>th</sup> and Environment Canada is now accepting public comments on it for 60 days. The government is expected to announce the final strategy a month after the public comment period ends.

"We've taken a careful look at the draft recovery strategy. On the one hand we're pleased that it acknowledges scientists' findings that habitat loss from industrial development is the principle threat to Canada's Boreal woodland caribou. It is a good story for one threatened population in Ontario. The Kesagami Range would be expected to have strong recovery measures implemented," says Janet Sumner, Executive Director of CPAWS Wildlands League.

However, the draft contains problems that need to be fixed so that it can function as a true "recovery" strategy for all Boreal woodland caribou with no herds left behind. As is, the strategy would only include 60% of the total area of all caribou ranges as critical habitat. This means that 40% of the total area of caribou ranges would not be regulated. It is very difficult to implement a range management approach when 40% of the area is left out of the critical habitat designation. Further, this also means that industrial incursions into 6.3 million ha of undisturbed caribou habitat (arbitrarily left out of the critical habitat designation in Ontario) would not be considered destroying habitat. Over 19 million ha of undisturbed caribou habitat would be left out nation-wide.

Wildlands League is also concerned that the strategy doesn't aim to give the remaining Boreal woodland caribou a higher confidence than 60% chance of being self sustaining. This is too low as Wildlands League's Anna Baggio explains, "If you were building a bridge and your structural engineer told you the bridge only had a 60% chance of working and holding all the cars and trucks on it? Would you cross that bridge? Well we don't like the odds. At the very least we need to aim to give caribou an 80% chance of being self-sustaining and this means allowing a much smaller level of disturbance in ranges – in the area of 20-25%," says Baggio.

The other major loophole in the strategy that Wildlands League believes requires elimination is the one concerning areas that have already been disturbed by industry. In such areas, the draft strategy could

*Wildlands League Statement on the Release of draft Federal Caribou Recovery Strategy*

allow provincial governments to continue destroying critical Boreal woodland caribou habitat until only 5% remains provided if they have a population stabilization plan in place.

“With only 5% of their remaining habitat – caribou have virtually no chance to recover to self-sustaining population levels. We are calling on the federal government to amend the strategy so that it places much stricter limits on the amount of permitted industrial development in already fragmented areas where Boreal woodland caribou still survive,” says Sumner. “We cannot and should not be writing off caribou populations in Canada,” added Baggio.

Additional actions Wildlands League would like to see the federal government undertake to improve the draft strategy:

- Regulate all of the area of ranges as critical habitat
- Clarify when disturbed habitat is rehabilitated enough for caribou sustenance
- Increase protection for all remaining undisturbed habitat that currently falls outside critical habitat designation
- Standardize the approach to recovery. All herds should be managed to maintain or increase the amount of undisturbed habitat in large interconnected patches so that populations have at least an 80% chance of being self sustaining.
- Examine why total disturbance in the Churchill range seems to be underestimated. The federal strategy says 31% whereas our analysis shows the range to be at 46%. Total disturbance in the rest of the ranges seems consistent with our findings.
- Reassess the Coastal Range designation so that the mainland population is considered separately from the islands.
- Reassess the Nipigon Range with up to date population trend data and population size information.

For more information please contact:

Anna Baggio, 416-971-9453 ext 47 office or 416-453-3285 mobile