

DEC 14, 2018

North East Caribou Update



BC WILDLIFE FEDERATION RESPONDS

BCWF representatives Jesse Zeman and Al Martin met on Friday, Dec 14, 2018 with the provincial Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy regarding the Section 11 conservation agreement under the Species at Risk Act. This agreement deals with the endangered Mountain Caribou herds in the northeast of the province. It is between the federal Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, the provincial Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy and the West Moberly and Saulneau First Nations.

The agreement focuses on actions to preserve and recover five caribou herds in the Chetwynd-Tumbler Ridge area. The agreement provides an alternative to the Federal Minister to impose unilateral actions under the critical habitat provisions under the Species at Risk Act. It also incorporates activities being implemented by the province of BC. The Province indicated that the draft agreement is close and has taken much longer than anticipated. The draft agreement and public engagement should begin in January or February 2019.

The BCWF is supportive of activities that promote caribou recovery that are supported by science. However, the approach taken by the governments excluding stakeholders

and the public has led to a great deal of speculation, particularly concerning our members' access and use of the area for hunting fishing and outdoor recreation. Other sectors have been equally concerned, particularly with economic impacts.

The government needs to get on with consultation and to represent the public interest. Dealing entirely behind closed doors creates speculation and destroys the public's trust in both the Provincial and Federal governments. Legitimate and credible stakeholders have to be at the table. The BCWF has been the longest-standing conservation organization involved in caribou recovery in the province of British Columbia and has a long history of supporting land use change and management tools to ensure the long-term viability of this endangered species.

The Provincial Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy indicated that there had been a great deal of learning in this process and the process for any future discussions should be adjusted. Jesse Zeman pointed out the importance of the establishment of a research Chair at an academic institution to provide credible, independent peer-reviewed, published academic research on mountain caribou so that science leads the conversation. The research would be relevant to BC and would assist governments, First Nations and stakeholders to determine the activities that lead to recovery based on science.