

Species at Risk: Canadians Working Together to Strike a Balance

Issue

Woodland caribou are a threatened species in Canada. By October 2017, the federal government will require impacted provinces and territories¹ to develop caribou range plans to restore and protect 65 percent of their habitat. This is a dramatic increase in habitat protection, and will have a significant impact on industries that operate in the ranges, the communities they support, and the Canadian economy. Currently, range plans are evaluated based on ecological or environmental criteria, and do not provide for a socio-economic impact analysis prior to submission to the federal government.

Background

In 2003, Woodland caribou were federally listed as a threatened species in the Species at Risk Act (SARA). Under the federal "Recovery Strategy for the Woodland Caribou," all provinces and territories are required to produce range plans that outline how 65 percent of boreal woodland caribou habitat will be restored to undisturbed habitat and maintained as such over time, and how the land and activities within the range will be managed for habitat protection. These range plans are due by October 2017.² The range plans are intended to support a landscape where species at risk and industrial activity co-exist.

Forestry allocations, by way of land and volume based tenures, are present in every boreal woodland caribou range. As the range plans are being developed, it is clear that there is potential for sustainable timber supply in each region to be significantly impacted. For example, according to a 2015 Montreal Economic Institute analysis of the economic impacts of implementing the recovery strategy in Quebec, the forest industry would lose 2,931 jobs and \$367 million of economic activity.³

The combination of additional species at risk plans, as well as a new structure retention directive and other government policies, all have the potential to decrease wood supply, increase costs and result in lost mill production or even closures. Carbon pricing systems place an additional burden on the forestry sector.

Even if all logging in the caribou's range of distribution completely ceased, it is entirely possible that downward population trends would continue because of factors like climate change, forest fires, insect epidemics, and hunting.⁴ Indeed, as noted by Natural Resources Canada, climate change has already altered the geographical range of certain tree species. This affects where and how caribou use the forest. In the Northwest Territories, for example, warmer weather, declining snowfall and permafrost thaw have been observed. More ice-on-snow events make travel and foraging difficult for boreal caribou.⁵ Forestry activities are but one factor among many others.

Range plans developed under the current federal process are evaluated based on ecological or environmental criteria, as the process does not allow for a socio-economic analysis to be conducted concurrent to plan development; rather, this analysis occurs after plan submission to the federal government. As such, range plans submitted to the federal government are missing key social and economic considerations about impacts to industry, local municipal governments and Canadian communities and families – considerations that, if known earlier, could lead to different, more balanced solutions.

¹ Forest Products Association of Canada, <http://www.fpac.ca/>, Provinces and territories impacted directly are: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories and the Yukon.

² Environment Canada, Recovery Strategy for the Woodland Caribou (Rangifer Tarandus Caribou), Boreal Population, in Canada, Update, 2012, doi:10.2307/3796292

³ The Montreal Economic Institute: The Economic Costs of the Boreal Caribou Recovery Plan, August 2015 http://www.iedm.org/files/note0615_en.pdf

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⁵ Recovery Strategy for the Boreal Caribou (Rangifer Tarandus Caribou) in the Northwest Territories, 2017, http://www.nwtspeciesatrisk.ca/sites/default/files/nwt_boreal_caribou_recovery_strategy_2017_final_0.pdf

Forestry, and other industries such as oil and gas, mining, and hydroelectric – also situated in caribou ranges – are a vital source of jobs for Canadians as well as economic activity in our communities and our provinces. Canada’s 347 million hectares (ha) of forest (nearly nine percent of the world’s forest) not only support local economies, but help to maintain a healthy environment, clean water, diverse wildlife habitat and a backdrop for tourism. The forest sector in Canada employs over 230,000 people, operates in over 200 communities from coast to coast, and provides a wide range of economic, social and environmental benefits to Canadians.⁶ In 2015, production in the forest sector contributed \$22.1 billion – or 1.2% – to Canada’s nominal gross domestic product (GDP).⁷ The industry is committed to the protection of the environment and wildlife species, and has already invested millions of dollars into research and measures around the protection of caribou.

An additional concern is that the current process takes a one-species approach. A multi-species approach, such as the strategy being deployed in Southern Saskatchewan, recognizes that these species do not exist in isolation of one another and, as such, makes for a more practical and efficient path for planning.⁸

The Canadian Chambers of Commerce firmly believes that endangered species can co-exist successfully with industry, development and land use. We are confident that by adopting a collaborative approach drawing from the expertise of a range of stakeholders across the country, Canada will be able to strike a balance between the protection of critical (extirpated, endangered, and threatened) species, and the viability and sustainability of Canadian industry, jobs and communities.

Recommendations

That the federal government:

1. Complete a socio-economic impact assessment prior to listing the species and in conjunction with a scientific assessment being conducted.
2. Ensure stakeholder interests are understood and considered, and inform the development of the plan and its implementation. Stakeholders include all those impacted, including, but not limited to: industry, ENGO’s, First Nations and Metis, municipal governments and community-based organizations.
3. Consider a multi-species approach to planning.
4. Include climate change projections within range plans.
5. Include in evaluations and assessments, factors related to population trends including predators, disease and other natural environmental impacts.

⁶ Forest Products Association of Canada, <http://www.fpac.ca/>

⁷ Natural Resources Canada <http://www.nrcan.gc.ca/forests/report/economy/16556>

⁸ http://www.sodcap.com/Docs/EnvironmentCanada_MarkWayland_2016.pdf