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Caribou Recovery Program – Wolf Reduction Procedure (2026)

This Procedure Replaces:

4-7-04.06 Caribou Recovery Program Interim Aerial Wolf Reduction Procedure (2021)

Staff and Organizations Affected:

1. The B.C. Caribou Recovery Program, responsible for identifying caribou herds where the reduction of wolf populations may support caribou recovery.
2. Directors, Regional Managers, and wildlife management staff responsible for:
 - (a) the management and conservation of wildlife, and/or
 - (b) the issuance of permits under the *Wildlife Act*.
3. Regional First Nations Relations staff.
4. Regional Managers with BC Parks responsible for letters of authorization under BC Parks Policy: Control of Native Wildlife Species for the Recovery of Species or Ecological Communities at Risk (2020).
5. Any individual or group working on behalf of the B.C. government requesting a permit for the reduction of wolf populations to benefit at-risk caribou herds.

Reason for this Procedure:

The Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (WLRS) has established this procedure to implement the Control of Species Policy (4-7-04.01.3) where it applies to wolf reduction for caribou recovery. There are four sections to this procedure:

1. Decision Path
2. Statutory Decision-Maker
3. Monitoring and Reporting
4. Continuing, Adapting or Discontinuing Wolf Reduction for Caribou Recovery

Purpose:

The Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (WLRS) holds the responsibility to:

1. Address the management and conservation of woodland caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*) as a species at risk in British Columbia (B.C.).

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			DATE EFFECTIVE March 10, 2026



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2. Set recovery objectives for caribou herds, as well as population objectives for any other species that could be managed to achieve caribou recovery outcomes.
3. Identify candidate caribou herds for reduction of grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) populations based on wolf densities in identified caribou habitat and associated predation risks to caribou herds.
4. Consider reducing wolf populations according to recommended caribou management thresholds (fewer than 3 wolves per 1,000 km²) to support the recovery of candidate caribou herds.
5. Recognize the rights of Indigenous peoples, which are affirmed, and fulfil B.C. government’s obligation to consult First Nations potentially impacted by wolf reduction activities to support caribou recovery.
6. Engage with *Wildlife Act* licence or certificate holders whose tenures overlap with areas where wolf reduction activities could occur. Consider potentially affected interest holders and organizations that represent potentially affected user groups.
7. Issue necessary exemptions via permits under the *Wildlife Act* for the specific purpose of wolf reduction for caribou recovery.
8. Ensure that wolf reduction methods are humane and consistent with current guidelines for the humane killing of wildlife. Follow the Province’s Standard Operating Procedures for Aerial-Based Live Capture and Lethal Removal of Wolves.
9. Monitor wolf populations, primary prey populations, and caribou populations relative to species-specific population objectives, and regularly report on the effectiveness of wolf reduction activities for caribou recovery.
10. Apply principles of adaptive management to wolf reduction objectives to continuously adjust or improve management practices to support caribou recovery.
11. Monitor the effects of wolf reduction for caribou recovery and to ensure long-term objectives are met for other species or ecosystem processes within caribou recovery areas.

Background and Rationale:

The reasons for caribou population declines are complex, with multiple factors interacting with each other (e.g., habitat loss, predation, natural disturbance, nutrition, climate change, etc.) and differing somewhat throughout the province. Not surprisingly, evidence collected through research and monitoring in B.C. suggests that the best results for caribou recovery are achieved when multiple population management actions are taken (some combination of predator reduction, maternal penning, supplemental feeding, etc.). Long-term caribou recovery success will depend on landscape-scale habitat management (i.e., habitat protection and restoration). However, it may be decades before the benefits of such measures are realized. To achieve immediate results,



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removing predators from specified caribou ranges has had the most rapid, positive effect. The overarching objective of the Caribou Recovery Program is to ensure self-sustaining herds; therefore, predator reduction cannot be a long-term solution for caribou recovery.

WLRS has established the Wolf Reduction Procedure (2026) to provide guidance for the direct reduction of wolf populations for the purpose of caribou recovery, particularly by aerial shooting (“wolf reduction”). This procedure applies to all ecotypes and all herds of woodland caribou in B.C. and excludes all other predator species.

This procedure does not apply to the management of wolf populations through licenced hunting, trapping, and/or management of their primary prey populations, which may be addressed through standard *Wildlife Act* management and regulation processes.

The B.C. government has adopted the maximum recommended population threshold for caribou recovery of fewer than 3 wolves per 1,000 km², as stated in the *Recovery Strategy for the Woodland Caribou, Southern Mountain population (Rangifer tarandus caribou) in Canada (2014)*. The objective in B.C. is to reduce wolf populations to below this threshold annually within identified caribou herd boundaries.

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1 Decision Path

1.1 B.C. Caribou Recovery Program Science Team: Identification of Caribou Herds

- (a) The B.C. Caribou Recovery Program (CRP) – Science and Knowledge Team have the responsibility to identify candidate caribou herds for wolf reduction, and to recommend wolf reduction as a tool to support the stabilization, and ultimately, the recovery of those caribou herds.
 - i) First Nations may also identify candidate caribou herds for wolf reduction, and the CRP Science and Knowledge Team have the responsibility to assess such proposals.
- (b) To meet engagement, consultation, and decision-making timelines, new proposals to implement wolf reduction should be submitted to the CRP Science and Knowledge Team by the end of April for potential initiation during the following winter.
- (c) For a caribou herd to be considered for wolf reduction, the following conditions should be met (refer to Figure 1 - Decision Matrix).
 - i) The caribou herd is closed to licensed hunting.
 - ii) The caribou herd is at or below demographic objectives.
 - iii) The caribou herd status and habitat condition are not in a state where extirpation is inevitable, regardless of management actions such as wolf reduction.



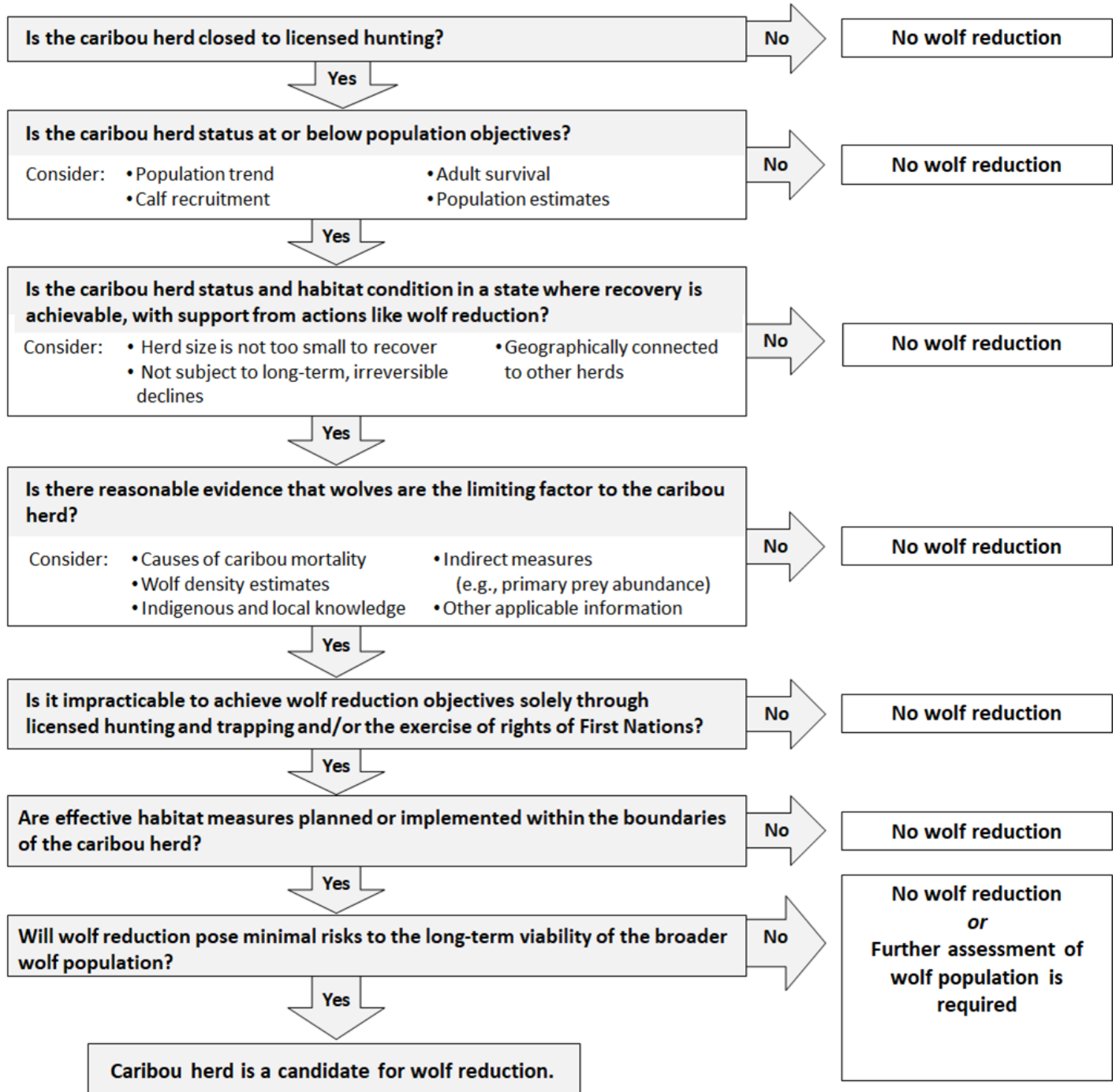
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- iv) There is reasonable evidence (including empirical data and/or Indigenous Knowledge) that wolf predation is a limiting factor on the caribou herd.
 - v) It is impracticable to achieve the wolf reduction objectives solely through licensed hunting and trapping and/or the exercise of rights of First Nations.
 - vi) Effective habitat recovery or protection measures are planned or are being implemented within the boundaries of the caribou herd.
 - vii) Wolf population reduction would pose a minimal threat to the long-term viability of wolves in the area.
- (d) The B.C. Caribou Recovery Program Science and Knowledge Team will provide a list of candidate caribou herds to implement wolf reduction to the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship’s Director of Conservation and Recovery.

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Figure 1. Decision matrix to identify candidate caribou herds for wolf reduction.





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1.2 Caribou Recovery Program: Endorsement

- (a) The Director of Conservation and Recovery will review the list of candidate caribou herds for wolf reduction, considering:
 - i) What is the current state of the caribou herd, including desired outcomes, recovery actions being employed and additional recovery actions planned?
 - ii) What is the feasibility of concurrent habitat recovery actions for caribou (core habitat protection, habitat restoration, constraints to disturbance in matrix habitat, access management, recreation and tourism management, and mitigating climate change impacts)?
 - iii) What is the feasibility of concurrent population recovery actions for caribou (primary prey management, maternal penning, conservation breeding, supplemental feeding, and translocation)?
 - iv) Will principles of adaptive management be applied to continuously adjust or improve caribou recovery actions?
 - v) What is the length of time needed for wolf reduction?
 - vi) Are resourcing commitments in place (e.g., funding and capacity)?
- (b) Additional considerations include:
 - i) Implementing wolf reduction for caribou recovery in a manner that mitigates risks to the long-term viability and conservation of native wildlife and ecosystems
 - ii) Implementing wolf reduction for caribou recovery in an adaptive management framework, acknowledging that wolf reduction activities will likely be necessary for multiple years while addressing landscape conditions that result in wolf population densities higher than the recommended threshold of 3 wolves per 1,000 km²
 - iii) Budget, operational constraints and relative priorities
- (c) The Director of Conservation and Recovery will endorse the proposed list of caribou herds for wolf reduction. Once a final list is approved, engagement and consultation activities can commence.

1.3 Engagement and Consultation

- (a) In collaboration with WLRS Regional First Nations Advisors, the B.C. Caribou Recovery Program will meaningfully engage and consult with First Nations potentially impacted by wolf reduction operations. The resulting information and feedback should support the statutory decision-maker’s consideration of Indigenous interests and help determine whether the consultation was adequate. Statutory decision-makers will clearly document how interests and potential impacts were



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considered in their decision and may specify accommodation measures in their decision rationales.

- (b) The B.C. Caribou Recovery Program will engage with *Wildlife Act* licence or certificate holders within the boundaries of the final list of proposed caribou herds for wolf reduction. Resulting feedback will be considered by the statutory decision-maker.
- (c) The B.C. Caribou Recovery Program might provide an opportunity for interest holders and the general public to provide comments on the final list of caribou herds for wolf reduction. If so, the resulting information will help identify regional opinions on wolf reduction, which may inform government-to-government discussions regarding caribou recovery.

1.4 Alignment with Existing Policy, Procedures and Agreements

- (a) The Director of Conservation and Recovery is responsible for ensuring that wolf reduction recommendations align with existing government policy, procedures, and agreements (also see Section 2.3).
- (b) Wolf Reduction for Caribou Recovery in Parks and Protected Areas:
 - i) Wolf reduction for caribou recovery within the boundaries of provincial parks and protected areas requires a Letter of Authorization from the BC Parks Regional Manager (*Park Act*, Section 9; Park, Conservancy and Recreation Area Regulation, Section 28-29).
 - ii) Guidance outlining conditions and expectations for Letters of Authorization are provided in the BC Parks Policy: *Control of Native Wildlife Species for the Recovery of Species or Ecological Communities at Risk (2020)*.
- (c) Wolf reduction for caribou recovery should be consistent with recovery actions and obligations documented in:
 - i) *Recovery Strategy for the Woodland Caribou, Southern Mountain population (Rangifer tarandus caribou) in Canada (2014)*
 - ii) *Canada British Columbia Conservation Agreement for Southern Mountain Caribou in British Columbia (Feb. 21, 2020)*
 - iii) *Intergovernmental Partnership Agreement for the Conservation of the Central Group of the Southern Mountain Caribou (Feb. 21, 2020)*
- (d) Any inconsistency between proposed wolf reduction measures and other recovery actions and obligations will be noted, with reasonings for those inconsistencies provided.



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- (e) Wolf reduction for caribou recovery that involves trans-jurisdictional herds should be coordinated with all relevant jurisdictions.

2 Statutory Decision-maker

2.1 Permitted Exemptions

- (a) The statutory decision-maker is the WLRS regional manager in each region where candidate caribou herds are identified for wolf reduction.
- (b) Regional managers may consider issuing exemptions via permit under *Wildlife Act* Permit Regulation Section 3.1 (B.C. Reg 19/2021) as required.

2.2 Permit Requirements for Wolf Reduction

- (a) WLRS regional managers are responsible to ensure the completeness of permit requirements for wolf reduction operations.
- (b) Permit requests for aerial shooting will document how the activity is consistent with the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals, AVMA Guidelines for the Depopulation of Animals, and B.C.'s Standard Operating Procedures for Aerial-Based Live Capture and Lethal Removal of Wolves.
- (c) Operators engaged in wolf reduction for caribou recovery must provide proof of the following in their permit application:
 - i) Approved Animal Care Application (see [FrontCounterBC](#) for Wildlife Branch Animal Care Application Form).
 - ii) Exemptions under the Canadian Aviation Security Regulations and Transportation of Dangerous Goods Regulations to transport firearms and ammunition and discharge firearms from an aircraft.
 - iii) Exemption from a Chief Firearms Officer to use otherwise prohibited firearms, if necessary, per the federal *Firearms Act*.
- (d) Wolf reduction activities initiated and/or led by First Nations must comply with all permitting requirements and be implemented in collaboration with the Caribou Recovery Program at every stage.
- (e) Permit requests will require further consideration by the WLRS regional manager if the requestor is also a *Wildlife Act* licence or certificate holder or interest holder in an area overlapping the proposed treatment area, due to a real or perceived conflict of interest.

2.3 Alignment with Policy and Procedures

- (a) WLRS regional managers will consider the guidance outlined in the following policies and procedures to inform their decisions:



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- i) 4-7-04.01.3 Control of Species Policy
- ii) 4-7-04.01.3 Protecting Species at Risk from Other Species Procedure
- iii) 4-7-04.13.07 Evaluating Sufficient Skill Under the Permit Regulation
- iv) Other applicable policies and procedures related to wildlife hunting and trapping, and to the disposition of dead wildlife.

2.4 Decision Documentation

- (a) For each decision, the statutory decision-maker will provide a completed record of decision to the Director of Conservation and Recovery.
- (b) The Director of Conservation and Recovery will maintain all records related to the decision.

3 Monitoring and Reporting

3.1 Monitoring

- (a) To assess the effectiveness of wolf reduction for caribou recovery, the following is recommended:
 - i) Caribou populations are to be regularly monitored according to B.C.’s Caribou Recovery Program’s monitoring and inventory schedule for adult and calf survival, and/or total estimated population size.
 - ii) Wolf populations are to be monitored by annual density estimates, and rates of immigration/reproduction of wolf populations during and following annual wolf reduction.
 - iii) Primary prey populations are to be assessed to measure their response to wolf reduction and inform wildlife management considerations. Alternatively, population trends may be estimated using an Integrated Population Model or similar quantitative process.
- (b) Population monitoring should be conducted according to the Resources Information Standards Committee standards by qualified biologists (i.e., government staff or contractors). Any variance from these standards will be documented.
- (c) Indigenous Knowledge that is provided will be considered as an important and complementary source of evidence for the duration of the wolf reduction program.

3.2 Reporting

- (a) Monitoring results will be reported to the WLRS Integrated Data and Analysis Services Branch within six months of the survey’s completion.
- (b) Results of wolf reduction for caribou recovery will be summarized annually in technical reports and/or the B.C. Caribou Recovery Program’s progress reports.

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These results should include information regarding the study area, timing, wolf and caribou population updates before and after wolf reduction operations, wolf removal locations and totals, costs, and recommendations.

4 Continuing, Adapting or Discontinuing Wolf Reduction for Caribou Recovery

4.1 Considerations

- (a) Wolf reduction should be continued following an initial five years of implementation if, for example:
 - i) The caribou population has not reached a size or density that can endure potentially elevated predation pressure without reverting to a declining trend, as a result of discontinuing wolf reduction.
 - ii) Habitat conditions and/or underlying predator-prey dynamics have not improved to a state where caribou are primarily using habitats where wolf densities are at or below 3 wolves per 1,000 km² in the absence of wolf reduction.
- (b) To discontinue wolf reduction, the effectiveness of concurrent recovery actions (addressing the underlying causes of high wolf densities and high caribou predation) should be considered, specifically:
 - i) Status and effectiveness of caribou habitat recovery actions (including habitat protection, habitat restoration, constraints to disturbances in matrix habitat, access management, and recreation and tourism management).
 - ii) Status and effectiveness of caribou population management actions (including primary prey management, maternal penning, conservation breeding, supplemental feeding, and translocations).
- (c) Wolf reduction may be discontinued when the identified caribou herd has met the recovery objective (i.e., its population is self-sustaining or considered to be stabilized with alternate recovery actions in place to reach self-sustaining status).
 - i) The habitat condition and/or the predator-prey system has returned to a state in which the wolf population will be self-maintaining at a density that supports long-term caribou population stability (approximately 3 wolves per 1,000 km²).
- (d) Wolf reduction may be discontinued when it becomes apparent that the recovery action will not achieve the recovery objective. For example:
 - i) No beneficial response in the identified caribou herd is observed after five years of achieving the annual wolf reduction objective (<3 wolves per 1,000 km²).
 - ii) Annual wolf reduction objectives (<3 wolves per 1,000 km²) could not to be achieved after five years of implementation.



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- (e) The approach to wolf reduction may be modified (i.e., frequency, duration, spatial scale, method) following an adaptive management framework. An experimental approach may be taken as a means of transitioning away from wolf reduction (rather than abruptly halting), and may occur if, for example:
- i) The caribou population has reached a size or density that can endure potentially elevated predation pressure without reverting to a declining trend, as a result of less intensive wolf reduction.
 - ii) The habitat conditions and/or underlying predator-prey dynamics have improved to a state in where wolf densities can be maintained below 3 wolves per 1,000 km² through less intensive wolf reduction.

Policy Manual Cross-References:

- (a) 4-7-04.01.3 Control of Species Policy
- (b) 4-7-12.04 Disposal and Storage of Dead Wildlife and Parts Policy
- (c) 4-7 – Other relevant wildlife policies on hunting allocation and hunting licences, furbearer management, wildlife conflict & carnivore management, uses of wildlife, etc.

Procedure Manual Cross-References:

- (a) 4-7-04.01.3 Protecting Species at Risk from Other Species (2006)
- (b) 4-7-12.04 Disposal and Storage of Dead Wildlife and Parts Procedure (1992)
- (c) 4-7-04.13.07 Evaluating Sufficient Skill Under the Permit Regulation (2021)
- (d) 4-7 – Other relevant wildlife procedures on hunting allocation and hunting licences, furbearer management, wildlife conflict and carnivore management, uses of wildlife, etc.

Other Cross-References:

B.C. Legislation and Regulations:

- *Wildlife Act* (RSBC 1996 c.448)
 - Permit Regulation (BC Reg 19/2021)
 - Hunting Regulation (BC Reg 220/2020)
 - Wildlife Act General Regulation (BC Reg 340/82)
 - Designation of Officers Regulation (BC Reg 38/2018)
- *Park Act* (RSBC 1996 c.344)
 - Park, Conservancy and Recreation Area Regulation (BC Reg 180/1990)
- *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (SBC 2019 c.44)

Federal Legislation and Regulations:

- *Species at Risk Act (SARA)* (SC 2002, c.29)
 - Related documents:
 - Recovery Strategy for the Woodland Caribou, Southern Mountain population (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*) in Canada (2014)
 - Canada British Columbia Conservation Agreement for Southern Mountain Caribou in British Columbia (February 21, 2020)



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- Intergovernmental Partnership Agreement for the Conservation of the Central Group of the Southern Mountain Caribou (February 21, 2020)
- *Firearms Act* (SC 1995, c.39)
- *Transportation Act* (SC 1992 c.34)
 - Transportation of Dangerous Goods Regulations (SOR/2001-286)
- *Aeronautics Act* (RSC 1985, c.A-2)
 - Canadian Aviation Security Regulations (SOR/2011-318)

B.C. Policy, Procedures, Management Plans, and other guidance:

- BC Parks Policy:
 - 5.3.2. Native Wildlife Species Control Policy: Control of Native Wildlife Species for the Recovery of Species or Ecological Communities at Risk (2020)
- Species and Ecosystems Data and Information Security Policy and Procedures (2015)
- Mountain Caribou Recovery Implementation Plan (MCRIP) (2008)
- Grey Wolf Management Plan (2014)
- Resources Information Standards Committee standards
- B.C. Standard Operating Procedures – Aerial-Based Live Capture and Lethal Removal of Wolves.

Other guidelines:

- American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals (2020)
- American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines for the Depopulation of Animals (2019)