

Caribou Recovery Committee



Annual Report 2020-2021

In partnership with



A Message from the Caribou Recovery Committee Members

Over the past two years, the Caribou Recovery Committee (CRC) has collaborated to review 23 applications that fall within the area covered by the *Intergovernmental Partnership Agreement for the Conservation of the Central Group of Southern Mountain Caribou (the Partnership Agreement)*. The proposals are varied and include resource development, recreation, tourism, and habitat restoration activities. Collectively, they demonstrate the diversity and importance of this area to all British Columbians.

Our goal as a committee has been to review these applications while considering the potential impacts of the projects on caribou, the effectiveness of mitigation and offsetting measures, and how a project would contribute to the Shared Recovery Objective of:

“immediately stabilizing and expeditiously growing the population of the Central Group to levels that are self-sustaining and support traditional aboriginal harvesting activities, consistent with existing Aboriginal and Treaty rights”

The work of the CRC represents a new process that has never been used elsewhere in the province. During the public engagement process for the draft Partnership Agreement, we heard that some stakeholders and community members were concerned with the concept of the CRC and how it may affect the lives and economy of the region. We hope that this report and the work of the CRC over the past two years will help demonstrate that these concerns were premature and show that the CRC can be a part of supporting the region’s broader conservation and economic interests.

In the coming year, we will focus on further streamlining our processes to provide more timely responses to applications, and improving our communication and engagement with project proponents, stakeholders, and the public. We will be working with all partners and the British Columbia Caribou Recovery Program to achieve these objectives.

The Caribou Recovery Committee was formally established on April 1, 2020, with representation from Saulneau First Nations, West Moberly First Nations, the Government of Canada, and the Province of British Columbia.

In the applications we have reviewed, many proponents demonstrate innovation and commitment to supporting caribou recovery. We would like to thank all the proponents who have engaged with us over the past two years. It is clear there is a strong commitment to support caribou recovery and a willingness to do it together.





Once a “sea of caribou”...

BACKGROUND

In recent years, Southern Mountain Caribou populations have declined significantly across much of British Columbia. In the Peace region, West Moberly and Sauteau elders remember a time when caribou were so numerous that the land was covered by a “sea of caribou.”

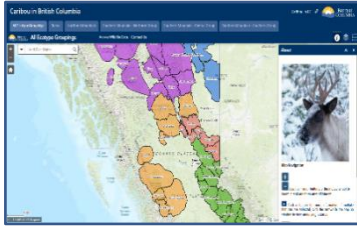
The cumulative effects of past, present, and future human and natural disturbances (e.g., hydroelectric development, historic unregulated hunting, industrial forestry, mining, oil and gas activities, climate change, wildfires, etc.) must be managed differently to halt the decline of caribou populations and help them recover.

To do that, we need a new approach that’s grounded in the best available information, including: multiple knowledge systems; partnerships with Indigenous peoples and other leaders in caribou recovery; and a plan informed by engagement with stakeholders.

Partnership Agreement

On Feb. 21, 2020, British Columbia, Canada, West Moberly First Nations, and Sauteau First Nations signed the historic [Intergovernmental Partnership Agreement for the Conservation of the Central Group of the Southern Mountain Caribou](#), also known as the “Partnership Agreement”.





[Explore BC's interactive caribou map](#)

The Partnership Agreement is a collaborative approach to help the Central Group of Southern Mountain Caribou recover, while also considering the social and economic well-being of communities and stakeholders in the region.

Central Group

The South Peace and Mackenzie region, which is part of Treaty 8 territory, includes five caribou herds known as the Central Group. They are found southeast of the Williston Reservoir and south of the Peace River. These herds have declined from about 800 animals in the early 2000s to as few as 230 animals in recent years.

Caribou populations in the Central Group experienced precipitous declines from the 2000s to the mid-2010s, and the Burnt Pine herd was considered extirpated in 2016.

Recent emergency recovery actions include a maternal penning program led by Saulteau First Nations and West Moberly First Nations in the Klinse-Za* range since 2013; a comprehensive aerial wolf reduction program across all ranges over the last eight years (five years in the Narraway herd); and a supplemental feeding program in the Kennedy-Siding range.

Although current population trends are promising, these herds are not considered self-sustaining due to their reliance on population management.



Habitat disturbance is the primary cause of caribou population declines in the Central Group, primarily affecting caribou through increased predation. The parties to the Partnership Agreement have agreed to work together to develop land use objectives related to caribou recovery and establish criteria for managing caribou habitat to support caribou recovery.

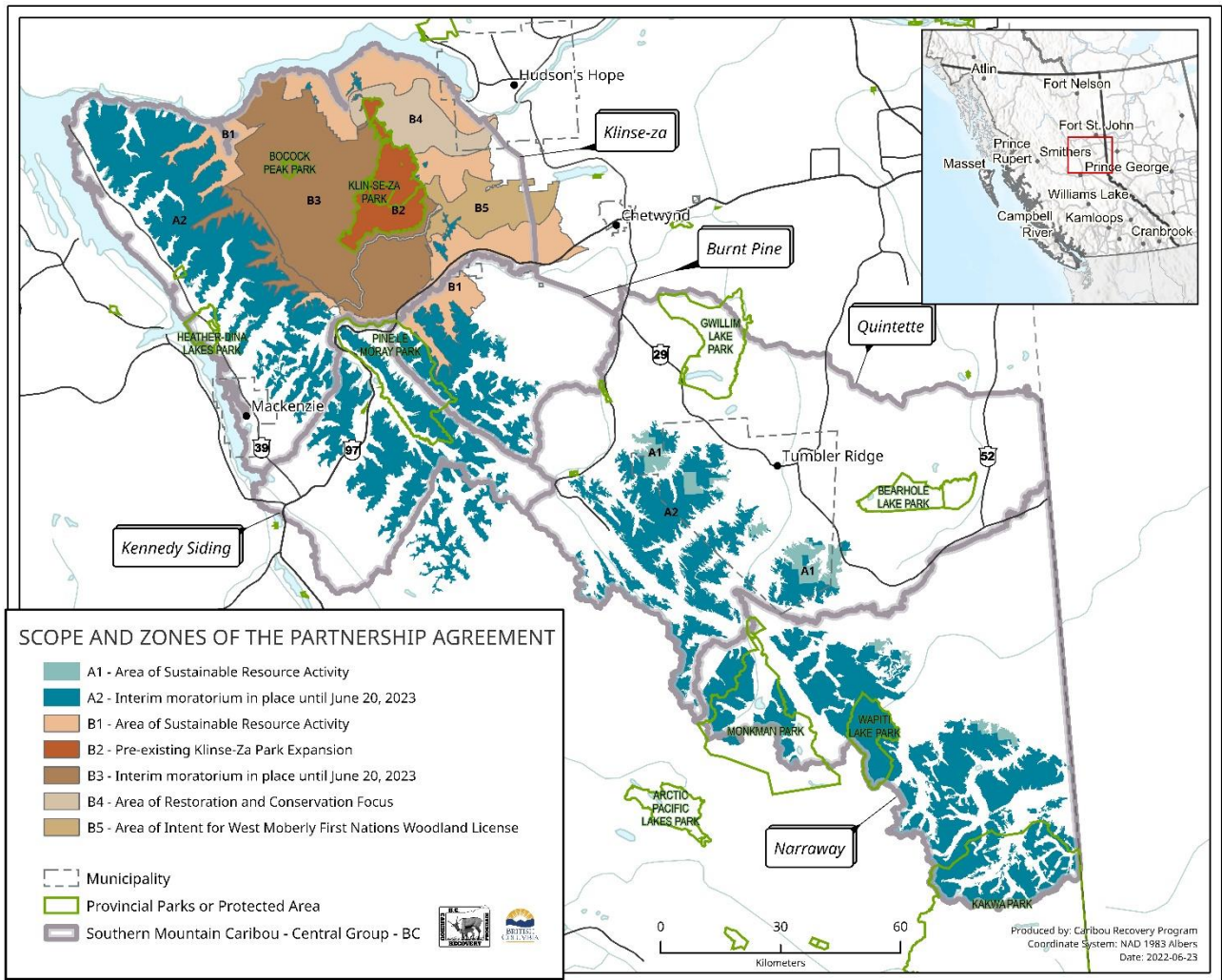
* The Klinse-Za caribou herd was formerly referred to as the "Moberly" and "Scott East" caribou herd by the provincial and federal governments. The name was changed by order of Chief and Council of West Moberly First Nations to reflect the sacred area that the caribou form an integral component of from a cultural perspective.



Shared Recovery Objective

The Partnership Agreement sets out a series of recovery measures, management zones, and a process for implementing regulatory measures inside and outside the specified zones to support the Shared Recovery Objective.

Scope and Zones of the Partnership Agreement



CARIBOU RECOVERY COMMITTEE

The Caribou Recovery Committee was formed in accordance with and follows the Terms of Reference included in the Partnership Agreement. The committee is responsible for reviewing applications for resource development activities within specified areas set out in the Partnership Agreement.

The Caribou Recovery Committee has one official representative from each of the signatories to the Partnership Agreement. The goal of the committee is to ensure that activities that could impact caribou habitat and populations are consistent with the expected practices and measures defined through the Partnership Agreement.

Through collaborative discussions, the committee makes consensus-based recommendations on submitted applications, which are sent to the provincial Statutory Decision-Maker to consider in their decision.

If the Statutory Decision-Maker intends to make a decision contrary to the committee's recommendation, they must provide a written rationale documenting how the recommendation was considered and include information that formed the basis for the resulting decision.



A Statutory Decision-Maker is a ministry staff person whose position has been granted the authority under B.C. legislation to make decisions on behalf of the Province regarding permitting and compliance.



**Partnership Agreement Caribou Recovery Committee
Guidance to Proponents on Applications**

December 5, 2020 Version 1.2
This document will be updated as needed to support proponents and the work of the Caribou Recovery Committee. Please refer to the [British Columbia Caribou Recovery Committee website](#) for the most recent version.

Background

On February 11, 2010, British Columbia, Canada, Yukon, 7 First Nations and 100 Members of the Caribou Recovery Committee signed the International Partnership Agreement for the Conservation of the Central Group of the Southern Mountain Caribou ("the Partnership Agreement" or "the Agreement"). The Partnership Agreement sets out the Parties' Shared Recovery Objectives of:

"to maintain and improve the population of the Central Group to levels that are self-sustaining and support traditional aboriginal harvesting activities, consistent with existing Aboriginal and Treaty rights"

A copy of the Agreement is available at the link provided above.

Protected Areas and Interim Moratoria on Resource Development

Partnership Agreement Zones identified in this section are depicted on Map 1 on page 27 of the Partnership Agreement, reproduced for convenience in the Appendix to this document.

To support the achievement of the Shared Recovery Objectives, the Agreement includes commitments to bring forward regulatory measures for permanent protection of Zones B1 and B2, and to take steps to review an interim moratorium on resource development activities in Zone A2 until the Parties reach agreement on permanent measures for the Central Group.

British Columbia has enacted a series of regulatory measures that provide provincial regulatory decision makers with additional resource development applications in Zones A2, B2, and B3, except in specific circumstances identified in the regulatory measures. Unless one of those specific exceptions apply, proponents should not submit applications for provincial authorizations for resource development activities in these Zones and should exclude portions of any applications that overlap these Zones.

Caribou Recovery Committee: Establishment and Structure

On April 1, 2010, the Parties formally established the Caribou Recovery Committee (CRC) as set out in the Agreement. The terms of reference for the CRC are found in Schedule 1 of the Agreement. The CRC includes certain applications for resource development activities specified in the Agreement and provides consensus-based recommendations regarding those applications.

The CRC is comprised of one representative from each of the Parties. The Provincial Caribou Recovery Program serves as the secretary for the CRC.

Within its first year, the Caribou Recovery Committee produced the guidance document [Partnership Agreement Caribou Recovery Committee Guidance to Proponents on Applications](#). This document helps proponents understand the expectations set out in the Partnership Agreement for natural resource applications. It includes the criteria the committee uses to review applications and the process the committee follows to complete its work. This guidance document was shared with tenure holders in the Partnership Agreement area, and conference calls were held with tenure holder representatives to discuss the committee's process.

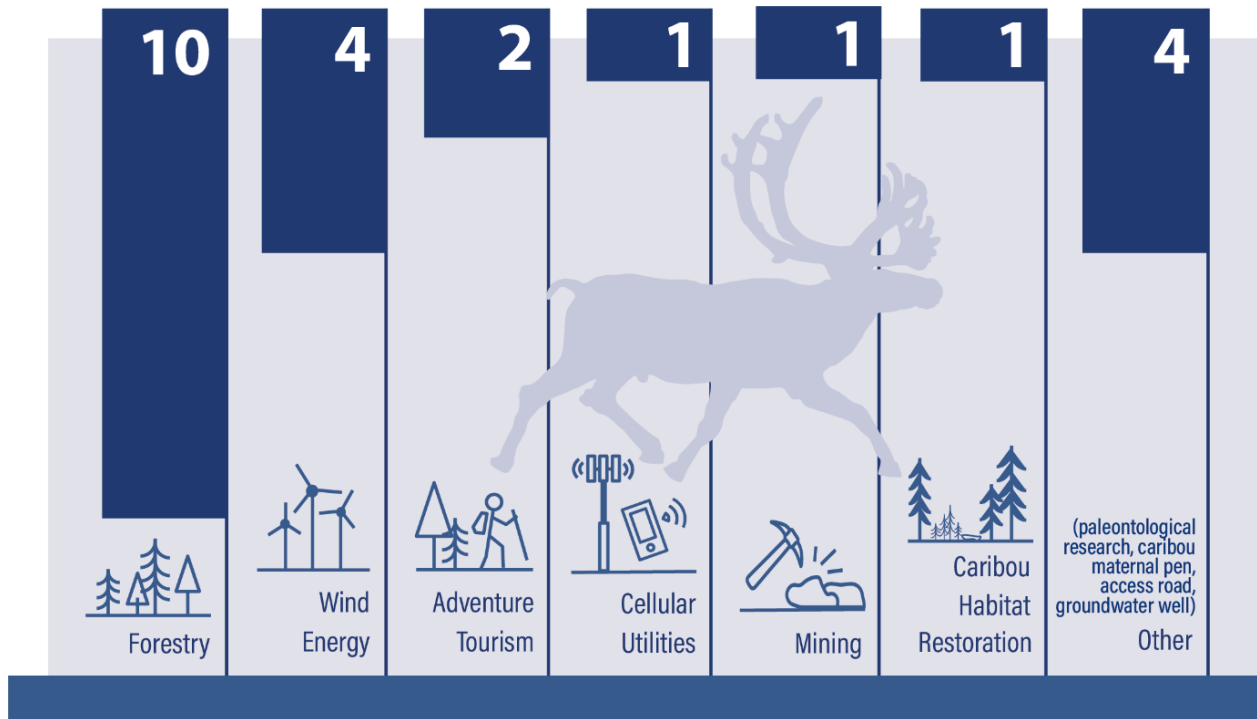
Caribou, or
"wah tzee"
in the
Indigenous
Dunne-za
language



Our Accomplishments

Since May 2020, the Caribou Recovery Committee has met monthly and has reviewed 23 natural resource applications. All applications except two were supported by the committee. Although a dispute resolution mechanism exists within the committee's terms of reference, it has not been used to date because a consensus was reached by committee members on all decisions.

Number of applications reviewed by the Caribou Recovery Committee



For several applications, the Caribou Recovery Committee collaborated with the proponent to address the committee's concerns and to ensure that beneficial measures for caribou were incorporated into their plans. Relationships are being built through collaboration, support, and patience as these new procedures are refined. The committee is grateful for the willingness of applicants to work through this important process. Already, changes are being implemented on the land base to improve conditions for caribou.

Our Successes

In their applications, many proponents have demonstrated innovation and commitment to supporting caribou recovery. The following are two examples:

Forestry Application Review



A forestry company submitted a cutting and road permit application for multiple cutblocks, some within zones identified for sustainable resource activity (Zone A1) and some within zones of restoration and conservation focus (Zone B4).

Caribou Recovery Committee (CRC) Review

The CRC reached out to the proponent with a number of concerns around the progression of development, future cutblocks being planned, habitat connectivity issues, and restoration timelines.

Proponent Response

The proponent engaged openly and transparently with the CRC. The proponent arranged and led a field excursion with CRC representatives to the area to see firsthand how the proponent was operating in particular zones, including some restoration activities. In addition, there were fruitful discussions about how the Partnership Agreement may affect the proponent's harvesting activities, and possible strategies to work together on meeting the Shared Recovery Objective.

Improved Outcomes

The proponent agreed to remove one cutblock from their application. The CRC noted future decisions will need to be grounded in a better understanding of longer-term licensee plans, to allow for decisions to support meaningful caribou recovery.

One area that will require additional work and discussion is including Indigenous cultural values into the assessment processes related to harvesting practices in and around the Partnership Agreement zones. The CRC looks forward to the opportunity to engage in further discussions to identify broader strategies over time for the area and provide the proponent with greater certainty for harvesting activities.

Adventure Tourism Application Review



A company wishing to conduct helicopter-guided hiking tours submitted an application requesting a Licence of Occupation under the *Land Act* to operate in areas that overlap with high elevation summer range of the Central Group caribou, located in the Partnership Agreement moratorium zone A2.

Caribou Recovery Committee Review

This type of activity is not included in the scope of the interim moratorium on new industrial development that is in place for zones A2 and B3. The application did not exceed the disturbance thresholds (e.g., forest harvesting/soil disturbance) outlined in the CRC Proponent's Guide; however, due to the potential impacts to caribou, the CRC chose to review and make a recommendation on the application.

Since there was potential direct overlap between the proposed timing of their operations (summer/fall) and the regional substantial risk timing window for caribou calving (May 1-July 15), which can negatively impact caribou, the CRC determined a conversation with the proponent would be the best course of action to mitigate those impacts.

Proponent Response

The proponent updated their plans and application to better support caribou recovery. It was also discussed how these hiking tours could be an important educational and outreach opportunity for clients to learn about caribou, and the proponent was enthusiastic about this new value-added component for their tours and clients.

Improved Outcomes

With advice from Caribou Recovery Program staff, the proponent agreed to: 1) comply with conducting their flights and hikes within the timing windows of least risk for caribou; 2) limit the number of trips to no more than three return flights per year at each location; 3) not to offer overnight trips; and 4) not allow dogs to accompany hikers on trips.

The CRC was also concerned about the proposed forty-year-term of the Licence of Occupation being too long considering current pressures on caribou populations. The CRC recommended the term be limited to five years, with no right of renewal, until a review of potential impacts to caribou recovery from the activity is conducted. The review would inform the CRC's recommendation on the approval of such a renewal.

Moving Forward

The Caribou Recovery Committee will continue to review forestry applications (e.g., cutting permits, road permits, and other operational authorizations) until Land Use Objectives related to caribou recovery (currently being developed) are established and until Forest Stewardship Plans have been amended and approved.

Proposed amendments to Forest Stewardship Plans will be reviewed by the committee and its recommendations will be provided to the Natural Resource District Manager before a decision is made.



Once an amended Forest Stewardship Plan has been approved, cutting permits, road permits, and other operational forestry applications will no longer be submitted to the Caribou Recovery Committee for review. However, the committee will conduct an annual audit of such forestry applications to assess whether they're consistent with the amended and approved Forest Stewardship Plans.

As indicated in the Partnership Agreement, there is a commitment to work together, negotiate, and seek agreement on a caribou co-management framework as a successor to the Caribou Recovery Committee. This framework may consist of a co-management board that's founded on a consensus decision-making process to ensure the protection and recovery of the Central Group of Southern Mountain Caribou.

Interesting facts about

Woodland Caribou

(*Rangifer tarandus caribou*)

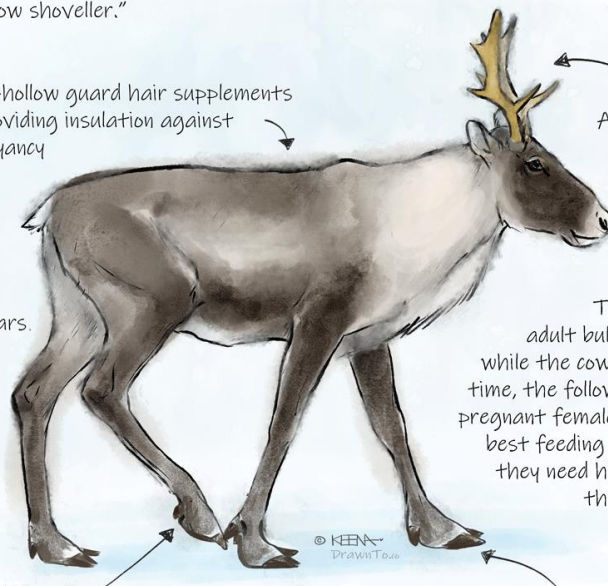
The name caribou comes from Mi'kmaq "xalibu", meaning "one who paws" or "snow shoveller."

A longer layer of semi-hollow guard hair supplements a dense undercoat, providing insulation against cold and wind, and buoyancy while swimming.

Life Span: 10 to 15 years.

Size: 1 to 1.2 m high at the shoulder, 110 to 210 kg in weight.

Scent glands at the base of the ankle dispense a distinct scent when the animal is startled, sending a warning message to other animals nearby.



The caribou is the only ungulate with antlers on both male and female - like this one.

Antler shape varies greatly and no two are the same - allowing researchers to identify individuals.

The large antlers typical of adult bulls are shed in early winter while the cows keep theirs until calving time, the following June. This allows the pregnant females to claim and defend the best feeding areas in late winter when they need high quality food to nourish their rapidly growing fetuses.

The large feet of the caribou act like snowshoes to help them "float" on soft snow. The characteristic clicking sound made by moving caribou comes from the tendons slipping over the bones in their feet. The broad, sharp-edged hooves easily break and clear the snow when caribou crater for lichens. The scoop shape also serves as an efficient paddle for swimming.

Drawn To Nature

Drawn To Animals

Drawn To Caribou