

# Caribou Recovery Committee



## Annual Reporting 2022 and 2023

In partnership with:





## A Message from Caribou Recovery Committee members

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

In 2022 and 2023, the Caribou Recovery Committee (CRC) collaborated to review 10 applications for resource development activities within the area covered by the Intergovernmental Partnership Agreement for the Conservation of the Central Group of Southern Mountain Caribou (the “Partnership Agreement”). These proposals are diverse and include resource development, recreation, and habitat restoration activities.

Our goal as a committee is to review these applications while considering the potential impacts and benefits of the projects on caribou, the effectiveness of mitigation and offsetting measures, and how a project would contribute to the Partnership Agreement's 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”***





Once a “sea of caribou”...

## BACKGROUND

In recent decades, Southern Mountain Caribou populations have declined substantially throughout much of British Columbia. In the Peace Region, West Moberly First Nations elders and Saulneau First Nations 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 planned human (hydroelectric development, historic unregulated hunting, industrial forestry, mining, oil and gas projects, etc.) and natural disturbances (climate change, wildfires, insect infestations, etc.) must be managed differently to halt the decline of caribou populations and help those populations recover.

To do that, we needed to take a new approach. This includes: consideration of best available information from multiple knowledge systems; partnerships with Indigenous peoples and other leaders in caribou recovery efforts; and informed engagement with stakeholders.

## Partnership Agreement

On Feb. 21, 2020, the British Columbia government, the Canadian government, West Moberly First Nations, and Saulteau 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”.

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 local indigenous and non-indigenous communities and groups in the region.



## Central Group

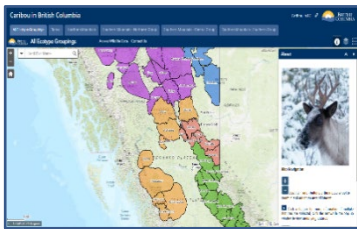
The southern portion of the Peace Region and the Mackenzie Region, which are within Treaty 8 territory, is home to five caribou herds (Narraway, Quintette, Kennedy Siding, Klinse-za, and Burnt Pine). These five herds are known collectively as the Central Group and are found southeast of the Williston 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.

Recent emergency caribou 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 in these caribou ranges since 2014 (since 2017 in the Narraway herd); and a supplemental feeding program in the Kennedy Siding caribou range.

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

Habitat disturbance is the leading cause of caribou population declines in the Central Group. Caribou are affected by increased predation, due to changes in predator abundance, predator density, and easier predator access to areas where caribou live (e.g., via resource roads). The parties to the Partnership Agreement have agreed to work together to develop Caribou Recovery-Related Land Use

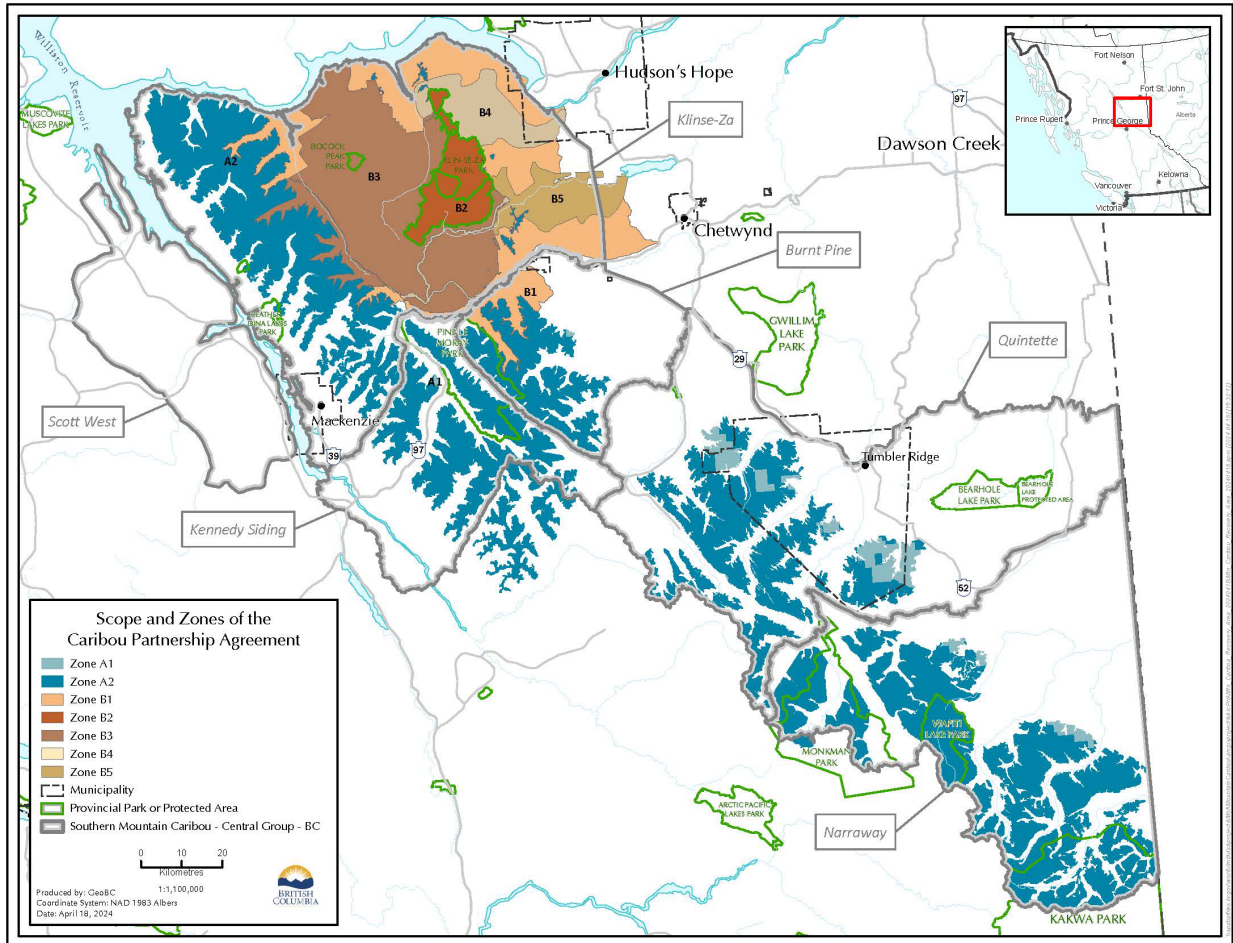
\* The Klinse-za caribou herd was formerly referred to as the “Moberly” and “Scott East” caribou herds by the provincial and federal governments. The name was changed by order of Chief and Council of West Moberly First Nations to reflect the sacred area in which caribou form an integral component from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



Objectives and recommend criteria by which caribou habitat should be managed to support caribou recovery.

### Scope and Zones of the Partnership Agreement

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 its Shared Recovery Objective.



# CARIBOU RECOVERY COMMITTEE

The Caribou Recovery Committee was formed in accordance with the Partnership Agreement and follows its terms of reference. 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 signatory to the Partnership Agreement. The goal of the committee is to ensure that activities that could impact caribou habitat and caribou populations are consistent with the expected practices and measures defined through the Partnership Agreement.

Through collaborative discussions, the committee produces consensus-based recommendations regarding submitted applications. Those recommendations are sent to the provincial statutory decision-maker to consider when making their decision.

If the statutory decision-maker intends to decide 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.

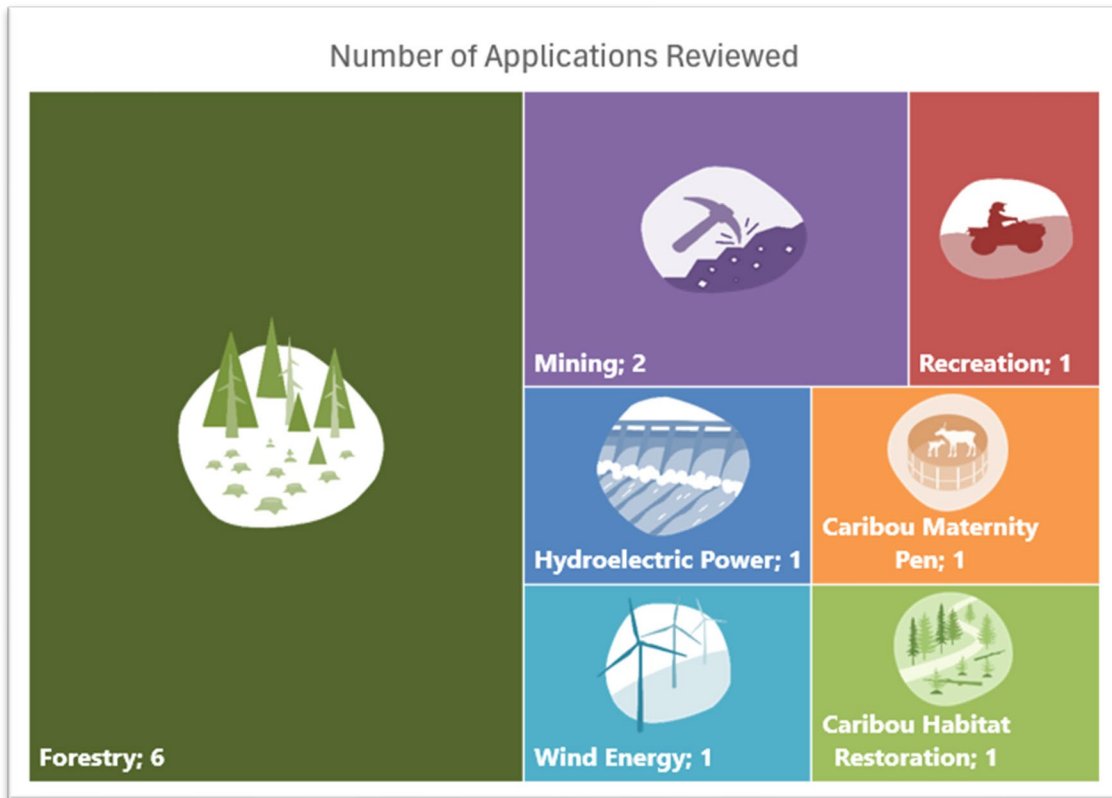
Within its first year (2020), the Caribou Recovery Committee produced the guidance document Partnership Agreement Caribou Recovery Committee Guidance to Proponents on Applications. This document helps proponents understand the expectations set out in the Partnership Agreement for natural resource applications. It includes the criteria that the committee uses to review applications and the process it follows to complete its work. This guidance document was shared with tenure holders in the area covered by the Partnership Agreement, and conference calls were held with tenure holder representatives to discuss the committee's process.



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.



## Applications reviewed by the Caribou Recovery Committee in 2022 and 2023



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

The Caribou Recovery Committee was pleased to receive one application to restore caribou habitat. Caribou habitat restoration is directly aligned with efforts to achieve the Shared Recovery Objective of the Partnership Agreement. Additional applications for habitat restoration are encouraged.



## Example: Application Review for Motor Vehicle Access

A wind energy company submitted an application to renew a permit to use motor vehicles for the transportation of people and equipment above an elevation of 1,400 metres in an area where that use is prohibited. The permit would support the operation and maintenance of an existing wind energy project located within Zone A1 (see map on Page 5), which is identified as a sustainable resource activity area.



### Caribou Recovery Committee (CRC) Review

While there was no new habitat disturbance associated with the project's operation and maintenance activities, the CRC had concerns about possible interactions between the project's operations and caribou populations.

### Improved Outcomes

The CRC recommended that the statutory decision-maker approve this application, provided the company was able to reduce and minimize interactions between its operations and caribou populations. The CRC recommended that the company employ various caribou mitigation strategies and requested that the measures it developed be submitted to community knowledge holders for West Moberly First Nations and Sauleau First Nations for internal review. The CRC recommended that such measures be included as terms or conditions of the permit renewal.



## Moving Forward

Consistent with the terms of the Partnership Agreement's Schedule 1, the Caribou Recovery Committee will continue to review permit applications from all sectors. These reviews will continue at least until Caribou Recovery-Related Land Use Objectives are established.

For the forestry sector in particular, the Caribou Recovery Committee will continue to review forestry applications (e.g., cutting permits, road permits, and other operational authorizations) until Caribou Recovery-Related Land Use Objectives are established and until Forest Stewardship Plans (and Forest Landscape Plans) have been amended and approved.

Proposed amendments to Forest Stewardship Plans (and Forest Landscape Plans) will be reviewed by the committee. Its recommendations will be provided to the Natural Resource District Manager before to a decision is made on the application.



Once an amended Forest Stewardship Plan (or a Forest Landscape 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 are consistent with the amended and approved Forest Stewardship Plans (or Forest Landscape Plans).

The Caribou Recovery Committee is developing principles and considerations that will improve the efficiency and consistency of application reviews. To keep the process transparent, these principles and considerations will be shared with affected land users. This includes winter motorized recreation activities.

As outlined in the Partnership Agreement, there is a commitment to work together, negotiate, and seek agreement on a caribou co-management framework that will serve as a successor to the Caribou Recovery Committee. This framework may consist of a co-management board that would be 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*)

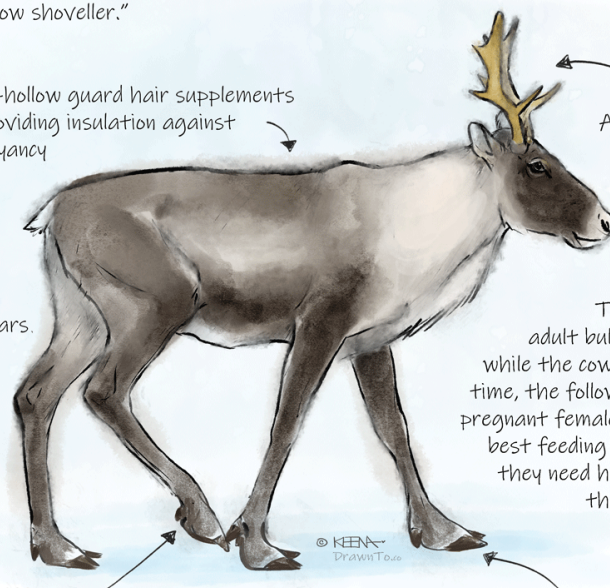
The name caribou comes from Mi'kmaq "xalibu", meaning "one who paws" or "snow shoveller."

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