

Caribou Recovery Program Strategy

November 2024

The Caribou Recovery Program Strategy — comprised of our vision, goals, objectives, and strategies — represents the culmination of successes, challenges, and lessons learned over the first five years of the program. The program’s vision focuses on resilient ecosystems supporting thriving caribou populations and is our north star.

Our team is dedicated to the recovery of this iconic species and the habitats and ecosystems that sustain them, through actions and strategies that support the program’s overarching objectives and goals.

Great strides have been made over the past five years, including: the ongoing implementation of a bilateral conservation agreement with the Canadian government to manage Southern Mountain Caribou recovery; the inter-governmental caribou Partnership Agreement for the Central Group of Southern Mountain Caribou; engagement with interested First Nations about setting a caribou habitat objective in the Southern Group’s ranges; collaborative development and implementation of the Boreal Caribou Protection and Recovery Plan with the Fort Nelson First Nation; development of habitat restoration prioritization tools and guidance; coordination of caribou monitoring and surveying efforts; and investments in research, caribou health, and data management.

Through the Caribou Recovery Program’s collaboration and partnerships with First Nations and other interested parties, we continue to pursue the goal of seeing caribou populations in B.C. return to self-sustaining levels.

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Intent

This strategy is intended to direct Caribou Recovery Program actions. Published in 2024, it will remain a “living document” with opportunities for public comment and revisions.

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Vision

Resilient ecosystems and thriving caribou populations.

Resilient ecosystems support thriving caribou populations and sustain Indigenous rights and the well-being of all British Columbians.

Goals

Four goals drive Program actions:

Goal 1: Caribou Recovery

Stabilization and recovery of Threatened caribou herds through a prioritized approach.

Goal 2: Inclusive Stewardship

Shared responsibility for caribou recovery.

Goal 3: Durable Provincial Program

Accountability and transparency support successful caribou recovery implementation.

Goal 4: Well-Informed Decisions

Multiple knowledge pathways inform caribou recovery and ecosystem health decisions.

Goal 1: Caribou Recovery

Stabilization and recovery of Threatened caribou herds through a prioritized approach

There are 54 caribou herds in B.C. and 39 are listed as 'Threatened' under the *Federal Species at Risk Act* (SARA) (Southern Mountain and Boreal caribou). Threatened herds most likely to recover in the near term (20 – 40 years) are being prioritized for the Province's recovery efforts (generally in areas with existing caribou populations and pre-existing habitat protections). In the short term, intensive population management and disturbance reduction are recommended while incremental habitat protections and restorative habitat actions have time to take effect. We will monitor the progress of these actions and adjust our focus if they don't achieve intended results, or as caribou recovery objectives are met, and our efforts and resources can be directed elsewhere. Habitat protections that are in place for herds that are not prioritized for recovery in the near term should remain in place to provide ecosystem health and biodiversity benefits, as well as future options for the re-establishment of herds. The Caribou Recovery Program will facilitate and support

partnerships to effectively steward herds of special concern to avoid their status under SARA being changed to Threatened.

Objectives and Strategies:

Prioritize immediate recovery actions on existing herds with the greatest likelihood of being recovered

1. Use the best available information.
2. Focus and prioritize recovery efforts on Threatened herds with the greatest likelihood of successfully recovering and/or to achieve shared recovery objectives.
3. Prioritize recovery implementation across appropriate spatial and time scales.

Increase quantity and quality of caribou habitat to sustain herd recovery into the long term

4. Plan caribou habitat actions at the broad landscape-level over the length of the recovery period so habitat quantity and conditions within caribou range are adequate to support self-sustaining populations.
5. Conserve and protect key caribou habitats.
6. Mitigate and manage threats within herd areas.
7. Accelerate habitat recruitment through restoration.

Stabilize and grow herd populations

8. Implement population-based recovery actions to stabilize and increase the number of caribou in prioritized herds until habitat recovery actions have had time to take effect.

Manage adaptively

9. Design and implement population and habitat programs so that it's easy to review the effectiveness of recovery actions.
10. Evaluate herd population performance using standardized, evidence-based methods and key metrics.
11. Monitor and assess the effectiveness of our actions and report on those findings.
12. Adjust approaches, as required, to ensure that recovery objectives are achieved.

Goal 2: Inclusive Stewardship

Shared responsibility for caribou recovery

Shared responsibility for caribou recovery is required for its success. Caribou Recovery Program staff continue to engage and work with governments, individuals, organizations, industries, and tenured rights-holders who are concerned about the conservation and protection of caribou. In doing so, the program adopts an interest-based, forward-looking approach to this work. Success here depends on the quality of our relationships with

interested parties and building trust with knowledge holders to successfully plan and implement robust, shared recovery objectives.

Objectives and Strategies:

Meaningful engagement on caribou recovery

1. Engage a broad range of communities, interested parties, and other governments, and share information transparently.
2. Use the best available evidence and appropriate oversight of risk and uncertainty.
3. Respectfully consider the needs of those with whom we engage and align on related land-based initiatives that enable caribou recovery.
4. Thoughtfully plan and deliver engagement processes to deter incidents of racism, misinformation, and threats of violence.

Interested First Nations are partners in the delivery of the program

5. Align our work and approach with the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and B.C.'s *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.
6. Work at the nation-to-nation level to define shared caribou recovery objectives.
7. Take an interest-based approach to collaboration with First Nations focused on health of the land and ecosystems to recover caribou herds.
8. Consult and collaborate with First Nation governments and address participation barriers (e.g., capacity, funding) to ensure full partnership in Program planning and implementation.
9. Continue to coordinate, collaborate, and communicate with partners to implement the Province's existing commitments to caribou recovery.

Alignment with other provincial and federal government initiatives with shared priorities

10. Provide guidance to land use planning and stewardship initiatives about setting recovery objective efforts and sequencing those efforts, to ensure priority objectives for caribou recovery are considered and established.
11. Where priorities overlap (and as appropriate), work in tandem with our B.C. government colleagues to prioritize caribou recovery objectives while maximizing co-benefits for ecosystem-based initiatives.
12. Work with the Canadian government on areas of shared jurisdiction to ensure that federal recovery strategies reflect our knowledge, input, and approach to caribou recovery.

Effective collaboration with stewardship partners who share an interest in the recovery of caribou

13. Support the efforts of other parties who are leading the way on caribou recovery initiatives.

14. Work with interest groups to adapt and improve stewardship practices to benefit caribou.

Goal 3: Durable Provincial Program

Accountability and transparency support successful caribou recovery implementation

The B.C. government's Caribou Recovery Program strives to be a global leader in the conservation of species at risk. Underpinning this approach is the program's foundation: "team, leadership, and communication". Success starts with a geographically distributed and coordinated program team that's focused on the key priorities defined within this strategy. To enhance public trust and confidence in the B.C. government's role in caribou stewardship, our intentions, efforts, and outcomes must be transparent. We report out regularly and draw on our experience and collective expertise to effectively communicate the conditions necessary to recover and maintain caribou and the ecosystems on which they depend.

Objectives and Strategies:

A coordinated and consistent provincial-scale program

1. Ensure our internal governance structure is well-understood, resourced, and aligned toward our priorities.
2. Sustain a professional, engaged, resilient, and aligned team.
3. Share information within the program and with internal government partners.

Confirmed strategic and operational direction for caribou recovery

4. Once this strategy has been finalized, communicate progress annually.
5. Confirm key components of the government's approach to caribou recovery — what we are/are not doing, where, and why.
6. Document procedures and considerations for each recovery action to inform our adaptive management practices and build certainty, trust and confidence in our work.

Broader public understanding of the status of caribou and requirements to help their populations recover

7. Create and implement a communication strategy to guide our outreach activities.
8. Develop clear, accessible information materials to raise awareness of caribou recovery efforts and support recovery decisions in planning environments ensuring that options, trade-offs and impacts are understood.
9. Share our challenges and successes so others can learn from our actions.
10. Report publicly on provincial caribou recovery actions, expenditures, and outcomes.

Goal 4: Well-Informed Decisions

Multiple knowledge pathways inform caribou recovery and ecosystem health decisions

Program decisions will be based on the best available science, knowledge, and information to support caribou recovery. Sharing knowledge among Crown and Indigenous governments, Indigenous knowledge keepers, academics, naturalists, and others that are close to the land, brings together multiple perspectives to support long-lasting solutions to resource management conflicts and successful outcomes for caribou and the ecosystems that sustain them.

Objectives and Strategies:

Improved knowledge to support caribou recovery decisions

1. Continuously identify and address priority science and knowledge gaps and risks related to caribou, their habitat, predator/prey dynamics, and caribou health.
2. Working with appropriate inter-governmental teams, consider the intersection of caribou recovery actions with Indigenous and community values (e.g., health, socio-economic opportunities for innovation).
3. With the consent of Indigenous communities, weave Indigenous knowledge, values, and perspectives into caribou recovery initiatives.

Accessible data and information

4. Store and maintain current and historic caribou data and information in a central repository that is consistent with B.C. Government standards.
5. Pursue data-sharing agreements to ensure the appropriate care of sensitive data and information, balanced with public accessibility.

Comprehensive decision support in coordination with partners

6. Consistently highlight threats and opportunities related to ecosystem health and resilience in the information provided to decision-makers.
7. Share herd summaries, highlighting population and habitat status, trends, threats, and recovery actions on the program's website so everyone is working with the same information.
8. Share current guidance on strategies, protocols, and procedures for caribou recovery actions on the program's website.
9. Where appropriate, integrate supporting analyses into decision-making support materials (e.g., socio-economic factors, policy, legislation interpretation).

Contact information

For more information about the Caribou Recovery Program Strategy, please contact:

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Or visit our website at:

Caribou Recovery Program — Province of British Columbia

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content?id=78EF48CA2ACD4BC68F623FA4ECDE39E8>