

Guidelines for Habitat Offsetting Proposals under the Peace Northern Caribou Plan

Background:

In November 2012 Government announced the strategic elements of a conservation plan for the seven northern caribou herds of the South Peace. Among these strategic elements was a commitment to protect (overall) 90% of identified high elevation winter range (HEWR) for the south peace northern caribou (including at least 80% in the Quintette herd area, and at least 90% in the remaining areas). This commitment was incorporated into the *Natural Resources Board Direction: Planning and Approval of Development Activities in the South Peace Northern Caribou Area* (NRB Direction) and associated *Guidance Document for the Development of Caribou Mitigation and Monitoring Plans (CMMP) for South Peace Northern Caribou*.

The NRB direction requires proponents to demonstrate, in a CMMP, that project activities achieve a net neutral or positive effect on the viability of South Peace northern caribou. A CMMP should outline all efforts to avoid, minimize, restore, and finally offset impacts to caribou habitat within HEWR. Offset actions may include both a financial contribution in lieu of population management actions and a proposal to secure habitat from future development.

The *Guidance document* provides a series of principles and considerations for the selection of habitat offsets, including prioritizing areas that are “like-for-like” and in-proximity to the area being impacted. To support that guidance and to enable moving forward in meeting government’s key principals for caribou management, the following guidelines have been developed. These are intended to support proponents to develop proposals for habitat offsetting, as well as facilitate a consistent evaluation of “like-for-like” by the Director of Resource Management, Northeast region.

Guidance:

Guidance for assessing ‘like-for-like’ include:

1. Proposed habitat should be entirely within established High Elevation Winter Range (HEWR) for northern caribou. Area outside of HEWR should have a description of why its quality is equivalent to HEWR (e.g., critical for connectivity to other areas; see criterion 2).
2. Proposed habitat should be equal or better quality for caribou to the habitat that is being impacted. The primary indication of habitat quality is the HEWR mapping (e.g. high versus very high classes). Additional methods of assessing quality include evidence of caribou use as measured by telemetry locations. As such and where data exist, habitat offsetting proposals should consider:
 - a. an equal or better concentration of winter telemetry locations for northern caribou,
or

- b. an equivalent kernel value where kernel analyses are available (a kernel analysis identifies areas containing 80% of winter telemetry locations).
3. Preference for proposed habitat within the same herd range that is being impacted, and in some cases the same subgroup. This latter point pertains to the Roman/Babcock/Quintette Mtn subgroup of the Quintette caribou herd which is spatially separated from the other caribou within the Quintette herd.
4. Preference, as a first priority for proposed habitat that is in one contiguous piece or contiguous with existing reserve areas (no tenures or low elevation habitat between proposed areas). As a next priority, preference for proposed habitat that is adjacent to or otherwise complements other habitat that is being actively managed for caribou.
5. Preference for proposed habitat should be within central core areas (rather than at the periphery of HEWR).

These criteria are intended to help inform the review of the habitat offset proposal in terms of achieving the net neutral or positive effect on caribou. Therefore, it is essential that a comparison of characteristics (quality for caribou) of impacted habitat and proposed offset habitat be presented in combination with a supporting rationale of how this meets or deviates from 'like-for-like' under the CMMP.