



**June 11, 2012**

**Resource Values Assessment: Northern Caribou**

**State of Knowledge:**

- Northern caribou, an ecotype of the woodland caribou, represent some of the largest caribou herds found in B.C.; and are provincially significant for species conservation and recovery.
- First Nations communities from north-central B.C. have depended on northern caribou for food and clothing for millennia, and caribou remain of high cultural significance to these communities.
- Northern caribou range over large areas of contiguous forest, exhibiting long seasonal migrations, generally using lower elevation old and mature pine forests during winter and moving to higher elevation forests and sub-alpine/alpine habitats during summer.
- Many northern caribou herds are in a stable to declining population trend, and mountain pine beetle salvage harvesting of important caribou winter areas can impact food supply and make caribou more vulnerable to predators.
- Northern caribou herds in the Central Interior, namely Itcha-Ilgachuz, Rainbow Mountains, Charlotte Alplands, Tweedsmuir-Entiako, Telkwa, Takla, are listed as **Threatened** under the federal *Species at Risk Act*, **Blue-listed** by the BC Conservation Data Centre and are a Priority 2 species under Goal 2 (prevent species from becoming at risk) of the BC Conservation Framework.

**Current condition:**

- Northern caribou have various habitat protection designations in different timber supply areas:
- In Lakes and Prince George TSAs, northern caribou winter ranges are designated or proposed to be designated as ungulate winter ranges, limited by a specified area of the timber harvesting land base. Current habitat protection designations make up approximately 2.1% of the Prince George TSA.
- In Quesnel and Williams Lake TSAs, northern caribou seasonal ranges are designated as wildlife habitat areas, limited by the target identified in the Cariboo Chilcotin Land Use Plan. They make up 4.2% of Williams Lake TSA and 10.8% of Quesnel TSA.
- In areas of the Williams Lake and Quesnel TSAs, timber harvesting may occur in designated northern caribou habitat, subject to requirements for retention of specific amounts, distributions, and types of forest cover.

**Sustainability Risk:**

- Reduction of wildlife habitat area or ungulate winter range for northern caribou will decrease the supply of suitable cover and forage habitat, raising risk of population declines.
- This could result in locally and regionally depressed populations and, in the worst case scenario, could lead to local extirpation (long-term loss of caribou from the area).
- Maintenance or recovery of northern caribou herds depends on a sustained supply of mature and old forest cover, and population recovery initiatives employed over a long time frame.
- Clear-cut harvesting and high densities of active resource roads increase the effectiveness of predators, particularly wolves. Clear-cut harvesting also improves forage availability for wolves, which increases wolf density and predation pressure on caribou.
- Development of access roads in northern caribou habitat can threaten the long-term viability of herds.
- Because northern caribou are listed as Threatened, further reductions in habitat and population could result in increasing protection actions required under the federal *Species At Risk Act*.
- Northern caribou in the Central Interior are included in the recently initiated federal recovery planning process for caribou in the Southern Mountain National Ecological Area.

**Supporting Information:**

Northern Caribou Management in B.C.: <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/speciesconservation/nc/index.html>

Wildlife habitat areas under the Forest and Range Practices Act:  
<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/frpa/index.html>