

ECO FACTSHEET



northcolumbia
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Mountain Caribou

- Southern Mountain Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*) are one of the world's southernmost caribou populations.
- Found from central British Columbia down to northern Idaho and Washington states.
- Listed as threatened species under the federal Species at Risk Act.



- Excessive logging, snowmobiling, heli-ski operations, and other recreational activities in the alpine have created obstacles which threaten their existence.
- Recent census results (2011) suggest that only approximately 7-9 caribou remain through the Mt. Revelstoke and Glacier National Parks ranges.

The caribou in this region are highly adapted to snow and cold weather conditions, they are distinct from other herds in their unique behavioural modifications to the wet climate of the Columbia Mountain

region. In early winter, they migrate to lower elevations where old growth canopy reduces the amount of snow on the ground, allowing for easier foraging. By mid winter, they have migrated up to the sub-alpine forest where deep snowpack allows them to



A. Weber/Parks Canada

reach lichen growing on higher branches. In the early spring, they will move back down to the valley bottom to forage on fresh growth, eventually returning to the high alpine meadows in the summer. Caribou's requirement for large, connected areas of old growth forest is challenged by the pressures of human land use. Completion of the railway in the late 1800's marked the beginning of these, continuing through to the 1970's, when hydro-electric reservoir development and logging reduced low elevation old growth forest habitat. Most recently, the expansion of recreation in the mountains is causing significant direct disturbance of caribou populations.



D. Moskowitz

Conservation Notes:

A combination of initiatives such as habitat preservation, maternal penning, and predator control is required to give threatened populations a chance to recover.

Regulation of human access and recreational activities in key habitats will reduce the level of disturbance to caribou, and prevent them from being displaced into poor quality habitat.

[What can we do...]

Conservation efforts are put in place to help eliminate the defragmentation of critical caribou habitat.

Contributors such as Parks Canada, Federal and Provincial Governments, forestry companies and other industry stakeholders, First Nations groups, local conservation groups, and the public must work together to limit the impact on caribou and help to recover the species.

Learn more about Mountain Caribou and familiarize yourself with local conservation strategies which can be found through Parks Canada or the Species at Risk Registry.

Be aware of how recreational activities impact populations:

Stay on main trails when hiking to avoid disturbance of feeding and calving grounds. Keep dogs on a leash at all times.

Check for seasonal closures before heading out to the backcountry - your ski or snowshoe tracks could inadvertently lead predators into inaccessible areas or intimidate caribou from using these areas.

Avoid snowmobiling, heli-skiing, and other recreational activities in areas where caribou are known to frequent.

Contact local, provincial, and federal governments to let them know that protecting critical habitat for endangered species should be a priority.



D. Moskowitz

Columbia Mountains has displaced caribou populations and limited their feeding, calving, and rutting territories.

2. Small Population Effects – with herd populations continuing to decline, it is unlikely that they can recover on their own. Small herd populations limit breeding possibilities, survival of calves, and increase the risk of predation and disease.

3. Prey and Predator Abundance – logging practices have created young forests which are suitable habitat for other prey species such as deer and moose. The abundance of those prey species brings in predators at higher numbers and increases the potential for caribou to encounter those predators.

4. Human Disturbance – Industry, development, and recreational activities such as snowmobiling, heli-skiing, and others allow for easy access into the backcountry and are driving caribou out of their preferred habitat.

5. Facilitated Predator Access – the above-mentioned activities provide predators with easier access to caribou winter range.

Revelstoke Caribou Rearing in the Wild (RCRW) formed in 2014 to conduct maternal penning to increase the survival rates of mother and calf by placing pregnant cows in a predator-proof 9.3-hectare pen. This initiative is one of many actions required to increase the recovery of the species in the area. It is a 5-year pilot project which is currently in its final year of operation.

Sources:

- 1. Conservation Strategy for Southern Mountain Caribou in Canada's National Parks, 2011, Parks Canada*
- 2. Recovery Strategy for the Woodland Caribou, Southern Mountain Population (Rangifer tarandus caribou) in Canada, 2014, Government of Canada*
- 3. Revelstoke Caribou Rearing in the Wild, 2015, rcrw.ca*
- 4. Woodland Caribou in Mount Revelstoke and Glacier National Parks, 2017, Parks Canada*