

## **Fate of Whiskey Jack Unknown**

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Marking the first forestry assessment by a non-government agency using governmental data and analysis methods, the CPAWS Wildlands League has released a report documenting what it says is the serious harm being caused by unsustainable logging in the Whiskey Jack Forest located west of Ear Falls.

The study, which investigated the results of Abitibi Consolidated's government approved logging practices in the Whiskey Jack Forest, near Kenora and the Manitoba border, found that the amount of wood that Abitibi is cutting is causing extensive damage to the forest ecosystem.

"We've found evidence that these logging levels are too high and we know they cannot be sustained," commented CPAWS Manager of Forest Certification Chris Henschel, who was also the lead author of the report. "The forest is in rough shape."

According to the Wildlands League, a large portion of the Whiskey Jack Forest is in a young and fragmented state as a result of the recently frequent amounts of fire, wind damage and extensive logging and as a result, the study found that harvest levels are too high to protect existing wildlife habitat.

"Abitibi cut almost all of the woodland caribou habitat in the forest between 1999-2004 that was still there after earlier logging periods," said Henschel. "I don't know if the caribou—which is a threatened species—will survive here. The Ontario government and Abitibi should be focusing on restoring the forest, rather than trying to sustain the cut."

Based on the report, the Wildlands League is calling on the province to reduce the allowable harvest level in the forest to improve the prospects for local wildlife and to provide greater stability in longer-term wood supply. The Wildlands League is also recommending that the province ensure that its plan for sustaining woodland caribou focuses on the protection of the habitat that is currently being used by the threatened species.

According to the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), during the Whiskey Jack Forest plan development, forest planners ensured that the Management Plan met all appropriate and prescribed tests of sustainability.

"MNR and (Sustainable Forest License) staff use sophisticated computer modeling to determine harvesting levels and we believe our foresters have used the latest and best science to determine the harvest level—and it is a sustainable level," said Shawn Stevenson, who is the MNR Area Supervisor for the Kenora East area. "The (Wildlands League) submission is a product of one interest group's re-interpretation of the data and modeling undertaken to produce the 2004-2024 Whiskey Jack Forest Plan. It represents an

alternative view of the forest which is keeping with the beliefs and priorities of that special interest group.”

According to Stevenson, 57,000 ha of the Whiskey Jack Forest are considered to be within the range of continuous woodland caribou distribution and the management plan recognizes that any remaining areas of suitable habitat that are currently being used, or have high potential for use in the future, would be deferred from harvest for a period of eighty to ninety years.

Although Abitibi Consolidated’s Kenora mill is currently non-operational, the Sustainable Forest Licensee must still meet all of its wood supply commitments to its other dependent mills in the region. These include shipments of polar to Trus Joist, saw logs to Kenora Forest Products, conifer to ACCC Fort Frances and veneer quality hardwood logs to Nipigon.

As of press time, Abitibi Consolidated had not commented on the information contained within the Wildlands League’s assessment of the sustainability of the Whiskey Jack Forest.