



Media Release

Santa's reindeer's cousins faring worse in Ontario than other jurisdictions, new national report finds

TORONTO, December 17, 2013- In the first annual assessment of how well provinces and territories are enacting the requirements for conservation plans under the federal government's National Recovery Strategy for Boreal Woodland Caribou, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) and David Suzuki Foundation (DSF) find the majority are lagging behind badly.

"We gave Ontario a low grade because we are discouraged about the lack of progress our government has made in implementing effective caribou conservation measures over the past year," says Anna Baggio, Director Conservation Planning for CPAWS Wildlands League. "Rudolph's cousins are in trouble and we implore Ontario to step up efforts to protect boreal caribou before cumulative impacts from industry jeopardize the long-term survival of this species," Baggio added.

Part of the reason for the low grade is because the province enacted broad and sweeping exemptions for industry from the *Endangered Species Act* (ESA) in July 2013. As a result, the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) no longer retains adequate oversight to protect species like caribou or their habitats from harmful threats. On behalf of CPAWS Wildlands League and Ontario Nature, Ecojustice filed a lawsuit in Divisional Court in September alleging the Ontario government acted unlawfully by making a regulation that undermines the *Endangered Species Act*.

The biggest threat to caribou's survival is habitat fragmentation and destruction, which increases access by predators. Scientists consider caribou as bellwethers of the health of the Boreal forest, which also cleanses our air and water, and stores vast amounts of carbon within its soils, moderating climate change.

"Santa should be very worried. We certainly are. It's not acceptable in this day and age that our government is failing to seek solutions that addresses the needs of caribou and other species at risk," Baggio added.

"We gave low grades to six of the nine provinces and territories that still shelter boreal woodland caribou on their overall performance in conserving caribou over the past year. Only three jurisdictions, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories, received "medium" grades because they have made some welcome progress in conserving Santa's reindeer's Canadian cousins," says Eric Hebert-Daly, CPAWS National Executive Director.

Canada's boreal woodland caribou are of the same family as domesticated "reindeer" found in Nordic countries. However, more than half of Canada's boreal woodland caribou populations are estimated to be at risk of extinction.

The groups gave low grades to the Yukon, British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador for their performance in advancing caribou conservation measures over the past year.

CPAWS and the David Suzuki Foundation conducted an extensive survey of provincial and territorial governments, and also drew on their direct experience participating in caribou conservation processes across the country to develop their report called *Population Critical: How are Canada's Boreal Woodland Caribou Faring?*

The groups found that in addition to a lack of concerted effort by most provincial and territorial governments to create effective caribou conservation plans, recovery of the species is also hampered by a lack of legislative tools to enforce protection in some provinces and territories, and a failure in virtually all jurisdictions to consider the cumulative effects of new development proposals and infrastructure, such as roads and power lines, on the health of the boreal forests and wetlands caribou rely on for survival.

-30-

Copies of the executive summary and full report, including the grades by province and territory, can be found at www.cpaws.org.

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