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Caribou running out of space in Ontario

Study shows 7 out of 9 local caribou populations on the verge

Toronto –Today a leading conservation group releases a new report showing that 7 out of 9 caribou populations in Ontario are tracking towards collapse due to high levels of industrial disturbance in their habitat. This is the first time this type of analysis has been applied in Ontario. Nine local ranges were examined along the northern limit of commercial logging in the province.

“The situation is much worse for caribou than what was previously understood,” said Trevor Hesselink, Director, Forests Program for the conservation group and author of the study called *A Snapshot of Caribou Range Condition in Ontario*. “The habitat for 7 threatened caribou populations is so highly disrupted and fragmented by clearcuts, roads and fire that it cannot sustain any further logging and industrial pressure in the remaining intact forest,” Hesselink said.

CPAWS Wildlands League applied the best available science together with data on disturbance threats to caribou to reveal a stark picture of the quality of habitat for the threatened species. The tool used in the report is based on the approach identified by the federal Science Advisory Group in their report to Environment Canada, the “Scientific Review for the Identification of Critical Habitat for Woodland Caribou, Boreal Population in Canada.”

Until now it was only suspected that local ranges were highly disturbed in Ontario. In April, the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) released a map of local caribou ranges in the province as part of its draft Caribou Conservation Plan. “Once the province identified local caribou ranges, then we could run the analysis,” Hesselink explained, “for each range we overlaid disturbance data from logging, roads, fire and other sources to give us a picture of the quality of its habitat at a meaningful scale to the species (beyond individual forest management units).”

“The findings are clear. We can’t wait. When 80% of the caribou ranges along the northern limit of logging are tracking to extinction, caribou have run out of space,” said Janet Sumner, Executive Director for the group. “It’s not enough to have good legislation, you actually have to take action, and so far this government hasn’t,” Sumner added.

To date, MNR has released a draft Caribou Conservation Plan containing local range maps but no delineation of habitat for caribou, which would trigger protection provisions under the *Endangered Species Act*. It also failed to describe any interim steps while the plan is being finalized, instead exempting the logging industry from the *Endangered Species Act* and actually using public dollars to construct more roads in caribou habitat.

“We have a limited window to protect the best remaining intact habitat for this species,” says Hesselink. “But this window is closing and if MNR continues to avoid positive action, the outlook for caribou won’t be good,” Hesselink added.

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