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## **Power routes seen as threat to caribou**

BY BRYAN MEADOWS

NORTHWEST BUREAU

A new study by a southern Ontario-based environmental group says routes for proposed power transmission lines through Northwestern Ontario must consider woodland caribou conservation.

In the face of growing demands for hydro power to service mines and to enable future connections to communities north of Pickle Lake, a CPAWS Wildlands League study has determined that of six proposed routes to supply energy from Ignace/Dryden to Pickle Lake, only one would pose the least risk to caribou.

Crossing Caribou Country: A special report assessing the impacts of new transmission line routes on threatened caribou in Northwestern Ontario, states that a power line option running along the Highway 599 corridor from Ignace to Pickle Lake, would not generate any additional human-caused disturbance in the caribou's Brightsand Range, and would only negligibly affect the Far North and Churchill ranges.

If a transmission line must be built, avoiding further fragmentation of intact caribou habitat should be the priority, the study says.

While the analysis and study conclusions are entirely those of CPAWS Wildlands League, the report was commissioned and funded by Sagatay Transmission L.P., a power transmission company led by Mishkeegogamang and Saugeen First Nations, and partner Algonquin Power & Utilities Corp.

The company favours the Highway 599 route for the 300-kilometre transmission line to Pickle Lake and beyond.

"There is significant evidence in the literature that suggests routing infrastructure alongside an existing highway corridor is generally likely to be the least harmful to caribou, relative to 'pioneer' line options (construction through virgin boreal forest stands)," Wildlands League spokesman Trevor Hesselink said Wednesday.

Hesselink, one of the report's co-authors, examined more than 150 scientific papers in the review. He said "pioneer" options would break new ground and fragment remaining intact areas.

Besides the Highway 599 corridor route (with a possible bypass option near Pickle Lake), the study looked at four other transmission line routing options, including three originating between Dryden and Dinorwic to Sioux Lookout, and north to Pickle Lake; and one that begins in the Dinorwic area and runs north to Pickle Lake.

Wataynikaneyap Power is looking at the latter routes for its proposed 230-kilovolt line from the Dryden area to Pickle Lake.

The company - a partnership between Goldcorp Inc., Central Corridor Energy Group and 18 First Nations - is proposing a first phase, 300-km line, which would reinforce electricity transmission into Pickle Lake, servicing Goldcorp's Musselwhite mine.

A second phase would extend the line north of the municipality to service 10 First Nations.

Wataynikaneyap has initiated an environmental assessment on Phase 1 and expects to complete construction to Pickle Lake by the end of 2015. The company is waiting for Ministry of Environment approval of its terms of reference.

Officials were not available to comment on the Wildlands League report.

Anna Baggio, Wildlands League director of conservation planning and study co-author, said "all other routing options would bisect an area that is currently caribou-occupied habitat and that has been described as some of the best available in the region.

"They would compromise the ability of the Churchill Range to be restored to 65 per cent and would reduce connectivity within the range and for this region of Ontario," she said.

The report also said that no additional permanent infrastructure should be introduced into the southern caribou ranges in Ontario (Churchill and Brightsand) and a focus on restoration is required; more research is needed on caribou ranges in the area; and the Endangered Species Act should be the guiding principle in any environmental assessment of proposed transmission lines.

"Province-wide, Ontario has already lost 40-50 per cent of its historic boreal caribou distribution," Baggio said.

"And local caribou populations here are facing high-risk situations," she added.

"If conservation measures are not built into new development plans, then Ontario's caribou could face the same fate as those in other provinces like Alberta, where continuing industrial development pressures threaten to wipe out some herds entirely," Baggio said.

For more information, visit [wildlandsleague.org](http://wildlandsleague.org).

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