

Future Northwestern Ontario Power Line Must Consider Caribou Conservation:

New CPAWS Wildlands League study

Least Risk to Caribou Should Determine New Transmission Line Route to Pickle Lake

TORONTO, December 18, 2013 – In the face of growing demands for hydro power to service mining and to enable future connections north of Pickle Lake in Northwestern Ontario, a new independent study finds that of six proposed transmission routes to supply energy from Ignace/Dryden to Pickle Lake, only one would pose the least risk to caribou. This is the option beginning in Ignace and treading along the same corridor as Highway 599, an existing permanent road.

The study titled, **Crossing Caribou Country: A special report assessing the impacts of new transmission line routes on threatened caribou in NW Ontario** offers eight conclusions. The two main ones are:

- No additional permanent infrastructure should be introduced into two highly disturbed southern ranges in Ontario, the Churchill and Brightsand Ranges, and a focus on restoration is required; and,
- If a transmission line must be built, avoiding further fragmentation of intact habitat should be the priority. The option beginning in Ignace and treading along the same corridor as Highway 599 (and excluding the Osnaburgh bypass) would not generate any additional human caused disturbance footprint in the Brightsand Range and only negligibly in the Far North and Churchill Ranges. This option should be prioritized for consideration by Ontario.

“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,” Trevor Hesselink, Director of Policy and Research for the group said. Hesselink, one of the co-authors, examined over 150 scientific papers in the review. He noted that ‘pioneer’ options would break new ground and fragment remaining intact areas.

“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% and would reduce connectivity within the range and for this region of Ontario,” said Anna Baggio, Director Conservation Planning for the group and co-author of the study.

“Province-wide, Ontario has already lost 40-50% of its historic boreal caribou distribution. And local caribou populations here are facing high-risk situations. 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,” says Baggio.

In addition to the extensive review of the scientific literature, this study adds a new perspective to the public discourse on transmission line routes by considering how much each of the proposed routes would add to human-caused disturbance in caribou ranges that are already in a risky situation, said the group.

The cost of conducting the study was financially supported by Sagatay Transmission L.P. however the analysis and conclusions are entirely those of CPAWS Wildlands League.



For more information please visit wildlandsleague.org or contact:

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CPAWS-Wildlands League is a not-for-profit charity dedicated to protecting Ontario's wilderness and seeking conservation solutions in partnership with industry, local communities and governments.