

**Valhalla Wilderness Society — Wolf Awareness Inc.— Save the Cedar League
Wilderness Committee — Pacific Wild — Raincoast Conservation Foundation
Bears Matter — Purcell Wilderness Alliance — Wildlife Defence League
Association for the Protection of Fur-Bearing Animals**

September 30, 2015

The Honourable Christy Clark
Premier of British Columbia
Box 9041
Station PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1
premier@gov.bc.ca

Dear Premier Clark:

The 2007 Recovery Plan (“the Plan”) for the mountain caribou herds of the Interior Wetbelt is failing dismally. The Plan aimed to stop the decline of the southern herds by 2014, yet by 2014 these herds had lost 500 mountain caribou. Only 1,358 remained, and their numbers continue to decline.

We are deeply concerned that, in response to the ongoing failure of the Plan, the Province has intensified predator control and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on maternity penning and translocations. Yet, it has not strengthened the habitat protection provided by the Plan. Nor has it sufficiently reduced the intrusion of concentrated motorized recreation into caribou habitat, which is known to have serious, life-threatening effects on mountain caribou.

Predator control, maternity penning and translocations are receiving the mass of the focus and funds. In 2015, seven caribou died in pens in BC while the Revelstoke Rearing in the Wild (RCRW) for the North Columbia herd cost \$367,582 for one year, and the Klinse-Za maternity penning project near Chetwynd cost nearly \$1,000,000 in 2014 and 2015. In 2015, wolf killing reportedly cost BC taxpayers \$500,000.

However, these projects do nothing to address the root causes of the decline of the caribou, which are habitat loss and fragmentation of old-growth forest, as well as snowmobiling and heli-skiing. In addition, climate change is driving fires, winter weather fluctuations, and vegetation changes. These factors make the need for habitat protection more urgent. In the Interior Wetbelt of BC, this means old-growth Inland Temperate Rainforest, which is critical caribou habitat in spring and early winter.

In past years, environmental groups have identified three priority park proposals — the Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal, the Quesnel Wilderness Area and the Walker Wilderness —for protection of Inland Temperate Rainforest. These parks proposals target the highest biodiversity, ancient Inland Temperate Rainforests thus far known to exist in Canada.

The Province has already recognized the high mountain caribou values of all three of these proposals, by granting several caribou conservation zones within them. This means that portions of these proposals have already been withdrawn from logging. However, the protection is only partial and impermanent. If the caribou fail to thrive, these zones could still be logged.

BC’s Conservation Data Centre lists 40 species at risk in the humid/wet forests of the Interior Wetbelt, in addition to caribou, and this figure does not include the species of the wetlands, rivers and other niches within these forests. Further, hundreds of species of lichens in these forests have never had their conservation status assessed. Maternity penning and wolf culls do nothing to save these species. It is now time to

ask how we can stop the decimation of all the species in BC's high-biodiversity Inland Temperate Rain-forest and Boreal forest.

We fully agree that the biodiversity crisis in BC calls for more environmental protection outside of parks. But core protection that is complete and permanent parks is urged by innumerable scientists as essential for the protection of biodiversity. Without increased and permanent protection in the form of parks, we believe there is a real possibility that the public will end up with nothing to show for all the years and hundreds of thousands of tax dollars the Province has already spent, and will continue to spend, on experimental techniques that have so far failed. BC could be left with no caribou, no old growth in any forest accessible to logging companies, and no new parks of substantial size to help keep other species from extinction. Meanwhile potentially thousands of wolves might be brutally slaughtered during the Province's five-year wolf cull experiment, doing severe damage to ecosystems.

A multi-year recovery effort ought to result in a legacy for future generations: if not saving all caribou herds, then at least creating lasting new permanently protected areas that will benefit other species at risk. Our urgent message to your government and to British Columbians is that we need to act now to expand and strengthen these protected zones to address the biodiversity crisis before it is too late for the caribou and all the other species at risk.

Sincerely,

Bears Matter
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Cc: All MLAs
Hon. Mary Polak, Minister of Environment
Hon. Steve Thomson, Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resources