

Nature Trust of BC
#260—1000 Roosevelt Crescent
North Vancouver, BC

April 10, 2008

The staff here at Northern Lights Wildlife Centre works everyday to promote wolf awareness in an effort to protect our environment and wildlife. We promote conservation through education at our interpretive centre, public presentations and school. We all care deeply about preserving our wildlife and forests.

In October of 2007 our government issued the BC Mountain Caribou Recovery Plan. We were encouraged to see that our government is taking action to save these unique animals. Listening to the people of BC, Canada and beyond helped them to reach the decision to restore caribou to their historical numbers. We are hoping that once again they will listen to the people they represent and that you will join us in making our voice heard.

We applaud the government for setting aside 2.2 million hectares of forestland; however, we are concerned about the section of the plan that involves predator control. Caribou is, and always has been, an important food source for predators including wolves. Wolves and caribou live in a balance and control each other's populations and we need to work together to help restore this balance. Human activity and habitat destruction is responsible for the decline in caribou populations and predators should not suffer for our self-interested ignorance.

Caribou are adapted to living in habitats that do not support other ungulates. Their habitat choice is an important avoidance strategy of predation (Bergerud, 1992). Logging and clear-cutting alters their habitat and increases shrubs in the area. This opens up new territory for other ungulates, such as moose, deer and elk. Predators simply follow their food source into these altered habitats and predation rates on caribou increase (Bergerud & Ballard, 1988). We cannot blame the wolf for preying on the ungulates that are available in an area. In addition to this, the logging and clear cutting eliminates caribou habitat. They are pushed into smaller habitats, resulting in higher population density and become an easier prey item.

In order for an area to be logged, new roads are built. It has been proven that roads prevent the movement of caribou between their seasonal ranges (Simpson Kelsall & Leung 1994). This fragments habitats and caribou become isolated and cut off from interbreeding and their food source.

Furthermore, when there is higher road density, habitat fragmentation and disturbed habitats there is higher predation on caribou (Kinley & Apps, 2001). These roads pose an additional problem because they provide energy efficient corridors for predators to reach the caribou (James & Stuart-Smith 2000). Although they are intended for vehicles, predators also use roadways to reduce energy loss and gain easier access to prey (Bergerud & Ballard, 1988). Snow pack created by snowmobiles and other vehicles create similar problems. It is human activity that is resulting in higher predation rates. The wolves should not be punished for our greed and the devastating effects we have on the wilderness.

The 2002 Strategy for the Recovery of Mountain Caribou in British Columbia suggested increasing the bag limits, extending the open season for hunting and trapping wolves. We are disappointed that this new caribou recovery plan has the same proposals. We urge you to join us and help the government learn from their past attempts, repeat them.

The BC government has been culling wolves since the 80's to increase the caribou population (Calgary Herald, 1986). The wolf cull in the Kechika and Muskwa valleys in northern BC began in 1982. This program aimed to increase ungulate numbers, including caribou (Calgary Herald 1984). B.C. Environment Minister Austin Pelton canceled the program in 1986 stating that it was no longer necessary given the "unqualified success" (Calgary Herald 1986). They culled killed 798 wolves, 16% of B.C.'s wolf population at the time. If culls are effective in saving the caribou, than populations should have been increasing over the past 20 years. However, caribou numbers have dropped significantly, proving that wolf culls are ineffective and not the appropriate method for saving the caribou. The proposed wolf cull demonstrates a lack of real wildlife management and continues to use wolves as a scapegoat and means of continuing our destructive force on the planet.

Increased wolf predation is a symptom of the human activity that is the ultimate cause of the caribou's decline. Preserving caribou habitat from logging, roads, railways and human impact is the only way to save the caribou and restore the natural balance of predators and prey that we have so drastically upset. It is unfair to sacrifice one species to save another.

We are working to prevent wolves from being used as scapegoats for problems that we humans have created. We urge you to contact the provincial and federal government and convince them to reconsider the wolf cull and focus their efforts on restoring the caribou's habitat and preventing the forces that decimate it.

Sincerely,
The Staff at Northern Lights Wildlife Wolf Centre
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Literature cited

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Contacts to Consider:

We have sent letters to these ministers and have expressed our concern over yet another proposed wolf cull in BC. We ask you to make your voice heard on behalf of these amazing animals and the ecosystem they create and support. We have also contacted other organization, like yourselves, that are established to defend, protect and save our environment.

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