

*Species at Risk Act (SARA) Consultation,  
Cooperation, and Accommodation Project*

# Southern Mountain Caribou Virtual Workshops: Series 3 Critical Habitat

## Summary Report

February / March 2023 Workshops

October 3, 2023

Prepared by:

Pacific Region, Canadian Wildlife Service  
Environment and Climate Change Canada



## Acknowledgments

We first acknowledge our presence and work on the unceded territories and lands of many different Indigenous Nations. We respectfully recognize the need for an ongoing commitment to reconciliation that includes an expression of gratitude to the land.

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) partnered with the [Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources](#) (CIER) on a [Species At Risk Act \(SARA\) Consultation, Cooperation, and Accommodation Project](#) in 2021. The goal of this partnership, in relation to Southern Mountain Caribou, is to support the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge, perspectives, and language in an amendment to the federal Recovery Strategy.

The January – March 2021 (series 1) and November 2022 (series 2) workshops were part of the early phases of a larger engagement and consultation process for Southern Mountain Caribou across its range. They did not, by themselves, constitute formal consultation.

ECCC and CIER would like to once again extend the deepest gratitude to the people who attended, participated, shared knowledge, and offered prayers to open and close these workshops. These contributions to caribou recovery are invaluable.

ECCC and CIER would also like to acknowledge the contributions to the project, workshops, and report by consultants Carmen Chelick (Biodigenous Consulting Ltd.), Kate Curtis, and Tash Prokop, all of whom provided essential expertise, time, and energy to the process. The workshops also benefited from visual support in the form of specialized illustrations, graphic design, and real-time graphic recording by [Fuse Consulting Ltd.](#) and [Conference Doodles.](#)



The information in this summary report is intended to:

1. Provide background material on what ECCC shared during the virtual workshops
2. Summarize what ECCC heard from Indigenous communities at the workshops
3. Enable additional opportunities for Indigenous communities to engage in, and contribute to, what will become an amendment to the federal Recovery Strategy for Southern Mountain Caribou

If you have questions, concerns, or ideas to share, please reach out to the Canadian Wildlife Service, ECCC biologists in the Pacific Region: Jean Polfus ([jean.polfus@ec.gc.ca](mailto:jean.polfus@ec.gc.ca)), Teresa Tufts ([teresa.tufts@ec.gc.ca](mailto:teresa.tufts@ec.gc.ca)), and Robin Steenweg ([robin.steenweg@ec.gc.ca](mailto:robin.steenweg@ec.gc.ca)), or in Prairie Region: Thea Carpenter ([thea.carpenter@ec.gc.ca](mailto:thea.carpenter@ec.gc.ca)).

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# Background Information

The Canadian Wildlife Service of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and the [Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources](#) (CIER) partnered to hold a series of virtual workshops on Southern Mountain Caribou recovery planning to support an amendment to the federal Recovery Strategy.

The information provided in this background section was shared by ECCC during the virtual workshops. It is included here to provide context.

Please see the section “Workshop questions and answers” for what we heard from participants at the February and March 2023 workshops.

## *Species at Risk Act*

The [Species at Risk Act](#) (SARA) is a federal law that includes measures to protect and recover Species at Risk (SAR) in Canada. Although SARA does enable multi-species approaches, to date, most Recovery Strategies, Management Plans, and policies have primarily focused on single species and have been informed largely by Western science. Provisions in SARA recognize the essential role of Indigenous Nations in wildlife conservation and require consideration of Indigenous Knowledge when species are assessed and when developing and implementing recovery measures. ECCC acknowledges that many Recovery Strategies do not currently reflect Indigenous Knowledge systems. As the implementation of SARA is constantly being adjusted, ECCC is committed to improving relationships with Indigenous peoples and advancing reconciliation.

## WHO WE ARE

### **Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)**

A department of the Government of Canada with responsibilities related to the natural environment, including biodiversity, pollution, weather, and climate change.

### **Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS)**

The branch of ECCC that focuses on wildlife conservation, including Species at Risk in Canada.

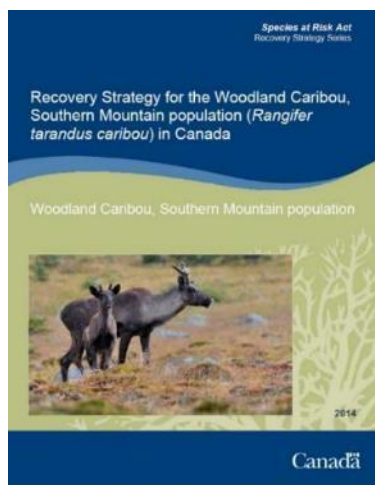
### **The Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER)**

Canada’s first National Indigenous-directed environmental non-profit charitable organization. CIER’s mission is to work in partnership with Indigenous communities and organizations to support and build sustainable Indigenous communities and protect lands and waters.

Species like Caribou have tremendous importance to many Indigenous communities and ECCC understands that Indigenous Knowledge systems need to be better reflected in relevant SARA processes. ECCC is working to provide new opportunities for more meaningful engagement and to explore multi-species, ecosystem-based approaches to SAR recovery in Canada. In doing so, ECCC seeks to strengthen partnerships with Indigenous Peoples.

## *The 2014 Recovery Strategy*

On June 3, 2014, ECCC posted the [Recovery Strategy for Woodland Caribou, Southern Mountain population \(\*Rangifer tarandus caribou\*\) in Canada](#)<sup>1</sup> on the Species at Risk Public Registry. Although this recovery strategy is informed by input from some Indigenous communities, many Indigenous



communities have expressed to ECCC that future amendments to this and other recovery documents for this species should better reflect Indigenous Knowledge and languages. ECCC, along with many Indigenous governments, are committed to meaningful engagement to continuously improve upon Southern Mountain Caribou recovery planning and actions.

## *Recovery Strategy Amendment*

A [SARA Recovery Strategy](#) is a planning document that identifies what needs to be done to arrest or reverse the decline of a species<sup>2</sup>. SARA allows for amendments to a Recovery Strategy at any time. Recovery Strategy development, including amendments, require, to the extent

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<sup>1</sup> The 2014 Recovery Strategy for Woodland Caribou, Southern Mountain population can be found on the SARA Registry [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> [https://wildlife-species.canada.ca/species-risk-registry/sar/recovery/recovery\\_e.cfm](https://wildlife-species.canada.ca/species-risk-registry/sar/recovery/recovery_e.cfm)

possible, ‘cooperation with others’ including ‘every Aboriginal organization that .... will be directly affected’ by the Recovery Strategy. In addition to ECCC's responsibilities to engage with Indigenous communities under the SARA, ECCC is committed to meaningful engagement and centering of Indigenous voices in recovery documents, in line with its responsibilities under the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) and the federal [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#). Recovery Strategies must also be developed in cooperation with provincial governments, which often hold primary responsibility for species management, land use, and implementing recovery measures.

*An opportunity to find new and innovative ways to center Indigenous Knowledge systems, languages, and perspectives related to caribou.*

#### The amendment to the 2014 federal Southern Mountain Caribou Recovery Strategy will involve:

1. More fulsome inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge and languages.
2. Completion of the currently incomplete mapping of Critical Habitat (including cooperation with Indigenous communities on updates to Critical Habitat categories, amounts, and boundaries).
3. General updates to reflect current best available information on caribou ecology and recovery.



ECCC and CIER are extremely grateful to those who came to the 2021, 2022 and 2023 workshops and engaged in conversations about how the federal Recovery Strategy amendment can respectfully include Indigenous Knowledge and languages. We recognize this has been challenging for many Indigenous communities who found the initial process to develop the 2014 Recovery Strategy inadequate due to the short timelines, limited funding to support participation and, ultimately, minimal inclusion of Indigenous perspectives. Through ongoing information sharing, listening, and new discussions, ECCC hopes to reinforce relationships and develop new partnerships with interested communities on the path towards reconciliation and a shared interest in caribou recovery.

Importantly, the federal focus on Southern Mountain Caribou acknowledges that this species, for many Indigenous communities across its range, is woven together with Indigenous identity, history, and values, and represents deep and personal relationships. ECCC recognizes that much of the progress towards Southern Mountain Caribou recovery to date has been the result of Indigenous initiative and leadership. ECCC will continue to look to Indigenous communities to guide recovery actions and will support the meaningful involvement of Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Holders, Hereditary and elected leadership, staff and youth in the Recovery Strategy amendment.



## Collaborations are key

Caribou recovery cannot occur without meaningful collaborations among governments—federal, provincial, and Indigenous. Responsibilities and roles vary across these groups and influence how collaborations manifest.



- The federal government is responsible for implementing the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) and managing federal lands (e.g. National Parks) for the conservation of species at risk (SAR).
- Provincial governments manage wildlife and land use on provincial lands, including making decisions related to industry development and wildlife monitoring.
- Indigenous governments manage and steward their lands, waters, skies, and the non-human relations that live within their unceded territories.

[SARA Section 11 Agreements](#) are cross-jurisdictional collaborations, between one or more parties and the federal government. They enable SAR recovery by providing funding and resources, improving communication between governments, and taking direct action to recover species. There are currently three Section 11 Agreements in place for Southern Mountain Caribou. These are between Canada and:

1. [Province of Alberta](#)
2. [Province of British Columbia](#)
3. [Province of British Columbia and West Moberly First Nations and Saulteau First Nations](#)

There are also many examples of collaboration through less formal arrangements, such as direct funding contribution agreements or shared cost arrangements. The significant progress made on caribou recovery in some areas is a testament to the importance of collaboration across jurisdictions and how Indigenous Nations have leveraged SARA as a tool for conservation.

## Workshop Series Overview

The February and March 2023 workshops were the third in a series of virtual workshops hosted by ECCC and CIER that aim to create space for dialogue around improvements to the Recovery Strategy, including the respectful inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge, perspectives, and languages and updates to critical habitat. These virtual workshops are just one of the many ways ECCC is seeking to engage with Indigenous communities on the Recovery Strategy amendment. An overview of the workshop series is provided below.

1. The **first series** included three virtual overview workshops about SARA processes along with six caribou-specific virtual workshops that took place between January 26<sup>th</sup> and March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021. At these workshops, ECCC presented tables and maps of words for caribou in many of the Indigenous languages of BC and AB that had been compiled from publicly available sources (e.g., books, articles, dictionaries, websites, etc.).
  - A [Summary Report](#) and [PPT slides](#) of ECCC's presentation and other resources are available on [CIER's website](#) under the Southern Mountain Caribou tab.
  - Following the 2021 workshops, ECCC continued to work with communities to verify the words for caribou in Indigenous languages and dialects.
2. The **second series** involved three virtual workshops that were held in November 2022 and focused on developing a plan for how feedback from Indigenous communities could be included in the Recovery Strategy amendment.
  - This report summarizes the outcomes from the second workshop series.
  - [PowerPoint slides](#) of ECCC's presentation and other resources are available on [CIER's website](#)
  - Following the 2022 workshops, ECCC held one-on-one meetings with interested communities.

ECCC partnered with CIER to provide capacity funding that supported 7 communities in their Indigenous Knowledge and language revitalization work that may (if communities provide consent as the engagement process continues) be included in the Recovery Strategy amendment.

3. The **third series** of virtual workshops, held in late February and early March 2023, focused on the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in updates to Critical Habitat.
  - This report summarizes the outcomes from the third workshop series.
  - [PowerPoint slides](#) of ECCC's presentation and other resources are available on [CIER's website](#)
4. The **fourth series of in-person workshops** is being planned for the winter of 2024 to continue the work with communities to develop, edit, and refine feedback and improvements to the Recovery Strategy amendment.

The workshops are only one early step of the larger process intended to engage with Indigenous communities in BC and AB on Southern Mountain Caribou recovery. The workshops were intended as information sharing and relationship building sessions between ECCC and interested Indigenous communities. These workshops, on their own, are not considered to represent formal consultation. We anticipate there will be additional opportunities to engage in this process in constructive ways including the many ongoing nation-to-nation discussions that preceded this project.

## *Inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge, Languages, and Perspectives in the Recovery Strategy*

To recognize Indigenous history, people's relationships with caribou, and to reframe current conversations around recovery actions, ECCC is working in collaboration with communities to center Indigenous voices in recovery documents, where appropriate, and as supported by communities.

The workshops serve as a starting point to begin facilitating dialogue on the meaningful and respectful inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge. ECCC looks forward to continuing to co-develop this approach in close collaboration with, and with respect for, the protocols of each individual community.

Community members are invited to provide feedback, ask questions, and are encouraged to set-up individualized meetings to discuss how their participation can be supported to meet the needs of their community. Communities will continue to have the opportunity to verify, update, or edit information related to their interests prior to ECCC finalizing the draft amendment.

# Workshop Series 3

ECCC and CIER hosted three half-day virtual workshops focused on the mapping of Critical Habitat in the federal recovery strategy amendment for Southern Mountain Caribou in BC and AB. These workshops were held on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023.

The repeat sessions, held across multiple days, were intended to allow as many participants as possible to attend. While all of the workshops followed the same [agenda](#), the topics, questions, and discussions that were brought forward by participants were unique between days.

Each workshop was facilitated by Tash Prokop (CIER contractor). Jean Polfus and Robin Steenweg (ECCC-CWS) presented information (see [PowerPoint slides](#)) and answered questions. The workshops were recorded in Zoom for internal review only and to ensure the accurate representation of community feedback and concerns.

## Objectives

- Build on past engagement and continue to share information on the status and process of the federal Southern Mountain Caribou Recovery Strategy amendment;
- Share updated information on Southern Mountain Caribou Critical Habitat;
- Discuss options for the co-development of respectful, personalized, and inclusive approaches to providing feedback on Critical Habitat, including:
  - One-on-one collaboration with communities
  - Written feedback
  - In-person multi-day workshops
  - Other preferred options/alternatives
- Create opportunities for networking among Indigenous communities, and provide opportunities for learning from Indigenous-led work supporting caribou recovery.

Critical Habitat is the habitat that is necessary to maintain or recover self-sustaining Local Population Units of caribou throughout their distribution<sup>3</sup>

To facilitate discussions on Critical Habitat (CH), ECCC presented drafts of potential options for updates to Critical Habitat as it is described in the [2014 Recovery Strategy](#).

Example maps depicting potential improvements to Critical Habitat and disturbance maps were shared, as well conceptual figures to illustrate the ways in which designating areas as Critical Habitat can support multi-jurisdictional decision making around habitat protection. Please see the [presentation slides](#) for more details.

Participants were invited to provide preliminary feedback on these preliminary suggested changes and ask questions. They were also encouraged to set up individualized meetings to discuss how their participation could be supported in a way that meets the particular needs of their community.

ECCC stressed that communities would have the opportunity to verify, update, or edit information related to their interests prior to the release, and public consultation on, a draft version of the proposed amendment to the Recovery Strategy.

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<sup>3</sup> As defined in the 2014 [Recovery Strategy for Woodland Caribou, Southern Mountain population \(\*Rangifer tarandus caribou\*\) in Canada](#)

## Participant Summary

The three virtual workshops (Feb 22<sup>nd</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023) had 80 participants total, 47 of whom represented 36 different Indigenous communities, associations, or organizations.<sup>4</sup>

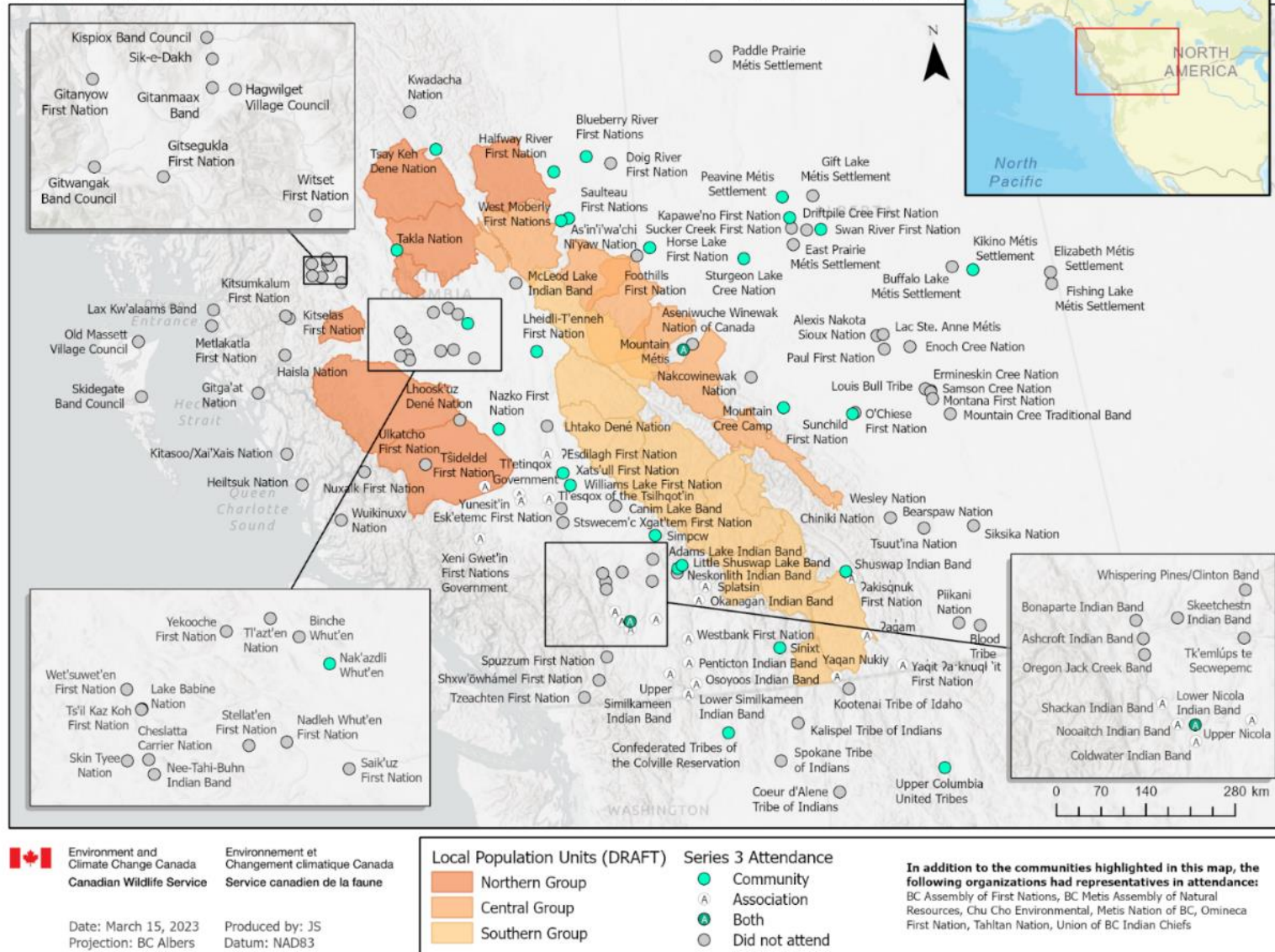


Number of Indigenous communities/associations/organizations represented at the February/March 2023 workshops		
<b>British Columbia</b> <i>Indigenous Community/ Organization Representatives</i>	<b>Alberta</b> <i>Indigenous Community/ Organization Representatives</i>	<b>United States</b> <i>Indigenous Community/ Organization Representatives</i>
<b>26</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>
<i>Individual Representatives</i>	<i>Individual Representatives</i>	<i>Individual Representatives</i>
<b>37</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>

Number of other participants at the February/March 2023 workshops		
<b>Government Employees</b> <i>CWS/ECCC, Parks Canada, BC Government</i>	<b>Consultants/Staff</b> <i>CIER, Other Consultants</i>	<b>Others</b> <i>University, ENGO, Graphic recorder trainees</i>
<b>26</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>4</sup> Repeat participants counted only once.

Critical Habitat - Virtual Workshop #3  
 Southern Mountain Caribou Recovery Strategy Amendment Community Engagement Feb 22, 28, and Mar 2, 2023



Map of Indigenous communities/associations/organizations who attended the February 22, 28 and March 2, 2023 Southern Mountain Caribou - Critical Habitat workshop series. Community locations are based on best available data from CIRNAC, Altalis, or online sources. Locations may be approximate.





SOUTHERN MOUNTAIN CARIBOU  
Critical Habitat Mapping Update - Meeting #2



# SOUTHERN MOUNTAIN CARIBOU Critical Habitat Mapping Update - Meeting #3



whole-ecosystem not-connected impacted  
 industry vascular plants primary  
 biodiversity northern spotted owl  
 growth first fragile caribou  
 traditional ciernations  
**protection**  
 sensitive lichen-at-risk  
 governance restoration old  
 old growth forests stewardship  
 high/low alpine old-growth  
 eco-system  
 species-at-risk

Live Graphic Recording  
 Aaron Russell @ConfDood  
 CONFERENCE Doodles.com

## Questions & Answers by Themes

The workshops were intended to provide a space for open discussion. Community representatives were encouraged to share their ideas and concerns about the process for completing the mapping of Critical Habitat in the federal Recovery Strategy amendment. The intent of current conversations is to continue discussions, invite input from communities on how to best reflect their interests in the amendment, and inform the process and direction for preliminary updates.

The ideas, questions, and concerns expressed by participants during the Critical Habitat workshop series are summarized into 6 themes below. They are ordered based on how frequently they were expressed by participants. We have included generalized participant questions (Q) under each theme as well as ECCC's answers.



Industry Related Threats to Caribou



Rights & Title and Meaningful Inclusion of Indigenous Perspectives



Timelines and Urgency



Baselines and Future Outlook



Sharing Information



Predation

## Industry Related Threats to Caribou

Participants raised concerns regarding the impacts of forestry and mining on caribou habitat, as well as oil and gas development occurring in their territories, often without their consent. There was significant discussion on the effectiveness of current regulatory tools:

### BC Provincial

- [Wildlife Management Areas](#)
- [Wildlife Tree Retention Areas](#)
- Biodiversity Management Areas
- [Old Growth Deferrals](#)

### Federal

- [Emergency Orders](#)

Participants also mentioned the recent [recommendation by the ECCC Minister](#) for an Emergency Order under SARA to protect Spotted Owls, and ECCC provided further information on the 2018 [Imminent Threat Assessment](#) and 2021 [decision not to issue an Emergency Order](#), at this time, for the protection of Southern Mountain Caribou.

Participants were skeptical as to whether some voluntary avoidance tools (e.g. Biodiversity Management Areas) or deferrals are actually effective in protecting caribou habitat. Ongoing disturbance (in particular, logging) in the Wolverine caribou herd's calving grounds was provided as an example of the weakness of some regulatory tools. Finally, concern was raised that the federal disturbance threshold of maximum 35% disturbance in some categories of Critical Habitat was 1) exceeded in all Local Population Units (LPUs), and 2) may be too high to support self-sustaining populations for many LPUs. Disturbance from recreational land users (snowmobilers and ATVs) in caribou habitat was also raised as an issue.



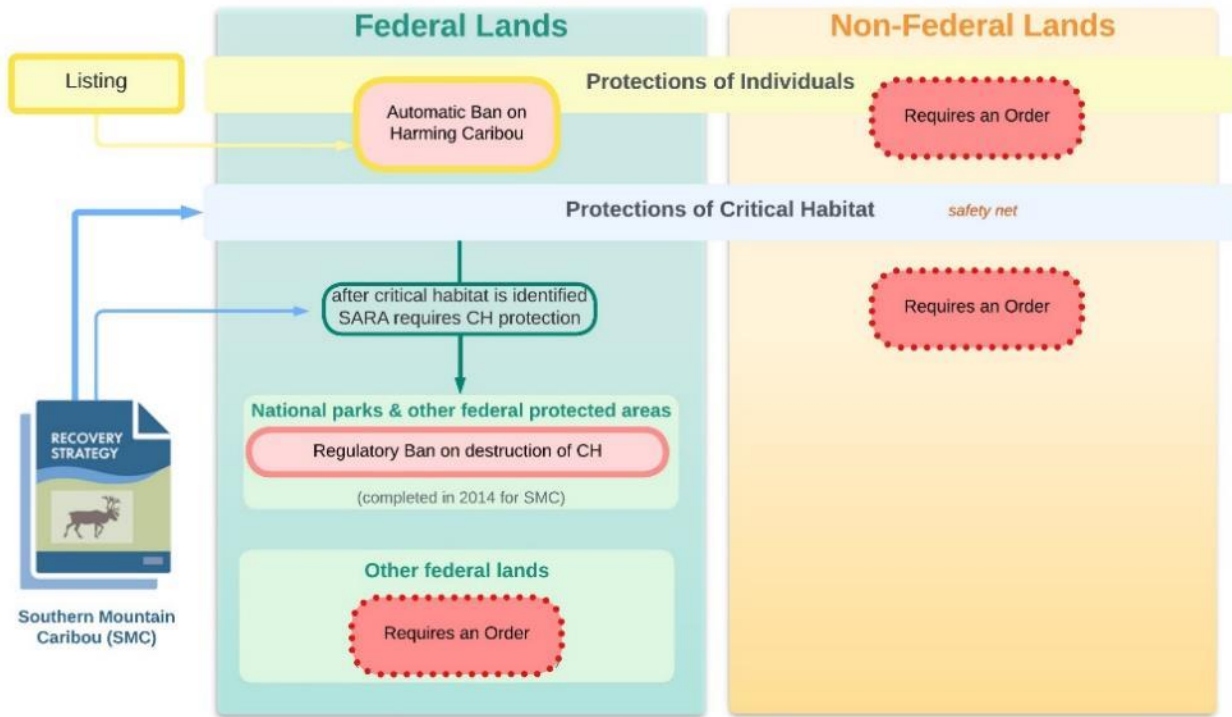
## **Q: Will designating areas as Critical Habitat put any limitations on industry development in caribou habitat?**

Designating areas as Critical Habitat only directly limits industry development on federal lands (National Parks and other areas under federal jurisdiction, see diagrams on next page). The ban on the destruction of Critical Habitat in the three National Parks where Southern Mountain Caribou occur, came into effect in 2014 following legislated procedure - 90 days after a statement was published in the Canada Gazette that describes the critical habitat for Southern Mountain Caribou (see [page 15 of the August 30, 2014 Canada Gazette](#)).

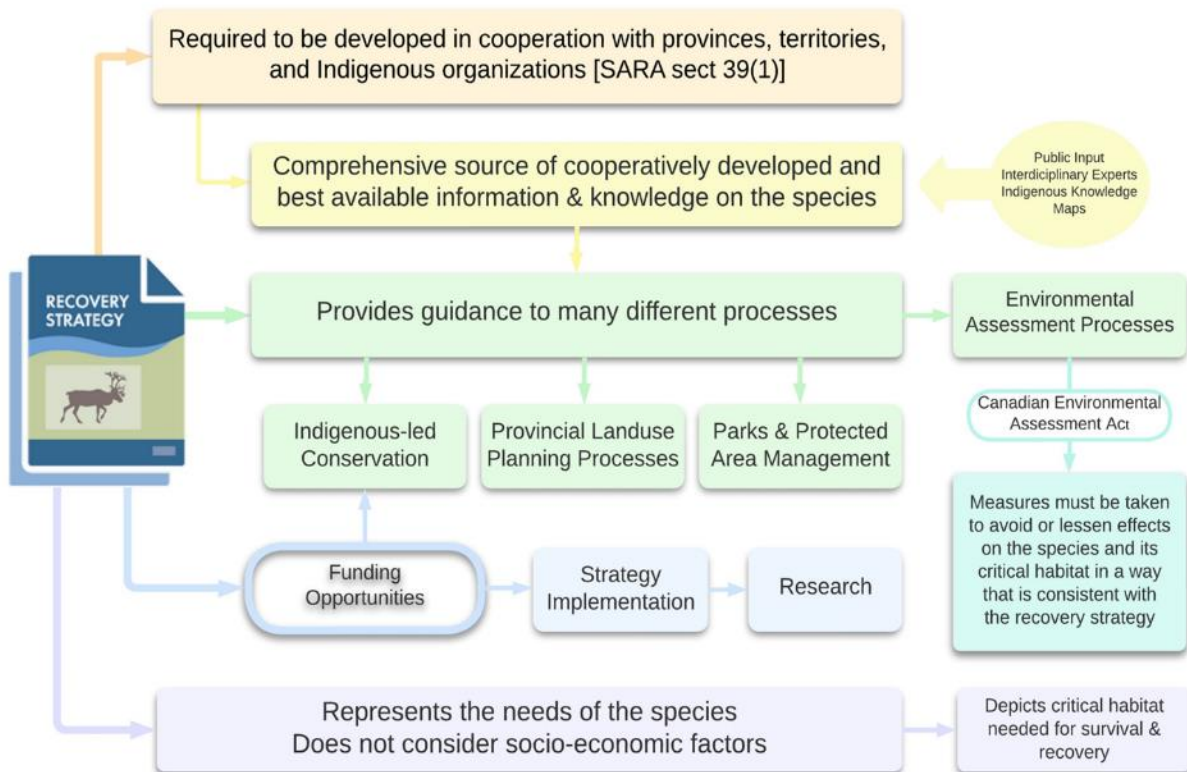
However, there are other ways Critical Habitat identification can limit industry development, such as environmental impact assessments, and by indirectly influencing provincial regulatory tools and land use planning processes (see diagrams on next page). If the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada formed an opinion that portions of Critical Habitat on non-federal lands are unprotected, SARA ([sect 61](#)) would require the Minister to *recommend* that the Governor in Council<sup>5</sup> make an order to prohibit destruction of the unprotected Critical Habitat. In all cases, the Governor in Council makes the final decision whether to make the order to protect the parts and/or portions of critical habitat which are unprotected on non-federal lands.

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<sup>5</sup> The Governor in Council refers to the Governor General acting on advice given by [federal Cabinet](#).

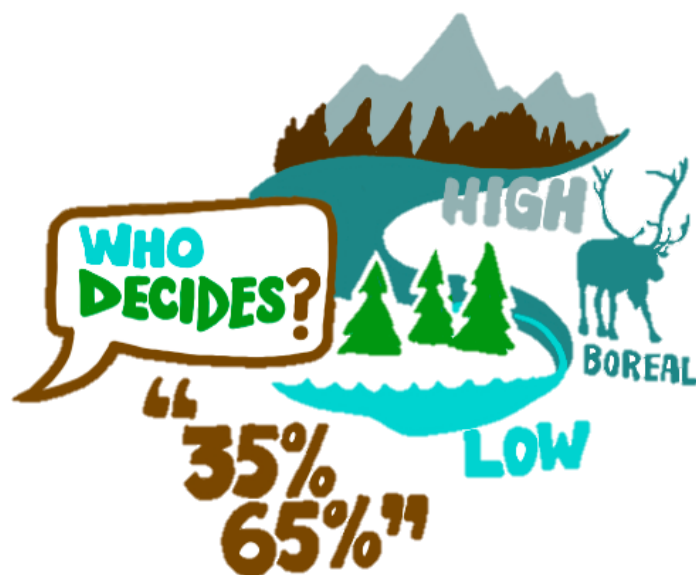


*There are currently no federal orders in place to prohibit destruction of CH for any species, anywhere in Canada.*



**Q: Who determined the 35% disturbance threshold? Does it truly reflect what Southern Mountain Caribou deserve? Sometimes it may be 0% disturbance.**

The basis for the 35% disturbance threshold (the maximum level of disturbance recommended within certain categories of critical habitat in the 2014 Southern Mountain Caribou Recovery Strategy) was based on a study done on [Boreal Caribou in 2011](#), before the Boreal Caribou Recovery Strategy was published in 2012. That study found that boreal caribou populations would have a 60% chance of being self-sustaining (able to maintain their population size over the long-term) if 65% of their habitat remained undisturbed. In the absence of a specific study for Southern Mountain Caribou, the 2014 Recovery Strategy applied the 35% disturbance threshold recommendation to the parts of Southern Mountain Caribou Critical Habitat that were the most like boreal caribou range (i.e. some matrix and low elevation winter range), and also recommended minimum levels of disturbance in all high elevation ranges. More recent studies suggest that 35% is likely the absolute maximum level of disturbance caribou can handle and may be much lower for some LPUs or categories of Critical Habitat for Southern Mountain Caribou.





**Q: Were there Indigenous representatives for the study on the 35% disturbance threshold?**



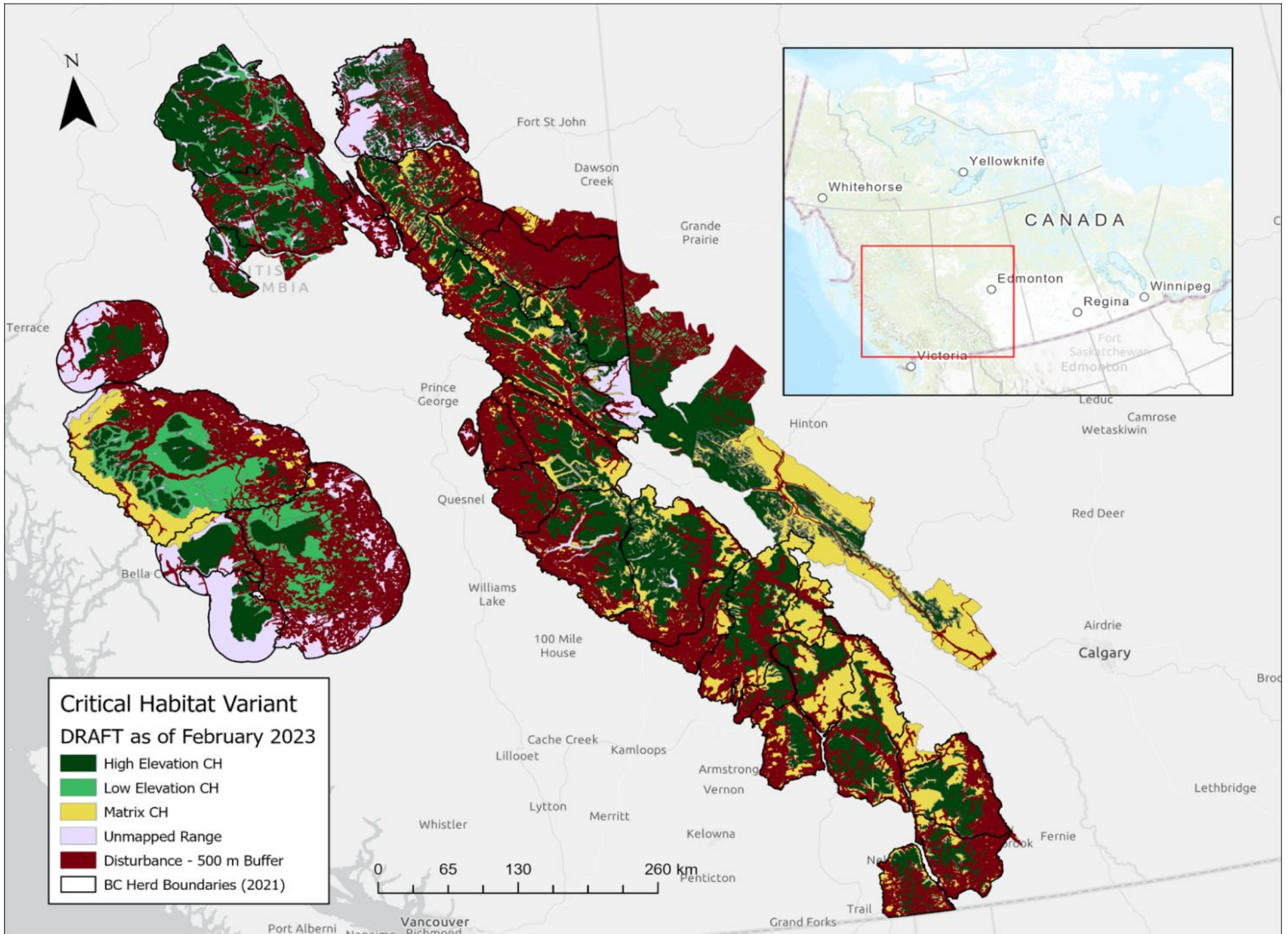
Unfortunately, there wasn't Indigenous input into the [research](#) that led to that 35% disturbance threshold. These studies have been Western science focused, using telemetry (collaring) data and population surveys. We'd like that to change this and hope to include more input from Indigenous communities on Critical Habitat in the Recovery Strategy amendment for Southern Mountain Caribou. This workshop is part of that effort.

**Q: Does disturbance mean just human activities? Or does it also include natural disturbance?**

We consider disturbance to include both natural disturbance, such as wildfires, and human disturbances such as forestry, oil and gas, associated roads, and other human developments on the landscape.

**Q: Do you have maps of the different caribou herds overlaid with disturbance of their habitat? Further, with Critical Habitat mapping, is there much focus on various types of impacts (forestry vs mining)?**

Yes. The disturbance map is provided at the provincial scale on the next page. We have maps showing types of disturbance and impacts: mining, forestry, roads, agriculture, etc. We can share this data. Please send an email to Robin Steenweg ([robin.steenweg@ec.gc.ca](mailto:robin.steenweg@ec.gc.ca)) if you are interested.



**Q: Are there examples of forestry deferrals that have been put in place? Specifically for the Wolverine caribou herd, currently, the local district has no mechanism to deny permits within the highest value caribou habitat. There appears to be no option for deferral.**

There have been some examples of successful deferrals in BC. For example, the SARA Section 11 [Partnership Agreement](#) (whose signatories include Saulteau First Nations, West Moberly First Nations, the government of BC, and the federal government), has resulted in large-scale, interim moratoria on industrial activities within the ranges of most Southern Mountain Caribou - Central Group - herds. These deferrals were made as Orders under [Part 13 of the Forest Act](#) for forestry ([M249/2021](#), and [OIC 355/2021 / BC Reg 158/2021](#)), and under [Section 7 of the Environment and Land Use Act](#) for coal, minerals, and oil and gas ([OIC 354/2021](#), [OIC 266/2019](#)). These deferrals were first implemented in 2019. They were renewed in 2021 and 2023 ([OIC 375/2023](#), [M178/2023](#)), and currently expire in June 2025.

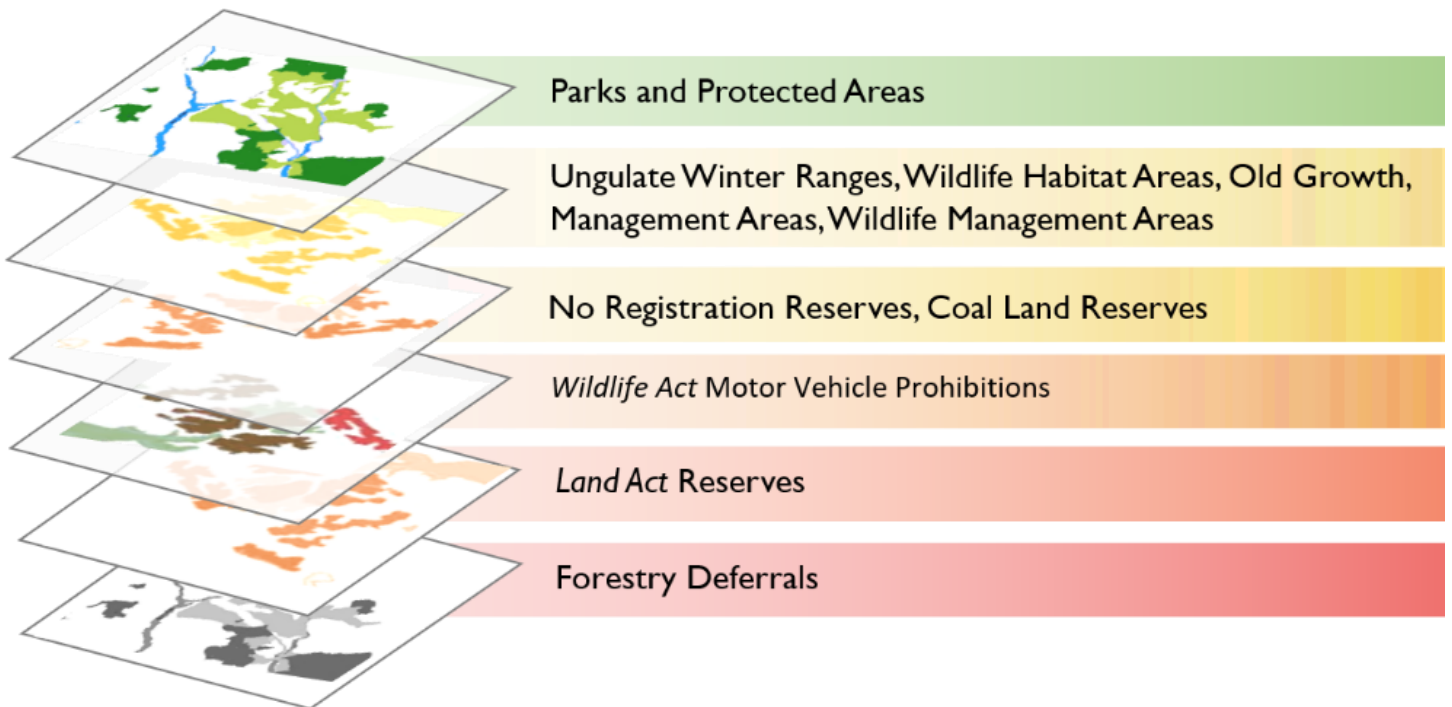
There have also been some successful deferrals associated with the BC [Old Growth Strategic Review](#) (see information about the mechanisms in [Part 13 of the Forest Act](#)). Old Growth Deferral areas (OGDs) were recommended by the provincial OGD technical committee. The Government of BC is consulting on the recommendations. If Cabinet approves, then [Orders in Council](#)<sup>6</sup> bring the logging deferrals into effect. Sometimes logging is still allowed within an OGD area. For example, there may be exceptions for cut blocks that were already approved. If there are blocks cut after a deferral Order has been made, that are outside any exemptions, there could be enforcement action. Complaints should be sent to a provincial [Natural Resource Officer](#). Feel free to also follow up with an email to ECCC, including details of the logging activity.

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<sup>6</sup> Provincial Orders in Council are made by the Lieutenant Governor of BC on the advice of provincial Cabinet.

**Q: In the list of BC Provincial Regulatory Tools, I didn't see oil and gas. Is there anything that can help guide the Oil and Gas Commission to better carry out land management for Caribou? This has been a massive challenge in the northeast of BC within the caribou Critical Habitat identified on the map.**

In the figure below, we have provided a snapshot of some of the BC provincial regulatory tools that are available to help protect caribou, in the absence of specific Species at Risk legislation. The rules associated with some (not all) ungulate winter ranges and wildlife habitat areas apply to oil and gas activities through the *Environmental Protection and Management Regulation* under the *Oil and Gas Activities Act*. More information can be found in the 2017 [Canada-BC Southern Mountain Caribou \(Central Group\) Protection Study](#).



## *Rights & Title and Meaningful Inclusion of Indigenous Perspectives*

Discussions of Rights & Title were often linked to concerns about the impacts of industry on caribou. Participants also raised issues with consultation and referral processes that take a 'box ticking' approach to satisfy legal requirements, rather than meaningfully addressing concerns. Participants provided examples of reluctance to include Indigenous Knowledge and stewardship principles in provincial decision-making and recovery plans. However, they also offered some potential solutions. For example, participants suggested a government-to-government shared decision-making policy whereby Elders and statutory decision makers meet jointly to make consensus-based decisions grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being, rather than a single decision-maker making unilateral land-use decisions.



One participant noted that caribou populations need to be rebuilt to sufficient levels to support the Constitutionally-protected right of Indigenous Peoples to hunt caribou. Another noted the need for education on the BC [\*Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act\*](#) and that it is *not* the responsibility of Indigenous Peoples to do the educating. Participants also raised concerns with the approach of siloing Indigenous Knowledge and Western science (implying an either-or choice) and reminded the facilitator and presenters to avoid this in their engagement approach.

## **Q: Can you elaborate on ‘Provincial Orders’? When does Truth & Reconciliation come in?**

“Provincial Orders” is a reference to “[Orders in Council](#)” that are made by the Lieutenant Governor of BC on the advice of Cabinet. How provincial decisions, such as orders that restrict industrial activities in some areas of caribou habitat, consider Truth & Reconciliation is a question for the Government of BC.

From an ECCC perspective, we hope our approach to amending the 2014 federal Southern Mountain Caribou Recovery Strategy begins to address some of the principles<sup>7</sup> of Truth & Reconciliation in the following ways:

- Acknowledge harm and trauma experienced by Indigenous communities during the engagement and publication process for the 2014 Recovery Strategy (see [presentation slides](#)).
- Begin with flexible relationship-building and an understanding of each community’s unique interests and capacity to participate in the Recovery Strategy amendment.
- Prioritize open communication and transparency around timelines and feasibility.
- Center Indigenous perspectives in the Recovery Strategy amendment as is appropriate and supported by communities.

Some of the Calls to Action in the [Truth & Reconciliation Commission’s \(2015\) Calls to Action](#) that are guiding ECCC’s work on the SMC Recovery Strategy are:

- #13** acknowledge Indigenous language rights
- #14** provide capacity funding to support community language revitalization efforts
- #57** continue training on Truth & Reconciliation and ways to implement the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) in our work

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<sup>7</sup> Please see [Principles respecting the Government of Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples](#)

## Timelines and Urgency

Several participants stressed the urgency of Southern Mountain Caribou conservation; in particular, the need to halt the ongoing destruction of Critical Habitat by forestry and mining activities. There was concern that the anticipated timeline for publication of the Recovery Strategy amendment will not provide the immediate protections that are needed. One participant shared that 100 hectares of caribou habitat is being logged each day in the calving grounds of the Wolverine caribou herd.



There was concern from several participants that there have been too many meetings, too much talk, and too much 'monitoring the decline of caribou' without concrete action being taken. One participant suggested that decision-makers need to join future workshops to remove the filter between Indigenous input and resulting policy and to move from talk to action. There was curiosity, and some skepticism, as to whether fully mapping Critical Habitat in the amended Recovery Strategy would lead to action to protect caribou habitat.

**Q: It's been 9 years since the Recovery Strategy was posted, but SARA has not been effective at forcing BC to meet its obligations to protect Critical Habitat for caribou. How can this process add pressure to accelerate that?**

Indeed, in the past 9 years we have seen caribou populations continue to decline and additional herds have become extirpated. During that time, there has also been *some* progress, and much of that progress has been Indigenous-led (e.g., implementation of the 2020 SARA Section 11 [Partnership Agreement](#) between Saulteau First Nations, West Moberly First Nations, the government of BC, and the federal government). While the process is slow, we believe the

amendment is adding pressure in a positive direction. For example, the proposed Sukunka Coal Mine Project was recently [rejected](#), in part due to impacts to caribou habitat that could not be mitigated. Since 2020, the federal government has also established SARA Section 11 Agreements with [Alberta](#) and [British Columbia](#) that have enhanced cross-jurisdictional collaboration on caribou recovery and facilitated federal funding toward caribou habitat restoration and management efforts. ECCC is supporting AB with caribou range planning and BC with caribou herd planning, and significant efforts are being made by multiple parties to fund habitat restoration efforts. Additional restoration projects have been taken on by individual Indigenous communities to support caribou habitat needs. We acknowledge, with urgency, that there is still much work to be done, in particular to center and support Indigenous-led conservation.

**Q: How will this workshop lead to policy changes? Are there any decision-makers here?**

The diagrams on page 19 outline some of the direct and indirect ways federal Recovery Strategies can lead to policy changes and habitat protection. Indigenous governments are encouraged to contribute as appropriate, to ensure their community's perspectives are included in the document in line with their own protocols. Indigenous communities can also influence policy through direct conversations with ECCC staff, and/or through written input (such as emails, written comments on draft documents, or letters).

Provincial and territorial governments have primary responsibility for land management within their jurisdictions. The federal government only steps in under exceptional circumstances, and decisions on SARA emergency orders are made at the discretion of federal Cabinet (with Ministerial input supported by context and information gathered from ECCC staff). Executive-level federal government staff have not previously attended workshops on the development of SARA Recovery Strategies.



## Baselines and Future Outlook

Participants urged ECCC to adopt the long-term vision of an Indigenous perspective, considering both the past and future of caribou populations and their habitat. Participants emphasized that protecting the ‘present day snapshot’ of habitat currently used by declining caribou populations would be insufficient to promote recovery. Instead, they recommended looking to the future, asking what habitat a thriving caribou population would require, and protecting that. Participants also noted the effects of climate change and natural succession on the location of future habitat. Participants expressed a cautious optimism that caribou populations could be recovered to levels sufficient to sustain hunting (aided, for example, by the [Jasper Conservation Breeding Program](#)) and that habitat could be restored over the decades to come.



### **Q: What is the baseline used when identifying habitat? Are you using this year’s bad news, or historic levels from 100 years ago for example?**

SARA defines Critical Habitat as the habitat necessary for the survival and recovery of a species at risk. Recovery is defined in the Recovery Strategy Population and Distribution Objectives (PDOs). In the 2014 Recovery Strategy for Southern Mountain Caribou, one of the PDOs is to “increase the size of all LPUs to self-sustaining levels and, where appropriate and attainable, to levels which can sustain a harvest with dedicated or priority access to aboriginal peoples.” In addition to ensuring better alignment between PDOs and identified Critical Habitat, the amended recovery strategy could also include additional map(s) to better depict the historical range of caribou, and the range retraction over time.

**Q: How does the Recovery Strategy consider future, potential areas, that may become Critical Habitat through natural succession? Especially those areas that may be contentious or not supported by the government?**

As noted above, the identification of Critical Habitat is linked to the definition of recovery of Southern Mountain Caribou, which includes caribou population sizes that are large enough to allow for Indigenous Peoples to exercise their Constitutionally-protected right to hunt caribou. We know that caribou do not currently have enough habitat to survive, and that they are affected by both the habitat that they use, and habitat beyond those areas, where predator-prey dynamics are out of balance (currently termed “matrix habitat” in the Recovery Strategy). To identify enough Critical Habitat to support recovery, areas need to be included that aren’t necessarily used by caribou now, but could be used in the future. Decisions around the protection and management of Critical Habitat are separate from the process of identifying Critical Habitat (see diagram on page 24 for a list of some of the BC provincial regulatory tools that can be used as policy mechanisms to protect caribou habitat).

**Q: Have you done climate refugia mapping to identify which areas of habitat might remain suitable with climate change?**

Caribou are a landscape species that adapts to changing environments through movement among different habitats. We require a landscape-scale lens to understand how they will respond to Climate Change. Although this is still an area of active research, caribou resiliency under climate change will likely revolve around enabling them to move and restoring lost abilities to move. One way to ensure caribou can adapt to Climate Change is to protect more habitat than they currently use, not necessarily focus on protecting specific refugia areas, although these may warrant close consideration.

## **Q: How can we support caribou breeding to boost populations?**

In the wild, boosting the population is less about getting the caribou to breed more, and more to do with increasing calf survival. Some interventions to help improve calf survival include maternity penning and predator control.

A caribou maternity pen is an enclosed location where pregnant wild-caught caribou are placed in late March. They are then monitored and guarded from predators in the pen as they give birth and raise their calves. The females and calves are then released back into the wild at the end of summer. Maternity pens can help increase calf survival and support critically imperiled caribou populations<sup>8</sup>.

When caribou are removed from the wild, captive breeding can also be used to help boost the population through better survival. There's evidence with reindeer in Finland that captive breeding can increase populations of wild reindeer quite quickly (if interested, please see this [Webinar](#) on the Finland project).

A new [caribou conservation breeding facility in Jasper National Park](#) (the first of its kind in North America) was approved in early 2023 and has started construction. The current timeline is for the facility to be ready for captive breeding in 2025 and the first calves could be released into the wild in 2026. Fourteen Indigenous communities and organizations participated in various [consultation activities](#) and provided feedback on the proposal and the [Detailed Impact Assessment](#) for the facility.

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<sup>8</sup> reference: <https://wildlifeinfometrics.com/project/klinse-za-caribou-maternity-pen/>

## Sharing Information



Participants asked what information Indigenous communities could provide to inform Critical Habitat boundaries. Several participants said their communities already had information on caribou locations from harvester interviews, wildlife cameras, and GIS mapping that could be contributed to the Recovery Strategy amendment. They asked how they should share such information with ECCC.

**Q: If Nations have mapped habitat for Southern Mountain Caribou in their territory, what is the process for presenting that product to ECCC for consideration to be included in the Recovery Strategy as Critical Habitat. What is the next step? Further, is there a mechanism to pass along input on Critical Habitat boundaries?**

Indigenous communities possess valuable knowledge that can and should inform updates to Critical Habitat. If an Indigenous community has mapping information on caribou in their territory and wants this information to be included in the Recovery Strategy amendment, the next step is to reach out and set up a meeting ([robin.steenweg@ec.gc.ca](mailto:robin.steenweg@ec.gc.ca); [jean.polfus@ec.gc.ca](mailto:jean.polfus@ec.gc.ca)). We can discuss a process and provide supports and resources to fit your community's interests and capacity. Communities will have a say in how their information is included, through multiple verification steps.

**Q: It sounds like written feedback (in addition to one-on-one meetings) is important. Is there a timeline for when written comments will be included in the amendment? When do you need information prior to the public comment period?**

We anticipate posting the proposed draft Recovery Strategy amendment on the Species at Risk Public Registry for the required 60-day public comment period in 2025. Written and verbal feedback can be provided up until posting of the proposed amendment, after which, official comments will be collected as part of the standard 60-day comment period process. ECCC hopes to continue to work closely with Indigenous communities prior to the posting of the proposed draft amendment. Communities are encouraged to contribute to the document as it progresses, and prior to the formal public comment period. The sooner written and verbal comments are provided, the more time we will have for back-and-forth edits and verification, to ensure your community's information is handled respectfully.

## Predation

Participants noted that predators thrive in disturbed habitats, preying on caribou calves and impacting populations. Some participants have noticed increasing numbers of predators in their territories. One participant commented that predator control, while often controversial, can be a short-term way of increasing caribou populations while working on longer-term habitat restoration projects. They stressed the importance of community education and ‘getting the balance right’ when it comes to managing predators.



### **Q: Is predation the main reason that caribou calves are dying?**

[Publications](#) on this topic indicate that, although the situation is different for each herd, predation by wolves, bears, cougars, eagles, lynx, and wolverines have been documented as the primary reason for low caribou calf survival. However, we recognize that although predation speaks to the *proximate* (immediate) cause of calves dying, the *ultimate* cause is habitat disturbance that changes predator-prey numbers, densities, and relationships.

### **Q: What about the expansion of predator populations and ranges?**

The expansion of predator populations and changes to the areas they occur is a concern. Given caribou behavior and survival strategies, recovery is only possible if caribou can separate themselves in time and space from predator populations. Habitat protection, restoration, and natural succession will take time, but should support more balanced predator-prey dynamics.

## Uncategorized Q&As

Some additional comments could not be easily categorized under the preceding six themes. These important questions and answers are included here.

**Q: I am struggling to see how 'habitat condition' gets evaluated through this process from an ecosystem health point of view. Thinking forward to how the federal process can aid broad scale protections, how will the updated Recovery Strategy help to inform this process?**

In the Recovery Strategy amendment, ECCC is proposing that 'habitat condition' could be defined as different management recommendations for each of the Critical Habitat (CH) categories. For example, the required habitat condition for caribou in high and low elevation CH could be defined as minimal disturbance (or no new disturbance, 0% disturbance, ect), as those areas are important for life processes such as calving. The required habitat condition in Matrix Critical Habitat could be defined as comprising at least 65% undisturbed habitat and low predator densities (fewer than 3 wolves per 1,000 km<sup>2</sup>). The management recommendations in the Recovery Strategy should inform provincial land management decisions and must be considered during federal Impact Assessments for major projects.

**Q: Can capacity funding be used for research looking into the best restoration methods that are specific to BC mountains?**

The CIER administered Capacity Funding is not intended for technical aspects of restoration projects (which can be funded through ECCC's [Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk](#) or [Habitat Stewardship Programs](#)). The funding available during the 2023/24 fiscal year is intended to support Species at Risk capacity development, education and outreach within

communities, and involvement in the development of federal recovery documents, such as the Southern Mountain Caribou Recovery Strategy amendment. These funds can go towards activities related to the Recovery Strategy, such as: staff time to review maps of Critical Habitat, venue rental, catering, and honoraria for meetings between Elders, Knowledge Holders, language speakers or community members to discuss language, knowledge or the potential for involvement in the Recovery Strategy amendment. Please check the CIER website or reach out to one of the ECCC staff for more information ([robin.steenweg@ec.gc.ca](mailto:robin.steenweg@ec.gc.ca); [jean.polfus@ec.gc.ca](mailto:jean.polfus@ec.gc.ca)).

ECCC also supports and helps guide Natural Resources Canada's restoration-specific funding under the "[2 Billion Trees](#)" program, and we encourage all interested Indigenous communities to apply. Indigenous-led caribou restoration projects are well-supported by this program.

**Q: What kind of feedback did ECCC receive from the Fall 2022 workshops? How was it incorporated into what is being presented today?**

Please see the Southern Mountain Caribou Virtual Workshops: Series 2, November 2022 Workshops Summary Report on [CIER's website](#) for a summary what we heard and actions taken by ECCC to address the feedback and suggestions we received. Many thanks for all who attended and have helped shape the development and direction of our workshop series.



# Next Steps

## *Future Workshops and Opportunities for Feedback*

The 2021, 2022, and 2023 workshop series (series 1, 2, and 3) are individual components of the many steps towards meaningful and respectful inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge, languages, and perspectives in the federal Southern Mountain Caribou Recovery Strategy amendment.

In the winter of 2024 ECCC is planning to hold **regional in-person workshops** to continue to work with communities to develop, edit, refine, and improve the Recovery Strategy for Southern Mountain Caribou through the amendment.

ECCC will continue to engage one-on-one with Indigenous communities who have expressed interest in being involved in the Recovery Strategy amendment. ECCC will seek to provide modest funding, technical support, and resources to facilitate each community's involvement. If you are interested in setting up a one-one-one meeting with ECCC, please reach out to the Canadian Wildlife Service, ECCC biologists in the Pacific Region: Jean Polfus ([jean.polfus@ec.gc.ca](mailto:jean.polfus@ec.gc.ca)), Robin Steenweg ([robin.steenweg@ec.gc.ca](mailto:robin.steenweg@ec.gc.ca)) and Teresa Tufts ([teresa.tufts@ec.gc.ca](mailto:teresa.tufts@ec.gc.ca)), or the Prairie Region: Thea Carpenter ([thea.carpenter@ec.gc.ca](mailto:thea.carpenter@ec.gc.ca)). We look forward to working with you in the future.

## *Community Recommendations*

ECCC appreciates all participants who provided feedback both during the workshop and through the post-workshop survey. The key recommendations below will help shape future workshops.

1. Most Indigenous communities have very limited staff and cannot give one single project their undivided attention. Time constraints on spending Capacity Funding for this process have caused additional strain on staff who were already spread thin. It would be helpful if more of the onus around figuring out what information is relevant for the amendment process, and figuring out who to provide the information to, was not on the communities themselves. There needs to be a framework for information sharing.
2. For future ECCC presentations, include examples of how Indigenous communities have been involved in making decisions on goals and thresholds for recovery. For example, explain the level of Indigenous involvement in setting the 35% disturbance threshold for Southern Mountain Caribou Matrix Critical Habitat.
3. Include federal decision makers in engagement meetings so that workshop discussions translate more closely to management actions. This would also allow communities to get familiar with the best contacts for sending in letters of support or concern.
4. Incorporate industry in discussions on Critical Habitat.

# Appendix A: Caribou Language

Indigenous peoples have used their languages to describe, categorize, identify, and maintain relationships with caribou since time immemorial. The detailed vocabularies provide complementary descriptions of biodiversity from a robust place-based perspective. Our intent is to collaborate with Indigenous communities to decolonize the language used to describe caribou, and through a biocultural diversity approach, and recognize and empower the voices of Indigenous people to shape caribou recovery efforts.

Tables of words related to caribou, in the Indigenous languages of BC and AB, compiled from publicly available sources in dictionaries and online. In some cases, words have been updated and verified by communities. These language tables are available in the summary report for Series 2 of the workshops, November 2022 on [CIER's website](#). A full list of language sources is available [here](#). This list will be continually updated as we continue to work with communities to find the most appropriate sources of information and language.