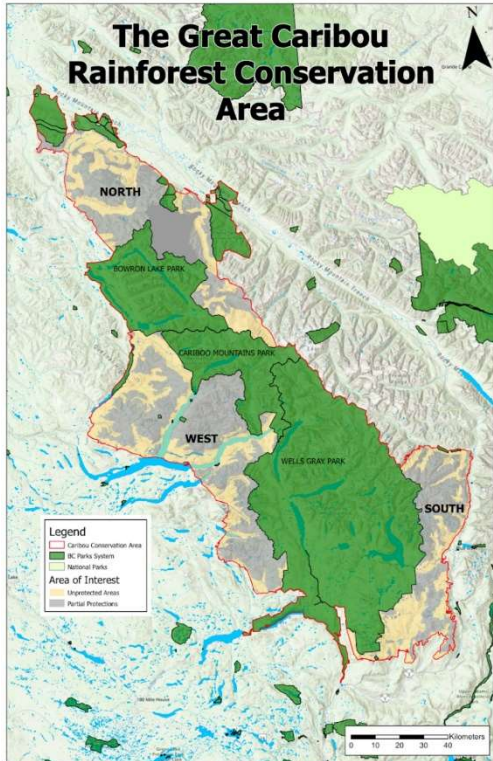


The Endangered Deep-Snow Mountain Caribou of British Columbia's Interior Wetbelt



The Deep-Snow Mountain Caribou (DSMC) of British Columbia's Interior Wetbelt mountains are unique and in danger of extinction. Also known as Southern Mountain Caribou, they are the only caribou in the world that seasonally migrate up and down rugged mountain slopes and winter at high elevation surviving on tree lichens in old-growth forests.

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada and British Columbia's Conservation Data Centre have declared Deep-Snow Mountain Caribou to be at the highest level of endangerment. Much of their habitat has been destroyed and logging continues apace despite compelling evidence that habitat loss is the primary reason for their decline.

The governments of B.C. and Canada have made some effort to protect them but with an over-emphasis on predator control and other short-term measures and not enough action to protect their habitat. As a result, fewer than 1,500 animals remain, a 50% decline in the past few generations. Their situation demands urgent action!

As recently as 20 years ago there were 17 DSMC herds in B.C. Since then, 6 have been wiped out. Of 11 remaining herds, 3 have less than 10 caribou and only 5 have more than 100 individuals. Little time remains to save these extraordinary caribou from being lost forever.

To save them, there is a critical need for a DSMC caribou conservation area with permanent protection. In its 2021 report the Harmony Foundation calls upon B.C. and Canada to create **The Great Caribou Rainforest Conservation Area**.

To identify the best location for the conservation area we examined the status of surviving herds and the overlap of their range with parks and nearby protected areas. The location was chosen for several compelling reasons.

1. It is home to 3 of the 5 largest remaining DSMC herds: North Caribou, Wells Gray North, and Wells Gray South.
2. The proposed conservation area is anchored by 3 established provincial parks: Bowron Lake, Cariboo Mountains and Wells Gray.
3. Surrounding these parks is additional habitat, some without any protection but much more of it with some protection.
4. The parks and surrounding protected areas were largely set aside for caribou.

Bowron Lake, Cariboo Mountains and Wells Gray Provincial Parks comprise 794,585 hectares. Wildlife Habitat Areas, Ungulate Winter Range and Old Growth Management Areas under The Forest Range and Practices Act (FRPA) hold 529,275 hectares of protection surrounding these parks. Only 231,872 hectares of range is without protection, a mere 14% of the entire 1,629,238 hectare proposed conservation area.

These protections have lessened the decline of the North Caribou, Wells Gray North and Wells Gray South herds. However, caribou require contiguous protected habitat. The relatively small

addition of land would stitch together the patchwork of protections to create a world-class, fully protected conservation area.

To the north a historic agreement between the West Moberly and Saultheux First Nations, Canada and B.C. has given hope for Central Mountain Caribou. However, it does not cover Deep-Snow Mountain Caribou, the most imperiled.

Beyond caribou protection, there are many other benefits from our proposal. BC and Canada have made commitments regarding climate change, biodiversity, old-growth forests and indigenous rights. The Caribou Conservation Area will contribute to meeting each of these goals and will benefit from the knowledge and leadership of First Nations.

The report also explores the benefits of transitioning the regional economy from resource extraction to enterprises more compatible with the natural environment. Value-added forest products, indigenous and eco-tourism and ecological restoration can provide economic opportunities well into the future. The area's diverse and unique ecology can attract many visitors including researchers, students and visitors seeking to study climate change and biodiversity. Over-dependence on extractive industries has led to declines in jobs and DSMC. The situation demands transition it to the low-carbon, knowledge-based economy of the future.

Much of the proposed conservation area sits within the extraordinary **Caribou Rainforest**. This rainforest, although 500 km from the Pacific Ocean, is a lush cedar-hemlock forest with stunning landscapes and biodiversity. Although old-growth in the Coastal Temperate Rainforest has received more attention, the Caribou Rainforest is equitable in terms of its conservation value.

No other large mammal is as closely tied to this region as Deep-Snow Mountain Caribou. Their decline raises alarm about their survival as well as the health of this unique ecosystem depended upon by many other plants and animals and the people that hope to live here for generations to come. We must not allow it to be destroyed for short-term economic gain. The decimation of the Caribou Rainforest and the Deep-Snow Mountain Caribou dependent upon it is a failure of historic proportion that must be stopped!

Michael Bloomfield, Founder and Executive Director
Harmony Foundation of Canada
harmony@islandnet.com 250-380-3001
<https://savethecaribou.ca/>

August 27, 2021

