

## Wildsight Golden - Position on Mountain Caribou Conservation and Predator Control in British Columbia

March 2017

Mountain Caribou<sup>1</sup> are an important, highly valued, and culturally significant species. Extirpation from the Columbian Mountain region would mean the removal of globally unique populations, and a great loss for the inland temperate old-growth rainforest ecosystem. Wildsight Golden believes that long-term conservation and restoration of this rare ecosystem for all of its significant biodiversity values is essential.

It is recognised that a primary threat to Mountain Caribou populations is fragmentation of their habitat. Forest harvesting practices across the landscape, construction several large hydro-electric reservoirs, and increases in backcountry use for recreation are serious concerns affecting Mountain Caribou. Climate change is also having a negative influence on the suitability of habitat for Mountain Caribou in the southern Columbian region, and will undoubtedly become an increasingly significant factor in the future.



Reductions in available winter food supply, increasing human access into remote areas and associated disturbances, along with alteration of predator-prey relationships are all related to habitat change and land use policies.

Maintenance of a metapopulation of the Mountain Caribou ecotype on the interior Columbian Mountain landscape, that will allow the survival and rejuvenation of small local populations, will most certainly require more extensive habitat protection measures and restoration over the long term.

On February 24, 2017, an information bulletin was released by The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations stating that they were taking immediate action to save the Columbia North caribou herd (located north of Revelstoke) from wolf predation through aerial wolf removal. The Golden Branch of Wildsight (Wildsight Golden) believes that predator

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<sup>1</sup> Mountain caribou are an arboreal lichen–winter feeding ecotype of the Woodland Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*) found primarily in southeastern British Columbia. Wildsight is a regional organization and has primarily worked to address threats to caribou populations resident in the Columbia mountain region.

control by directly killing wolves that are preying on Mountain Caribou is a desperate measure to attempt to delay the ultimate effects of habitat disturbance and destruction. Wildsight Golden does not believe that wolf culls will likely save small, isolated, remnant populations of Mountain Caribou, especially without further significant protective measures in place. Wolves are being made the scapegoat of generations of bad habitat management decisions on the part of people.

Unfortunately we are at a crucial point where species will be gone from the landscape without some difficult decisions within our society. Wildsight Golden strongly supports measures such as:

1. Landscape level protection for high biodiversity value areas including no harvest zones; special caribou management zones where summer and winter caribou habitat values are maintained or restored; establishment of careful habitat management for corridors and linkages across the broader landscape between summer and winter habitats, and further development and implementation of silvicultural practices in all areas that favour the long-term maintenance of suitable caribou habitat.
2. Access management including well-enforced closures for motorised vehicles and for any recreational activities that increase predator access to areas of remaining high quality winter caribou habitat (snowmobiling, heli-skiing, snow cat skiing and backcountry skiing); strict restrictions on road building in no harvest zones.
3. Moving away from the current single-species based approach to management, and working towards a more holistic ecosystem-based approach addressing multiple species and the entire landscape of the Interior Old-Growth Rainforest.

Increased public education and support for the recovery of Mountain Caribou and their habitats is essential. Governments are continually attempting to balance the interests of the public, industry and ecosystems. Protecting the habitat of threatened species, with a focus on large, intact ecosystems that thereby protect a large suite of species must be made a priority in order to achieve a balance between the needs of our present and future.

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Wildsight Golden is a local Branch of the regional Wildsight organization. Wildsight Golden works on local environmental monitoring, habitat restoration and education programs to support the development of ecologically sustainable communities in the Golden area.