

# Alberta northwest caribou committee pushes for answers from the provincial government

**November 29, 2017 – Fort Vermilion, AB –The Northwest Species at Risk (NWSAR) municipal Committee has been engaging with the provincial government to find solutions to protect the region’s threatened Woodland Caribou while also protecting northwest Alberta jobs.**

**“We know that a balanced approach to protecting our caribou is what will work best,” said Lisa Wardley, Chair of the NWSAR Committee and Deputy Reeve of Mackenzie County. “The environment and the economy can go hand-in-hand. We can protect our wildlife and our jobs at the same time”.**

Wardley continued, “That is why our Committee took it upon ourselves to draft an extensive 180-page report that we submitted to the federal and provincial government in June with our recommendations to protect and recover caribou populations in a sustainable way that doesn’t hurt our communities and protects our jobs”.

The Committee’s report includes extensive scientific research, socio-economic analysis and stakeholder input from a variety of industry, community groups and the public at large.

The provincial government is expected to respond before the end of the year, by releasing draft documents on how it plans to recover caribou populations. The government has promised to show its plans to northwest Alberta citizens and get their feedback.

This is great news from the Committee’s perspective as it has worked hard to get to a place where the government was willing to consider alternate plans. In 2016, the government considered turning 1.8 million hectares of northwest Alberta land into a park – effectively sterilizing the area’s oil and gas and forestry resources and therefore devastating the region’s economy and communities.

Through the NWSAR Committee’s research they were able to demonstrate that simply drawing lines on a map does not effectively recover a species. In fact, a more robust recovery plan that utilizes cross-border collaboration, local stakeholder knowledge of the landscape and comprehensive ecological and scientific data is more successful at protecting caribou.

The Committee has made several concrete recommendations to the government on how to effectively recover the Woodland Caribou populations while also protecting people’s livelihoods.

The NWSAR Committee has received a positive response from the provincial government on the following items:

The provincial government has officially put out a request to conduct a socio-economic analysis of the region, and the impacts that any caribou recovery plans will have;

The government has committed to not creating a provincial park that would sterilize the area's resources and not effectively recover the caribou;

The government will release its plans to the public for input before they finalize them;

The government has committed to creating balanced caribou recovery plans that protect the region's environment and economy;

Local stakeholder groups, with expertise in the region's landscape will be engaged to help finalize caribou recovery plans; and

Forestry and oil and gas tenures that are currently in place will remain.

"While this is great progress we are still concerned about future and proven oil and gas and forestry reserves as no firm commitment has been made by the provincial government to protect these assets when caribou recovery measures are implemented," said Terry Ungarian, NWSAR Committee member and Reeve for the County of Northern Lights.

"When the government releases its plans this winter our Committee will have achieved many of the goals we set. So we have lots to celebrate but we aren't done until the caribou herds are sustainable, our communities have guarantees that our jobs are safe and all levels of government have collaborated on a multi-species landscape approach to environmental and resource planning in northwest Alberta," said Crystal McAteer Vice-Chair of the NWSAR Committee and Mayor of the Town of High Level.

To learn more about the NWSAR Committee and to view their report and recommendations visit: [AlbertaNWSAR.ca](http://AlbertaNWSAR.ca)

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## **MEDIA CONTACT:**

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## **BACKGROUND**

### **Woodland Caribou**

Boreal Woodland Caribou are designated as a *threatened* species under federal and provincial legislation. Both levels of government require Recovery Strategies and Action Plans to protect boreal caribou. Range plans for each caribou herd is a requirement by the federal government.

Alberta is expected to put in place 15 draft Range Plans for 15 boreal caribou populations this winter. The federal government is expected to provide a written response in April, 2018, that will deliver an assessment of whether or not the province's draft range plans will provide meaningful progress towards fulfilling legislative requirements to protect and recover the Woodland Caribou.

### **NWSAR Committee Information**

The Committee is comprised of municipal councillors from: Mackenzie County, County of Northern Lights, Town of High Level, Town of Rainbow Lake, Clear Hills County and the Town of Manning. For more information visit: [AlbertaNWSAR.ca](http://AlbertaNWSAR.ca).

### **NWSAR FACTS**

The region has a population of approximately 30,000 people and is 120,000 square kilometers.

The area's main industries are resourced based, heavily dependent on oil and gas, forestry and agriculture.