



# Winter Recreational Users' Workshops February 26 & 28, 2013

## WHAT WE HEARD:

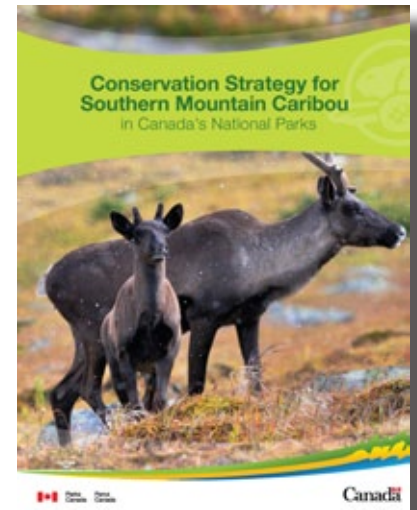
Summary of questions and comments:

- Caribou conservation
- Proposed adjustments to backcountry use in important winter caribou habitat

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To meet key actions identified in the *Conservation Strategy for Southern Mountain Caribou in Canada's National Parks*, Parks Canada is proposing adjustments to backcountry use in important winter caribou habitat in Jasper National Park (JNP). The proposals recommend implementation of seasonal closures from November 1 – February 28 annually, for key caribou habitat in the A La Peche, Brazeau and Tonquin caribou ranges. These areas will continue to be accessible after March 1, providing backcountry users the opportunity to enjoy them when days are longer, temperatures warmer, and snow conditions are usually at their finest.



To help inform decision making for these areas, Parks Canada offered interested winter recreational users the opportunity to discuss the proposals and to assist in compiling a winter recreational use inventory.

### **Winter Recreational Users Sessions:**

On February 26th and 28th, 2013, workshops were held in Jasper and Edmonton to discuss current and potential winter use of Jasper National Park's subalpine and alpine (backcountry) areas.

As part of this discussion, participants were presented with information on, and rationale for, the proposals. This document aims to share questions raised at the sessions relating to caribou conservation and to the proposals, as well as Parks Canada's responses to the questions. We have also compiled a summary of comments received through these workshops.

### **What we heard:**

Jasper National Park is undoubtedly a very special place to all of us. Those who live and play here, are passionate about the natural undisturbed landscapes and wildlife, and inherent in that passion are the personal connections and experiences gained through recreational pursuits. For those who provided input, most winter backcountry users would be willing to adjust their recreational use in support of caribou conservation if they felt that doing so would make a difference for caribou. From the caribou conservation perspective, no single action will result in caribou recovery on its own. Accordingly, Jasper National Park is taking action to address all five key threats facing caribou; these proposals address the threat of *facilitated predator access*. While it is difficult to measure the success of one action in isolation, with caribou numbers in peril it is nevertheless imperative to pursue every concrete step we can to protect caribou and their habitat within the park.

Another strong message heard was that the changes would be more palatable if alternatives were available or there was an increased investment in other winter opportunities (i.e. groomed trails). Parks Canada is committed to reviewing and evaluating suggested alternatives.

### **Who we heard from:**

The workshops specifically targeted winter recreational users of JNP for two reasons: firstly for the working groups to be effective in compiling an inventory of use, participants needed to have that first-hand knowledge of the areas being discussed; secondly, as this user group will be affected we felt it was important to work closely with them and capture their input directly.

Between the two workshops held in Jasper and Edmonton, there were a total of 204 participants. Comments submitted from those who could not attend the sessions or had follow-up comments is also included.

## Southern Mountain Caribou Conservation in Jasper National Park

Summary of questions, answers and comments:

### **How does Parks Canada determine important winter caribou habitat?**

*Does Parks Canada have a map to show the areas where caribou go?*

Parks Canada has a variety of spatial data on caribou movement, habitat use, and home ranges. We have collected location data on 61 caribou, up to 24 locations a day, since 2001. As a result, we have a very solid understanding of what constitutes caribou habitat in JNP. We have published this information in progress reports and these data have been cited in peer-reviewed papers. The areas proposed for seasonal closures have been mapped out using these data. A map of important caribou habitat is included in the *Conservation Strategy for Southern Mountain Caribou in Canada's National Parks (2011)* available on-line at [www.pc.gc.ca/caribou](http://www.pc.gc.ca/caribou).

*Is their habitat in the woods or in the alpine?*

Southern Mountain caribou in Jasper move elevationally in response to seasonal changes. Once vegetation in the high alpine is snow-covered, caribou descend to the upper subalpine forest for easier access to ground lichens. Generally as snow depth increases, caribou are forced to move down to the (more dangerous) valley bottom. By late spring, they move back into the alpine where they remain through to the next winter's snowfall. Some individuals remain above tree-line year-round, if snow conditions permit.

*Are caribou sensitive to a big change in their environment?*

Yes, caribou are sensitive to change in their environment. They are adapted to live in areas where predator numbers are low. Anything that increases predator numbers, even if it's not directly in caribou habitat, has an effect on caribou through increased predator encounters. Predator numbers can increase through habitat change (e.g. fire) and high elk/deer populations (that may be influenced by human impacts such as human use areas acting as predator refuges). Caribou can also be sensitive to disturbance - they have been shown to be displaced by snowmobile/ATV trails, aircraft, loud noises, and roads, for example.

### **With such low numbers in some of the herds (Maligne & Brazeau) is there really any hope they will survive no matter what we do?**

Parks Canada's priority is to reduce or eliminate threats to Southern Mountain caribou found in the national parks to increase their chances of recovery. The smaller the populations become, the less likely they will be able to recover on their own. Parks Canada's herd augmentation strategy for JNP aims to address this threat. We will not give up on caribou, and we have a legal obligation not to, pursuant to both the *Canada National Parks Act* and the *Species at Risk Act*.

*What about inbreeding? What is Parks Canada going to do to get the numbers up?*

Inbreeding is not a present risk, but is a concern for the future as herds continue to decrease in size. Recent studies using different types of DNA (microsatellite versus mitochondrial) have shown conflicting results, on one hand identifying high diversity and on the other showing very low diversity. However, given high diversity in microsatellite DNA (where inbreeding depression begins to occur), inbreeding is unlikely to occur within the next 10-50 years. Parks Canada is partnering in ongoing research to accurately determine the influence and degree of inbreeding depression for JNP's caribou through pedigree analysis. Results from this work will be available in Fall 2013. Genetic diversity will be an important consideration for our herd augmentation strategy.

*Why is adult female mortality a problem? What is normal/desirable recruitment (survival of young vs. adult female mortality)?*

For long-lived, slow growing populations, adult female survival is the most important factor for population growth. For a population to increase, the number of female calves that survive to adulthood should be higher than the number of adult female deaths in that time. Female caribou do not have their first calf until they are 2 or 3 years old, and with high adult female mortality, each female has a lower chance of replacing herself in her lifetime. If adult female mortality remains high in Jasper, fewer females will be produced and the population is more likely to decrease. High calf survival can offset this to some degree, but since half the calves are male, it may not be enough to stop population decline. Adult male mortality is not considered as not as many males are needed for a population to increase.



Populations will naturally fluctuate and some species are more resilient than others. Caribou like many other Species at Risk increase slowly. Our goal is to increase the JNP caribou populations up to a number where they can withstand natural fluctuations and show a generally stable or increasing trend. In addition, the 5 threat categories identified in the Caribou Conservation Strategy will need to be mitigated for caribou recovery to be successful.

### **What about captive breeding?**

*Why not do captive breeding in Jasper? How much money is going to be spent on captive breeding (over the next 20 years) and will it be sustainable? When will it begin and will long term funding be available?*

Captive breeding on national park land has been considered. There are a number of reasons the Calgary Zoo was chosen as the preferred partner on this initiative. The Zoo's experience in conservation breeding would bring needed expertise in veterinary care, animal husbandry, restoration biology and genetics as well as increase the opportunities for public awareness, education and outreach. Parks Canada is working with the Calgary Zoo and the Provinces of British Columbia and Alberta to finalize these plans. Details will be released when an agreement is in place.

*How many animals need to be in a herd for the population to be sustainable?*

Based on population trends and caribou research, biologists have suggested that if the threats to caribou are mitigated, increasing herds to at least 70 animals will be sustainable.

*B.C. Government recently did herd augmentation - did it work?*

The B.C. Government recently did a translocation (moving animals from one place to another) of caribou from Northern B.C. to the Purcells to increase numbers in this critically small herd. There is risk in any translocation and high mortality is expected. In the case of the Purcell translocations, this was only the first stage of the program and it is therefore too early to tell if it has been successful. In many cases, like the Purcell Mountains, these are high risk efforts but the alternative is extirpation. While many of the factors that could affect the success of releasing captive bred caribou in the mountain parks are different from those in the Purcells, Parks Canada and its partners are learning from this experience to improve the chances of success of future translocations to national park lands.

**Where is the proof that self-propelled ski tracks actually facilitate wolf access?**

*While ski touring has been a constant activity since the 1920s & 30s, I question that human activities including their tracks have been the main contribution to the decline of the caribou herds in this park.*

While there is evidence that self-propelled ski tracks do facilitate wolf access to caribou habitat, this is not considered the main contribution to the decline of caribou herds. It is one of 5 key threats to caribou population declines in the mountain national parks. While it is likely that altered predator-prey dynamics has historically had the most significant impact on caribou declines in JNP, with population numbers currently so low, it is essential to address all threats to help caribou recover.

*Your data is based on maintained trails - has it been proven that wolves have used these tracks to follow in to the areas where the herds are? How much compression does a ski put on snow compared to track-setting?*

We have several sources of information showing that wolves select trails: 1) Wolf GPS radio collar data on trails, 2) camera images of wolves on trails, 3) models that take GPS collar data and extract general patterns across a larger area showing that wolves select trails and move faster on trails; 4) Peer reviewed research shows that wolves select cleared or packed trails globally.

It takes very little snow compaction to increase a wolf's ability to travel in an area. Humans and snowmobiles exert surprisingly similar ground pressure on snow. A human on skis or snowshoes exerts around 0.55 Psi compared to typical ground pressures for moderate-light to heavy grooming tractors (for ski trails) that range from 0.8 psi to 1.2 psi. A 1970 skidoo nordic 399 (like an old track setting machine) has a ground pressure of only 0.290 psi, this would of course increase relative to the size of the driver. Snowmobiles exert relatively low ground pressure as the weight is distributed over a greater surface area. This is what makes them good for travelling through snow.

*Wolves don't need tracks to walk on snow - why are we doing this? Even with tracks, if the snow is really deep and soft in the alpine, once wolves step off the track wouldn't they have difficulty hunting?*

Wolves don't need tracks, and we will never prevent wolves naturally accessing caribou habitat. Data show, however, that they will choose to travel on trails and can travel faster on them. This indicates that wolves require less energy when travelling on trails, and can go farther. Caribou live in these hard to access areas as a predator avoidance strategy, relying on the snow "buffer" to reduce the chance of wolves accessing these areas. Wolves have a high footload ratio in snow, about the same as caribou, but have short legs and are not as well adapted to walk in deep snow environments. They can, however, travel for short distances off-trail and in deep snow. We have seen wolves follow caribou tracks that intersect a trail, and wolves have killed caribou near trails (e.g. Verdant creek). If wolves can get through the snow "buffer" up to a wind-blown ridge, they are at a large advantage to move great distances. Caribou will also use wind-blown ridges, putting wolves and caribou in direct contact with each other.



*How much time has been spent talking to the outfitters, wardens, locals and guides to find out if encounters with either species are common in these regions?*

We spent months in the archives of the Jasper Museum going through historic records from many sources. This included records from traders, trappers and explorers, backcountry warden logs, wildlife summaries, and research updates from previous projects. We receive sightings reports from outfitters and were able to examine some of these from previous years. Caribou sightings reported by locals are also recorded into our observations database. All these sources were included in defining caribou habitat.

*Is there potential for adverse effects on caribou with higher frequency of use in these areas during March & April?*

While overlap of human use and caribou winter habitat could lead to displacement, the key threat being addressed by closures at that time of year is facilitated predator access. By late winter, depending on snow conditions, packed trails are less likely to offer wolves an unnatural advantage.

### **Why would wolves choose to go into the alpine when other prey are lower?**

*Aren't we messing with predator-prey dynamics by doing this?*

As wolf densities increase (can be caused by changes in prey numbers), wolves are competing for food. Some wolf packs will be forced to hunt in marginal habitat such as the alpine. While wolves don't use these areas frequently, we do have evidence that when they do, they often use trails to get there. In implementing seasonal closures, we are reducing the risk of our trails giving wolves an advantage, allowing them to access habitat that would normally be inaccessible. By doing this, we are restoring the natural predator-prey dynamic.

*If wolves are the problem, why don't we control wolves - sterilization, wolf culls, shock collars, other ideas?*

Controlling wolves is an option, but it's not a long-term solution. Wolf culls have been shown repeatedly to be ineffective unless a year-round, perpetual program is implemented. Sterilization may have temporary benefits, but long term impacts to wolf biology are less certain; it could lead to pack dissolution and increased wolf density. There is some evidence that shock collars may provide a small deterrent to a specific site, but it is unlikely that this will be effective on the scale of a national park, and it may have further implications for wolf biology (e.g. collaring all animals will be necessary, effects to pack size and cohesion are unknown, and wolves may quickly learn to go around the 'shock zone'). Parks Canada believes that by addressing the root cause of wolf-caribou interactions (e.g. prey availability and predator access) we can have a longer-term positive effect on caribou.

### **What about habitat loss?**

*We shouldn't be focusing on only one threat (predator access). Is there a prospect for success if we don't consider habitat loss?*

Parks Canada has identified five key threats to caribou in the mountain parks. Actions are being taken to address all of these threats including habitat loss. Our success in reducing or eliminating all the threats and not just one or two, will be essential for caribou recovery. Specific to habitat loss, we have no evidence to suggest that habitat is a limiting factor in JNP. To reduce the threat of habitat loss, we are working within the Park boundaries to ensure that wildfires in caribou habitat are addressed immediately, and have made prescribed burn plans with caribou habitat in mind.

*What can anyone say, when Parks asks us to give up most of the backcountry skiing in the park to save the caribou, and the decision to expand the Marmot Basin Ski Area has already been finalized before the caribou study for that location has even been completed?*

Parks Canada has not made any decisions about future development and use of the Marmot Basin Ski Area. The *Marmot Basin Site Guidelines for Development and Use* (2008) outline what development and use may be considered in future, and establish growth limits, ecological management parameters and approaches to ski area operation. The site guidelines propose a leasehold reduction of 18%, removing the Whistler Creek bed area from the lease to protect this ecologically important area from future development. In exchange for this lease reduction, Parks Canada is prepared to consider a number of potential future initiatives through a long-range planning process. The caribou risk assessment, led by Dr. Fiona Schmiegelow at the University of Alberta, will inform long-range planning decisions by Parks Canada for Marmot Basin. It will also provide information for managing off-piste and out-of-bounds skiing in the Whistlers Creek drainage. More information on the Marmot Basin Site Guidelines can be found at: <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/ab/jasper/plan/plan8.aspx>

*Did the 2003 burn in the valley beside have an impact? 15 years ago the Maligne herd was strong.*

The 2003 burn in the Rocky River undoubtedly had a large impact on predators and prey in that region, but it was outside of caribou habitat. Wolf dynamics in the Maligne valley have changed significantly in the last decade, and from 2003-2006 there were two resident wolf packs in the area. We believe this was the most important factor explaining caribou decline in the Maligne.

**Has there been an increase in caribou numbers and a decrease in wolves since the implementation of the Cavell seasonal closure (2009)?**

*What are the stats on caribou mortality and wolf predation/access? How many caribou are killed by wolves in the winter and summer? How many have been killed by avalanches, and does the fact that the change in climate and the change in snow conditions contribute to making it more difficult for both wolves and caribou to travel in winter months?*

It is difficult to measure population level effects from a closure of such small geographical extent. The purpose of the closure is to stop facilitating wolf access to this important winter caribou habitat. To gauge the effectiveness of the closure, we looked at how wolves responded before and after. We found that in 2010 wolves were 1.6 times more likely to select the trail once it was open compared to when it was closed. Also, wolves travelled significantly faster on trails than anywhere else, and they selected to travel on trails instead of other features throughout their pack's territory.

Caribou mortality as a result of wolf access is a rare event and difficult to capture. With the current status of Jasper's caribou herds, however, the impacts of these rare events could be devastating. While we cannot prevent natural predation events, we can stop enabling these events. We have been following wolves for several years looking at what wolves kill and where it occurs. In 2012, wolves were not prevented from entering the Astoria valley (shallow early snow pack) and they were successful in killing 3 caribou during the closure period. This was done naturally, without human interference. It is not possible to know what the effects would have been had there been a trail into the valley. What we do know, however, is that wolves select to travel into the valley more strongly when a trail is present.

Our current research program has been active for 10 years. Many of our mortalities are "unknown" because we can't be there when it occurs. Only when we have a collared wolf pack simultaneously at the location can we say that a wolf was responsible for the mortality. We have tracked 78 caribou since 1988. No tracking was done between 1993 and 2001. During this time we documented 49 mortalities of collared animals, 20 of which were caused by wolves, 17 were unknown, 4 were from avalanche, 3 were from grizzlies, and 5 were other from other causes.

*How many caribou were killed during scientific studies over the last 30 years (capture & collaring)?*

There was one caribou death in 2001 and one suspected but unconfirmed from the 1988 -1993 period. Parks Canada does acknowledge this risk, however, and caribou are no longer being collared in JNP. Population counts are being conducted using DNA scat analysis, a noninvasive method that has proven effective over the last 7 years.



**Under what circumstances would Parks Canada consider re-opening an area?**

*What if the resident herd is wiped out (like in Banff)? How long are the closures? What would be the criteria to reopen? If funding isn't secured for captive breeding will the closures still go ahead?*

Caribou recovery is a long-term process and threats will need to be mitigated at least until herds are stable or increasing, and able to withstand natural predation. Once this is achieved, criteria for removing the proposed seasonal closures could be examined.

Our objective is to prevent the loss of any of JNP's caribou herds. If however, a resident herd becomes extirpated, Parks Canada would pursue re-introduction of caribou as is planned for Banff National Park. If funding isn't secured for the captive breeding program, Parks Canada would look at other options for herd recovery as all 3 Southern Jasper herds are at risk of extirpation. This would still involve adjustments to winter backcountry use in important caribou winter habitat to address the threat of *facilitated predator access*.

**What are Parks Canada's plans to educate our kids (especially local kids) on caribou?**

*Is Parks Canada embarrassed by the lack of knowledge in Jasper's schools about caribou? How are you "capturing hearts and minds"?*

Woodland caribou education has been a priority for Parks Canada and conservation actions for at least the last decade in JNP have included outreach initiatives. More recently, the "Caribou in Your Backyard" program provided interactive learning opportunities to all students in Jasper's schools. This program was later refined to target specific grades where caribou fit into curriculum outcomes. Currently caribou programs are offered in Jasper to grade 3 students and in conjunction with the Palisades Stewardship Education Centre to grade 7 and grade 10 students. For the last four years, through the nationally funded caribou conservation program, there is a public outreach and education person dedicated to caribou in the mountain parks. As this position is based in Jasper, locals and visitors have benefited from numerous learning opportunities including "Caribou got the Blues" music events and yearly participation in Jasper's Enviro Fair, Parks Day, Jasper in January, the Wildlife Festival and interpretive programs.

In 2012, students from the Jasper Sustainability Club for Youth were invited to assist with wolf killsite monitoring and two students accompanied a CBC media crew and Parks Canada staff into the Tonquin to learn about caribou research. Last year a "Caribou Ambassador" program was piloted as an outreach opportunity at key trailheads leading into caribou habitat. Communications also reach out to external audiences in a variety of ways including local, regional and national media, up to date web content, social media, interactive educational resources, Calgary Zoo programs, and other urban outreach initiatives.



## **Will there be any value in closing the North Boundary area when the A La Peche herd spends a lot of time outside the Park?**

*Is Parks Canada working with neighbouring land managers?*

The A La Peche herd, more than any other herd in the park, faces the pressures of habitat loss and fragmentation outside the Park. Recent evidence shows that some of this herd no longer migrates into the foothills, choosing to stay in JNP year round. It is a priority therefore to protect what intact habitat remains within the Park and Parks Canada is working with neighbouring land managers toward caribou conservation. (i.e. Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, forestry industry representatives, etc)

## **What about other species - why are we managing for a single species?**

Under *Species at Risk Act* legislation, when a species is listed, it is a priority to protect individuals found on federal lands, and once a recovery strategy is in place, to protect what is determined as critical habitat. While this places a focus on single species management, the result of protecting caribou habitat will also help other alpine dwelling species. Parks Canada is currently working on Action Plans for species at risk found in national parks that will better coordinate efforts to benefit multiple species and ecological integrity priorities. Management of caribou inevitably involves management of other large ungulates and their predators; we don't aim to manage a single species, but instead an ecosystem of which this particular species at risk is a part.

## **What are other national/provincial parks doing to protect their caribou?**

*If species at risk can't live in a national park, where will they have room?*

The *Conservation Strategy for Southern Mountain Caribou in Canada's National Parks* outlines actions for Jasper, Banff, Mount Revelstoke and Glacier National Parks. In British Columbia, to assist in the recovery of the Columbia North herd, a number of partners including Parks Canada, the Province of B.C, recreational user groups, First Nations and industry are supporting the implementation of a maternity penning program that combined with actions to mitigate threats such as seasonal area closures, habitat protection, and management of alternate prey numbers, aims to increase calf survival in that area. The recently released *Recovery Strategy for the Woodland Caribou, Boreal population (Rangifer tarandus caribou) in Canada* provides direction for the implementation of conservation action plans for Boreal caribou across Canada. Wood Buffalo and Wapusk National Parks have been involved in that process. Some of the caribou conservation methods on nearby provincial lands, outside of national parks, have included wolf culls, wolf sterilization, liberalized hunting seasons for wolves and cougars, caribou maternity pens, predator-exclusion fences, reductions in other prey populations, access management and industrial operating guidelines in caribou habitat, closures and restrictions to recreational activities (snowmobiling, heliskiing), augmentation of herds, minimizing industrial activity in core caribou habitat and caribou habitat restoration.

**General Comments:**

**Following is a compilation of comments received in response to caribou conservation information presented. As they are not specifically questions but reflective of personal opinion or general commentary, Parks Canada has not included responses.**

*The reasons for the decline of the mountain caribou herds are multi-factorial. Parks Canada does not have any empirical evidence that the proposed winter closures of Jasper's back-country would be enough to reverse the decline. In fact, in years of low snow pack, the wolves will be able to access the caribou winter grounds even if people do not.*

*If there are strong compelling reasons why a road closure Nov. 1 - Mar. 1 would help the caribou and if there is a good measurement system in place to determine if a several year closure helps the caribou population, then I am willing to consider this. But to date, I haven't heard a lot of evidence that road access is killing off the herd.*

*Parks Canada has a responsibility to protect the Park for future generations. Jasper is also a World Heritage Site: This also implies a responsibility to the rest of the world to preserve and maintain what values and species are here.*

*Parks knew what needed to be done to protect caribou some 30 years ago, and nothing whatsoever has been done for almost all of that time.*

*I am also a backcountry skier, and I understand the distress of the backcountry users; these closures will be very painful. I do, however, also understand the importance of what needs to be done, and I accept that with the privileges of recreating in a national park also come the responsibilities to preserve and protect it. I am only hoping that Parks Canada itself will now also come to recognize its own responsibilities and to stand firm on whatever measures are necessary to protect the caribou.*

*Our National Parks are not just for people to play in, as most people seem to believe, but for future generations to know that Canada's wildlife and other species are still alive and well. As a previous back-country skier I accept that there are a lot more people in the Parks than there are animals, who, unlike people, have few other places to go, and so should have priority for protection.*

*Distressed to hear some asking to have wolves killed in the park so that they can ski when and where they wish. There must be limitations to what can be done in a national park.*

*Balance: I know that as users we want access to everything, and to fully support the health of the ecosystem we should never venture into it. Those of course seem mutually exclusive - but somewhere in the middle there must be a sweet spot where we encourage and support the ecosystem while also allowing people to experience said ecosystem so those people can then be a part of the encouragement and support.*

*While we applaud efforts to help the caribou in the national parks I think we all know that the real reason for this species decline is the unabated industrial development of the adjacent boreal forest by the oil, gas, and coal industry.*

*I am fully prepared to restrict my use of the JNP backcountry conditional upon Parks Canada providing: enhanced funding for caribou monitoring and research, ensuring that the winter restriction is enforced, any proposal from Marmot Basin Ski Hill to expand into Whistler Creek is denied.*

# Proposed Adjustments to Winter Backcountry Use in Support of Caribou Conservation

Summary of questions and answers:

## **What is being done to capture the human impact of these closures?**

*Economic impact (Commercial backcountry lodges, rental equipment, etc); impact of taking away the reason many people live in or visit Jasper.*

Parks Canada hosted the two winter recreational user sessions, the outcome of which is being summarized in this document, in recognition that this particular stakeholder group would be directly impacted by the proposed adjustments to winter backcountry use in important caribou habitat. Parks Canada is also meeting with commercial operators in these areas as well as representatives from the Municipality of Jasper, the Jasper Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Jasper to discuss the proposed seasonal closures and how these may impact them. Parks Canada is using information from these meetings to compile recreational use data and analyze where changes may be made or alternative options offered.

## **What could you hear from us, from Canadians that would get you to change priorities to preserve recreational areas? Where is our specialist?**

As mentioned, Parks Canada held two workshops with regional winter recreational users. This was an opportunity to get feedback directly from the “specialists” - those of you who use these areas in winter; have cultural and historical connections to the areas, trails and cabins; and have long and diverse experiences of winter in Jasper National Park’s backcountry. The inventory, comments and suggestions will all be considered in decision making by Parks Canada.

In the winter of 2011/12, Canadians were given the opportunity to comment on the *Conservation Strategy for Southern Mountain Caribou in Canada’s National Parks* including some of the proposed actions to address the 5 key threats. The results of the survey conducted indicated that the majority of respondents were willing to adjust their recreational use of the mountain national parks in support of caribou conservation. More specifically, 90% indicated that they would support seasonal trail closures or the relocation of trails to limit recreational impacts in important caribou habitat. While this was discussed in the broad context of caribou conservation in the mountain national parks, the specific closures being proposed for Jasper National Park will be available for public comment prior to decisions being made, to ensure that all interested Canadians have an opportunity to provide input.

## **Why is Maligne being dealt with separately? If we are dealing with caribou habitat at the park level then all areas should be included.**

The Jasper National Park Management Plan contains broad direction for the Maligne Valley: to enhance the ability of visitors to connect with the area and update infrastructure where needed, while maintaining the area’s high conservation values and improving space and security for wildlife—with a focus on caribou conservation and grizzly bear habitat security. Given the complexity of interacting factors and considerations in the valley, a more detailed strategy is needed to focus Parks Canada’s implementation efforts. Parks Canada is currently preparing an Implementation Strategy that will propose actions and approaches to meet ecological and visitor objectives in both winter and summer. Opportunities to review and comment on the strategy will be provided later this spring or fall.

## **How was the Whistlers Creek area determined? Why doesn't it follow the Marmot Pass Area?**

The study area for the caribou risk assessment was determined through the development of the Marmot Basin Site Guidelines approved in 2008, a collaborative process that included public consultation. The study area includes Marmot Pass.

## **Why would the closures reopen on March 1st, right at a critical time where the snowpack begins to soften at lower elevations, where putting in a trail would make it easy for wolves to access terrain they would normally never get to in March? Why would you even take that chance just so a few select people can get their powder turns in?**

By late winter snowpack generally consolidates and wolves can easily travel on top of the snow. At that point packed trails offer no advantage. Snowpack is, of course, variable from year to year and the March 1st date represents a compromise between caribou conservation objectives and the opportunity for winter recreational use of these areas.

## **Are these closures just a way to address Parks Canada budget cuts?**

*Funding cuts - 6th threat to caribou? Will track-setting increase? Will Parks Canada do more work to open more areas? To open any new/alternate areas would require an influx of money - where will this come from?*

As very little funding is required to maintain JNP's winter backcountry offer, the proposed closures are not a way to address budget cuts. They are intended to address the threat of *facilitated predator access* to areas of important winter caribou habitat.

Parks Canada is committed to maintaining current winter opportunities in JNP for sightseeing, walking/hiking, cross-country skiing and other recreational pursuits by clearing and maintaining roads and trailheads, grooming trails, preparing snow reports, and maintaining the avalanche control program. Through the workshops, we have compiled an inventory of current and potential winter recreational use in JNP's backcountry. This information will be used to inform decision making by Parks Canada related to both caribou conservation and winter service offer, and future planning for JNP.

## **Are more people using trails now than 10/20/30 years ago?**

*Do you have recent figures for the numbers of back-country skiers and snowboarders using any of these areas at present?*

There is no evidence to suggest that winter backcountry use has increased significantly. While some overnight use can be captured through accommodation stats and backcountry permits, day use is difficult to track consistently. Some indications of use can be gauged by trailhead washroom use, parking capacity and visitor feedback, none of which seem to indicate a large increase in use.

## **How do you propose to enforce the closures and what are the consequences of being caught in a closed area?**

Any new seasonal area closures approved by the Superintendent for implementation will be enforceable under Sec. 36 of the National Parks General Regulations. During the specified closure period, violators would be charged a fine of up to a maximum of \$25,000.

Suggestions for changes to the proposed adjustments to winter backcountry use:

**The following is a compilation of suggestions and comments from the recreational users' sessions. While no answers are provided, this input will be used to inform decision making on the proposed seasonal closures.**

### **Adjustments to closure areas:**

*Adjust boundaries so that key ice climbs are not cut off.*

*Is Yellowhead Pass Trail included? Should preserve winter access to this historic trade route.*

*Choose 2 areas to close and see how that goes before closing all areas.*

*More closures up higher rather than closing off areas completely.*

*Shut down North Boundary and Brazeau areas.*

### **Can we keep these areas open?**

*Keep Mile 45 Burn open*

*Keep North half of skyline open, close road at Watchtower*

*Keep the Tonquin Valley open via the North access or by helicopter. (and keep the Cavell Rd closed to March 1 but allow earlier access via the North access or helicopter).*

*Keep these areas open: Bald Hills, Snow Bowl and Watchtower Basin - This is an historic area for ski touring, and is probably the most used by skiers in Jasper National Park. Furthermore, the caribou population there is probably beyond saving. Hopefully, the remnants of the herd may learn to stay to the south, in the Maligne Pass/Brazeau area, which could be closed.*

*Keep Whistler Creek Basin open - skiers, snow-boarders and staff from Marmot Basin are going to use it anyway, and it's a small area with no evidence of winter caribou use that I'm aware of. It is also an area of heavy skier use, historically, and easy access to pleasant alpine and sub-alpine ski touring terrain.*

*Please don't close any areas - we will miss them if they are closed.*

### **Adjustments to timing:**

*Have certain areas open earlier one year and then another area the next.*

*Have closures based on snow conditions, presence/absence of caribou and/or wolves.*

*Continue the partial closures you have in the Cavell-Tonquin Area (November to mid-February) until you have good evidence of its impact on the caribou population, then review it.*

*The proposed March 1 opening of the Cavell Road will seriously impact the groomed XC skiing offer since Feb, can be a meltdown disaster in the lower elevations.*

*March 1 date is far too late - miss Family Day weekend in February and people often ready to move on to Spring activities.*

*The Tonquin Feb. 15 opening date was very effective. We all respected that closure since it made sense. People tend to respect closures if they are reasonable and have alternatives to chose from.*

**Things to consider for new/alternate areas:**

*There are few (if any) alternatives for the proposed closure areas. Areas being considered for closures provide easy access to the alpine offering options throughout the season. There is nothing else comparable in the park.*

*We use some of the current areas because of existing facilities and infrastructure. Develop facilities that do not conflict with caribou habitat - series of huts, options for day/overnight/ weekend trips, replace existing far-flung facilities, open warden cabins to public bookings and use. Could allow some recreational user groups to erect and maintain basic backcountry shelters to take the pressure of PC for funding. Need options for 3 - 4 hours of skiing, huts or shelters for longer tours.*

*It's very important that both front country and back country be considered together when discussing winter recreational use. I believe that most winter recreationists use both the front and back country offer and perhaps by combining back country access restrictions with an augmented front country offer it would make the overall changes more palatable to some.*

*All fire roads (Signal, Geraldine, Palisades and Pyramid) could be brushed to aid in the skier/ snowshoe quest to get up high.*

*Elevation is absolutely crucial when talking skiing in this park. Good skiing is above 1500 m and in many areas takes too long to access this elevation in a day.*

*If you build a road to provide easy access to the Elysium Pass area, I wouldn't object to your proposed closures.*

*Where we ski depends on snow conditions, avalanche forecasts, weather, etc. Some alternatives may only be possible when all those factors align.*



**Other comments:**

*Will avalanche forecasting continue if these areas are closed? This is still needed for ice climbers. All this needs effective communication, including info centre year round with long hours and up to date website.*

*Closures will have an environmental impact: to access different areas will require driving greater distances, more fuel consumption, more potential for wildlife-vehicle collisions, etc.*

*Closures will concentrate use in open areas and in the valley - what impacts will that have?*

*Many of us filled with despair that huge tracts of this park will be closed forever based on evidence from dubious data and it will not make any difference in the caribou's survival.*

*To close down these areas is telling us all that we don't know the real answer, but just to be sure, we are going to close down all the places where people want to ski, and where the terrain is such that it allows skiers of all levels to enjoy the mountains.*

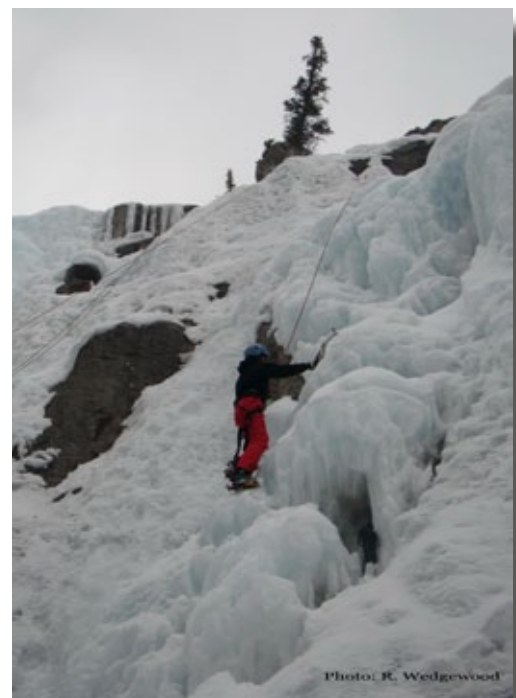
*If less people use the backcountry due to restrictions, closed trails or unmaintained trails then there will be less people who care about preserving the backcountry. This puts the backcountry in danger of development due to the smaller voice of the opposition. Things such as the nearby Cadomin mine could one day be expanded into Jasper if the boundaries are reduced due to lack of interest in preserving the backcountry.*

*There is still time for spring skiing (the best skiing of the year!) after the closure, and other areas remain unaffected altogether (e.g. Parker Ridge/Hilda/Nigel/Fryatt/Elysium etc). NIMBY in a National Park... who would have thought!*

*While I do not like to see large chunks of JNP's backcountry closed off to back-country skiers, in this case I believe the future of the caribou should have priority, particularly as their existence is so threatened elsewhere. It should be noted that these areas will be open by March 1, so the areas are not totally closed off.*

*These closures are meant to help a Species at Risk Act protected animal - this should be a priority in a national park.*

*We urge you to reconsider these proposed changes which are likely to do little to help the caribou and will deprive many of us who are among the parks strongest supporters of access to these areas.*





*I feel that Parks Canada has forgotten about Visitor Experience when there are plans to close all the areas to visitors to JNP. My duty to deliver positive Parks messages seems to get more difficult all the time.*

*With fewer services over the years, shut down of trails, neglect of campgrounds in the backcountry, doing away and cutting back of the warden service, at the same time ever increasing Park entry fees, what is there going to be left for the active outdoor visitors?*

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