



Environment
Canada

Environnement
Canada



© Mike Klaczek

How we considered comments

To assist with the comprehensive review of all of the comments, a public opinion research company was hired to provide a professional analysis, including a statistical breakdown of the submissions. Concerns were broadly categorized as: agreement/disagreement with the recovery strategy, mention of issues with habitat conservation, predator management, etc., and a detailed report was produced.

Environment Canada staff reviewed and analyzed 192 detailed submissions. From those, 975 points were identified and considered in the revisions to the recovery strategy.

What people have said on the proposed recovery strategy for boreal caribou

A summary of the engagement process, comments received and changes made

Background

The proposed recovery strategy for Woodland Caribou, Boreal population ("boreal caribou") was posted on the Species at Risk Public Registry on August 26, 2011, for a 60-day public comment period, as required by the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). This period was extended for an additional 120 days, as a result of Environment Canada's desire to consult Aboriginal communities prior to finalizing the recovery strategy. 265 Aboriginal communities that are located within and adjacent to the distribution of boreal caribou, were contacted to participate in meetings to comment on the proposed recovery strategy. The public comment period closed on February 22, 2012.

19,046 comments were received from Aboriginal communities and organizations, government, industry stakeholders, environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS), academia, and the public. The majority of these comments were received as copies of form letters initiated by ENGO campaigns. In addition, a petition was received, totaling 32,045 signatures. A total of 192 more detailed submissions were also received. As a point of comparison, the total number of comments received for all 71 recovery strategies posted on the Species at Risk Public Registry to date is 286, an average of 4 per recovery strategy.

Canada 

What people have said

The main comments of respondents, when all considered together, were (there is no order of priority):

- The recovery strategy needs revision as it appears to want to protect industrial development to the detriment of boreal caribou;
- Population and distribution objectives should not prioritize recovery of certain local populations;
- 60% probability of self-sustainability is problematic;
- Range delineation needs updating;
- The critical habitat concept is too prescriptive;
- A better definition of what constitutes disturbance is needed;
- The recovery strategy and the engagement process are an infringement on Aboriginal and treaty rights;
- Northern Saskatchewan's situation is unique, with high fire and very low anthropogenic disturbance;
- Efficacy of predator management is questionable;
- Management of boreal caribou should be done at the local and regional level;
- Pollution, noise and climate change are important threats;
- The socio-economic impacts should be taken into account.

How we changed the recovery strategy

The final recovery strategy is posted on the Species at Risk Public Registry (www.sararegistry.gc.ca). Here are the main changes that were made:

Population and distribution objectives

The recovery strategy now includes two population and distribution objectives.

The population and distribution objectives for boreal caribou are, to the extent possible, to:

- Maintain the current status of the 14 existing self-sustaining local populations; and
- Stabilize and achieve self-sustaining status for the 37 not self-sustaining local populations.

Achieving the population and distribution objectives would allow for local population levels sufficient to sustain traditional Aboriginal harvesting activities, consistent with existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

The time frame to maintain or regain self-sustaining status will vary. Reversing disturbances and land-use practices in highly disturbed ranges will take time, i.e. a number of decades. Population and habitat indicators will be used to measure progress toward recovery.

60% probability of self-sustainability

The probability for a local population to be self-sustaining has been kept at 60%. This probability of self-sustainability means that boreal caribou local population growth is stable or increasing. The 60% probability is a reasonable starting point providing a likely certainty of recovery, given the available information on boreal caribou at this time. A probability of 100% is ideal, however, unrealistic since 0% total disturbance is virtually impossible even without anthropogenic disturbances. It is important to emphasize that 60% is a minimum probability of self-sustainability; provincial and territorial jurisdictions responsible for wildlife management have the flexibility to target a higher probability.

Range delineation

Range delineations were updated based on new information made available by provincial and territorial jurisdictions: there are now 51 local populations. Further updates are expected as new information becomes available.



Critical habitat

Critical habitat definition has been updated as:

- the area within the boundary of each boreal caribou range that provides an overall ecological condition that will allow for an ongoing recruitment and retirement cycle of habitat, which maintains a perpetual state of a minimum of 65% of the area as undisturbed habitat; and
- biophysical attributes required by boreal caribou to carry out life processes.

Critical habitat is not identified in the Boreal Shield range located in northern Saskatchewan. More information is required to understand the relationship between disturbance and boreal caribou survival in ranges with high fire and very low anthropogenic disturbance. The recovery strategy includes a schedule of studies for population information to be collected in northern Saskatchewan, and for critical habitat to be identified by the end of 2016.

Definition of disturbance

The final recovery strategy now includes a definition of disturbed habitat as being habitat showing: i) anthropogenic disturbance visible on Landsat at a scale of 1:50,000, including habitat within a 500 m buffer of the anthropogenic disturbance; and/or ii) fire disturbance in the last 40 years, as identified in data from each provincial and territorial jurisdiction (without buffer). In addition, provinces and territories may have updated information and tools which may be used to identify when disturbed habitat returns to an undisturbed state.

Predator management

The selection of predator management would be in accordance with provincial/territorial jurisdictional policies and procedures and in line with provincial/territorial action plans that describe the mix of habitat and mortality management measures that may be required. Where necessary, predator and in some cases alternate prey management may be applied as interim management tools, in conjunction with other management approaches such as habitat restoration and management, to achieve boreal caribou local population growth; it should not put predators or alternate prey at risk.

Lead role of provinces and territories

The lead role of provinces and territories as land and wildlife managers for boreal caribou has been clarified. As a first step, provinces and territories will develop range plans. Range plans may be stand-alone documents, or part of other planning documents including action plans. Range plans will outline how the given range will be managed to maintain or attain a minimum of 65% undisturbed habitat over time. Specifically each range plan should reflect disturbance patterns on the landscape, as measured and updated by the provinces and territories, and outline measures and steps that will be taken



to manage the interaction between human disturbance and natural disturbance. The main purpose of a range plan is to outline how range-specific land and/or resource activities will be managed over space and time to ensure that critical habitat is protected from destruction. Range plans, consistent with the recovery strategy, will be used for the following:

- One factor considered by the Minister of the Environment in forming an opinion on whether provincial or territorial laws effectively protect critical habitat within each range;
- To inform reporting required under SARA on implementation and progress toward meeting the population and distribution objectives;
- To inform decisions related to environmental assessments, issuance of permits, and other approval processes.

Pollution and climate change

The threat assessment has been adjusted in the final recovery strategy, acknowledging that threats and their level of concern differ between regions and local populations. The level of concern for managing the effect of pollution on the recovery of boreal caribou remains low nationally.

Climate change is recognized as a threat in the final recovery strategy. The recovery strategy also recognizes that there are many uncertainties surrounding the impacts of climate change and how climate change may interact with other threats. It is acknowledged that climate change can result in habitat changes that favour deer and other prey species, which expand into boreal caribou range, increasing predator populations and predation of boreal caribou, and facilitating the spread of disease. It can also induce a northward shift in boreal forest composition and allow forest insects that cause tree mortality to expand their distribution (e.g. mountain pine beetle).

Socio-economic impacts

In accordance with SARA, an evaluation of the socio-economic costs and the benefits to be derived from its implementation will be done at the action plan stage.

Next steps

The next steps in boreal caribou recovery are the development of range plans and action plans. Environment Canada will continue working closely with the provinces and territories throughout the development and implementation of range plans and action plans. Aboriginal peoples, stakeholders and the public will be invited to participate in the process.

For more information

To find out more about boreal caribou recovery, please contact us at:

Environment Canada
Inquiry Centre
10 Wellington Street, 23rd Floor
Gatineau (Quebec)
Canada K1A 0H3
Telephone: 819-997-2800
Telephone (toll free):
1-800-668-6767
Fax: 819-994-1412
TTY: 819-994-0736
Email: enviroinfo@ec.gc.ca
Website: www.sararegistry.gc.ca

