
CANADIAN WILDLIFE BIOLOGY & MANAGEMENT



CWBM 2015: Volume 4, Number 2

ISSN: 1929–3100

Editorial

Boreal Woodland Caribou Habitat — More Field Work is Needed

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Since the classification of the boreal woodland caribou as a “Threatened Species” in 2002, and the publication of Environment Canada’s Recovery Strategy in 2012, many wildlife researchers and managers became involved in wolf predation studies, caribou population modelling, and general range assessment. Although habitat loss and degradation is the primary factor affecting the persistence of the species, relatively little field work has been conducted on the habitats used seasonally by the boreal caribou populations of different ecozones. Accordingly, I must admit that it was difficult to recruit contributions from scientists with true field experience and new datasets. This Canadian Wildlife Biology & Management issue represents well the current status of accessible research work on caribou habitat. It is a cross-section of habitat projects that are presently being conducted on some boreal caribou populations. There is an obvious lack of papers on habitat studies, habitat conservation and restoration programs, and effective recovery measures. In some cases, work is currently being conducted but it is either preliminary in nature or it did not survive peer-review scrutiny. In other cases, some scientists

prefer to share their data only with a ‘select group of scientists’ or ‘stakeholder committees’. The recovery of the boreal woodland caribou is a highly political issue with major socio-economic consequences. However, as this CWBM issue shows, there is a need to revise Environment Canada’s Recovery Strategy. Not all disturbances cause habitat avoidance by caribou; and not all contiguous black spruce forests meet the habitat needs of the species. We should no longer postpone the implementation of habitat conservation programs with the excuse that some caribou populations are presumably unsustainable, or their current range is highly fragmented and it may take another 40 years to bring back large intact forests. Caribou will persist if, and only if, we act now by conserving and further improving their habitats, and eliminating or at least minimizing habitat loss and alteration caused by industry. I hope that this CWBM issue will motivate recovery teams and government agencies to implement effective habitat conservation programs, and generate some interest in newcomers interested in caribou research and conservation to conduct habitat field work and publish their findings.