

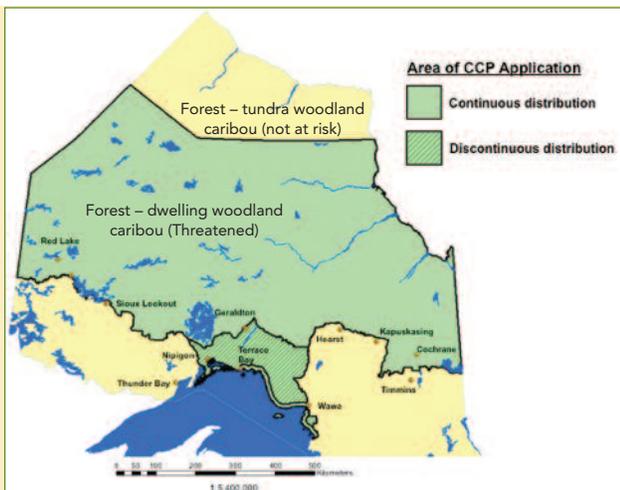
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Ontario's Woodland Caribou Conservation Plan

Ontario's forest-dwelling woodland caribou are native to the province's northern forests, and are an important indicator of the health of the boreal forest ecosystem on which they rely. These caribou were once widespread in Ontario; however, since the late 1800's, more than 40 per cent of the province's caribou range has been lost due to human caused disturbances to habitat and from an increase in predation and disease.

Forest-dwelling woodland caribou were assessed by the Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario (COSSARO) and are now listed as threatened in Ontario under the Endangered Species Act.

Ontario has two different "ecotypes" of woodland caribou, the forest-dwelling and the forest tundra, based upon their different habitat use and migratory behaviour. Since forest-tundra caribou occur further north, they have not experienced the same degree of overlap with human development and disturbance and are currently not considered not at risk.



Woodland caribou ecotype zones

After substantial public and stakeholder consultation, the Caribou Conservation Plan was released by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources in 2009.

This plan outlines policy direction on actions Ontario is taking to support the conservation and recovery of woodland caribou. The goal of the plan is to maintain self-sustaining populations of forest-dwelling woodland caribou where they currently exist, improve the quality of their habitat and help caribou return to previously occupied areas.



Photo: Ted Armstrong

Key Elements

The plan includes key principles which guide its implementation including an 'adaptive management' framework. With this approach, the latest science and knowledge is continually updated and reviewed and then applied to improve caribou conservation activities.

The caribou conservation plan includes eight key elements that are considered vital to the overall recovery of caribou in Ontario.

1. Enhance Caribou Science: Research and Monitoring

Ontario has committed to undertake long-term research of caribou in Ontario, focusing on the following areas:

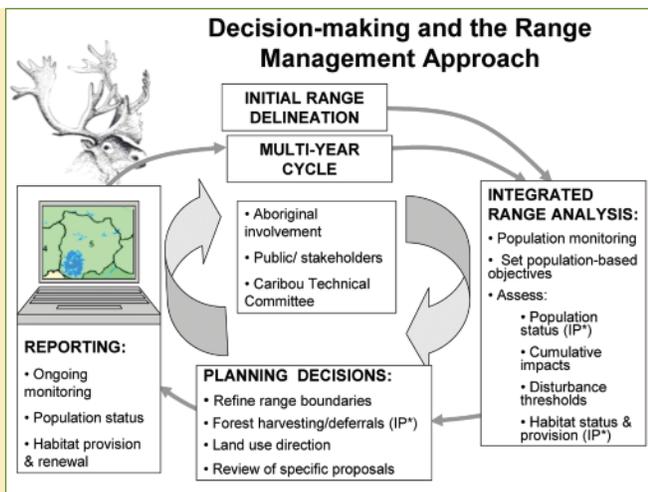
- Human-caused disturbances
- Natural-caused disturbances
- Predation
- Habitat quantity
- Re-occupancy of previously logged areas by caribou

This leading edge research is being conducted in partnership with academic institutions and industry organizations.¹ Key research priorities include:

- Evaluating how caribou respond to human-caused and natural disturbances, including changes in the wildlife (predator-prey) community;
- Determining the limit of cumulative effects beyond which caribou will not occupy a landscape²; and
- Determining what factors drive changes in caribou populations such as birth and death rates, and by immigration and emigration in these landscapes.

Cumulative effects are the additive effect of individual habitat disturbances that, when combined together, cause significant change to landscape-level ecological functions in a particular geographic area.

A provincial caribou monitoring program has started, and a monitoring plan is being developed. A provincial caribou database for both current and historic data is already in place. In addition, a Provincial Caribou Technical Committee has been established to provide independent scientific and technical advice and expertise on the implementation caribou conservation measures.

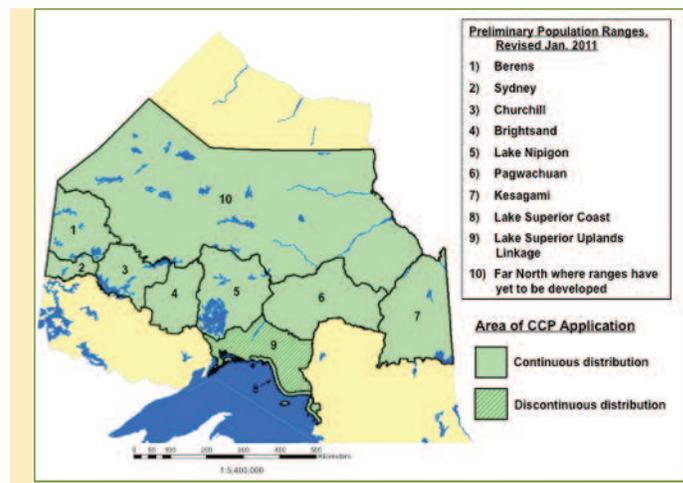


2. Adopt a Range Management Approach

Range management means managing caribou populations across Ontario by managing specific geographic areas important to the continued presence of caribou.

Because range management is one of the primary approaches for decision-making, Ontario's recovery actions in Ontario will be consistent across caribou distribution, and management decisions will be tailored to each individual range, its unique characteristics and range condition.

Following the release of the plan in 2009, the number and boundaries of the preliminary ranges were adjusted based on new information. However, boundaries for ranges to the north will be established as new information is received.



Ranges will be assessed on a rotating basis, with habitat and caribou populations of one or two of the ranges assessed each year. Individual ranges will be re-assessed on a regular basis through aerial surveys, collaring and landscape analysis tools. This information will help guide decisions on caribou habitat management.

1. Including the Centre for Northern Ecosystem Research (CNFER), the Forest Ecosystem Co-op, the University of Guelph and the Canadian Forestry Service
2. Rodgers et al., 2007]

3. Improve Planning

Parks, protected lands and the Far North are important contributors to caribou habitat. Thus, considerations must be made for caribou over the wide range of resource and land-use activities on Crown land. How caribou use the landscape will be important an important consideration in the establishment, expansion and management of protected areas.

The Ontario government initiated consultations on an approach to caribou habitat regulation in winter 2011 to protect caribou habitat.

Forest management plans will include provisions for caribou and ensure sufficient habitat and the renewal of that habitat for future caribou populations. This will be managed by way of 'dynamic caribou habitat schedules' which ensure sufficient quality and quantity of caribou habitat within forests that are also being managed for forest products.

To ensure sufficient future habitat is available, a 'caribou insurance policy' is being implemented. This policy requires access into new areas of harvest meet three conditions: a sufficient amount of habitat, successful habitat renewal and viable caribou population status and provides greater certainty for renewed caribou habitat in areas licensed for forest.

Assessing cumulative effects to the range level is an important basis for decision-making and a screening tool that assesses implications of proposed developments within caribou habitat will be completed in 2011.



Photo: Tim Timmermann



Photo: Ted Armstrong

4. Enhance Caribou Management

Existing and future caribou habitat needs will be considered in forest management practices. The plan includes an emphasis on silviculture to ensure harvested forests within caribou ranges are renewed. Forest management and caribou conservation objectives are usually with each other.

5. Managing the Entire Wildlife Community

Caribou recovery actions consider the management of the broader wildlife community, in particular the management of predators (e.g. gray wolves and black bears) and other members of the deer family that also support predators (e.g. moose, white-tailed deer). Habitat condition, size of deer and moose populations, predation all impact the health of caribou populations. The movement of caribou from areas of healthy caribou populations to areas of stressed and isolated caribou populations is also being reviewed.

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Photo: Lee Gerrish

6. Focus on Geographic Priority Areas

The plan places a priority on the caribou populations most at-risk, which are typically along the southern boundary of the area of continuous distribution. Immediate recovery actions will focus where the threats are most significant, although many actions will apply across all areas where caribou live.

The plan recognizes areas of both continuous and discontinuous distribution in Ontario. The area of continuous distribution reflects the area where caribou live now, where they can be expected to live in the future as habitat becomes suitable, and where caribou can freely move and intermingle. The area of discontinuous distribution is the area where caribou live in isolated populations or may occur only on a temporary basis. Caribou movement through this area between areas of continuous distribution can be important to improve the long-term prospects for caribou.

7. Improve Outreach and Stewardship

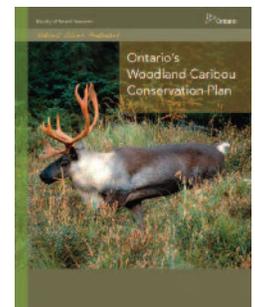
Improved public engagement, outreach, approaches and products, for public and stakeholders are being developed, including factsheets, web material and technical report summaries and best management practices for industry groups.

A State of the Woodland Caribou Resource report will be created by 2014 to outline the state of the provincial caribou population and progress in achieving the goal of recovery.

8. Integrate Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge

Efforts are underway to increase the availability and use of aboriginal traditional knowledge to support caribou recovery. This includes the need to work with Aboriginal peoples to increase mutual knowledge and identify opportunities for shared research and recovery actions for caribou.

To view the plan in full, please read the complete Ontario's Caribou Conservation Plan.



For additional information:

Visit the species at risk website at

ontario.ca/speciesatrisk

Contact your MNR district office

Contact the Natural Resources Information Centre

1-800-667-1940

TTY 1-866-686-6072

mnr.nric.mnr@ontario.ca

ontario.ca/mnr