



Jonathan Wilkinson

NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

May 19, 2017

A Canadian icon under threat

You may have a caribou in your pocket.

Our 25 cent coins have been graced by this iconic symbol of Canada's natural heritage since 1936 - and it's about as close to a caribou as most of us in North Vancouver will ever get. But hold on.

These reclusive and threatened animals are about to emerge into the forefront of public debate in BC and across the country as a concrete example of how we collectively can ensure that economic progress and environmental sustainability go hand in hand.

Boreal woodland caribou are listed as "threatened" under the federal Species at Risk Act. This means their population is in decline and, absent thoughtful action, they are - in several areas of the country - on the road to extinction. Scientific evidence irrefutably points to loss of habitat as the primary cause.

In 2012, the federal and provincial governments developed a Boreal Woodland Caribou Recovery Strategy. It directed provinces to develop habitat range plans for Canada's 51 caribou herds by October of this year.

These Recovery Strategy plans must detail how each province intends to manage boreal caribou habitat with the goal being that, over time, at least 65 per cent of each range is either maintained or restored to undisturbed condition.

BC's challenge

In British Columbia, this is going to be a challenge no one should underestimate.

BC is home to five Boreal caribou ranges more or less adjacent to each other in the Fort Nelson area. The Peace River District has been the focus of significant economic development in recent years - particularly oil and gas exploration and development. The total undisturbed habitat in the five Boreal ranges presently averages just 30-35 per cent - whereas the threshold under the Species at Risk Act is 65 per cent.

Southern Mountain Caribou herds in the south-eastern part of the province are also under pressure.

Provinces have primary responsibility for the management of species at risk on non-federal lands. It is their job to work with industry, indigenous

communities, environmental organizations and local municipalities to develop detailed action plans relating to caribou protection.

However, under the federal Species at Risk Act, if appropriate protection is not put into place by a province or territory or if there is not a plan for such protection to be put into place over a reasonable timeframe, the federal government has a legal obligation to consider providing such protection directly.

Deadline approaching

Over the past year, with the October 2017 deadline for reporting on progress approaching, the federal government has been actively working to encourage and support provincial and territorial governments in developing their action plans. I have travelled to most of the provinces involved to discuss caribou habitat planning with provincial Ministers and stakeholders in my capacity as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

It's complex and challenging - and will require significant creativity, flexibility, good will and compromise amongst all stakeholders to drive towards solutions that are perhaps not perfect from everyone's perspective but can be acceptable to all.

Minister of the Environment and Climate Change Catherine McKenna and I, along with other members of government are focused intently on these files. By being thoughtful, creative and resolute in approach, we are committed to working with the provinces and stakeholders to find paths that lead to long term sustainability of Canadian caribou, and other species at risk, in the context of a growing economy.

Finding ways in which we can constructively and creatively work to ensure that economic progress and environmental sustainability go hand in hand is critically important to Canadians and to this federal government. It is something that is increasingly a touchstone of concern in the modern world, in an era where climate change is a reality and where biodiversity is increasingly at risk around the globe.

CONTACT INFO:

CONSTITUENCY OFFICE: 102 West 3rd Street, North Vancouver
 EMAIL: Jonathan.Wilkinson@parl.gc.ca | TEL: 604-775-6333