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Woodland Caribou

Boreal Population

Scientific Name: *Rangifer tarandus caribou*

Taxonomy: Mammal

Range: Yukon, Northwest Territories, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador

Last COSEWIC Assessment: Threatened Status

SARA Status: Schedule 1, Threatened

Government of Alberta Status: Threatened

Fact Sheet

Information adapted from:

Species at Risk Public Registry (www.sararegistry.gc.ca/species/speciesDetails_e.cfm?sid=636)

Appearance

Caribou, ancient members of the deer family (Cervidae), are one of Canada's most widely distributed large mammals. Caribou are unique among Cervids in that both sexes have antlers.

The Woodland Caribou's coat is mostly brown in summer (more grey in winter), but the neck, mane, shoulder stripe, underbelly, tail underside and patch just above each hoof are creamy white. The caribou is 1.0 to 1.2 m high at the shoulder, and mature individuals weigh 110 to 210 kg. The average weight for bulls is 180 kg; for cows it is 135 kg.

The caribou's coat consists of a fine crimped under-fur with a thick layer of guard hairs on top. The guard hairs are hollow (like straws), and the air trapped inside acts as insulation to keep in the caribou's body heat.

Distribution

Caribou are classified by ecotype (where they occur and how they behave) for their management and conservation. There are three major types of caribou in Canada: Peary, Barren-ground, and Woodland. Woodland Caribou, the largest and darkest-coloured are irregularly distributed

throughout our boreal forest and mountains from the island of Newfoundland to British Columbia.

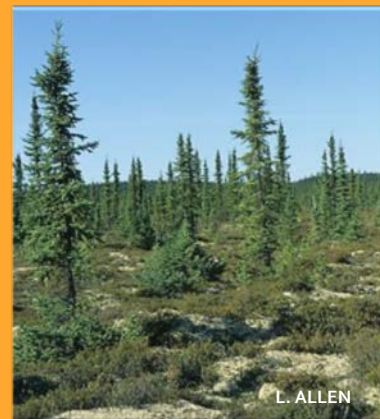
Recent research efforts have increased the number of known populations to more than 64, and this number is expected to rise further as more individuals are radio-collared and distributions are delineated. Population surveys prior to 2002 estimate there are 33,000 forest-dwelling caribou in the Boreal population — 18% of the total for Canada.

Threats

The following factors all contribute to the decline of the caribou:

- habitat destruction
- fragmentation of habitat
- disturbance by humans (including construction of roads and pipelines, agriculture, mines, forestry)
- predation (by wolves, coyotes, and bears)
- hunting
- weather and climate change.

Habitat



albertawilderness.ca/caribou-mountains-features

In winter, Woodland Caribou use mature and old-growth coniferous forests that contain large quantities of terrestrial and arboreal (tree-inhabiting) lichens. These forests are generally associated with marshes, bogs, lakes, and rivers.

In summer, the caribou occasionally feed in young stands, after fire or logging.

Many subpopulations of the Woodland Caribou Boreal population show a preference for peatlands; they generally avoid clear cuts, shrub-rich habitat and aspen-poplar dominated sites. The most common tree species in preferred habitats are Black Spruce, White Spruce, and Tamarack.