

## Caribou Protection Plan Guidelines and Caribou Calving Information

Caribou Protection Plan – Integrated Resource Management Planning Division

The submission of a Caribou Protection Plan (CPP) to Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD) is a pre-requisite for exploration and construction activities within zones identified on the ESRD caribou landuse referral map and excluded from the scope of the Enhanced Approval Process (EAP).

The CPP will include all new exploration and construction activities planned for the winter season. If exploration and construction activities are planned for the summer season they may be included in the same CPP, or submitted as a separate CPP prior to the application and approval of summertime exploration and construction activities.

- Winter season CPPs must be submitted to the appropriate Area field office by October 15th of each year. Upon receipt, the reviewing officer will assign an approval number within two weeks, or return the plan to the submitting company with an explanation of deficiencies to be addressed.
- Amendments with additional information are accepted until November 30th of each year.
- An approved CPP is valid for one year, from October 15th to October 14th of the following year.
- An approved summer season CPP is valid from the date submitted until October 14th of the same year.

The expectations for CPP content are described below. ESRD staff review the CPPs to ensure that companies have considered impacts to caribou in all aspects of operational planning.

At a minimum, the CPP must include:

- **CPP Overview**

The CPP submission will describe how the mitigation strategies a company is implementing will contribute to the following desired outcomes for caribou habitat. The desired outcomes are:

- Reducing all sources of human-caused direct mortality associated with anthropogenic features (i.e. hunting, poaching, and vehicle collision).
- Reducing excessive predator-caused mortality for both calves and adults (i.e. related to predator abundance, distribution, ease of travel, and hunting success).
- Reducing habitat loss (i.e. due to habitat change or conversion).
  - Avoiding habitat changes which negatively affect caribou population growth.
  - Avoiding development within key habitats (local and landscape scales) and key seasons.

- Increasing harmonization with the forest industry operating ground rules and long-term spatial forest harvesting plans.
- Reducing the partial avoidance (i.e. reduced use) that caribou demonstrate in relation to industrial features.
- Reducing potential increases in the distribution and productivity of other prey species.
- **Description of Proposed Work**

The CPP submission will include a summary of the new construction and exploration work to be completed for all activities under Mineral Surface Lease (MSL), License of Occupation (LOC), Pipeline Lease Agreement (PLA), Geophysical Exploration (GEO), and active timber dispositions. This summary of work will include:

- Annual Operating Plans and contingency cutblocks
- Planned drilling locations identified by legal location
- Contingent drilling locations identified by legal location
- Proposed access highlighting type of road to be built, routing and term
- Proposed pipeline routing identified by legal locations for the beginning and end of the pipeline
- Proposed location of the geophysical lines for all program types (i.e. 2, 3 and 4 (time lapse) dimensional)
- **Proposed Schedule of Work**

The CPP submission will include a schedule of work that indicates the start date and completion date for each phase of the planned activity, including final clean-up.

If a single CPP is submitted, then planned construction and exploration activities for all seasons will be included in the schedule. If a separate CPP will be submitted for summer activities then the winter season CPP does not need to include the summer activities.

- **Map of Proposed Activities**

The CPP requires a digital submission of all map data by October 15th. Following completion of exploration and construction activities a digital submission of an “as built” map is required by June 15th.

The data is used in the review of applications to co-ordinate access and evaluate for potentially conflicting activities in order to minimize disturbance level and impacts to caribou. All data is confidential while in the ESRD’s possession.

The digital map of proposed activities must identify the following:

- Caribou range boundary
- Current/existing infrastructure (wells, roads, pipelines, camps, powerlines, etc)
- Proposed drilling locations
- Proposed access routes
- Proposed campsites

- Proposed pipelines
- Cutblocks and log storage areas
- **Caribou Calving Information**
  - Caribou cows move off on their own during April in preparation for calving. Aerial flights on collared animals have shown once they find a suitable area they then move very little. Results demonstrate the possibility of some degree of fidelity to calving locations by individual cows in some ranges. Calves are typically born through the first three weeks of May, with some calving extending into the end of May or even the first week of June.
  - Once calves are born, collared cows generally remain in the same location, moving very little over the next few weeks. Often, when a cow moved shortly after calving, she was found without a calf.<sup>1</sup>
  - Every day that the calves are allowed to grow and develop undisturbed by humans and predators increases the likelihood of their survival to recruitment age (1 year old).
  - "A common temporal pattern shown in the first year is for caribou calf mortality to be highest in the first 30 days after birth."<sup>2</sup>
  - "Variability in juvenile survival plays a critical role in determining population dynamics of ...Woodland Caribou"<sup>3</sup>
  - Fisheries and wildlife biologists suggest 'the later the better' as the philosophy for industrial activity in caribou zones during non-frozen ground conditions. In light of caribou calving and calf survival dynamics, there should be no activity approved until mid July. ESRD recommends a timing restriction of Feb. 15th to July 15th to reduce impacts to pregnant cows and their calves. Companies should plan for an early entry date, and an early exit date this is encouraged.
  - For the timber industry's spring planting work, special consideration for earlier entry may be granted, following discussion with ESRD field staff. It is understood that the June-July window provides more favourable conditions for seedling survival.
  - The understanding should exist that work during non-frozen ground conditions is carried out with no graded access being developed. All temporary access must be removed upon completion of the proposed activities and prior to snowfall. There should be no greater footprint or disturbance created by summer activities than there is by equivalent winter operations. As well, all proposed activities in caribou range, regardless of time of year, must be covered under an approved caribou protection plan prior to commencement.
  - Where all weather roads have been approved for production purposes, that use may continue, provided use is halted while adverse ground conditions prevail.
  - ESRD field staff that deal with requests for summer entry into caribou range are encouraged to contact their fisheries and wildlife counterparts and discuss the proposed activities, with all ESRD staff striving for uniformity of approval conditions.

<sup>1</sup> Alberta Fish & Wildlife Division, unpublished data.

<sup>2,3</sup> Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and Alberta Conservation Association. 2010. Status of the Woodland Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*) in Alberta: Update 2010. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. Wildlife Status Report No. 30 (Update 2010). Edmonton, AB. 88pp.