



**Management of Woodland Caribou
(*Rangifer tarandus caribou*) Habitat Within
Canfor's Grande Prairie FMA 9900037**

A Timeline




Revised November 4, 2008

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Cover Photo: Kent Brown
Woodland caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*)

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1. Introduction

In Alberta, woodland caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) have a legal designation of Threatened¹ under the provincial Wildlife Act, and nationally across Canada under the Federal Species at Risk Act (SARA)². In compliance with SARA, and as directed by the Government of Alberta (GoA), the Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Team developed the *Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan 2004/05 – 2013/14* (GoA, 2005). The recovery plan was developed at a strategic level and it calls for local implementation plans to be completed within 5 areas of the province. The West Central Alberta Caribou Landscape Planning Team prepared the *West Central Alberta Caribou Landscape Plan* (WCACLPT, 2008) and submitted it to the Alberta Caribou Committee (ACC) for consideration. ACC reviewed the WCACL plan and submitted a report to the Deputy Minister (July 10, 2008) recommending a landscape plan for caribou ranges in west central Alberta, with a focus on woodland caribou recovery (ACCGB, 2008).

Two ecotypes of woodland caribou are found in west central Alberta. The Little Smoky herd is the lone boreal ecotype and it is characterized as year-around forest dwelling and non-migratory. The remainder of the herds (5) are classified as the mountain ecotype (Narraway, Redrock-Prairie Creek, A La Peche, South Jasper and North Banff herds)³ (WCACLPT, 2008).

In west central Alberta, woodland caribou are typically associated with large contiguous stands of mature (i.e. > 80 years old) coniferous forest. On provincially administered lands, these types of landscapes have been changing through timber harvest, oil and gas development and fire suppression. The progressive alteration of these large contiguous coniferous forests to a younger, more fragmented forest and climate conditions, short and long term are thought to have facilitated an increase in primary prey species other than woodland caribou (e.g. moose, elk and deer). In addition, populations of moose, elk and deer have increased over the last 50 years to meet management objectives for hunting. These changes have resulted in higher densities of wolves, particularly in areas immediately adjacent to caribou range. These increased densities of wolves typically result in increase mortality of woodland caribou to a point where some herds may disappear in the near future and the outlook for others is questionable (ACCGB, 2008).

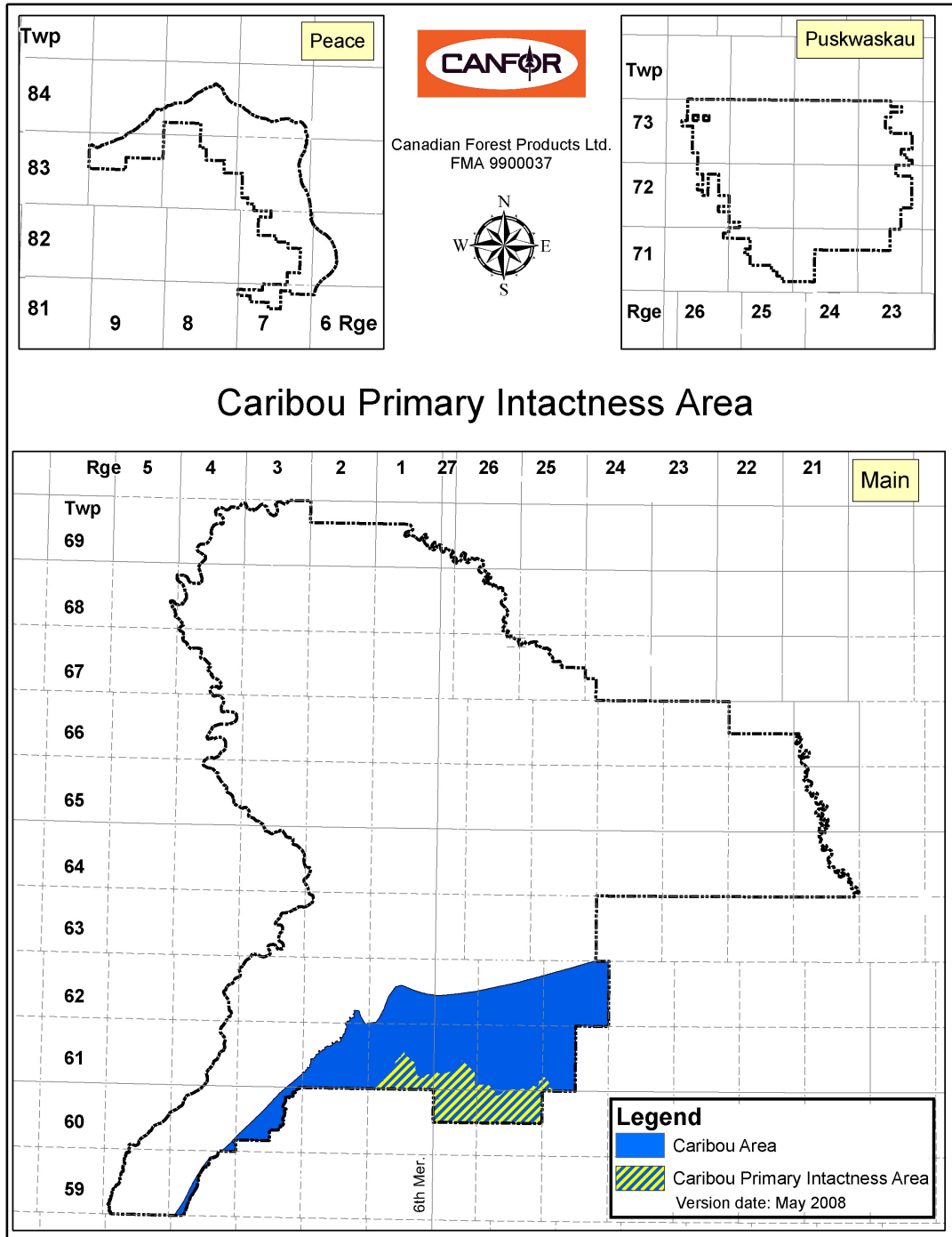
There are portions of two (2) woodland caribou ranges within the Canadian Forest Products Ltd. (Canfor) Forest Management Agreement (FMA) area: A La Peche and Little Smoky (Figure 1). Their total combined ranges comprise 466,373 ha (A La Peche 198,578 ha and Little Smoky 267,735). Approximately 70,225 ha (15%) of the combined ranges are located within the FMA area.

¹ In 2001 the Scientific Subcommittee of the Alberta Endangered Species Conservation Committee noted that woodland caribou in Alberta might be near to qualifying for *Endangered* status. The status of woodland caribou in Alberta will be reassessed in 2008 (WCACLPT, 2008).

² Southern mountain and boreal populations of woodland caribou.

³ Narraway, Redrock-Prairie Creek and A La Peche herds migrate between forested winter range and sub-alpine/ alpine summer range either locally, or over long (~80 km) distances. The South Jasper and North Banff herds migrate short distances elevationally throughout the year, but stay close to alpine areas (WCACLPT, 2008).

Figure 1. Caribou Area and Caribou Primary Intactness Area



2. Management of Woodland Caribou Habitat within Canfor's FMA 9900037

The following is a chronology of Canfor's participation in caribou initiatives undertaken to maintain caribou habitat within its FMA area:

- **1991** Canfor and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development work together to define caribou ranges within the FMA area;
- **1993** Canfor joins the West Central Alberta Caribou Standing Committee (WCACSC). The mandate of the Committee, formed in 1992, is to provide a forum for multi-stakeholder communication, and decision making with regard to industrial land-use guidelines that would help conserve caribou in west central Alberta; Pg 103 DFMP
- **1996** The WCACSC establishes "*Operating Guidelines for Industrial Activity on Caribou Ranges*". Canfor implements the guidelines to minimize 'intrusions' into the Caribou Area; Pg 107 DFMP
- **1997** Industrial Forestry Services Ltd. prepares a report for Canfor titled, "An Overview of Research, Monitoring, and Inventory Requirements for Management of the Canfor Alberta Operations Portion of the Little Smoky Caribou Herd Range". The document outlines Canfor's immediate management information needs:

 - What is caribou habitat?
 - How much caribou habitat is there?
 - How much habitat do the caribou need?
 - How many caribou are there?
 - How fast is the habitat changing so that it is no longer habitat?
 - What actions can Canfor take to affect the rate of change of caribou habitat in a way that will be beneficial to the caribou? IFS, 1997

Dr. Warren Eastland, a caribou expert with Industrial Forestry Services Ltd., conducts a presentation for the Forest Management Advisory Committee to increase their knowledge of caribou and its habitat requirements; Pg 376 DFMP

Canfor's Track Monitoring Program is established to determine the habitat use by caribou, wolf, deer and moose (Brown, 2000). The program is a periodic approximate measure of caribou distribution within the Little Smoky range. Copies of the reports are provided to Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and West Central Alberta

Caribou Standing Committee. With the ability to overlay track surveys on AVI, Canfor uses the tracking data for operational planning. The data is also used to identify ranges and the type of stands that are being utilized and, in conjunction with other research, will assist in development of the Company's caribou habitat constraints;

Pg 106 DFMP

- **1998** WCACSC initiates a five (5) year caribou research project (1998 to 2003), with Canfor as one of the sponsoring companies;

Pg 103 DFMP
- **1999** Consultation with members of the Forest Management Advisory Committee (FMAC) and Forest Ecosystem Management Task Force (FEMTF)⁴ results in the selection of seven (7) indicator species for the FMA area, including woodland caribou;

Pg 97 DFMP
- **2001** Canfor commences participation in the Caribou Range Restoration Program (CRRP) initiated by WCACSC. The program is designed to modify the characteristics of existing linear disturbances (roads, seismic lines, and pipelines) to lessen and eventually eliminate their detrimental effects on woodland caribou and other species. A variety of techniques, such as scarification, grade removal, re-contouring, and reforestation, are used to speed the recovery of linear disturbances;

Canfor reforests ten (10) kilometers (10 ha) of linear corridors in the Caribou Area using approximately 6,000 seedlings.

Engel, 2001
- **2002** Canfor reforests approximately forty-seven (47) km of seismic line requiring approximately 60,000 seedlings.

Engel, 2001
- **2003** Canfor applies habitat cover constraints within the *Detailed Forest Management Plan* (Canfor, 2003) to forested stands identified within the Caribou Area as follows:

 - No more than 20% of the area can be in pioneer or young seral condition;
 - No less than 20% of the area can be in old seral stage;
 - Maximum opening size of 1,000 ha; and
 - 30 year green-up.

Pg 106 DFMP

⁴ The role of the Forest Ecosystem Management Task Force was to serve as a scientific technical group to Canadian Forest Products Ltd. in the development of the 1999 Detailed Management Plan. The Task Force provided guidance to Canfor to help ensure that the Detailed Management Plan reflected a sound and practical approach to forest ecosystem management.

Canfor monitors the habitat conditions in the Caribou Area to ensure the target percentage of pioneer or young and old seral stages are achieved. The acceptable variance is to have no more than 25% of the area in pioneer/young seral condition and no less than 15% of the area in the old seral condition;

Table 1 indicates the percentages of old seral stage over the planning horizon.

Preliminary model runs indicate, and subsequent analysis confirm, that the old seral class could support some harvesting without delaying the time that it takes to recover to the lower limit of the DFMP prescribed range (15%). The 20% old seral stage requirement will be achieved by 2021;

Canfor and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) recognize that the habitat constraints presented within the DFMP are an interim step for provision of long-term caribou habitat until such time that 'new' caribou habitat constraints are developed;

Pg 385 DFMP

Canfor establishes *Objective 9* to identify ranges and type of stands that are being utilized by woodland caribou to assist in development of a strategy compatible with West Central Alberta Caribou Standing Committee objectives. The data collected under the Caribou Research Project, currently being conducted by WCACSC, will provide assistance to Canfor in the continuing development of a caribou management strategy.

Pg 385 DFMP

- **2004** Canfor and ASRD work cooperatively to develop a caribou habitat assessment that evaluates the current caribou management strategies;

Pg 385 DFMP

Alberta Newsprint Company (ANC), Weldwood of Canada Ltd., Weyerhaeuser Company Limited, and Canfor recognize that management efforts in one portion of the range have implications for the entire range. The four companies have been working cooperatively to assess the impact of their operations on caribou habitat. In 2004, they collaborated to develop an initial review of caribou habitat quality, and an assessment of the current influence of habitat on caribou population growth within the Little Smoky/ A La Peche caribou ranges using forest cover, cutblocks, and base features information. Project methodology included development of maps of current caribou habitat quality and land use features for 2003 and also projected habitat quality for the periods 2008, 2013, 2018, and 2023;

The Forestry Corp, 2004

To meet CSA requirements, Canfor initiates an independent project to assess habitat quality (HQ) and effectiveness (HE) for the Caribou Area within its FMA area. The objective of this project is to incorporate

HQ/ HE metrics into the timber supply analysis for its FMA area to evaluate the potential impact of alternative strategies for caribou habitat management on timber supply. Using 1997 as a base year, HQ/ HE was examined for the years 1999, 2009, 2019, 2049, 2099 and 2199. The decision rules and assumptions for calculating habitat quality were consistent with those used in the assessments conducted by The Forestry Corp (2004);

Miehm, 2004

Canfor initiated an evaluation of the Boreal Caribou Committee (BCC) caribou habitat planning target for the Little Smoky range (BCC, 2003 and McLoughlin *et al*, 2004) wherein the multiple regression model contained in the manuscript were applied to the Caribou Area. The results are presented to ASRD for review;

The Caribou Range Restoration Program (CRRP) and Canfor initiate a project to test the effects that site preparation techniques have on limiting the use of linear disturbance areas by caribou predators and alternate prey species. It tests the effect that tree falling, when done densely enough, has on predator and alternate prey movement.

CRRP, 2004

- **2005** Canfor is committed to identifying management strategies and silvicultural tactics for retention, reestablishment and regeneration of terrestrial lichens in the Caribou Area. The Company and ASRD work cooperatively to review information, identify issues and determine the appropriate courses of action;

Pg 146 DFMP

Canfor and nine other forestry and energy sector companies and one Aboriginal community formed the Caribou Landscape Management Association to develop and implement a plan to ensure the long-term conservation of the Little Smoky and A La Peche caribou herds. The Association's efforts focus on:

- Cooperating to reduce the future industrial footprint in Caribou habitat;
- Reclaiming the industrial footprint to restore caribou habitat,
- Supporting applied research to increase knowledge about caribou and caribou habitat for the purpose of conservation; and
- Partnering and supporting Alberta government initiatives to manage caribou recovery through the *Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan*.

Thorp, 2005

Canfor provides financial support for the Suncor Energy Inc. and ConocoPhillips *Little Smoky Caribou Calf Survival Enhancement Project*;

**Suncor *et al*,
2005**

which provides a means to have an immediate positive impact on the continued survival of the Little Smoky herd while other longer-term approaches are implemented. The program provides an opportunity to obtain important and accurate information on calf survival during the first weeks and months following calving;

Canfor takes a precautionary approach to management of caribou by deferring harvesting and road construction within the Caribou Area for two years (May 1, 2005 – Apr. 31, 2007);

Stephenson,
2005

Canfor and Suncor Energy Inc. (Suncor) enter into the first ever agreement to establish an effective and efficient relationship to work together at the planning and operational level and to minimize or reduce the ecological footprint on the forested landbase within Canfor's Forest Management Area.

Stephenson,
2005a

- **2006** Canfor provides in kind support for Suncor's, *Little Smoky Caribou Habitat Restoration Pilot Project* by providing 600,000+ coniferous seedlings for the 2005/ 06 Work Plan.

Suncor et al
2006

Canfor provides financial support and data for the Caribou Landscape Management Association's Caribou Adaptive Management Plan. This project will provide a forest habitat management framework as the basis of an adaptive management plan for the west-central woodland caribou herds. The objective is to develop the plan in a cooperative and integrative atmosphere where government, forest industry, and oil and gas industry feed into one common plan.

Thorp et al,
2006

Canfor provides support for the CLMA⁵ Long-Term Access Plan (LTAP). The objective is to plan the overall long-term road footprint in caribou ranges thereby enhancing caribou conservation and other ecological values. The LTPA will guide integrated industrial development and government reviews for approval regarding development of energy and forestry resources. In June 2006, the Province of Alberta endorsed the LTAP as a guiding document for access development⁶.

Thorp, 2007

⁵ CLMA was remained the Foothills Landscape Management Forum on July 11, 2008.

⁶After several revisions, in 2007 the LTPA was renamed Integrated Industrial Access Plan (IIAP). In July 2008, ASRD officially approved the IIAP and disseminated Information Letter 2008-05 (Foothills Landscape Management Forum Berland Smoky Access Plan) (ASRD, 2008). All planned and implemented primary access must comply with that document.

- **2007** Canfor continues its precautionary approach to management of caribou by extending its original two-year deferral of harvesting and road construction within the Caribou Area for an additional year (May 31, 2007 to Apr. 31, 2008) (Appendix 1). Stephenson, 2007
- **2008** Canfor's deferral in the caribou ranges is extended one additional year (terminating April 30, 2009). The decision was made with strong reservations because the delay in implementing an aggressive healthy pine strategy in the southern portions of its FMA area increases the risk of an irreversible mountain pine beetle infestation. Stephenson, 2008
- **2009** Canfor develops Healthy Pine Strategy (HPS) amendment to its approved Detailed Forest Management Plan 2003 in response to ASRD's *Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan for Alberta* (ASRD, 2007). Development of the plan is guided by the *West Central Alberta Caribou Landscape Plan* (WCACLPT, 2008) and the recommendations regarding that plan prepared by the Alberta Caribou Committee Governance Board (July 10, 2008) (ACCGB, 2008). The overall objective of the Healthy Pine Strategy is to reduce susceptible pine volume to 75% of the level identified in the approved 2003 DFMP, achieve, to the greatest extent possible, the coniferous harvest levels established therein and to provide volume allocations to deciduous operators while meeting the environmental objectives presented in the Sustainable Forest Management Plan (2005). The HPS amendment includes a 15-year harvest deferral in caribou primary intact areas (Figure 1), while allowing harvest of pine dominated stands in secondary and tertiary intact areas within, and adjacent to, caribou ranges. Canfor, 2009

3. Canfor Contributions to Caribou Initiatives

Canfor has been actively involved in caribou management since 1991 and with caribou initiatives since 1997 (Table 1). The Company continues to manage caribou habitat with the best information available and is currently working to improve or enhance data.

Table 1. Canfor Contributions to Caribou Initiatives

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 Summary of Contributions 1997+

Initiative	1997 - 2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
West Central Alberta Caribou Standing Committee	\$67,923	\$10,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$77,923
University of Alberta	\$219,000	\$36,500	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$255,500
Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council Scholarship	\$5,500	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$5,500
Canfor Track Monitoring Program	\$168,631	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$168,631
Caribou Range Recovery Project	\$3,657	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,657
Caribou Habitat Assessment	\$50,160	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$50,160
Little Smoky Caribou Calf Survival Enhancement Project	\$0	\$0	\$16,000	\$0	\$0	\$16,000
Foothills Landscape Management Forum (formerly Caribou Landscape Management Association)	\$0	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$80,000
West Central Alberta Caribou Landscape Plan (formerly CLMA Caribou Adaptive Management Plan)	\$0	\$45,000	\$12,500	\$13,400	\$0	\$70,900
Suncor Caribou Restoration Pilot Project	\$0	\$0	\$88,912	\$17,130	\$0	\$106,043
Total	\$514,871	\$111,500	\$137,412	\$50,530	\$20,000	\$834,314

4. Into the Future

As new information becomes available, managers gain a better understanding of woodland caribou and its habitat requirements. As a consequence, management of caribou habitat within the FMA area has evolved and improved. Canfor will continue building on past successes by continued involvement in initiatives that benefit caribou over the long term.

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Appendix 1.
Canfor Caribou Habitat Management Commitments

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CARIBOU HABITAT MANAGEMENT COMMITMENTS

Temporary Harvesting Deferral

On February 11, 2005 Canfor Alberta Woodlands Operations committed in a letter addressed to the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society to defer timber harvesting in the range area of the Little Smoky caribou herd for two years. Ref: [Canfor Response to Jan 10 Letter.doc](#). During the October 17, 2007 Management Review, the Alberta FMS committee decided to continue the deferral for an additional year in order to provide sufficient time for caribou recovery plan strategies to be endorsed by the West Central Caribou Landscape Planning Team.

- The deferral period commenced on May 1, 2005 and will subsequently terminate on April 31, 2009.
- During the deferral period, Canfor will not conduct any timber harvesting or new road construction within the Little Smoky caribou herd range area.
- The caribou area is that area identified as the range of the Little Smoky Herd in Figure 1 of the report entitled "Management of Woodland Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*) Habitat Within Canfor Grande Prairie's FMA area: A Timeline". Ref: [Caribou Timeline May 2004.pdf](#)
- The deferral does not prevent Canfor from conducting silviculture, forest monitoring and inventory or road maintenance and road restoration activities within the caribou area.
- During the deferral period, the harvest sequence that was approved in Canfor's Detailed Forest Management Plan on November 3, 2003 will be amended by shifting harvesting from the Deep South Operational Unit to the Deep North Operational Unit, or as required to address mountain pine beetle infestations.
- Modifications to the approved harvest sequence, and resulting impacts on forest values and management commitments must be evaluated through a Compartment Assessment prepared by Canfor, the results of which are subject to approval by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development.
- The Compartment Assessment will be included as a component of the June 1, 2005 Annual Operating Plan.

Commitments to Maintain Caribou Habitat

The Detailed Forest Management Plan for FMA 9900037 includes a commitment to maintain woodland caribou habitat within the FMA area. The following strategic planning constraints have been adopted.

- No more than 20% of the caribou area will be in pioneer or young seral condition.
- No less than 20% of the caribou area will be in old seral condition.
- The maximum opening size in the caribou area is 1000 hectares.
- Stands adjacent to new openings in the caribou area must be at least 30 years old.
- Seismic lines and road corridors within cutblocks will be reforested concurrently with cutblock reforestation.

Ref: [DFMP F Section \(subsections 1 to 10\)](#)

Ref: [DFMP G to J Sections](#)

Commitments to Minimize Caribou Disturbance

Research indicates that human disturbances may cause direct mortality of caribou, particularly young calves, human developments may cause displacement of caribou or act as barriers to movement, and human activity may increase the incidence of caribou harassment. Disturbance is especially damaging to caribou during the spring calving season, and for the period immediately following. As a result, Canfor has committed to minimize intrusions into the caribou area and adopt the following principles.

- No scheduled activities will be conducted in the caribou area during the calving season, May 1st to June 30th
- Timber harvesting in the caribou area (notwithstanding the 2005-08 deferral) will be restricted to the period November 1st to February 28th.
- All roads constructed by Canfor (post 1999) in the caribou area will be constructed to a Class V Standard (winter use only).
- Existing seismic lines will be used for access within the caribou area whenever feasible.
- Roads that are constructed and/or utilized for timber harvesting or other winter activities in the caribou area will be seasonally or permanently deactivated prior to March 15th of the year in which the activities have occurred.
- Gates will be erected and maintained on all Canfor roads into the caribou area that are held under Licenses of Occupation, providing the restriction of public access is authorized by government.
- If required for winter access into the caribou area, Canfor's bridge on Deep Valley Creek (NE7-62-26-W5M) will not be installed prior to November 1st and will be removed prior to March 15th.

Ref: [DFMP F Section \(subsections 1 to 10\)](#)



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