

**Experimental Wolf Reduction to Enhance the Recovery of the Threatened Quintette Caribou Herd  
in the South Peace  
and  
South Selkirk Mountain Caribou Wolf Management Plan**

**Dave Hervieux**

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**Key Recommendations:**

- The South Selkirk caribou population is declining by 30% to 40% per year (as demonstrated by the population numbers listed in the operational plan). Based on this rate of decline, the caribou population will likely be in a state of quasi-extirpation within a year.

**Immediate delivery of effective actions to reduce excessive mortality rates for this caribou population are required, if the goal is to retain the population and avoid population extirpation.**

- I note that in most cases mortality rates for adult female caribou are highest during spring and summer. And in all cases mortality rates for caribou calves are highest during the first weeks of life. My recommendation, therefore, is to strive for immediate delivery of an aircraft-based predator management program (i.e., using aircraft-based operations to locate, collar and shoot wolves) in the next weeks prior to the loss of snow cover within the caribou range. In addition, or alternatively if aircraft-based delivery is not possible before the loss of snow conditions, I would recommend delivery of an intensive ground-based wolf snaring program to live-capture and radio-collar wolves, followed by locating and shooting wolves associated with collared wolves from aircraft. Shooting of wolves using this alternative approach may be possible without snow cover when wolves are located in more open alpine areas. Collaring of wolves may also allow management activities to occur in association with wolf den sites. A program to snare and radio-collar wolves within and adjacent to this caribou range after the loss to snow conditions this spring would be advantageous even if there is aerial deliver of wolf management prior to snow loss (i.e., ground-based work should be considered as an additional program action for this spring and summer).

**Comments on the Operational Plans:**

- I accept the discussion and evidence provided in the Operational Plan with respect to the impact wolves have recently had on this caribou population. I suggest that measures to manage excessive predation rates from cougars should also be implemented, if not already being done. At the caribou population levels currently documented there is essentially no room for additional loss of female caribou.
- I strongly agree with the comment made in the Operational Plan regarding the inadequacy of hunting and trapping of wolves to achieve caribou population growth objectives. We have

various data and information from studies and our work in Alberta demonstrating that, even with strong logistical support from the Alberta Government, intensive trapping efforts can only remove 20% to 30% of a wolf population, and wolf populations have been found to grow during such trapping programs.

- The Alberta Government has annually delivered wolf control in the Little Smoky (boreal) woodland caribou range since 2005. During that period we have killed wolves within and adjacent to the caribou range only during mid to late winter. Our goal is to annually remove all wolves and have the caribou range as wolf-free as possible by the end of snow cover. We annually remove approximately 100 wolves. Since 2005 the Little Smoky caribou population has transitioned from years of steep annual population decline to population stability and (in some years) growth.
- As noted in my Key Recommendations listed above, I suggest that predator management in and adjacent to the South Selkirk caribou range should not be delayed until winter/spring of 2014/15, but should begin immediately as recommended in the Plan.
- Regarding the proposal to use road killed moose, elk or deer to pre-bait wolves in anticipation of aerial tracking, capture and euthanizing of wolves, our experience is that reliance on road kills is not logistically suited to the task. Road kills can be hard to obtain, can't be scheduled to coincide with planned operations, are difficult to handle and move, and are often in poor condition which will not provide an adequate basis to attract and hold wolves to a site. Our Little Smoky program (which includes both using aircraft-based operations to locate/collar/shoot wolves and ground-based application of vertebrate toxicants) is conducted with moose and elk carcasses which we collect on site through aircraft based shooting. Early attempts to base the program on road-kills failed. Also, we recommend against relying on deer carcasses, since in many cases they will only last a day (depending on the abundance of ravens and other scavengers).
- To the extent possible I would encourage gaining support for operations in Idaho and/or Washington. It maybe that operations only in Canada will not be adequate to achieve caribou population objectives. Although, I note that wolves likely travel back and forth across the border and it may be possible to address wolf packs when they are in Canada.
- It is a reasonable idea to attempt collaring of single wolves and wolf pairs, in the hope that those collared animals will lead to other wolves. However, in our experience single wolves and wolf pairs are not always associated with larger packs (acknowledging that we only do winter work). I would suggest that prompt removal of singles and pairs should be retained as a potential management action.
- The budget figures you list will be dependent on ground conditions, the location of wolves, and the fidelity of wolves to packs. It might be possible to remove all of the wolves in the 1 or 2 packs in a day, or it might take multiple days.

**Closing Remarks:**

- I think that the Operational Plan you have provided is fundamentally sound. The proposed work has been demonstrated to be effective in the Little Smoky caribou range since 2005 – we have avoided extirpation of that population and allowed for population growth.
- I recommend fast action in order to retain an option to conserve the South Selkirk caribou population.

Thanks very much for the opportunity to review and comment upon this important topic.

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