

Caribou and Forestry: Better Science is Critical



Woodland caribou are complex animals. There are still many things about them we don't fully understand. Their reclusiveness and remote habitats mean research is difficult and requires time to conduct effectively. Gaining the benefits of sound science from patient research is key to sustaining caribou on the landscape.

Predator/Prey Relationships

We know caribou are prey to wolves, bears, and cougars. We still need to learn more about the roles each of these predators, as well as other prey species and climate change impacts, play in caribou mortality. For example, as the climate changes, white-tailed deer seem to be moving north into caribou territory. Will this attract more predators that prey on caribou? Are there certain conditions that make it easier for predators to reach caribou? What steps can be taken to manage predators better? More research needs to be done in these areas.

Breeding Conditions

Research is currently underway to determine the best conditions for caribou breeding and calving. Measures being studied include surrounding calving areas with large pens to protect newborns from predators. Will caribou breed in enclosures? Can calves born in protected areas survive in the wild? We need time to figure out whether this "maternal penning" strategy will work.

Counting Caribou

Caribou are difficult to count. They inhabit rugged and remote areas, travel in small groups and move frequently. But accurate counts are essential if we are to understand their response to management strategies. Caribou populations have been assessed using a variety of methods, including using helicopters to count from the air, and working on the ground to collect DNA from scat to identify individuals. These methods can produce different numbers for the same area. We need to develop best practices, and apply these practices consistently across the province, to arrive at accurate herd counts.

A Long-Term Commitment

A sustainable future for caribou requires a commitment to long-term monitoring and adaptive management. The forest industry is committed to playing our part in this process and has invested heavily in working with research institutes to expand our scientific knowledge base, and in working with governments and environmental organizations to develop effective range planning protocols. Ongoing support and collaboration from the federal and provincial governments will be essential.