



CARIBOU AND FORESTRY: REGIONAL FLEXIBILITY IS KEY

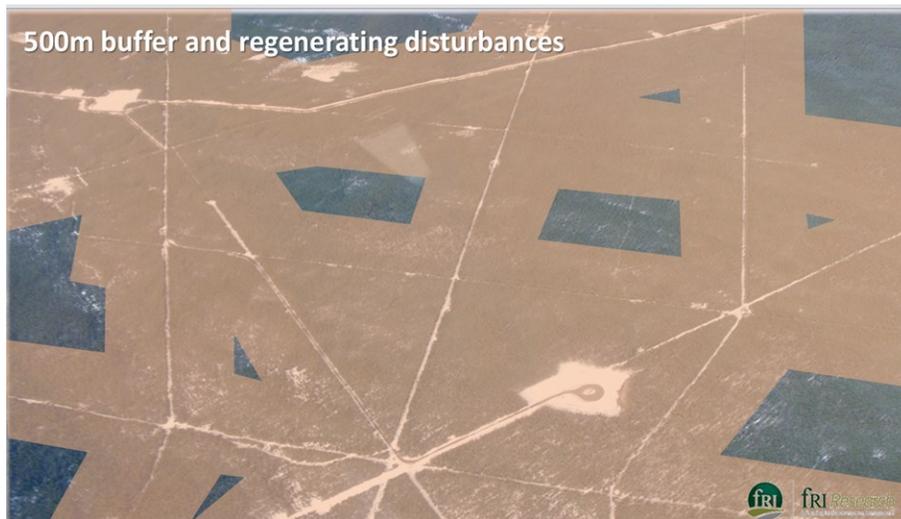
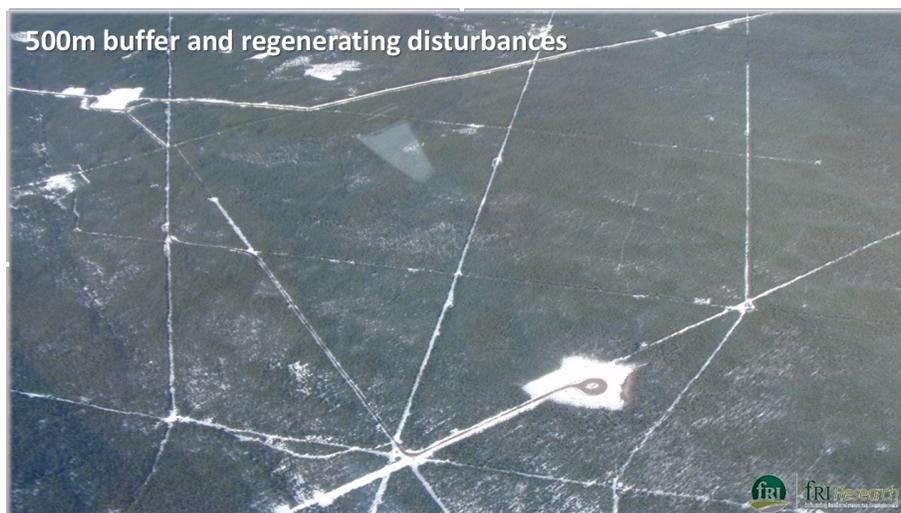
The caribou planning process is taking place on a national level. The challenge is that not all forests and caribou habitats are the same. A high elevation boreal forest in Alberta presents markedly different conditions than a black spruce bog in Ontario or a wetland complex in Manitoba. We believe the caribou planning process needs flexibility to deal with these different conditions. A “one-size-fits-all” solution won’t help caribou or communities.

Disturbance Thresholds Canada’s caribou recovery action plan stipulates 65% of each herd’s habitat should be counted as undisturbed and applies this standard to ranges all across Canada, regardless of local conditions. Yet, caribou are thriving in areas of northern Saskatchewan that have more than 65% disturbance due to fire activity. Meanwhile, Banff National Park has disturbance levels well below the threshold – and caribou have disappeared from the park.

Defining Disturbance The Caribou Recovery Plan defines disturbances on a 40-year horizon and uses a 500 metre buffer to calculate disturbance amounts. For example, if an area experienced wildfire or was harvested in 2000, it would be considered to be disturbed until 2040, despite regrowth of a healthy forest. Similarly, an area logged in 2017 and replanted the following year would fully contribute to the 35% disturbance threshold until 2057. But areas react very differently, depending on the type of forest and the type of disturbance. In one area, the forest crown may close-in just 20 years after disturbance, while in another area it may still be open after 45 years. Different forest types grow at different speeds and not all disturbances are the same. A major highway represents a markedly different type of disturbance than an abandoned mining trail. Disturbance definitions require careful consideration of local and regional conditions. A blanket definition applied all across Canada is not the best strategy.

Visualizing Disturbance The Caribou Recovery Plan stipulates that all forest within 500 metres of the edge of a disturbance counts as part of that disturbance. This is sometimes referred to as a 'buffer'. The effect of this buffer is that a far greater area is counted as disturbed. For example, a pipeline that is 15 metres wide and 1 kilometre long has an actual area of 1.5 hectares. Once a 500 metre buffer is applied, the area counted as disturbed measures about 100 hectares. This may not be scientifically justified and makes it very difficult to meet thresholds for undisturbed forest in caribou areas.

The illustration below shows forest in Alberta with a number of typical disturbances (roads, cut-blocks, and a well site). The second illustration shows all areas that would be counted as disturbed once the 500 metre buffer is applied.



Working Together When it comes to our forests and caribou, local and regional knowledge is critically important. Conditions are not only different across Canada, they also vary considerably in the forests that surround your community. Our foresters have the experience and expertise to manage forests on a large scale. They have local knowledge and are willing to collaborate with government and local stakeholders to develop strategies that will work for caribou and our communities.