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Ministry of Agriculture and Lands

STAKEHOLDER INPUT SOUGHT FOR MOUNTAIN CARIBOU RECOVERY

VICTORIA – To develop a successful mountain caribou recovery plan, the provincial government is seeking input and support from stakeholders regarding the mountain caribou science team's findings and conclusions on the state of mountain caribou in British Columbia, Agriculture and Lands Minister Pat Bell said today.

The findings clearly demonstrate that recovery of mountain caribou in B.C. is possible over the long term. The findings are the result of nearly two years of extensive research on mountain caribou in British Columbia by a team of independent mountain caribou experts from British Columbia, Alberta and Idaho. The team was formed in 2004 as part of the Species at Risk Co-ordination Office (SaRCO) cross-government planning activities.

"Based on the results of the independent science team's research, we believe we can successfully recover mountain caribou to sustainable numbers in British Columbia," said Bell. "Now we need the input and support of environmentalists, First Nations, industry, tourism operators and communities to develop and implement a recovery plan in 2007."

The science team divided the mountain caribou habitat area into 11 planning units based on geography. The team found that a minimum of 75 to 100 animals are required in a planning unit in order to maintain a resilient population. Currently, only six of the planning units have herds greater than 75, with the largest herd containing approximately 717 mountain caribou. Each of the remaining five planning units has up to 37 animals.

According to the science team's research, potential recovery actions could include:

- Removing predators such as cougars and wolves that are known to kill mountain caribou.
- Removal of other ungulates such as deer and moose from mountain caribou habitat.
- Further protection of core mountain caribou habitat from logging.
- Further management of recreation activities in mountain caribou habitat.
- Translocation of mountain caribou from larger to smaller herds.

"We're pleased to see the provincial government take the next steps in the caribou recovery program," said Dave Butler, director of Land Resources, Canadian Mountain Holidays. "We're committed to working with them to ensure our operating practices are effective in preventing mountain caribou displacement in all areas of mountain caribou habitat."

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Mountain caribou are found in the east of the province from as far north as Mackenzie down through the Kootenays and into the United States. They are listed as endangered by the provincial government. Primary threats to these animals are habitat alteration and increased mortality from predators. In British Columbia, more than 64 per cent of the current mountain caribou herd areas are either protected or managed for mountain caribou.

To view the mountain caribou science team's findings and conclusions, please visit: http://ilmbwww.gov.bc.ca/sarco/mc/

An audio clip of Agriculture and Lands Minister Pat Bell speaking about the mountain caribou recovery plan is available at: www.mediaroom.gov.bc.ca//DisplayEventDetails.aspx?eventId=321

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2 backgrounder(s) attached.

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