



Valhalla Wilderness Watch

P.O. Box 335, New Denver, British Columbia V0G 1S0
Phone: 250-358-2610; wildernesswatch@netidea.com

April 3, 2008

PRESS RELEASE

CENTRAL SELKIRK MOUNTAIN CARIBOU ASSIGNED CLEARCUTS WHILE INDUSTRY LOGS THE OLD-GROWTH

A BC government planner has identified twelve thousand hectares of clearcuts and burns to be protected as habitat for the endangered Central Selkirk Mountain Caribou. Meanwhile, large areas of old-growth forest critical to the herd's survival would be slated for logging. The mountain caribou is dependent upon old-growth forest and is in danger of extinction chiefly because of too many clearcuts and roads.

The BC Government promised that 20,000 hectares of high suitability habitat would be protected in the Central Selkirks. "That's one-quarter of the total amount of Timber Harvesting Land Base that the government promised to protect for mountain caribou," says Craig Pettitt, Plan Reviewer for Valhalla Wilderness Watch. "If that turns into a big protection hoax, the whole plan will be exposed as a fake."

Valhalla Wilderness Watch is calling for an immediate moratorium on logging in this planning unit, and the resignation of the current Herd Expert, Milt Hamilton. Mr. Hamilton was the mountain caribou planner for Pope and Talbot Ltd., the logging company that held some of the most valuable Mountain Caribou habitat in the Central Selkirks. Although Pope & Talbot is bankrupt and its mill has been sold to Interfor, it is still claiming an interest in the timber supply in that area. The BC government hired Hamilton as a contractor to make maps identifying the location of the 20,000 hectares of new protected forest.

First Mr. Hamilton identified only 60% of 20,000-hectare allowance. The maps had to be redone, putting the Central Selkirks far behind the other units in the planning process. Now preliminary analysis by the Government's own Kootenay Local Habitat Team (draft report, March 2008) indicates that the new maps have identified 12,000 hectares of young forest 0-60 years old amongst the protected areas. That means clearcuts and burns.

"Protecting 0-60 year-old-forest is a death plan for mountain caribou," says Pettitt. "And there are numerous other industry-biased problems with the plan. Mr. Hamilton is advocating "aspatial" forest protection, which means that no areas would be identified for protection. Logging companies would just keep logging and leave behind a certain percentage of forest; they would be able to choose the best and leave the caribou the low-quality sites.

Hamilton's reports have repeatedly advocated that planning for mountain caribou should revert to previous planning by Pope & Talbot and the Government under the old Kootenay-Boundary Higher Level Plan. "Since that time, there have been nearly five years of new planning under the *Species at Risk Act* and BC's Species at Risk Coordination Office at taxpayer's expense," says

VWW director Anne Sherrod. “Yet Mr. Hamilton wants to turn back the clock to 2002 as if none of this ever existed. That's just an insult to the taxpayers.”

Hamilton and other contractors have done the Mountain Caribou census for the last seven years; during at least part of that time Mr. Hamilton was employed by Pope & Talbot. “How can the public trust this Mountain Caribou census?” asks Pettitt. “How can the public trust that these contractors won't be working for Interfor in the future? For years government has turned caribou protection in this planning unit over to the logging companies; if the new plan continues in this direction it is a total breach of trust.”

“The BC government and the cooperating logging companies, snowmobile clubs, and environmental groups took many bows in the press for agreeing to protect a large amount of caribou forest,” says Sherrod. “But the negotiations had settled nothing. The agreement said the protection must not reduce the rate of logging for five years, must not use more than 1% of the Timber Harvesting Land Base, and must not stress any logging companies. The economic concerns of logging companies come first, even if the mountain caribou go extinct. Now the logging companies are screaming that there are major impacts to their mills. What is the government going to do? Cancel the protection? Where is that going to leave ten environmental groups that approved this backroom deal?”

Unless the BC government acts decisively, the plan for the important Central Selkirk herd could be tangled up in logging companies' economic claims for a long time to come. The result: logging of critical mountain caribou habitat will go on this summer. If that happens, the fraud that was predictable from the plan's original terms will become a reality, with a disastrous end for the Mountain Caribou.

Craig Pettitt 358-7997
Anne Sherrod 358-2610

Background document available at www.vws.org.