



Valhalla Wilderness Watch

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British Columbia, Canada
Update on the Mountain Caribou/Inland Rainforest Crisis

WILD HORSE DEATHS, WOLF SLAUGHTER LINKED TO BC'S GREENWASHED MOUNTAIN CARIBOU RECOVERY PLAN

Faced with the near extinction of the mountain caribou, brought about chiefly by logging old-growth forest, the BC government has refused to halt the logging. Instead it chooses to cynically blame wolves and other predators for the disappearance of the caribou. Under immense public pressure, the government promised sweeping protection of caribou habitat last year, but so far this promise has not been kept. When and if the new protection appears, it will be largely outside of the area where most logging takes place. This means that destruction of mountain caribou habitat by logging can continue almost unabated. In the meantime, the government has launched a campaign to wipe out wolf packs and subject other predators to increased killing.

Recently the public was shocked to learn that the BC government has been paying aboriginal people to kill the famous Chilcotin wild horses so the carcasses can be used to bait and trap wolves as part of the mountain caribou recovery program. (*Vancouver Sun*, Dec. 06, 2008) After being live-trapped by neck and leg snares, or powerful leghold traps, most or all of the wolves are killed. Subsequent investigation by the *Sun* showed that the BC government had killed 24 wolves over the past year alone. (*Vancouver Sun*, Dec. 15, 2008) Though these programs have also been referred to as “sterilization” programs, government documents indicate that the procedure is either to kill all wolves in a pack except the dominant pair, which are sterilized, or else to completely wipe out whole packs of wolves and sterilize the first immigrating pair.

By resorting to trapping, the BC government has added cruelty to ecological damage caused by eliminating top predators from the ecosystem. When wild animals are caught in snares or traps, they struggle violently to free themselves, often injuring themselves seriously. It is well known that smaller non-target species of wildlife can step into the traps, crushing their legs. Last year a Creston couple lost their dog, Rosie, when she stepped into two wolf traps set by the Ministry of Environment. The traps crushed both legs and Rosie screamed in agony while being driven 23 kilometres to a vet. There is no vet to mercifully end the suffering of wild animals that fall into these traps.

During the public process to create a recovery plan, 19 environmental groups signed a letter to government totally opposing predator killing as a way to increase the number of endangered mountain caribou. Forty-two (now 51) scientists signed a petition saying that predator control was being overemphasized. They recommended nonlethal predator control by closing logging roads and banning snowmobiles and skiers from caribou habitat. (Predators could not reach mountain caribou during the winter if it were not for snowmobiles and skiers compacting the snow in major areas into a solid surface, allowing predators to travel well.)

All these groups and scientists said the top priority for caribou protection was an immediate end to logging old growth forest. Mountain caribou need old-growth forest to survive. Unfortunately, on October 16, 2007, the BC government announced a plan that would not significantly reduce the logging of mountain caribou habitat. It would allow snowmobilers to continue using mountain caribou habitat on promises of “monitoring” themselves, and would allow whole packs of wolves to be wiped out. Many thousands of letters of protest have been sent to the BC government because of the terms of this plan — 5,000 letters from Germany alone, due to the work of German environmental group Robin Wood.

However, the government shields itself from this criticism with the support of logging companies, snowmobile clubs, heli-ski businesses and a coalition of ten environmental groups called the Mountain Caribou Project (MCP). These groups negotiated an agreement that approved “no net loss” to the timber corporations as a basic element of the plan. This agreement would have no credibility at all if it were not for the approval of the Mountain Caribou Project. These groups signed confidentiality agreements to join secret negotiations that led to the government’s announcement — an action that has been greatly deplored and denounced by some other environmentalists.

Now, 15 months after the agreement was announced, there is no approved plan, most areas of the mountain caribou range have no new habitat protection, and the government is relying upon the slaughter of wolves to boost the numbers of mountain caribou. Valhalla Wilderness Watch calls upon all who care about wildlife to raise their voices against the killing of the wild horses and wolves, and demand a mountain caribou plan that will end the destruction of the old-growth forests of the Inland Rainforest Region.

[For additional details, see the attached background report.](#)

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Background Report

WOLF SLAUGHTER, the MOUNTAIN CARIBOU PLAN and GREENWASHING

1. Media image versus reality
2. Details of the plan agreement.
3. The predator control controversy
4. Less habitat protection means more predator killing
5. The crucial importance of caribou forest to climate control
6. The Progress Board: vested interests monitor themselves
7. Defending the government plan

1. MEDIA IMAGE VERSUS REALITY

On October 16, 2007, the BC government dazzled the world with the announcement of a “partnership” to save British Columbia’s endangered mountain caribou. The partners — BC government, logging companies, snowmobile clubs, heli-ski businesses and the Mountain Caribou Project (MCP) — had agreed to protect 2.2 million hectares of high quality mountain caribou winter habitat. They had also agreed to kill predators. But in the big media promotion, the habitat protection received all of the focus and predator control (which had been the subject of massive protest) received little attention. The Mountain Caribou Project press release stated:

“Three years ago, the importance of habitat protection wasn't fully appreciated,’ said John Bergenske of Wildsight. 'Predator control was touted as the silver bullet for saving caribou. But today, habitat protection is recognized as the major focus of caribou recovery, and any intended predator control will be subject to stringent criteria to be developed by the Ministry of Environment. It's a big win for the wildlife and the people of British Columbia, and indeed for the global community ...”

Certainly the talk and the press materials emphasized habitat but the actions have been just the opposite. The government is relying upon killing predators as its silver bullet to increase caribou numbers without reducing the logging that is destroying habitat. And the predator control has been going on in secret for at least the last couple of years.

This paper will compare media statements with reality. It will show how massive habitat protection could actually mean little or no reduction in the rate of habitat destruction. It will show a backroom deal negotiated by confidentiality agreement, that still keeps the public in the dark 15 months later, being promoted as “transparency.” It will show the environmental groups that signed the confidentiality agreement and kept the terms of the agreement secret from the public

until it was a done deal, now being positioned as watchdogs and whistleblowers. Valhalla Wilderness Watch charges that this is government by public relations firm. VWW's concern, besides being for the mountain caribou and the wolves, is for the integrity of democratic process in British Columbia.

ForestEthics is a US-based environmental negotiation firm. The Mountain Caribou Project (MCP) is a coalition of nine environmental groups funded by ForestEthics (FE). Its member groups, besides FE, are Wildsight, Sierra Club of BC, Quesnel River Watershed Alliance, Conservation Northwest, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, BC Nature (Federation of BC Naturalists), North Columbia Environmental Society, and the Shuswap Environmental Action Society. The Mountain Caribou Project was represented by ForestEthics and Wildsight in the negotiations on the caribou plan.

The Mountain Caribou Project and ForestEthics say they signed the confidentiality agreements only to be able to see and comment on the proposed mountain caribou plan before its public release. However, when the government announced the negotiated agreement, its October 16, 2007 press release included Minister of Agriculture and Lands Pat Bell stating:

"I particularly commend the Mountain Caribou Project for their significant contributions to this process. For the past three years, they have been deeply involved in building this collaborative solution, and we all look forward to its implementation on the ground."

The *Arrow Lakes News* (Oct. 24, 2007) reported:

"several members of environmental organizations involved in the plan, and other stakeholders said they recently had to sign confidentiality agreements before gaining access to cabinet-level meetings on the plan."

The Mountain Caribou Project (MCP) and ForestEthics (FE), have stated that they do not support predator killing in absence of the land protection part of the BC government's mountain caribou recovery plan. Everyone agrees that the predator killing will not save mountain caribou if their habitat is not protected. But what FE and the MCP are not saying is that the terms of the plan they approved will not significantly stop the destruction of the caribou's habitat except perhaps in one or two very limited areas — *and even that small benefit depends on whether the government approves and implements the recommendations of its scientists.*

When the government announced the new plan agreement, the Backgrounder to its press release recognized that:

"Habitat loss and fragmentation has been identified as the underlying cause of mountain caribou population declines since 1995, with mortality by predators as the secondary cause. Halting and reversing habitat loss is central to the plan's success."

Habitat for mountain caribou is old-growth forest 140 years or older. Scientists have identified logging and logging roads as the chief cause of this habitat loss and fragmentation. But the very newspaper articles that announced the agreement on a recovery plan quoted John Allen, President and CEO of the Council of Forest Industries, as saying:

"Will the forest industry be inconvenienced? The short answer is no ... the Minister said that there'll be very little if any impact on harvesting levels..."

For an animal dependent upon old-growth forest and endangered by logging, how could the government “halt and reverse habitat loss” and “protect 2.2 million hectares” of habitat while causing “very little if any impact on harvesting levels”? Only in the world of public relations firms, spin-doctoring and greenwashing is it possible.

At first few people understood that the mountain caribou lives in steep, rugged mountains and many of them survive by traveling from the valley bottoms to the mountain tops twice a year. There are millions of hectares of rock, ice, alpine meadows and sparse subalpine forest not fit for logging in these mountains. Some of these very high, sparse forests, are critical mountain caribou winter habitat. But in spring and early winter, the caribou move to low- or mid-elevation forests. This migration is critical in terms of food and shelter from early winter storms. These lower areas are covered with some of Canada’s most productive forest — lush inland temperate rainforest in the valley bottoms. This is where most of the logging occurs, in an area called the Timber Harvesting Land Base (THLB). The Mountain Caribou Project agreed to a plan that will protect only 0.7% of the THLB. The plan will protect the caribou’s high winter range but allow its lower spring and early winter range to be destroyed by logging.

Many thousands of British Columbians as well as 5,000 German people have sent letters of protest of this plan to the BC government. They are still demanding an end to logging old-growth forest in the Inland Rainforest Region — the only place in the world where mountain caribou are found.

The agreement signed by the Mountain Caribou Project is only one example of a new trend in the North American environmental movement. The old activist model of united opposition to environmental damage is being replaced by a new model in which a few environmental groups form a coalition to negotiate private agreements with governments and industries. These groups will decline to join the broader environmental movement on crucial environmental issues, because to do so would be to take positions they must leave open in order to make deals with industry and government. Any serious, major environmental conflict brings on these private negotiations.

The negotiating organizations may run public campaigns on environmental issues, but they use the public support they garner as “social licence” — clout to enable them to sit in the negotiating chair representing themselves as the environmental interest. Yet their private negotiations shut the door on the public. What can public input mean when a few private organizations are deciding the matter between themselves? The old decision-maker, the BC government, now unloads its responsibility on the negotiating partners, which have no public mandate, no mechanism for accountability to the public. Yet these agreements may cover huge areas of public lands.

Six years ago the first agreement of this type, the Boreal Initiative, was signed by 11 corporations, environmental groups and First Nations. It was outspokenly opposed by Charles Caccia, the highly respected chairman of the House of Commons environmental committee. He stated:

“There’s not much conservation in this kind of formula ... The question that arises from all this is the legitimacy of a framework produced by people who have no public mandate nor public accountability.” (“MP finds fault with deal to save old forest,” *Vancouver Sun*, Dec. 10, 2003)

The outcome of these agreements is minimal or unsatisfactory conservation gains in return for huge gains for industry. Typically the negotiating parties create for themselves the grounds for

ongoing negotiations that go on for years. The public is not only locked out of these meetings, but also never sees any definitive results that can be expected to last from one minute to the next. This is called “adaptive management.” The negotiating parties change the deal as they go along to address whatever conditions come up. These long-term negotiations create a huge gravy train of jobs for technical, legal, negotiating and coordinating professionals, while the environmentalists involved gain tremendous power in funding and by association with government.

Meanwhile, the corporations enjoy their large gains while being shielded from public opposition by the evident consent of the negotiating environmental groups. The seal of approval of several well-known environmental groups is incredibly valuable to a resource exploiter or government. It means that any critics of their policies and activities will be seen by many of the public to be uncooperative and extreme. The ability to brand a government, a government policy, or a corporation with the name of a well-known environmental partner must be very valuable indeed.

Since the announcement of the plan agreement, the Mountain Caribou Project has helped to create a media image of the proposed habitat protection that is far better than the actual reality:

“These new commitments ... have raised the bar for future forest protection across Canada. Today’s announcement is a victory ... for environmental organizations it’s never enough, but we think this is a giant leap forward ... for the mountain caribou I think this is going to do the job.”

Candace Batycki, ForestEthics
Arrow Lakes News
October 24, 2007

“The recent mountain caribou milestone is cause to uncork the bubbly.”

Sierra Club of BC
Newsletter, Issue #45
November, 2007

The government has not been bashful about returning the favour:

“I certainly have a lot of respect for ForestEthics in the work that they've done, and Wildsight - Candace Batycki and John Bergenske - deserve a lot of credit for being willing to be open and work with government.”

Remarks in the BC Legislature by
Minister of Agriculture and Lands Pat Bell
Hansard, April 10, 2008

2. DETAILS OF THE PLAN AGREEMENT

- Of the 2.2 million hectares of caribou protection promised, most of it was already protected years ago. It included all existing parks. A huge area of those parks is rock, ice, and alpine meadows. For years BC governments had excluded the lush low- and mid-elevation forests from parks, allowing it to be logged. This is one of the reasons why the mountain caribou is in so much danger of extinction.
- The part of the 2.2 million hectares that was already “protected” also includes forest retained in wildlife conservation zones in the past — fragmented forests in which anywhere from 30-70% have been logged and cut up with logging roads.

- However, the new plan agreement did include 380,000 hectares of new protection throughout Mountain Caribou range and this would have been very worthwhile except for the fact that low- and mid-elevation forest is to be mostly excluded from that too. Only 76,094 hectares of the proposed new protection can come from the Timber Harvesting Land Base (THLB). 76,094 hectares is only 20% of the total new protection, and only 0.7% of the THLB.
- Unfortunately for the mountain caribou, that 76,094 hectares of protected THLB must result in “no net loss” to the logging companies, no significant reduction of the allowable annual cut for five years, no threats to mill viability. To arrange this, the government has made provisions to substitute young forest in the 0-60 year class for old-growth forest — ie, clearcuts and burns, even though it is known that the mountain caribou needs forest 140 years and over. And after five years, in many areas there could be no remaining commercially valuable caribou forest left to cut.
- In some areas the “protection” from logging is only partial protection in which an area is logged and a certain percentage of the forest left behind.
- In spite of these dismal conditions, the government scientists have been quite skillful in locating where the new protection should be, and there could be significant gains in a couple of local areas; thus it is scandalous that the government has not come through with even this small amount.

3. THE PREDATOR CONTROL CONTROVERSY

In a recent letter ForestEthics and the Mountain Caribou Project said they had approved a plan with predator control on the advice of government scientists:

“the position of the Mountain Caribou Project, including ForestEthics, has always been that we decided long ago to support the mountain caribou science panel, and that the panel clearly said some predator control would have to happen, but that none of our member groups is happy about that situation, and that we do not support any predator control when the other pieces of the recovery plan have yet to be legalized.”

However, it is important to understand that there has been bitter division within the scientific community about killing predators to save caribou. The Mountain Caribou Science Panel is not an independent body of independent scientists. It is hired by the BC government; all the scientists work for the Ministry of Forests, Ministry of Environment or the logging industry. In the past, BC government biologists and managers have been threatened with loss of their jobs for making truthful statements and recommendations to the public, and some have even lost their jobs.

During the five years of public process on the mountain caribou, some government/industry scientists and the logging companies constantly blamed wolves and cougars for the disappearance of the caribou. These scientists ignored reports (some of them their own) in peer-reviewed scientific journals, which were almost unanimous in showing that logging was the main cause of the disappearance of mountain caribou. They paid no attention to the ecological role of large carnivores in the health of ecosystems, or to the fact that many predator control programs have wasted huge amounts of taxpayer dollars and failed.

In 2006 Valhalla Wilderness Watch released a report entitled “How the BC Government is Killing Mountain Caribou.” It provided references and quotes from many of these scientific studies about mountain caribou and predators. A follow-up report, “Caribou Greenwash,” in 2007, added many more quotes and references. (These reports are still available at www.inlandtemperaterainforest.org.) They outline the various controversies between scientists.

In late October 2006 the BC governments’ Mountain Caribou Science Team released a heavily spin-doctored draft report that offered five options for future mountain caribou management. Only the last and highest option had any significant new habitat protection. The other four options would unleash long-term slaughter programs for wolves and cougars, increased hunting of black bears and, shockingly enough, killing of two species at risk, blue-listed grizzly bears and wolverines. This document declared that predation was the chief cause of the decline of the mountain caribou.

Many thousands of letters from the public to the government were generated by Valhalla Wilderness Watch, Ecological Internet, Wilderness Committee, Save-the-Cedar-League, the MCP and a number of German organizations, especially Robin Wood and Naturschatz. The letters urged habitat protection and many were also against predator control. On Nov 30, 2006, 19 environmental groups signed a joint submission to the government saying they were against predator control to save the mountain caribou and that all logging of old-growth forest in mountain caribou habitat must stop. In June 2007, 42 (now 51) biologists and botanists sent a petition to government saying that predator control was being misemphasized, insisting that an end to logging old-growth forest must be the top priority, and recommending nonlethal predator control.

This huge push by the public, scientists and environmentalists, to turn the planning process away from predator control and towards habitat protection, seemed at first to have been successful when the grand announcement of huge habitat protection was made on October 16, 2007. But several months later, the plan was under fire from angry environmentalists who noticed that predator control was proceeding without any “stringent criteria.” In February, 2008, the Mountain Caribou Project issued an Open Letter which gave assurances that:

"The plan will: 'Manage predator populations only where they are preventing recovery of mountain caribou. Elevated predation rates are explicitly recognized as a secondary effect of habitat loss and fragmentation; the plan requires that predation management be supported by *publicly reviewed scientific rationales*.'" (emphasis added)

However, at that very time the government was already trapping wolves, and had also removed the hunting bag limits on wolves and cougars, without public review at all. To the contrary, the trapping was proceeding in secrecy and continued to do so until the dog Rosie had her legs crushed in two wolf traps, and the *Vancouver Sun* uncovered the killing of the wild horses for wolf bait. There were *no* signs posted near the traps that caught Rosie to warn members of the public who might be walking their dogs. In a letter to Fur-bearers Defenders (July 02, 2008), the Ministry of Environment stated:

“Regional staff report traps have been tripped, tampered with and even stolen recently, and it was a Ministry decision not to post this wilderness area.”

The public can’t even get signs to keep them from stepping in the traps, much less a public review process.

4. LESS HABITAT PROTECTION MEANS MORE PREDATOR KILLING

Scientists consulted by Valhalla Wilderness Watch pointed out that the terms of the proposed government plan included unrealistic time frames for major increases in the mountain caribou herds. This, they said, would pressure managers into heavy predator killing. For instance, government biologists were ordered to produce two-and-a-half times more mountain caribou in the South Selkirks within 20 years, with only 3,803 hectares of new protection of the Timber Harvesting Land Base. Scientists for the South Purcells herd were ordered to produce seven times more caribou within 20 years with only 5,984 hectares of new THLB protection. Independent scientists consulted by Valhalla Wilderness Watch emphasized that this was a death sentence for wolves and cougars.

Government scientists are anxious to have the environmental groups know that less habitat means more predator killing. The Revelstoke herd was allocated only 10,000 hectares of new protection for the Timber Harvesting Land Base. The following is the view of the Revelstoke planning team in one of their documents posted on the website of BC's Species at Risk Coordination Office:

" If ... a large portion of the area is in an early seral condition that produces an abundance of alternative prey and their predators, then intensive management of the predators and, perhaps their prey will be needed to maintain caribou. An abundance of early seral not only means more forests is being harvested [sic], but also far more resources must be directed at intensively managing predators and alternative prey. There is also greater risk for caribou when there is an abundance of early seral and caribou conservation depends on intensive management of the predator prey system."

The Kootenay Lake Unit had 10,000 ha of Timber Harvesting Land Base (THLB) that was caribou habitat. This was, however, well above what the government plan would allow to be protected. The Kootenay Lake planning team had to down-grade some of its previous habitat protection to fall within the cap that the government had placed on THLB protection:

"We therefore revised mapping and zone designations to bring the impact within the THLB cap. We accomplished this mainly by converting Core Habitat to Supporting Habitat in several partially harvested or burned areas falling within extensive tracts of gentle terrain. Other changes included converting a small amount of Supporting to Connectivity and refining linework in some areas to remove habitat polygons or make strips of habitat along ridgelines somewhat narrower. Collectively, these changes will result in *additional risk due to the loss of foraging habitat, downgraded linkages and decreased ability to accommodate changes caused by wildfire*. Most importantly, the changes will result in an increased predation risk due to the greater amount of early-seral forest and greater juxtaposition of old and young stands. The extent to which this risk is manifested will depend on the success of the predator-prey management regime."
[emphasis added]

However, it must be emphasized that many biologists and ecologists do not accept this equation. They say it is wrong because mountain caribou without sufficient habitat will die out with or without predator control. The population boost that predator killing may cause will be temporary and will enable ongoing logging of habitat that will kill the caribou. It must be understood that clearcuts transform these forests from mountain caribou habitat to moose-deer/wolf-cougar

habitat. Mountain caribou cannot utilize the young forest as food or as shelter or for travel. By continuing to clearcut old-growth forest, we are enlarging the wolf/cougar problem with one hand while trying to reduce it with the other.

Government scientists have admitted openly that killing of predators to save caribou will have to be massive and prolonged, for 60-100 years. But “top predators” such as wolves and cougars serve critical functions in the ecosystem. These animals are native species in mountain caribou range and they are perfectly natural in the young forest conditions caused by logging. They follow both logging and fires. They keep moose, deer and elk in check so that new trees and other plants can recover, and they keep these populations healthy by taking weak animals that otherwise would starve or die of disease. Killing predators will greatly expand the damage to the Inland Rainforest ecosystems, by eliminating keystone species necessary for the health of the whole ecosystem. Studies have shown that elimination of top predators can wipe out other species as well.

There have always been hidden agendas behind predator control. Politicians want to satisfy the demands of hunters, ranchers and logging corporations. In the 1950s, the BC government Fish and Wildlife authorities scattered 2,000 poisoned baits *a year* all over BC, causing carnivores large or small to die an agonizing death. This was done so that hunters could bag their deer, elk and moose more easily.

The information relayed to the public by the Mountain Caribou Project, that the predator killing will be carefully selective of individual animals posing a danger to caribou, does doubtlessly come from the government, as we have seen government documents that called baiting wolves with rotten carcasses “selective”, even though every carnivore for miles around might show up. We have seen wolf sterilization programs called “nonlethal” predator control in the same breath that it is stated that all wolves in the pack except the alpha male and female will be killed. Scientists know that with wolves, killing only some members of the pack causes the pack to disperse, generate new and more packs, and speed up their rate reproduction.

There is a very real chance that wolves are increasing in some areas of the province because government killing programs are dispersing them and raising birth rates. When the Quesnel-Cariboo Mountains wolf killing began in 2003, the project proposal said there were 3 wolf packs, of which only 2 were a risk for caribou populations. By 2004 a Progress Report said there were 11 packs. Now we hear there are 13 packs and that there are more and more wolves all the time.

5. THE CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE OF CARIBOU FOREST TO CLIMATE CONTROL

What is the answer to this complex dilemma? This dilemma is caused by the focus on single-species protection. The best scientists we know say that we should be addressing ecosystems at risk rather than species at risk. The forests of the low- and mid-elevation slopes must be protected for all the multitude of values they hold. *That is what would give the mountain caribou the best chance of survival.*

The decline of the mountain caribou tells us that many more species are being lost because of the destruction of our high-biodiversity low- and mid-elevation forests. Scientists have found 283 lichen species in the lowland Inland Rainforest, of which about 75% were found in old-growth. *If it turns out we cannot save the mountain caribou in all of its current range, we can at least start saving these other species.*

Looking at the ecosystem as a whole, we would be saving these forests for their carbon stores alone. Scientific studies in Oregon have found that old-growth temperate rainforests store higher amounts of carbon per acre than in any other type of vegetation anywhere in the world. The studies found that “managed forests in temperate regions may contain as little as 30% of the living tree biomass and 70% of the soil carbon found in old-growth forests. Disturbance of old-growth temperate forests may reduce carbon storage for at least 250 years and with continued harvesting, carbon storage may be reduced indefinitely.”¹

The idea that commercial logging preserves carbon in the wood products that are created is being laid to rest. Only 10-25% of the carbon in an old-growth forest remains stored in the wood products created from the trees.

The US Forest Service Climate Change Resource Center says that the elimination of logging on US public lands, “could result in an annual increase of as much as 43 percent over current sequestration levels on public timberlands and would offset up to 1.5 percent of total U.S. greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. In contrast, moving to a more intense harvesting policy similar to that which prevailed in the 1980s, may result in annual reductions of 50 to 80 percent in anticipated carbon sequestration (Depro et al. 2008).”²

In a province losing over 9 million hectares of dry pine forest, there is no excuse for logging the remaining old growth of the humid forests that constitute vast carbon stores. With the arctic ice melting, sea levels rising, and the warming earth starting to release massive quantities of carbon, humans should be protecting all the major carbon stores we have. If the government had any real commitment to doing something about global warming, these forests would be protected and there wouldn't be hordes of snowmobiles roaring over mountain caribou habitat. A large part of the hidden agenda behind killing the wolves would be gone.

In the clear light of sanity we could then ask, “Is it right to knowingly, deliberately destroy the critical habitat of a species, even after it is known that the logging is annihilating the animals, then blame predators for killing the last few members of the herd, and set off on a new kind of killing spree that damages the ecosystems even more?” It would be possible to admit that predation is how many endangered species die when they have lost their habitat. It would be possible to admit that humans, not wolves are causing the problem. Predator control leads nowhere but to a continuous downspiral into more and more wildlife deaths, more cruelty and more ecological damage.

6. THE PROGRESS BOARD: VESTED INTERESTS MONITOR THEMSELVES

The government has set up a “Progress Board” to monitor the implementation of the plan agreement. The members of the board are the same interests that negotiated the agreement. The mandate of this board is “track and report both to member constituencies and to the public on the effectiveness of recovery actions.” Sitting on the board are the logging companies and snowmobile clubs — two interests that have been holding up the plan. It is ridiculous to imagine

¹ Harmon, M., et al., “Potential Upper Bounds of Carbon Stores in Forests of the Pacific Northwest,” *Ecological Applications*, 2002.

² US Forest Service, Climate Change Resource Centre, “Policy Analyses and Climate Change,” <http://www.fs.fed.us/ccrc/topics/policy-analyses.shtml>

them being prompt and honest about telling the public that they have been holding up the plan by resisting giving up anything to save an endangered species.

It is no comfort that ForestEthics and the Mountain Caribou Project are on this Board, for they are also vested interests, because they must defend the plan that they helped to create, and creating it has given them some degree of power. Of great concern is the fact that the government has literally designated and authorized as the official body from which it will take guidance. It is very clear that all other members of the public and their organizations will be blocked out by this board, which could stay maintain its control over information and access to government for years as the government continues to drag its feet on protection. Moreover, the Progress Board is a fixture typical to all such agreements — a body that will constantly be in negotiation with each other and the government, constantly jiggling the terms and conditions under “adaptive management.”

During the last 15 months since the plan agreement was announced — a year filled with many objectionable ploys and delays in planning — the Progress Board has never made a single public statement. The Valhalla Wilderness Society became a participant in the scientists’ consultation process to determine the location of proposed new protection for the Timber Harvesting Land Base. VWS and its sister organization, Valhalla Wilderness Watch, began informing the public as early as November 2007 on the evolving terms of reference and subsequent planning issues, releasing reports, press releases and updates.

ForestEthics set up a “Best Practices Blog to ensure transparency and accountability of government efforts to recover the world’s only Mountain Caribou.” This blog so far contains no information later than May 5. We learn that the first meeting of the Progress Board has occurred in a conference call, with 14 people on the call. The only participants identified are ForestEthics, Wildsight, the BC government’s Integrated Land Management Bureau, the Council of Forest Industries and the BC Snowmobile Federation. There is no specific information whatever on the content of the discussion.

Nevertheless, to its credit, ForestEthics hired Dr. Lee Harding to do an audit of the progress of the recovery plan. Dr. Harding is a well-respected biologist who has worked for the federal government, and is a well-known friend of species at risk. Harding’s report, released in May, added helpful information to what is publicly known, and it confirmed that predator killing was the only aspect of the plan that was on schedule by May. He documented a huge array of technical difficulties and obstructions that had delayed the plan, especially the requirement to analyze the impacts on timber mills; nevertheless, his report stated that the habitat component should be completed by the end of May. So far as we know it was indeed completed, if not in May then in June, and yet six more months have gone by with no word from the government, ForestEthics or the Progress Board. The plan seems to have fallen into a black hole.

Dr. Harding’s report blamed various restraints to protect the timber industry as a major cause of delays in the planning:

“The principal difficulty of applying the latest version of the recovery strategy is the constraints imposed to protect commercial interests. These include:

“Incremental caribou habitat protection areas captured in this process (high and low suitability habitat combined) may not exceed 1% of the commercial timber harvest land base (THLB)

throughout the mountain caribou range.

“Although the above cap will not affect the total amount of high-quality caribou habitat to be protected throughout their range,³ each of the habitat planning teams was also given an *a priori* cap on incremental THLB area that may be reserved for caribou in each planning unit and this is likely to limit the protection of available, high-quality habitat for certain herds.

“Beyond these caps, the main goal of protecting high quality habitat within the THLB is subject to ‘accommodations [that] will be made to protect local forest operator viability.’

“Protection of caribou habitat in the non-timber harvest land base (NHLB) may not affect the annual allowable cut (AAC) and forest operations in the short term, defined as five years or the next timber supply review (TSR), which is usually completed province-wide at five-year intervals.

“The Hon. Pat Bell (Minister of Agriculture and Lands) and the Hon. Rich Coleman (Minister of Forests and Range) have recently restated the foregoing as a policy of “no net loss” of short-term timber supply as a consequence of the caribou management plan.”

Harding’s point is worth noting, for these constraints not only severely limit the amount of high quality habitat to be protected, but also choke the process in a technical morass in which it may possibly never see the light of day. It is rather bizarre, however, to read Harding’s report and recognize that these are the terms to which his client consented. If the MCP didn’t consent to them during the secret negotiations, it has consented ever since. At no time has the MCP criticized these constraints publicly for the limits they impose on habitat protection.

With his expertise and access to information, Harding was able to state definitively that:

“In British Columbia, work began on a recovery strategy in 1988, culminating in a preliminary recovery strategy in 1994 . However, this was not implemented and the government appointed another team, the Mountain Caribou Technical Advisory Committee, which included some of the same members. It produced another recovery strategy in 2002. During this eight-year delay, the Central Selkirk herd dropped from at least 265 to 103 caribou, a 61% decline, while the South Purcell population dropped from 90 caribou to 20, a 78% decline. Other populations followed similar trajectories.”

The planning process and subsequent secret negotiations that produced the current plan agreement are no exception to this *modus operandi* of tearing up and restarting planning processes, only to tear them up again, until the mountain caribou are gone forever. An earlier report by Valhalla Wilderness Watch, “Caribou Greenwash,” (still available at www.inlandrainforest.org) provides details of how the BC government transformed a federal/provincial public planning process under the federal *Species At Risk Act* into a backroom deal negotiated by confidentiality agreement. In the course of doing so, it shut down and discarded the results of the first three years of planning, replaced it with a deceptive new round of public consultations, which were themselves upstaged by the announcement of the results of the secret negotiations. During this time, critical remaining intact mountain caribou habitat was been cut open with logging roads and clearcuts.

³ Harding here seems to have copied a specious rationale made by Minister Pat Bell when confronted on the limitations of the 1% cap on protecting the Timber Harvesting Land Base (THLB). Of course the cap will limit the amount of high-quality caribou habitat to be protected throughout their range, if one recognizes that the THLB contains the caribou’s spring and early winter habitat, and that the THLB is the place where most habitat destruction is taking place.

Included in the agreement package was a 5-year delay in the reductions in the allowable annual cut, under the name of saving the mountain caribou. Not only that, the government, timber corporations and snowmobile clubs have so far bought themselves 15 extra months before the plan even gets started. When it is understood that numerous processes to save the caribou have, for years, been started up and then torn down before they came to any results, then one sees how dangerous this one-year delay is. Once a plan has been stalled long enough, the government apparently believes the public will forget about it and it can safely be dropped.

It was, then, of great disappointment that recently, when Valhalla Wilderness Watch went to the media with the fact that the plan was way overdue, ForestEthics spokesperson Candace Batycki reflected no outrage or even disappointment in the failure of the plan to materialize. According to the *Vancouver Sun* (Dec. 15, 2008),

‘Candace Batycki, endangered forests program director for ForestEthics, stood in support of the government a year ago and said she remains hopeful for a positive update soon on land protection.’

In releasing Dr. Harding’s report, the Mountain Caribou Project issued a media release called “Potholes in the Road to Recovery.” While this media release was very weak (saying that “shortcuts” and “setbacks” were delaying the plan) it was a welcome relief for Valhalla and other groups that had been the sole critics of the plan. But unfortunately, ForestEthics and the Mountain Caribou Project were also repeatedly defending the plan from stronger criticism. The point of FE’s and the MCP’s criticism is that the plan they created is late. They have never recognized that the plan itself betrays the caribou and deceives the public.

7. DEFENDING THE GOVERNMENT PLAN

When Valhalla Wilderness Watch criticized the plan in the press in January 2008, ForestEthics spokesperson Candace Batycki was quoted as saying: “Now I’m not a caribou scientist but when a caribou scientist says this plan will work what else is there to think about?” (*Nelson Daily News*, January 30, 2008)

When Valhalla criticized the “no net loss” to the timber industry aspect of the plan, the Mountain Caribou Project released an Open Letter dated February 11, 2008 that denied this aspect:

“There were no commitments to ‘no net loss’ in the October announcement; rather the commitment is that in the short term no mills will be made non-viable by habitat protection announcements.”

When Valhalla provided direct quotes from the newspapers and from the government proving that “no net loss” had been understood from the beginning, the Mountain Caribou Project did not reply. When Dr. Lee Harding noted this same constraint in his report, the MCP did not remove its consent from the plan.

When Valhalla called for the resignation of the Central Selkirks Herd Expert because he was the former biologist of a logging company, he had refused to map the full amount of protection assigned to that herd, and was now offering burns and clearcuts for an animal that needed old-growth forest, Batycki speaking for ForestEthics responded: “That’s a personal attack that was way out of line...” (*Nelson Daily News*, circa April 25, 2008.) What’s more, ForestEthics supported the inclusion of the clearcuts and burns!:

"Further, both Batycki and Zacharias [head of the Species at Risk Coordination Office] explained that the land is still in play and nothing firm has been decided yet. One issue with not having those early seral patches [clearcuts and burns] included in the protected area is that without the protection, the forest could still be logged in the future and that means roads could be built through to access those areas. Zacharias indicated that the government wants to protect areas that will contribute to the species' recovery over time. Some of those trade-offs do have to be made. 'It's not going to be 100 percent,' added Batycki. 'We're looking for as much primary forest to be protected as possible because that's what caribou need.'" (Nelson Daily News, circa April 25, 2008.)

Most recently, ForestEthics and the Mountain Caribou Project have claimed that the killing of the Chilcotin wild horses for wolf bait is only "tangentially linked to the mountain caribou issue. It is our understanding that the horses were being culled to satisfy ranching interests, and that the Ministry of Environment decided to use some of the carcasses to bait wolves." However, this is what the *Vancouver Sun* article really stated:

"Environment Ministry spokesman Dan Gilmore confirmed the ministry paid members of the Xenigwet'in First Nation of the Nemaiah Valley \$500 apiece for four horses last winter." [ed. note: later figures go up to 15 horses.] "When it came time to consider how best to lure and capture wolves for the purposes of the mountain caribou recovery program, it was recommended that we use horseflesh," he said in a statement. ... Rodger Stewart, regional manager of environment for the Cariboo, said his office dealt directly with the Xenigwet'in administration ... and said he would not rule out making another request in the future ... The horses were shot last winter to aid in the live capture of wolves near Quesnel as part of ministry research into threatened caribou populations." [ed. note: government document indicate that most or all wolves were killed after 'live capture.']"

The following quote from Minister Pat Bell shows how the government uses the consent of the Mountain Caribou Project and ForestEthics to shield itself from the consequences of its wrongdoing. NDP critic Michael Sather confronted Minister Pat Bell in the legislature about the problems with the mountain caribou plan. In his reply Minister Bell stated:

"Although there are some other environmental organizations that disagree with the decisions that have been made, I would suggest that when you bring ten environmental organizations on board in a collaborative process, you've done very well.

"I certainly have a lot of respect for ForestEthics in the work that they've done, and Wildsight - Candace Batycki and John Bergenske - deserve a lot of credit for being willing to be open and work with government. Part of openness and transparency falls to the progress board that's being established.

"I have every confidence in the world in Candace's ability and John's ability to speak up and say if they don't believe the government is meeting their objective. It would be foolish to think that we would appoint individuals from the environmental community to a progress board if we didn't want to be held to account."

It was great good fortune to have an MLA willing to ask questions about the caribou plan in the legislature, but this is what happened to it. The Minister flashed the Ring of Consent given to him by ForestEthics, Wildsight and the Mountain Caribou Project, and that was all he needed to do. In effect, with comments like these, the government has purchased and now promotes the

Opposition to its own policies — an Opposition that looks very much like the environmental movement, but can be counted on to rubber-stamp a plan that saves the timber industry and the snowmobile clubs from any significant losses to save the caribou, and not to object with any vigour when the plan doesn't even materialize.

With large amounts of funding, the Mountain Caribou Project manages to present an impressive appearance of being the “watchdog” role over the government’s plan. It has hired Dr. Harding. It has set up a website called, ironically enough, a “transparency site.” FE proudly proclaims it has hired its own “whistleblower”: highly respected champion of endangered species, Gord McAdams, a long-time official of the Ministry of Environment who was fired for providing a court of law with information on endangered Painted Turtles.

Perhaps both Harding and McAdams may possibly be able to rescue the groups of the Mountain Caribou Project from the government and a gang of vested interests which, having the consent of the MCP for cover, are taking astonishing licence to flout the public trust after holding an unparalleled media celebration to take bows for their commitments. These gentlemen worked for government during a time when the government oversaw the activities of logging companies and commercial and non-commercial recreation on Crown lands and made sure they met their commitments. Now a board full of the vested interests is appointed to oversee the government’s fulfillment of its commitments.

Dr. Harding is due to release another audit report in January. ForestEthics says it “won’t pull any punches.” But the only punch that will do anything for the mountain caribou is for ForestEthics and the Mountain Caribou Project to remove its consent from the plan.

It needs to be understood that during the whole five years of the planning process for the mountain caribou, the BC government repeatedly showed itself to be extremely biased in favour of the logging industry and insincere about protecting the mountain caribou. After the mountain caribou deal was celebrated, with no actual plan in existence, experienced mountain caribou activists warned the members of the Mountain Caribou Project that they had signed a blank check and given it to a government and to vested interests that did not deserve such trust. The betrayals were accurately predicted, but now, the Mountain Caribou Project can omit its role in creating and validating this plan, and gain a “watchdog” public image by criticizing the predictable failures in the implementation of what it helped to create.

ForestEthics is now moving into a campaign on coal bed methane in the Sacred Headwaters, and the Gateway Pipeline that will carry dirty oil from the tar sands of Alberta to the BC coast for shipment to the US and China in huge oil tankers like the Exxon Valdez that spewed oil all over the Alaskan coast, killing untold amounts of sea life. In advertising for a campaigner ForestEthics has described itself as:

“one of the world's leading forest protection organizations. Over the past seven years we have had unprecedented success protecting critical forests in Canada ... Our Inland Rainforest Program has focused on protecting the old-growth forests endangered mountain caribou need to survive.”

Yet it is precisely in the area of conceding the logging of almost all the low elevation old-growth Inland Rainforests, as well as the mid-elevation forests, that ForestEthics has failed the mountain caribou. Can this be called real forest ethics?

Slaughtering top predators for decades will do immeasurable harm to inland rainforest ecosystems, while it brings back in force in British Columbia a frontier mentality that cares nothing about ecological linkages and the welfare of the whole ecosystem. Predator control will empower once again the reign of callousness in BC wildlife management which, in the 1950s, spread 2,000 poisoned baits a year for BC's wild carnivores.

Wolf researchers have now documented wolf packs cooperating to care for their young, and for their sick and injured, to a degree second only to the primates. These are living beings whose treatment at the hands of human beings puts human moral consciousness somewhere in the dark ages, destroying something which, when human understanding finally arrives, will be seen as a treasure; but by then it may be too late.