

Caribou Extinction Is The Latest Environmental Threat To Oil Industry

Image Gallery



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Online PR News – 26-July-2010 The possible extinction of the woodland caribou in Alberta, Canada is the latest environmental disaster threatening to disrupt the oil industry, according to a new report issued today (15/7/10) by The Co-operative.

Woodland caribou, once common in the boreal forest of Alberta, are now threatened with extinction in the region by rapidly expanding developments extracting oil from the tar sands.

Under Canadian law the government has a duty to protect the habitat of woodland caribou; however, to date, next to no action has been taken. In response Cree indigenous communities living in the area are now calling for an immediate moratorium with immediate effect, on all new industrial developments in those areas within caribou habitat.

This would have major consequences for oil industry expansion plans for the tar sands, including BP's recently announced Kirby tar sands project which would lie within critical habitat.

As part of its Toxic Fuels Campaign as well as other environmental campaigns such as [Climate Change Facts](#), The Co-operative is working with the Beaver Lake Cree Nation, a small indigenous community in northeast Alberta whose traditional territories cover 30 per cent of all existing [Albertan tar sands](#) operations.

An expert study by Dr Stan Boutin of the University of Alberta and funded by The Co-operative, looked at the two caribou herds within the Beaver Lake Cree's traditional territories, an area the size of Switzerland. It found that only 175 – 275 caribou remain, down 10 fold on historic numbers, and that these herds are facing extinction by 2025 without immediate habitat protection.

Current tar sands production within Beaver Lake Cree traditional territories stands at 546,000 barrels of oil per day (bpd), with plans to increase production to 1.75 million bpd over coming years. The Co-operative's report finds that 99 per cent of these expansion plans are within or near caribou critical habitat and are at risk from protection measures.

Using evidence from the expert study, the Beaver Lake Cree and other First Nations in the area are calling

upon the Canadian Government to make an emergency order under the Species at Risk Act (SARA). This order would need to instruct the protection of remaining caribou habitat and introduce a moratorium, with immediate effect, on all new developments within those areas. Under SARA the government was required to implement a recovery plan that protected critical habitat for this threatened species by 2007, but to date next to no action has been taken.

Paul Monaghan, Head of Social Goals and Sustainability at The Co-operative, said: “Should the Canadian Government carry out its legal obligations then the oil industry’s massive expansion plans for the tar sands would be severely curtailed. This timely report shows how perilous the Caribou’s continued existence is in Alberta, and is a real slap in the face to those that say the tar sands can be extracted in an environmentally friendly way.

“These creatures are tough, at times surviving on small patches of lichen which they can smell through inches and inches of snow. However, the dissection of the boreal forest by tar sands developments completely undermines their ancient strategy of spatial separation, whereby they steer well away from predators such as wolves. This report provides the hard data to back up what First Nations people have been saying for years: the caribou are dying.”

Chief Al Lameman of the Beaver Lake Cree Nation, said: “It is difficult for me to express the anger I feel at the loss of this noble animal in our territory. And the situation is getting worse and worse all the time. Our traditional land is dwindling. We need habitat for our animals like our caribou to ensure there is a healthy surplus. These animals sustain us and as they die, our future becomes uncertain. We must act now to take care of Mother Earth.”

“We are calling on government to immediately call a halt to the destruction of our lands, the land that sustains our caribou and our people. We want a moratorium on all development within and adjacent to woodland caribou ranges that overlap with Beaver Lake Cree Nation’s traditional territory.”

The full report ‘Save the caribou – stop the tar sands’ and new ‘Save the caribou’ viral game can be accessed via: www.goodwithmoney.co.uk/beaverlakecree

Notes to editors:

1. Woodland caribou normally exist at low densities in very large range areas, they are found in undisturbed old growth boreal forest and forested peatlands; they avoid young forest and shrub rich habitats that support higher densities of moose and deer and in turn wolves. The ranges of the two woodland caribou herds cover 35% of the Beaver Lake Cree’s 38,972 km² of traditional territories. The report finds that tar sands related disturbance, such as well pad clearings, clear cut seismic exploration lines and pipelines have had a significant impact upon these ranges, degrading the habitat value of 66% of the East Side Athabasca River herd range and 51% of the Cold Lake herd range. The two herds have respectively declined by 71% since 1996 and 74% since 1998.

2. Protection of caribou habitat within the Beaver Lake Cree’s traditional territories would impact upon the following major new tar sands developments and expansion plans: BP and Devon’s joint Kirby project (plans to produce around 105,000 bpd); Statoil’s Kai Kos Dehseh project (plans to produce 240,000 bpd); Cenovus’ Christina Lake, Narrows Lake and Foster Creek projects (plan to expand production from 131,000 bpd to 549,000 bpd); and MEG Energy’s Christina Lake project (plan to expand production from 25,000 bpd to 210,000 bpd).

3. To coincide with the new report, The Co-operative has launched a new online viral game called 'Save the caribou'. The aim of the game is to get the caribou through the tar sands developments to the safety of undisturbed forest, avoiding the lakes of toxic waste, diggers, pipelines, processing plants and traffic in the process.

4. Tar sands are a complex mixture of bitumen, sand, water and clay. The production of **dirty oil** from tar sands is a polluting and energy intensive process, emitting on average three times more greenhouse gases (GHGs) than conventional oil production. Canada has 175 billion barrels of proven oil reserves in tar sands deposits; this is second only to Saudi Arabia's conventional oil reserves. Average tar sands production in Alberta, Canada, currently stands at 1.3 million barrels of oil per day. The Canadian Government has granted licenses to increase production to 7.0 million barrels oil per day. Every major oil company has existing or planned operations in Canada's tar sands, including Shell, BP, Exxon Mobil, Total, Conoco-Phillips and Chevron. In July 2008, the Co-operative and WWF-UK published a report 'Unconventional oil: scraping the bottom of the barrel', which found that exploiting the tar sands would increase atmospheric CO2 by up to 12 parts per million, enough alone to take us to the brink of runaway climate change.

5. The Co-operative has been supporting the Beaver Lake Cree as part of its Toxic Fuels campaign since February 2009. In response to their traditional territories being destroyed by tar sands developments, in violation of their constitutionally protected treaty rights, the Beaver Lake Cree have commenced a legal challenge to protect their environment and halt new developments. The Co-operative and its members and customers have donated more than £200,000 to support the legal challenge to date. For more information see: www.goodwithmoney.co.uk/beaverlakecree

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