

Revelstoke Caribou Rearing in the Wild (RCRW) Society Maternity Penning in the Revelstoke Region

Maternity penning involves placing pregnant female caribou in a pen in the wild where predators can't get in. Caribou calve in the pen and about one month after birthing all caribou are set free. This method increases calf survival because it protects calves during the riskiest part of their lives—the first month after they are born.

Maternity penning is one tool for caribou recovery. A number of factors led RCRW to launch a maternity pen in the Revelstoke region:

The Right Reason

The RCRW is focusing its efforts on the largest and most stable of the herds in the Revelstoke area, the Columbia North herd.

Pregnancy rates for caribou in the Columbia North herd are consistently high but the number of calves surviving their first year is not enough to sustain the population.

The Right Goal

The sole focus of RCRW society is to fundraise, plan and conduct maternity penning project of mountain caribou to increase calf survival in the North Columbia Mountains over a five-year pilot period. Our aim is to *help* increase the number of the herd from the current estimate of 152 to a sustainable population of 250 animals.

The Right Foundation

Measures taken by the Province of British Columbia over the past two decades to reduce threats to caribou in the region include:

- Protecting caribou habitat from resource development.

- Reducing the number of primary prey species (moose) to historic levels (from ~1650 to ~300), thereby reducing predator numbers;
- Reducing impacts from recreation through winter closures and restricting activities.



Photo Credit: T. Anderson

The Right People

The RCRW Society is a grassroots initiative, composed of a wide-diversity of members and organizations in the Revelstoke region that are committed to the conservation of Southern Mountain Caribou.

Forest industry, government, First Nations, scientists, commercial and non-commercial recreation users have set aside diverse interests to concentrate on what's best for this endangered species.

The Right Support

The construction of the pen in 2013 cost ~\$160K; annual operational costs range from \$300K to \$400K. The maternity penning project would never have happened without dedicated fundraising and funders. This project is a reality thanks to significant support from the Government of Canada, Province of BC, Columbia Basin Trust, The Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program, Shell Canada, Revelstoke Community Forestry Corporation, Parks Canada, Downie Timber Ltd, and Golder and Associates.

RCRW receives an incredible amount of local support with thousands of volunteer hours dedicated to pen construction, lichen collection (for feeding caribou), and the use of local contractors, expertise and equipment at no cost. The community is the backbone for this project—support for this initiative has been truly impressive. Please see the attached list to view the logos of all our sponsors.



Photo Credit: T. Anderson

Recognizing Risks

The second year of the maternity-penning pilot begins in March 2015. We at RCRW recognize that no project is risk free.

There's always a certain amount of risk when handling wild animals. We have the provincial

wildlife veterinarian overseeing the project as well as a highly experienced animal capture, science and monitoring team. We use established animal care protocols and best practices.

The maternity pen fence is 4 metres high; this keeps caribou in and predators out. The pen is surrounded by a 2.5 metre-high, 14-strand electric fence to facilitate the exclusion of predators. Shepherds living on-site actively monitor the area to ensure animal safety.

However the biggest risk to these animals is doing nothing at all.

Progress So Far

In March 2014 we safely captured 10 adult female caribou and 2 juveniles. Of these, 9 were pregnant and successfully gave birth. The caribou were released in July. As of December, all adults are alive; six of nine calves were confirmed alive in October 2014, but we were unable to gain a visual on the other three. Since then, one calf has been killed by wolves. Monitoring flights will be conducted in March 2015 to confirm the status of the calves.

To download video and images, or learn more about Revelstoke Caribou Rearing in the Wild Society and maternity penning in the Revelstoke area, please visit:

RCRW website:

<http://rcrw.ca/>

RCRW facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/RevelstokeCaribou?fref=ts>

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