

Caribou Released from Maternal Pen

Release marks second season of project aiming to reverse decline of threatened species

July 17, 2015, Revelstoke, BC: Seventeen adults, 11 calves (three to six weeks old) and one juvenile caribou were recently released from a maternal pen near Revelstoke. The release is part of a multi-stakeholder pilot project by the Revelstoke Caribou Rearing in the Wild Society (RCRW) aimed at increasing the number of endangered mountain caribou in the Columbia Mountains. Maternal penning is designed to increase calf survival by protecting cows and calves from predation during late gestation and the first few weeks of life

Adult female caribou were captured in April and transported to a predator-resistant enclosure and have been tended by shepherds. The released animals have now moved into their natural high-elevation summer range and will be monitored for the next eight months using satellite-linked collars.

During captivity there were five mortalities—an adult cow and four calves. The causes of these deaths varied. An adult cow and her calf died due to poor physical condition; three other calves died as a result of abandonment, injury (consistent with trampling) and infection, respectively.

From the beginning, the project has implemented professionally reviewed standards of care. In the interest of improving care and gaining insight into sources of caribou mortality, a wildlife veterinarian re-assessed the caribou, the site and procedures. Recommendations from this assessment were implemented immediately, including more rigorous quarantine measures, increased frequency of water changes, removal of standing water, decreased disturbance and early release.

“We thank the dedicated wildlife veterinarians who provided assistance at all hours of the day and night” said Kelsey Furk, President of RCRW. “We continue to work with qualified biologists and veterinarians to learn from our experiences and use this knowledge to support ongoing conservation efforts.”

Currently, there are approximately 120 caribou in the Columbia North herd. The recovery goal is to increase the population to a self-sustaining level of 250 caribou.

RCRW is a community-based partnership that includes the Revelstoke Community Forest Corporation, Splatšin First Nation, the North Columbia Environmental Society, the Revelstoke Snowmobile Club, Mica Heli Guides, the Province of BC and the Columbia Mountains Caribou Research Project.

The maternity penning project is grateful to the many dedicated volunteers and funders that make this project possible. Major supporters include the Government of Canada, Parks Canada, the Province of BC, the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program, the Revelstoke Community Forestry Corporation, Columbia Basin Trust, Shell Canada, Golder and Associates Ltd., Downie Timber and Selkirk Tangiers Heliskiing. To see a full list of supporters go to rcrw.ca/contributors.

For photos and video go to:
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