

Revelstoke Maternal Penning Project Year 3 Spring Update



Caribou in the maternal pen - March 2016

The Revelstoke Caribou Rearing in the Wild (RCRW) project was launched in 2014 to conduct maternal penning. Maternal penning in our area involves placing pregnant caribou in a newly expanded nine (9.3) hectare pen safe from predators, from late March until mid-July, the riskiest time of year for both adult and calf mountain caribou. Come July animals are released back into the wild.

The RCRW is a collaborative, community-led, not for profit society. Representatives from the forest industry, an environmental organization, governments, First Nations, and the winter recreation sector have set aside diverse interests and together are taking action to protect this endangered species.

Year Two (2) Update -2015 Caribou Cohort

In March 2015, 18 adult female caribou and one 10-month-old calf were captured. All but two of the adult females were pregnant and 15 calves were born in the pen. All caribou and calves were radio-collared to allow for post-release monitoring via satellite. On July 13th, 17 adult caribou and 11 calves were released from the pen and moved to high elevation habitat.

As of May 2016, 9/15 (60%) calves survived until March 2016. These results are an improvement

from Year 1 where the survival rate for calves was similar to caribou born in the wild (~22% survival). With high snowpack in the sub-alpine in winter 2015/2016 acting as a winter barrier between predators and caribou, the RCRW reached our goal of doubling survival of pen-born caribou calves to 10 months of age over that of wild-born calves.

Year Three (3) Update- 2016 Caribou Cohort

In March 2016, 12 adult female caribou were captured. Eleven of the 12 cows were pregnant. The number of captured animals was reduced this year to minimize issues that could impact animal well-being for the duration of their stay in the pen.

RCRW will provide an update later in the season.

Most caribou and calves will be radio-collared, as has been conducted in Year 1 and 2, to allow for post-release monitoring via satellite.

New and Current Initiatives the RCRW has completed in Year 3 include:

- Expanding the pen from 6.4 to 9.3 hectares;
- Installing a solar powered flow-through water system;
- Having a BC Government veterinarian on-site for the first few weeks of calving;
- Continuing to minimize human contact with animals in the pen;
- Continuing to employ full time staff with training in animal husbandry to monitor the caribou in the pen and patrol for predators;
- Continue to use strict hygiene protocols prior to entrance and exit of the pen;
- Continuing to follow professionally reviewed protocols, building on the best standards for wildlife capture and care;
- Continuing to run and recruit volunteers for our very successful lichen harvesting program (105 kg collected by 20 volunteers in 2016) and pen maintenance;

- Continuing to support outreach on Caribou ecology through education in west Kootenay schools (229 students in 5 towns participated in 2015).

Looking to Year Four (4) of Maternity Penning

Assuming efforts in 2016 substantially reduce the challenges experienced in 2015 - the plan is to capture 17 pregnant females in 2017. RCRW needs to capture approximately 20 caribou annually to have a demonstrable impact on population growth rate. The RCRW goal is to work up to that number with conservative and incremental increases in the number of female caribou we catch and protect using maternal penning.

The health and welfare of caribou, from capture through release is our top priority.

This project is still at a pilot stage, and offers a huge learning experience. RCRW continues to adjust best practices based on our experiences of penning caribou and are constantly employing the advice and assistance of wildlife veterinarians and biologists to make maternal penning as effective as possible.

An extended study time of five years will allow for the averaging of results on calf recruitment and survival over both typical and atypical years, including a number of factors such as weather, predation and accidents.



Calves playing - July 2015

Acknowledgements and Future Funding

RCRW relies on volunteers, in-kind support, grants and donations from a variety of sources including government and non-government agencies. Most funding is applied for, and approved annually with a smaller portion secured over multiple years. Funding is mostly secure to March 2017, but further funding will be required to continue operations past this date. If you are interested in contributing to the project through donations, grants, or as a volunteer please contact the Executive Director at rcrwsociety@gmail.com, or at [250-814-3272](tel:250-814-3272).

We are grateful to the many dedicated volunteers of all ages and funders that make this project possible. 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, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, Shell Canada, Golder and Associates Ltd., Downie Timber, Mustang Powder, Eagle Pass Heli-skiing, Crescent Spur Heli-skiing, Selkirk Tangiers Heli-skiing, Selkirk Mountain Helicopters, Emco Corporation, Grundfos Canada, the BC Hydro First Wave program.

To see a full list of supporters and board members please go to rcrw.ca.

To learn more about Revelstoke Caribou Rearing in the Wild please visit:

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