

Provinces fail to meet federal deadline on protecting caribou

 [cbc.ca/news/politics/boreal-caribou-province-deadline-1.4380050](https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/boreal-caribou-province-deadline-1.4380050)



Five years after they were forced to come up with strategies to protect habitat for the boreal caribou, not a single province has met that deadline, according to a federal government progress report released today.

The report paints a bleak picture for the animal.

While the regions finish drafting their strategies, the number of caribou continues to decline, the report says.

The document also states that while provinces have made some progress on coming up with recovery strategies for the caribou, the iconic species continue to decline in numbers, and the "habitat condition in the majority of ranges has worsened since 2012."

- [Why Canada's endangered species are declining faster than ever](#)
- [Ottawa releases woodland caribou recovery plan](#)

The caribou are found in the boreal forest that stretches like a ribbon across nine provinces and territories. The majority of their habitat falls on provincial Crown land.

In 2012, those jurisdictions were mandated under the federal species at risk act to come up with plans to protect the caribou habitat under their jurisdiction.

Tuesday's report states "provinces and territories have not fully met the Oct. 5, 2017, deadline for completing range plans."

Trying to stop the decline

"However some progress has been achieved," it adds.

British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec released draft or final range plans or portions of strategies. Alberta committed

to completing a draft plan by this December and Saskatchewan will also have a draft plan before the end of the year as well.

Manitoba has indicated it will have final plans for five of the nine caribou ranges by next year. The rest will be done by 2020.

Quebec will have the second phase of its provincial action plan by the spring of 2018.

But in the interim, the number of caribou continues to decline.

"The best available data, submitted by provinces and territories, indicates that many boreal caribou local populations continue to decline across Canada," according to the report.

"There are several small local populations, some of which are isolated, that continue to be at greater risk of extirpation or of not achieving or maintaining self-sustaining status."

At the same time more or more of its habitat is disturbed.

Environmental group sues government

This report comes as an environmental group is taking the federal government to court for what it says is a failure to uphold its responsibilities laid out in the Species at Risk Act.

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society says federal Environment Minister Catherine McKenna has not acted to protect the habitat of the boreal woodland caribou.

The group says the environment minister's lack of action in reporting on preservation efforts has left the caribou habitat fragmented and unprotected from industrial development resulting in a decline of caribou populations.

McKenna's office won't comment on the lawsuit while it's before the courts.

But after a spring meeting with her provincial counterparts to talk about species at risk, and in particular the caribou, McKenna told reporters "It's challenging. Let's be frank. We know there is work to be done. It requires everyone working together."

In the wake of this report, Environment Canada will begin its own assessment of the caribou, and its habitat across the country. That review is expected to be done early in 2018.