
Forest-dwelling Woodland Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*) in Ontario: Planning for Recovery Near the Edge of Range

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Abstract

The forest-dwelling ecotype of woodland caribou (Rangifer tarandus caribou) has been designated as “Threatened” both nationally and within Ontario. A provincial Recovery Team and a supporting public Advisory Committee have been established to develop a Recovery Strategy for Ontario. The objective of Ontario’s Recovery Strategy is to stop range recession and retain currently occupied range, to stabilize and secure isolated populations, and to work to regain lost caribou range in strategically important locations. Five recovery zones have been designated to provide the basis for geographically-specific recovery action plans – Lake Superior Coast, Lake Nipigon Basin, Central Highlands, Northwest and Northeast. Each of these recovery zones faces both unique and common threats to the continued presence and health of caribou populations. The Recovery Strategy will identify recovery actions to address a range of recovery objectives, including policy and legislation, inventory and monitoring, population management, land-use planning and management, research, and communications and outreach. Large protected areas, within a landscape context, play an important role in caribou recovery.

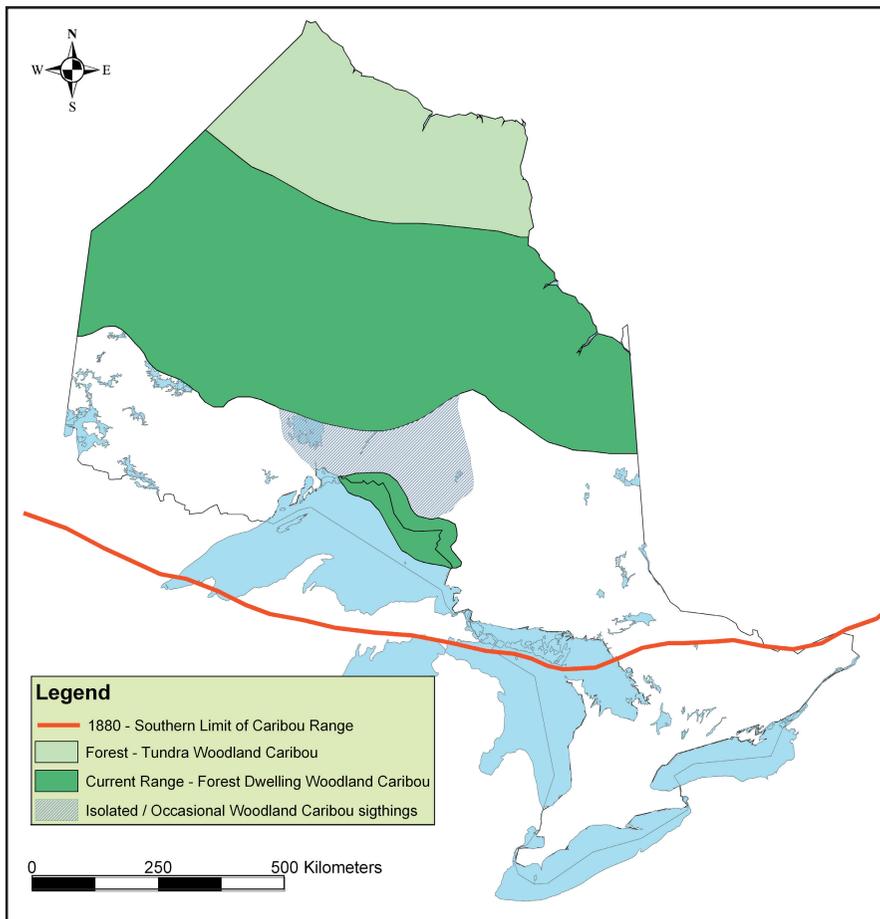
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Introduction

The forest-dwelling (boreal) ecotype of woodland caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*) has been designated as “Threatened” both nationally and within Ontario. Their range has declined by more than 40% since 1880 (Figure 1). Caribou in the more northern “forest-tundra” ecotype, occurring adjacent to and within the Hudson Bay Lowlands, are considered not at risk.

Each Canadian jurisdiction within woodland caribou range is producing an individual recovery strategy, with coordination and communications through a National Technical Committee. Ontario has established a provincial Recovery Team and a supporting public Advisory Committee to develop a Recovery Strategy for Ontario.

Figure 1. Woodland Caribou range in Ontario.



Recovery Goals and Strategy

The proposed goal of the Recovery Strategy of Ontario has three facets:

- Maintain self-sustaining, genetically-connected forest-dwelling woodland caribou populations where they currently exist;
- Ensure security for and connections (reproductive) among currently isolated mainland populations; and,
- Re-establish caribou in strategically selected landscape units in order to achieve self-sustaining populations and ensure connectivity.

The Recovery Strategy will identify recovery actions to address a range of recovery objectives, including:

- legislation and policy;
- inventory, monitoring and reporting;
- population management;
- land use planning and management;
- research; and,
- communications and outreach.

While the Recovery Strategy is being developed, ongoing efforts are taking place to address caribou conservation needs through forest management and land-use planning within an ecosystem management framework, and expanded monitoring and research initiatives. Large protected areas, within a landscape context, play an important role in caribou recovery.

Woodland Caribou Advisory Committee

An advisory Committee has been established to support development of the Recovery Strategy. Membership includes:

- Environment North,
- Ontario Nature,
- Nature & Outdoor Tourism Ontario,
- Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities,
- Northwatch,
- Ontario Federation of Anglers & Hunters,
- Ontario Forest Industry Association,
- Ontario Fur Managers' Federation,
- Ontario Lumber Manufacturers' Association,
- Ontario Mining Association,
- Ontario Prospectors' Association,
- Trent University,
- Wildlands League, and
- World Wildlife Fund.

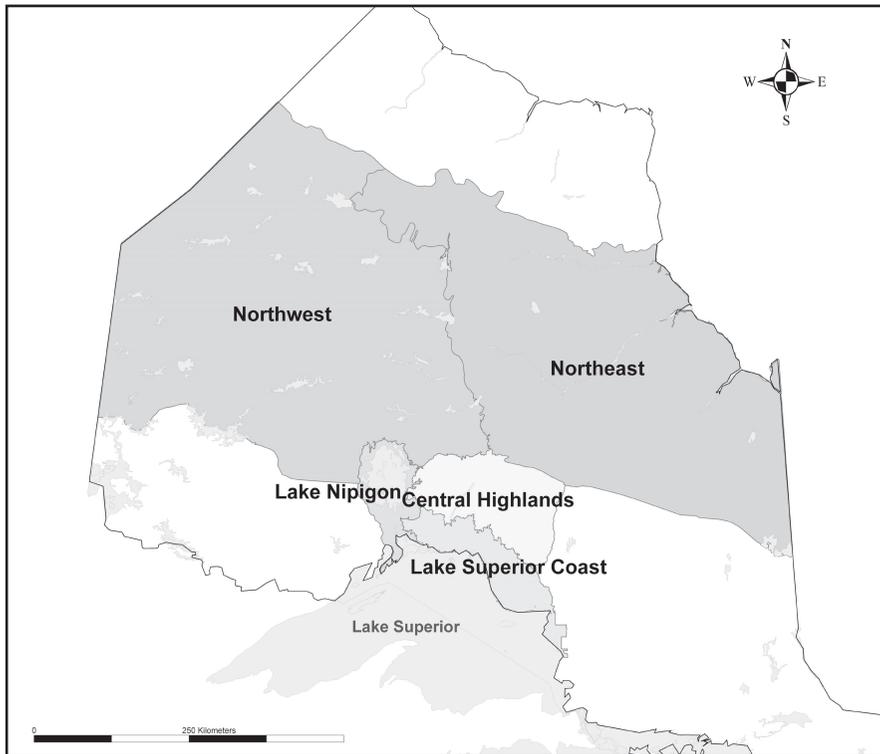
Recovery Zones

Five ecologically-based recovery zones have been designated to provide the basis for geographically-specific recovery actions – Lake Superior Coast, Lake Nipigon Basin, Central Highlands, Northwest and Northeast (Figure 2). Each zone presents different opportunities and constraints for caribou recovery and provides a geographic context for the consideration and evaluation of recovery approaches. These zones reflect both ecological and human development factors. Each of these recovery zones faces both unique and common threats to the continued presence and health of caribou populations. Action Plans, which will identify specific operational and site-specific actions to recover and conserve caribou, will be developed for each Recovery Zone.

Recovery Approaches and Challenges

Current recovery activities include the implementation of landscape-level forest management guidelines for caribou habitat, recognition of the role of large protected areas in caribou conservation, and expanded inventory and

Figure 2. Woodland Caribou Recovery Zones in Ontario.

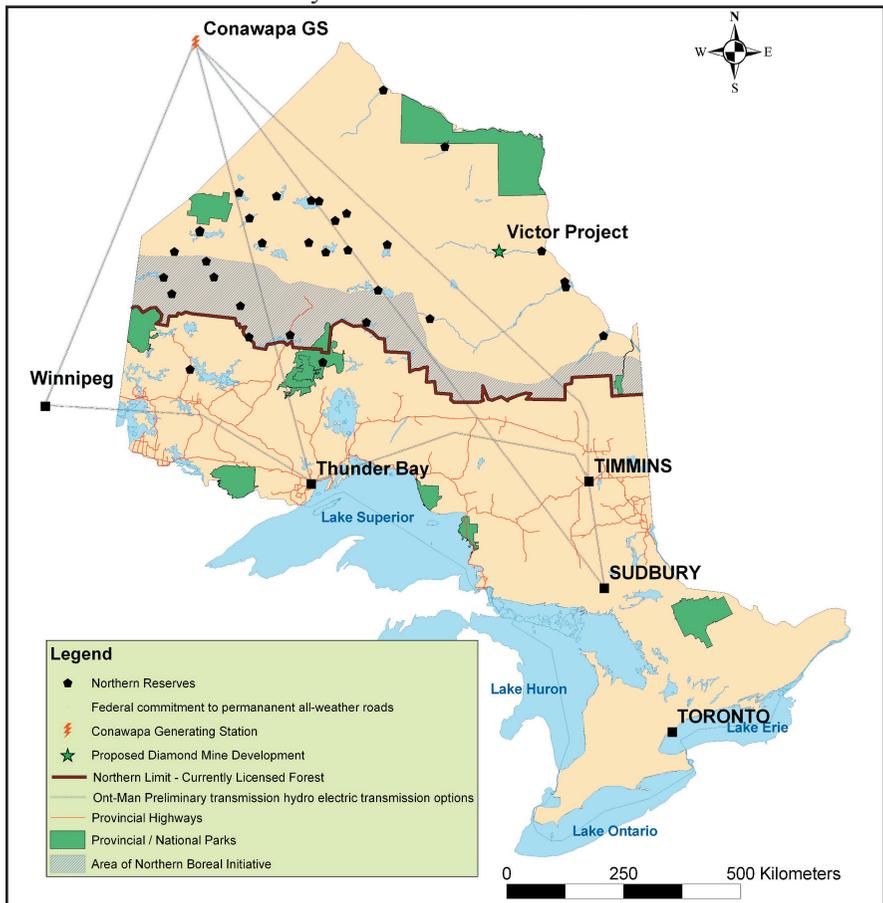


monitoring efforts. Caribou conservation and recovery remains a challenge with existing levels of development in the boreal forest. Proposals for expanded human development across the northern Ontario landscape provide an increasing challenge and an increasing risk for caribou (Figure 3).

Current and proposed human development activities that must consider caribou recovery objectives include:

- the continued northward expansion of forest harvesting;
- the northward expansion of access networks for both logging purposes and all-weather access to northern First Nation communities;
- the Northern Boreal Initiative, which is providing for community-based land-use planning with First Nations to identify opportunities for resource management, economic development and protected areas;
- the proposed Ontario-Manitoba hydroelectric transmission corridor;

Figure 3. Anticipated future resource development pressures affecting woodland caribou recovery in Ontario.



- increasing interest in tourism development; and
- northeastern Ontario diamond mining.

Conclusion

The Recovery Strategy for Ontario will address a variety of objectives by identifying actions to retain and regain woodland caribou range and to stabilize caribou populations. Designation of recovery zones will allow the development of actions – ranging from policy and legislation to communication and outreach – that are geographically specific. Given the importance of considering the landscape context, integration with other provincial Recovery Teams will aid the stabilization and recovery of caribou populations in the boreal region across Canada.

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