



ALBERTA
ENVIRONMENT AND PARKS

*Office of the Minister
MLA, Lethbridge-West*

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Mr. Michael Bloomfield
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Ms. Christyann Olson
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Ms. Kecia Kerr
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Ms. Rachel Plotkin
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Mr. Art Jackson
President
West Athabasca Bio-Regional
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Dear Mr. Dyer, Mr. Bloomfield, Ms. Olson, Ms. Kerr, Ms. Plotkin and Mr. Jackson:

Thank you for your letter regarding Alberta's Draft Provincial Woodland Caribou Range Plan. I appreciate the detailed input, and welcome the opportunity to provide the following information.

Alberta is committed to stabilizing, recovering and ultimately achieving naturally sustaining caribou populations. The caribou range plan is a made-in-Alberta plan that demonstrates the government's commitment to the recovery of caribou populations while protecting jobs and local economies.

The caribou range plan is a working document that seeks to find a balance between meeting federal requirements under the *Species at Risk Act* and addressing the economic and environmental realities here at home. The Government of Alberta is committed to maintaining jobs, local economies and strong communities. The caribou range plan is not a one-size-fits-all solution that will be applied across all ranges, nor is it a final plan. It is a pushing off point for further conversations at the local level to make sure we get it right for each range. Environment and Parks is continuing to advance caribou range planning with the development of range-specific details. We expect some ranges to be completed by the spring of 2018.

With regards to conservation areas, we are continuing to engage with Indigenous peoples and stakeholders from industry, municipal governments and environmental non-government organizations to gather further input before the range plans are finalized. Part of that conversation will be to understand potential social and economic impacts of proposed conservation areas and how they would benefit caribou recovery and biodiversity as a whole. Further discussions are required to determine appropriate boundaries, management intent and designation to meet required objectives for caribou and other land management objectives.

The protection of caribou habitat will result in greater certainty for industry operating within caribou range boundaries and our conversations with industry generally support the candidate conservation areas that have been identified. During the engagement process, we will have further discussions with stakeholders about which conservation tool may work best for Alberta's communities.

The analysis of each range will determine the extent of requirements and priority for restoration. Following the release of range-specific plans, restoration planning will be required to develop appropriate operational plans. It is important that Indigenous peoples and other land users are engaged to ensure we incorporate the understanding of traditional land use and access needs into restoration activities.

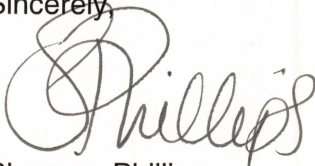
With regard to regional access management plans, they are likely more appropriate and effective in areas with higher potential for traditional petroleum and natural gas development. Access plans will be prioritized and completed in ranges where they are likely most effective, following the release of a final range plan. Regional access management plans must be implementable and the implication of trade-offs between tenure holders needs to be understood. As such, we believe these plans will be most effectively developed with industry support.

The extent of current disturbance within caribou ranges is a result of decades of resource extraction and economic activities. Legacy footprint that still requires restoration will take at least 40 years to appropriately restore a site. There is extensive disturbance and the restoration work on the ground will take decades to complete. The federal government recognizes this and indicates they understand habitat recovery may take up to 100 years or more. While evaluating unintended consequences, we continue to strive to develop habitat recovery maps that show plausible and measurable outcomes.

Regarding statutory provisions, regulatory mechanisms continue to be explored to enable range plans. Positioning caribou range plans as sub-regional plans under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* should provide the strength and enforcement required for successful implementation.

Thank you again for providing a detailed response to Alberta's Draft Provincial Woodland Caribou Range Plan. The Government of Alberta is proud to be working on forming partnerships with environmental non-governmental organizations for habitat recovery work, which is a crucial part of our caribou recovery strategy and a great investment in Alberta's future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Shannon Phillips'.

Shannon Phillips
Minister

cc: Honourable Oneil Carlier, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Honourable Margaret McCuaig-Boyd, Minister of Energy
Andre Corbould, Deputy Minister
Ronda Goulden, Environment and Parks, Policy and Planning Division
Brian Makowecki, Environment and Parks