

Help Jasper's Tonquin Valley Caribou Survive

JASPER'S CARIBOU ARE ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION

In the 1960s, southern Jasper National Park had hundreds of caribou. Today there are fewer than 60 animals left. One herd is gone, two more are at such low numbers that they might not last much longer.

The Tonquin herd is the largest group left, only 45 animals in total including 10 or less breeding females. Parks Canada has improved wildlife management in Jasper National Park and has closed winter access into the Tonquin backcountry until February 16, but the Tonquin herd continues to decline.



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Because caribou are a sensitive species, it is urgent that we do more to help them survive and recover. This means giving the Tonquin herd more space in the winter months when they are most stressed.

WHAT DO CARIBOU NEED?

Jasper caribou spend winter in alpine terrain, when other animals are in valley bottoms. They need quiet areas with deep snow – places that elk and moose avoid, where predators like wolves can't easily move or hunt.

In winter, caribou eat mostly low-protein lichens. They can't afford the energetic costs of moving to avoid humans. Caribou cows are pregnant in winter; they need to stay healthy so that they can give birth to strong calves in late May or June.

“There are so few Tonquin caribou that the survival of every individual counts.”



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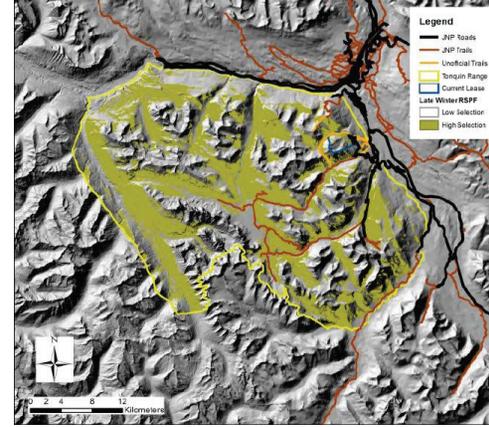


Figure 1. Spatial representation of access and habitat classes 3, 4 and 5 during the late winter (January 22nd to May 22nd) season 2002-2009. Tonquin Valley ski and snowmobile supply routes (in red) make paths far into high quality 'late winter' caribou habitat (shaded yellow/green areas). (Source: Czetwertynski and Schmiegelow, *Tonquin Caribou Risk Assessment Final Report*, 2014)

HOW DOES BACKCOUNTRY SKIING AFFECT CARIBOU?

Backcountry skiing and snowmobile supply routes in Jasper's Tonquin Valley bring noise and people into high quality winter habitat that Tonquin caribou need to use. This can be harmful in three ways: stressing the caribou, displacing them, and making it easier for predators to hunt.

Caribou can perceive touring skiers as a predation risk. This can cause caribou to avoid good habitat areas where people have been.

Caribou respond to human activities by spending more time moving and staying alert, and less time foraging and resting. Stressed animals use more energy; stress hormones stay in caribou for hours or days after a stress event. Frequent disturbance can make adults lose body condition and be less resistant to disease, and can reduce calf weight and strength.

Packed snow trails also make it easier for Jasper's wolves to move out of the valley bottoms and into alpine areas.

There are so few Tonquin caribou that the survival of every individual counts.

WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Be a champion for Tonquin Valley caribou to survive in their home range, where they belong:

- Lead by example and ask your peers: stay out of Tonquin backcountry all snow season, choose to go elsewhere
- Ask Parks Canada to keep Tonquin backcountry closed all snow season for caribou. Connect via Twitter (@JasperNP) and email (pc.jasperinfo.pc@canada.ca)

This document is a collaboration between The Alpine Club of Canada, Alberta Wilderness Association, CPAWS Northern Alberta, David Suzuki Foundation, and Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative.

