



## **Snow Machine Violators of Caribou Protected Areas Cited by Ministry of Environment**

April 7, 2009

Revelstoke, BC. Six snowmobilers have been fined \$230 apiece for sledding in protected mountain caribou habitat. A Conservation Officer caught the violators two kilometers inside a clearly posted Wildlife Habitat Area in the last week of March. The province of British Columbia has closed areas to motorized recreation as part of its effort to recover North America's most endangered large mammal.

Members of the Mountain Caribou Project, a coalition of ten environmental organizations working to make recovery efforts effective, supports the work by Conservation Officers to enforce restrictions in critical habitat.

"The science is clear that snowmobiles and caribou don't mix", said Virginia Thompson, of Revelstoke based North Columbia Environmental Society. "Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of the snowmobile clubs and associations to educate riders about mountain caribou and to abide by closures, there are still some snowmobilers who are not respecting the needs of this critically endangered animal."

The area in which the violators were cited, Sale Mountain, is part of the home range of the Columbia South herd which has dwindled to only 20 animals down from 38 in 2006 and 114 in 1994. It is one of the few areas of caribou critical habitat that government has closed to snowmobiling out of several that were recommended by its own caribou experts in the Revelstoke Shuswap recovery area.

In addition to the six who were cited, Conservation Officers noted that there were multiple tracks of snowmobiles in other closed areas.

Biologists have been adamant that their closure recommendations are critical to the survival of the resident herds because these are areas that the animals depend on, especially in winter. Government has allowed snowmobile clubs to propose Stewardship Management Agreements (SMA) as a way around outright closures in some areas. Sale Mt is not one of those areas. These agreements are still to be negotiated in many areas and conservation groups remain critical of

any opening of areas recommended by the province's Mountain Caribou Recovery Science team for closure.

The conservationists point out that forest licensees in the area have urged government to close critical habitat to motorized recreation and that all user groups must share responsibility for protecting the caribou. Ironically, many areas that are off-limits to logging and road-building are open to snowmobiling meaning the habitat is still not effectively protected for caribou.

"The provincial government has made a commitment to BC citizens that it will effectively protect mountain caribou habitat. Effective protection from all threats to recovery is essential for success: everyone's got to do their part," said Lawrence Redfern, Mountain Caribou Project Outreach Director. "Hopefully these citations will encourage better compliance with the law, and with a consistent science-based approach we'll soon be seeing mountain caribou populations increase."

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