



wildsight

For Immediate Release

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Speed kills two caribou on Kootenay Pass – small herd suffers big loss

Wildsight asks MOT to reduce speeds along one short section where caribou congregate

CRESTON: Two endangered mountain caribou — a pregnant female and a calf — were killed last week on a notorious section of Highway 3, where the animals often congregate to lick highway salt. The two were part of the remaining South Selkirks herd, which has between 40 and 50 animals. So far this year three animals have been lost on Highway 3. Ministry of Environment staff indicated the unreported collision was caused by an SUV, traveling uphill — an entirely avoidable collision.

Wildsight is asking the B.C. Ministry of Transport to:

- 1) reduce the speed limit in this section of road, (which is less than two kilometres from the east side of Kootenay Pass);
- 2) increase the visibility of warning signage; and
- 3) investigate alternate salt sources in winter months to get the animals off the highway.

“Kootenay Pass near Creston is one of the few places we can see endangered species right on the side of the highway,” said Dave Quinn, Wildsight’s Purcells program manager. “This herd of 40 to 50 animals cannot sustain significant highway losses, and we need to do whatever we can to minimize the chance of more.”

Quinn, who has been working for Mountain Caribou Recovery for several years, both as a biologist and as an advocate, is familiar with the area the animals were killed.

“The caribou are regularly seen crossing or licking salt at roughly the same location on the highway,” he said. “It’s a short, steep section of highway, near where rigs pull over to check brakes and traffic slows around the Stag Leap Park parking area.”

Quinn said that, to his understanding, the MOT is reticent to reduce speeds here for safety reasons. However, he said that a *reduced speed zone* here would not unduly impede traffic. “Trucks already stop at the nearby summit to check brakes — and other traffic slows due to the resulting congestion and congestion at the parking lot for Stag Leap Provincial Park.”

“This is about human safety,” Quinn said, “but it’s also about an endangered species, a tiny herd of mountain caribou, that British Columbia, Washington and Idaho have invested significant public funds to protect.”

The South Selkirks herd has been a success story in terms of B.C. endangered species. From a low of 25 animals in 1985, it has grown to nearly 50 animals, through the efforts of both Canadian and U.S. land managers.

“All tools possible have been used to bring this recovery around,” Quinn said. He mentioned the contentious issue of snowmobile use of critical winter range, protecting critical forest habitat from logging, targeted predator control of a cougar with a “sweet-tooth for caribou”, and extensive multi-year reintroduction/translocation efforts.

“For the herd to take such a big hit is really discouraging, really sad,” he said. “Especially when we know that it wouldn’t take much to make this section of Highway 3 safer for them. And especially when so much work has been done to help the herd survive and recover its numbers.”

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About Wildsight

Wildsight works locally, regionally and globally to protect biodiversity and encourage sustainable communities in Canada's Columbia and Southern Rocky Mountain region. This area is internationally recognized as a keystone to conservation in western North America. For more information, please visit www.wildsight.ca. Or visit www.mountaincaribou.ca for information about mountain caribou recovery in British Columbia.

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