CAN WE MANAGE CARIBOU RANGES DIFFERENTLY AND HAVE STRONG ECONOMIES?

Canada's woodland caribou are a threatened species. Human activities have fragmented older forest areas that caribou depend upon, yet habitat disturbance continues to grow. Provinces have the responsibility to manage wildlife and natural resources. Can we manage caribou home ranges differently for caribou recovery, and still have good economies?

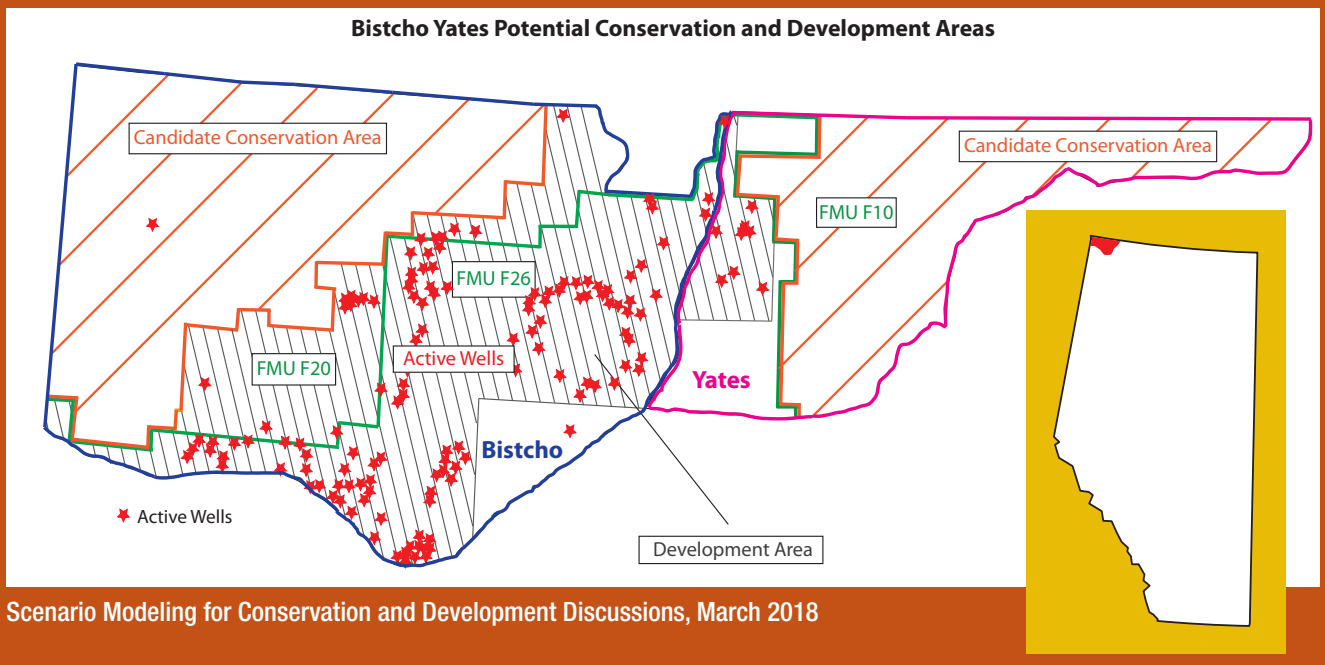
Photo: John Marriott

According to eminent natural resource economist Dr. Thomas Michael Power, of Power Consulting Inc.:

Managing lands for caribou recovery can grow the economy in the Bistcho-Yates caribou range lands of northwest Alberta.

Power's October 2018 study The Economic Impact of Restoring Woodland Caribou Habitat in the Bistcho and Yates Ranges in Northwestern Alberta concludes:

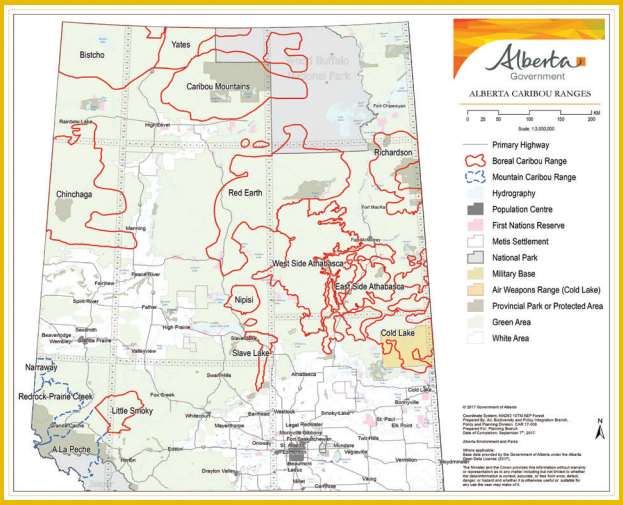
- Caribou conservation and the continuation of existing Bistcho-Yates economic activities are possible
- Flawed assumptions have led to exaggerated projections for habitat protection costs and job losses
- Land use choices for both caribou and a restoration economy can be found that value important ecological, cultural and commercial concerns
- Two large conservation areas in Bistcho-Yates can be created that avoid forestry and energy leased areas
- Seismic line restoration can provide significant new economic activity for 20 years
- At least 65 percent undisturbed caribou habitat can be reached with almost no displacement of existing industrial activity in Bistcho-Yates ranges



Scenario Modeling for Conservation and Development Discussions, March 2018

Full Report Available at Caribou4Ever.ca

The Power study recommends, across all Caribou Ranges, that we begin with shared goals of caribou recovery and community economic activity, to build optimized 'least cost' solutions



"[Economic] sources of instability in Alberta's forest products industry have been much more disruptive than efforts to protect caribou habitat are ever likely to be"

"These optimization models are not new and have been used to optimize timber harvest programs for some time. What is new is placing value on the caribou habitat with a constraint that at least 65 percent caribou habitat be undisturbed"

Key findings:

- Dependence on volatile natural resources disrupts regional economic development
- A 'restoration economy' - habitat restoration programs to restore the legacy damage from past exploration and development - has substantial benefits
- Established models can 'optimize' land use choices by weighting the ecological, social and economic values in an area - the best energy plays, caribou habitat, water, forest - to generate least-cost and most beneficial alternatives
- Best operating practices that minimize surface disturbance are essential in areas of existing and future commercial activities
- Where priorities overlap, it is possible to generate least-cost and most beneficial pathways to manage ranges for an economy that supports caribou and other significant wildlife and forest benefits

Restoration: Significant Dollars into the Economy, Significant Environmental Benefits

Seismic line restoration funds can flow directly into communities as seasonal wages and salaries, fuel purchases and equipment rentals. Based on pilot data, the economists estimated that restoring 65 percent of Bistcho-Yates' legacy seismic lines would:

- Generate 100 direct jobs per year
- Give a regional economic stimulus of $24 million per year or $434 million (undiscounted) over 18 years
- Be a solid regional employment opportunity for a region of Alberta that has been dependent on volatile oil, gas and forestry industries, and could lay the basis for a more diversified economy by strengthening outdoor recreation and tourism potential

The Power study determined that restoring and managing ranges to meet the minimum caribou requirements will:

- Protect natural processes that are important to many wildlife species
- Provide environmental services that flow from the natural landscapes, including maintaining and storing clean water and carbon
- Help recognize indigenous interests and rights

Restoration priorities must be established to achieve caribou recovery and ecological value in the most cost effective way. Conservation models, telemetry from radio collars, studies rooted in traditional knowledge such as those done by the Doig River First Nation on the Chinchaga range[1], or all of them together with the help of an optimization model, will prioritize activities that return a range to at least 65 percent undisturbed status.

The Economic Impact of Restoring Woodland Caribou Habitat in the Bistcho and Yates Ranges in Northwestern Alberta was commissioned by Alberta Wilderness Association, David Suzuki Foundation and Harmony Foundation to evaluate a caribou restoration economy.

[1] Leech, S.M., Whittaker, C. and the Doig River First Nation. Madziih (caribou) Tsáá? ché ne dane Traditional Knowledge and Restoration Study. Report prepared for DRFN and the David Suzuki Foundation by the Firelight Group December 2016. 60 pp. 2016. https://davidsuzuki.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/caribou-traditional-knowledge-restoration-study.pdf