

Why the rare woodland caribou's diet is being watched in the Boreal forest



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It's not just a little concern over a few too many holiday treats...it's to help understand the nutritional value of food available in the forest habitat of caribou, so that forest managers can help increase their chances of surviving northern winters.

Woodland caribou can be found throughout Canada from Newfoundland to British Columbia, and are also found in some of the northern U.S. States. A number of herds have declining populations – over 50% of caribou calves in Canada and the U.S. don't survive past 50 days old, for a variety of reasons – some known, and some unknown. To reverse the decline, researchers must first understand it.

Through a **grant** awarded by the **Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI)**, the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement (NCASI) of Canada is using a herd of caribou to sample the nutritional value of important plant communities, in an effort to determine which are most beneficial from a dietary standpoint. Controlled research undertaken with these animals to establish the relationship between diet and caribou body condition and reproduction is now being tested in the field, in the boreal forest of Canada. This research will help evaluate how maternal nutrition may be affected by summer vegetation, and whether this is a possible contributing factor to caribou population decline. Based on this knowledge, it will be possible to more effectively identify landscape areas that are suited for protection, and to design harvesting approaches that will better manage forest habitat for caribou.



The research is further supported by a number of SFI Program Participants that are certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard, including Millar Western, Weyerhaeuser, Louisiana-Pacific, Domtar, Resolute and Tolko. The final results will reach beyond the initial project boundaries, to help design land management practices which aid caribou conservation throughout western Canada, Ontario and Quebec.

But efforts to improve caribou habitat aren't limited to nutrition. SFI has also awarded a **grant** to the University of Saskatchewan to study other important impacts on caribou habitat. The project will focus on learning how timber harvest and seismic activity affect the movements of caribou, as well as grizzly bears, and assess physical impacts to the animals from stress. An important outcome of this research will be prioritizing habitats for restoration. Project partners include the Foothills Research Institute, Weyerhaeuser Ltd. and West Fraser Ltd. □□ All SFI Program Participants are required to take measures to protect habitat for significant species such as the caribou in order to be certified to SFI sustainable forest management standards and fiber sourcing chain-of-custody standards. In addition, through the **SFI Conservation and Community Partnerships Grant Program**, SFI has awarded \$1.9 million to date to foster research and pilot efforts to improve the sustainability of forests and the wildlife that depends upon them. Additional partner contributions bring the total investment to \$7.1 million. Past grant recipients include American Bird Conservancy, American Forest Foundation, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Nature Conservancy Canada, World Resources Institute, The Nature Conservancy of North Carolina, US Endowment for Forests and Communities, and many others.

Learn more about SFI, and how advocacy for sustainable forest management translates to advocacy for wildlife, at www.sfiprogram.org.