

Section 11 Agreement: Boreal Caribou

Mr. Speaker, conservation of wildlife in the Northwest Territories is a responsibility shared by governments, boards and individuals through our co-management system. This Legislative Assembly has made a mandate commitment to develop range plans for boreal caribou in the NWT. Today I would like to share some significant news about those plans and our made-in-the-North approach to protecting boreal caribou in the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, boreal woodland caribou are listed as a threatened species under both federal and territorial legislation. These caribou are distinct from our nine barren-ground herds, which migrate above and below the tree line. Boreal caribou live in the forest, either alone or in small groups.

Our government, together with our co-management partners, has been working on a made-in-the-North approach to managing boreal caribou and their habitat in the NWT. This includes a framework for developing regional range plans, plans that will help us maintain adequate habitat across the NWT to support a healthy and sustainable population of boreal caribou.

Under the federal *Species at Risk Act*, at least 65 per cent of the land used by boreal caribou must be maintained as undisturbed habitat. This is a requirement we take very seriously. We do not want the federal government to step in and issue a federal protection order. This safety net order, as it is called, would give the federal government authority over our territorial lands that are considered critical habitat for boreal caribou. We are working closely with the federal government to avoid this, Mr. Speaker.

That is why I am pleased to share with you today that our government has reached an agreement with the federal government under Section 11 of the *Species at Risk Act*. This conservation agreement recognizes and supports our approach to boreal caribou and habitat management, and reduces the likelihood of a protection order.

The agreement sets out conservation measures to support boreal caribou in the NWT, including development and implementation of range plans to protect boreal caribou habitat.

As part of this agreement, the Government of Northwest Territories and Environment and Climate Change Canada have also negotiated federal funding for range planning in the NWT. This funding is significant, and will support our collaborative process to build regional range plans with our co-management partners.

Under this agreement, Canada will provide \$3.255 million to the GNWT over the next five years to support the conservation measures in the agreement. In addition, Mr. Speaker, we have negotiated \$1 million in funding to allow our Indigenous co-management partners to fully engage in the range planning process, to ensure these plans truly reflect the values and interests of Northerners.

Currently, about 69 per cent of boreal caribou range in the NWT is undisturbed and our boreal caribou population is considered self-sustaining. That is very good news. It means we are in a good position to meet the 65 per cent requirement for undisturbed habitat, and continue to support conservation of this species.

Mr. Speaker, I am confident that, together with our co-management partners, we can help maintain our population of boreal caribou while ensuring continued opportunities for sustainable economic growth now and into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.