

# Caribou at the Crossroads

*Manitoba's threatened caribou herds at increased risk from proposed developments in the pristine East Shore Wilderness.*



Majestic woodland caribou – Photo: Terry Parker

The woodland caribou is a spectacular icon of Canadian wilderness, ranging from the wildlands of northern British Columbia all the way to Newfoundland. Caribou are known as an indicator species — wherever there are healthy caribou populations, there are vast and unbroken boreal forests. But many of Canada's caribou populations are facing significant threats.

*“It is estimated that the (Manitoba) woodland caribou population has decreased by 50% since 1950.”*

*Manitoba Government “Woodland Caribou in Manitoba” Report 1993.*

Already, industrial development has fragmented and destroyed too much habitat. In Manitoba, the provincial government estimates that half of the original woodland caribou population has disappeared

from the landscape, largely due to human disturbances. In May 2000 the Manitoba government released the Woodland Caribou Conservation Strategy, which stated that to maintain present caribou populations in the province “Habitat considered critical for the

continued viability of a woodland caribou range will be protected by legal designation. No development will occur within these protected areas.”

Based on these criteria, no wilderness area in Manitoba is a better candidate for protection than the East Shore Wilderness Area, a roadless and wild expanse of boreal forest caribou habitat located on the east side of Lake Winnipeg (see map inside). It is world-renowned as a caribou sanctuary, with a land area larger than Greece. Caribou have roamed there in peace since ancient times.

Now that could all change. A provincial government-sponsored, landuse planning process called the East Side Planning Initiative is underway. The Manitoba government has proposed beginning construction of hundreds of kilometres of roads before the Planning Initiative is even complete. Without proper planning and studies, this proposed road network would be a disaster for the region’s woodland caribou, bringing in new industrial developments and increasing access for illegal hunting and for predators such as wolves.



East Shore Wilderness - Sunset at Wanipigow. Photo: Steve Daniels

How could this happen? Despite the ecological importance of the East Shore as a caribou refuge, protection of the caribou is not even being considered as a key objective of the Planning Initiative. The Manitoba government is proposing the same brand of “business as usual” development in the East Shore that has already wiped woodland caribou out of areas such as Whiteshell and Duck Mountain provincial parks. Clearcut logging is allowed in more than half the total area of these parks.

It’s time for Manitoba to set a conservation example for the rest of the country, rather than retain its status as conservation pariah. NDP Premier Doer must live up to his government’s commitment to protect woodland caribou by including it as a key objective in the East Side Planning Initiative. To save the caribou we must save their home – Manitoba’s East Shore Wilderness Area.

## ***Public Support High for Caribou***

***In a recent poll by McAllister Opinion Research, Manitobans showed strong support for preserving caribou habitat on the East Shore Wilderness Area.***

- **89%** said Manitoba should make protection for the woodland caribou herds and their habitat a key objective of any East Side land use plan.
- **84%** said protecting the animals, birds and unique species **like woodland caribou** that live in the Manitoba East Side is more of a priority than economic development in this area.
- **85%** said Manitoba should protect the woodland caribou and their habitat under its Endangered Species Act.

The sample size (n= 425), the sample selection method (random digit dialing), margin of error (plus or minus 4.75% 19 times out of 20) and the dates of field (April 11-13, 2003).

# *Stopping the Pattern of Destruction*

## *Half of Manitoba's Caribou already lost!*

Fifty percent of Manitoba's woodland caribou are already gone from the province's boreal forest landscape largely because of human developments such as clearcut logging, mining, hydro dams, and hydro line corridors which break and destroy critical caribou habitats.



Clearcut logging is the single largest human caused threat to Canada's boreal forests and to the future of Manitoba's woodland caribou. Clearcutting destroys the large, contiguous tracts of old growth forests that the caribou require to obtain the lichens necessary to their diet. Unfortunately, this critical caribou habitat is comprised of the larger, old growth trees that logging corporations like Tembec, a Quebec-based multinational logging corporation, have a big appetite for. Tembec's paper mill in Pine Falls currently consumes large forested sections in the southern portion of the East Shore Wilderness (see map far right). Sixty-two per cent of Nopiming Provincial Park is in Tembec's Forest Management License Area. All the caribou ranges in Tembec's cutting area have been assessed by the Manitoba government, in their 2000 Woodland Caribou Conservation Strategy for Manitoba, as "high risk" and in need of protection.

Clearcut logging operations like this one in Whiteshell provincial park have contributed to the eradication of woodland caribou from the park. Currently 47% of the park is open to clearcut logging.

Photo: Shelley Sandhu

*No woodland caribou bands have ever survived a program of even moderately intensive clearcutting in their vicinity."*

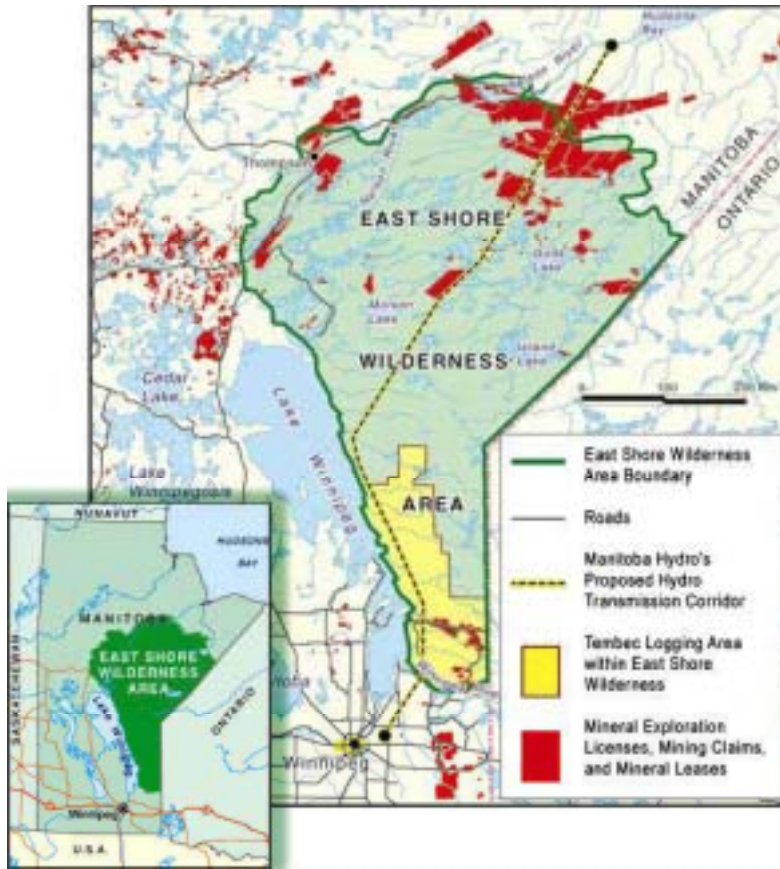
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Mining from smelters and air emissions harm caribou habitat. Lichens, an essential food source for caribou, are extremely sensitive to airborne contamination. Chemicals from the air accumulate in the lichens making them potentially harmful to caribou when digested. Mining activities also negatively affect caribou if facilities are close to, or on, critical habitats such as mineral licks, calving areas, travel corridors, adjacent habitats, or rutting areas.

Hydro transmission line corridors such as the proposed BiPole 3 (see map far right) slice through caribou range, increasing access for illegal hunting, predation by wolves, and deer (which are carriers of a parasitic brainworm that is lethal to caribou). Hydro dams permanently alter and destroy caribou habitat by mass flooding.

Humans and caribou can co-exist by creating locally managed, non-timber forest product economies that do not impact critical caribou habitats. Eco-tourism is one great example. According to recent Manitoba government press releases, the tourism industry produces over four times the amount of jobs than logging does in Manitoba



Cartography by Chris Player, Western Canada Wilderness Committee.  
Source for proposed and existing developments: Manitoba Conservation Department

## ***Manitoba's East Shore Wilderness***

*I don't want to lose the boreal forests in Manitoba because I didn't do anything when I had an opportunity and a responsibility to do it."*

**Premier Gary Doer** — August 3, 2002

According to the World Resources Institute (1) just 20 per cent of the earth's forests remain intact and undisturbed. Nearly 50 per cent of these undisturbed forests are found in the boreal forests of Canada, Russia, and Alaska.



The Canadian Lynx's preferred habitats the old growth boreal forest's that are imminently threatened by roads and development in the East Shore Wilderness. Photo: Don Sullivan

The boreal forest is Earth's largest source of fresh water and its vast forests are considered the "northern lungs of the planet." It is also the planet's largest single land storehouse of carbon. As such, it plays an important part in regulating Earth's climate.

Almost five billion years in the making, Canada's boreal forest is the largest contiguous stretch of wilderness left on earth. One of the most significant intact tracts in Canada's boreal forest is the 150,000 square kilometre East Shore Wilderness Area on the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

The East Shore is a mosaic of interconnected wildlands, encompassing diverse tree species such as pine, spruce, poplar, and birch, as well as innumerable wetlands, lakes, rivers, and bogs. It provides forest habitat for many wildlife species including lynx, black bears, moose, foxes, owls, and the woodland caribou.

Ancient travelers of its intact ecological tapestry, the woodland caribou have lived largely undisturbed for countless generations in the East Shore. The area provides everything woodland caribou need, including calving grounds and lichens, an essential food source.

To ensure the continued survival of Manitoba's woodland caribou, Premier Gary Doer has an obligation to honor his personal commitment to adequately protect Manitoba's boreal forests. To meet this obligation, the Wilderness Committee is pushing for the ecological integrity of the East Shore to be fully protected through



White Pelican - Photo: Ron Thiessen

a network of large interconnected parks, protected areas, wildlife reserves, cultural heritage sites, and conservation restrictions on how industrial development is allowed to proceed in unprotected areas.

The first step is to conserve adequately large, interconnected areas of the East Shore to maintain a globally unique caribou sanctuary, as a model for scientific and traditional knowledge, wildlife protection, sustainable community-driven development and climate regulation.



Woodpecker - Photo: Ron Thiessen

If, on the other hand, government inaction allows woodland caribou to be logged to extinction, we would lose an integral strand in the Canadian boreal's fragile web of life. For a fragile ecosystem like the boreal forest to retain its proper balance, every thread within that fabric must remain strong.

*(1) More info on the World Resources Institute Pan-Boreal Mapping Initiative at [forests.wri.org](http://forests.wri.org)*



## ***There are Solutions for Manitoba's Caribou***

The East Side Planning Initiative, with a stated goal of "maintaining the ecological integrity and biological functions of the boreal forest within the planning area," is the perfect opportunity to ensure the caribou's survival in Manitoba for future generations. And yet the Planning Initiative is currently proposing to give away land for logging, mining, and hydro without studies that would provide critical information on woodland caribou in the East Shore.

The Wilderness Committee has long advocated for planning processes that are based on sound scientific principles. To achieve this, the provincial government must make provisions for the planning process to include:

- Full protection of woodland caribou and its critical habitat as a key objective.
- Funding for independently-sourced scientific research which also incorporates First Nations' traditional knowledge, to determine the survival needs of all the East Shore caribou herds.
- Thorough First Nations consultation must take place, with consent required before proceeding with any development.



Logging and wildfires in Nopiming provincial park and surrounding caribou habitat has placed the Owl Lake caribou herd at "high-risk." According to government documentation, this herd has decreased from approx. 200 in the 1960's to 65-75 in 2000. Photo: Don Sullivan



- An ecology-first approach in the East Shore Wilderness planning process.
- Absolutely NO road building and NO resource allocation before the entire planning process, including scientific studies and public consultation, is complete.
- Mining exploration, Hydro's BiPole III project, and other development plans impacting the area must be halted during the land-use planning process.
- A majority of the East Shore must be fully protected from industrial exploitation such as clearcut logging, mining, and hydro to protect its ecological integrity.



The Manigotagan River is the great divide between two "high-risk" caribou ranges. Photo: Don Sullivan