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The Honourable Catherine McKenna
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Dear Premier Horgan and Minister McKenna,

We are environmental and animal protection organizations, and independent biologists, that collectively represent thousands of British Columbians and Canadians. Some of our organizations have sponsored much research in the humid, conifer forests of the Interior Wetbelt. We are writing to you out of concern for the “Southern Group” of Southern Mountain Caribou that inhabits these forests.

These caribou are also known as the “Deep-snow Mountain Caribou”. They are genetically distinct from all other caribou, and their habits are unique, in that they live in steep mountains and migrate to high elevations in winter, to feed exclusively on hair lichens in the protection of deep, powder snow. COSEWIC has classified these caribou as endangered and irreplaceable, and states their loss would mean a vast range shrinkage for caribou in BC.

We are writing to ask why the BC government would be so inexcusably erroneous as to declare that there will be no additional habitat protection for the Southern Group, because there is already enough protected. That was the message of Minister Doug Donaldson in statements to the media (Nelson Star and others, Sept. 18). We are outraged.

The Hart Ranges, Wells Gray South, Wells Gray North, Columbia North, Columbia South, Frisby-Queest and Central Selkirk herds are all examples of declining Deep-snow Caribou herds whose habitat is being clearcut. The Hart Ranges herd faces 78 planned cutblocks and a pipeline. Wells Gray South has clearcutting over an area as large as 500 football fields throughout their core critical habitat.

The Central Selkirk herd has only 24 animals left alive. The province’s own biologists have documented these caribou being displaced from the best habitat to marginal habitat by rampant motorized recreation, yet the government refuses to enlarge snowmobile closures and regulate heli-skiing in a manner that will restore even part of the abandoned habitat to the caribou.

These refusals make a mockery of Canada’s *Species at Risk Act*, and defy the federal government’s attempts to urge BC to protect more habitat. Instead BC is planning to kill 80% of more of wolves around the Hart Ranges and Central Selkirk herds. Together with similar plans for the Itcha-Ilgachuz and Tweedsmuir-Entiako herds in the west Chilcotin region, this would represent a massive extermination program for wolves and possibly other large carnivores.

This will only prop up the caribou numbers while the habitat continues to be destroyed or disturbed past the point where caribou can survive on their own. Meanwhile the loss of top carnivores over vast expanses of land will cause additional, very serious ecosystem damage.

We are deeply dismayed that, according to news reports, “analysts” have told Mr. Donaldson that enough habitat has been protected for the Deep-snow Caribou. To the contrary, his own biologists, and those of the federal government, have ex-

plained to the public that logging the habitat causes increased predation, which causes caribou decline. Yet the habitat continues to be logged, despite the ongoing decline of the caribou. How do these analysts account for scientific studies that have proven that caribou populations decline as the habitat disturbance increases? Such studies are why the federal government has called the need for new habitat protection urgent.

Now the public now faces yet another round of public meetings, for “Herd Plans”, while the main decisions have already been made and announced by Minister Donaldson. The decree that there will be no new habitat protection for the Southern Group maintains the same clamp on any future plan that was on the old plan and caused it to fail. The “Herd Plans” are discredited before their planning processes can even be announced.

The past planning meetings, in the spring of this year, were preceded by well-organized and inflammatory misinformation campaigns. Meanwhile, the substantial input of environmentally-concerned citizens into previous processes remains unacknowledged by your government and dismissed.

Our organizations are deeply aware that independent scientists all over the world have said that the loss of biodiversity is a crisis that threatens human life. This is specifically true of the decline of the Deep-snow Mountain Caribou because they inhabit the old-growth humid forests with huge trees that scientists say are crucial to mitigating climate change. These forests represent huge carbon sequestration and storage capacity, making their destruction an act of wanton neglect of even human survival.

We ask that the provincial government respectfully acknowledge the British Columbians and Canadians represented in this letter. We also request that before the next round of meetings for “Herd Plans”, the provincial government denounce the statement published on September 18, 2019 that ‘enough habitat’ has been protected.

Working together on solutions is the only chance our caribou have to be brought back from the brink of extinction. We therefore call on the federal government to enforce the *Species of Risk Act* to increase habitat protection for the Southern Group of Southern Mountain Caribou, while also tending to the needs of the Central and Northern Groups.

Sincerely,

22 Signators

cc: Hon. Doug Donaldson
Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resources and Rural Development

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