

**Background Information:**

The southern Selkirk Mountains population of woodland caribou occupies high-elevation habitat in the Selkirk Mountains of northern Idaho, northeastern Washington and southern British Columbia. It is currently listed as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), with designated critical habitat.

The Service proposed to amend the listing from the southern Selkirk Mountains population of woodland caribou to the larger Southern Mountain Caribou Distinct Population Segment (DPS) that encompasses the Southern Selkirk Mountains population of woodland caribou. The Southern Mountain Caribou population is a DPS of woodland caribou. In simple terms, a DPS is a group of animals that are behaviorally and/or geographically discrete from other populations of the same animal.

The Service received a petition to delist this species in May 2012, from the Pacific Legal Foundation (representing Bonner County, Idaho), and the Idaho State Snowmobile Association. The petition requested that the species be delisted because it did not properly meet the definition of a DPS under the Service's 1996 DPS Policy.

The Service opened a 60-day comment period on the proposed amended listing May 8, 2014, and extended it until Aug. 6, 2014.

After a review of the best available scientific and commercial information available at that time, the Service determined that delisting was not warranted and continued protection under the ESA continues to be necessary. To define a DPS that is consistent with the Service's 1996 distinct population segment policy, however, the Service proposed to amend the current listing by recognizing a new DPS: the ***Southern Mountain Caribou DPS***, to include a broader range of mountain caribou in British Columbia.

The new scientific information that caused the reopening is a 2014 assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). COSEWIC reviewed the status of the Southern Mountain caribou population, changing it from threatened to endangered in Canada under Canada's federal Species At Risk Act (SARA) pending review by the federal Environment Minister. A copy of the assessment is available here: [http://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/document/default\\_e.cfm?documentID=2575](http://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/document/default_e.cfm?documentID=2575). The Service is now also considering the scientific information from the COSEWIC assessment and is seeking additional comments and information regarding the status of the Southern Mountain Caribou DPS. The Service will consider all comments when rendering a determination following the reopened public comment period.

The proposed DPS includes the currently listed transboundary southern Selkirk Mountains population of woodland caribou that moves between British Columbia, northern Idaho and northeastern Washington, United States, as well as similar local populations in British Columbia. The proposed DPS meets Service criteria because it is both discrete and significant due to geographic, behavioral and genetic separation from other woodland caribou. The Service proposed to list the new Southern Mountain Caribou DPS as a "threatened" species under the ESA, due in part to a broader range and larger additional local populations.

The Service determined that the 30,010 acres in the U.S. designated as critical habitat in November 2012, remain applicable to the United States population of the proposed Southern Mountain Caribou DPS. Thus, if the proposed amendment to the listing is finalized, the existing critical habitat for the DPS would be reaffirmed.

The Service appreciates the hard work of all partners who have worked on caribou recovery, which has required dedication to scientific excellence and a commitment to collaborative conservation.