

NEWS RELEASE

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Cooperative Caribou Research Partnership

British Columbia Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resources

U.S. Forest Service

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Kalispel Tribe of Indians

Kootenai Tribe of Idaho

The Nature Conservancy of Canada

Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program – Columbia Basin

Idaho Department of Fish and Game

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

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Cooperative Caribou Collaring Research Project Launched

Joint Effort to Collect Data in British Columbia, Canada

A five-year cooperative research project intended to provide insight into the reasons for increased mortality of Southern Selkirk Mountains woodland caribou in British Columbia, Canada, was recently launched.

The collaring study is a cooperative research project of the British Columbia Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resources, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Kalispel Tribe of Indians, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, The Nature Conservancy of Canada, Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program – Columbia Basin, Idaho Department of Fish and Game and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The cross-boundary Southern Selkirk Mountain caribou population declined from 46 animals in 2009, to 27 in 2011, with only 18 caribou counted at the end of the 2014 winter census. The herd is at high risk of local extinction. Biologists planned to collar up to 10 caribou this year and maintain the active collars for a five-year period. After two collaring sessions in March, six caribou were successfully collared. The effort will resume again next year when snow conditions allow.

It is hoped that data from the collars will help identify reasons for the decline in caribou in this region. The data received from the collars may also be used to inform future habitat use and resource management in the Canadian and U.S. Selkirk Mountains.

A new generation of technology is being used, based on GPS satellite data collection. The new collars will provide better quality data with more frequent collection points. Most importantly, an e-mail is received when there is an inactive period of eight hours, which will allow rapid post-mortality investigations within 24 hours to better inform the cause of death. Older technology required air flights to discover caribou mortalities, which was costly, and less efficient. Sometimes, mortalities were not discovered until weeks later, leaving little evidence to reliably determine the cause of death.

In addition to greatly improved mortality detection, the new collars will provide daily locations of the animals, which will document caribou movement and habitat use patterns. The research project will compare current information with that collected in the past 15 years. The collaring process is well-tested by the British Columbian government, with the successful capture and collaring of over 200 other caribou in other populations over the past three years with no capture-related mortalities.

The collective research partners are committed to this unique and technologically advanced approach to scientific data collection, and will work together to draw conclusions from the study as it proceeds over time.



Photo by Wendell Maki



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