

Revelstoke Review

Letter: Spilling more wolf blood won't save caribou

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Despite compelling evidence that caribou will disappear without mature forests, [a recent report](#) risks their survival by giving cover for government to ramp up wolf killing while allowing industry to continue destroying critical habitat. The authors claim that “intensive population treatments” — aerial gunning and strychnine poisoning of wolves, hunting of cougar, moose and deer, and maternal pens for caribou — are necessary until we Canadians understand that unless we use natural resources more responsibly caribou will vanish.

The report Saving Endangered Species Using Adaptive Management not only lacks scientific rigor in its design, but should also be questioned for side-stepping an ethical review process that would have prohibited its publication. Unlike provincial biologists, academics are not allowed to conduct inhumane research, let alone publish it. But these authors have blood on their hands too, despite leaving the slaughter to the government co-authors and their contract killers.

In defense of the paper's shortcomings and the controversial killing methods it condones, the authors cite the late ecologist Graeme Caughley's statement that “It is better to save the species than to achieve scientific purity.” Scientific purity went out the window when so-called adaptive management lumped penning and killing together without testing their impacts separately.

What the authors are essentially saying is “It is better to save the species than to protect the ecosystem”. No ecosystem is safe when more than a dozen non-target species are killed by baited snares and strychnine strewn across the landscape ostensibly to save caribou. Unsurprisingly the threatened Grizzly and even caribou themselves have been counted among the list of victims. Caughley would be appalled to see his words used as a bandage on such a bloody wound.

Of course, if every predator in an area is killed and calves are stuck in maternity pens, then caribou likely will survive longer. But it's not recovery if caribou have no habitat left to return to. The solutions described in this paper are equivalent to a caribou zoo surrounded by clear-cuts, pools of toxic waste and a shooting range. Is this what passes for modern conservation?

We cannot have rampant habitat destruction and caribou. It really is as “black and white” as described by Rob Serrouya, the report's primary author: we either change our ways and diversify rural economies, or we will lose caribou. We must also hold scientists and governments accountable to ethical research standards and ensure tax dollars are devoted to conservation studies that are humane and maintain the ecological integrity of the ecosystem. Killing wolves fails both requirements.

None of the experts from the Canadian Council on Animal Care, the body that prevents researchers and academic institutions from treating animals inhumanely, SPCAs or the Canadian

Veterinary Medical Association approve of the wolf-killing methods used in B.C. and Alberta. Serrouya himself has stated in a planning document prepared for the B.C. government that “there is no humane way to directly reduce wolf numbers”. The same document described ongoing logging in the caribou recovery unit where wolf killing was recommended to commence.

Four years of wolf killing didn't save the South Selkirk caribou in B.C. The few remaining females were moved at considerable expense to a maternal pen in the Columbia-Revelstoke region where tax-funded wolf killing continues alongside old-growth logging and recreation. Studies like Serrouya's would call that the best option, but there will be no improvements to caribou protection unless government and industry do the obvious: protect caribou habitat.

Beyond raising serious debate within the scientific community, this travesty should disturb every decent person. Because wolf killing largely occurs without supervision there is no intervention to end extreme cases of suffering, which is unavoidable with the methods being used.

We should be at a turning point in our relationship with wildlife where the inherent value and respectful treatment of all species is central to environmental decision making. This is not just a creed that belongs in textbooks; it must be applied in the field. Right now it's a killing field and no in government seems ready to stop it. It's up to Canadians to demand better.

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