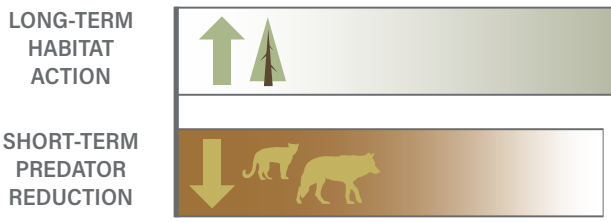
Can predator reduction achieve outcomes that support caribou recovery in B.C.?

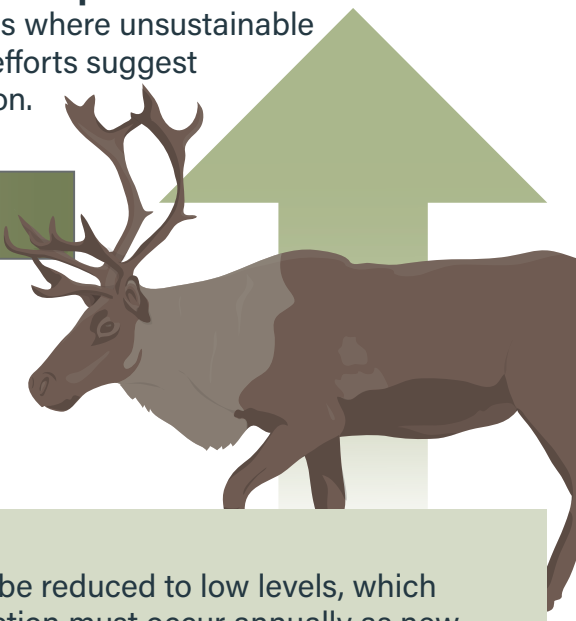
Woodland caribou recovery is a key priority of the Province of British Columbia (B.C.). Human-caused habitat alteration, the ultimate cause of caribou declines in B.C., has disrupted predator-prey dynamics. This has boosted populations of wolves and their primary prey and provided wolves easy access into caribou habitat.

Habitat protection and restoration are essential to caribou recovery. However, habitat recovery is a gradual process that occurs over a long period of time. As a result of high predation rates, many herds are at risk of extirpation before they can benefit from long-term habitat recovery.

Predator reduction is an emergency, short-term recovery action to support caribou populations while long-term solutions are developed and implemented.

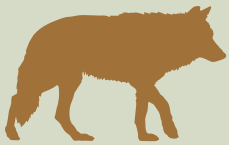
In 2015, B.C. began predator reduction efforts in select caribou ranges where unsustainable predation from wolves caused declines in caribou. Early monitoring efforts suggest several of these herds have responded positively to predator reduction.





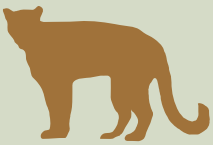
Methods used for predator reduction

To have a positive effect on caribou populations, wolf densities must be reduced to low levels, which often requires the removal of >80% of wolves in the local area. Reduction must occur annually as new wolf populations rapidly recolonize these areas and are resilient to high rates of reduction/mortaility. The Province of B.C. uses methods that can effectively reduce predators and carry no risk of bycatch to other species. The predator reduction activities occur under a high level of oversight from professional biologists.



Wolf Reduction:

Wolves are shot in the winter from helicopters. This is the most effective method available to reduce wolf populations across broad, remote landscapes. The Province of B.C. has also collaborated with four Indigenous communities to support ground-based wolf hunting and trapping, in concert with aerial-based efforts.

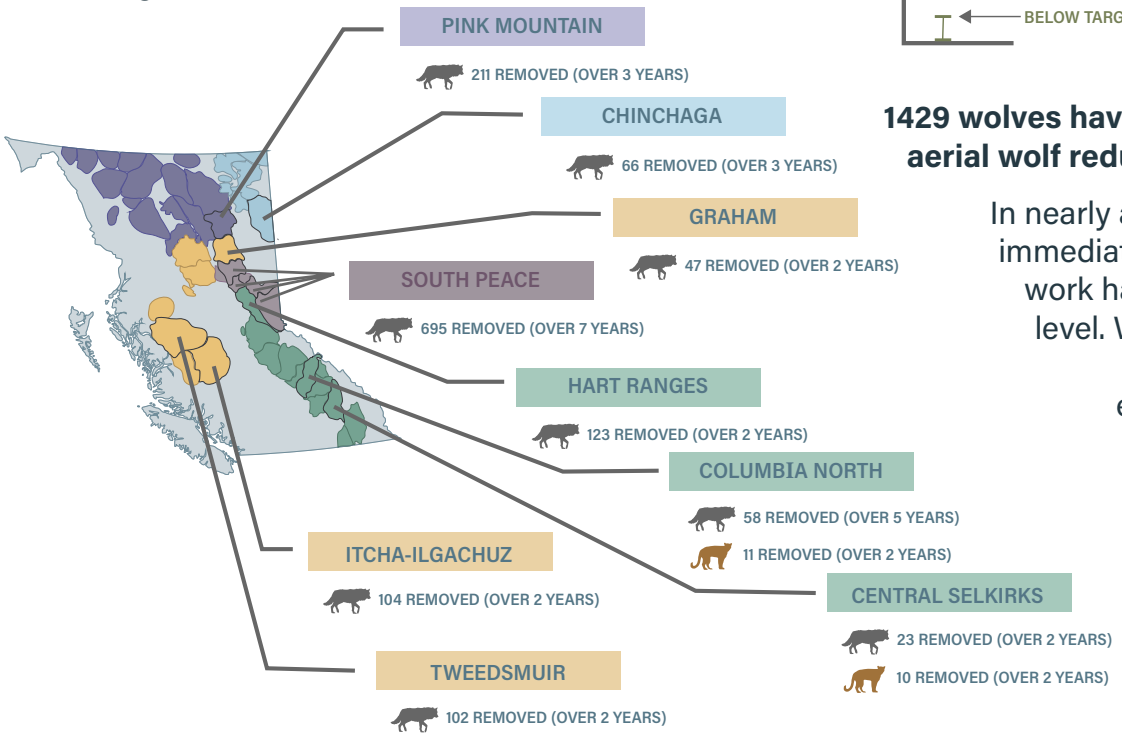


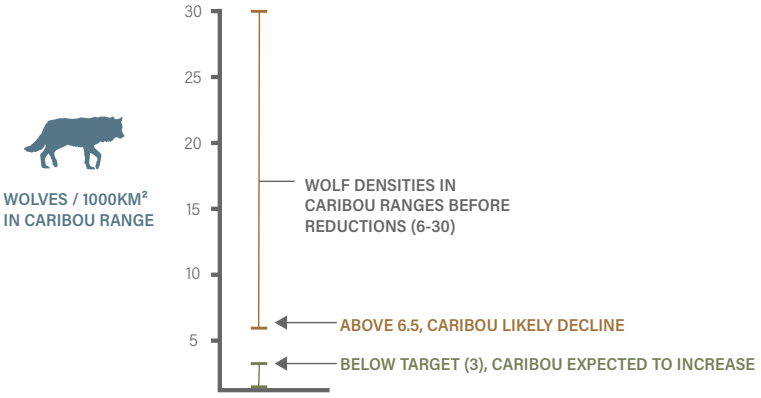
Cougar Reduction:

Only individual cougars likely to pose high risk to caribou are targeted for removal. This is done via ground-based methods using hound handlers.

Wolf reduction efforts have reduced wolf densities in caribou habitat to target levels

Prior to the implementation of wolf reduction, wolf densities were two to ten times the maximum target wolf density for recovering caribou herds.





1429 wolves have been removed since aerial wolf reduction started in 2015.

In nearly all cases, wolf densities immediately following reduction work have achieved the target level. When this target is met, government biologists expect to see increased caribou survival and population growth within herds. This is supported by the most recent science.

Predator reductions are part of a multi-lever approach to recover caribou

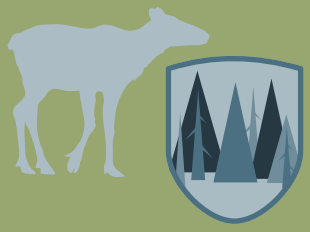
The strongest increases in caribou numbers occur where and when multiple recovery actions are occurring, including short-term actions like predator reductions.

Long-term actions, like habitat protection and restoration, are critical to achieving self-sustaining caribou populations.

FOR SOUTHERN MOUNTAIN HERDS

2.57 MILLION HECTARES PROTECTED (OVER 59% OF CORE HABITAT IN THOSE RANGES)

CENTRAL GROUP OF SOUTHERN MOUNTAIN CARIBOU



750,000 HECTARES NEW HABITAT PROTECTION UNDER A PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT*

1.4 MILLION HECTARES TOTAL PROTECTED AREA

**Inter-Government Partnership Agreement for the Conservation of the Central Group of the Southern Mountain Caribou.*

Reducing predator populations to support caribou recovery is a tremendous responsibility. B.C.'s predator reduction programs are delivered with a high level of oversight by professional biologists in an adaptive management framework. All reductions are conducted in manners consistent with the current veterinary guidelines for euthanasia of wildlife in field conditions, and follow the applicable policies and procedures for predator reduction.

BRITISH COLUMBIA