

# Alberta Trappers' Association

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## REPORT FROM BRIAN BILDSON - Upper Smoky Caribou Recovery Task Force

It's been quite a while since I represented the Alberta Trappers Association as the Upper Smoky Caribou recovery task force rep. And I wish I could tell you that good things have been happening for caribou since we wrapped up our duties, but I can't. If anything, I'm feeling a bit used over the whole deal. But it didn't come as a surprise.

Let me explain. Upon the regional caribou task forces launch, Minister Nixon stood in front of task force members and extolled us to find a "Made in Alberta" solution to caribou management. We were told that the Federal Government would swoop in under the Species At Risk Act's authority and mandate management strategies on Alberta if we couldn't do that.

And in the end, I believe that may be what this whole caribou shell game has been all about. Namely, keeping the Feds out and the wheels of commerce turning. And the way to do that was for the provincial Government to approve sub-regional caribou management plans for all the other task force regions my fellow ATA members sat on, but not the upper Smoky.

Based on the strength of the completed sub-regional plans, the Federal and provincial governments signed a new woodland caribou management agreement. With the understanding, I'm sure that the Upper Smoky regional plan would soon roll out. And yet still no Upper Smoky plan.

Is it a coincidence that the Upper Smoky region is the hottest resource play in the province? The levels of activity going on down there right now are essential to our provincial revenues. And our Upper Smoky task force knew that when drafting our report. We debated endlessly on how to find a way to do both, work the resource, and still protect the caribou and their habitat. And we were successful in coming up with solid work plans for the most part. But those innovations need to be implemented on the ground, not just be part of a report.

If you were to cut through the B.S., the situation is simple. The longer the Government holds off releasing the final Upper Smoky Caribou plan, the better it is royalty-wise. Take Weyerhaeuser, for example. Knowing a caribou management plan was forthcoming, they submitted a new application to extract over 550,000 cubic meters of wood per year for the next DECADE. And the Government approved those harvest levels despite knowing they are unsustainable.

And to prove it wasn't a fluke, the Government then approved the West Fraser harvesting plan to remove 564 cut blocks within the A La Peche herd range. West Fraser realized that the clock was ticking on their opportunity to harvest the minuscule 6% of their FMA that falls within the caribou habitat. So, they just applied to cut it all in one big cut, before the management plans come into effect, problem solved for everyone but the caribou.

By the way, many of our dollars have gone into restoring this same habitat the provincial Government now permits West Fraser to cut. What a farce and waste of money.

Having been asked to sit on the Upper Smoky caribou task force by the ATA was an honour. And I and most everyone on the task force gave it our best, and we produced a meaningful, effective caribou management plan that had eluded the Government for decades.

And now it'll sit on a shelf for as long as the provincial Government can stall its implementation. After all, we got the Feds off our back. So, what's the panic, no one in Alberta cares, right?

Brian Bildson