

**Revelstoke Rod and Gun Club**  
**Special Meeting - August 5, 2009 - 7:30 pm Revelstoke Community Centre**  
**Presentation by Garth Mowat, Senior Biologist, MoE regarding**  
**Caribou Management in the Revelstoke Area**  
**approx. 40 people in attendance**

President Gary Krestinsky opened the meeting at 7:32 pm and welcomed everyone in attendance. He outlined the club's concern with regard to this topic as being not just concern about caribou, but impact on all species. The club has sent letters to the Ministry of Environment and the local MLA, however have not received replies to their letters yet. The club questions why predators (wolves) are not being dealt with as a method of predator control, to date except for a few being trapped. The club is further asking for the cow/calf harvest over and above the regular season numbers to be rescinded for this season. The club feels that the plan is essentially a scapegoat for not doing anything to control the wolves as it would seem more "politically" volatile to do so. Gary explained that it is the club's belief that politicians need to give the experts (scientists/biologists) the tools to effectively do their job so that the "Species at Risk Act" does not get enacted if the caribou herd counts go down.

Notes from presentation:

- The research project on caribou has been going on in Revelstoke longer than almost anywhere else
- There is more info known about the caribou in the Revelstoke region than anywhere else in the province thanks to information provided by MoF
- Caribou management changed three years ago and the "Species at Risk" office was created in Victoria
- Caribou numbers have been declining all across Canada and Revelstoke is no different than anywhere else.
- More winter areas targeted for winter habitat were negotiated and identified and mapped
- Garth Mowat's mandate with regard to the caribou is population management.
- Different herds in Canada have various sized closures of different kinds, however over the years heli-skiing and snowmobiling in the Revelstoke area have had little impact on the population numbers of the caribou.
- There is currently a predator/prey management plan in the process at MoE, in draft form. There are difficulties with this document as there is disagreement between various biologists about how the process should take place.
- Different opinions about wolf control vs cougar reductions
- Possible pilot project could take place which involves penning the pregnant cows from April 1 to June 30th during the latter trimester of their pregnancy and the first thirty days of the calf's life. Research has proven that the fact that 75 - 90% of caribou calves die within the first 30 days of life and this type of program has proven to be effective in other regions. Cows and calves are released from the pen in amazing condition and prove to have a higher survival rate.
- The predators of woodland caribou are mixed, depending on the area, and sometimes the elevation at different times of the year that the herd populates. Grizzly bears, wolverine, black bear and wolves are known predators.

- In Southern BC, wolves ARE NOT ACTIVELY SEEKING OUT CARIBOU. It is more a random predation that occurs after the first 30 days of the calf's life. Wolves like moose!
- It is known fact that wolves seek out moose and there are over 300 moose at all elevations north of Revelstoke.
- A herd requires more than 80% survival rate of calves to survive as a stable population
- Even though the number of LEH tags for moose in the region is going up, hunter success is actually going down. Of the additional 80 tags, expected success is only going to be approximately 18 tags filled.
- Number of wolves is estimated to be 36, but in actual fact people believe it to be higher, possibly 60 to 70.
- Research has proven that when the moose population declines in an area, the wolf population also decreases...approximately a three year lag. This supports a pilot project which supports decreasing the moose population in order to decrease the wolf population.
- Cougar don't figure at all into caribou calf mortality, while wolves do figure into both calf and adult mortality. In the Revelstoke system, grizzly bear and wolverine probably figure highest in the calf mortality
- The push currently is to treat Revelstoke a pilot area to hold moose population to a carrying level where it will hold the wolf population to less than 20.
- Effective method for holding moose numbers lower is by cow and calf hunts, added to a bull hunt.
- Garth does not feel that reducing the number of wolves will greatly effect calf mortality, that is why he is a strong supporter of a "penning" project in the Revelstoke area and is pushing strongly for it.
- Winter food is not an issue for the caribou, and would have little to no effect on survival. The current herd could double and still have enough winter food in the area to sustain them, therefore winter habitat protection is not a huge issue with so few caribou currently in the herd.
- The idea that heli-skiing and snowmobiling have contributed to the population decline is not a functional hypothesis as the herds began their decline prior to the introduction of these activities.
- When asked about his feelings on the effectiveness of the plan, Garth explained that he does not feel that simply holding moose population down to hold down the wolf population will cause significant increases in caribou population. This is why he is such a strong and vocal supporter of a "penning" project. At the current rate, caribou will not likely survive in the long term without drastic and sometimes risky measures.
- When asked about grizzly bear management, Garth explained that politically, a grizzly plan would not have a hope. Explaining further, he said that there could be a single bear that is the problem, and it still not be one of the ones killed...hard to single out which bears are potential issues.
- Wolf reduction plans which would not receive support from cabinet are difficult and ineffective to carry out, but could be done if necessary if cabinet changed their position.
- When asked if biologists know how many caribou are killed by wolves, Garth replied that he did not know that, however there is credible data that wolves are limiting caribou growth.
- When asked how likely a penning project would be in this area, Garth explained that historically the idea is not highly supported due to the risk involved with moving pregnant cows and the potential for "too many eggs in one basket" with all the cows/calves penned

making access easier should a predator get in. He further explained that projects like this involve monitoring of the pens etc so that predator risk is minimal if not non-existent. There seems to be more and more support recently showing a shift in thinking, however there is no funding in this fiscal year for a project such as this, but he said that if there is a will there...the funding will come.

- Garth stated that of the 4 herds in his region, the Revelstoke herd has the best chance of survival of all of them.

Article from Revelstoke Times Review:

## Government biologist and Rod & Gun Club meet to discuss caribou



The Fish & Wildlife Branch is considering using Revelstoke area hunters to bring about a moose cull with the hopes of reducing wolf populations in the area. Wolves are just one of several different predators which prey on vulnerable mountain caribou calves. Photo courtesy of Angus Glass/Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program

By [Brandon Adams - Revelstoke Times Review](#)

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Government biologist Garth Mowat met with the Revelstoke Rod and Gun Club and members of the public last Wednesday to discuss mountain caribou and a potential moose cull intended to help buoy the threatened animals' numbers.

Over forty people were present for Mowat's presentation, which took place at Revelstoke's Community Centre.

The catalyst for the meeting was a decision made this summer by Mowat and other biologists from the Ministry of Environment's Fish and Wildlife Branch to issue an additional 70 limited entry cow and calf moose permits for the fall 2009 hunting season.

The decision, which was announced later than normal, surprised many from the Revelstoke Rod and Gun Club, and prompted an early June letter to the editor authored by club president Gary Krestinsky.

Both in their letter and at Rod and Gun Club meetings, hunters expressed fears that the Ministry of Environment was avoiding a wolf cull, a recommendation earlier made by biologists and other stakeholders as a step towards helping the mountain caribou.

Many within the club worried that the decision to avoid a wolf cull was a political decision based on public perception instead of science, and that the moose population was instead being unfairly targeted.

“Our club invited Garth up for a special reason,” said Krestinsky at the beginning of the Wednesday evening meeting. “We’re concerned about [mountain] caribou naturally: we’re a conservation club. But we’re also worried about other ungulates ... [as well as] bears and wolves.”

“Why ... are predators, especially wolves, aren’t being managed like they could be according to other ... biologists,” asked Krestinsky.

Krestinsky also said the club was concerned that moose are acting as “the surrogate ... for not doing anything with the wolves.”

“The science should drive what happens,” said Krestinsky as he ended his preamble. “We want to vote for politicians who are giving scientists the proper tools to do the job.”

Given this history, Mowat, who is the senior wildlife biologist in the Fish and Wildlife Branch’s Kootenay region, attempted to address the club’s concern and explain the branch’s plan for mountain caribou recovery in the region.

Mowat began his presentation with an overview of the current status of Mountain Caribou in the region.

“There’s been a research project on Caribou in Revelstoke for, probably, longer than anywhere in British Columbia,” said Mowat, who noted that biologist Bruce McClellan started the project over 18 years ago.

“[And] three years ago, they changed the way caribou management is done,” said Mowat. “I don’t know exactly why it was done, but there was a perception that things weren’t going the way they need to go.”

“It’s not just mountain caribou ... other [Caribou] herds are declining. It’s a really general phenomenon ... it’s a really broad issue. Revelstoke is no different than anywhere else,” noted Mowat.

Mowat explained the the Ministry of Environment is working on managing several different threats to the mountain caribou. Mowat noted that both heliskiing and snowmobiling have been targeted for restrictions in an attempt to shore up mountain caribou habitat.

But, explained Mowat, the real issue for the mountain caribou is not adult survival, but calf survival.

“The last six or so years, adult survival has been ‘normal’,” said Mowat. “But they [the herds] never grow: calf recruitment is perennially low.”

Mowat explained that government biologists are now focusing on bolstering calf recruitment numbers through a variety of programs ranging from predator control to investigating more drastic plans, including temporarily ‘penning’ expectant mountain caribou numbers.

“When we look at Woodland caribou and Boreal Caribou ... the predators are a mixed bag,” said Mowat, who went on to explain that the most significant predators, in terms of mountain caribou, are: Grizzlies, Wolverines, Wolves, and Cougars.

In order to reduce predatory pressure on mountain caribou, the Ministry of Environment has been pursuing a reduction in wolf populations in the region, explained Mowat.

“Wolves figure in both adult and calf [Caribou] mortality,” explained Mowat.

“When moose numbers decline, wolves follow them [down] by a three year lag,” explained Mowat. “Any biologist from Northern Canada wouldn’t bat an eye at this: wolves and moose follow each other.”

This, said Mowat, is why the Fish and Wildlife Branch is looking at using hunters to significantly reduce the region’s moose population.

When asked why biologists and hunters don’t directly target wolf populations instead of culling moose, Mowat responded with a two-part answer.

Firstly, Mowat noted that the government had been encouraging trappers to trap more wolves, but the program hadn’t been very successful.

Secondly, said Mowat, “You just can’t catch enough [wolves].”

“You really have to use helicopters, or poison, or some other nasty thing to bring wolf levels down,” said Mowat, who also noted that the reductions in wolf populations need to be ‘significant’ to reduce predatory pressure.

Mowat explained that using helicopters or poison is politically unpalatable, so the Ministry instead decided to use other methods to reduce the wolf population.

While Mowat did say that wolves were a factor in caribou mortality, Mowat noted that it’s likely other predators that are contributing to the mountain caribou’s low calf survival rate.

“I bet if we ever did collar a lot of caribou calves in this system, the main predators are going to be Grizzly Bears and Wolverines,” said Mowat.

“We’ve got lots of Grizzly Bear in the area,” said Mowat, pointing to slide showing 179 Grizzlies in Management Unit 4-38 and 117 in 4-39.

Yet given the unfeasibility of predator control for Grizzlies and Wolverines, Mowat said that he and some other biologists propose ‘penning’ pregnant mountain caribou during the latter stages of pregnancy and the first month of the calving period.

Mowat said that this approach has significantly increased calf recruitment for some herds in the Yukon, but is hotly debated among biologists in the Kootenay region.

Ultimately, Mowat asked members of the Revelstoke Rod and Gun Club to consider just how far they’re willing to see moose numbers drop, while Krestinsky and others asked Mowat how they could help government biologists win support for programs like the penning of expecting Caribou.

In an interview after the meeting, club president Gary Krestinsky said, "I thought it went quite well. We were trying to get an answer to some of our questions ... and I think Garth explained things quite well. We're still interested in seeing that the politicians give the biologists the tools that they need."

"I think we all learned quite a bit, it was an educational thing for most of us because Garth is the expert," said Krestinsky. "He worked on it for quite a while ... I think we learned how to better approach them and support them."

Full disclosure: the author is a member of the Revelstoke Rod and Gun Club