

THE HINTON VOICE

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Caribou kill setback for herd recovery

Masha Scheele
reporter@hintonvoice.ca

The Caribou Patrol confirmed that a bull caribou was killed after it was struck by a tractor trailer unit roughly 32 kilometres south of Grande Cache on April 17.

A report on the accident was received at 6:37 pm by the Caribou Patrol, to which a Caribou Patrol crew member and a Fish and Wildlife officer were dispatched.

The body of the bull was collected and stored in a freezer overnight and was transferred to Dr. Laura Finnegan at fRI Research Caribou Program in Hinton for a necropsy & DNA sampling, explained Chantelle Bambrick, Caribou Patrol member and RPFT and ILM Technician of Foothills Landscape Management Forum.

"Every caribou killed is one less animal that can contribute to a potential population recovery so we consider each death a setback. This caribou was struck and killed in an area where caribou crossing signs had been posted and several caribou have been crossing the highway in that area over the past two weeks. Sometimes, no matter how hard we try, the caribou just don't make it," said Bambrick.

As caribou migrate, it's common to spot caribou on or near Hwy. 40 within the caribou corridor, and Bambrick urges drivers to slow down.

The Caribou Corridor extends from Big Berland River to Muskeg River.

"We have signage that stays up all year round along the highway corridor but we don't have anything to let people know that it's migration time so they should pay more attention," said Bambrick about the necessity of having staff go out on patrol.

Each year, the Caribou Patrol Program works to reduce the potential of vehicle collisions with woodland caribou on area roadways through periodic patrols, enhance awareness of caribou management, and collect data on wildlife sightings.

The Caribou Patrol Program was established in 2012 as a pilot project to contribute to the recovery efforts for the Woodland Caribou in the foothills of west central Alberta, which are a threatened species under the Canadian Species at Risk Act.

The Aseniwuche Winewak, an indigenous community near Grande Cache, partnered with Foothills Landscape Management Forum who, in turn, applied for funding from the federal government to start the pilot project.

"I think it's important that it's an indigenous-led stewardship program, they're doing what they can to help increase awareness and promote caribou conservation locally. We've done what we can to educate people and have created those educative booklets, we have a website, we have a Facebook

page, we're trying to get the word out there," said Bambrick.

The program is currently funded by Environment and Climate Change Canada, Aseniwuche Winewak Nation of Canada, Foothills Landscape Management Forum, and the Alberta Government.

"Initially that pilot project ran to see if caribou were being killed by poachers, or if hunting was kind of a big issue for caribou in west central Alberta. We quickly found out that caribou do die by poaching but not very often. What we were finding is that the main source of caribou mortality is caribou getting hit or killed on the highway," stated Bambrick.

This year, the Caribou Patrol Program is focusing on regional outreach events and is hosting a BBQ information session at the Big Berland River pullout on Hwy. 40, right in the middle of the caribou zone.

The information session on May 10 is a great opportunity for people to learn about the program and potentially see a caribou while enjoying a burger with the Caribou Patrol crew.

Construction on Hwy. 40 goes into part of the caribou migration zone this year and Bambrick hopes the construction workers make it out to the information session as well.

Caribou can often be seen in groups of up to five animals, but Bambrick said they did have two instances where somebody had seen 14 or 15 animals together, a pretty rare sight.

The public can report caribou sightings through the

caribou patrol website and Facebook page which were created in late 2013 to keep track of the location of the herds.

"We quickly found out that caribou were mainly on the highway for certain periods of the year and that makes sense because the A La Peche herd is a migratory mountain herd, so they do cross Hwy. 40 in the spring and in the fall," said Bambrick.

Bambrick explained that under provincial jurisdiction in Alberta there are 15 herds of caribou, while the Jasper herd is under federal jurisdiction.

Caribou Patrol works with four caribou herds spread across west central Alberta, three mountain ecotype herds, which migrate, and one boreal herd called the Little Smoky herd, which moves around on the land but doesn't migrate.


Most reports received by Caribou Patrol are on the Little Smoky and the A La Peche herds which live between Hinton and Grande Cache.



Michael Merriam Photo

Cont'd on Page 5

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PAGE 14

COUNCIL COVERAGE.....3 & 5

OPINION..... 6 & 7

STUDENTS VOTE.....9

THE SIREN CALL..... 11

CAREERS.....18 & 19



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Youth Advisory Council to include bursary

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Council is bringing the Hinton Youth Advisory Council (HYAC) Bylaw #1128 including a bursary to the Regular Council Meeting of May 7, 2019 for first reading.

“Changes [to the terms of reference] were recommended by Edson and Whitecourt as well as the community members around the planning table that have extensive experience working with youth. The objective of these changes is to involve a more diverse set of youth and to encourage long term active engagement with participants,” said Jenna Altrogge, FCSS Assistant Manager about the two versions of the bylaw presented to council during the standing committee meeting on April 23.

Both versions allocate \$3,000 for meeting meals, clothing and swag items, and HYAC operating expenses like transportation, community outreach events, printing, and advertising for new members.

Council is moving ahead with the version that includes an additional \$5,000 allocated for a bursary fund, wherein each student would be entitled to a maximum of \$500 per year.

The bursary funds would be released to the student upon graduation from secondary studies.

In order to qualify for the bursary, each student would be required to actively participate in HYAC activities and attend at least five meetings per year, volunteer in the community at least four times per year and be enrolled in and have paid for post-secondary studies upon graduation.

Since the bursaries are awarded at the end of the annual term, with the earliest date for bursary eligibility being fall 2020, the financial impact

of the additional \$5,000 each year would be a longer-term consideration and could be budgeted for in 2020, according to Altrogge.

“...the opportunity for the experience of being on council and having some input in the direction of our community is fantastic.”

Coun. Trevor Haas

The \$3,000 required would be needed upon commencement of HYAC activity in October 2019, and could be found in Legislative Services Grants and Donations, which has a current budget of \$6,500 and is used for miscellaneous donation and scholarship purposes, stated the meeting’s agenda notes.

In future years, administration recommends an increase in the Legislative Grants and Donations budget to reflect the desired amount required for HYAC operations, to be incorporated into the 2020 budget.

The terms of of reference states two councillors will be involved in HYAC meetings, Coun. Dewly Nelson asked whether this was realistic as they are committed to other committees as well, to which Mayor Marcel

Michaels responded that this could be revised after one year if they find it doesn’t work.

“If worst case scenario, only one can show up, you at least have one. But if you have two engaged councillors with our youth, I think you get more one-on-one time,” said Michaels.

“I think there would be a value to have the opportunity to spend more time, at a better ratio with those students.”

“Any opportunity we can give our youth financially and the opportunity for the experience of being on council and having some input in the direction of our community is fantastic,” agreed Coun. Trevor Haas.

Administration hopes to present at schools to introduce HYAC and encourage teacher and student interest starting in May with students applications due on September 30, 2019.

Council would then appoint students to HYAC for a one-year term from October, 2019 to September, 2020.

Hinton administration consulted the Town of Edson and the Town of Whitecourt, both of which currently operate effective Youth Councils with strong community and youth involvement.

The Hinton community team consisted of Madison Sharman, Manager at Northern Rockies Museum of Culture and Heritage, Terra Verch, Public Relations Officer at Northern Rockies Museum of Culture and Heritage, Pamela Stewart, Assistant Manager at the Hinton Municipal Library, Leanne Weik, BEST Program at Harry Collinge High School, Linda Watson, Youth Outreach Supervisor at the Town of Hinton, and Amanda Yaworski, Teacher at The Learning Connection.

Hwy. 40 has been ‘pretty deadly’ for caribou

Cont’d from Page 1

Not as many sightings are reported for the herds between Grande Cache and Grande Prairie, which migrate between Alberta and British Columbia called Red Rock Prairie Creek, and the Narrows herd, said Bambrick.

Bambrick explained that the A La Peche herd spends their summer in the mountains and then crosses the highway to spend their winters in the foothills. Migration can start as early as March and can go as late as June.

Last year, sightings were reported in every month of the year, which Bambrick said is unusual. Once frequent sightings from the public are reported the Caribou Patrol start patrolling the road.

“I’ve worked with Alberta Transportation to make sure that they can notify people on the Alberta 511 both on the website and their twitter feed, and the local radio stations have both been really fantastic. I let them know when the caribou migration is kind of ramping up and they let their listeners know,” said Bambrick.

In seven years of operation, the Caribou Patrol has seen four caribou killed on the highway, including the bull killed on April 17.

“Highway 40 has been pretty deadly for caribou in the past. I was able to find a report that said that in the 90’s there was one year where 15 caribou were killed in a year and a following year 17 were killed, so I don’t know if I can say that our program has made a difference but I think it does. Raising awareness helps, every caribou counts at this point,” said Bambrick.

Numbers of caribou are dwindling said Bambrick, the last recorded numbers from 2013 show that each herd has roughly 100 animals and according to Bambrick they have a hard time recovering their population.

No reliable surveys have been conducted for the Narrows, Redrock-Prairie Creek and A La Peche populations because many of those caribou use low elevation forested habitat during winter, making them difficult to count, stated the Canadian Species at Risk Act.

“We get pretty excited when we see a cow and calf together. There’s a really high mortality rate among caribou calves, a lot of them don’t survive past the first couple of months of life,” said Bambrick.

Bambrick added that the Committee On the Status of Endangered Wildlife In Canada (COSEWIC), a group that assesses animals and gives recommendations to the government of Canada whether to add animals to the Species at Risk Act re-assessed the mountain caribou herd and recommended their designation be changed from threatened to endangered in 2014, which hasn’t been officially updated with Environment and Climate Change Canada. To report a sighting, or learn more about the program go to cariboupatrol.ca.

On May 10, enjoy a free barbeque and information session at the Big Berland River pullout from 11 am to 2 pm.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Hinton Wood Products is commencing timber harvest planning activities in the Marlboro 14 compartment of our Forest Management Area.

The Marlboro 14 compartment is located east of the Athabasca River approximately 45 kilometers east of Edson. The main access is via the Medicine Lodge Road which splits the compartment. A team of natural resource management professionals are currently gathering information on the timber, ecological and fish and wildlife resources for the area.

As part of HWP’s Public Involvement Process, members of the public with resource value concerns or knowledge of this area are invited to offer comments during the initial planning phase.

You can make comments or inquire about our planning process by calling 1-780-865-8974 or by writing to the following address:

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