Caribou patrol program returns to regional roads

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Caribou patrols will return to the northeastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains on Nov. 15, extending a pilot project that was undertaken last year.

Modeled after a "Caribou Cowboy" project that successfully ran for several years along Hwy 40 south of Grande Cache and building on last year's pilot project, the purpose of these patrols is to encourage caribou to move off of the roads in an effort to reduce the risk of vehicle collisions.

Woodland caribou are classified as threatened in Alberta. The outcome of the patrol project will contribute to the overall recovery plan by reducing mortality of caribou and collecting human use data to assist in successful implementation of broader landscape recovery strategies.

Crews, each comprised of two Aseniwuche Winewak Nation (AWN) members, will begin patrolling the area within approximately a 100-km radius of the town of Grande Cache.

"This project will provide a

meaningful way for the AWN to directly participate as an active partner with industry and government in recovery efforts for caribou," said Wayne Thorp, managing director of the Foothills Landscape Management Forum (FLMF), which operates under the Foothills Research Institute.

The patrol persons will collect information on wildlife sightings and on effectiveness of existing barriers to vehicle traffic. They will educate users of the roads – both public and industrial – and will reduce collisions with wildlife by using actions to persuade caribou to leave the roadways. Patrols will continue until March 16, 2014.

Patrol persons are observers and do not have any regulatory enforcement authority, although they can collect information that could be passed on to the regulator.

The patrol crews are employed by the Aseniwuche Environmental Corporation under contract to Aseniwuche Winewak Nation of Canada. Funding is provided by the FLMF, the provincial government and the federal government under the Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk.