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A Highway 40 North Demonstration Project Update
Putting Natural Disturbance Research to Work

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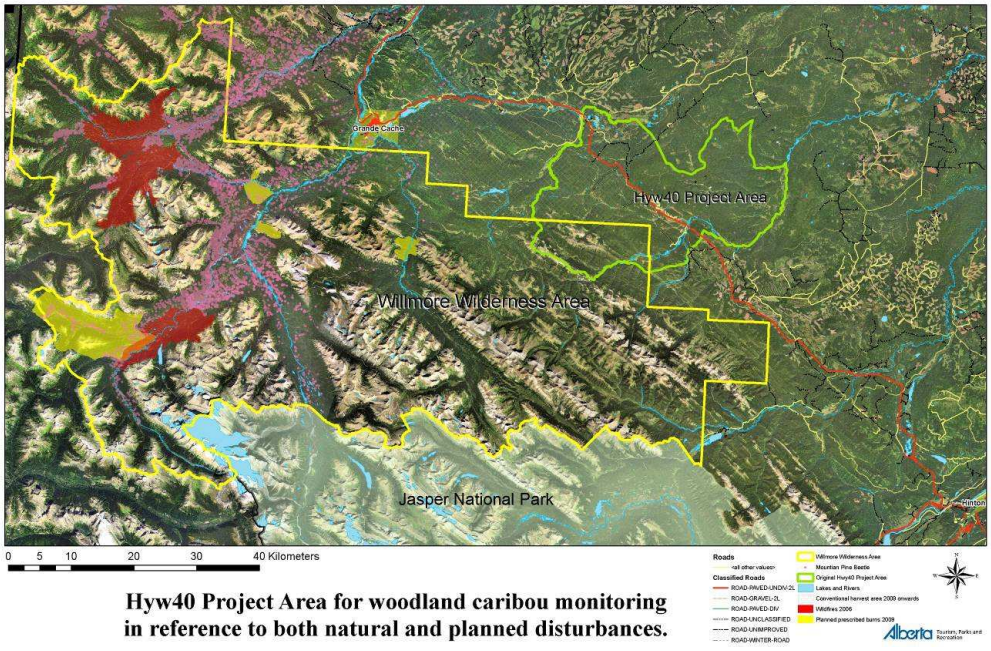
Is Caribou Monitoring Still a Priority?

Very much so. The Hwy40 Demo Project originally was designed to develop an operational plan based on knowledge of historical disturbance patterns for the purpose of developing more ecologically based disturbance activities. As part of that goal, three of the partners involved (West Fraser Mills, Alberta Newsprint Co. and Alberta SRD) agreed to fund an adaptive management monitoring project for woodland caribou. Due to a variety of factors, the disturbance-event plans arising from this process are unlikely to be invoked in the near future. However, the project's original questions regarding caribou conservation remain relevant. Our primary questions concerned the mechanisms by which caribou move to other parts of the landscape – specifically in response to a disturbance event that approximated natural patterns (see Update 14). To this end, by spring of 2007 12 GPS collars had been deployed on caribou within and adjacent to the Hwy40 project area, including animals within Willmore Wilderness Area and northern Jasper National Park. These collars continue to be re-deployed today.

Thanks to two new collaborations, our original research goal is not only intact, but significantly expanded. First, a formal partnership was formed between FRI and Jasper National Park to standardize and store all caribou data in a single Parks Canada-based database that was funded under the Species at Risk Act (SARA) Interdepartmental Recovery Fund (IRF). Second, project synergies were identified between Hwy40-based monitoring and the concurrent Northern Rockies Woodland Caribou Project out of the Universities of Montana and Calgary. That allowed us to not only share costs associated with field crews, equipment, and flights, and but also to coordinate collaring activities and analysis.

The broader initiative that the Hwy40 caribou are now part of is similarly interested in the influence of large-scale disturbance events within the core-caribou range. However, the work now includes a much more sophisticated research program that includes secondary impacts of predation, mountain pine beetle infestation, and mountain pine beetle control impacts (single-tree harvest, and prescribed fires). This larger project will also provide ongoing coordinated monitoring in a larger area within which harvesting and oil and gas exploration is likely to continue.



Hyw40 Project Area for woodland caribou monitoring in reference to both natural and planned disturbances.

For more information on the Hwy40 project, please contact: Dr. David Andison, Bandaloop Landscape Ecosystem Services, (604) 225 – 5669, andison@bandaloop.ca, or visit www.foothillsresearchinstitute.ca