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Effects of the Keystone XL pipeline on extinction of Alberta's Woodland Caribou Part of the Washington Rally

Alberta conservation groups have sent information on the decline of woodland caribou in Alberta to the people organizing the February 17 Washington Rally to stop Keystone XL. This information was added to the organizers list of reasons for President Obama to turn down this pipeline.

In the package are a poster, a flyer and a fact sheet on government's decades of broken promises with respect to caribou habitat conservation. The main messages are that petroleum development in Alberta is killing caribou, approval of the Keystone XL will help push caribou to extinction in Alberta, and Alberta is not developing its petroleum resources responsibly.

People care about conservation of biodiversity and the status of the iconic woodland caribou is a blatant example of Alberta's failure to balance economics with environment," said Helene Walsh with Keepers of the Athabasca, "People who use our petroleum resources are part of the problem and they need to know about Alberta's dismal record on caribou conservation. They need to know Alberta has a huge credibility gap between what it says and what it does."

"Due to industrial use of their ranges Alberta caribou herds do not have enough suitable habitat left, and all are in decline. Already scientists say caribou herds in tar sands areas of northeast Alberta will die out in the next few decades if there are not significant changes in industrial use. More pipelines will allow the new industrial development that will push caribou extinction in Alberta even faster," said Walsh.

Government and industry continue to insist that Alberta develops its resources responsibly, however, in the oil sands area caribou ranges are already 64% disturbed by industry, far past a 20% disturbance limit where they're still likely self-sustaining. And it could get much worse as demonstrated in the Little Smoky Range in the Alberta Foothills where even though 95% of the range is already disturbed the government is still approving industrial use of the final five percent. Caribou there are only maintained by poisoning and shooting hundreds of wolves.

"It is time to slow down the development of the oil sands until the environmental effects have been studied and there is a plan to create the balance governments are always talking about. Ottawa and Alberta seem unwilling to do that, and so perhaps the caribou's best hope in the short term is that the Keystone XL will not be approved," said Walsh.

Contact: Helene Walsh 780 922 0908