

First Nations groups seeking better caribou protection from Ottawa

Bob WEBER *The Canadian Press*

EDMONTON — Several First Nations and Indigenous groups have asked the federal government to step in and protect some endangered caribou herds on provincial land in Alberta.

In a letter to federal Environment Minister Catherine McKenna, the coalition said Alberta hasn't met Ottawa's deadline for coming up with a plan to save five threatened herds in the northeastern part of the province heavily impacted by forestry and oilsands development.

If Alberta won't make the move, they said Ottawa should.

"Despite the good efforts by some companies, there's nothing right now that prevents a new oil and gas well or a new oilsands mine or a harvest cutblock from destroying critical habitat," said Barry Robinson of Ecojustice, one of the groups that signed the letter along with Cold Lake First Nations, the David Suzuki Foundation and the Alberta Wilderness Association.

Robinson said McKenna could use the Species At Risk Act which gives Ottawa the power to issue a "safety blanket" order.

That order, said Robinson, obliges the federal minister to step in if provincial protections for critical habitat of an endangered species on provincial Crown land are inadequate.

The formal petition delivered to McKenna on Monday, along with the



A woodland caribou is shown in this handout photo.

letter, goes through 11 Alberta laws and concludes none offer legal protections, although Robinson notes some companies try to minimize their damage to caribou herds.

The submissions to McKenna come as Alberta and all the other provinces continue to fail to meet a federal deadline to release recovery plans for the threatened herds. That deadline passed in October.

McKenna has said her office will study measures taken by the provinces and decide in April whether those protections are enough.

Robinson said it's time for action, adding Ottawa has already let its own deadlines slip by. The 2012 federal

document that contained the deadline the provinces have now missed was itself five years late.

"Given the purpose of the Species At Risk Act, very little has been done and it's been 10 years since the species was listed. It's time for either the province or the federal minister to step up."

Caribou are in decline across the country. A 2015 federal assessment found 81 per cent of Canada's 51 woodland caribou populations are declining. The reasons are thought to stem from habitat loss and damage from forestry, energy development and wildfires.

The assessment concluded those populations will decline at least another 30 per cent in the coming years.

Redford lands job as Afghanistan policy adviser

The Canadian Press

CALGARY — Former Alberta premier Alison Redford has taken a new job as policy adviser to Afghanistan's minister of energy.

The World Bank says Redford has been hired as a consultant, but wouldn't confirm her specific job title.

Her LinkedIn page says she started in the position through the World Bank Group this month.

The job description says economic growth will be developed in Afghanistan by attracting international oil and gas investment.

Redford stepped down as premier in March 2014 after 2 1/2 years in office marked by a public scandal over lavish spending on herself and her inner circle.

Her earlier career included a number of postings in some of the world's most troubled regions, including Afghanistan.

Redford, a lawyer, was one of four United Nations international election commissioners who helped administer Afghanistan's parliamentary elections in 2005. After that, she was an adviser to the Canadian government on its future involvement in the country.

Redford also worked on South Africa's national elections in 1994. Many of Redford's political woes stemmed from revelations of a \$45,000 trip to attend former South African president Nelson Mandela's memorial in late 2013.

Stephen Carter, Redford's former chief of staff, said she'll do well in her new position.

"She has tremendous strengths," he said. "People don't understand just how talented she is, especially at these kind of big questions and big visions."

Carter, who says he has not spoken to Redford in years, said other former premiers whose tenures ended on a low note have had an easier time post-politics than Redford has.

"I think it has to be sexism. I don't think there can be anything else," Carter said. "Women suffer more in politics."

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