



Dramatic evidence presented at conference in New Zealand on increasing rates of logging and road building in sensitive caribou habitat in Québec, Canada

If rates of disturbances continue to increase, local caribou populations will decline rapidly. Meanwhile key data is withheld by the Government of Quebec

AUCKLAND New Zealand, December 5 2011: At the International Society of Conservation Biology Conference in Auckland, New Zealand, representatives from the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) in Québec Canada today presented dramatic scientific evidence produced by Global Forest Watch Canada of increasing rates of logging and road building in sensitive caribou habitat in Québec.

Critical woodland caribou habitat in the James Bay region of northern Québec is being rapidly impacted by roads and logging, according to research conducted by Global Forest Watch Canada and commissioned by the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee).

Isaac Voyageur, a Cree from Québec said, "The Grand Council of the Crees came to this important conference in order inform the international community engaged in Conservation Biology about our work and more importantly, the precarious situation of the woodland caribou in Eeyou Istchee."

"We conducted this study, *Mapping Disturbances and Restoration-Protection Opportunities for Woodland Caribou within the James Bay Region of Northern Québec*, because the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) expressed concerns about the potential devastating effects of proposed forestry road construction and other industrial developments on woodland caribou within their traditional territory," said lead author Peter Lee, executive director of Global Forest Watch Canada.

Lee continues: "We used Landsat satellite pictures over multiple years to map roads and clearcuts. These pictures from space provide evidence of the disturbing rate of clearcut logging and road building. The scientific literature also provides evidence that woodland caribou cannot survive this pace and scale of industrial disturbances.

The caribou mapping and analysis were peer reviewed by caribou scientists. The study found that:

- The annual rate of buffered industrial disturbances is speeding up, from 219 km²/year between 2002 and 2009 to 259 km²/year between 2009 and 2010. Planned disturbances to 2013 will increase to 466 km²/year. Fires will exacerbate the amount of total disturbances.
- The total area projected to be disturbed by 2013 by buffered industrial disturbances and by fires is at least 10,468 km², or 32% of the area of known woodland caribou range.

"Many investigations have reported dwindling caribou populations across Canada," continued Mr. Lee. "They have largely disappeared from their historical range due to widespread loss of habitat across most of Canada's southern boreal forest."

Woodland caribou are formally listed as Threatened in Canada under the federal *Species at Risk Act (SARA)* and designated as "vulnerable" under Quebec's *Act respecting threatened or vulnerable species of Québec*.

Every year caribou move northward in search of intact habitat. According to Québec's 2008 woodland caribou recovery plan, the southern limit of the caribou's range has continued to retreat northward. Aerial surveys have shown the population's precarious state and their ongoing decline.

Peter Lee states, "At the current increasing rate of industrial disturbances in combination with forest fires, the prospect of these caribou supporting self-sustaining local populations in the near future appears to be declining rapidly."

Lee concludes, "Given the potential economic trade off that may be necessary to protect the caribou, Canada and Québec governments have been reluctant to release information to allow the Crees and wildlife managers to draw an accurate portrait of the viability of the caribou in this area and across Canada. The absence of official information has made it very difficult to advance constructive dialogue toward conservation solutions. Asserting their Treaty rights in Québec, the Crees have called for a moratorium on industrial development, in particular forestry, until they are assured that the woodland caribou will be protected."

- 30 -

About Grand Council of the Crees Eeyou Istchee – The Grand Council of the Crees is the political body that represents the approximately (2003) 14,000 Crees or "Eeyouch" ("Eenouch" – Mistissini dialect), as they call themselves, of eastern James Bay and Southern Hudson Bay in Northern Quebec. The Grand Council has twenty members: a Grand Chief and Deputy-Grand Chief elected at large by the Eeyouch, the chiefs elected by each of the nine Cree communities, and one other representative from each community. The present Grand Chief is Mathew Coon Come and the Deputy Grand Chief is Ashley Iserhoff. The Council's head office is in the Cree community of Nemaska, although it also has offices in Montreal and Ottawa.

About GFWC – Global Forest Watch Canada provides access to more complete information about development activities in Canada's forests and their environmental impacts. "We are convinced that providing greater information about Canada's forests will lead to better decision-making on forest management and use, which ultimately will result in forest management regimes that provide a full range of benefits for both present and future generations."

Contact:
Peter Lee, Executive Director, Global Forest Watch Canada
Telephone: 780 422 5989
Email: peter@globalforestwatch.ca