

Recommendations for, and voluntary contributions, towards a Kesagami Range Caribou Action Plan Clarification Document

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Introduction

Based on recent feedback received on the CBFA caribou action plan for the Abitibi River Forest portion of the Kesagami Range, there were some potential ambiguities in the strategies outlined for Zone 1. In addition, it was recommended to have a high level description of the overall intents of each zone to provide proper context of the strategy. This document is designed to clarify the statements made to ensure a clear understanding of the recommendations. It will be appended to the proposal and will be an integral part of the document. Themes include recovery, access management, as well as the strategic linkage concept (Lake Abitibi to Zone 2). In the true spirit of the CBFA, this proposal is intended to build the collaboration needed to assist wildlife (in this case caribou), while working to facilitate a healthy and growing socio-economic environment for the people of the region in question.

3 Zone Concept

The Abitibi River Portion of MNR's Kesagami Range contains a substantial amount of area suitable for caribou, and is an area of significant socio-economic importance to the entire region of Northern Ontario. It is recognized the forest is not uniform and that some areas are more acceptable to maintaining caribou, while other areas are more acceptable to economic development. As a result, our strategy proposes a zoned approach based on the following descriptions:

- Zone 3 significant caribou presence, very little disturbance and challenging conditions for the harvest of wood – plan is caribou conservation with no future harvesting to occur.
- Zone 2 significant caribou presence, an economically valuable wood supply and a moderate level of existing disturbance – The plan is to continue with the DCHS to study the impacts and compatibility with timber harvesting and learn from the experiment to assess the merits of long term implementation of DCHS.
- Zone 1 little to no caribou present but the area is critical for facilitating a healthy and growing socio-economic environment supporting individuals and their families who live in the local region. While this zone will focus on socio-economic development, some caribou management strategies could be considered within the context of the FMP that may include: protection of potential calving areas on Lake Abitibi; the establishment of a potential strategic linkage between Lake

Abitibi and Zone 2; and, where appropriate, arrangement and amounts of mature conifer are maintained over time.

Recovery

The term “recovery” is used throughout the document and as such, needs to be clearly defined. For purposes of this recommended caribou action plan, recovery is intended to refer to harvesting and renewal that influence the pattern and amount of forest disturbance. Typically, forest managers have influence only over habitat and not population dynamics directly and therefore the efforts described in this strategy refer to managing forest cover (through harvest and access) only. The approach to recovery will be consistent with the overall framework that secures wood supply to existing mills while conserving caribou habitat.

There is no discussion or advice being offered on the concept of “reintroduction” which we interpret as the physical relocation of animals from one location to another with the hope they may persist in the area they were moved to. Our opinion on the advisability of using reintroduction is not commented upon nor advocated in this recovery strategy.

Zone 1 Forest Management Zone

Forest managers have influence over various factors such as species composition, forest fragmentation, and age. These factors are managed through accessing, harvesting and renewing the forest. It is recognized that coniferous forest cover is preferred for caribou and the conditions on the Abitibi River Forest are well suited for growing conifer trees. Through practices such as “careful logging around advanced growth” (CLAAG), “harvesting with regeneration protection” (HARP), tree planting and aerial seeding the site conditions of the Abitibi River forest are conducive to maintaining conifer forest cover.

Fragmentation of the forest is also seen as undesirable for caribou so our strategy advises allocation of harvest blocks in a manner that over time, large patches of conifer dominated forest are created in the area between Lake Abitibi and zone 2. This is not to be confused with a DCHS. This proposal does not intend to use a DCHS in zone 1. The intent is to reduce the amount of fragmentation compared to present levels of fragmentation, while also enhancing the socio-economic viability of Zone 1.

Zone 1 will also be managed to maintain the appropriate mature conifer forest cover targets as required by the FMPM. It is understood that managing access will assist in reducing the amount of fragmentation compared to the present state of zone 1.

This strategy recommends that the forest planners when developing access strategies for the roads in zone 1, and especially the area between Zone 2 and Lake Abitibi,

reduce the overall road density. Considerations should be given to the type and use of the roads.

Conclusion

Indeed, there is currently a lot of caribou research underway with more anticipated in the future. As new independent peer reviewed science becomes known, our overall recommendations on caribou may need to be adjusted to reflect the new knowledge as it becomes available in a reasonable fashion.

The same goes for the socio-economic health of the region. The intent is to conduct impact assessments and make them part of the overall review in the future to ensure informed and manageable decisions are being made that see both caribou populations and the economic conditions of the communities be sustainable.