

Standard Operating Plan Approval Conditions for Forest Operations in the Boreal Plain (SK2) Woodland Caribou Conservation Unit

Effective March 15, 2025

Boreal woodland caribou are a species of conservation concern in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan's Range Plans for Woodland Caribou outline the province's landscape management approach to achieving and maintaining self-sustaining caribou populations while allowing for continued economic activity in northern Saskatchewan.

Pursuant to *The Forest Resources Management Act*, this document provides the standard approval conditions for **forest management activities in the SK2 woodland caribou conservation unit**, consistent with the strategies outlined in Saskatchewan's Range Plans.

1. General Conditions

- a) Activities not carried out in accordance with these conditions are deemed non-compliances. All non-compliances shall be reported to the area forester or inspecting officer within 24 hours following their discovery and verification by the licensee. The non-compliance report shall include the location of the non-compliance and the circumstances related to the non-compliance.
- b) The contractor(s) / operator carrying out the forest management activities described in the operating plan must be given a copy of these conditions, which must be kept on site to ensure that all conditions are met.

2. Forest Harvest

- a) Harvest shall not be conducted in Tier 1 caribou habitat management areas.
- b) Timber shall not be staged or stored in Tier 1 caribou habitat management areas unless described in an accepted caribou mitigation plan associated with an approved operating plan.
- c) If timber storage and/or staging in a Tier 1 caribou habitat management area is approved, the following condition applies:
 - i) Timber shall be stored in existing openings within 500 m of an existing Class 1 road or highway.

3. Roads

- a) New roads shall not be constructed in Tier 1 caribou habitat management areas unless described in an accepted caribou mitigation plan associated with an approved operating plan.
- b) Signage indicating that the road is subject to closure or reclamation shall be posted on all newly constructed or upgraded Class 1, 2, and 3 roads when road construction is complete, consistent with the Forest Operations Standard.
- c) Newly constructed or upgraded roads in Tier 1 and Tier 2 caribou habitat management areas shall be reclaimed as soon as possible, with the maximum timeframe being consistent with the reclamation section of the Forest Operations Standard.

4. Operating Period

- a) Only forest management activities classified as lower risk or operational exemptions in Table 1 may be conducted during the high-risk period for caribou (April 1 to July 31) in Tier 1 and Tier 2 caribou habitat management areas, unless the responsible licensee and/or shareholder is operating within their approved caribou strategy in their Forest Management Plan or unless otherwise described in an accepted caribou mitigation plan associated with an approved operating plan.
- b) Forest management activities not appearing in Table 1 shall be considered higher risk unless described as lower risk or an operational exception in an approved Forest Management Plan or an accepted caribou mitigation plan associated with an approved operating plan.
- c) The Area Forester or designate shall be notified prior to any approved higher risk forest management activities starting during the high-risk period for caribou (April 1 to July 31) in Tier 1 and Tier 2 caribou habitat management areas.

Table 1. Risk classification of forest management activities for the application of the high-risk period for woodland caribou.

Activity Category	Activities
Lower Risk / Operational Exceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hauling on Class 1 or Class 2 roads, including from gravel pits/burrows • Seedling delivery and tree planting including required use of helicopter and off-road vehicle transport • Regeneration assessments, including required use of helicopter and off-road vehicle transport • Road, crossing, or block inspections • Road and crossing maintenance or emergency work, limited to what is required to meet requirements set out in the Forest Operations Standard and the Aquatic Habitat Protection Permit • Block layout • Reconnaissance
Higher Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Road and watercourse crossing construction • Tree felling • Bunching • Processing • Skidding • Other mechanical vegetation clearing • Mechanized site preparation • New surface disturbance relating to sand and gravel extraction activities



5. Response to Caribou Observations

- a) In active travel and forest harvest activity work areas (i.e. excluding operation of temporary work camps), unless worker safety will be compromised:
 - i) Stationary or mobile motorized equipment shall not start up if caribou are observed within 500 m;
 - ii) Stationary and mobile motorized equipment shall idle down if caribou are observed within 500 m; and
 - iii) Regular activities may proceed only when at least one of the following conditions is met:
 - 1) Caribou are out of sight of the active travel or work area;
 - 2) Caribou are more than 500 m away from the active travel or work area; or
 - 3) At least 30 minutes have elapsed.
- b) Helicopters or other aircraft shall not land within 500 m of observed caribou, unless required for safety reasons.
- c) The Area Forester or designate must be notified within 48 hours if caribou or recent (i.e. since the last rain or snowfall) caribou sign (pellets, tracks, cratering) are observed in the active travel or work areas. Additional mitigation measures may be recommended in higher risk situations (e.g. observations of cow-calf pairs, observations of congregations of caribou or repeated observations of caribou over a short time in the same area).
- d) All observations of caribou or caribou sign must be submitted annually to the Saskatchewan Conservation Data Centre [Report a Woodland Caribou Sighting website application tool](#) or using the [incidental species observation load form](#).

6. Alternative to Standard Approval Condition(s)

If one or more standard approval conditions cannot be met, licensees must submit a caribou mitigation plan to accompany their operating plan submission or amendment, that includes the following:

1. The rationale for why the standard approval condition(s) for the proposed forest management activities cannot be met; and
2. An alternative approach that describes strategies to achieve the following, as relevant to the proposed forest management activities:
 - a. Minimize temporary habitat loss resulting from forest management activities, including the overall contribution to cumulative disturbance.
 - b. Minimize habitat alteration and fragmentation resulting from forest management activities to maintain the function and connectivity of woodland caribou habitat.
 - c. Minimize sensory disturbance to woodland caribou associated with forest management activities, especially during the high-risk period of April 1 to July 31.
 - d. Minimize linear feature density and lines of sight associated with forest management activities to minimize potential increases in predator efficiency and human access.



Information Notes

Information notes have been included in these approval conditions to provide further information or direction. Information notes are not part of the requirements of these approval conditions and are inserted for convenience of reference only.

Caribou Habitat Management Areas

Caribou habitat management areas (CHMAs) have been delineated in three tiers (tiers 1, 2, and 3) to spatially stratify the SK2 caribou conservation unit for the application of different management objectives and strategies. The CHMAs were determined based on their relative importance to and known use by caribou, current habitat condition and potential risks. Tier 1 CHMAs provide the highest value caribou habitat in SK2.

Spatial boundaries of the CHMAs for SK2 West, SK2 Central and SK2 East are published on the Saskatchewan GeoHub: <https://geohub.saskatchewan.ca/>

Caribou Mitigation Plans

Caribou mitigation plans must be reviewed and accepted by the Ministry of Environment prior to the approval of any forest management activities in the operating plan (or amendment), that do not meet the standard approval conditions. Review and acceptance of a caribou mitigation plan will be completed during the operating plan review and approval process. To avoid potential approval delays for those activities not meeting the standard approval conditions, submission of the caribou mitigation plan to the Area Forester or designate is recommended as soon as possible in advance of the operating plan (or amendment) submission and no later than with the operating plan (or amendment) submission.

Additional Guidance

The following additional guidance is provided for licensees to consider in the development and execution of operating plans, where possible, to further minimize potential impacts of forest management activities on woodland caribou and woodland caribou habitat.

- Minimize all forest management activities, including helicopter and other aircraft activity, during the sensitive timing window (April 1 to July 31) to the greatest extent possible.
- Minimize maintenance on existing roads in Tier 1 and Tier 2 caribou habitat management areas to what is required for operations, where possible, while still meeting regulatory requirements under the Forest Operations Standard. For example, the timing of road maintenance activities should coincide with the timing of other harvest operations to minimize sensory disturbances to woodland caribou.
- Where safe and practical, fixed wing and helicopter flights should maintain an altitude of at least 300 m above ground level when flying above caribou.
- When planning road reclamation within an event, consider planning for reclamation of adjacent or nearby Class 2 or Class 3 roads that are no longer required for forest management activities.



Information Note

These approval conditions do not negate or replace any other authorizations required pursuant to any other provincial or federal legislation especially that of *The Wildlife Regulations*.