

Woodland Caribou in Saskatchewan



Saskatchewan is home year-round to woodland caribou and seasonally to barren-ground caribou that spend the winter in the north part of the province. Woodland caribou are listed as threatened under the federal *Species at Risk Act* due to population declines across their Canadian range. In Saskatchewan, there are two caribou conservation units: SK2 (Boreal Plain) and SK1 (Boreal Shield). In SK1, the population is currently stable. In some parts of SK2 where land use pressures are higher, the population is declining.



Woodland Caribou Habitat

Old forests and peatlands

Woodland caribou require large areas of mature to old-growth evergreen forest and peatlands (also known as muskeg). Peatlands offer areas to escape from predators, especially during calving. Jack pine forests rich in lichen provide foraging areas. Caribou naturally live at low densities to avoid predators (primarily wolves and bears) and find enough food.



Jack pine - lichen forest



Black spruce peatland

Woodland Caribou Range
(outlined in white)

Woodland Caribou Tracks and Sign

What to look for

Woodland caribou have a rounded, crescent-shaped hoof print. Their fecal pellets are about the same size as deer pellets. In winter, the pellets are rounded with a distinct pinched off end and in summer they occur in clumps. In winter, caribou dig through the snow to access lichen, leaving behind pits called "craters".



Hoof print (approximately
15cm from front to back)



Fecal pellets



Craters

Woodland Caribou and Habitat Disturbance

Human activity and wildfire

Woodland caribou's specialized habitat requirements for large areas of older forests and peatlands make them very sensitive to habitat disturbance and human activity.

Young forests resulting from forest harvest, wildfire, or other disturbance do not have enough food resources (lichen) to support woodland caribou. Younger forests also often host more deer and moose and their predators (primarily wolves and bears), which increases risk for caribou.

Recently burned areas are typically used less by woodland caribou than intact forests. Unburned forest patches in a wildfire may be used for calving and for cover when travelling across the landscape.

Habitat fragmentation caused by roads, trails and other habitat disturbance changes how woodland caribou use their range. Roads and trails also increase risk by making it easier for predators to travel in woodland caribou habitats.

Human activity during the calving and calf-rearing period in spring and early summer can displace cows with calves and cause them to move to lower quality habitats where there is less food or where they are more likely to encounter predators. Movement is also energetically costly for pregnant and lactating cows.



Reindeer lichen is an important source of food



Woodland caribou tracks in snow



Caribou trail



Bull woodland caribou

Living, Working and Playing in Woodland Caribou Range

You can help woodland caribou by:

- **Staying on existing trails** to minimize disturbance to caribou habitat.
- **Minimizing noise** around the calving period in spring and early summer (April 1 to July 31).
- **Idling down or turning off engines** and other equipment when you see caribou. Give the animals time to move off the trail and out of the area or out of sight before re-starting equipment and continuing travel.
- **Not following caribou or caribou tracks.**
- **Reporting sightings** or signs of woodland caribou to <https://biodiversity.sk.ca/reportcaribou.htm> to help build our collective understanding of caribou distribution and occurrence in Saskatchewan.

Have a question? Contact us at woodlandcaribouproject@gov.sk.ca