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Predator assessment in Alberta's woodland caribou ranges

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Woodland caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*) are threatened in Alberta. This status designation is supported by empirical evidence of declining mountain and boreal populations, a northward recession in distribution, and herd-specific changes in range use. These trends are strongly linked to anthropogenic footprint, which in turn may be driving increases in the densities of primary prey and thereby wolves in and around individual caribou ranges. More wolves mean a greater probability of wolf-caribou interactions and as such, higher rates of caribou mortality. Wolf densities in most of Alberta's ranges are unknown but are expected to be greater than in an undisturbed wolf-primary prey-caribou system. This prediction has prompted provincial and national recovery teams to recommend wolf control as a short term recovery strategy for caribou, if the need for control is clearly demonstrated. The Alberta Caribou Committee's Research and Monitoring Subcommittee (RMS) intends to determine if and where this need exists by measuring wolf densities in and around multiple caribou ranges over the next three years. This project is part of a larger research and monitoring program that has been proposed by the RMS, which is designed to test the hypotheses that predation pressure is the proximate cause of the caribou declines and habitat change is the ultimate cause of the caribou declines. In doing so, the RMS will test the validity of wolf control, restoration of current footprint, and limiting future footprint as recovery options for caribou. As such, this program is critical for designing, implementing, and evaluating caribou recovery efforts in Alberta.