



COLLABORATION LEADS TO SOLUTIONS FOR THE WOODLAND CARIBOU IN CANADA

AUTHORS

MARIE-EVE SIGOUIN F.ENG. M.SC. (GREENFIRST FOREST PRODUCTS),
PIER-OLIVIER BOUDREAU B.IOL. (SOCIÉTÉ POUR LA NATURE ET LES PARCS – SECTION QUÉBEC),
BENOIT CROTEAU (CONSEIL DE LA PREMIÈRE NATION ABITIBIWINI).

GreenFirst Forest Products is a forest-first business, focused on environmentally sustainable forest management and lumber production. GreenFirst holds long-term timber supply guarantees on crown land in the provinces of Quebec and Ontario. These lands are certified to the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) forest management standard, some for over 15 years.



Photo Credit: David Gervais



Photo Credit: Jeremy Leblond-Fontaine



Scope and objectives

GreenFirst supply areas overlap in part with the range of the woodland caribou, a species designated as threatened under the federal Species at Risk Act and Acts under Ontario and Quebec legislations. As soon as the woodland caribou was designated as a threatened species, our forestry planning team in Quebec began the implementation of measures to preserve its critical habitat. Furthermore, under our former company name, Tembec, we are contributing authors of the 2007 Caribou Habitat Management Plan north of La Sarre (Detour population).

A non-compliance issued during a monitoring FSC® audit in 2013 ignited a great journey of collaboration to develop solutions for managing woodland caribou habitats. The Woodland Caribou Habitat Management Plan (the “Plan”) needed to be updated to maintain FSC certification on the land. The Plan had to evolve in order to meet the requirements of:

- 1 the federal recovery plan following the non-compliance issuance in 2013, and then,
- 2 the new national forest management standard that came into effect in 2020.

The caribou population in question, named Detour/Kesagami, is trans-boundary and involves two separate provincial jurisdictions which presents an additional challenge when it comes to harmonizing protection or monitoring measures on each side of the border.

Photo Credit: Dominic Leclerc

Innovative approach



- An untypical and unique collaboration was formed from the beginning. To ensure consistency and buy-in to the Plan we developed, we worked in the spirit of a collaborative approach with a wide range of partners from environmental and research groups to First Nations and government.
- Thus, the Société pour la Nature et les Parcs (Quebec), representatives of the Council of the Abitibiwinni First Nation in Pikogan and local and regional officials from the Ministère des Ressources Naturelles (as it was called at the time) were invited to participate in our working group on the Quebec side. In addition, other partners (mostly, in Ontario) were also consulted and kept informed throughout the process.
- With the financial support of Environment and Climate Change Canada, we were able to bring together all the stakeholders involved in the caribou range (including representatives of the mining industry) in a forum to discuss the caribou habitat management issues of this population. This forum led to a series of very concrete actions including: sharing information and data, setting up projects to further incorporate Aboriginal traditional knowledge, proposing protection measures, and conducting a trans-boundary aerial survey of the entire population, something that had never been done before.
- We worked in complete transparency with our partners by sharing all results in real time. The detailed analysis of the territory, which identified the habitat suitable for the caribou as well as operational constraints allowed us to propose consensual measures to the government. An untypical and unique collaboration was formed from the beginning. To ensure consistency and buy-in to the Plan we developed, we worked in the spirit of a collaborative approach with a wide range of partners from environmental and research groups to First Nations and government.

Conclusions



- The desire to maintain FSC certification played a key role in our company's involvement in this initiative.
- The outcome of such a wide range of special interest groups being able to work together for the greater good of saving the caribou population is outstanding. A precious relationship of trust has developed over the course of many years and meetings. In this sense, the stability of the work team over the years has certainly favored the success of our approach.
- The will and commitment of the stakeholders is the key to any collaboration and surely leads to solutions in complex issues as managing for Woodland Caribou.



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