

Alberta caribou at risk of extinction

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Canadian environmentalists trying to prevent the extinction of Alberta's woodland caribou are asking the government to protect the remaining herds.

Eight major conservation groups have filed a petition to Environment Minister Stephane Dion, the Globe and Mail reported Wednesday. It demands Ottawa stop the precipitous slide in caribou numbers in the province, where largely unrestricted logging and oil exploration have cut the population to 3,000 or fewer from as many as 9,000 during the 1960s, the newspaper said.

The environmentalists say without federal protection, the caribou are likely to become extinct in many areas within 40 years.

The groups told the Globe and Mail they have lost confidence that Alberta will take any steps to protect the caribou if such actions inconvenience industry.

Under the Canadian Endangered Species Act, Dion can ask for an emergency edict banning activities adversely affecting the species at risk. But because of fear of offending the provinces, the federal government has never used that power.

"What is the point of the Species at Risk Act if it's not used to actually save any species at risk?" asked Devon Page, lawyer for the Sierra Legal Defense Fund, which filed the petition.

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