



HeliCat Canada Backgrounder Release of BC's Mountain Caribou Recovery Plan

- October 16, 2007 -

Helicopter skiing began in British Columbia in the 1960's and since 1978, HeliCat Canada has been the voice of the helicopter and snow-cat skiing sector in the province. The Association now represents 39 mechanized skiing and snowboarding operations. This includes 28 Active member businesses, 8 Probationary members and 3 Applicant members, in addition to 25 Associate members.

HeliCat Canada member businesses – located from the Coast Mountains to the Rockies and from the West Kootenays to the province's northern regions - share the world's best powder skiing with guests from around the world. Using professional mountain and ski guides, HeliCat members operated for just over 88,000 skier-days in the winter of 2006/2007. These businesses are important parts of communities and economies throughout BC.

By becoming members of HeliCat Canada, helicopter skiing and snow-cat businesses in BC agree to follow and promote internationally-recognized principles and practices around safety, guest experience and sustainability while operating on Crown land. Each operation operates under the authority of one or more legal tenures issued under BC's *LAND ACT*.

In 2003, HeliCat Canada members approved *Best Practices for Sustainability: Stewardship of Mountain Ecosystems*, a document outlining principles and practices for environmental stewardship, and for social and economic sustainability. In upholding these practices, members are committed to minimize the impact of their operations on the environment and to act as responsible stewards of the lands and communities in and adjacent to their tenured operating areas.

Because many HeliCat Canada members operate in areas classified as mountain caribou habitat, the Association and its members have been active in formal mountain caribou recovery planning since at least the year 2000 when the province's first Mountain Caribou Technical Advisory Committee (MCTAC) was created. In November 2005, HeliCat Canada signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministries of Environment, Agriculture and Lands, and Tourism, Sport and the Arts. This MOU formalized practices to prevent the displacement of mountain caribou in member's operating areas. These practices require all operators to record and report all caribou observations and avoid all areas where caribou or their tracks are seen. Over time, operators use these observations and the resulting decisions they make to adjust the use of their ski terrain to further reduce the potential for caribou interactions.

HeliCat Canada and the province's Species at Risk Coordinating Office (SaRCO) jointly sponsored mountain caribou training for guides, pilots and snow-cat operators in the fall of 2006.

"As a key component of the province's Mountain Caribou Recovery Plan, I am pleased to see that government recognizes the significant commitment our members have made and will continue to make as responsible stewards of the areas in which we are privileged to operate," says John Forrest, President of HeliCat Canada. He added, "As an association, HCC is committed to working with government to undertake research to confirm that its operating practices remain appropriate for meeting the goal of not displacing caribou".

Barbara Rose, Chair of HeliCat Canada's Environment Committee will be working with her HeliCat colleagues to help implement the Recovery Plan. "Within the proposed timeframes," she says, "we look forward to working with government and conservation groups to ensure members, operating in caribou habitats, understand and follow approved operating practices."

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