



Maternal Penning to Enhance Survival of Caribou within the Klinse-Za Herd

External: Issued May 8th, 2020



Days in pen → 56

Days until release → 79

Cows are well adjusted to maternity pen



Figure 1. Guardians feeding pellets.

With eight weeks since capture, all the animals in the pen appear well adjusted and content with their new home. All thirteen adult cows and the one calf are behaving normally and appear completely healthy. The caribou are eating well; finishing two 20kg bags of pelleted feed a day; this is likely to increase substantially after calves are born! This year we have added wood rounds to the feeding troughs to reduce the intake rate during feeding, helping to avoid any feeding complications. Caribou also receive a tasty treat each day, in the form of terrestrial lichen; we provide two bags of lichen at the weigh scale (details below), which are very popular and completely finished every day by the caribou. The creek running through the pen provides fresh water.

The weather up at the pen has been mild, going into the double digits



some days. The snow level this year was higher than previous years at the site. The majority of the pen is covered in snow, but the feeding meadow is beginning to melt out and show signs of spring. The snow itself is very soft and 'rotten' in the afternoons, which impedes movement; the caribou appear to be mostly using existing, packed trails (Figure 2). During daylight hours, they are difficult to observe as they mostly stay in the trees, preferring the north aspect slopes and thick, medium-aged stands with shade. The caribou tend to feed in the twilight hours of the evening.

Social behavior is difficult to observe at the moment, as they spend increased time in the trees, and in small groups. This kind of behaviour is typical just prior to calving. We are beginning track elusive cows with telemetry, in order to detect calving events as soon as possible. The cow-calf pair have been observed spending increased time apart, which is typical prior to calving; cows often push their calves away prior to having a new calf in the spring.



Figure 1. Well used caribou trails provide sure footing for the caribou as temperatures warm

Pregnancy

In previous years, the earliest live calving event took place on May 4th. However, calving generally begins in earnest between May 11th and 15th. No calves have been born yet, but swollen udders, dropped antlers, and solitary behaviour all indicate that calving time is right around the corner.

Unfortunately, we have not received pregnancy test results yet, as many labs experience delays related to COVID-19. We are expecting to receive the results next week, which will be very helpful in knowing how many calves to expect.



Current status



Figure 2. Double electric fences around pen.

The crew has been hard at work making adjustments and setting up infrastructure at the pen. The double electric fence is structurally sound. The fences circulate 9600 kV of electricity, delivering a hard shock to any predator attempting to gain access inside the pen.

As in previous years, we have set up a weigh scale close to the feeding meadow. It consists of a wooden shelter over the scale, a spot where we place a tub of lichen to lure the caribou in, and a motion-activated trail camera that is trained on the scale display, thus recording the weights of the animals that are stepping on the scale. When we review the photos, we can link the weight reading on the scale display with the ear tags and collar that is visible on the caribou. Since we have the weights from capture, these photos provide valuable information on whether the cows are gaining or losing weight in the pen.

This year, we wanted to move the feeding troughs (and the observation tower) out of the feeding meadow to reduce trampling in this area, which is very rich in natural vegetation forage (once the snow melts). A second observation tower, where guardians sit to observe the caribou using binoculars and a spotting scope, has been built; it is located to the side of the road running through the pen.



Figure 4. Caribou stepping on the scale can be identified by ear-tag combination, and the scale readout indicates their current weight



Predators

There has been no large predator sign at the maternity pen itself. However, there has been an increase in predator sign near the access roads to the pen. Lynx tracks have been observed couple of kilometers down the road from the pen, and large grizzly bear tracks have been noted on the forestry roads below the pen.

Trail cameras have been installed at each of the three entrances to the pen. There is also one camera up in the alpine above the pen, and two cameras on the road leading up to it. These motion-activated cameras play a key role in helping us monitor any predator activity in close proximity to the pen.



Figure 3. Guardian doing predator patrol in the alpine.

The teams:

- Nîkanêse Wah tzee Stewardship Society
 - West Moberly First Nations (Chief Roland Willson/Tamara Dokkie)
 - Saulteau First Nations (Estelle Lavis/Carmen Richter)
- Caribou Mat Pen Working Group¹
 - West Moberly First Nations (Tamara Dokkie)
 - Saulteau First Nations (Carmen Richter)
 - Wildlife Infometrics (Matt Erickson)
- Mat Pen Technical Advisory Team²
 - Revelstoke penning (Rob Serrouya)

¹ The Caribou Mat Pen Working Group is a committee appointed by the Nîkanêse Wah tzee Stewardship Society.

² The Mat Pen Technical Advisory Team is an ad hoc committee chosen by the Working Group to obtain technical advice.



- FLNRO (Helen Schwantje)
- FLNRO (Mike Bridger)
- Support teams – capture specialists, veterinarian team, guardians, lichen collectors

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³ Current and historic