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# Caribou

## *Rangifer tarandus*

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Mammalia — Artiodactyla — Cervidae

### CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Apparently secure subspecies (G5T4)  
Statewide: Critically imperiled (S1)  
ESA: Endangered  
USFS: Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status  
BLM: No status  
IDFG: Endangered

### BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act; rangewide declines and isolated population.

### TAXONOMY

The woodland caribou (*R. t. caribou*) is the subspecies that occurs in Idaho. The terms “woodland” and “mountain” caribou have been used interchangeably for the population in the Selkirk Mountains.

### DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The caribou is circumboreal in distribution, occurring in the tundra and boreal zones of Europe, Asia, and North America. The subspecies referred to as woodland caribou occur across southern Canada. The only extant herd of woodland caribou that regularly occurs in the U.S. is the Selkirk herd, which uses parts of southern British Columbia, a small portion of western Alberta extreme northeastern Washington, and northern Idaho. Within Idaho, the caribou is restricted to the Selkirk Mountains. The Selkirk population occupies an area of approximately 5000 km<sup>2</sup> (2000 mi<sup>2</sup>) that is equally split between the U.S. and Canada. The current population size is 30 to 40 animals, and only a few of these use habitat in Washington and Idaho. The Selkirk population is largely isolated from adjacent caribou populations to the north and east.

### POPULATION TREND

Population trend for the woodland caribou across its range over the past 10 to 15 years has been sharply downward. Many populations of have experienced a 50% decline. The Selkirk population has remained stable, but only through augmentation with translocated individuals from other herds.

### HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

The woodland caribou inhabits mature forests dominated by subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce. Individuals migrate to lower elevations in December and January and return to higher elevations after the snow has consolidated in late January. During the summer individuals forage on small wood browse and forbs. During the winter individuals rely almost exclusively on arboreal lichen.

The woodland caribou breeds during September or early October. Females separate from other caribou and move to high elevation ridges to calve in late April to May. This behavior is thought to be a predator avoidance strategy. Females generally have their first calf at 2 years of age. Single calves are usually produced, although twins occur rarely.

## **ISSUES**

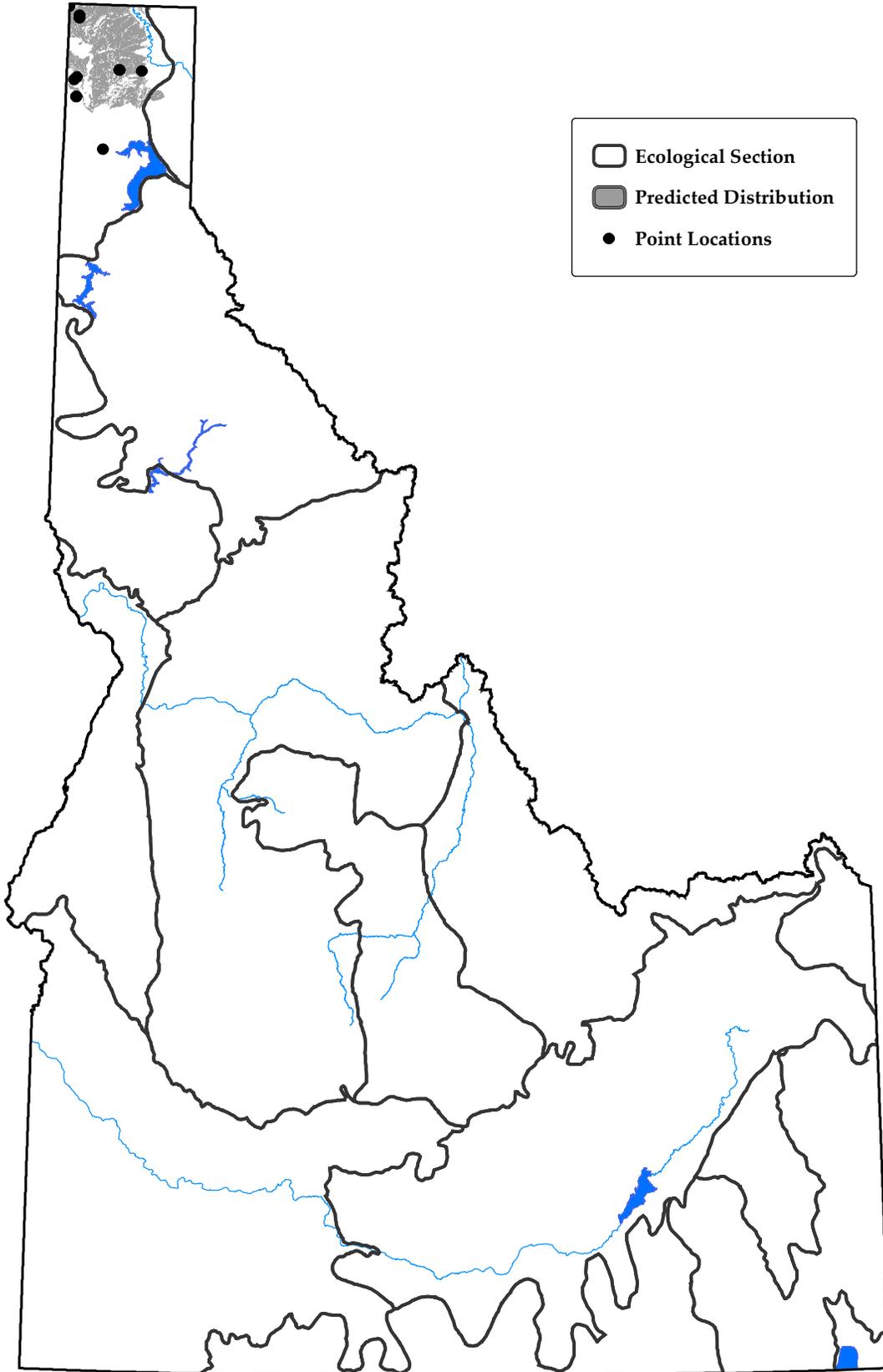
Habitat loss and fragmentation is the primary threat to this species. Timber harvest can effect habitat structure and can cause the fragmentation of large tracts of mature forest. Habitat alteration and fragmentation has broad implications for movement patterns and habitat use. Habitat alteration resulting in a younger seral forest within and adjacent to caribou range may affect predation patterns. Increased predation rates may have implications for small population viability. Other threats include winter recreation, such as snowmobiling, heli-skiing, cat skiing, and backcountry yurt operations, which may result in displacement from optimal habitat or increased energetic demands. Poaching has also been an important source of mortality.

## **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

A wide range of conservation actions are being implemented or considered throughout the range of the herd, including fire management, changes in forestry practices, regulation of winter recreation activities, predator control, deer and moose population management, caribou translocation, and captive rearing.

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Map created on September 22, 2005  
and prepared by Idaho Conservation Data Center.  
Sources: Point data are from Idaho Conservation Data Center,  
Idaho Department of Fish and Game (2005). Predicted distribution  
is from the Wildlife Habitat Relationships Models (WHR),  
A Gap Analysis of Idaho: Final Report. Idaho Cooperative Fish  
and Wildlife Research Unit, Moscow, ID (Scott et al. 2002).  
Predicted distribution is approximate (for more information, go to  
[http://www.wildlife.uidaho.edu/idgap/idgap\\_report.asp](http://www.wildlife.uidaho.edu/idgap/idgap_report.asp)).

