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The Syilx Okanagan Nation Files Under Section 80 of the Species at Risk Act to Protect styílca?ɔ - Southern Mountain Caribou

stqaʔtkwłniwt, Westbank, Syilx Okanagan Nation Territory: The Syilx Okanagan Nation has formally petitioned the federal Government of Canada under Section 80 of the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) to issue an Emergency Order to protect critical caribou habitat.

"The current provincial and federal recovery measures have failed to address ongoing habitat destruction and cumulative effects across caribou ranges" says Chief Dan Wilson, Okanagan Indian Band. "Without immediate and enforceable habitat protection measures, styílca?ɔ will be lost forever".

"The continued logging of critical caribou habitat is inconsistent with Syilx Forestry Principles and Standards, yet the province continues to authorize logging in these core areas," says Councilor Jordan Coble, Chair of the Syilx Nation Natural Resource Committee. "The key issue is the lack of meaningful habitat protection — only 35 percent of core habitat for the Columbia North herd is currently protected."

The Nation calls on the federal government to take immediate emergency action to protect critically threatened Southern Mountain Caribou herds before further irreversible losses occur. The petition focuses on the Columbia North, Frisby-Boulder, and Central Selkirk herds, which occupy ranges within the unceded territory of the Syilx Okanagan people in southern British Columbia.

The Southern Mountain Caribou are currently listed as "threatened" under section 1 of SARA. The petition that has been filed highlights the severity of the situation facing the three remaining caribou herds in Syilx Okanagan Territory:

- The **Frisby-Boulder herd** is now considered functionally extirpated, with only 8 animals remaining;
- The **Central Selkirk herd** has declined to approximately 17 animals and continues to decrease; and
- The **Columbia North herd** has shown some population increase and was recently estimated at approximately 162 animals, but that growth remains fragile and is largely attributed to movement from adjacent ranges rather than long-term habitat recovery.

Additionally, the petition addresses broader issues of cumulative effects, old-growth loss, fragmented land-use planning, and the need for Indigenous-led stewardship grounded in Syilx law and responsibilities to the land. Despite years of recovery planning, habitat disturbance from industrial forestry, road development, recreation, wildfire, and landscape fragmentation continues to undermine recovery efforts.

The petition is expected to increase pressure for stronger habitat protections and elevate national attention on the continued decline of the Southern Group of Southern Mountain Caribou in British Columbia.

In October 2025, the Syilx Okanagan Nation Chiefs Executive Council enacted the *styítcaʔ Protection Order* through Tribal Council Resolution 2025 No. 552, affirming Syilx law and responsibilities to protect caribou and critical habitat across Syilx Territory. The Order established Indigenous-led protections grounded in Syilx stewardship, science, and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent for activities affecting styítcaʔ and their habitat. Despite this, habitat loss and disturbance continue to accelerate, underscoring the urgent need for stronger federal intervention and enforceable habitat protections.

For the Syilx people, styítcaʔ — Southern Mountain Caribou — are more than a species at risk. They are deeply connected to Syilx culture, laws, food systems, and responsibilities to tmixʷ, all living things. The continued loss of caribou habitat and declining herd numbers directly affect the exercise of constitutionally protected Indigenous rights under Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.

About Section 80

Section 80 of SARA provides the federal government with authority to intervene when a species faces imminent threats to its survival or recovery. If the federal Minister determines such threats exist, the Minister must recommend emergency protections to the Governor in Council. An Emergency Order could introduce legally enforceable restrictions on activities impacting critical habitat, including industrial development, road construction, forestry operations, and other land-use activities across affected areas**.** While Section 80 orders are rarely used**, they represent one of the strongest legal tools available under federal species-at-risk legislation when existing protections are inadequate.**

The Okanagan Nation Alliance is committed to conserve, manage, co-manage the wildlife, lands and waters of the Nation's territory. The Syilx Okanagan Nation affirms that its laws and responsibilities originate from time immemorial, and that these continue to guide the Nation's stewardship and decision-making today, and for future generations to come.

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