

Nîkanêse Wah tzee Stewardship Society

Newsletter Update

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



July 30th, 2024 – two female caribou and a calf leaving the Bickford pen on release day

External: November 27, 2024

Pen Update

Time has flown by since the release on July 30th, bringing exciting developments-including the completion of the new Klinse-Za Caribou Maternity Pen! With that milestone achieved, we're now counting down the days to our next capture in March 2025.

Release from the pen

Before the release, the Pen Guardians worked tirelessly in July and August to monitor the cows and calves, ensuring every pair was observed at least once a day. With the highest number of animals ever in the Klinse-Za Maternity Pen at one time, these observations were crucial for understanding group dynamics and keeping track of their health.

The release took place on July 30th with 21 female adults and 18 calves exiting the pen. Early in the morning, before the usual feeding time, Pen Guardians opened two sections of the geotextile fence leading towards Bickford Mountain. To encourage the caribou to exit, they placed troughs filled with lichen and pellets at the openings. The first caribou ventured out while the Guardians continued their work, with the rest following later in the day.



July 30th, 2024 – trail camera photos of release from the Bickford pen

Effectiveness Program

Along with female caribou in the pen, collared caribou in the wild help us track the herd's movements and investigate mortalities. This fall, five adult caribou have died, with causes still under investigation. This is a higher number than normal, but notably, two of the three females that passed away were older than 12 years (C315S~12, C349S~15), highlighting that caribou are living longer, with their deaths likely being health-related.

Two of the mortalities were males, marking the first collared male deaths to be investigated. Bulls were first collared in 2022, and these deaths will offer valuable insights into male life expectancy and causes of death.

*120 days
since
Release*



*103 days
till next
Capture*



Fall 2024 – Linfitt cabin and an aerial view of the new pen site

Maternity Pens ~ Bickford Dismantle & Linfitt Build

A maternity pen has a finite lifespan largely due to short-term impacts on vegetation. Our first pen, at Bickford, served us from 2014-2017. Our second pen was at Rochford from 2018-2021. We then returned to the Bickford pen in 2022-2024 and enlarged the pen size. We have now completed the construction of our fourth pen at Linfitt, situated between Chetwynd and Mackenzie. This new location was strategically selected to encourage the Klinse-Za herd to expand into the less-utilized northern part of their range, formally known as the Scott East.

Shortly after the release in July, Pen Guardians and community members began dismantling the Bickford Pen to transport equipment, materials, and supplies to the new pen location. This process involved removing and re-spooling the two outer electric fences, pulling out numerous t-posts used for the electric fences, removing troughs, taking down the observation towers, and relocating everything to the new site. Construction began simultaneously as the dismantlement of the Bickford Pen, with work progressing as equipment, materials, and supplies arrived. Along with the pen itself, a new cabin has been built to house the Pen Guardians on their 24/7 week-long shifts.

Bickford Pen site is scheduled for a full restoration in the summer of 2025. For now, the geotextile fence remains in place, with six large cut-outs around the perimeter to allow animals safe passage through the area during the winter.

This is a gruelling effort, with pen builders working tirelessly for 2.5 months to finish the project. A huge thank-you goes out to the Pen Guardians and community members who stepped up to accomplish this challenging task!

The Teams

Níkanêse Wah tzee Stewardship Society

- ◆ West Moberly First Nations (Chief Roland Wilson/Tamara Dokkie)
- ◆ Saulteau First Nations (Naomi Owens-Beek, Carmen Richter)

Maternity Pen Technical Advisory Team²

- ◆ NWSS Executive Director (Candace Batycki)
- ◆ Wildlife Infometrics (Scott McNay)
- ◆ Wildlife Infometrics (Line Giguere)
 - Landon Birch (substitute for Scott & Line)
- ◆ Program Scientist (Clayton Lamb)
- ◆ Ministry of Forests (Caeley Thacker)
 - University of Calgary (Owen Slater) as a substitute
- ◆ Ministry of Water, Lands, and Resource Stewardship (Mike Bridger)



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Water, Land and
Resource Stewardship

