



Nikanêse Wah tzee

Ensuring Caribou Futures

We're excited to share spring updates from the field, including this year's capture efforts, our population survey results, a welcome to some new team members, and a special recognition we were honoured to receive. Thank you for being part of this journey to protect and restore the Klinse-Za caribou herd.



Maternity Pen Update

Caribou Capture

On March 10, 11, and 13, a total of **20 adult female caribou were safely captured** and transported to the Linfitt Maternity Pen for the 2026 season. Twelve of these females have previously spent time in a Klinse-Za maternity pen as adults, and fifteen were born in a pen themselves.



All animals are currently doing well, and we look forward to the upcoming calving season. This work would not be possible without the skill, care, and dedication of the capture team.

The penning program plays a critical role in protecting pregnant cows and improving calf survival during this vulnerable time. It is careful, hands-on work that makes a measurable difference for the herd. With continued support, efforts like these help move us closer to a self-sustaining caribou population.



Welcome Matt, our new Caribou Maternity Pen Lead

We're pleased to welcome Matt Erickson. As our Caribou Maternity Pen Lead, Matt oversees day-to-day pen operations and fieldwork, while continuing to support aerial surveys, capture efforts, and mortality investigations. He brings valuable continuity, technical expertise, and steady leadership to this critical work.

Matt grew up in Prince George, BC, and holds a BSc in Wildlife and Fisheries from the University of Northern British Columbia. He brings a strong connection to the land and extensive hands-on experience across Alaska, the Northwest Territories, British Columbia, and Alberta as a hunting guide and wildlife professional.

Following his studies, Matt worked with Wildlife Infometrics Inc., supporting operations at the original Bickford maternity pen and contributing to construction and field supervision at the Rochfort pen. His experience spans aerial surveys, wildlife capture, maternal penning, and mortality investigations across a range of species.

We're excited to have Matt on the team and look forward to the knowledge and care he brings to supporting caribou recovery.



Back row left to right: Helen Schwantje, Mark Dwyer, Owen Slater, Shari Willmott, Clayton Lamb, Blake Spencer, Matt Erickson, Tyler Hadland, Zana Everett, Russell Vickers, Ken Latreille, Ted Euchner, Ben Wood, Hunter Gentry, Carter Bergen, Corbin Brown.
Front row (L->R): Jordan Demeulemeester, Candace Batycki, Jordan Smaldon, Dana Bentley, Isobel Stone, Ben Berukoff, Nigel Street, Danica Hoffart.

Science Program Update



Population Survey

Challenging weather conditions this year prevented us from completing a full blind survey. Instead, we used a minimum-count approach.

Where possible, reconnaissance flights were conducted ahead of pen captures to gather baseline information on group composition and help guide cow selection. Following capture operations, additional flights focused on locating remaining collared animals.

Weather limitations, combined with caribou often occupying dense forest, made it difficult at times to determine sex or confirm individual identities.



Can you spot the cow?

In total, 170 animals were counted. All cows penned during the 2025 season were observed, along with 14 of the 17 penned calves. The remaining three calves were likely included in the count as unmarked calves, as they were seen closely associated with their mothers, but could not be definitively identified. Without having a population estimate using the traditional methods, an Integrated Population Model was used with the survey data and past years to get a population estimate of approximately 200 animals.

Land Restoration Update



Monitoring What Restoration Makes Possible

In winter, we focus on data management, reporting, and reviewing thousands of trail camera images collected over the summer. Across the herd area, trail cameras are installed one to two years before restoration treatments are applied and remain in place for several years afterward.

This long-term monitoring helps us assess whether restoration efforts are effectively reducing human and predator use of reclaimed trails. Sites showing the strongest results help inform techniques at future restoration locations.



A Rare Visitor

While sorting through images, we also captured a wolf of an unusually pale colour. Wolves in this region are typically black or grey, making this nearly white individual a rare sight. Encounters like this are reminders of the dynamic and complex ecosystems within the herd area.



A Curious Return to Bickford

In October, we shared the story of a caribou cow who wandered into the Bickford maternity pen after capture in 2024.

In reviewing the 2025 trail camera data, we observed a different cow returning to the area, this time with her calf.

This observation highlights the strength of maternal imprinting. Calving in the safety of the pen appears to leave a lasting association, potentially influencing cows to return in subsequent years.

It also reinforces why restoring trails surrounding the Bickford pen was a priority this past fall. By reclaiming those former access routes, we reduce the likelihood that predator travel corridors remain in place. If a cow chooses to return to calve near the pen, restoration helps increase the chance she and her calf can do so with less disturbance and reduced predator risk.

Restoration is not only about reclaiming land, it is about supporting safer conditions for future generations.

Guardian Training



In February, the Níkanêse Wah tzee Stewardship Society hosted a two-day gathering of caribou guardians from West Moberly First Nations, Saulteau First Nations, and McLeod Lake Indian Band at Dunne-za Lodge on the shores of Moberly Lake. As the first gathering of its kind, it was a meaningful and successful opportunity to come together on the land.

Guardians received teachings from Saulteau Elder Ken Cameron and West Moberly Elder George Desjarlais, who shared knowledge on the history of caribou, the sacred circle of life, listening to

the animals, and natural law. Workshop sessions covered the history of the maternity pen project, pen management, caribou biology and ecology, and relevant permits and policy.

Participants also received hands-on training in telemetry to locate collared caribou, and had time to share ideas, experiences, and challenges while building relationships with one another.

Thank you to board director Tamara Dokkie for the beautiful meals and for hosting us so generously on the land.

Special funder thank you



The Níkanêse Wah tzee Stewardship Society could not do its work without the support of many dedicated funders, all of whom are listed on the [Partners Page of our website](#). For this newsletter, we are spotlighting the [Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative \(Y2Y\)](#).

Y2Y has been a committed partner since 2014, particularly their Director of Landscape Protection, Tim Burkhart. They have brought in funding partners (including the Real Estate Foundation of BC and the Mitsubishi Corporation Foundation for

the Americas), supported the creation of the film [Caribou Homeland](#), and helped tell the NWSS story far and wide. In October 2024, at the Healing the Land Conference, Saulteau First Nations honoured Y2Y with the Partnership Excellence award.

If your company or organization would like to support our work, please contact us via info@cariboufutures.ca.

Partners



Sponsors



Níkanêse Wah tzee Ensuring Caribou Futures

The Níkanêse Wah Tzee Stewardship Society takes a hands-on approach to revitalizing the Klinse-Za caribou population through maternity penning, land restoration, and scientific research. This Indigenous-led partnership between West Moberly First Nations and Saulteau First Nations unites community members, caribou guardians, and scientists. Guided by both traditional and Western knowledge, our efforts are scientifically sound and community-driven.



West Moberly
First Nations



Saulteau
FIRST NATIONS

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