



February 10, 2005

Honourable David Forbes, Minister, Saskatchewan Environment
Honourable Buckley Belanger, Minister, Northern Affairs
Legislature Building
Regina, SK S4S 0B3

Dear Sirs,

I am writing on behalf of the Saskatchewan Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society to register strong concern regarding the recently announced agreement to establish a groomed snowmobile trail in the Mid Boreal Lowland between Tobin Lake and Creighton. Our concern stems from what appears to be little or no investigation into the impacts of a recreational snowmobile trail on ecosystem health in the area, and inadequate response to legitimate concerns raised by many local people regarding impacts to traditional homelands.

The Mid-Boreal Lowlands with its wetlands, peatlands, black spruce and open tamarack stands is a sensitive region, providing important habitat for many wildlife species. Many local people depend on the integrity of this place and its spectrum of wildlife to pursue their traditional activities and to operate local outfitting businesses. It is well known that linear disturbances like recreational snowmobile trails impact ecosystems by changing predator-prey relationships and attracting human activities that disrupt ecosystem functioning. What starts out as one trail, often leads to more trails bringing additional impacts and disruptions to the area that often occur throughout the year.

The health of the woodland caribou population in the region is of particular concern to CPAWS. The decision to invite significant increases in motorized traffic on a trail through key caribou habitat does not consider conservation issues pertaining to the caribou. Saskatchewan's caribou are designated as a 'threatened' species in Canada, and a provincial recovery plan is being developed to ensure the species' longevity in our province. The Mid Boreal Lowlands are home to one of the more vulnerable populations of woodland caribou and as such, the decision to develop the trail at this time is inappropriate. It is also a shortsighted decision because the caribou recovery plan will soon call for restrictions on roads and trails in important caribou habitat. Closure of this non-essential trail is quite possible.

We recognize that snowmobiling is a popular recreational activity and important to some local businesses. Many of our members enjoy the sport. In the interests of maintaining healthy ecosystems however, it is critical that trail selection and developments are done responsibly and carefully. Plans to build or upgrade new snowmobile trails anywhere in our province must consider the cumulative impacts to the land and to all user groups.

The Tobin-to-Creighton trail is a single trail, but the circumstances surrounding its approval point to a much larger problem in the management of our forests. That is, there is a growing and practical need for government, communities, snowmobile organizations and others to move away from localized, adhoc planning for snowmobile trails, into strategic, long-term planning for ecosystem health that can accommodate some trail developments. It is essential that plans determine the appropriateness of a trail or trails in a given region, in relation to environmental and local community concerns.

In closing, we respectfully request that you review and revoke this agreement to establish a groomed snowmobile trail between Tobin Lake and Creighton so that ecological and local concerns are properly addressed. Further, we ask that government consider the implementation of broader management initiatives to investigate the ecological impacts of trail expansion throughout the boreal forest.

Sincerely,



Colleen Rickard

cc Chief Peter Laliberty, Cumberland House Cree Nation
Renée Carrière, Endurance Lodge, Cumberland House
Clifford Carrière, Chairperson, N-28 Trappers Association
Dale McAuley, Mayor, Cumberland House
Lyle Munro, Chairperson, Torch River Trappers Association
Hon. Lorne Calvert, Premier of Saskatchewan
Hon. Joan Beatty, Minister and MLA Cumberland
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