

Caribou and the Mining Industry

Concerns about the health of caribou herds across the north have made headlines in the past year and there are many ideas about what is impacting their health, whether it is climate, natural cycles, over hunting, or industrial development.

From a mining perspective, suggestions from the media about the impact mining and mineral exploration have on caribou are questionable and there is no evidence that development has affected caribou migration or the health of the species as a whole. However, everyone agrees that more research is necessary.

Those that have been around the industry long enough should be quite familiar with the Lupin gold mine (pictured) and the famous scenes that show hundreds of caribou grazing on the property, unaffected by vehicular traffic, noise, and even the regular landing of jet aircraft. It is well known that caribou adapt to their surroundings and in the grand scheme of its migration range, mining operations and their small footprints don't pose much of a burden to caribou. Caribou have the right-of-way on all haul roads at the mines and staff are advised of any sightings by radio as part of protection strategies.

The environmental performance of the NWT's diamond mines are world class and caribou monitoring is a regular part of their operations. Under their Environmental Agreements, the three diamond mines conduct Wildlife Monitoring. Diavik's programs suggest that wildlife are not significantly affected, although it appears that caribou generally avoid the mining area. Its program of monitoring has expanded in recent years as community concerns on the cumulative effects were raised.

Miners working on the Barren Lands are ideally located for the information they collect on caribou movement. Mineral exploration projects in Nunavut have also sponsored caribou monitoring programs. Baffinland Iron Mines Limited has been helping the Nunavut Government collar animals on Baffin Island, as have Starfield Resources Ltd. and AREVA Resources in the Kivalliq Region.

Northern people need economic opportunities and the caribou need respect. The industry seeks continuous improvement of caribou management associated with its projects, and understands that caribou are critical to the health of the northern ecosystem and people.



Caribou grazing at the Lupin Gold Mine