

Helping Alberta's Threatened Caribou

Alberta's iconic caribou are dwindling in numbers because of human activity—particularly resource development by industry.



John Peters of Silvacom Ltd is developing a new landscape management tool that could help government balance the needs of industry and the environment.

Source: Ward Ferguson

But a project supported by AI Bio could help the species make a comeback in northeastern Alberta's Algar region, where energy companies have fragmented the boreal forest with seismic lines and access roads.

"We have these old seismic lines through prime caribou habitat, and this allows wolves and other predators to effectively hunt caribou," says John Peters of Silvacom Ltd, an environmental consulting and software firm.

The Landscape Ecological Assessment and Planning (LEAP) Algar Caribou Habitat Restoration Project is a multi-year project aimed at restoring these legacy seismic lines in prime caribou habitat. In the first phase of the project, conducted over five years, Silvacom collaborated with Canada's Oil Sands Innovation Alliance and other partners to restore this habitat. Much of the work involved planting trees in the corridors created by industry to reconnect forests and make caribou less vulnerable to predation.

In the second phase of the project, which started spring 2015, Silvacom worked with a number of partners, including AI Bio, to

analyze the impact of restoration efforts on a few ecosystem services like wildlife habitat and water quality.

By restoring previously disturbed areas, the project is helping to improve the area's ecosystem services, resulting in both environmental and economic benefits.

He's hopeful that the tool could help the government find strategies for protecting the environment while supporting industry: "There are ways to achieve development goals while maintaining environmental sustainability."



The Algar region. The Landscape Ecological Assessment and Planning (LEAP) Algar Caribou Habitat Restoration Project is a multi-year project aimed at restoring legacy seismic lines in prime caribou habitat in northeastern Alberta.

Credit: John Peters

For more information about this project, visit www.BioLINK.albertainnovates.ca and search for project number "BIO-13-006."

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