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A comprehensive and corporate caribou observation database for Ontario

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Caribou recovery documents from across Canada concur on the importance of monitoring caribou range use and population health. In Ontario, large amounts of caribou observation data exist from surveys and studies. These data have substantial value when designing and implementing caribou habitat conservation measures, particularly on a highly dynamic landscape. These data existed in many different places and forms making effective, efficient and consistent use difficult. Ontario developed a comprehensive caribou observation database to act as a secure, corporate repository for all past and future caribou observation data. Data types include point and polygon data associated with caribou collaring data, historical observations, calving surveys, directed studies, traditional knowledge and casual observations from the public. The long term vision is to support applications that report on the provincial status of caribou as a mechanism for tracking success of recovery efforts. This database has been incorporated into Ontario's Natural Resource Values Information System (NRVIS) where most other data used to support resource management planning is housed. Features of this database include 1) province wide user-access for data entry and edit where authorized, 2) point and polygon data types, 3) ability to manage historic and contemporary data, 3) direct links to metadata such as survey and study details, or scientific reports associated with the data, 4) records of areas surveyed whether or not caribou evidence was observed, 5) links between observations and collected specimens. Significant issues included data sharing, data sensitivity, use of data from non-government sources, mandatory provision of data when collected using government funds, and maintenance of data standards and integrity. Of primary importance was the commitment of data providers and users to quality assurance throughout the data life cycle. It is anticipated this database will stimulate spin-off research and knowledge generation that that will advance caribou recovery efforts. Monitoring and reporting at the national level using shared jurisdictional data will require national resolution of many of these same issues.