

**EFFECTS OF A MOUNTAIN PINE BEETLE EPIDEMIC ON
WOODLAND CARIBOU WINTER HABITAT USE IN
WEST-CENTRAL BRITISH COLUMBIA.**

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Abstract

During winter, woodland caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*) in the Tweedsmuir-Entiako population in west-central British Columbia use mature lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*) forests at low elevations where they forage primarily on terrestrial lichens. In 1994, mountain pine beetles (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*) were detected in northern Tweedsmuir Park and adjacent managed forests. By 2006, over 200 000 ha of the Tweedsmuir-Entiako caribou population's annual range were heavily attacked by mountain pine beetles. By then, most of the attacked trees had lost their needles and were in the "grey" phase of the attack, prompting interest in caribou habitat use of grey-attacked stands in response to potential changes in snow conditions. This project was initiated in 2006 to investigate caribou winter habitat use and foraging during the grey phase of the mountain pine beetle epidemic, using radio-collared caribou and snow tracking. Preliminary results from the first two years suggest that caribou are using grey-attacked lodgepole pine stands during winter, and that they are continuing to forage on terrestrial lichens in those stands.