



## DISTRICT OF CHETWYND

### MEDIA RELEASE

#### **INTERGOVERNMENTAL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT FOR CONSERVATION OF CENTRAL GROUP OF SOUTHERN MOUNTAIN CARIBOU**

February 21, 2020, Chetwynd, BC - District of Chetwynd Mayor and Council were extremely disappointed to hear that the Federal Government and Province of BC signed the Intergovernmental Partnership Agreement for Conservation of Central Group of Southern Mountain Caribou (Partnership Agreement) today with Salteau First Nations and West Moberly First Nations.

“Caribou recovery is at the core of this process,” stated District of Chetwynd Mayor Courtoreille; “Only by working together can we move forward to take meaningful action toward caribou recovery. And yet the Province has excluded local government from the beginning. Premier Horgan’s letter to us dated January 16, 2020 made it very clear that nothing in the draft Partnership Agreement would be changed and that Chetwynd would not be allowed to participate on the Caribou Recovery Committee that is referenced in the Partnership Agreement.”

Blair Lekstrom, former liaison to Premier Horgan for the caribou recovery plan, stated; “It is extremely disappointing to see the Federal government, the Provincial government, Saalteau First Nations and West Moberly First Nations move forward with the signing of this Partnership Agreement. To sign an agreement of this magnitude with little or no understanding of the socio-economic impacts that it will have on our region is disgraceful. I am proud of the report I was asked to prepare for Premier Horgan which contained 14 recommendations that allowed for a path forward to help make the Partnership Agreement work for all. Unfortunately, it is clear today that the government had no intention of listening to myself or the people I engaged in the development of this report. Our residents who enjoy the back country are respectful of the land and we do not need elected governments in Victoria and Ottawa unilaterally imposing an agreement upon us that fits their political agenda rather than the needs of our region. Our industries extract our resources as well or better than any jurisdiction in the world and we should all be proud of that. These resources are what help pay for all of our collective needs such as healthcare, education, housing and so much more. If the four signatories to this agreement believe this is a path towards reconciliation, they are sadly mistaken. This great country was built by First Nations and non-First Nations people together and if we are to ensure Canada remains the best country in the world in which to live, we must move forward together. Not First Nations Canadians, not non-First Nations Canadians but Canadians as one.”

Peace River Regional District (PRRD) Electoral Area “E” Director Dan Rose added, “The PRRD has stated all along that local involvement in caribou recovery will ensure its success. I will continue to try to find ways to heal the divisions that this process has inflicted on our communities. Mayor Courtoreille and I hope to meet with Saalteau and West Moberly First Nations soon to communicate community concerns and work together to mitigate them. We are one large community and we share challenges. Any negative impacts of the Partnership Agreement will have long lasting quality of life impacts as will any positive impacts. I believe the province is not capable of understanding reconciliation but our communities have lived and worked and played together for a long time and know how to solve problems. I sincerely believe collaboration among all our communities will provide the best way forward.”

Mayor Courtoreille added, “We support reconciliation. But is it reconciliation if most of the community of Chetwynd is excluded from the process? Caribou is the whole community’s concern.”

A large area has been excluded from the timber supply area for caribou recovery in the Partnership Agreement, but sources differ on the amount of the area excluded, as well as the impact this reduction in fiber supply will have economically and socially in Chetwynd. After it was pointed out that the costs of the proposed Partnership Agreement had not even been measured, the Province reportedly had a socio-economic impact assessment done. But the District of Chetwynd was not consulted during the creation of the socio-economic impact assessment nor has it been provided with a copy of that study to date.

In May of 2018 Federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Hon. Catherine McKenna, declared that Southern Mountain Caribou face imminent threats to their recovery. The Province of BC has committed to protect and restore caribou habitat; the District of Chetwynd believes the stakeholders who are directly affected must be included in planning and that all initiatives must be a result of science and evidence-based analysis.

In closing, Mayor Courtoreille stated, “Over the past 18 months Premier Horgan made promises that Chetwynd would be engaged in the process and that our input would be considered with regard to the Partnership Agreement and Caribou Recovery Committee. We feel that being told by Premier Horgan that there would be no changes to the Partnership Agreement and that we would not be a participant on the Caribou Recovery Committee is disrespectful to the South Peace and to Chetwynd.”

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