

VIA EMAIL

September 12, 2022

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**Re: Urgent; Proposed Sukunka Coal Mine Project; Environmental Assessment;  
Extirpation of Quintette Caribou Herd; Infringement of Treaty Rights; Public  
Engagement and Climate**

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We understand that you will soon be receiving a briefing on the impacts of the proposed Sukunka Coal Mine. We write to provide you with our views on the subject. The Quintette Caribou Herd is fragile, vulnerable, and endangered. The herd's habitat is already over 80 percent impacted by industrial activities. There are already six other open-pit coal mines permitted in the region. The proposed Sukunka project will occupy the Bullmoose-Chamberlain Mountain complex, which is a last refuge of the Quintette Caribou Herd.

Your teams have concluded that, even with mitigation measures and conditions, the Project will result in serious and significant impacts on caribou, and on grizzly bear, as well as on Treaty rights and indigenous health, traditions and culture. We urge you to listen to what the experts say, in particular about the adverse impacts to caribou. But first we want to remind you about what happened to the Quintette Caribou Herd the last time the Province approved a coal mine expansion in the Quintette region.

#### **1. What Happens to Endangered Caribou when Ministers Fail to Listen to the Experts?**

Ten years ago, in the autumn of 2012, another mining company sought to expand the existing Trend Coal Mine by incorporating the neighbouring Roman and Quintette Mountains in its operations. The BC EAO reported that an expert technical working group warned about the risk of displacement of caribou. The EAO Report provides:

*"An instance of displacement of the Babcock-Quintette sub-herd may already have occurred in the winter of 2011/12 when some of the collared caribou in the sub-herd moved to low elevation habitat. There is speculation by the WG that the movement occurred due to the*

*Proudly determined*

*new industrial activity at the Trend Coal Mine adjacent to the proposed Project site. The move to low elevation habitat use had not been observed in the previous 10 years and was not observed for the remainder of the Quintette herd in 2011/12. A sub-herd of the Narraway caribou herd has exhibited similar behaviour, and the overall population size of the Narraway herd has decreased from 180 individuals in 2008 to 98 in 2012, most of which can be attributed to the decline in the sub-herd."*

Consequently, the EAO concluded that the proposed Trend-Roman mine expansion would have significant adverse impacts on the Quintette Caribou Herd and related Treaty rights. The EAO Report provides:

*"... EAO concludes that the proposed Project would likely have a significant residual adverse effect on the Babcock-Quintette sub-herd, and in turn, the Quintette herd."*

*"... EAO concludes that there is a negative impact on the Treaty 8 right to hunt caribou as part of the seasonal round that has not yet been appropriately accommodated."*

The provincial Ministers, however, disregarded both the warnings from technical experts and the conclusions of the EAO. Instead the Ministers approved the expansion on the advice of inexperienced personnel tasked with developing 'policy' on caribou. The Ministers wrote:

*"Based on information we have received from government staff ... we are of the view that ... there will not be a significant adverse effect on caribou ... ."*

Minister Terry Lake and Minister Rich Coleman  
Rationale for Decision – Roman Coal Mine Project  
December 13, 2012 [underlining in original]

The following year the mining company suspended operations at the Trend Mine (apparently due to market conditions) and placed the site in care and maintenance. The company did, however, go on to perform just enough construction work on access roads, clearing, and ditching to persuade the EAO that the Trend-Roman expansion project had been 'substantially started'. The EAO made that determination on around 20 December, 2017 (six days after the expiry of the expansion project's EA certificate).

In the meantime, provincial caribou experts had been monitoring the impact of the project on the fragile Quintette Herd. In January 2018, a few weeks after the 'substantially started' determination, experts from the BC Ministry of Environment and the BC Ministry of Forests, Lands & Natural Resource Operations provided an update on the status of caribou herds in the region. Those experts reported that since the granting of an EA certificate in December 2012, even the relatively small level of disturbance and the resulting displacement of caribou caused by the pre-operational construction at the Trend-Roman expansion site had had a devastating impact on the Quintette Caribou Herd. The Report provides:

*"From 2013 to 2016 Quintette caribou experienced unprecedented rates of adult mortality, which corresponded to the displacement of caribou from high-elevation to low-elevation winter habitat. During this short time period the Quintette caribou population declined by over 50% (114 - 129 animals in 2013 compared to 62 in 2016). This research illustrates the importance of either completely eliminating any development within SPNC core habitat, or ensuring that the allowable percentages of development occur in geographically appropriate areas. The Trend mine expansion **disturbed less than 1%** of the Quintette high-elevation*

winter range (548 of 71,276 hectares), but resulted in a significant decline in the population of Quintette caribou.”

**Science Update – S. Peace Caribou  
BC MoE and FLNRO  
January 2018 [bold text in original]**

In the autumn of 2012, provincial Ministers ignored the expert warnings and made a decision that pushed the fragile and endangered Quintette Caribou Herd to the edge of extinction. Now, exactly ten years later, you are faced with the same question; do we listen to the experts, or not? This time we urge you to listen to the experts and heed their warnings.

**2. What Do Caribou Experts Say about the Sukunka Coal Mine?**

The reports that you receive from the EAO tend to filter and paraphrase the statements that your experts make in their own reports. Below we invite you to connect more directly with federal and provincial experts in their own words. These and similar statements confirm expert consensus on the following points: (i) that the Quintette Caribou Herd is fragile and vulnerable; (ii) that the range of the Quintette herd is already highly impacted; (iii) that the Bullmoose/Chamberlain Mountain complex is an important last refuge for the Quintette herd; (iv) that the Sukunka project is highly likely to cause displacement of caribou from that area; and (v) that the impacts of the project on caribou cannot be mitigated.

*“The proposed Glencore mine is located within the range of the Quintette caribou herd, and would directly and indirectly impact the winter range, summer range and matrix habitat for this herd. ... Any additional destruction of core caribou habitat is inconsistent with efforts to recover these endangered caribou herds, and will increase the risk of the animals being extirpated.”*

**Dr. Dale Seip, P. Ag., R.P.Bio, Wildlife Ecologist, Ministry of Environment  
Memo Re: Proposed Mitigation Measures for Caribou  
in Relation to Glencore Mining Proposal  
21 June 2016**

*“It is important to note that the proposed mine would exist on Bullmoose Mountain, one of 2 remaining areas used by caribou in the Quintette over winter.”*

**Chris Addison, R.P.Bio, Wildlife Ecologist  
Ministry of Forests, Land and Natural Resource Operations  
July 12, 2016**

*“The [Glencore] Memo demonstrates that displacement of caribou individuals from the Bullmoose/Chamberlain high elevation habitat is highly likely ... Such an outcome could contribute cumulatively to the risk of immediate or near-immediate extirpation of the Quintette herd.”*

**June Yoo Rifkin, Head, Environmental Assessment  
Environment and Climate Change Canada  
23 August 2016**



*"In 2008, the Quintette herd was estimated to be 200 individuals; however, the population dropped to 62 individuals in 2016 following the Roman Mountain expansion of the Trend Mine."*

*"Quintette caribou have recently abruptly abandoned High Elevation Critical Habitat elsewhere and moved to low elevation Critical Habitat where predation risk is higher, in the case with the Trend-Roman mine."*

*"The Bullmoose/Chamberlain mountain complex on which the Project is proposed is important high elevation range for caribou in the Quintette LPU ..."*

*"ECCC maintains the view that, given the caribou in the Quintette LPU are currently using the Critical Habitat that would be directly or indirectly affected, and that the amount of disturbance from cumulative effects in the area already exceeds the management objective of minimal disturbance, this Critical Habitat is likely irreplaceable."*

**Environment and Climate Change Canada**  
**Memo re: Project Effects and Proposed Offsets for the Sukunka Coal Mine Project**  
**28 May 2021**

*"Remaining undisturbed habitat is irreplaceable considering the existing level of disturbance already exceeds the management objective set out in the Recovery Strategy for the Quintette LPU. The proposed offsets are unlikely to result in a net neutral or positive effect on caribou and caribou habitat within an ecologically meaningful timeframe and location ..."*

*"... ECCC maintains the view ... that, based on science and best available information, including indigenous knowledge, regarding the current status of the Quintette herd and cumulative effects to its habitat, the impacts of the Project cannot be fully mitigated."*

*"... the current suite of proposed offsetting measures are, in ECCC's view, not likely to result in a net-neutral or positive effect on caribou and caribou habitat if the Project were to proceed."*

*"Recovery efforts should be focused on retaining existing habitat and improving habitat conditions as a priority, with active management occurring only as an interim measure, not as a means to justify ongoing habitat disturbance or delays in habitat restoration. ..."*

**Environment and Climate Change Canada**  
**Memo re: Project Effects and Proposed Offsets for the Sukunka Coal Mine Project**  
**28 May 2021**

*"... ECCC is of the view that the effects of the Project are likely to compromise recovery of the herd, and increase the risk that recovery cannot be achieved."*

**Environment and Climate Change Canada**  
**Memo re: Project Effects and Proposed Offsets for the Sukunka Coal Mine Project**  
**28 May 2021**

*"The Quintette caribou herd relies on high elevation habitat throughout all life stages and high functioning high elevation habitat is relatively scarce and a known limiting factor for the*

*survival of the herd. Provincial monitoring has shown that the high elevation surrounding the proposed project (Bullmoose-Chamberlain complex) is frequently and extensively used by caribou in all seasons and life stages. As the herd has contracted over the past 20 years, the Bullmoose-Chamberlain complex has consistently been found to contain between 20 and 40 percent of all observed caribou within the Quintette, and its importance as one of the few remaining areas of intact high elevation habitat cannot be overstated. ...”*

**Scott Schilds, R.P. Bio., Wildlife Ecologist, Ministry of FLNRORD**  
**Memo Re: Sukunka Mine EAC Application**  
**6 August 2021**

*“In conclusion, the current suite of mitigations and proposed offset measures are not likely to result in a net-neutral or positive effect on caribou and caribou habitat if the Project were to proceed. ... Despite best efforts by Glencore, Stantec, and members of the caribou sub-working group to design a thorough and robust mitigation strategy, there appears to be no adequate solution to fully mitigate the potential impacts on caribou within this important habitat complex.”*

**Scott Schilds, R.P. Bio., Wildlife Ecologist, Ministry of FLNRORD**  
**Memo Re: Sukunka Mine EAC Application**  
**6 August 2021**

*“The Quintette caribou herd has been in a long-term state of decline due to cumulative impacts to caribou habitat driven by development across multiple industrial sectors. These impacts have caused abandonment of portions of the range, further intensifying the importance of the Bullmoose-Chamberlain complex where the Project is being proposed. Considering the high levels of existing disturbance, the Project is likely to have significant adverse cumulative effects that would increase the risk of extirpation for this already threatened caribou herd.”*

**Scott Schilds, R.P. Bio., Wildlife Ecologist**  
**Ministry of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship**  
**Memo Re: Sukunka Mine EAC Application**  
**4 August 2022**

### **3. Impacts to Treaty Rights and Indigenous Interests**

We also invite you to consider the expert opinion offered by Saulteau elder and retired Chief Ken Cameron. Ken is one of the few people who saw with his own eyes the large herds of caribou that lived in the region now called Quintette, and watched their decline long before federal and provincial scientists became interested in endangered species and biodiversity. Ken writes:

*“If this huge project were to proceed now, with twenty-five years of blasting and digging and hauling, before the Quintette herd has had a chance to recover, I can tell you with 100 percent certainty, after a lifetime of observing these animals in their habitat, that these animals will scatter. They will be driven from their last refuge and the herd will be pushed to extinction, like the Burnt Pine herd before them. The Quintette herd will never recover if this project is approved now.*

*I don't want the Quintette herd to go extinct. Canada does not want that to happen. This does not need to happen. There are lots of coal resources available elsewhere, and there*

*are very few caribou left here. Please listen to us now. We know what we are talking about when we say that the approval of this unnecessary project at this time will cause catastrophic declines in caribou populations. It will mean the end of the Quintette herd."*

**Ken Cameron, SFN elder and retired Chief**  
**Letter to Minister of Environment and Climate Change**  
**18 August 2021**

We note that the EAO has concluded that, even after the application of the additional mitigations, offsets, and conditions, the Project would result in the following significant adverse impacts:

- Significant adverse impacts to caribou;
- Significant cumulative adverse impacts to caribou in the region,
- Significant risk of extirpation to the Quintette herd; •
- Significant adverse impacts to woodland caribou as a SARA listed wildlife species; and
- Significant cumulative adverse impacts to grizzly bear.

In addition, the EAO has concluded that, even after the application of the proposed additional mitigations, offsets, and conditions, the Project would result in the infringement of Treaty rights and other serious and significant impacts on our people and our culture, including:

- Serious impact to the Treaty right to hunt caribou;
- Significant impact on Indigenous peoples' health and socio-economic conditions;
- Significant impact on Indigenous peoples' physical and cultural heritage; and
- Significant impact on Indigenous peoples' resource harvesting and current use of lands and resources for traditional purposes.

We say that the impacts of this Project on caribou, grizzly, fish, and water quality will be even more severe than the conclusions reached by the EAO. We know because for generations we have observed and measured the impacts of industrial activities on landscapes in northeast BC.

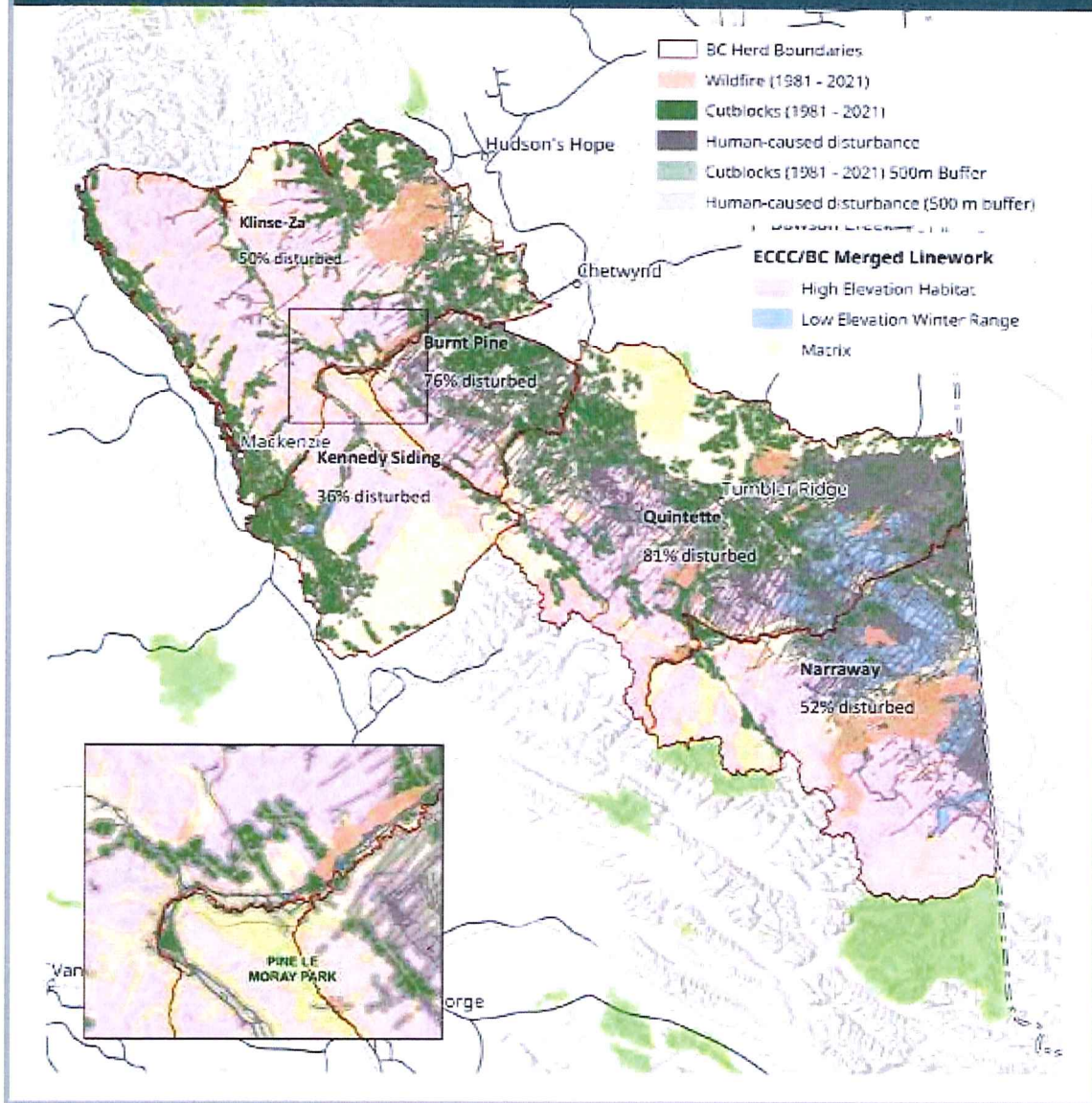
We note that the existing and ongoing activities in the mining, forestry, and energy sectors within the Quintette region are already unsustainable – including the six open-pit coal mines already permitted in the Quintette region – Brule, Willow, and Wolverine-Hermann (Conuma Coal), Quintette (Teck Coal), Trend-Roman (Anglo-American), and Murray River (HD Mining). The cumulative impacts of those activities have pushed and will continue to push landscapes here closer to the edge of regional economic and ecological collapse.

Below is a map produced by the BC Caribou Recovery Program showing that the Quintette LPU is already 81 percent impacted by cumulative effects, making it the most impacted caribou range in northeast BC. Even more impacted than the range of the already extirpated Burnt Pine Herd.



### How Much of the Central Mountain Caribou Ranges is Disturbed?

In addition to human-caused disturbances, forest fires less than 40 years old are included in calculations of cumulative disturbance. Caribou avoid disturbances by varying degrees, depending on the type of disturbance, level of human activity and habitat type (for example, alpine or low elevation forest). Existing research shows a strong negative relationship between human-caused disturbances buffered by 500 metres, plus unbuffered fire and caribou recruitment outside of high elevation habitat types. When buffers on human-caused disturbance are included, between 36% and 81% of the five Central Mountain caribou ranges has been disturbed within the past 40 years. Many disturbances overlap with one another but are only counted once in these calculations.



We have already endured many, many poorly planned and highly impactful decisions based on flawed policy rationales. Now we are saying that in the present circumstances a decision to issue an environmental assessment certificate to yet another huge open-pit coal mine in northeast BC, one that is located in the last remaining refuge of the Quintette Caribou Herd, would be worse than unreasonable and irrational. We would have no alternative but to consider such a decision to be an attack on our people and our culture.

#### 4. Conclusion

In closing, we note that during the recent 30-day public engagement period (August 2-September 1, 2022) around 700 people submitted comments online expressing opposition to the Sukunka Mine. It is our understanding that together with hardcopy submissions the total number of persons who wrote to oppose the project is even higher. The two main reasons given for public opposition were (i) the impact of the project on endangered caribou, and (ii) the impact of the project on GHG emissions and climate. Many individuals also opposed the project because of its impacts on Treaty rights, and expressed support for indigenous-led conservation.

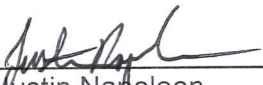
We recommend that the Ministers take seriously the public opposition to the project. Not only is it clear that the public is overwhelmingly opposed to the project (only two people wrote messages generally in support of mining), it is also clear that no one is clamoring for another coal mine in northeast BC; not the local residents, not the local governments, not the unions, nor any other organization, institution, or community group. Why? Because no one needs this project, and the significant and far-reaching impacts it will have on a very precious area within a highly disturbed region are too serious and significant to ignore.

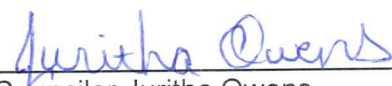
We urge you to refuse to issue a certificate. That decision is reasonable and it is the right thing to do.

Yours truly,

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Councilor Penny Berg

  
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Councilor Falon Gauthier

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chief Justin Napoleon

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Councilor Juritha Owens

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Councilor Rudy Paquette

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