



UNGULATES (ATIK / CARIBOU AND MOOZ / MOOSE) PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY

Issued February 2025



The study area associated with the Community Access Road contains habitat for ungulate species. Two ungulate species have been identified as valued components for the Community Access Road—they are moose / mooz and caribou / atik. Moose and caribou rely on specific habitats for movement, feeding, breeding and rearing young. The caribou Regional Study Area covers the range of four provincial caribou ranges (Missisa, Ozhiski, Nipigon and Pagwachuan ranges).

Existing Conditions

Information on ungulates was gathered through field surveys carried out between 2019 and 2023, by collecting Indigenous Knowledge and by using existing information from other studies. Through the caribou collaring program, 30 adult female caribou were collared in 2021 to research their habits including breeding, migration patterns and habitat use. The collar studies showed that caribou strongly prefer sparse forest and treed bog habitat during all seasons.

Atik / Woodland Caribou

Caribou, a species at risk, overlap three federal ranges (named ON5, ON7, and part of ON9) and four provincial ranges (Missisa, Ozhiski, Pagwachuan and Nipigon) within the Regional Study Area. The three federal ranges, and the Missisa, Ozhiski and Pagwachuan provincial ranges were found to have habitats to support healthy caribou populations. The Nipigon provincial range does not have enough undisturbed habitat to support a healthy population. Environment and Climate Change Canada indicates that for local populations in Ontario to thrive on their own, at least 65% of their habitat needs to remain undisturbed.

More than half of the study area has valuable caribou habitat. The best habitat is in the northern part of the study area, while the southern part has poorer habitat. Caribou may change their travel routes, showing they can adapt their migration and winter behaviours. They are using the best habitats available in the study areas.



Adult caribou survival in the area seems to support stable or growing populations. The number of young caribou in the study area, however, varies a lot making it unclear what the current population trends are for caribou in the area.

Mooz / Moose

The study area has habitats like forests and wetlands that moose need for food and cover. Wildfires have increased habitat availability. Moose move a lot and use different habitat patches. Good quality habitat is found in the south-central area, while poor habitat is in bogs and fens. Moose populations in Ontario have been declining since the early 2000s, especially in the north. Based on survey results and population monitoring conducted by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, current moose numbers are below the desired levels. There are currently thought to be approximately 91,200 moose in the province. Threats include predators, hunting, disease, habitat loss and climate change. Management of non-Indigenous hunter harvest of moose is governed by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources through the use of hunting tags. Overall, there is limited high-quality habitat and moose are using both good and poor habitats.



Potential Effects and Mitigations

Three things were looked at that might affect caribou and moose: how much habitat is available, where the habitat is located and their ability to survive and reproduce.

Activities during construction and the long-term use of the Community Access Road, like clearing vegetation, aggregate collection and ongoing use and maintenance of the road, may impact caribou and moose. The Community Access Road may alter terrain, soil and plant types, impacting habitat availability and survival. Sensory disturbances, like lights, smells, noise and human activity, can affect habitat use and movement. Roads and snowbanks may reduce habitat connectivity and affect distribution. Increased predator access and public hunting could raise predation risks. Vehicle collisions and equipment use may harm or kill ungulates. Dust emissions can change soil and vegetation quality. Changes to ground and surface water can also affect soils and vegetation, impacting caribou and moose habitat availability.

Mitigation measures have been suggested to reduce, eliminate or monitor the potential effects on caribou and moose. These measures include:

- The Community Access Road construction will use existing access roads where possible to reduce loss of habitat;

- Avoiding disruption to ideal caribou and moose habitat areas, where possible;
- Scheduling construction activities for important caribou and moose habitat areas at times when they are less vulnerable, when possible;
- Staying at least 30 metres away from lakes and rivers, and reducing the removal of vegetation surrounding waterbodies as much as possible;
- Keeping habitat areas for caribou and moose as connected as possible;
- Using construction methods that help native plants grow back;
- Using barriers and tools to not disturb recovered areas;
- Using wildlife policies, including avoiding sensitive timing windows, and wildlife awareness training for contractors and employees;
- Preparing and implementing an Environmental Protection Plan that includes measures to protect wildlife, such as measures to reduce vehicle collisions with wildlife, limit noise disturbance, and replant in areas where vegetation has been cleared; and.
- During long-term use of the road, signs will be put up where wildlife are often seen, and speed limits will be lowered in caribou habitat areas for non-commercial traffic. For commercial traffic, lower speed limits will be enforced on the whole road.

Residual Effects

Through the proper use of mitigation measures, the potential effects from the construction and long-term use of the Community Access Road are expected to be effectively managed, minimized or mitigated.

Atik / Caribou

The Community Access Road will cause habitat loss and disturb caribou in the Missisa and Nipigon ranges. Most habitat loss will happen in the central and northern portions of the Local Study Area. Mitigation measures will reduce the impacts to caribou habitat, however, permanent loss of habitat is unavoidable in the Missisa and Nipogon caribou ranges. The effects of the Community Access Road may extend beyond the caribou Regional Study Area.

Roads and other barriers may reduce caribou movement and disconnect habitats, especially for caribou not used to roads. This can negatively impact their survival. The Community Access Road may also increase the risk of caribou deaths from predators using the new roadways, and from vehicle collisions and hunting. The risk is greatest during the long-term use (i.e. operations and maintenance) of the Community Access Road.



Mooz / Moose

The Community Access Road is expected to cause habitat loss and sensory disturbance to moose. Construction will remove winter moose habitat, mainly in the south-central part of the Local Study Area. Sensory disturbance which includes lighting, noise and human presence is expected to lower habitat quality for moose. The road may make moose movement more difficult and remove connection between habitat areas, however, moose in general travel long distances to find good habitat. Overall, the Community Access Road is expected to have a minimal negative impact.

The Community Access Road might slightly increase the risk of moose deaths from predators using new roads and from vehicle collisions and hunting, especially during the long-term use of the road. This increased risk is expected to have a minimal impact on the overall moose population.



Cumulative Effects Assessment

Atik / Caribou

The cumulative effects of habitat loss in the Nipigon range and linear barriers in the Missisa range are significant. Cumulative effects are, however, not expected to be significant for the Ozhiski and Pagwachuan ranges because these areas are not within the Community Access Road footprint.

Mooz / Moose

The Community Access Road's cumulative effects on the moose population in the Regional Study Area are not expected to be significant. While there might be some negative effects on moose habitat, the regional moose population should stay healthy.

Monitoring during the construction and long-term use of the road will be decided based on federal and provincial permitting requirements, and recommendations from Indigenous communities received from consultation activities during detailed design. The purpose of monitoring is to make sure the measures used to protect the ungulate populations are working and to update these measures if necessary.

Local Study Area: the area where direct effects of the road are likely to take place and includes a 10 km buffer on either side of the Community Access Road

Regional Study Area: the area where indirect effects are likely to occur. For caribou the proposed alternative routes intersect four caribou ranges: Missisa range, Nipigon range, Ozhiski range and Pagwachuan range.



Want to learn more?

If you are interested in learning more about this topic, please review the technical report available in the appendix of the Draft Environmental Assessment / Impact Statement.

Contact Info

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