

Liberals lambast lack of action to stop hunt of endangered caribou herd

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THE TELEGRAM WITH FILES FROM THE CANADIAN PRESS

The provincial Liberals accused the government of not doing enough to protect an endangered caribou herd in Labrador, during question period at the House of Assembly, Tuesday.

Last week, Innu hunters from Quebec crossed the border, and as of Monday, had killed almost half of the estimated 100 animals in the Joir River herd.

Justice critic Kelvin Parsons told Natural Resources Minister Kathy Dunderdale it wasn't good enough for the province to just monitor the situation.

"The rights of the Quebec Innu to hunt do not override the legislative powers of conservation and safety," he said.

agreed and admitted it's a sad situation. But she said it's far too dangerous for wildlife officers to intervene any further.

"But as important as these animals are to all of us, Mr. Speaker, all of them is not worth the life of one of my conservation officers and I absolutely refuse to put them at risk," Dunderdale told the House.

Outside the House, Dunderdale noted the province has confiscated two snowmobiles and several Komatik sleds from the 45 Innu hunters, but said no charges have been laid.

The hunters are from three Quebec bands and are travelling with more than 100 women, children and elders.

Dunderdale reiterated Tuesday they are shooting from moving snowmobiles and said she's surprised no one has been hurt because of that dangerous practice.

According to an assessment conducted by provincial wildlife officers and the Institute for Environmental Monitoring and Research, an independent organization, there were 108 Joir River caribou as of March 5.

But Ken Rock, a lawyer for two of the three bands involved in the hunt, said the bands don't agree the herd is threatened.

Rock said the Quebec Innu believe the number of animals in the herd is closer to 2,500.

"If the government demonstrated ... that the caribou herd is endangered, we would respect that," Rock told The Canadian Press.

"We want to establish a channel where we could have exchanges with the officials of the government, but they won't allow that."

But Dunderdale said the Innu are well aware that the herd in question is endangered. And she said the province has been pleading with the Innu since 2004 not to kill the animals. But she said those pleas have fallen on deaf ears.

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The Labrador Metis Nation said it has "grave concerns over the destruction of the Joir River caribou herd" in a news release.

But it blames the Williams government for the illegal hunt.

"(The government) has tried to suppress our Aboriginal rights and is paying the price," the release reads. "Other Aboriginal people, a different people, have moved in from elsewhere to fill the vacuum the Williams government has created."

The release suggests that if the Metis were granted the rights they feel they deserve, the herd would not be threatened by the Quebec Innu.