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First Nations take Ottawa to court over caribou

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Chief Al Lameman of the Beaver Lake Cree Nation holds a copy of the application that was filed with the Federal Court in Edmonton Wednesday. (CBC)

Alberta First Nations and environmental groups are going to court to force the federal government to protect northern Alberta caribou herds.

Lawyers for the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Enoch Cree First Nation and the Beaver Lake Cree Nation filed an application for a judicial review Wednesday morning at the Federal Court in Edmonton.

"Today is kind of historic for us, because we have finally come to the realization that enough is enough," said Chief Al Lameman of the Beaver Lake Cree Nation. "Our animals are suffering because of the oil exploration that's going on."

The First Nations will argue that as federal minister of the environment, Jim Prentice is required to issue an emergency order to protect caribou habitat.

They will also claim that Prentice must file a recovery plan for the animals, as required under the Species at Risk Act, said Jack Woodward, the Victoria-based lawyer who is representing the First Nations.

"He hasn't done that," Woodward said. "He's three years out of date. He was supposed to do it by June 5, 2007. It says it right on the face of the statute."

Environmental legal group Ecojustice filed a similar application in the same court Wednesday on behalf of the Alberta Wilderness Association and the Pembina Institute.

Prentice's office told CBC News he won't comment on cases before the courts. The federal government has 60 days to respond to the applications.

The legal actions follow up on a warning that was made in late July when First Nations gave Ottawa a deadline of Aug. 27 to create an emergency plan to stop development in areas of northeastern Alberta they say are critical to the woodland caribou.

They sent a letter to Prentice on July 15 asking that no more development permits be issued for the area. If Ottawa didn't comply, the groups said they would go to court.

In the letter, the groups referred to research by Stan Boutin of the University of Alberta that suggests caribou herds have declined so dramatically, they are in danger of extinction.

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[AlexinNunavut](#) wrote: Posted 2010/09/09
at 1:40 PM ET Talk about killing the messenger.

The Enviros dont give you enough credit for the good work you do.

The Americans that dont want to buy your oil are just plain ignorant.

Your fellow Albertan Aborigines just want more caribou to waste hunting when you cant.

Must be real tough being the only one right all the time huh Alberta?

Truth is, if the companies were ripping up range or cropland to get to the bitumen instead of boreal forest, you