

**Voluntary Recreational Access Management Group
February 1, 2006 Meeting**

Attendance List

Name	Organization	Contact #s
George Schultze	MOE	Fax 847-7728, ph 847-7299, george.schultze@gov.bc.ca
Les Auston	Houston Snowmobile Club	845-7040, lauston@telus.net
Dina Hanson	BV Back Packers	ph 846-9214, quickdnd@bulkley.net
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Ed Hinchliffe	BV Oldtimers	Ph 847-3932, bhinch@npsnet.com
Mel Coulson	BV Naturalists	Ph 846-5649, melandevi@bulkley.net
Terry Close	Houston Snowmobile Club	Ph 845-7040, TERRY_CLOSE@HOTMAIL.COM
Daryl Hanson	Smithers Exploration	ph 846-9214, quickdnd@bulkley.net

Agenda

- 1.) Review Activities Since Last Meeting
- 2.) Status report of caribou
- 3.) Club Reports
- 4.) Improving Compliance and Awareness
- 5.) Action Items

Minutes

1. Review Activities Since Last Meeting
 - George handed out and went over a prepared summary of activities to date (see attached summary)
 - Have monitored population
 - FW telemetry flights occurring weekly as of Christmas until March 31/06
 - 10 more animals to be collared
2. Status report of caribou
 - Herd est. to be about 100 and stable to increasing (See attached summary)
 - Mortalities and collar failures have reduced collared sample size. Age of collars and age of animals thought to be contributing factors
3. Club Reports
 - Houston Snowmobile Club
 - Glad that telemetry flights are being conducted again, felt that the optics of not doing them gave the impression that the Telkwa caribou were no longer a priority for government

- Club has significantly increased their ability to make people aware of the voluntary compliance requirements through contact with users via a club operated toll booth at the trail head. This compliments the steps already taken IE the signage and club member vigilance.
- Would like to have a short, one page caribou update that could be handed out at the collection booth.
- In accordance with the Morice RMP, signage will be put up designating the boundary of the Burnie Lakes Non Motorized Area

Discussion

George commented that just because funding was not available for regular telemetry flights, does not mean that the caribou are no longer a concern. The flights being conducted at this point are more to provide information to the groups and are to be used as one of the tools to manage their recreational activities around the caribou and not so much the biology. The Telkwa caribou recovery area has already been identified and now it is up to the groups, in order to maintain the voluntary status on the access restrictions to manage their activities.

(Les) considering the high profile of the Telkwa Mountain Caribou Recovery project and the success to date, is mystified why funding would not be automatic

(George) the reality is that all that can be done is to apply for the funds and hope the request is approved. There have been comments from managers that, since the purpose is to facilitate and manage recreational use in the area, perhaps the users should be paying

BV Naturalists

- Concerned about certain events that occurred over last year between snowmobilers and the tenured Back Country Recreation business in the Burnie Lakes area and snowmobilers and some back country skiers in the Starr Creek area
- Concerned that not enough is being done to address the concerns of disturbance to the caribou under the current access agreement.
- Concerned that, as the caribou population increases, the ability of caribou to utilize required habitats currently not being used may be affected by levels of recreational use

Discussion

(George) Regarding the conflicts between users, the Ministry has been very clear from the outset that this process is intended to be about the caribou and not a tool to resolve or promote stake holder/ user conflicts. It is unfortunate that these conflicts occurred. However, under the current access understanding and agreement reached by the VRAMG (March 2003) these incidences fall outside of the scope of the VRAMG and the Telkwa Caribou Recovery Plan. MOE also has concerns with regards to the effectiveness of the current voluntary access management strategy

over the long term. The potential implications to the ability of the caribou to expand into unused habitats is also a concern; however according to the agreement, as long as the caribou continue to do well and, the voluntary access strategy continues to address the needs of the caribou, the current strategy will be used. The stake holder groups participating in the VRAMG have recognized that the needs of the caribou will take precedence over recreational access in the recovery area and have committed to curtailing their activities in areas where the caribou are. There has been a commitment that, if the stakeholders can not make the voluntary access strategy work, they will support other options including legislated restrictions.

BV Old Timers

- made one ATV trip into Hunter's Basin last year during the Aug. approved time,
- did not see any caribou
- brushed out a few of the alders along the way.
- asked if there would be any possibility of additional trips (1 or 2 more)

Discussion

(George) MOE realizes that one or two more trips into the Basin using the agreed-to protocol would likely be a low risk to the caribou; however, I have concerns with regards to the optics and the potential implications to the effectiveness of voluntary restrictions given that there will always be a certain amount of non-compliance.

(Dina)Agrees that the presence of atv tracks on the trail will be an invitation to other atvers to access the area.

(Les)Reminded the group that the intent of this group was to not only look after the interests of the caribou but to also try to maintain recreational opportunities if they did not adversely affect the caribou.

(George)If there is some way that the public could be made aware of the legitimate use without promoting unauthorized use, it could conceivably be acceptable. Again the initiative would have to be managed by the user group (VRAMG?).

BV Back Packers

- still vigilant, make contacts with other users in the area
- have reported caribou observations to MOE
- would like to pursue the possibility of extending the non-motorized access season in the Core Recovery Area. Currently season is from July 15 to September 15

Discussion

(George)There would not likely be any opportunity to open the season earlier due to the sensitivity of caribou to disturbance during calving but there may be an opportunity at the end. At the end of the season the

caribou (calves) are larger and more mobile. In recent years the rutting grounds in the Telkwas is not only restricted to the Camel Humps Area. Therefore, implications are that a two week extension into the Hunters Basin area would likely have less of an impact to the caribou than if the majority of the rut took place in the same area.

(Dina)The documentary “Being Caribou” also indicated the extreme sensitivity of caribou to disturbance at calving.

(George) I am in favour of extending the non-motorized (hiking) season to the end of September (September 30). Steps will have to be taken by the groups to edit existing signs etc. to reflect it.

Smithers Snowmobile Club

- not represented at this meeting; however, the Smithers club’s 2003 pamphlet showing the map highlighting their various areas of use was presented.
- New Club President is Max Starr

Discussion

(George)Unfortunate that no one was able to make it from the Smithers club. The pamphlet is a good idea and am pleased to see caribou recovery area mentioned. Feel message to users regarding the voluntary restrictions that the club has agreed to manage could have been emphasised.

(Mel and Dina) Thought the identified areas in the Telkwa Range (in the Smithers Snowmobile Club’s pamphlet) were a bit misleading as the voluntary closure area should include Hunter’s Basin

4. Improving Compliance and Awareness

- Continuing need to get the message out
- Use the media to remind people that the recovery plan is still active
- Prepare an info sheet or card that can be handed out to users to provide them with an update
- Build upon the Houston Snowmobile club scenario by manning trail heads and access points at high use times and passing out information to the users.
- The access over the Telkwa River at the 118 road continues to be a problem as the bridge and roads are intended to be used only for industrial purposes. Motorized Recreational access south of the river is only allowed if they can get across the river with out the use of the bridge. Once across the river the Voluntary Access restriction and agreement applies. PIR is taking steps to address some of the problems with the gate.

5. Action Items

Action Item 1: George to draft a short update on the status of the project that can be disbursed by the clubs.

Action Item 2: George to draft an article on the caribou and submit it to the Houston and Smithers Newspapers

Action Item 3: George to contact the Smithers Snowmobile Club president to discuss the access agreement and find out what steps the Club is taking to ensure compliance.

Action Item 4: Club Reps will coordinate to discuss and set up a protocol and schedule for manning trailheads and access points to inform the public

Action Item 5: Dina will lead the initiative of changing the dates on the signs to reflect the Sept 30 closure

Next Meeting TBA.

- If any group wishes to send a representative to participate actively at the next meeting please contact Dina Hanson or George Schultze so that you will be apprised of the date when next meeting date is set.
- As always, if any group has any comments, questions or points they would like to have discussed and considered at the VRAMG meetings they can pass the information on to one of the active participants so that it can be tabled at the next meeting.

February 1, 2006

Telkwa Caribou Recovery Project Update to the VRAMG

The last Voluntary Recreational Access Management Group (VRAMG) meeting was held on August 11, 2004. Since that time Ministry of Environment has continued to do monitoring of the Telkwa Caribou Herd (Table 1.) and forwarded the results to the active participants of the VRAMG. Recreational activities in the Telkwa Mountains continue to be on a voluntary compliance basis with the prescribed, agreed upon, conditions.

Table 1. Ministry of Environment monitoring activities in the Telkwa Mountains, August 2004- present.

Date	Activity
September 27, 2004	Fixed Wing Telemetry
October 28, 2004	Helicopter Rut Count
March 21, 2005	Helicopter Recruitment Count
October 19, 2005	Helicopter Rut Count
December 23, 2005	Fixed Wing Telemetry
January 3, 2006	Fixed Wing Telemetry
January 9, 2006	Fixed Wing Telemetry
January 18, 2006	Fixed Wing Telemetry

The budget for the 2005/06 year is \$48,750 from the Provincial Habitat Conservation Trust Fund. The objectives for this year are to:

1. Continue to monitor the population through rut counts and recruitment counts,

2. Monitor the locations of animals to facilitate the VRAMGs in managing their recreational activities,
3. To boost the decreasing sample size of collared animals.

To date a contract has been let and is in progress for regular Fixed Wing telemetry flights. Ten VHF radio collars were purchased. A contract has been let to capture and collar ten additional caribou in the Telkwa Mountains. Application has been made to the habitat Conservation Trust Fund for \$53,000 to do the same in 2006/07

Herd Status

The Telkwa Caribou Herd status is thought to be good in that it is thought to be , if not increasing, stable with the numbers estimated to be around 100 (Figure 1). With the decline in the number of collared animals in the population the art of estimating plays more of a role. In the Fall of 2005 only 48 animals were actually seen after locating 6 collared animals. The estimate of 100 + is supported by a telemetry flight in December where 69 animals seen plus two collared animals not seen indicated at least 71 known live animals. Also, the calf to cow ratios would still indicate that recruitment needs are being met. (Figure 2). The fall bull to cow ratio was also lower which could be an indication that not all of the bulls were seen during that flight (Figure 3).

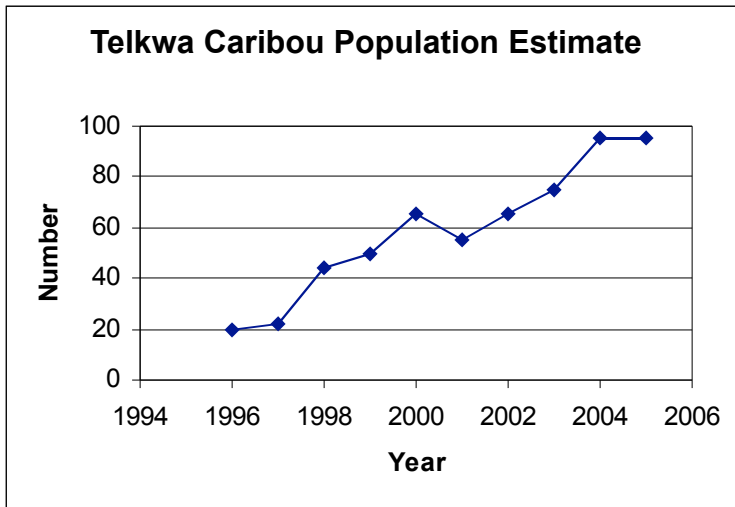


Figure 1. Population estimate

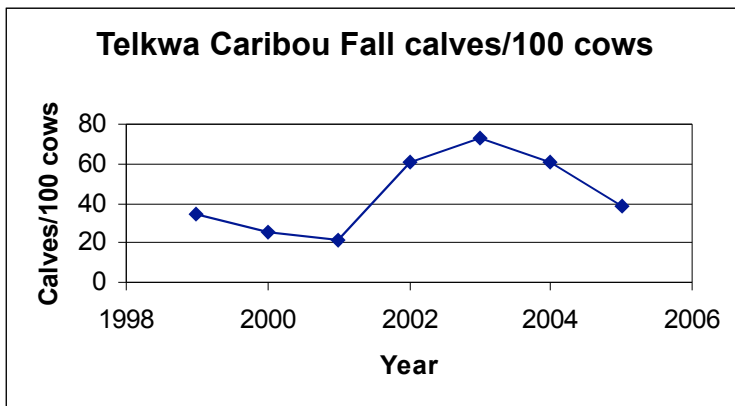


Figure 2. Calf to Cow Ratios

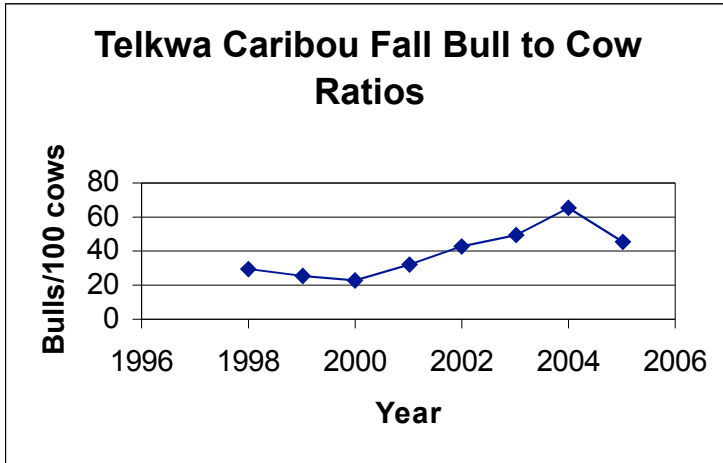


Figure 3. Bull to Cow Ratios

Since September of 2004 four collars can no longer be located (Battery failure), and seven collars have indicated mortality (Table 2). Of these seven only three collars were recovered. One was determined to have likely been a wolf kill while the others remain undetermined either because the collars were not recovered and/or due to the time interval between locations all evidence had disappeared. The current number of collared animals being tracked in the Telkwa Mountains is 6.

Table 2. Collars no longer being Tracked

Caribou	Fate	Cause	Date	Recovered(Y/N)
148.001	Failed	-	(last heard) July/04	
148.010	Failed	-	(last heard) Mar/05	
148.151	Failed	-	(last heard) Mar/05	
149.870	Failed	-	(last heard) Sep/04	
148.021	Mortality	?	Oct/05	Y
148.032	Mortality	?	Dec/05	
148.051	Mortality	?	Dec/05	
148.102	Mortality	?	Mar/05	
148.251	Mortality	Wolf pred	Mar/05	Y
148.283	Mortality	?	Oct /05	
149.247	Mortality	?	Oct/05	Y