

**(DRAFT) Voluntary Recreational Access Management Group
April 20, 2009 Meeting**

Attendance List

Name	Organization	Contact #s
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Eric Becker	Back Country Horsemen	Ph 847-1173 bvsolutions@gmail.com
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Agenda

- 1.) Overview of Activities Since Last Meeting (Sept 26, 06)
- 2.) Status Report of Caribou
- 3.) Wildlife habitat Area (WHA) Designation
- 4.) Access management and Compliance Concerns
- 5.) Group Reports
- 6.) Proposed expansion of Telkwa Mountain Goat LEH Hunting Area
- 7.) Misc Discussion points

Minutes

- 1.) Overview of Activities Since Last Meeting (Sept 26, 06)
 - Discussed “summary of activities” handout
 - No budget available this year
 - Disappointment and concern expressed by group that government does not appear to be fully committed to recovery program or recovery programs elsewhere because there always seems to be no commitment for resourcing. Reps felt that considering the sacrifices people are making, governments should step up to the plate to provide adequate resources to properly monitor the populations as well as the effectiveness of the strategies employed.
 - Response was that the reality was that there are not always going to be resources available but that that by no means should be interpreted that the government is not committed to the recovery programs or meeting its responsibilities under SARCO.
- 2.) Status Report of Caribou
 - Population appears to be declining over the last two years
 - Calf recruitment seems to be down (low calf counts) and not sure exactly why. Based upon progesterone results from 5 cows where two were determined to be pregnant, unclear if the low number of calves is due to low number being born or high calf mortality after they are being born.
 - No indication that the bull ratio is too low.
 - Caribou distribution/use in the recovery area still seems to be similar over the years though there does appear to be some shifts IE less use in the area west of Mooseskin Johnny now than what was observed in earlier years. Could be due to a number of or combination of factors including different individual animals now being monitored (not every animal is collared so because no collared animals was found does not necessarily mean there were no caribou), changes in weather /seasonal patterns , displacement due to disturbance etc.
 - reps asked for direction on what could they do to halt or reverses the downward caribou population trend. Response was that it was now more important than ever to ensure recreational activities were not negatively impacting caribou. This means that we have to do everything we can to ensure compliance with the access restrictions.
 - Predator management, while it is still unclear exactly what the main reason is for the recent change in population trend, predation is certainly recognized as one of the causes of mortalities. Lower predator numbers would benefit survival rates of the herd. Hunters, trappers and guides are involved with a predator management program that benefits agriculture and wildlife. This program, if carried out over the longer term could benefit the Telkwa caribou herd given the low numbers of caribou and the relative importance of every individual animal.
- 3.) Wildlife Habitat Area (WHA) Designation
 - A WHA is an area designated under the Provincial Forests and Range Practices Act to protect wildlife habitat values and guide industrial (forestry) activities (not to be confused with a Wildlife Habitat Management Area (WHMA) which is a regional term used to identify crown land designations in relation to wildlife and agricultural values in the local area).

- Notice regarding WHA proposal was distributed to a wide distribution list including, stake holder organizations, MOF, Ministry of Mines, Forest tenure Holders, First Nations, active mineral tenure holders, Guides, trappers etc.
- Does not specifically apply to other industries such as mining but does serve as a heads up to the industry that there are other values that need to be considered.
- The Ecosystems branch is the lead group (Rick Keim)
- Once a WHA is designated it is permanent and can be amended through legislation or only be cancelled by rescinding legislation.
- Input is still required from Forest Tenure holders before final package can be submitted for Deputy Minister Approval.
- Anticipate final package would be submitted in 4-6 months, hopefully by Oct – Nov.

4.) Access Management and Compliance Concerns

- Nothing has resulted from the VRAMG Sept 20, 2006 recommendation to pursue summer motorized regulation
- Ministry now involved with the WHA process to protect habitat and does not wish to divert focus from that initiative at this point. Once the WHA is established then focus will shift to Access Management needs. Both are considered essential for recovering and maintaining a caribou population.
- In the interim reps should report back to the clubs the need for continued diligence in making the Voluntary Access Management work
- Houston Snowmobile club (Les Auston) has implemented a reporting program using forms that riders, users, members can fill out to report details of trips and sightings etc. He has offered to make forms available to other VRAMG members.
- More and more scientific reports have been and are being published that show the negative correlation of recreational use in an area and the impacts to caribou.
- In the absence of specific information the best science available will be referenced and the ability to quantify and assess degree of impacts, changes in use, compliance rates etc. at the local level and resolve specific issues is difficult. Likely more conservative, broader prescriptions will be recommended that will likely have a greater impact on recreational opportunities. Information is good!
- Suggestion to put a form Kiosk or box at trail heads BV Back packers (interested in trial at Hunter's Basin Trail head.(George will see if any are available)
- BV old timers would still like one weekend a year motorized access into Hunters's Basin, respecting habitat and riding protocols
- Summer motorized concerns are not only related to damage to the habitat but in large part to displacement of animals due to disturbance.
- 18Km bridge Access- the understanding from the start is that the bridge is not intended to be used for recreational access purposes. IE not to facilitate increased recreational use into the area from what would have been there prior to the construction of the bridge approximately 15 years ago. Issue needs to be resolved with a number of parties including MOF, PIR and Wetsuwet'en before original understanding is compromised (IE key given out for purposes other than industrial forestry activity).

5.) Group Reports

- In general not much to report from group reps. Observations reported usually shortly after they are made.
- Smithers club has never seen any sign of caribou in any of their trips into the Non-motorized area,
- Houston Snowmobile club had reported the one mortality in January, BV naturalists and Hikers nothing to add to what was already reported,
- BV OldTimers reported seeing one person with 6 dogs, some of them running loose in Hunter's basin
- Back Country Horsemen reported incidence of caribou being attracted to riders and following them
- Discussed value of information and continued need for clubs to ensure compliance with voluntary restrictions

6.) Proposed expansion of Telkwa Mountain Goat LEH Hunting Area

- Proposal put forward by Skeena Hunters Advisory Group (SHAC)
- Being considered by Ministry but no decision made yet
- This particular proposal requires consultation with the Wetsuwet'en
- Input from public will be considered
- Results of input and consultation will be discussed at next SHAC meeting (December)
- Biologists feel that the proposed season would have minimal biologic impact to the caribou recovery plan considering that the timing and how the people access the area would be regulated to comply with the conditions of the current voluntary access restrictions. As well, the number of people participating in the hunt would be small controlled by permits and quotas.
- VRAMG members generally felt this would not help the recovery plan because of the optics. They felt that this would jeopardize credibility for the project and undermine the efforts and sacrifices made by people to date.

7.) Misc Discussion points

- Signs prepared by Environmental Stewardship (Rick Keim) with shared Logos are currently being stored at the MOE warehouse pending approval of the WHA
- Rumor of a poacher being found with a caribou in the back of his truck. The incident in question was an individual who had unlawfully killed a caribou in the Ft Nelson Area. Individual was fine \$1000 and had some licence action taken against him.
- New telemetry technology, apparently chips can be inserted into animals and monitored remotely for up to two years. Apparently system is being used by a Rancher in the Cariboo. Something to consider for cash strapped project.

Next meeting sometime end of October early November timing partially dependant upon WHA process.