

## **Chronology of the Decline of the Telkwa Caribou Herd (to 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2015)**

**1965** - 271 woodland mountain caribou counted in the Telkwa Mountains, these being a remnant of a herd that historically had a much wider distribution in north central BC.

**Late 60s and early 70s** - In conjunction with increased public access due to mining activity and helicopter hunting the herd numbers crashed.

**1971** – The use of helicopters for hunting caribou was prohibited throughout BC.

**1973** - Ban on caribou hunting. In addition, with the collapse of the mining interests (which reduced the number of people accessing the area) the herd appeared to be making a slow recovery.

**1981** - To assist this recovery, recreation access restrictions were proposed, approved by the Deputy Minister of Parks and reached Order in Council stage. However, due to strong lobbying by snowmobilers, local MLA, Jack Kempf, lobbied against the proposal and it was dropped.

**1993** - Herd down to 11 animals.

**1997** - Only 6 caribou (no calves) recorded. This second collapse was in conjunction with increased recreational use into the area as well as advances in all terrain vehicle and snowmobile technology which allowed motorized vehicles to penetrate more deeply into caribou core habitat.

**1997** - Ministry of Water Land and Air Protection, under direction of the Bulkley Land and Resource Management Plan, developed the *Telkwa Mountains Caribou Herd Recovery Plan*. Potential liabilities to the herd identified as: reduced productivity and recruitment to the herd because of disturbance caused by recreationists; reduced habitat effectiveness due to human caused displacement and harassment, and increased winter predation due to the creation of hard packed trails (by snowmobiles and back-country skiers) over which wolves could freely move, thus negating the caribou's natural evolutionary advantage of being able to outrun their predators in deep snow.

Recovery plan launched with community support.

**November, 1997** - BC Environment relocated 12 caribou from the Chase-Sustut herd and released them into the Telkwas.

**Fall 1998** - 20 more caribou relocated. To address recreational impacts to the herd, these relocation efforts were augmented by community backed voluntary access restrictions.

**2002** – The *Voluntary Recreational Access Management Group* (VRAMG), a multi-stakeholder group consisting of snowmobilers, backpackers, trappers, hunters, quad-riders, prospectors, naturalists and back-country horsemen, amongst others, was established to help guide recovery efforts. Initially there was good response from the public and the recovery project seemed to be working well.

**2004** - Close to a half million dollars spent to date on recovery efforts: \$235,000 from Habitat Conservation Trust Fund and \$310,000 from Forest Resources BC.

**2005** - Telkwa Caribou Herd estimated at 95 animals, including 23 calves.

**July 19, 2006** - A fixed wing telemetry flight records 114 caribou.

**2006** - With herd numbers at their peak, voluntary compliance with the access restrictions by the public appeared to be eroding. Concerns expressed by the VRAMG were:

- Increasing use of motorized vehicles in the non-motorized area
- Increasing number of dogs being taken into the CORE area
- Amount of winter motorized use in the non-motorized area (including use as per agreement

with clubs) may be reducing the effectiveness of the habitat so caribou do not use it

- Non-motorized user activities may be displacing caribou
- Increasing forest development is creating more potential access points making it logistically harder to control users.

The VRAMG countered by publishing articles in the *Interior News*, printing fliers for distribution and talking to people who were not complying. Unfortunately, this seemed to have little effect.

**Summer 2006** - concerned about the lack of voluntary compliance, VRAMG undertook a survey to document non compliance (complete with photographs) and questioned the people involved asking them if they were aware of the guidelines and, if so, why they were ignoring them. Some claimed ignorance, but most people said they were aware of the access restrictions but chose to ignore them. This included people on quads, 4x4 trucks and people taking their dogs into the Recovery Area.

**September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006** – Based on this survey, the VRAMG made a unanimous recommendation that MOE pursue legislated summer closures to help maintain the herd. This call was ignored by government.

**2006 – 2008** - The herd began a steady decline and monitoring flights were stopped because of lack of funds.

**November 10, 2008** - only 47 animals (significantly only 2 calves) were sighted.

**March, 2009** - VRAMG made the same request of the new Regional Manager, Tom Bell, that legislated summer closures be put in place. Tom responded that the closures would be easier to implement after the WHA proposed for the area was in place, a process estimated to take about a year to 18 months. Therefore no was action taken.

**March 09, 2009** - only 22 animals sighted (including 4 yearlings), the lowest March count on record since the recovery project began.

**2013** - Firm funding secured from the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund up to 2017 for: installing more collars, conduct monitoring flights, investigating the role of wolf predation (including collaring some wolves) and monitoring of motorized recreational access in the recovery area.

**March, 2013** - Only 11 caribou observed during monitoring flight, although an extensive search was conducted. During the flights, extensive snowmobile tracks were observed in the non-motorized area and the caribou seemed to have moved away from tracked areas.

**Summer, 2013** - Multiple access sensors placed along trails into Telkwas to better assess voluntary compliance. These included buried magnetic detectors for recording vehicles that passed over them, photo beams to detect both people and vehicles (also animals) and remote cameras.

**2014** – The funding promised in 2013 was reduced for year 2014 and cancelled for years 2015-2017.

**February, 2015** - Snowmobile tracks found in areas of the Telkwa Caribou Recovery Area seldom or never used for winter motorized recreation in past years. Wildlife staff called a temporary (voluntary) closure of the area to snowmobilers.

**16<sup>th</sup> March, 2015** - Fixed-wing flight records more snowmobile activity activity in the core recovery area, with fresh snowmobile tracks seen on Glacis Peak and in Hunters Basin.

**17<sup>th</sup> March, 2015** - 16 caribou counted during monitoring flight, 5 of which were calves.

**Current** – WHA proposed in February, 2009 still not implemented. Caribou still have no legal protection, although mandated by SARA legislation.