

Telkwa Mountains Recreation Access Management Advisory Group

Meeting minutes from: January 16, 2016 (FINAL)

Attendance/Representation:

Angling, hunting & trapping - Igor Steciw

ATVers - Dave Tolton (am), Trish Oosterhoof (pm)

Conservation - Jim Easterday & Daphne Hart

Hikers/backpackers - Dina Hanson & Jonathan Van Barneveld

Horsemen - Eric Becker

Mineral Exploration (Hobby) - Daryl Hanson

Bulkley Valley Stewardship Coalition - Jay Gilden

Skiers - Mike Dunbar & Dave Pellows

Snowmobilers – Wade Lubbers (on behalf of Bill Wookey) - Smithers

Regrets: Les Austin – Snowmobilers, Houston

Guests/Speakers:

Jocelyn Campbell, Ph.D., R.P.Bio, Ecosystems Section Head

Conrad Thiessen, M.Sc., R.P.Bio. Senior Wildlife Biologist

Skeena Region, Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations

Facilitated by: Pam Penner

Agenda:

- Introductions
- Objective of Committee
- Purpose of today's meeting
- My role as facilitator
- Your role/responsibilities as reps
- Decision making
- Working Guidelines
- Communication Plan
- Process design
- Next Steps
- Gov't role

Objective of Committee is to make recommendations to government, by June 15th, regarding recreational access use in Telkwas that achieves caribou conservation. (This will give Jocelyn time to write up recommendation and submit to Cabinet by the fall.)

Purpose of Today's meeting

- Establish the timeframe, working guidelines, and process for making decisions and submitting recommendations.
- Provide clarity regarding the role of the facilitator, the committee, and government.
- Create a process to communicate the committee's progress to others.

Role of Facilitator

- Remain objective, neutral, and impartial. I have no stake in the recommendations the committee makes.
- Ensure all voices are heard and that airtime is shared.
- Ensure interaction remains respectful.
- Manage process you create.

Role of Committee Members

- Express the opinion of your members, not just yourself.
- Work collaboratively to meet the needs of everyone to the greatest degree possible.
- Negotiate fairly and respectfully.
- Create a climate of how you want to work together.
- Have productive dialogue.
- Outline the role and responsibilities of representatives in the Terms of Reference.

The committee discussed the current name for the Committee and decided (unanimously) to change it to Telkwa Mountains Recreation Access Management (TRAM) advisory group.

Wade asked the group if he could join the group in addition to Bill Wookey. The Committee agreed that we would allow one observer from each Value group to attend as a non-participant. That would allow for a maximum of 7 extra people. Wade was welcomed to be that observer or trade off with Bill.

Decision Making

Decisions will be made by consensus, not by voting. Refer to the Terms of Reference for decision making process.

Working Guidelines

How do you want to work together? The group agreed to speak respectfully to each other.

Communication Plan

Who needs to know what, when, how and by who?

One role and responsibility of the Representatives is to communicate with their members – both by collecting concerns, ideas and suggestions and relaying the minutes and status of the Committee. At a minimum, representatives will communicate with their members at their monthly meetings.

Process Design

Incomplete. Add to the next agenda.

For example, what documents need to be reviewed? what data collected? from where?

Next Steps

Pam will email out the minutes of this meeting, the agenda for the next meeting, draft Terms of Reference, and suggested meeting dates.

Government Role and Expectations– presented by Jocelyn

Jocelyn will send Pam a copy (and Pam forwarded it to the group on February 18) of the Recovery Strategy for woodland caribou – Southern Mountain Population in Canada. It is also available online at http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/virtual_sara/files/plans/rs_woodland_caribou_bois_s_mtn_pop_0114_e.pdf

(Pam sent Jocelyn's powerpoint presentation under separate email.)

3 eco-types of Woodland caribou in BC – Provincial Designations

Capable of interbreeding

1. Boreal caribou (northeast)
2. Mountain Caribou (east and southeast in province)
3. Northern ecotype Caribou (Telkwa Mountains herd)
 - Winter at high elevations. Live off wind slopes or low elevation forests where they feed on pine or terrestrial lichens
 - Telkwa caribou generally spend all year round at high elevation. Anecdotal evidence indicates that some of the caribou use low elevation forests at certain times of the year.
 - 16-20 animals. A number are collared.
 - Blue listed in BC

Ecological areas – Federal Designations

- Telkwas mountains are in the southern mountain national ecological area
- Caribou in this ecological area are currently listed as threatened federally
- Proposed change in Federal designation for the Telkwa herd to DU7: Special concern

5 Pillars

1. Habitat Management
2. Population management
3. Monitoring
4. Communities
5. Recreation Management

In order to pursue population management we have to deal with other factors contributing to population decline (such as caribou displacement by recreational activity or industrial development, etc.) before addressing predator management.

Caribou are not tranquilized when collared. (Pam sent video links from Conrad to group under separate email).

Recommendations from this group go into a Recreation Access Management plan that Jocelyn develops and submits.

Comments & Questions

After some group discussion about whether skiers or snowmobilers had a greater impact on the caribou, One group member commented that both skiers and snowmobilers make different types of tracks which affect the caribou and expressed that the intention is for our full group not be divided by blaming each other.

Jocelyn – skiers can be more stressful for caribou because the impact lasts longer. However a snowmobile can cover so much more terrain in a given time period, it has the potential to impact many more caribou. Thus the comparison between skiers and snowmobiler impact can only be considered as a physiological response on a single caribou, not a comparison of impacts to the herd.

Snowmobilers come and go fast as per Kathy Parker's research. On January 25th, Pam sent Kathy's response to Jocelyn along with a copy of the document: **Motorized Backcountry Recreation And Stress Response In Mountain Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*)** By NICOLA L. FREEMAN, 1996.

Group member - there are natural packed tracks when snow melts and freezes it creates an ice "concrete jungle" (5 week periods in early spring). Also, we have not seen any wolves on time lapse videos on cameras in Grizzly Plateau.

Jocelyn – worst thing we can do is create a path from low to high elevations as it assists in wolf travel to caribou. Caribou are declining worldwide and we don't have handle on why – climate change? natural cycle?

Group member – are caribou scared off by noise? Jocelyn responded that, yes, they are scared off by noise.

Jocelyn added that there is a physiological stress on them. A stressed cow will either produce no calf or a weakened calf that won't likely survive. Caribou respond first with curiosity and then avoid area.

Jocelyn - Objective of this committee is to make recommendations to Government that will become part of the Recreation use and access management plan for the Telkwa Mountains. Jocelyn will include recommendations to senior government in Cabinet to put legal/legislated closures in place. There are no tools to enforce voluntary closures. The Committee is to provide recommendations and rationale on where closures should be and should not be. User group agreements should be addressed by Ben or Brandy at another meeting.

Jocelyn - Ben would have to answer to whether there are consequences to someone who violates a User Group Agreement. If so, what are consequences?

There are areas where legislated closures are appropriate and do not currently exist.

There are areas for caribou only (period) and areas for recreational users (period). The goal of the TRAM advisory group is to define where these areas are and what tools are recommended to manage the recommendations.

Predation is an issue. In order to be successful passing recommendations for predator management to Cabinet level, we have to have addressed everything else first (i.e., recreational use, habitat management). For more information on the lost Moberly court case and lots of other information refer to: <http://www.oktlaw.com/blog/west-moberly-supreme-court-of-canada-denied-leave-to-appeal/>

Group member requested tables showing maps of trails, satellite imagery, existing VRAM zones and what they mean as well, rec trails and facilities as well as those recognized in Land Use Plans, existing tenures, etc. (**Jocelyn will arrange for these**). Both large and small scale maps with land marks (roads, peaks, creeks) are required.

Group member – what we have been doing for last 15 years hasn't been working. We need to pull out all the stops to protect caribou. Numbers are down. Let's take every measure, close everything off for two years and review.

Jocelyn – re: Gov't expectations. TRAM advisory group is to make recommendations not decisions. Jocelyn's commitment is: "I will use your recommendations and follow through with action. I will push but I cannot guarantee they will be accepted. The Director of Wildlife in Victoria makes the decision and usually accepts our recommendation unless there is a very good reason." Timeline for completion: end of June to give Jocelyn time to write up recommendation and submit to Cabinet by the fall. Asks group if there is anyone interested in writing up recommendation from group for submission to her in June. There will be funding for this position.

Mike Dunbar will ask Jill if she is willing to be the recording secretary (voluntary) and write up recommendation (paid contract) in June for submission to Jocelyn.

Jocelyn will work with Conrad to provide more specifics on what bookends are. The scientists' priorities. There will be closures, just not known where. (A group member added, "I believe that we agreed that

Jocelyn and Conrad would come back to the group with a list of how (and why) they feel the current voluntary restrictions are inadequate. This would be a good starting point for our discussions.”)

(Follow-up from Jocelyn: The handout that Pam sent group on February 18th (Telkwa Caribou Management Plan, Pillar 3, Recreation Management components) also includes why the voluntary restrictions are inadequate.)

Group member - The previous outcome from VRAM group was a focus on education and there was an almost unanimous decision to government to legislate closures. We were told it would be 18 months. *See Mel's history notes attached.*

Group member – believes that voluntary measures did work. There was 10% non-compliance when the VRAM group was active. Voluntary restrictions stopped being effective when the committee was less active and didn't educate new users.

Voluntary restrictions/closure means that there is no enforcement but with legislated closure there can be enforcement.

Jim Easterday – advised group that bcnorth.ca is a website that is a resource for caribou information. Click on “caribou information”. He will add a link to Morice LRMP.

Group member – “If we are to make a serious effort to save the caribou in the Telkwa Mountains then we have to seriously consider three main factors. We have to preserve their environment, we have to control predation and we have to control access. If you leave any of these three items out the caribou population probably will not survive, especially when there are only 15 to 20 animals left. According to the terms of reference the Game Branch (at least at present) is only concerned with access. This is not enough.”

Questions for Conrad:

Conrad will provide point location data prior to transplants and shortly after and currently. Collars represent different individuals. These are collared locations. There are currently two active collars. FLNRO will be going out this weekend and replacing batteries on others. There have been more than 12 active collars.

Group member asked for more frequent updates so they know the areas to stay away from. Ideally updates would be every Thursday.

Question: Group member asked where the science data/evidence will come from to help us make a recommendation. Conrad responded that it is all funding dependent. FLNRO has a graduate student looking at caribou and past recreation use. FLNRO will be continuing to monitor. Information will be shared with committee. FLNRO does not have information from the Telkwas to determine whether skiing or snowmobiles have a greater impact on the caribou. Our numbers are too small (Group member asks, “What numbers? Is this caribou numbers or information on interaction between caribou and different types of recreation.”) Jim Easterday advised that he has a website with links to information on bcnorth.ca. He invited Conrad to look at it and add to it.

Question: How does genetic drift and inbreeding depression apply to the Telkwas? Inbreeding does impact the caribou and transplanting of a couple caribou could make a genetic difference. Conrad will send out a summary of the fall rut count. We have a minimum of 16 animals now. Conrad will look into effect of genetic drift on caribou extirpation.

Question: Are we considering augmentation both for genetic diversity and for kick starting herd? We are nearing the same numbers as before when we augmented herd. Jocelyn said that funding is hard to come by but we have increased the profile of the caribou. Group member asked why we aren't transplanting a couple caribou every year or so? Or exchanging caribou with another area? Conrad responded that it is a possibility and one of the tools for consideration. The last couple years there have been good calf recruitment. Group member asked what we can do. Conrad said to put forward recommendations, aside from rec access. Jocelyn said collectively this group has a lot of influence.

Question: Does influx of elk affect caribou? (i.e., parasites) We don't have any data but they could well be transmitting disease. If there are more elk or moose, there will be more wolves.

Question: Group member asked why we aren't pulling out all the stops on this problem? Conrad acknowledged how frustrating this is for people and they don't have the data to determine what is causing the reduction in caribou. For example, in one area the study revealed that the greatest predators of caribou calves are wolverines not wolves.

Group member asked whether there was any evidence of any Caribou being killed by predators in the Telkwas since Conrad started working on the Telkwa herd project. Conrad's answer was no, but that he did not know if any calves had been killed.

Question: What is base line for voluntary access, zones, restrictions, permissible areas? **(Answer:** See handout on Telkwa Caribou Management Plan, Pillar 3, Recreation Management components (Pam sent to group on Feb. 18) for the principles and elements required in a solution.)

Question: If we recommend that the voluntary restrictions that exist now become mandatory, would that be sufficient? Or not? Conrad said the TRAM advisory group may come up with novel ideas or restrictions and they don't want to restrict us. Conrad also said that the agreement as it is written is not clear enough, with exceptions. There is a perfect world for caribou and for recreation (and forestry and mining) but there isn't a perfect world that combines both. Group member asked if Jocelyn and Conrad could tell us what is wrong with current management zones and prescription and we will work on solutions.

Pam will send the Committee a list of dates for scheduling upcoming meetings.

Meeting adjourned.

Chronology of the Decline of the Telkwa Caribou Herd (to 23rd March, 2015). Compiled by Mel Coulson

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 20th, 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 action was 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.

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

17th 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.