

Telkwa Mountains Recreation Access Management Advisory Group

Meeting minutes, April 21, 2016. Meeting convened at 5:30 PM, Nora Building, Smithers, B. C.

Attendance/Representation:

ATVers - Dave Tolton, Ed Hinchliffe
Conservation - Jim Easterday, Daphne Hart
Hikers/backpackers - Dina Hanson, Jonathan Van Barneveld
Backcountry horsemen – Eric Becker
Mineral exploration (hobby) - Daryl Hanson
Bulkley Valley Stewardship Coalition - Jay Gilden
Skiers - Mike Dunbar, Dave Pellow
Snowmobilers – Wade Lubbers, Les Auston
Angling and hunting - Igor Steciw
Observer: Bill Wookey

Guests/Speakers:

Jocelyn Campbell, Ecosystems Section Head, Skeena Region, Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations
Brandy Hughes, Recreation Officer, Nadina/Skeena Recreation District, Recreation Sites and Trails BC

Facilitated by: Pam Penner

Recorder: Jill Dunbar

Agenda

- **Starr Basin – boundaries**
- **Access to Meat Cache – vote**
- **Houston Peak – should it be a separate area?**

Opening remarks

Pam reiterated the decision-making process, summarized as follows: An area is discussed, a preliminary vote taken, persuasive papers written and circulated as needed, a final vote is taken without further discussion.

Starr Basin - winter

Jocelyn Campbell: Response to question regarding hard packed snow and access: Rotten snow impedes progress, and bulletproof snow only exists for limited periods of time, such as early mornings, so it is impossible to enforce.

Group member: There is a time period when wolves can go anywhere so there should be a period of wider recreational access.

JC: Caribou are also disturbed by noise and human activity and are more vulnerable to disturbance in late winter. We don't do any capturing after March 1.

JC: We are working on an app to make telemetry data accessible more often. But if there is a lot of activity, caribou won't be found in an area. An example of this is Grizzly Plateau.

Group member: Has there been an analysis of how much activity could be accepted on the west side of Starr Basin?

JC: Not yet.

Group member: Snowmobile group doesn't feel that activity in Starr has a big impact on caribou. Sanctioned rides won't work, since natural conditions determine access.

Pam: How does that address needs of caribou?

Group member: We need good science that will give us caribou locations. We don't see wolves in there.

Group member: Skiers want to be in areas where there is no motorized use. Snowmobile tracks interfere with skiing.

Pam: So you can't co-exist?

Group member: We can split timing of use.

Group member: There has been good cooperation for the last 8 years. Skiers had first priority. Snowmobilers were not supposed to be there if a ski trip was booked. There was a conflict only once, which came from a misunderstanding in the cabin booking process.

Group member: The booking system at Starr Cabin as a way to keep the snowmobile and skier uses separate did not work because the snowmobilers come in for day trips and, therefore any reservation system for the cabin did not control when they are present.

Group member: We must limit our activities for sake of the caribou, but we need to tolerate a bit of noise.

Pam: There needs to be tolerance both ways.

Group member: Snowmobile tracks don't cover a big percentage of the area.

Group member: Starr was chosen years ago for its good quality skiing. Snowmobile activity started when forest roads were built to the south. If a skier is going to fly in they want untracked slopes. But a machine passing by is OK. We have to compromise. The question is – how much activity is too much?

Group member: Reliance on telemetry is not good enough. It won't tell you where the caribou are when you go there. Not all caribou have collars. The effect of snowmobiles lasts into the future.

Group member: Let's discuss caribou, not skier/snowmobiler conflicts. What Paddy Hirshfield did not say on April 20 was that the Bulkley LRMP was crafted through a much bigger process than this one. There were huge compromises made and the community accepted it. He can't support a recommendation that would create an area like Grizzly Plateau. There should be some kind of access, but not so intense, and the solution could be sanctioned rides.

Group member: We are not asking for intensive use. But the caribou can be avoided because they stay in one area for the winter.

Group member: Has this access caused decline in the herd?

Group member: We can't answer this but we must give the caribou the best chance we can. Industry has made great concessions. We should also.

JC: The 2016 Boutin and Merrell paper reported that the greatest concern is changes in forest structure that increases habitat for ungulates and therefore wolves. Of moderate concern is disturbance by snowmobiles and other activities – caribou will abandon habitat.

Group member: Who represented recreation at the LRMP table? Nobody with a machine would have agreed with the LRMP.

Brandy Hughes: Recreation details were addressed by the RAMP processes.

Group member: Recreation was addressed in every section of the LRMP.

Group member: The LRMP is a live document. The RAMP process came out of it because there were conflicts. In the Morice there was general consensus as well.

Group member: We compromised a lot in the LRMP but gained certainty.

Group member: How many individual snowmobilers go into Starr?

Group member: From Houston side it is 25 to 30 people in a season.

Group member: There are about 20 areas to go snowmobiling in this region. We need clearly defined zones and sanctioned rides. Dates could be transferable if weather doesn't cooperate. LRMPs are clear that we must be responsible for wildlife conservation.

Group member: Compromises have already been made. Snowmobilers' support of the Core Area restrictions is a huge compromise. Starr is a high value area. Sanctioned rides mean that there will be less hands-on understanding of the snowpack and more accidents.

Group member: What are your 3 favourite places to ride in Starr?

Group member: All of it.

Group member: We are here to represent values, not clubs. Everyone has to be included.

Brandy Hughes: Is there no other terrain similar to Starr locally?

Group member: Correct. That is the complex terrain that is left.

Brandy Hughes: It is important to co-exist. We can help with that. More people will be moving here and there will more pressure on the land base.

Group member: Caribou are not responsible for accidents and avalanche deaths.

Group member: Snowmobiling has gone down in areas like Dome. Sledders are looking for new places. The new technology breeds boredom.

Group member: There are fewer sledders there because there has been less snow in the past 2 years.

Vote:

- 1) In favour of no access for a number of years, then staged reopening: **2**
- 2) In favour of full access with caveats such as education, club memberships, avoidance strategies: **7**
- 3) In favour of access during certain periods under certain conditions (such as sanctioned rides at discretion of government based on caribou and/or 50:50 shared access during certain periods (registered use): **5**

ACTION: Jim Easterday will prepare persuasive paper pertaining to 1

Wade Lubbers will prepare persuasive paper pertaining to 2

Dina and Daryl Hanson will prepare persuasive paper pertaining to 3

Papers will be emailed to Pam by May 5.

Group member: How will the new MOE moose enhancement program help this cause?

Jocelyn Campbell: The team will take a landscape approach and keep moose habitat away from caribou habitat.

Access to Meat Cache

Vote:

Access to Meat Cache	Preliminary results, March 15	Final results, April 21
In favour of snowmobile access	8	7
Opposed to snowmobile access	4	6
Abstaining	2	
Members present	14	13

Abstaining members, March 15 – one felt timing should be a consideration, one felt more scientific data is needed.

Starr Basin boundary - summer

Rationale for polygons from Conrad Thiessen:

- *Incorporated all 75% kernels with at least 1km buffer*
- *Extended boundary down below treeline*
- *Mostly tried to avoid 'social' values, however left the main trail to Starr cabin out of the polygon*
- *Included Tom George as a possible expansion area for caribou even though not currently used much*

I imagine more of the social component will become involved in the exact boundary in the Starr basin above the cabin. I felt it was more my role to provide a boundary that was more biologically rationalized. We can discuss these lines more if the pencil needs to be sharpened down...

Group member: An elevation line means that lower elevation areas such as Mooseskin Johnny would be excluded.

Group member: Would 1100m include all the kernelled areas?

JC: Yes, mostly.

Group member: Why not connect areas and make it one contiguous area?

Group member: What elevation is Starr Creek cabin at?

Group member: In tying the two together you protect caribou moving across Mooseskin corridor.

JC: 1100m would work for both seasons.

Group member: Boundaries should go around highest value habitat – the 75% kernels. Then open the other areas to more activity.

Group member: Does this have to be ground truthed?

Group member: No, it can be based on telemetry data.

JC: There would be no need to flag out a boundary.

Group member: Kernels would change over time.

Group member: Government doesn't like to talk about giving areas back.

Group member: There should be one polygon, for simple enforcement.

Group member: Is the area delineated by 1100m larger than the current area?

Group member: Yes.

Group member: Keep in mind that habitat in Mooseskin Johnny is protected from development.

Brandy: If you decide on a closure based on elevation could we still put in a hiking trail?

Group member: We are not discussing what happens inside boundaries.

Group member: Would you have to park outside the 1100m?

Group member: The goal is to make it simple for CO's and maximize area for caribou.

Options for a basis for the boundary are:

- 1100m contour line
- geographic features
- highest value habitat
- current boundaries (no harvest zone of the WHA) (excluding Herd Dome)

Decision: Boundary to be based on WHA - no harvest zone, excluding Herd Dome.

Houston Peak

Group member: Current use is summer hiking. Area is currently designated non-motorized. There is no quad rider interest at present.

Not a preliminary vote but the general sense at this point is:

Yes to open access: 10, No: 1, Abstaining (leave as Zone B): 1

Discussion to resume at next meeting.

Final Recommendation package to Tony Pesklevits to include:

- Request that caribou location data be updated every two weeks in the winter so snowmobilers and skiers can avoid area.
- Post on Conrad's Facebook page
- Animated?
- Enforcement applies to all areas

Next Meeting:

- **Houston Peak**
 - **Summer**
 - **Winter**
- **Core Recovery Area: Boundary Expansion?**
- **Grizzly Plateau above Gas Stop**
- **Starr Basin: Summer**

Meeting adjourned 9:45 PM