

(DRAFT) Voluntary Recreational Access Management Group

December 16, 2010 Meeting Minutes

Attendance List

Name	Organization	Contact #s
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Agenda

- 1.) Overview of Activities Since Last Meeting (January 14, 2010)
 - Caribou Sightings
 - Budget request for 2010-11
- 2.) Proposed expansion of Telkwa Mountain Goat LEH Hunting Area
 - update
- 3.) Wildlife Habitat Area (WHA) Designation
 - Update
- 4.) Telkwa Caribou Access Understanding
 - Intent
 - Review wording
- 5.) Group Reports
- 6.) Misc. Discussion Points

Discussion

Introductions;

People introduced themselves and which group they represented.

1. Overview Since Last Meeting (January 14, 2010)
Activities: handout

Date	Activity/event	Result
Feb 5	3 caribou reported E of Houston	
Feb 9	Vehicle telemetry	Heard 6 collars, 2 on mortality
March 9	Spring helicopter survey	Results forwarded to VRAM
March 11	2 caribou reported near Woodmere Nursery	
April 11	2 caribou reported near Woodmere Nursery	
April 13	Caribou update presented to BVRC	
April 19	4 caribou reported near Woodmere Nursery	
April 19	3 caribou reported near Walcott	

May 2	1 caribou bull reported @ Skilhorn rd	
June 1	1 collared caribou at Walcott	
July 17	2 caribou reported crossing E-W @ Mooskin Johnny L	
Aug 9	Hikers with dogs reported on Hankin Plateau	
August 30	Received a report of trail cut to alpine on Hankin Plateau	Follow up extension of trail reported in 2004, appears to have been extended in 2007
Sept 9	Goat Survey in Telkwa Mts	Observed 328 pop est 377
Oct 28	Fall helicopter survey	No pop est , optimistic calf numbers, results forwarded to VRAM
Nov 17	Interagency Work group met	Call meeting with VRAM to clarify wording of special access agreement
Nov	Report that caribou might be back in Walcott/Barret	

- No funds received by ministry since 2007 has resulted in no specific activities (surveys, telemetry etc.) in the Telkwa Mountains. Future funding opportunities do not look optimistic
- 2.) Update on Proposed expansion of Telkwa Mountain Goat LEH Hunting Area
- Goat survey conducted September 9, 2010, conditions near perfect, counted 328 population estimate of 377
 - New/latest information will be used when decision is made with regards to goat hunting opportunities in the Telkwa Mts.
 - Province now in 2yr hunting regulation cycle so any changes would not appear before the 2012 season
 - Decision maker has not yet made a decision regarding how the goat hunting opportunity would be implemented.
 - Guide has concerns that the proposed 1100m non-motorized boundary is not fair in the south as there is a voluntary agreement for summer motorized to the "gas stop" in Grizzly Plateau
 - BVR&G rep suggested that system similar to that used in the Babine Mts be considered regarding hunter access. LEH goat hunters are allowed to travel as far as the Harry Ohrms cabin on the Fletcher-Gardiner Trail.

3.) Wildlife Habitat Area (WHA) designation

- WHA still progressing
- Has been delayed by concerns around timber supply
- Has gone out to stakeholders for review
- Will hopefully be forwarded to the decision maker soon (early in 2011)

4.) Telkwa Caribou Access

- Issues
- a) lack of telemetry information and indications of declining caribou numbers
 - b) Increasing recreational use and apparent lack of understanding of the TC recovery project
 - c) Need for interpretation of language in Management Plans and access agreements in order that they clearly outline the intent of the public and stakeholder consensus

- Heated discussion by parties raising issues such as: decrease in caribou due to predation by wolves and grizzly bears and difficult snow conditions in 2006; recreational users not the problem; frustration with government's failure to provide funding; why are we even trying to save the caribou; impossible to achieve compliance either voluntarily or through enforcement; when is caribou project going to end; caribou are being sighted all over the valley so why do we need voluntary access control in Telkwa Mtns.; why should people be restricted in recreation because of caribou etc.
- disappointment and disgust expressed by individual who sat on LRMP as well as long time participant of the VRAM in what he was hearing at this meeting, the LRMP was lengthy and encompassing public process and it was the people's choice to protect and maintain caribou and this group and no individual on this group has the right to undermine the LRMP.

Reviewed History of Telkwa Caribou Recovery project and purpose of the VRAMG

- Counts as high as 271 were recorded in 1965, numbers declined in the late 60 early 70's around the time when there was a high degree of human activity in the area , In 1973 caribou hunting was closed as well as the ability to use helicopters for hunting was halted and the high level of mining activity dropped off. High numbers of caribou in the early 60's may well have been influenced by the provincial predator control programs being carried out however there is no question that other factors contributed to the decline of caribou in the area Caribou seemed to be increasing to the mid 80's but by the early to mid 90's numbers were again dropping with only 6 thought to be present when caribou recovery initiatives began.
- Bulkley LRMP (The people) gave priority to the management of caribou and caribou habitat (over riding recreational values)
- Morice LRMP as well recognized Caribou as a high priority species.
- The Caribou Recovery Plan was drafted in 1998 which identified several liabilities facing caribou including low numbers, predation, motorized recreation, poaching etc.

- 32 caribou were transplanted into the area from the Sustut/Chase herds in 1997 and 1998.
- The recreational access zones were identified to maintain habitat viability as well as minimize disturbance to the caribou and stakeholders adamantly lobbied to maintain them as voluntary stating that they the stake holders would make it work.
- The intent was to not promote or encourage increased recreational use in the area and to minimize the liabilities to caribou and caribou habitat. The VRAM group was formed whose purpose is:

" to: work co-operatively towards insuring compliance with voluntary access restrictions in areas and times when it is required to meet the objectives of the recovery program; and to do so in such a way as to allow recreation use in areas that might otherwise be off limits, so long as such use is consistent with the sustainability of the Telkwa Caribou".

- The Telkwa caribou Recovery Plan and the access provisions also played a role with providing a degree of comfort the Wetsuweten when industrial forestry operations were expanding into the area south of the Telkwa (hence the 18km Bridge conditions)
- The VRAM developed Access Understanding agreements with the Houston and Smithers Snowmobile Clubs.
- The VRAM group worked together with signage, information pamphlets, public education and peer pressure to support the compliance with the Voluntary restrictions.
- In September 2006, the VRAM group recommended that the Province initiate steps to implement summer non-motorized legislation in the non-motorized area. This has not been implemented to date.

Issue a) lack of telemetry information and indications of declining caribou numbers

- Data indicates that there may be a declining trend in the caribou population over the last three years
- Telemetry data that was provided to the groups to manage for more liberal use in areas by allowing them to direct users to areas where the caribou were not and stay away from areas where caribou were has, due to the lack of funding, become an unreliable resource,
- The result is that the precautionary principle must be applied and that there is a need to ensure that existing agreements are meeting their intent

Issue b) Increasing recreational use and apparent lack of understanding of the TC recovery project

- There are indications that recreation in the recovery area is increasing
- More hikers and non motorized use
- More motorized use in the summer
- More winter motorized use in the winter
- Public perception that the intended non-motorized area is actually motorized (particularly in the Bulkley side).
- Smithers Snowmobile Club did not implement the access understanding agreement effectively
- BV Nordic club proceeding making/considering agreements around the Starr Cr Cabin management without considering the Caribou Recovery priority

Issue c) Need for interpretation of language in Management Plans and access agreements in order that they clearly outline the intent of the public and stakeholder consensus

There are several LRMP's and agreements involved in the recovery area. It is difficult at times to interpret the language in the agreements to determine what the original intent of the agreements was.

- Uncertainty compromises the intent of protecting caribou and caribou habitat, makes it difficult for the managers to make decisions, makes it difficult for the clubs to implement agreements (E.g. Starr Cr Cabin motorized and back Country Skier agreement), makes it confusing for individuals to understand the rules
- It is clear that caribou and caribou habitat are the overriding values that drive all other recreational use opportunities in this area
- The current access understandings between the snowmobilers need to be explicit and rigorously followed

Action Item: George to redraft the current access agreements in order that they are more explicit and less likely to be interpreted in an ambiguous manner. Once Draft is completed it will be forwarded to the Clubs for comments, edits etc, once the draft is satisfactory to the two parties, the draft will be forwarded to other participants of the VRAM for review and comment before it is officially recognized

5.) Group Reports

- No reports from groups (no time)

6.) Misc Discussion points

- Government is restructuring, parks still in Ministry of Environment while Fish, Wildlife and Habitat in Ministry of Natural Resources Operations (MNRO).MNRO decision maker position for approx the next 6 months will be Dana Atagi or Karen Diemert.
- Facing a 25 million dollar cut provincially next year

- Restructuring may result in a degree of turmoil and uncertainty over the next 2 years