

Telkwa Mountains Recreation Access Management Advisory Group

Meeting minutes, February 20, 2016. Meeting convened at 9:00 AM, Nora Building, Smithers, B. C.

Attendance/Representation:

Angling and hunting - Igor Steciw
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 Gildea
Skiers - Mike Dunbar, Dave Pellows
Snowmobilers – Wade Lubbers, Les Auston

Observer – Bill Wookey

Adjustment to group membership since last meeting: Ed Hinchliffe is member not observer. Igor Steciw represents angling and hunting only, not trapping. Trish Oosterhoff is observer not group member.

Guests/Speakers:

Jocelyn Campbell, Ecosystems Section Head, Skeena Region, Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations
Ben Heemskerk, Regional Manager (North Region) Recreation Sites and Trails BC
Brandy Hughes, Recreation Officer, Nadina/Skeena Recreation District, Recreation Sites and Trails BC

Facilitated by: Pam Penner

Recorder: Jill Dunbar

Agenda

- Jocelyn Campbell
“Bookends”: The desired condition and the alternative to a recommendation
- Ben Heemskerk/Brandy Hughes:
 - Vision and objectives, compliance data, update on Telkwa caribou activity
 - User group agreements, consequences for violations
- Finalize Terms of Reference
- Create/revise process for achieving objectives (see process draft)
- Review meeting dates

What do we need to know?

- When/where are caribou most vulnerable?
- Reason for areas designation (i.e., Core – how come?) Why 3 zones and not more or less?
- 10 year caribou activity
- Request for Conrad: movement of caribou outside Telkwas (collared/non-collared). Can we have telemetry data weekly? How do we process anecdotal information?
- If someone buys a \$25 free miner's license, are they an industry user rather than a recreational user? And therefore have access to Telkwas – all zones under industry user agreement?
- Reason ATVers are banned from Grizzly?

Presentation by Jocelyn Campbell:

Existing agreements are insufficient. Compliance is voluntary therefore not enforceable, and is deteriorating.

Zone boundaries are arbitrary. They can be revised as long as principles are followed.

Boundaries need to be readily available to users on their devices.

A proposed solution must adhere to a set of principles. Jocelyn reviewed principles (i) through (vii). Key points are that existing agreements can be used as a basis for solution, revised as needed to meet principles; solution can be changed over time in light of new information; self-regulation amongst users is encouraged.

Alternative solution to TRAM recommendation: FLNRO is prepared to move forward with a Motor Vehicle Prohibition (MVP) under the Wildlife Act Regulation Schedule 1, for both motorized and non-motorized supported by motor vehicles. Access would be provided by permit only.

Reference: Wildlife Act MOTOR VEHICLE PROHIBITION REGULATION online at <http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/ID/freeside/474756515>

Discussion:

Question: What are the consequences under this Regulation?

Answer: Fines, in the order of hundreds of dollars. As well, equipment has been confiscated.

Q: Why would there be closures for one group and not another? It is divisive.

A: There are no legal tools to prevent a person from walking anywhere on Crown land but vehicles can be prevented. Dogs can be stopped.

Q: What about horses?

A: That is a separate category.

Q: Is helicopter access allowed?

A: Helicopter access is controlled under the Wildlife Act. It may be prohibited in certain circumstances.

Comment: Please expand on self-regulation.

A: A good example is the sanctioned ride for ATV users. Riders had to be club members, and geographic range and timing of the ride was controlled.

Comment: It doesn't make sense to say that anything voluntary will work. It doesn't make a difference if people are club members or not.

A: Look at Starr Basin: There would be a blanket closure, with an exempted ride that only club members can go on.

Q: What is the rule today?

A: Anyone can go in anytime.

Comment: There is no difference if there is no enforcement.

A: Permits to go there would make access enforceable.

Comment: In other areas of B.C. rules are being enforced.

A: Conservation Officers can't be out there every day. If users know that they *may* be out there, that is a deterrent.

Q: There are new spots on the map indicating that the caribou are using new areas. Are there areas that may not need to be closed?

A: Yes, it is possible for some give and take (principle i). Caribou use of the core recovery area has dropped over time.

Comment: We haven't established if access really affects the caribou. Numbers show that the caribou population has declined *or* increased regardless of increased access.

A: It is a challenge to say what decline is caused by. It is a global decline. It is a combination of habitat loss, predation, and access. The Telkwa herd is declining faster than others. We do know that access is a form of pressure on caribou. The herd is not a migratory herd and is staying in the Telkwa Range.

Q: If herd goes below 10 animals would a closed area be reopened? Many people have never seen caribou in the area. People inform themselves of caribou locations before they go in, they have good will. How does closure improve things?

A: Without a solution from TRAM the closures would be reviewed in 20 years.

The definition of extirpation:

Extirpation will be confirmed if all of the following occur:

An observed and ongoing decline that is approaching 0.

A census where no animals or tracks are recorded.

Several subsequent surveys over 5 years where no animals or tracks are recorded.

No indication of re-colonization from other adjacent herds.

No intent for herd augmentation.

Data shows non-compliance and there isn't always good will. The gate at Howson Creek was torn down. Last year there was a ride over Grunt Pass.

Comment: We talked to MOE and tried to come up with a plan but were told not to go there. People don't all have faith in this process.

Comment: We all have to do our part to ensure caribou survival. Industry already is. If there is a chance that recreation has an impact then let's do what we can. We need legislated closure and then sanctioned access. This is unfortunate but there must be areas that are closed. Caribou need a variety of terrain. Science shows that snowmobiles displace caribou. Skiers do as well, but snowmobiles cover more ground faster.

Comment: In other areas of the province, closed to snowmobiles 5 years ago, caribou are still declining. Science doesn't have the answers. We have people at the trailheads letting everyone know where the animals are; we have signage and education. Every area needs to be looked at separately. Government uses the precautionary principle.

Comment: 1) A certain amount of snowmobile activity and caribou can co-exist; 2) we are not addressing predator control, which is a major factor.

Presentation by Ben Heemskerk:

Ben reviewed the mandate of Recreation Sites and Trails BC, which is to provide recreation opportunities on crown land, often through partnership agreements. The Telkwas can provide amazing recreational opportunities.

Discussion:

Q: What if an area is closed for motorized and First Nations people want to go in on snowmobiles? And shoot a few caribou?

A: This needs to be answered by a Conservation Officer. The Office of the Wet'suwet'en has been invited to this table and would like to be kept informed.

Q: What are the current agreements?

A: The 2003 agreement stands. The boundary between the Morice and Bulkley TSAs goes through the WHA so there are two LRMPs that apply. This process can help to clarify agreements.

Comment: Starr Basin is contentious. Fewer people go in there than elsewhere. The number of people affects the experience.

A: We manage for a range of recreation values experiences. There is a need for core recovery areas for caribou in Starr, mostly in alpine.

Q: Do we have numbers of animals before the Starr Creek cabin went in?

A: Until there was collaring we could not really say what was happening.

Comment: Porphyry Creek: One collar was found here, and we can assume there would be a group of animals there.

A: Agreements could look at lower elevations. Discuss this question later in this meeting.

Comments: For many years prior to recreation activity there was mining, providing road access. Hikers and winter recreationists got good areas under the agreements. Why is this not workable?

Debbie Cichowski's report contains population information from 1949. Recommend that all members read this document.

When we propose zones, is there potential for new trail development if this is consistent with zones?

A: We would need approval from MOE.

Comment: In the Morice LRMP there are proposed trails that go up Emerson Ridge.

A: This group would need to look at that.

Q: Can we say yes to what we talked about for Grizzly Plateau?

Pam: The process is to look at existing zones and build on them. Review them, and if OK, leave as is.

Comment: We need to know timing: When is the herd most susceptible to disturbance. This will help when reviewing zones. We can include that reasoning in our recommendations. We need the last 10 years of data, which is the most recent.

Pam: Check BC North website for background documents:

<http://bcnorth.ca/caribou/index.html>

BVCRB also plans to include a collection of documents on its website.

Comment: Have animal sightings been recorded below tree line?

A: We will ask Jocelyn.

Comment: We should be aware of other places where caribou are found and where they are moving. Perhaps they are moving, not dying. We need the telemetry results.

ACTION: Jocelyn Campbell will request MOE record of caribou sightings from Conrad Thiessen and circulate to this group.

Terms of Reference

Discussion: There are no objections to changes as presented at this meeting (mandate and remuneration sections). Wording of decision-making section needs to be changed to remove "most".

ACTION: Pam will revise the wording, circulate to the group, and finalize, if there are no further objections.

Meeting Dates

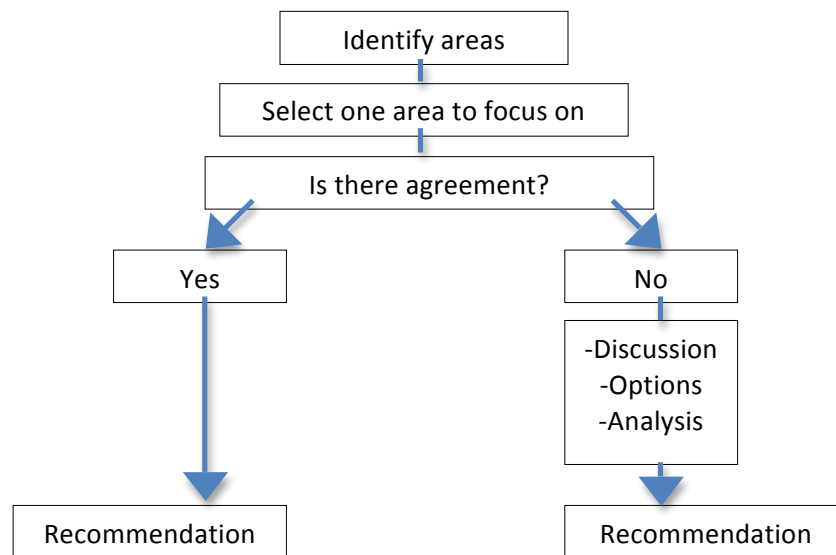
Upcoming meetings will be held March 14 & 15, April 20 & 21, May 9 & 10, and June 13 & 14. All will be evening meetings, locations to be confirmed.

Process for achieving objectives

Pam presented a proposed strategic planning process.

Comment: Let's abbreviate the process and get right to discussing zones.

Pam: Abbreviated process looks like this:



Identification of areas

1. Grizzly Plateau (green on map)
2. Core recovery area (red on map) – including: Hankin Plateau
Webster Lake
Hunter's Basin
Emerson
3. Access route to Meat Cache (through Grizzly Plateau)
4. Starr Basin (yellow on map) – east and west of Mooseskin Johnny Lakes
5. Houston Peak (west of Grizzly Plateau)
6. Other areas? Question: Can we expand the Recovery Area into non-coloured areas? Answer from Jocelyn: Yes

Grizzly Plateau, Winter

Discussion:

Group consensus for winter motorized access to Grizzly Plateau from Sept 16 to April 30. (*Note: a request was made that we include the reason behind dates when we have closures*).

It will continue to be monitored from Thursday to Sunday by the Houston Snowmobile Club with the intention of educating/informing users.

There is a 10-year agreement in place (starting in 2014) with Ben Heemskerck, Regional Manager (North Region) Recreation Sites and Trails BC.

Grizzly Plateau, Summer

Discussion:

Open access is endorsed up to the Gas Stop without a permit.

Options past the Gas Stop:

1. Permit system with timing considerations – to avoid summer calving season. MOE to decide who gets a permit and when.

Comments from Jocelyn Campbell: Could include the specific conditions for permits in group recommendations - governments change.

Notable time periods for caribou:

Critical January 15 to July 15

Most critical May 15 to July 15

Cautionary September 15 to January 15

Low risk July 25 to September 15

(NFB film recommendation from Jocelyn: Being Caribou. Download at

https://www.nfb.ca/film/being_caribou/download/)

Comments: Permits all over the Telkwa Range will dissipate the chances for caribou recovery. Would permitted rides encourage “renegade” riders to go there as well, or discourage them? More people will join the clubs.

It creates an atmosphere of non-compliance.

2. Limited entry draw

3. Requirement to stay on hard packed surfaces. There is 5 to 6 km of hard packed above the Gas Stop. The Gas Stop is signed.

Q: Is there any evidence of people riding off hard packed surfaces?

A: Yes, and that may be considered environmental damage under the law.

Comment: Summer motorized use leads to lots of road maintenance on the part of the Houston club. Summer use disturbs ground lichen in the alpine.

4. Some method of managing dogs in area.

5. Total closure, for three years. Sends a message that we really support the caribou and gives us a chance to see how they will react.

Comment: In our recommendations should we include a rule that if there are caribou in the area people must stay a certain distance away? This must be kept simple and enforceable. We have the technology to see where the animals are.

ACTION: Jocelyn Campbell will look into the legal tools that are available to keep hikers out of an area. Possibilities:

Section 58, Forest and Range Practices Act:

http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/ID/freeside/00_02069_01#section58

Conservancy Areas or Ecological Reserves

Environmental and Land Use Committee (ELUC)

Summary of recommendations for Grizzly Plateau

Area Recommendations	Summer	Winter
Grizzly Plateau		
Below the Gas Stop	Open access	Open access
Above the Gas Stop¹	<p>Non-motorized access allowed July 15 to September 15</p> <p>Depending on caribou use, one motorized ride allowed per year by permit at the discretion of MOE. Timing: August to mid-September. See Example of conditions in Appendix 1.²</p>	Open access

Notes. 1. Dissenting view: The two group members representing conservation values do not agree with the access recommendations for the area above the Gas Stop and propose a complete closure to summer motorized recreation in this area. The members have submitted a written report outlining their views to the group.

2. Bulkley Valley Stewardship Coalition: Support is conditional upon and dependent on the ATVer's commitment not to seek any rides into the Core Recovery Area and only one ride per year into the areas in the Starr Creek zone.

Next meeting: Core Recovery Area and access route to Meat Cache

Comment: We will need mapping or orthophotos which show areas of low, medium and high caribou use based on recent data so that we can meet with our clubs to discuss this area ahead of the next meeting. Maps will include elevation bands.

ACTION: Jocelyn Campbell will provide printed maps to Comment members prior to next meeting.

ACTION: Jocelyn Campbell will ask Debbie Cichowski to attend next meeting and give a 30-minute presentation.

Meeting adjourned, 4:20 PM.

APPENDIX 1

Conditions agreed to for a sanctioned ride. This is an example only. Conditions would need to be written to suit specific circumstances.

- * This approval is for one day in September 2014 only, with no expectation of a repeat occurrence.
- * All riders must be members in good standing of the BV Quadriders club. A maximum of 20 ATV-riders may participate.
- * Trail clearing cannot involve cutting shrubs or trees (dead or alive). Logs blocking access across the trail could be removed for the ride and then returned when leaving.
- * Members must stay on hard packed trail/road at all times.
- * A FLNRO GPS unit must be carried and used to track the ATV route and to record the location of any sighted caribou.
- * Access only when caribou are not in the area. If GPS locations or observations indicate that caribou are in or near the area, then the sanctioned day-ride will be cancelled with no alternative date available. If caribou are observed during the ride all riders must immediately leave the area.
- * Provide at least 1 week notice of the date the ride will occur to the Guide/Outfitter.
- * BV Quadriders will not access Hunter Basin by ATV in 2014 or 2015.
- * One FLNRO rep will accompany the riders to provide access through the gate and may accompany the riders for the duration of the trip.
- * BV Quadriders will continue to work with the VRAM and government on solutions to recreational access in the Telkwa Mountains.