

# Telkwa Mountains Recreation Access Management Advisory Group

Meeting minutes, May 11, 2016. Meeting convened at 5:30 PM, Round Lake Hall, Telkwa, B. C.

## Attendance/Representation:

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

## Guests/Speakers:

Conrad Thiessen senior Wildlife Biologist, Fish & Wildlife, Skeena Region, Ministry of Forests,  
Lands and Natural Resource Operations

**Facilitated by:** Pam Penner

**Recorder:** Jill Dunbar

## Agenda

- **Opening Comments**
- **Summary of Meat Cache**
- **Grizzly Plateau**
  - **Non-motorized access above the Gas Stop**
  - **Dates for winter access**
- **Starr Basin – summer/winter, motorized/non-motorized access**
- **Area East of Mooseskin Johnny**
- **Recommendation package**

## Opening comments

Pam: Reminder that this is a committee, it is not about individual wants. It is also about the caribou.

## Meat Cache

Pam: Recap of vote: For winter motorized the vote for limited access, i.e. sanctioned rides, was rescinded.

Group member: We should be considering non-motorized.

Group member: Where is the government representative tonight - do they not respect this process?

Pam: A biologist will be here. Tony P. would attend if invited by the group.

Meat Cache, winter non-motorized: Discussion: Currently unrestricted. Motorized is open Sept 16 – April 30.

Group member: We should ask Conrad when he arrives.

Group member: Broader issue is effect of non-motorized traffic on caribou.

Meat Cache summer non-motorized: Currently no restrictions. Horses and bikes included.

Calving is in back reaches of the Meat Cache. Recommendation August 1 – Sept 30 full access.

Meat Cache summer motorized: Area is not machine accessible.

Question from group member: Should we restrict horses? Horses could make a big disturbance.

Conrad Thiessen: It is up to the group to recommend whether horses should be restricted or not.

Group member: The BV Horsemen don't know of anyone who has been in there.

Group member: People from Houston could go in there in theory.

Question for Conrad: Will the bike/horse decision apply to the Core? We discussed that, for the Core, bikes and horses are included as non-motorized.

Question for Conrad: What dates are ideal for access for winter motorized and non-motorized?

Pam: Does it impact caribou for people to be in there?

Question for Conrad: What is effect of human non-motorized presence?

CT: The difference between motorized and non-motorized is the speed of movement and area covered. Walking – probability of encountering caribou is lower.

Question for Conrad: when if the hunting season in there?

CT: It ends Sept 30.

Group member: Dates recommended for winter non-motorized are Sept 30 to April 30 for Meat Cache. The voluntary access rules say Sept 16.

Group member: We know that there are kernels in summer so do we need to restrict access for non-motorized?

CT: Caribou use the northern part of the zone. There is not a lot of activity in there at that time so it's probably not a big concern.

Group member: Access to the Meat Cache is closed April 30 – August 1. Hunting opens July 31. Do the caribou calve there?

CT: Hard to say. If there was a full herd there is potential for this.

Group member: Were they calving there when numbers were high?

CT: Can't say.

Group member: Maybe we should restrict access if there may be a calving issue to give caribou the benefit of the doubt.

**Vote:**

| Access to Meat Cache  | Results,<br>May 11 |
|---|--------------------|
| In favour of closure from April 30 to July 31.                                  | 12                 |
| Opposed   | 1                  |
| Abstaining (reason: no need to change the dates. Dates should be same as Core.) | 1                  |
| Members present   | 14                 |

Group member: What about hunters that need to set up camps earlier than the opening date?

CT: Hunters would want to go in earlier.

Group member: It's not a huge concern. There are only 5 tags.

**Grizzly Plateau above the Gas Stop**

Pam: Current dates for summer non-motorized access are July 15 – Sept 15.

Group member: When is the rut?

CT: Late Sept to mid-Oct.

Group member: Should we make opening dates consistent with the rut?

Group member: Dates could be July 31 to Sept 30 for summer non-motorized for both areas to match the hunting and be the window for ATVs.

Group member: Mid-Sept could be the beginning of the rut – should we fall back to Sept 15?

CT: The more people there are, the greater the impact. We would know if caribou are in the area or not.

Group member: The augmented herd did well for many years with access the way it was. Why do we need to change? The herd has crashed at least twice that he knows of and people were going in there.

CT: We weren't monitoring as intensively then so we can't give a specific reason.

Group member: They did well with the pressures that were there.

Group member: Things aren't what they were 20 or 30 years ago. There is more pressure. We are willing to give the caribou a chance and we must do so by law.

Group member: Why are we here if it could be other factors? Is access that different now than it was in 2009 when there was a full herd?

Group member: Industry is doing their part, recreation must do our part.

CT: It is difficult to identify a single cause. It is a combination of causes.

Group member: In 2006 there was a big snowfall – isn't that a consideration?

CT: Yes it is.

**Vote:**

| Access to Grizzly Plateau above the Gas Stop, summer non-motorized | Results,<br>May 11 |
|--|--------------------|
| In favour of open access from August 1 to September 30             | 11                 |
| In favour of open access from August 1 to September 15             | 2                  |
| Abstaining (Reason: No need to change the dates)                   | 1                  |
| Members present  | 14                 |

Group member: Does motorized include helicopter?

Group member: It is anything that makes tracks.

Group member: Helicopters make imprints.

Group member: There are elevation restrictions for helicopters.

Pam: For winter, current dates are Oct 1 – April 30.

Group member: Some caribou might still be rutting on Oct 1.

Group member: We are allowed to snowmobile in there if there is snow after Oct 1.

CT: The rut goes into mid October.

Group member: It is Ok to change to Oct 15 – April 30.

Group member: Could we give them 2 more weeks in case of late rutting. We need to work around the caribou schedule.

CT: The more time that there aren't people there, the better for caribou.

Group member: We usually start snowmobiling there in early November.

**Vote:**

| <b>Access</b> to Grizzly Plateau above the Gas Stop, winter, motorized and non-motorized | Results,<br>May 11 |
|--|--------------------|
| In favour of open access from October 15 to April 30                                     | 8                  |
| In favour of open access from November 1 to April 30                                     | 6                  |
| Members present  | 14                 |

| <b>NO Access</b> to Grizzly Plateau above the Gas Stop, winter/summer, NON-motorized and sanctioned rides | Results,<br>May 11 |
|---|--------------------|
| In favour of no access from April 30* – July 31   | 12                 |
| Opposed   | 1                  |
| Abstain (reason?)   | 1                  |
| Members present   | 14                 |

| <b>NO Access</b> to Grizzly Plateau above the Gas Stop, winter, motorized and non-motorized | Results,<br>May 11 |
|---|--------------------|
| October 1 – October 15  | 8                  |
| October 1 – November 1  | 6                  |
| Members present   | 14                 |

Question for Conrad: What do you think of April 30?

CT: Calves drop in early May. Females move to calving sites in late April. Before April 30 would be better. Issues are calving and low energy stores in late winter.

Question: Would April 15 be better?

CT: Would like to refer to Best Management Practices for industry.

Q: What is bull to cow ratio?

CT: There are enough bulls to impregnate the cows.

Group member: They probably need more time at the end of the breeding season.

Pam: Rationale needed for October 15 – no volunteers.

ACTION: Rationale for November 1 – Jim Easterday will write.

ACTION: Conrad will make a recommendation for an ideal date for April.

Group member: If the impact is the same in each zone dates should be the same.

Group member: The boundary for the Meat Cache should be Denys Creek, not Houston Tommy.

## **Starr Basin**

Group member: How is the zone defined? We have Wade's black-circled area and Conrad's.

Group member: It is the east part of Zone B, from Mooseskin Johnny west. Outer boundary is the no harvest zone boundary.

Group member: Proposes full snowmobile access.

Group member: Conrad, what can you live with? One 4-day trip, or 2 ..?

CT: Difficult to say what the specific impact of a trip is. Less is better for caribou.

Group member: Skiers would like open motorized access to the cabin for maintenance once or twice a year and for access to skiing. It is costly to get there and hard to plan. Club still has tenure although cabin has been condemned. We have a permit. We use an area that is within a day's reach of the cabin – it is a radius.

Group member: Isn't it enough to say we don't go in there if caribou are there?

CT: Not all caribou are collared, and if caribou aren't there it may be because people are there.

Group member: Backcountry skiers hike, fly, or ski to get in. Is a remote experience. There are two groups – the backcountry skiers don't do the cabin maintenance, the Nordic skiers do.

Group member: Snowmobiles travel through the middle of the area.

Group member: The Smithers Snowmobile Association (SSA) has done maintenance in there as well. There is a working relationship. Snowmobilers started going in there after Babine Park was established.

Group member: Maybe the machine access could be accommodated if it is only once a year.

Group member: It is unworkable to allow machine access to the cabin only. Can't be enforced.

Proposes splitting whatever access is available.

Pam: So far there's a little of everything – what about the skiers?

Group member: Concern is user conflicts – skiers don't want areas tracked out. A temporal split is needed.

Group member: There is agreement with SSA that skiers have first dibs and it is closed to snowmobilers for 2 weeks ahead of ski bookings.

Group member: Snowmobilers do not book the cabin. Separation by cabin booking doesn't work.

Pam: Do people go in on day trips?

Group member: Yes and this has nothing to do with booking the cabin.

Pam: What about the caribou?

CT: Caribou use has shifted so there is more use north of the cabin in winter in the few years.

Pam: Is there a way to avoid those areas and still have recreation access?

CT: It is difficult.

Group member: Are sanctioned rides possible?

CT: That would be more manageable. It is potentially a safer spot for caribou.

Group member: That is why skiers are asking for a small amount of use. We recognize that we won't be able to go in more.

Group member: When we applied for the cabin access wasn't restricted. We don't know why that has changed.

Group member: It would be good if users wrote down everything they want.

Backcountry skiers: 2 or 3, 4-day trips. Access by snowmobile or helicopter. Not using cabin.

Nordic skiers: If cabin is moved, would like unrestricted snowmobile access for maintenance and to ski while in there.

Snowmobilers: Full access, in consultation with Conrad, and we don't go in there if caribou are there.

Group member: Respects this but machines have tremendous impact.

CT: How do you manage for the public who go in there? We post locations of caribou, we take monitoring flights, people went in anyway.

Group member: They avoided the caribou.

Group member: Houston users go in from Morice West and we use it for about 4 weeks in Spring. About a dozen people at a time.

Group member: What terrain is the cabin in?

Group member: Subalpine, at the edge of opening.

Group member: With this wish list there would be no caribou. Conrad has to consider that there may be more caribou, and it would be hard to track them all. Caribou recognize that humans have been in there and machines leave traces long after they have gone.

Group member: How much activity affects the caribou? Would the skiing proposed here be a game-changer for the caribou?

CT: There are cumulative impacts.

Group member: What are the other impacts?

CT: Predation, landscape changes, access. Starr cabin is right on the edge of winter habitat. Going north of the cabin has more impact. Covering more area has more impact.

Group member: Has seen caribou in Skillhorn Road area – even with lots of trails and tracks.

CT: "Attractive sink": An area where there is lots of food but predators kill the animals anyway.

Group member: It's a moot point. Herds of 20 or less are very fragile. Any disturbance is too much. We must be conservative.

Group member: One option would be to put the wish lists back a year or two so Conrad can see what the caribou do with no disturbance.

CT: We generally know what good habitat is. With access would see more. But we can't do a controlled experiment.

Group member: Are there records that show caribou migration?

CT: It is possible that there was interchange between populations. The Telkwa herd doesn't move out of the Telkwa mountains. Collaring is somewhat biased, since it is easier to capture animals in the alpine. Survival at higher elevations seems to be high. We don't know about lower elevations.

Group member: Old timers have told of caribou moving along the Telkwa River.

Pam: In April, options were full access, no access and limited access.

Group member: We would need to define limited access.

Group member: There won't be agreement so it will be government making the decision.

Group member: Jocelyn said that full access is off the table.

Group member: There are two types of conflicts that we must address: Human/caribou and different users.

Group member: We could vote on full, no, or some access without defining "some" access until later.

Pam: The "no access" option was pulled and Jim declined to write a paper.

Group member: Our permit gives full access – what has changed?

Group member: The caribou are declining. The permit is a Licence of Occupation for the cabin. The access agreement contains the rules for access.

Group member: Does access mean just to the cabin?

Pam: It is to the whole Starr Basin.

Group member: Is there value in looking at full motorized access and full non-motorized separately?

Group member: It doesn't matter if it is a skier or a snowmobiler riding in on a machine.

Group member: For full access we are really talking about motorized.

Group member: Skiers could be included in limited access. We would limit our motorized activity.

Group member: But if we are booking the cabin, to make it pay we want full access.

Group member: Using Tony's model, we can look at spatial limits and protect the northeast. Then grapple with temporal limits.

Group member: Skiers are after access, which is restricted to a specific route. Going in to go hill climbing requires different management.

Group member: The situation with SARA changes everything.

Starr Basin (summer/winter – motorized/non-motorized)

Defined as:

- WHA no harvest boundary
- Mooseskin Johnny West
- South end to Lower Burnie Lake (excluding park)

**Vote:**

| Access to Starr Basin, winter, motorized and non-motorized                                      | Results,<br>May 11 |
|---|--------------------|
| In favour of full access  | 4                  |
| In favour of limited access (i.e., certain timeframe, access only to cabin (restricted access)) | 9                  |
| Abstaining (Reason: Doesn't use the area)   | 1                  |
| Members present   | 14                 |

**Next Meeting: June 13, 2016**

- **What would limited access look like?**
- **Vote on dates**
- **Starr Basin summer motorized and non-motorized**
- **Mooseskin Johnny East – include in Core?**

**Meeting adjourned 9:30 pm**

DRAFT