

Caribou/Snowmobile Aerial Monitoring Report

Of March 24, 2014

Methods

The aerial monitoring program is conducted as a cooperative program between the Kalispel Tribe, the Defenders of Wildlife, and the Selkirk Conservation Alliance.

An aerial over-flight was conducted of the Southern Selkirk Mountains woodland caribou recovery area to monitor snowmobile user compliance with existing snowmobile use restrictions and to monitor and locate caribou and other important wildlife use areas in relation to areas with snowmobile use restrictions. To conduct aerial monitoring a Cessna 172 fixed wing type aircraft was utilized.

To accurately locate boundaries of areas with snowmobile use restrictions in place, a laptop computer running a geographical information-mapping program (Arc view ver. 3.3) was utilized. In addition to mapping software, the existing arc view extension, DNR gamin, was utilized to connect a handheld GPS system to computer for real-time mapping. In addition to a pilot, a single observer/recorder was utilized.

Conditions

Weather conditions were clear throughout the survey area. Temperatures ranged about 25 to 35 degrees Fahrenheit within the survey area, no wind. The flight originated and concluded from the community airport in Priest River, Idaho. The flight began at approximately 1130 and ended at approximately 1600; total flight time over the survey area was approximately 1.5 hours. A map of the flight path is shown in Figure 1.

Results

Snowmobile Use (only snowmobile use within designated closure areas is reported)

Bunchgrass Meadow/ Molybdenite Ridge Evidence of snowmobile use (tracks or located on Bunchgrass meadow, appearing to originate from south side of meadow from FS road system. Snow mobile use along Molybdenite Ridge was along both the east and western portion of ridge system. Snowmobile use of eastern portion of ridge appeared to emanate from road system in Jungle Creek whereas snowmobile use along west portion of ridge system emanated from road system to south.

Big Snowy Lake Snowmobile tracks seen on the U.S. side of Big snowy Lake and access was along brushed-out International Border from road system in B.C.

Grass Creek, Blue Joe Creek, Continental Mine Snowmobile tracks were observed within the upper portions of Grass and Blue Joe Creek drainages within the designated caribou closure. Access appeared to be from Trapper Creek drainage. Snowmobile use along Continental ridge north of the Mine. Access appeared to be from Continental Mine area.

Cow Creek Snowmobile use and evidence of ‘high marking’ by snowmobile users was observed in Cow Creek within the designated closure area. Access was from the Trapper Creek drainage on IDL lands.

West Fork Cabin. Snowmobile use was observed around West Fork Cabin and use extended up the drainage to the south for several miles. Snowmobile use was within most of the open meadows and sparsely timbered areas within vicinity of the cabin.

Two Mouth Lakes south to Beehive Lake. Tracks of four ‘Snowbikes’ were observed within the Standards Lakes area where the riders proceeded to the Two Mouth Lakes area then north towards Myrtle Lake with use along ridge systems, drainages and ‘bowls” along the way and back.

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Figure 1. Snowmobile tracks on Bunchgrass Meadow.



Figure 2. Snowmobile tracks on Big Snowy Top Lake.



Figure 3. Snowmobile tracks showing hithmarking at back end of Cow Creek.



Figure 4. Snow Cycle tracks within designated closure between Two Mouth Lake and Myrtle Lake.

