

Caribou/Snowmobile Aerial Monitoring Report

Of February 19, 2011

Methods

The aerial monitoring program is conducted as a cooperative program between the Advocates for the West, the Defenders of Wildlife, Idaho Conservation League, Kalispell Tribe of Indians and 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 182 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. Snowmobile tracks within snowmobile closure areas were recorded, as were any recognizable wildlife tracks. The monitoring flight originated and ended at the community airport in Priest River, Idaho.

Conditions

Weather conditions were clear with no cloud cover. High winds between 10 and 20 mph below 7,000 feet. The last measurable snow was 24 to 48 hours prior to flight. Snow tracking conditions were anticipated to be good based on time since last snow and snow conditions, but in retrospect snow tracking condition from the aerial perspective were poor because of high winds at low elevations, which obscured most track evidence from the past few days.

The flight began at approximately 1000 and ended at approximately 1300, total flight time was approximately 4.2 hours. A map indicating flight path is shown on Figure 1.

Results

Snowmobile Use

Because of unanticipated weather conditions which obscured all evidence (tracks) of snowmobile use from the past few days, thus the only evidence snowmobile use that was observed was from the day of the flight.

Observed snowmobile use during this flight was within areas such as Roman Nose Lakes, Trapper Creek, Sundance Burn Area, on most roads which were open for use and on IDL lands which where snowmobile use was not restricted. Use within these areas was considerably heavy with lots of active use occurring. All snowmobile use during the time-frame of flight was within boundaries of areas where no snowmobile restrictions were in place. No evidence of snowmobile use was observed within areas where snowmobile use was restricted.

Within the British Columbia portion of the monitoring area, snowmobile tracks were observed on most of the road systems and on Boundary Lake., which is north of the International Border. A considerable number of tracks from ‘telemark’ skiing were observed within much of Stagleap provincial park, especially within the southern portion of the park. Helicopter activity was observed north of highway 3, within the park and was associated with avalanche control and monitoring programs (DeGroot, pers comm.).

Wildlife

Few wildlife tracks were observed during this monitoring flight. An attempt was made to locate the reported caribou tracks within the Berry Creek area. No tracks were observed within this drainage or adjacent drainages either because the animals which made the tracks either had ‘moved on’ or that the surface winds that were previously mentioned, obscured any track evidence. Few other wildlife tracks were observed during the flight and the only tracks that were observed were during the latter portion of the flight. Other wildlife tracks that were observed included snowshoe hare and moose. No caribou, wolf or wolverine tracks were observed.

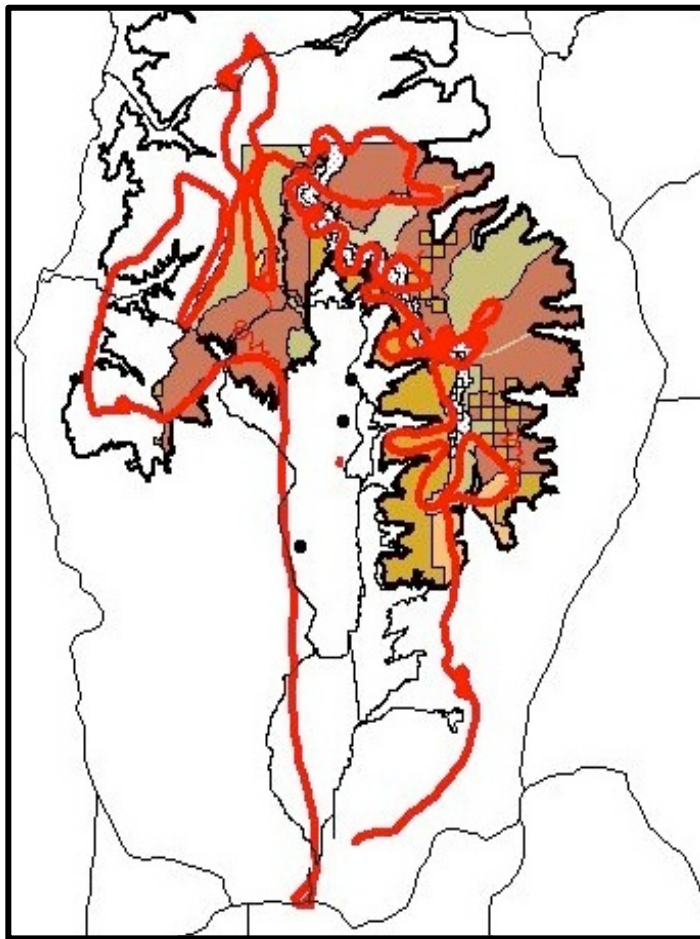


Figure 1. Map of southern portion of caribou recovery area, showing flight path (2/19/2011) taken in red

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