

## **Caribou/Snowmobile Aerial Monitoring Report**

***Of February 27, 2012***

### **Methods**

The aerial monitoring program is conducted as a cooperative program between the Advocacy of the West, the Defenders of Wildlife, the Idaho Conservation League, 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 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. Because of the conditions of the community airport at Priest River, the monitoring flight originated and ended at the community airport in Sandpoint, Idaho.

### **Conditions**

Weather conditions were generally clear with occasional cloud cover within the western portion of the survey area. Snow tracking conditions were generally good based on time since last snow and snow conditions. It was estimated that approximately 48 hours days had elapsed since the last snowfall over much of the survey area. The western portion of the survey area that included the Shedroof Divide, Crowell Ridge, Molybdenite Ridge and Bunchgrass Meadows were not surveyed because of low cloud cover.

Very little air turbulence was encountered during flight. A map indicating flight path is shown on Figure 1. The flight began at approximately 1200 and ended at approximately 1500; total flight time was approximately 3 hours. A map of the flight path is shown in Figure 1.

### **Results**

#### ***Snowmobile Use***

Snowmobile use within the surveyed area was generally “light” when compared to previous winter surveys and is likely due to the day of week (Tuesday) and that it was only less than 48 hours since last snowfall. Snowmobile tracks that may have been made during the earlier part of the previous weekend were not likely visible as they were likely covered by snow, except in a few small wind swept areas.

Violations of the snowmobile closure were observed within the vicinity of West Fork Cabin where older snowmobile tracks were observed south of the cabin within some of the small open areas. Snowmobile tracks were also observed on Continental Lake, which is also within a closed area. It appeared that access to

Continental lake was from road # 1382 when snowmobile use is allowed but restricted to the route only. Grass creek

Evidence of snowmobile use was seen on Standard Lakes, within the Trapper Creek Basin, Upper reaches of Grass Creek, Cow Creek, Roman Nose Lakes and within the Sundance Burn, all within areas designated as being open for snowmobile use. Access to the Grass Creek area by snowmobiles apparently was through one of the lower lying ridges between Grass Creek and Cow Creek that are within the open area.

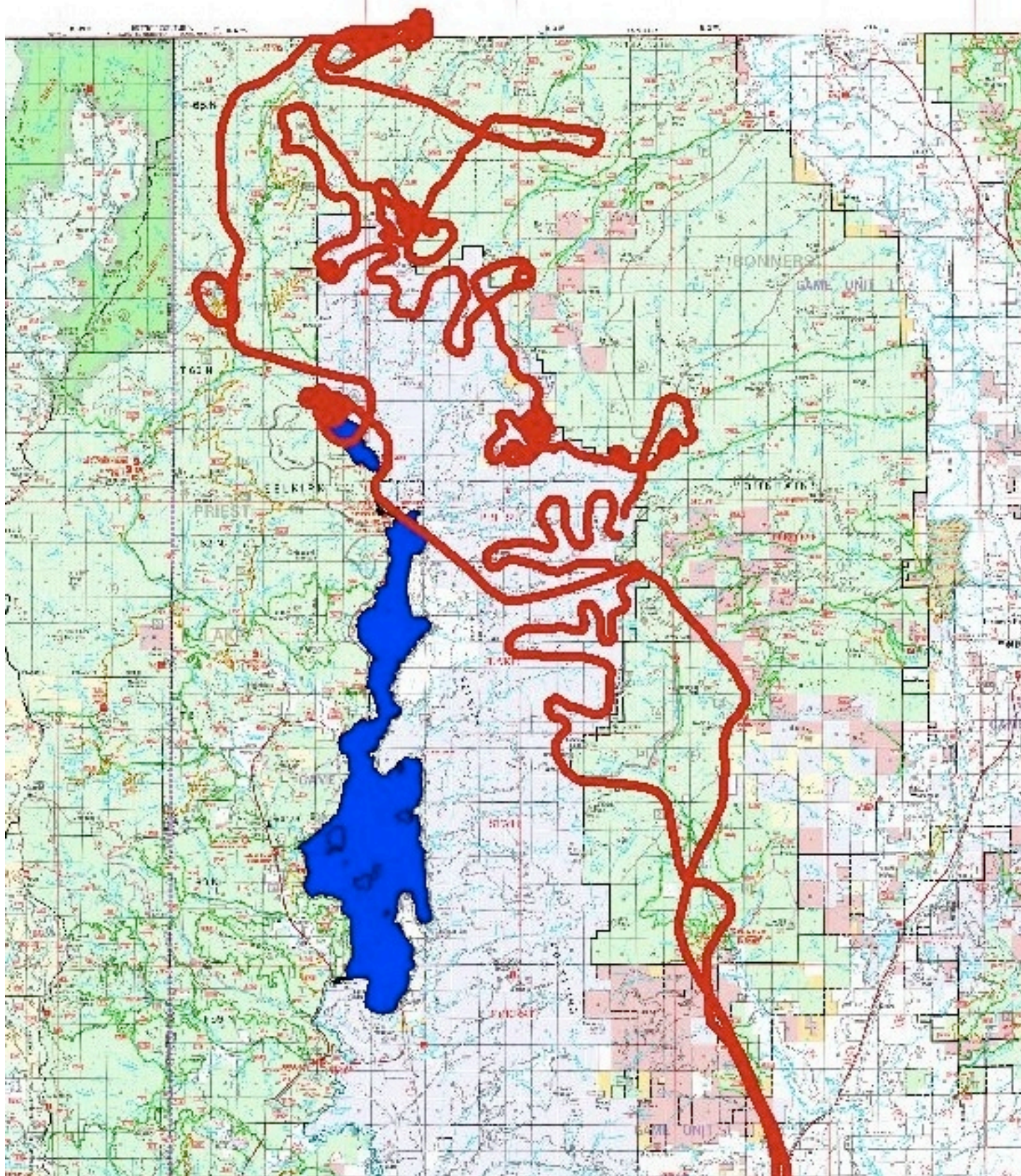
No snowmobile tracks were visible on the Pack River road within the closure area. No evidence of snowmobile use was seen within Horton ridge, Abandon Creek or Hidden Lake. Snowmobile tracks were also visible on the county maintained road through Shorty Pass, but no evidence of use off this road was visible.

### ***Wildlife***

Possible mountain goat tracks were observed within the upper reaches of Smith Creek and along Green Bonnet Mountain. Possible wolverine tracks were observed within the Abandon Creek drainage below ridge system northeast of Lionshead. Recent wolf tracks were observed within Malcolm Creek drainage and the Upper Priest River drainage. Caribou were not observed during this flight because of weather conditions.



*Figure 1. Map of southern portion of caribou recovery area, showing flight path (2/27/2012) taken in red.*







*Figure 1. Photo showing snowmobile tracks in vicinity of West Fork Cabin.*





*Figure 2 Photo of potential wolverine tracks within Abandon Creek Drainage.*

Timothy Layser  
Wildlife Biologist  
Selkirk Conservation Alliance