

Telkwa Caribou Recovery Area VRAMG – Conservation Group

Summer Recreation Proposal – Modified February 26, 2016

Summer caribou habitat is not as critical as winter habitat due to abundance of high-quality forage and ease of access by caribou to all parts of the range without the risk of avalanche or deep soft snow. On the other hand, most predation of caribou takes place in summer rather than in winter due to presence of bears in summer combined with caribou calving and ease of travel by all predators.

Motorized use in summer can easily displace caribou even if the driver never sees the caribou. We propose that all summer motorized recreation should be prohibited above 1400 metre elevation throughout the Telkwa Range. That restriction conforms to current access regulations for the new mountain goat Limited Entry Hunt established in the southeast portion of the Telkwa Caribou Recovery area in 2011. In fact the season dates for the new mountain goat LEH were designed to match the hiking season in the northern portion of the Core Area.

The fate of summer non-motorized recreation is a more difficult decision. We have found very little scientific research on caribou and hikers other than a strong argument against dogs. Most of the Telkwa Range is remote for hikers with the exception of the Core Recovery Area and the loss of the Goathorn Creek bridge means that few hikers will be accessing the Hunter Basin, Webster Lake and Hankin Plateau trails. Over the last decade, hikers have obeyed guidelines and voluntary access restrictions willingly and consistently. We expect compliance to continue.

Any non-motorized access to the Starr Creek area would place hikers in the centre of the caribou travel corridor east to west and will likely displace caribou, Helicopter access should be controlled.

The impact of hikers on caribou is much less than that of motorized vehicles due to the slow walking speed, small distance travelled and a lack of noise and fumes. A few hikers during the current July 15 to September 30 opening may not displace any caribou but many hikers or a large group may indeed cause displacement. Dogs should never be taken into the Telkwa Caribou Recovery area. We will leave the final decision for non-motorized access in the Core Area to Fish and Wildlife staff .

Our proposal:

We propose a closure of all summer motorized recreation under the Wildlife Act for the entire Telkwa Caribou Recovery Area over 1400 metres elevation with the exception of the main Grizzly trail to the “Gas Stop”. Non-motorized recreation shall be closed except that access to the Core Area and the Grizzly Plateau shall remain open from July 15 to September 30, subject to the approval of Fish and Wildlife staff. The closure shall be in force for a term of three years commencing immediately. At the end of the term, the closure shall be reviewed and lifted or renewed as necessary.