

Draft Caribou/Snowmobile Aerial Monitoring Report

January 22, 2010

Methods

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 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 existing areas of snowmobile use restrictions, 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 via an 'usb-to-garmin' connection cable. In addition to pilot, a single observer/recorder were 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 generally clear with occasional high clouds and valley fog in areas. A high degree of turbulence was experienced which resulted from the combination of high winds and orthographic influences. Because of turbulence, flight elevations generally were above 7500 to 8000 feet.

Snow tracking conditions were marginal to adequate based on time since last snow and snow conditions. It was estimate that approximately 2 days had elapsed since last snow over much of the survey area.

Snow depths recorded at Bunchgrass Meadows SNOTEL site indicated a snow depth of 58 inches for the day of flight and SNOTEL site at Hidden lake recorded 66 inches.

Results

As a result of air turbulence, the monitoring flight was generally restricted to areas where an over flight was determined safe. A map indicating flight path is shown on figure 1. The flight began at approximately 1000 and ended at approximately 1330.

Few wildlife tracks were observed primarily because of poor snow tracking conditions, flight altitude and time of year. Two caribou were observed within the headwaters of the Salmo River, within the Salmo Priest Wilderness. Based on two animals size, it is

believed that the two caribou observed were a cow and calf. Based on the number of day beds observed on the ridge, there is a possibility to additional caribou were in the vicinity but were not observed. Other wildlife track were observed within the Headwaters of Malcolm Creek and appeared to be that of a single moose, which are not uncommon within that area during the winter.

Snowmobile intrusions into closed areas were observed within the Pack River drainage, Continental Mine, Grass Creek and Abandon Creek. Within Pack River, snowmobile track were observed on the closed road system to the end of road near Harrison Lake. Snowmobile tracks with this area also indicated 'high marking' activity within several avalanche chutes which were adjacent to the road system. With Abandon Creek, evident of snowmobile activity was also observed throughout the private parcel with the abandon Creek closure with several sets of track exiting the private parcel onto the IDL closure east and north of the private land parcel. It appeared that access was gained to the private parcel the road system, east through and across the drainage then on the private parcel of land. These tracks only entered into restricted lands by several hundred feet. Within the Continental Mine area, snowmobile track were observed throughout the private parcel and on adjacent national forest systems lands within the surrounding closure to the north of the private parcel. These tracks only entered into the closed area by several hundred feet. Additional track were also observed, off of FSR 1388 to near the vicinity of Continental Mine. Snowmobile tracks were observed on the road system within upper end of the Grass Creek drainage and were believed to have come from the roads systems to the north, but were not followed.

Snowmobile tracks were observed on the Harvey Creek Road system and lands immediately adjacent to the road, south to the vicinity of Bunchgrass meadows. Not snowmobile tracks were observed on Bunchgrass Meadows or on Molybdenite Ridge.

Immediately adjacent to the border with British Columbia, snowmobile use was observed north of the border within the vicinity of Crutch Creek and on the small lake east of Big Snowy Mountain. To access the small lake east of Big Snowy Mountain, snowmobilers are traveling for a road system in British Columbia to the International border line and following the line east to the lake. Additionally, extensive snowmobile use was observed on Boundary Lake, which is northeast of Kanisku Mountain. Boundary Lake is within British Columbia, immediately north of the international border.

Overall very little off road snowmobile use was observed during this over flight and was likely a result of lower snow conditions within many of the popular areas, the time of week (as this flight was conducted on Friday) and the fact that it is still early in the winter use season.

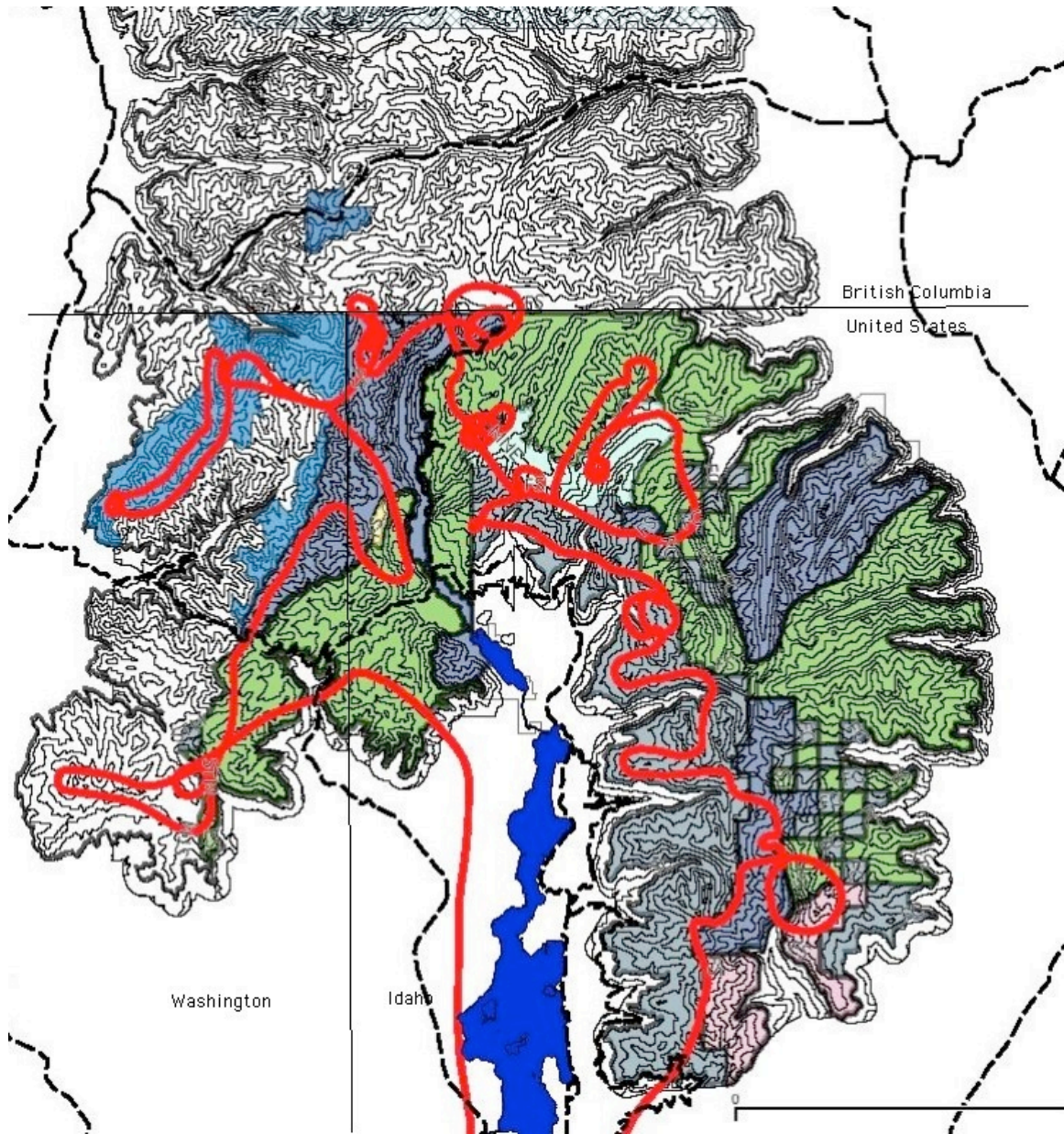


Figure 1. Map of southern portion of caribou recovery area, showing flight path (1/22/2010) taken in red. Area marked in blue and green indicated various winter use restrictions in place.

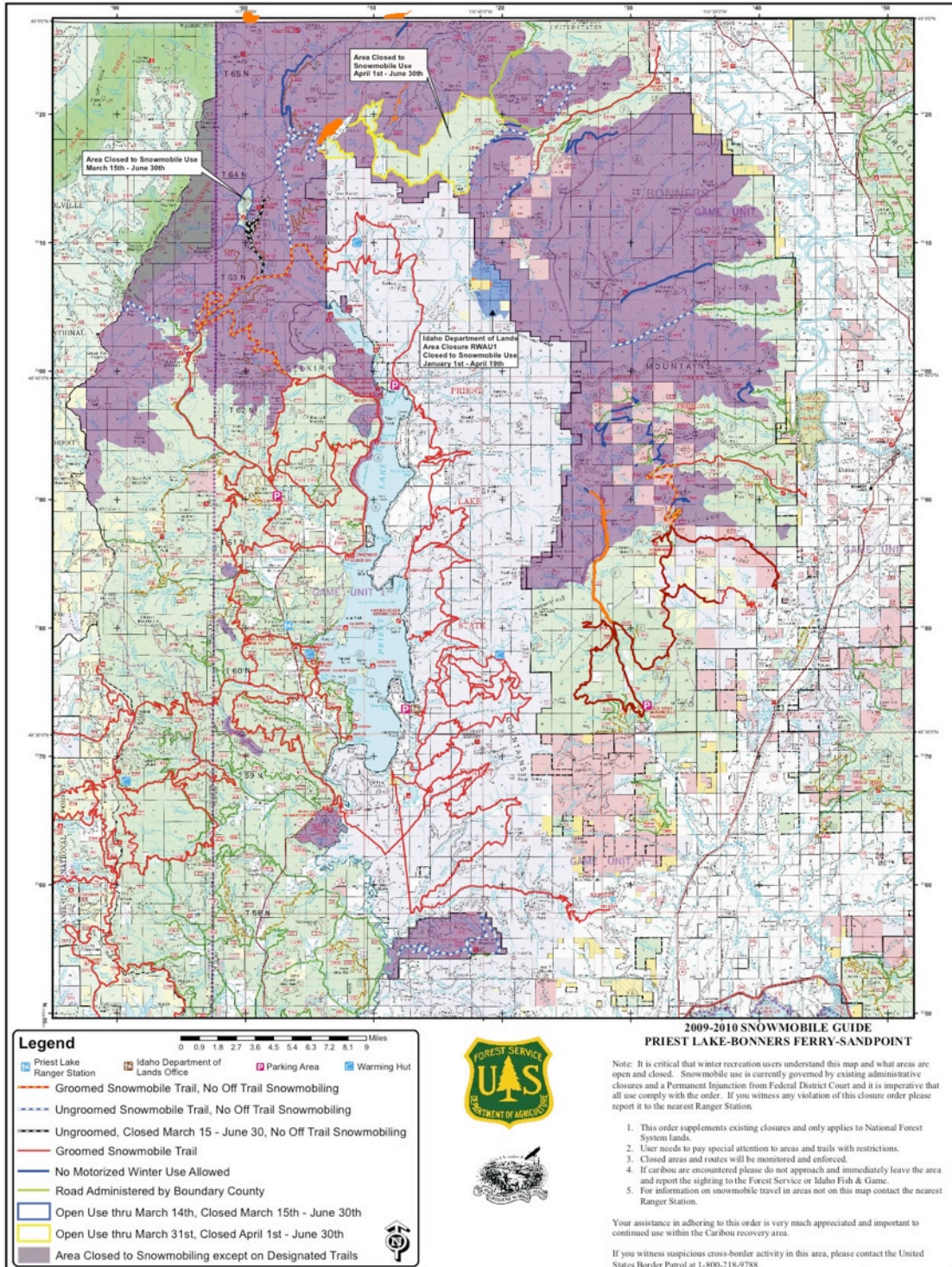


Figure 2. Map of surveyed area, with areas of snowmobile use within restricted areas shown in orange.