

Draft Caribou/Snowmobile Aerial Monitoring Report

Of March 24, 2010

Methods

An aerial over-flight was conducted of the Southern Selkirk Mountains woodland caribou recovery area with an objective 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 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 generally clear with occasional high cloud cover. Snow tracking conditions were generally good based on time since last snow and snow conditions. It was estimated that approximately 1.5 days had elapsed since the last snow over much of the surveyed area. Some new snow had accumulated at the higher elevation since the last monitoring flight but had now been substantial amounts to completely cover older tracks. There was some difficulty discerning older tracks from those snowmobile track which had been put down over the weekend. It appeared that the persistence of older tracks which was heavily dependent on aspect to sun (solar radiation and aspect for prevailing wind).

Results

No 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 1630.

Snowmobile tracks were observed within the IDL snowmobile closure within **Abandon Creek**. It appeared that the snowmobile tracks were from the previous weekend.

Evidence of recent snowmobile activity was observed within the closed area along ridgeline between **Continental Mountain** and **Trapper peak**. Snowmobile tracks were observed within closed area along saddle between **Trapper Creek** and **Cow Creek** drainages and between Trapper Creek and Grass Creek drainages. No recent snowmobile tracks were observed within closed area at the headwaters of the Cow Creek drainage. No snowmobile tracks were observed on road systems in **Blue Joe Creek** although recent snowmobile tracks were observed on road system passing north through **Saddle Pass**. Recent snowmobile tracks were observed along ridge between **Trapper Creek** and **Grass Creek**.

On the Colville National Forest, fresh snowmobile tracks were observed on the south side of **Bunchgrass Meadows**.

Recent snowmobile activity was observed on **small lake on west side of Big Snowy Mountain**. Snowmobiles gained access to lake via a road system in British Columbia and through the 'brushed out' border, which passes through the lake.

Snowmobile tracks were observed on **Boundary Lake** in British Columbia, which is northeast of **Kanisku Mountain** and approximately .4 miles north of the international border. A few moose tracks were observed along **Kanisku Mountain** within an area where they were located during a previous flight.

Wolf tracks were observed along **Hughes Ridge** on the old road system which is between Hughes Ridge Lookout, northward to the proposed wilderness boundary. **Wolf tracks** were also observed along the lower portions of **Malcolm Creek**, although by the number of tracks it appeared that only a few individuals were in this group traveling together.

Possible **wolverine tracks** were observed along the headwaters of **Grass Creek** extending from the ridgeline between Trapper and Grass Creeks and into the timber farther down the drainage in Grass Creek.

Bear tracks were observed with avalanche chute on north side of **Big Snowy Mountain**. Tracks originated from the ridgeline and proceeded down slope for approximately one mile and entered into thicker timber near the border with British Columbia. Given the location of these tracks it was speculated that these maybe the tracks of a grizzly bear, although that could not be confirmed.

Recent caribou tracks were observed within vicinity of **Little Snowy Top Mountain** in the same general area where they had been detected during previous surveys. Caribou were not observed during this monitoring flight.

Within the **Upper Smith Creek** drainage ungulate tracks were again observed which were thought to be that of either a single moose or possibly a caribou. Because the animal was again located within small group of timber and could not be observed, I was unable positively confirm the species identification. I later learned that Idaho Department of Fish and Game confirmed a moose at this location, which is based on a visual observation of the animal while conducting a helicopter moose census the same day.

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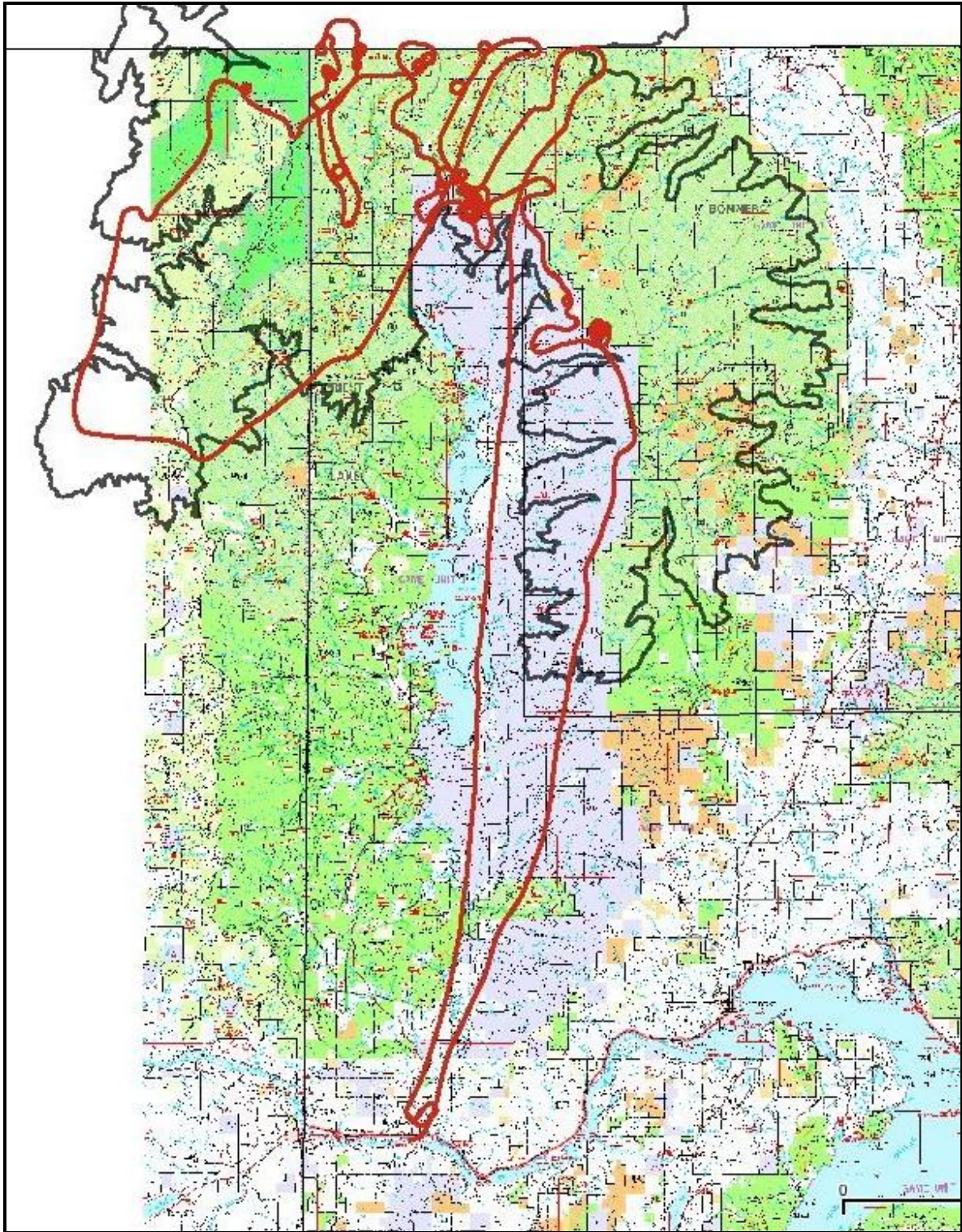


Figure 1. Map of southern portion of caribou recovery area, showing flight path (3/15/2010) taken in green.

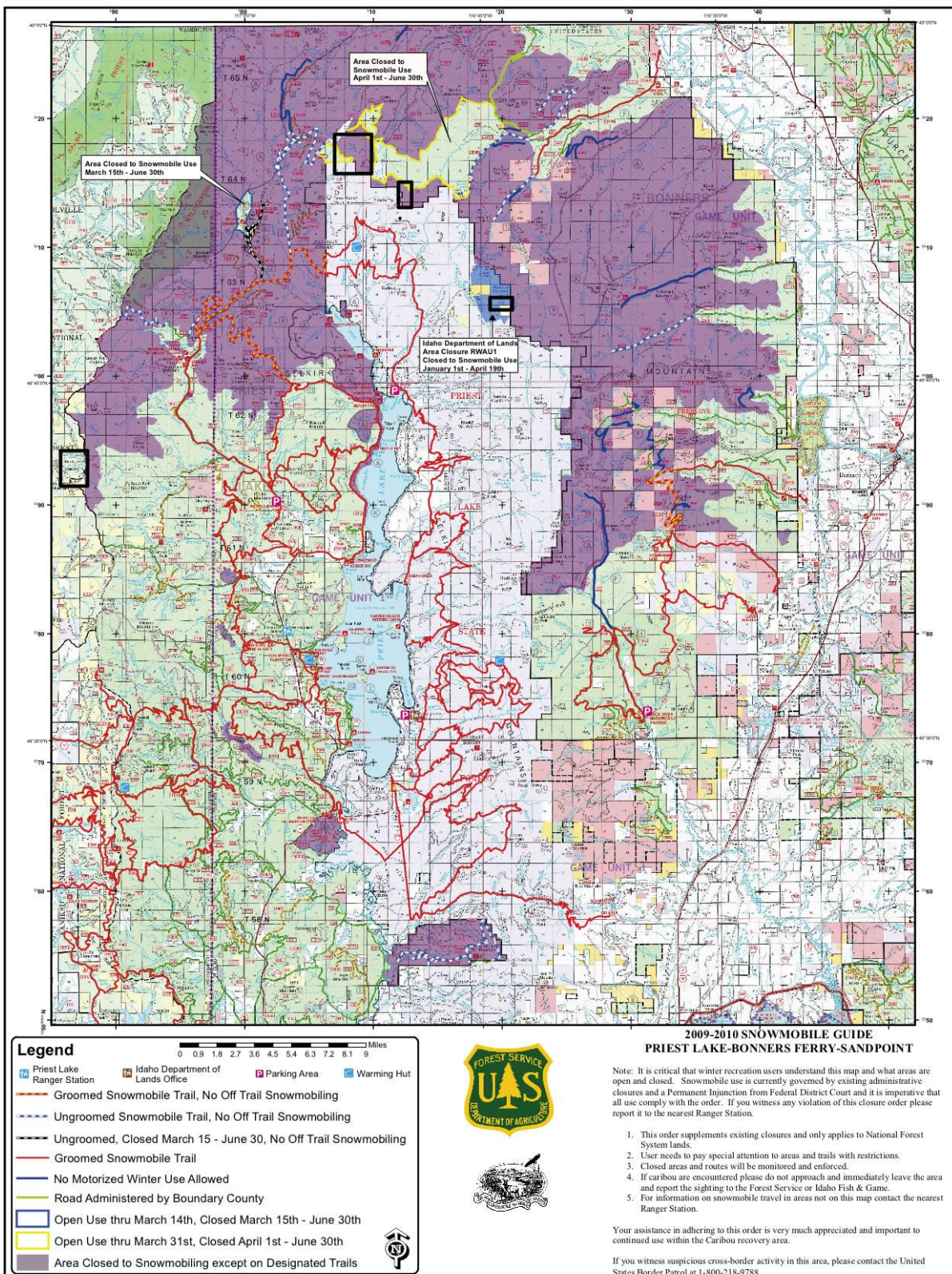


Figure 2. Map showing locations of snowmobile intrusions into areas where winter recreation use is restricted.



Figure 3. Snowmobile tracks within closed area in Abandon Creek.

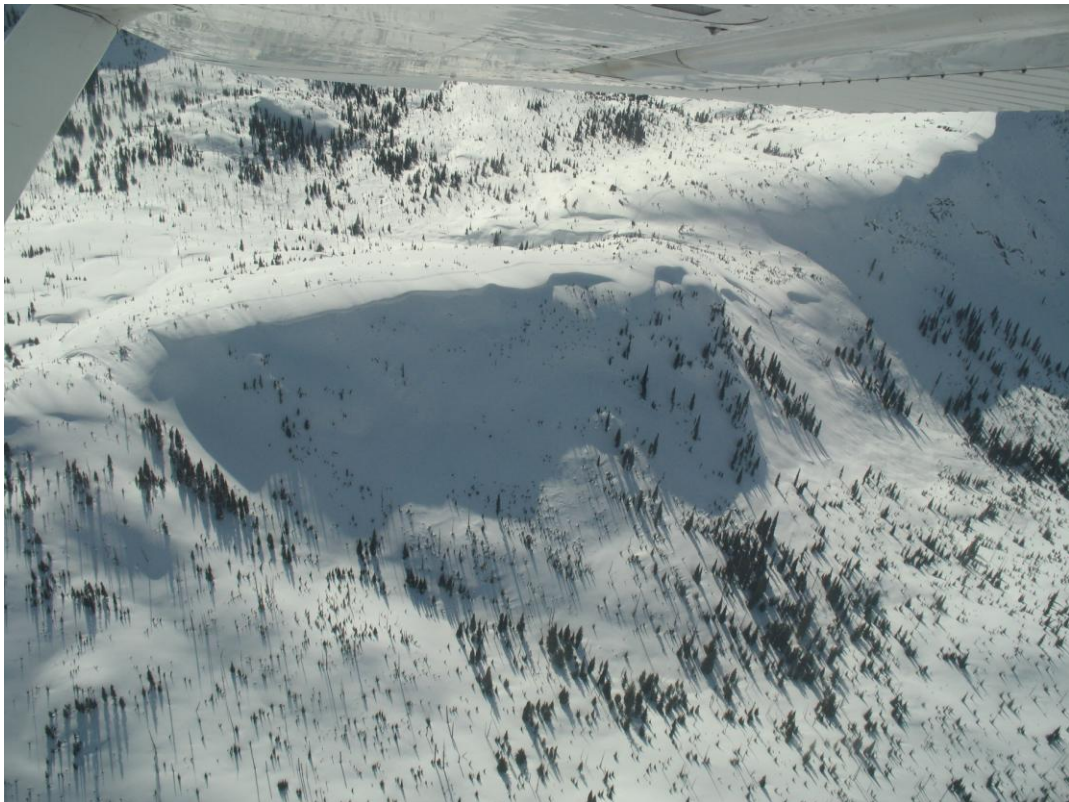


Figure 4. Snowmobile tracks within closed area along ridge system dividing Trapper Creek and Grass Creek drainages.

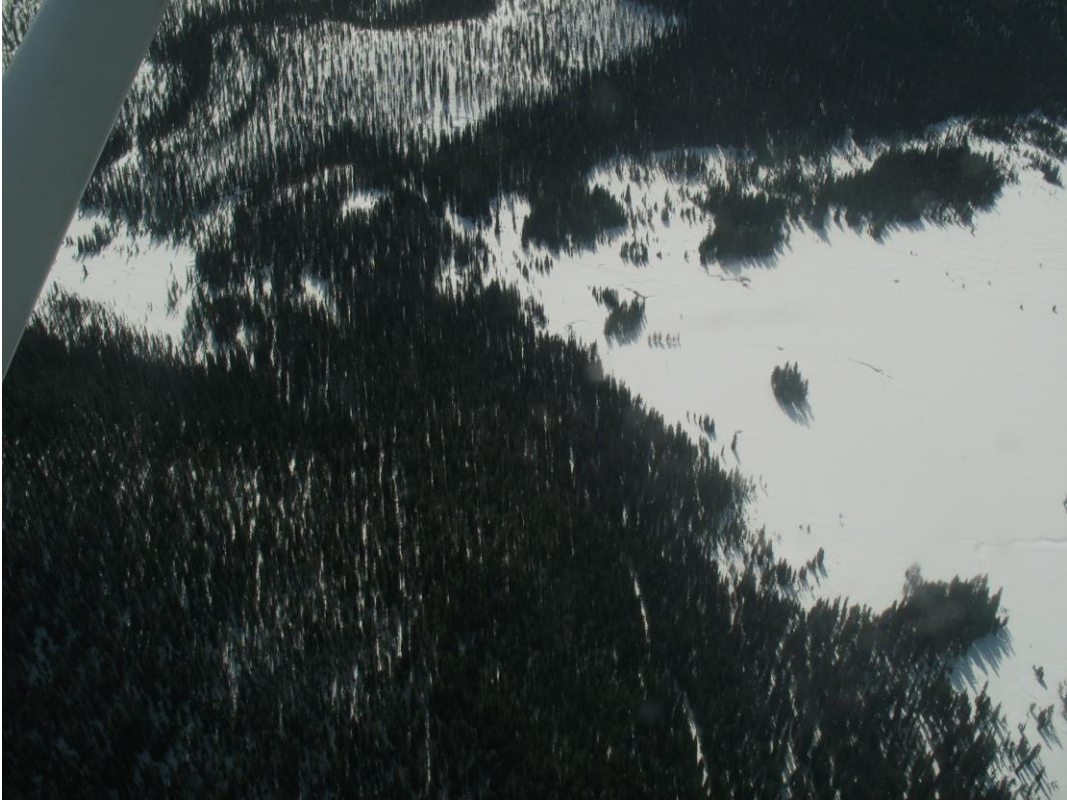


Figure 5. Snowmobile tracks along south edge of Bunchgrass Meadows on the Colville National Forest.