

Draft Caribou/Snowmobile Aerial Monitoring Report

Of March 5, 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 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 good based on time since last snow and snow conditions. It was estimated that approximately 2 to 3 days had elapsed since the last snow over much of the surveyed area.

Snow depths recorded at Bunchgrass Meadows SNOTEL site indicated a snow depth of 67 inches for the day of flight and SNOTEL site at Hidden Lake recorded 73 inches.

Results

Very little air turbulence was encountered during flight. A map indicating flight path is shown on Figure 1. The flight began at approximately 1300 and ended at approximately 1630. A map of the flight path is shown in Figure 1.

Snowmobile intrusions into closed areas were observed within the Abandon Creek, West Fork Smith Creek, Cow Creek, Trapper Creek, Trapper Peak, Hidden Lake, and Bunchgrass Meadows. A map showing areas where snowmobile intrusions were detected during this flight is shown in Figure 2.

Recent snowmobile activity was evident by tracks on **Bunchgrass Meadows**, **Molybdenite Mountain** and **Crowell Ridge** were surveyed but no snowmobile tracks were detected. 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.

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.

Numerous moose tracks were observed along east slopes of **Kanisku Mountain** and other older wildlife tracks were also observed. It was believed that these older tracks were not moose tracks based on track pattern. Snowmobile tracks were observed on **Boundary Lake** in British Columbia.

Recent snowmobile activity was observed in 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. No 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 on the north side **Hidden Lake**, near the tree line. Older snowmobile tracks could also be seen on Hidden Lake and were likely resulted from use over the past several weeks as they were partially covered by snow. Hidden lake is within the closed area, although FSR #2545 that leads to Hidden Lake is open for snowmobile use but snowmobile use is restricted to the road prism.

Recent snowmobile use was observed within most of the forested openings south of **West Fork Cabin** and several tracks extended west and upslope towards **Joe Peak**.

Snowmobile tracks were observed within the **Abandon Creek** drainages along the southern portions of the closure put in place by the Idaho Department of Lands. Snowmobilers were gaining access to this area via roads system in section 20 and following drainages southwards then crossing the drainage to snowmobile along the northern slopes of Lions Head Ridge.

Recent snowmobile tracks were observed on **Kent Lake**, and users likely traveled several through the dense timber along Lion Creek to gain access to this point. Several of the snowmobile tracks within this area were along the slopes to the east of Kent Lake and closely approach the closed area boundary, but it could not be determined accurately if they entered the closed area.

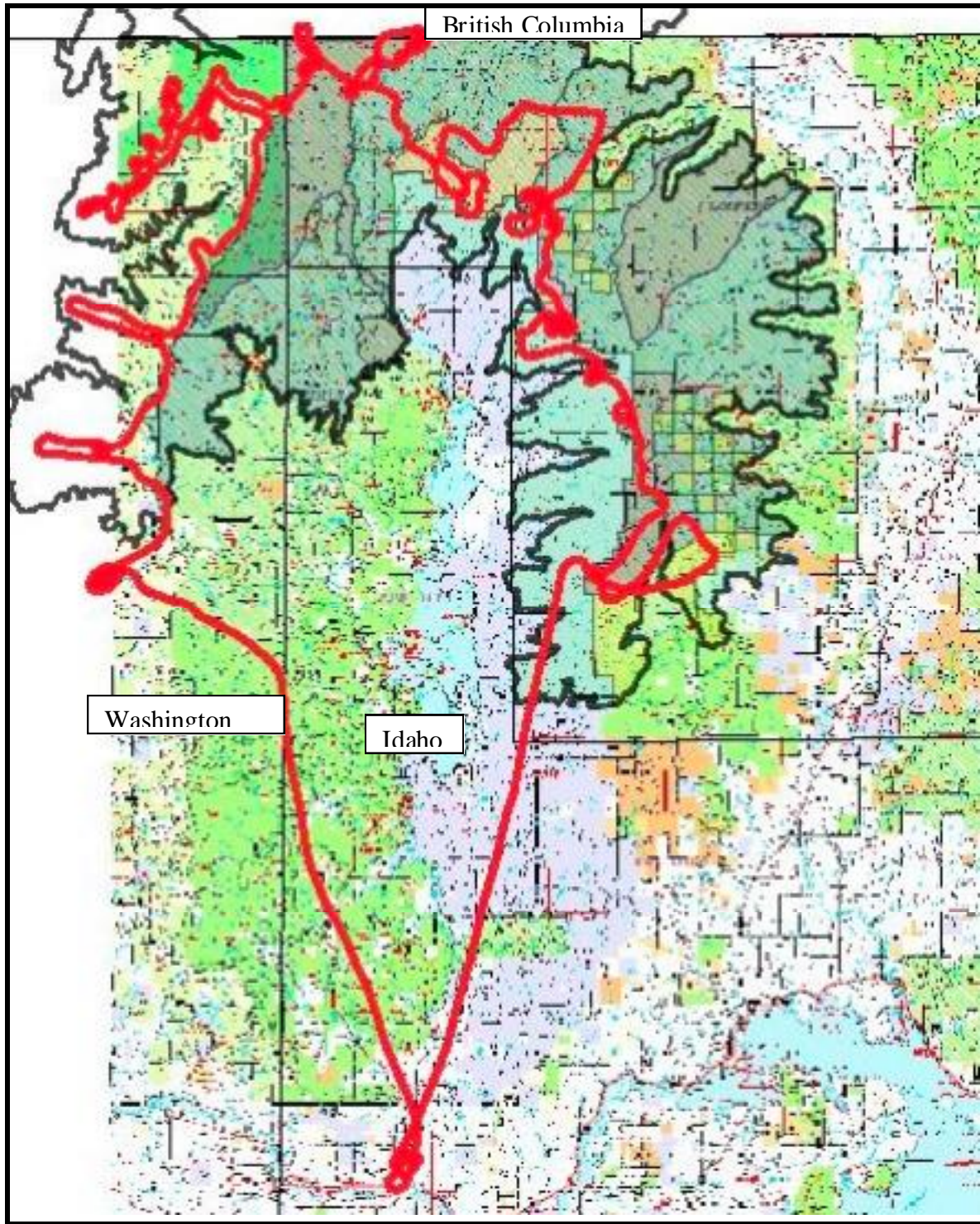


Figure 1. Map of southern portion of caribou recovery area, showing flight path (3/5/2010) taken in red.

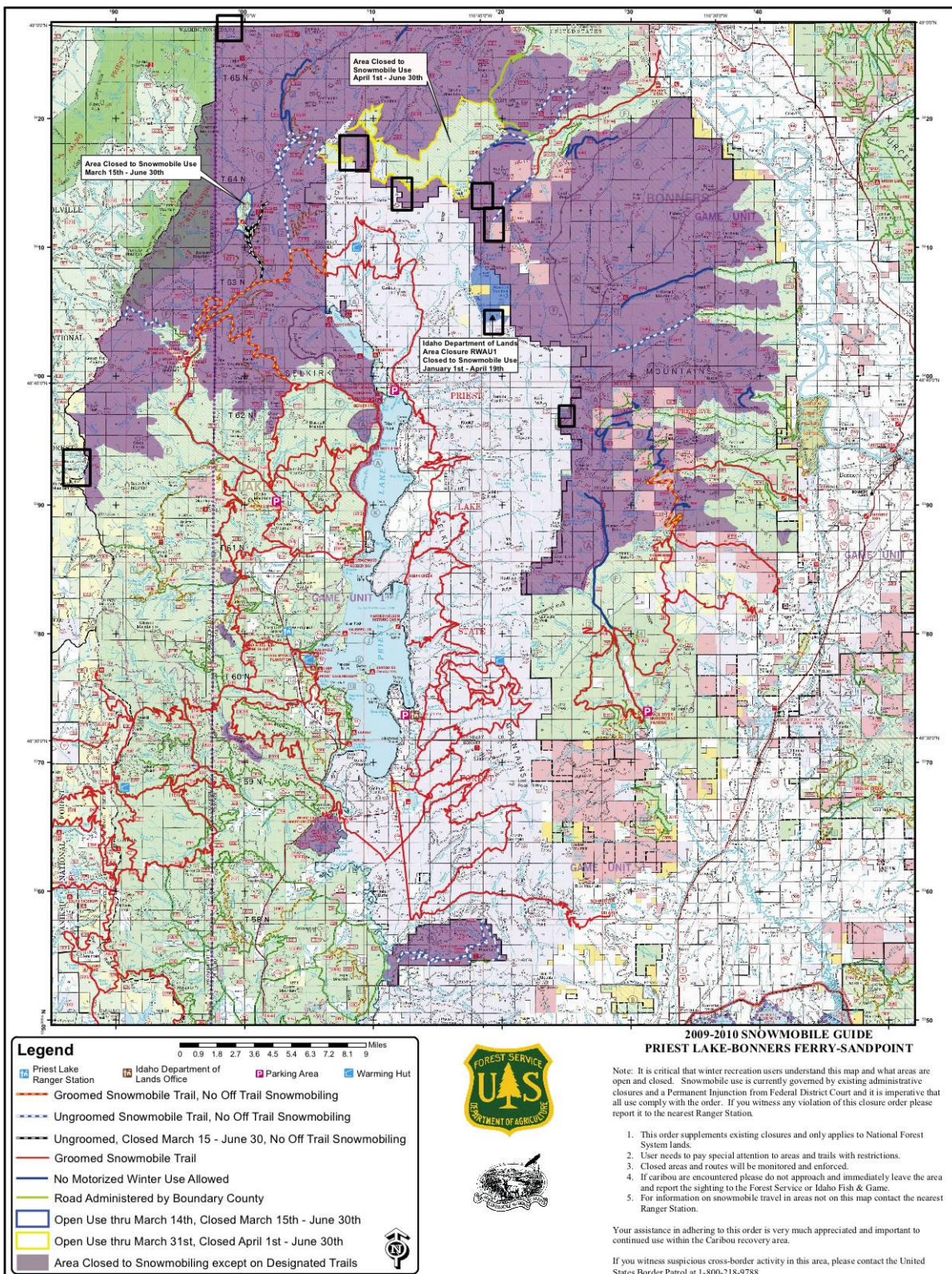


Figure 2. Map showing locations of snowmobile intrusions into areas where winter recreation use is restricted.



Figure 3. Picture of Bunchgrass Meadow showing snowmobile tracks (3/5/2010).

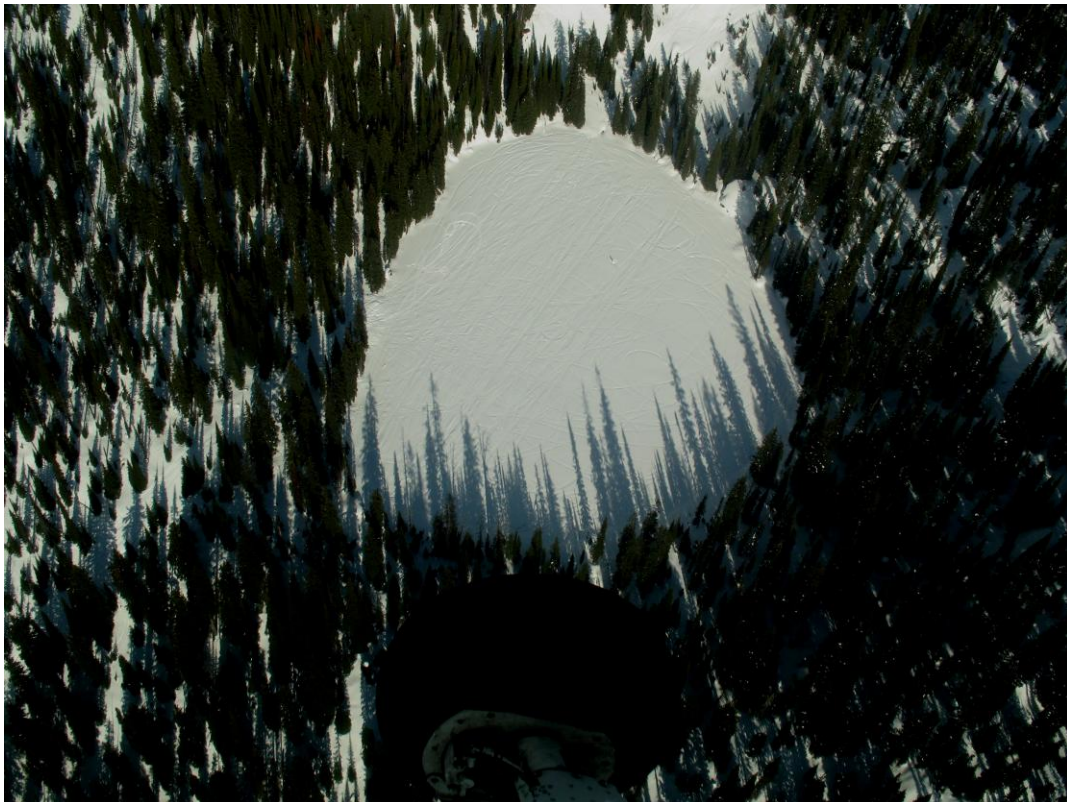


Figure 4. Picture of snowmobile tracks on small lake on west side of Big Snowy Mountain.



Figure 5. Picture of snowmobile tracks on ridgeline between Trapper Peak and Continental Mountain.



Figure 6. Picture snowmobile tracks on saddle between Trapper Creek and Cow Creek drainages.



Figure 7. Picture of snowmobile tracks on Hidden Lake.

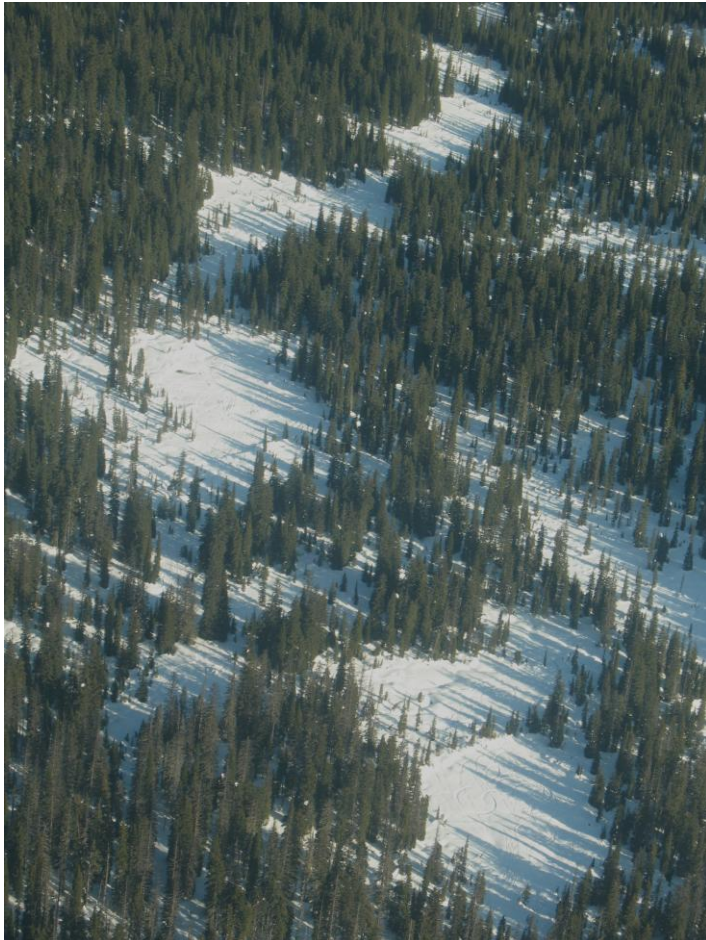


Figure 8. Picture of snowmobile tracks south of West Fork Cabin.

Timothy Laysen
Wildlife Biologist
Selkirk Conservation Alliance