

Caribou/Snowmobile Aerial Monitoring Report

Of March 11, 2013

Methods

The aerial monitoring program is conducted as a cooperative program between the Kalispel Tribe, the Defenders of Wildlife, 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 clear within the very southern portion of the survey area with high cloud cover and moderate turbulence that diminished during the duration of the survey flight. Temperatures ranged about 25 to 35 degrees Fahrenheit within the survey area, no wind. The flight originated and concluded from the community airport in Sandpoint, Idaho. The flight began at approximately 1130 and ended at approximately 1600; total flight time was approximately 4.5 hours. A map of the flight path is shown in Figure 1.

Results

Snowmobile Use (only snowmobile use within designated closure areas is reported)

Cow Creek Snowmobile use and evidence of 'high marking' by snowmobile users was observed in Cow Creek. It snowmobile tracks indicated that access was from the Trapper Creek drainage on IDL lands.

Grass Creek and Blue Joe Creek Snowmobile tracks were observed within the upper portions of Grass and Blue Joe Creek drainages and access was from Trapper Creek

Big Snowy Lake Snowmobile tracks seen on the U.S. side of Big snowy Lake and access was along brushed-out International Border road system in B.C.

Bunchgrass Meadow Snowmobile tracks were documented at Bunchgrass Meadow on the smaller meadow which is located on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest.

West Fork Cabin Snowmobile use was observed around West Fork Cabin and use extended up the drainage to the south for several miles. Snowmobile use was within most of the open meadows and sparsely timbered areas.

Wildlife

Mountain goat tracks were observed at three locations in the vicinity of Upper Smith Creek during flight. Wolverine tracks were observed the eastern portion of Bugle Ridge and north of Hidden Lake. One set of (potential) wolf tracks were seen at Bunchgrass Meadows.

Tim Layser
Wildlife Biologist
Selkirk Conservation Alliance

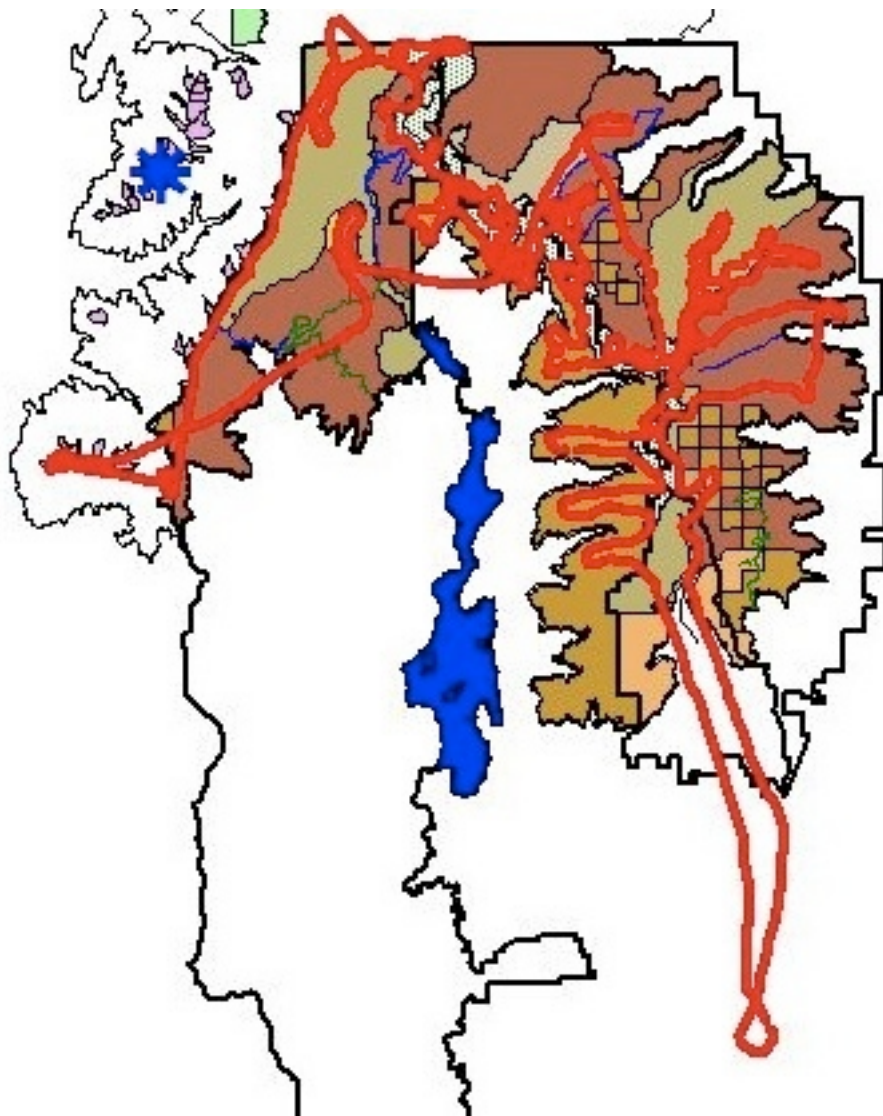


Figure 1. Map of southern portion of caribou recovery area, showing flight path (2/15/2013) taken in red.



Figure 1 Snowmobile tracks within south end of Cow Creek.



Figure 2 Snowmobile tracks in closure within upper portion of Grass Creek drainage.



Figure 3 Wolverine tracks located within vicinity of Hidden Lake.