

Caribou and Snowmobile  
Aerial Monitoring Program Summary  
Selkirk Conservation Alliance

The Selkirk Conservation Alliance has conducted an aerial monitoring program over the past several years, which has complemented efforts by the Forest Service in a similar endeavor. Our aerial monitoring reports have been informative in identifying areas where snowmobile use continues to be a problem to date.

Aerial over-flights were conducted within the Southern Selkirk Mountains Woodland Caribou Recovery Area to monitor snowmobile user compliance with existing restrictions and to monitor and locate caribou and other important wildlife in relation to areas with snowmobile use restrictions. To conduct aerial monitoring a Cessna 182 fixed-wing type aircraft was utilized. Monitoring flights were generally scheduled following a period of recent snowfall. In 2012, five monitoring flights were conducted, four monitoring flights in 2011, seven in 2010, 2 in 2009, three in 2008 and two in 2007. Monitoring flights have been conducted since 2004. Since 2010, reports for all flights were forwarded to the U.S. Forest Service and other relevant agencies and interested parties in order to assure our findings were shared. Regular participation in monthly conference calls with the Forest Service were also conducted where information from monitoring flights was also shared.

During each monitoring flight in order 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 the 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.

Several areas are evident where snowmobile use violations are basically repetitive or were detected during almost every monitoring flight. Other areas we observed are where snowmobile violations may not be so brazen but violations are detected one or more times over the course of the winter monitoring season. As we are sure you are well aware, the court injunction is still in place and violations of the designated closures by snowmobilers must be addressed before the onset of the next winter season in order to reduce the potential adverse impacts on caribou as well as grizzly bear recovery efforts.

One area of particular concern is “Trapper Creek’ or more specifically the area from Continental Mountain to Phoebe’s Tip including the upper portions of Blue Joe Creek, Grass Creek and Cow Creek. These areas are within the mapped movement

corridor that was identified in the findings of the United States District court in February 2007. Snowmobile use within this designated closed area is common throughout the winter season and well into the early and mid spring seasons. Snowmobile access into this area often originates from the Trapper Creek drainage on Idaho Department of Lands ownership. Other routes of access into this area are from Cow Creek, or the road system in Blue Joe and Grass Creeks via the road through Saddle Pass or from road #1388 out of Lime Creek. It is obvious that the intended 'disturbance-free' travel corridor outlined by the courts has not had the desired 'disturbance free' effect that was intended. Snowmobile use within these areas has only been marginally reduced since the closure was implemented in 2007.

Special note should be drawn to the snowmobile use violations, which have been documented each year in the areas of Cow Creek, Grass Creek, and Blue Joe Creek that are closed to snowmobile use after the April 1<sup>st</sup> grizzly bear den emergence period as these areas likely represent core habitat for grizzly bears as well as potential denning habitat. This 'late season' snowmobiling activity very likely impairs some of the bear management units from achieving the recommended level of core habitat for grizzly bears.

Other areas where snowmobile use violations are of concerns are: vicinity of the West Fork Cabin in Upper Smith Creek. Abandon Creek and the Upper portions of Smith Creek, Bunchgrass Meadows on the Colville National Forest, Crutch Creek along the border with British Columbia, Pack River, Two Mouth Lakes, Blue Joe Creek, Grass Creek and Hughes Ridge.

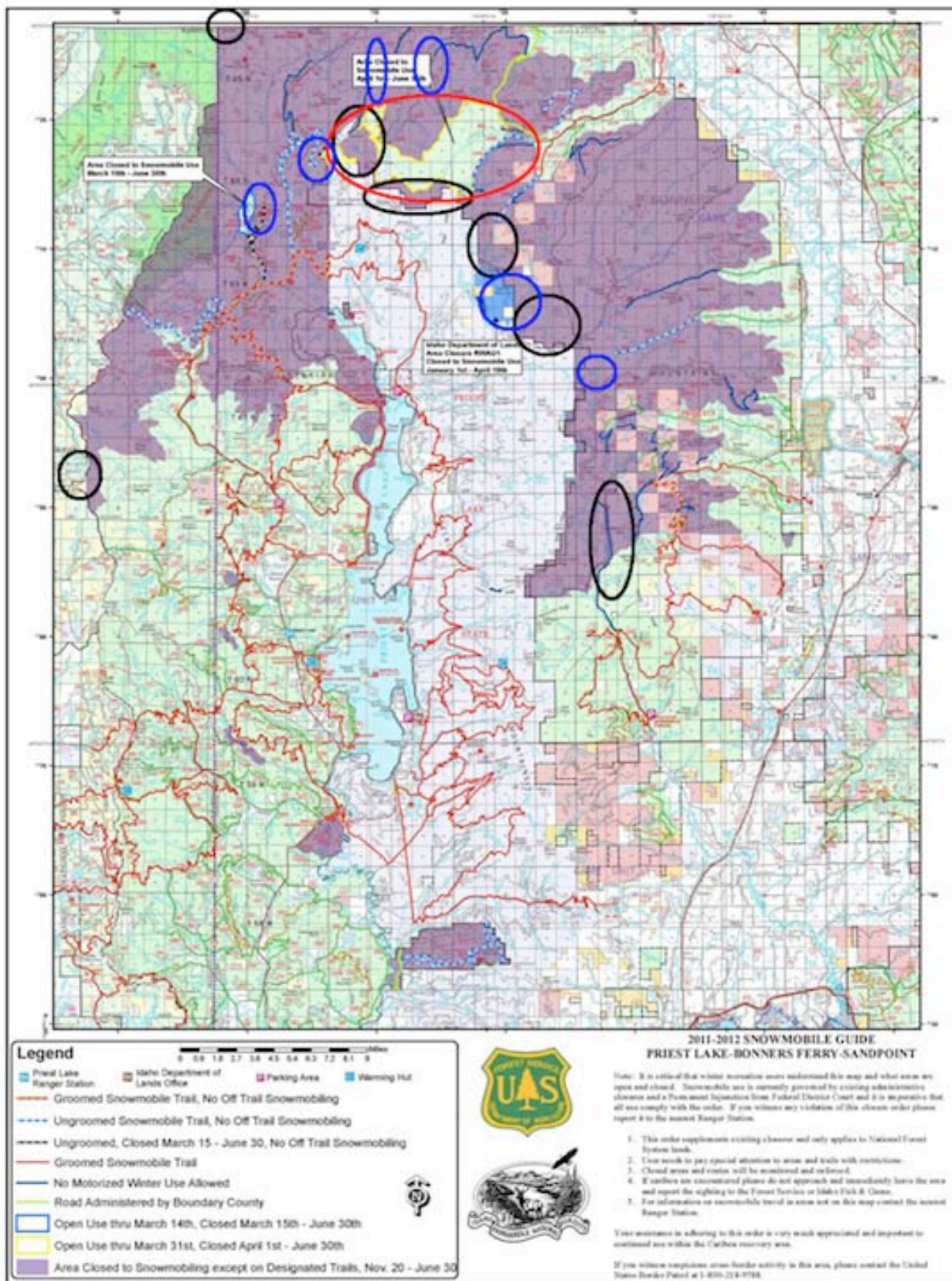


Figure 1. Areas indicated in Black area where regular snowmobile use violation occurs. Areas identified in blue are where snowmobile use violation occurs one of more time each year. Area indicated in red is where snowmobile use violations of grizzly core often occurs.



**Figure 2. Snowmobile tracks on Trapper peak, within closed area taken. Photo taken Feb 22, 2010.**



**Figure 3. Photo of snowmobile tracks within Upper Grass Creek and movement corridor closure. Photo taken March 5, 2010.**



Figure 4. Snowmobile track within Abandon Creek within closure area. Photo taken April 16, 2010.



Figure 5 Snowmobile track on Bunchgrass Meadow, within closed area. Photo taken Jan 31, 2011.



Figure 6. Snowmobile tracks within closure area near West Fork Cabin. Photo taken Feb 28, 2012



Figure 7. Snowmobile tracks at Two mouth Lakes within closed area. Photo taken April 22, 2012.