

# Caribou/Snowmobile Aerial Monitoring Report

Of February 23, 2015

## Methods

An aerial over-flight was conducted of the Southern Selkirk Mountains woodland caribou recovery area to monitor snowmobile user compliance with existing snowmobile 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. The monitoring flight originated and ended at the community airport in Priest River, Idaho.

## Conditions

Weather conditions were clear with relatively little turbulence. Temperatures ranged about 25 to 35 degrees Fahrenheit within the survey area, no wind. The flight began at approximately 0930 and ended at approximately 1200; total flight time was approximately 2.5 hours. A map of the flight path is shown in Figure 1. After approximately 1.5 hours of flight I determined that snow conditions were too hard and little evidence of animal tracks were detected because of the snow conditions, because of this so I decided to shorten the flight time.

## Results

A complete survey of the caribou recovery zone was not conducted because of snow conditions and time constraints. A map shows the flight path and survey area is included and description of document incursions into closed areas is included below.

**West Fork Cabin.** *Snowmobile tracks were noted within the meadow system south and southwest of the cabin (closed area). Snowmobile tracks appeared to have been older than 3 days prior.*

**Cow Creek.** *Older snowmobile tracks were located within the headwaters of Cow Creek (closed to snowmobiling) which is a popular area for 'high marking'. The tracks appeared to be greater than a week old as evident by the degree of melting.*

**Ridge system between Trapper Creek and Cow Creek.** *Snowmobile tracks were located traversing the ridge system between Trapper Creek and Cow Creek, closed areas. These tracks appeared to have been made in the past few days and likely from the past weekend. These tracks were also apparently made by persons on 'snow-motorcycles' and are of the same type which were observed within the Two Mouth, Harrison, Beehive and Myrtle Lakes area last season.*

**Ridge system between Trapper Creek and Blue-Joe Creek.** Snowmobile tracks were located traversing the ridge system between Trapper Creek, Blue-Joe and Grass Creeks (closed areas). These tracks appeared to have been made in the past few days and likely from the past weekend. These tracks were also apparently made by persons on 'snow-motorcycles' and are of the same type which were observed within the Two Mouth, Harrison, Beehive and Myrtle Lakes area last season.

**Bunchgrass Meadows.** Snowmobile tracks were noted on two locations within the vicinity of Bunchgrass Meadows. Use was observed on the smaller meadow immediately north of the main Meadow that is on the Colville National Forest and on a smaller meadow east of the main Meadow that is on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests. Both locations were within closed areas.

**Molybdenite Ridge.** Snowmobile use was observed along the western portion of Molybdenite Ridge (closed area) below the top of the ridge. It appeared that snowmobilers were coming from the road system below.

**Jungle Creek.** Snowmobile use was observed throughout much of the road systems and adjoining older timber harvest areas within the Jungle Creek Area. I was not able to locate where snowmobilers were gaining access to this area.

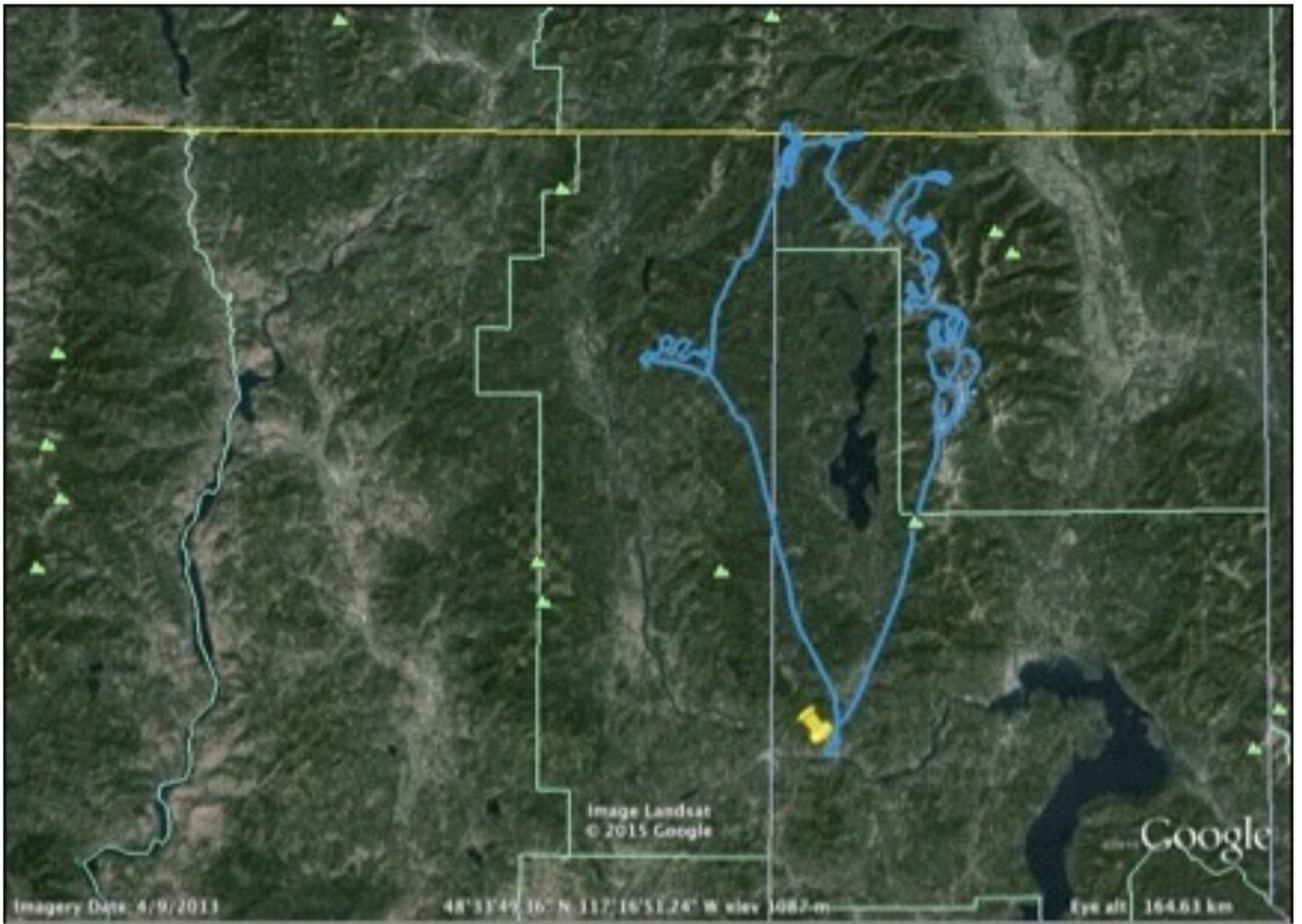
**Boundary Lake.** Fresh snowmobile tracks were observed on Boundary Lake, which is just north of the international border. This area is not closed to snowmobile use.

**Big Snowy Lake and International boundary.** Fresh snowmobile tracks were observed on the Lake on the west side of Big Snowy Mt. Snowmobilers accessed the lake from the road system north of the border and along the brushed-out borderline. Some of the track entered into the U.S. side, which is closed, to snowmobile use. Extensive snowmobile use was also noted within most of the smaller drainages along the headwaters of Crutch Creek in Canada.

## **Wildlife**

The only wildlife tracks seen were what was believed mountain goats tracks with the vicinity of upper portion of Kaniksu Mountain. Tracks were along both sides of the border. No animals were seen.

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*Figure 1. Map of flight track for February 23, 2015.*

