

Skeena Wildlife Regulation Change Proposal Form

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Objective of Proposal (describe what outcomes the regulation change is expected to achieve. For example change to bull:cow ratio, reduce crowding of hunters, etc):

The objective of this proposal is to minimize human disturbance in the home range of the Telkwa caribou herd in order to increase habitat availability and ultimately, increase the likelihood of herd recovery.

Proposal Description (specific MU's, season dates, bag limits, attach a map if required, # of authorizations, etc):

The proposed regulation changes apply to the home range of the Telkwa caribou herd, which is found in M.U. 6-9. Specifically, the proposal addresses access in the following areas: Hunter Basin, Webster Lake, Hankin Plateau, Glacias Peak, Grizzly Plateau, the Meat Cache, Mooseskin Johnny Lake, and Starr Creek. See attached map for relevant spatial boundaries. The eastern part of the home range, which includes Hunter Basin, Webster Lake, Hankin Plateau, Glacias Peak, Grizzly Plateau, and the Meat Cache, has an existing motor vehicle closure which prohibits the use of motor vehicles for hunting, excluding the main trail to the "Gas Stop" location on Grizzly Plateau (located at 54.382000N by 127.00805 W). This proposal builds on the existing closure in that it prohibits the use of motor vehicles, regardless of hunting activity. The proposal recommends a year-round closure in the northern part of the Telkwa Mountains proper and a closure from May 1-Nov 1 on Grizzly Plateau and from Apr 1-Dec 15 in the Meat Cache. Additionally, this proposal recommends a year-round closure of the western part of the study area to motor vehicles, including Mooseskin Johnny Lake and Starr Creek.

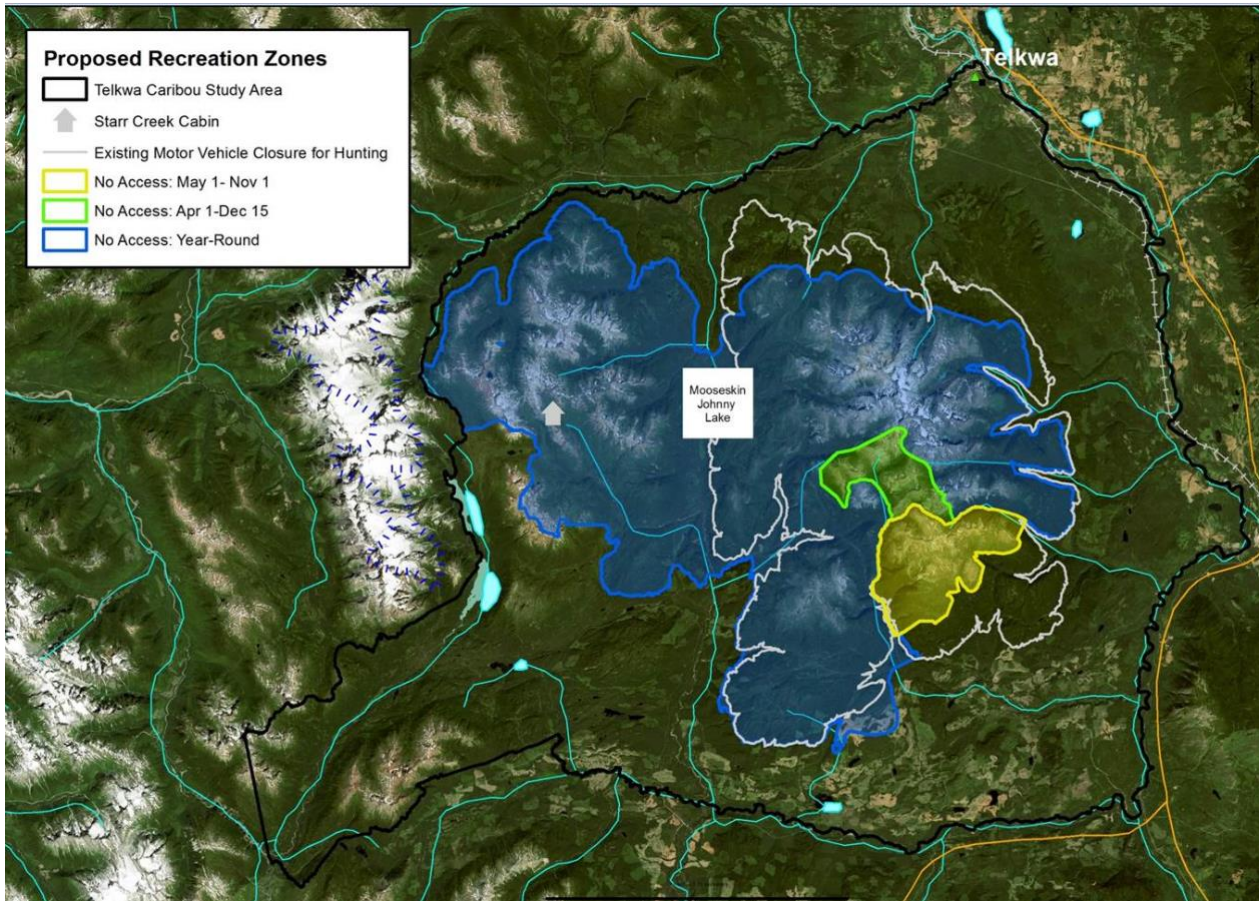
Under this proposal, permits will be available for access into Grizzly Plateau, Mooseskin Johnny Lake and Starr Basin. Permits may be issued to individuals or groups and will be limited both in the number of days that users may access the area, and the number of users that may use the area on any given day. Permits will not be issued if there is caribou activity in the area and/or if there is non-compliance with permit conditions. The proposal is to include:

- 21 days for snowmobilers into Starr Basin between Dec-April
- 21 days for skiers into Starr Basin between Dec-April
- 2 days for quad riders into Mooseskin Johnny Lake and Starr Basin between Aug-Sept
- 2 days for quad riders into Grizzly Plateau between Aug-Sept

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Proposal Rationale (provide supporting survey data*, scientific literature, and/or traditional knowledge):

The Telkwa caribou herd (TCH) is an island population of northern caribou located in west-central British Columbia. Despite population augmentation in the late 1990s, this herd has declined to fewer than 20 individuals and is at continual risk of extirpation. The last minimum count of animals was conducted in Oct 2016 and totalled 18 animals (Thiessen and Grant 2016). Recent research suggests that the primary driver of the decline of the TCH is altered predator-prey dynamics as a result of commercial forestry (Grant 2017). Results also suggest that other human activities, such as roads and recreation, may act cumulatively with the effects of forestry to adversely affect the Telkwa herd.

Telkwa caribou largely avoided areas with high road and cutblock densities, both of which are generally found at low elevations. As a result, the TCH predominantly selected high-elevation habitat (>1600 m). Recreational activities overlap with this alpine habitat and can lead to displacement of caribou from high-quality habitat and/or increased accessibility to caribou habitat by wolves (Seip 2007, Lesmerises et al. n.d., Lesmerises et al. 2016, Simpson 2000, Bergerud 1988). Although response to recreation was variable, avoidance of recreation areas by

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Telkwa caribou was documented in both the winter and summer. Ultimately, this could have an influence on individual fitness and the population trajectory of the Telkwa caribou.

Voluntary access restrictions have been in place in the Telkwa Mountains since the early 2000s. Recreation monitoring is ongoing and has taken place in the Telkwa Mountains since 2013. Results from recreation monitoring suggest that voluntary access restrictions have not been effective in minimizing recreation in the home range of the TCH. For example, the voluntary access restrictions suggest no motorized activity in the Mooseskin Johnny Lake and Starr Creek area, yet monitoring data indicate that there have been an average of 21 motorized users per month in this area between 2014-2015. Similarly, access restrictions designate Hunter Basin as a non-motorized area, but monitoring suggests an average of 9 motorized users per month in this area between 2014-2015. This evidence demonstrates that voluntary restrictions are not being obeyed and legalized restrictions are required to minimize the influence of recreation in the home range of the TCH.

The TCH is included in the Southern Mountain National Ecological Area (SMNEA) and is listed as 'Threatened' federally. The federal recovery strategy includes objectives to manage recreation impacts on habitat and habitat use. The federal Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) recently undertook a habitat protection assessment for caribou herds within the SMNEA. This assessment evaluates the adequacy of BC's conservation measures in protecting critical habitat for SMNEA caribou. If, as a result of the assessment, the federal Minister forms the opinion that critical habitat is unprotected (and risks to critical habitat are not managed) under provincial statutes, then the Species at Risk Act (SARA) requires that the federal Minister recommend that a protection order be made. This order would bring SARA into force for the unprotected portions of critical habitat and the federal government would have jurisdiction over how habitat is protected.

This assessment has begun for Peace Northern Caribou herds (in the NE). The evaluation of critical habitat and protection measures for the Telkwa caribou herd will be initiated in 2017. It is anticipated that the assessment for the Telkwa herd will include an evaluation of regulations to limit recreation impacts. Indications are that voluntary restrictions will be deemed inadequate.

Related Literature:

Bergerud, A.T. 1988. Caribou, wolves and man. *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* 3:68–72.

Grant, L. *in review*. Spatial factors influencing northern mountain caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) survival and distribution in the Telkwa Range. MSc Thesis, University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, BC.

Freeman, N.L. 2008. Motorized backcountry recreation and stress response in caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*). MSc Thesis, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.

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Lesmerises, F., D. Florent, C.J. Johnson, and M.-H. St-Laurent. *n.d.* Spatial response of mountain caribou to the intensity of backcountry skiing. *Animal Conservation: in review.*

Lesmerises, F., C.J. Johnson, and M.-H. St-Laurent. 2017. Refuge or predation risk? Alternate ways to perceive hiker disturbance based on maternal state of female caribou. *Ecology and Evolution* 7: 845-854

Mahoney, S.P., K. Mawhinney, C. McCarthy, D. Anions, and S. Taylor. 2001. Caribou reactions to provocation by snowmachines in Newfoundland. *Rangifer* 21:35–43.

Powell, T. 2004. Reponse comportementale des caribous des bois au harcèlement par les montoneiges. Thesis, University of Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke, QC.

Reimers, E., and J.E. Colman. 2006. Reindeer and caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) response towards human activities. 3:55–71.

Simpson, K. 2000. Impacts of backcountry recreation activities on mountain caribou. Ministry of Environment, Lands, and Parks, Victoria, BC.

Thiessen, C, and Grant, L. 2016. Telkwa caribou rut count: Oct 18, 2016. Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations, Smithers, BC.

Pros and Cons of Implementing this Proposal (explain how the benefits of this proposal outweigh the costs):

Pros:

- Minimizes disturbance and increases habitat availability for the TCH
- Increases the potential for TCH recovery
- Enables management to proceed with large-scale conservation efforts for the TCH
- Aligns with guidelines for southern mountain caribou recovery under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA).
- Meets the requirements of habitat protection under SARA and minimizes the potential for Environment and Climate Change Canada to invoke a protection order for the Telkwa herd.
- Minimizes conflict between user groups (non-motorized and motorized)
- Increases quality of experience for recreational users.

Cons:

- Decreases access into areas where access has been unlimited.
- Limits motorized access for hunters in a portion of MU 6-9 (note that motorized access for hunting is already limited in the Telkwa Mountains through the existing Section 16 reserve under the *Land Act*).

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Demonstrate how support was achieved for this proposal within your First Nation or stakeholder group (e.g., voting results from members including total number polled, # support, # non-support, # indifferent, etc; concerns raised during discussion; efforts taken to reach as many individuals represented by your group):

This proposal aligns with the BC Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations' caribou recovery program objective to protect and restore critical caribou habitat.

List First Nations and stakeholder groups (other than your own) that you contacted regarding the proposed regulation change (include details of support or not for the proposal):

Proposed regulations are largely based on the Telkwa Recreation Access Management group's recommendations for recreation access in the Telkwa Range. The TRAM group included representatives from the following user groups: Bulkley Valley Quad Riders Society, Bulkley Valley Naturalists, Bulkley Valley Outdoor Recreation Society, Houston Hikers Society, Bulkley Valley Backpackers Society, Backcountry Horsemen of BC (NW Chapter), Smithers Exploration Group, Bulkley Valley Stewardship Coalition, Bulkley Backcountry Ski Society, Smithers, Snowmobile Association, Houston Snowmobile Club, and Bulkley Valley Rod and Gun Club. Over the course 8 months of meetings in 2016, the TRAM group developed recommendations for recreation access in the zones described in this proposal. There was a consensus from TRAM on motorized access restrictions in the following areas and seasons:

1. Grizzly Plateau – Winter
2. Meat Cache – Summer
3. Core Recovery Area – Summer
4. Core Recovery Area – Winter
5. Mooseskin Johnny East – Summer
6. Mooseskin Johnny East – Winter
7. Mooseskin Johnny West – Summer

There was not a consensus from TRAM on motorized access restrictions in the following areas and seasons:

1. Grizzly Plateau – Summer
2. Meat Cache – Winter
3. Mooseskin Johnny West – Winter

Where TRAM did not reach a consensus, government biologists used existing scientific literature and Telkwa specific research to develop recommendations for recreation access. This proposal has been presented to each TRAM group and official responses are still being collected. The following broadly describes the stance of the TRAM groups. '*NO RESPONSE*' indicates that an official response has not yet been received as of Mar 31, 2017.

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1. Bulkley Valley Quad Riders Society – SUPPORT
2. Bulkley Valley Naturalists – DO NOT SUPPORT and would like a full closure of the Telkwa mountains with no access.
3. Bulkley Valley Outdoor Recreation Society - SUPPORT w/ exception of Mooseskin Johnny West and Meat Cache where they want more limited access.
4. Houston Hikers Society – *NO RESPONSE*
5. Bulkley Valley Backpackers Society – SUPPORT
6. Backcountry Horsemen of BC (NW Chapter) – *NO RESPONSE*
7. Smithers Exploration Group – SUPPORT w/ exception of Meat Cache where they want more limited access.
8. Bulkley Valley Stewardship Coalition – SUPPORT
9. Bulkley Backcountry Ski Society – *NO RESPONSE*
10. Smithers, Snowmobile Association – DO NOT SUPPORT and would not support any limitations on access.
11. Houston Snowmobile Club – SUPPORT
12. Bulkley Valley Rod and Gun Club – *NO RESPONSE*

Although, First Nations are aware of the proposed regulations, official consultation has not yet taken place. The public consultation process will begin in June 2017 and will include public open houses and presentations at council meetings in Smithers, Telkwa, and Houston.

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