

Management of Helicopter-supported Adventure Tourism in BC



Helicopter-supported adventure tourism (AT) activity in BC is expanding, and now occurs in all seasons in many previously inaccessible areas. This has the potential to significantly impact the effectiveness of wildlife habitats and directly disturb wildlife during critical periods.

The Province of BC is responsible to ensure that authorized activities on the landbase do not infringe on the rights of Indigenous peoples. BC and the Federal government share responsibility for the recovery of species at risk. Stewardship of all wildlife is a shared responsibility of all British Columbians.

Information is currently lacking regarding the location, duration, and intensity of helicopter activity in relation to priority wildlife habitats. Such information is essential to inform risk-management strategies and avoid blanket closures. Global Positioning System (GPS) and data management technology now allows for passive collection and secure sharing of helicopter flight paths to support wildlife management.

Management of human activity on our landbase is needed and is a key element of the province's strategy to ensure the sustainability of wildlife populations into the future. It is also consistent with our commitments under the Together for Wildlife Strategy and the recovery of Species at Risk.

The Province is seeking to work collaboratively with operators to enhance management of adventure tourism related to wildlife to meet legal obligations, update guidelines, and to uphold societal expectations.

Caribou

Caribou are a nationally important species at risk. BC is home to 55 herds of woodland caribou. Despite significant investments and effort, caribou herds continue to decline and their range is shrinking.

Management of human disturbance, including disturbance associated with helicopter activity in caribou habitat, is critical to enable caribou recovery in



Photo: © BC Caribou Recovery Program

addition to habitat protection and other management tools.

Currently, no spatial data or sightings information is being provided to the Province regarding helicopter activity in caribou habitat to enable development of mitigation strategies or assess the effects of helicopter-supported activities on caribou behaviour, habitat use, and seasonal movements.

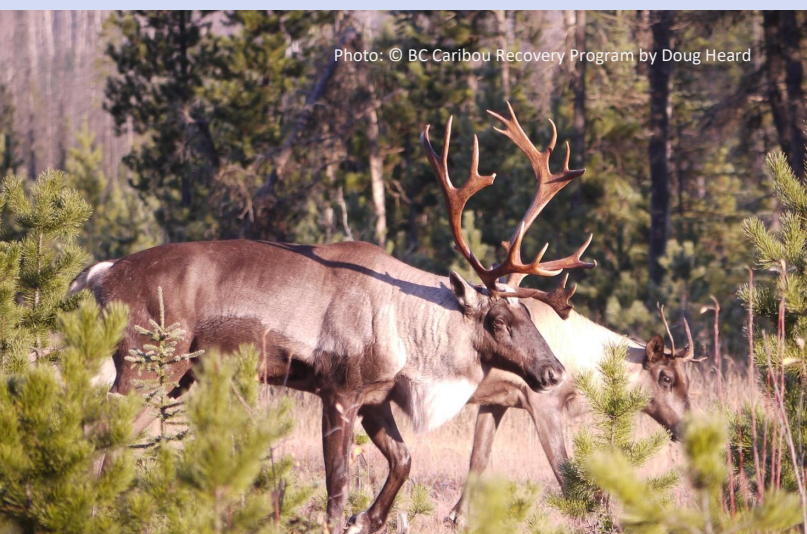


Photo: © BC Caribou Recovery Program by Doug Heard



Photo: © Province of British Columbia via Daniel Guertin

Mountain Goats

BC is home to over half of the world's population of mountain goats and has a global responsibility to ensure sustainable management of this iconic species.

Mountain goats react strongly to helicopters. Acute, short-term behavioral responses to helicopter activity have been consistently documented at distances of 1.5 km, and up to 2 km. There are recent reports of population declines from several regions of the province.

Other Species

Mountain sheep, grizzly bears and wolverines are also priority wildlife species requiring enhanced management of adventure tourism and recreational activities to ensure the long-term sustainability of their populations and the effectiveness of their habitats.



Photo: © Christine Friedrichsmeier

The Provincial Wildlife Management Approach

BC is seeking to have tenured heli-tourism operators submit the following data and abide by species-specific avoidance guidelines to inform development of site-specific mitigation strategies and demonstrate effective management of helicopter-supported activities on the provincial Crown landbase:

- a) Submission, at the end of winter and summer operating seasons, Global Positioning System (GPS) flight data for all helicopter-supported commercial activities. These data are already routinely collected.
- b) Submission of a map of all helicopter landing sites on Crown land and number/name each site to correspond with the Adventure Tourism Tenure Management Plan.
- c) Maintain a 2000 m horizontal separation distance between helicopters and caribou; 1500 m adjacent to identified mountain goat habitats, and a minimum 500 m vertical separation for both species. In all cases, safety takes precedence over these setbacks.
- d) Submission of sightings of priority wildlife species to government through a web-based Annual Reporting Form as prescribed by the Province and as amended when necessary, and
- e) Operators are to abide by provincial backcountry recreation/tourism wildlife policies and local government strategies as amended when necessary.

The province has developed a secure database to store GPS flight data and will work collaboratively with operators to ensure the effective use of these data to inform wildlife stewardship and development of site-specific mitigation strategies.



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