

# WILDLIFE INFORMATION FOR COMMERCIAL BACKCOUNTRY RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NORTH CENTRAL MONASHEE MOUNTAINS

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Amongst the wide variety of wildlife residing in the North Central Monashee Mountains are rare, threatened or endangered species as well as species of special management emphasis. Color code status has been assigned to species to indicate their vulnerability.

Red listed: Includes any indigenous species or subspecies (taxa) considered to be Extirpated, Endangered, or Threatened in British Columbia.

Blue listed: Includes any indigenous species or subspecies (taxa) considered to be Vulnerable in British Columbia.

Special Management: Includes species which are not red or blue listed but are particularly sensitive to a variety of disturbances and require additional management emphasis.

Backcountry recreation has the potential to impact wildlife and wildlife habitat, depending on the location, time of year, intensity, frequency and type of backcountry recreation activity. However, with thorough planning, impacts to wildlife from commercial backcountry recreation can be mitigated.

## 2.0 COMMERCIAL BACKCOUNTRY RECREATION GUIDELINES

During 2000, the Ministry of Environment recognized the need for province-wide commercial backcountry recreation guidelines to address wildlife concerns and allow ministry staff to be provincially consistent in their evaluation of backcountry recreation proposals. The draft provincial guidelines are currently under review, and interim guidelines entitled [Expanded Kootenay Region Interim Wildlife Guidelines for Commercial Backcountry Recreation in British Columbia](http://www.elp.gov.bc.ca/wld/comrec/crecintro.html) (<http://www.elp.gov.bc.ca/wld/comrec/crecintro.html>) have been established. The guidelines will assist commercial backcountry operators and government agency staff in protecting wildlife and wildlife habitat while sustaining ecotourism and adventure travel in British Columbia.

While current proposals will be reviewed using the Interim Guidelines, the new Provincial Guidelines will be implemented once interagency reviews are completed. All new proposals after that date will be reviewed using the new Provincial Guidelines. The provincial guidelines, entitled [Draft Guidelines for Mitigating Impacts of Commercial Backcountry Recreation on Wildlife in British Columbia](http://www.elp.gov.bc.ca/wld/comrec/crecintro.html) (<http://www.elp.gov.bc.ca/wld/comrec/crecintro.html>), should be considered when drafting a CBR management plan. Once the draft guidelines are implemented, existing CBR operators will have to comply with the standards outlined in the guidelines as they are phased in.

**If any of the species listed in the interim guidelines occur in a CBR proposal area, proponents should pay particular attention to the specific species requirements outlined in those guidelines. A CBR proposal should indicate what measures will be taken to ensure the wildlife strategies in the guidelines will be met.**

## 3.0 OKANAGAN SHUSWAP LAND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN (LRMP)

The [Okanagan Shuswap LRMP](http://www.lrmp.gov.bc.ca/okanagan/) (<http://www.lrmp.gov.bc.ca/okanagan/>) is a strategic land use plan (SLUP) providing policy type management direction and has guiding principals that could influence a CBR proposal. This SLUP should be reviewed and a submitted CBR management plan should be consistent with the LRMP document. Polygon specific Resource Management Zone (RMZ) mapping with accompanying text is available for specified wildlife, recreation and tourism as well as protected areas. These pdf files can be

downloaded by selecting the appropriate link on the left-hand side of the main page. Digital and HP Plotfile mapping is also available in the Okanagan Shuswap LRMP under the downloads tab on the navigation bar at the top of the page.

## **4.0 WILDLIFE AND RESOUC E INFORMATION**

### **4.1 IMPACT MITIGATION AND INVENTORY**

The Ministry of Environment anticipates that CBR operations may have wide ranging impacts and/or localized site impacts. Operations with motorized access and activities which impact the larger landscape would fall under wide ranging impacts. These operations may have greater impacts on mountain caribou, grizzly bears, mountain goats, wolverines and ungulate winter range in general. Facilities that will occupy space on the land (i.e. have a footprint) and will therefore change the landscape, would fall under localized site impacts. Species such as fisher, martin, gray wolf, northern goshawk, harlequin duck, rare plants and rare plant communities would be more likely to be impacted by localized facilities. These would include roads, ski runs, snowcat trails, hiking trails, cabins, heli-pads, fuel caches, emergency shelters and parking lots for example.

The Ministry expects that management plans will be submitted using the current level of available information although proponents are free to conduct preliminary surveys to enhance their proposals and reduce the chance of post award conflicts. Management plans should avoid areas where recreation activities will impact wildlife. Once a proposal has been accepted conceptually for a specific area, the proponent enters a second level of commitment with Ministry of Environment that will require wildlife inventories to be conducted where information is deficient. Following that, a third level of commitment may be necessary in order to address potential conflicts for site specific facilities with a definite footprint on the land. A proponent would reach this third level of commitment when there is direct overlap between sensitive species range and proposed activities. The outcome of the inventories may result in further restrictions and mitigative strategies. High wildlife value areas with several species of concern would be exposed to intense scrutiny and might be subject to increased restrictions.

Ministry of Environment staff will be available to assist in inventory planning and the Ministry would like to have a wildlife employee participate in any flight surveys to provide local knowledge of the area. Proponents should not expect that initial proposals would be accepted as submitted if conflicts with wildlife are evident. As appropriate, inventory results will be used to modify proposals to reduce and eliminate wildlife conflicts. **All inventories must be conducted by a registered professional biologist and conform to government standards (i.e. Resource Inventory Committee - RIC). Inventory costs are the responsibility of the proponent.**

### **4.2 RARE PLANTS, PLANT COMMUNITIES AND SPECIAL HABITATS**

#### 4.2.1 Rare Plants and Plant Communities

The Tracking List section of the [BC Conservation Data Center](http://www.elp.gov.bc.ca/rib/wis/cdc/) (<http://www.elp.gov.bc.ca/rib/wis/cdc/>) provides lists of rare and endangered species and plant communities by forest district. Several data files can be searched by request at the BC Conservation Data Center and this information is available in database format or as spatial data files. This data may prove helpful in identifying potential recreation activity/species and plant community conflicts.

The only rare plant community known to occur in the CBR study area is the Red listed Western Hemlock/velvet-leaved blueberry-false box. Individual plant species at risk in the area can be found by requesting a search at the BC Conservation Data Center.

#### 4.2.2 Other Plant Communities and Special Habitats

There are special habitats found throughout the study area which are valuable to wildlife and contribute significantly to the biodiversity of the area. The Ministry takes special interest in these habitats, as they are

relatively scarce and localized. The special habitats of concern in the study area are riparian areas, wetlands, alpine/subalpine meadows, coarse woody debris, and wildlife trees. Management plans should avoid development in riparian and wetland areas and minimize soil erosion and compaction as well as vegetation loss in alpine/subalpine meadows. The natural supply of large standing dead trees and large fallen trees should be retained for wildlife use.

For information on mitigating possible impacts to rare plants, plant communities and special habitats, consult the Interim Wildlife Guidelines and see the above section entitled Impact Mitigation and Inventory.

#### **4.3 WILDLIFE**

Major wildlife species of concern in the study area are mountain caribou (red listed), grizzly bear (blue listed), wolverine (blue listed) and mountain goat. The wildlife values are such that severe constraints may be required for some commercial backcountry recreation activities.

Listed below is information on these four species that are most affected by wide ranging activities. Section 4.3.5 discusses other species of concern in this area, which are impacted by localized facilities. If the proponent does not agree with any of the available habitat mapping, the onus is on them to prove otherwise with an inventory conducted by a registered professional biologist.

##### **4.3.1 Mountain Caribou (Southern Population)**

Mountain caribou are generally found along the southeastern and northeastern boundaries of the study area and east of Shuswap Lake in the Anstey Range as noted in the [Okanagan Shuswap LRMP](http://www.lrm.gov.bc.ca/okanagan/) (<http://www.lrm.gov.bc.ca/okanagan/>) under the Wildlife - Mountain Caribou RMZ link. Key caribou habitats include early winter range consisting of mature and older closed canopy forests for snow interception, late winter sub-alpine forest, early spring open forage areas (eg. riparian, avalanche chutes), and calving grounds with hiding cover (Okanagan-Shuswap LRMP, Mountain Caribou Habitat RMZ, p4-1). Arboreal lichens, found in old growth forests, are the main source of food for mountain caribou during the late winter.

##### Issues

Currently, mountain caribou (southern population) are federally classified as threatened (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada – COSEWIC) and red listed provincially. They are easily stressed in the presence of snowmobiles, helicopters and all terrain vehicles. Mountain caribou are most susceptible to disturbance in late winter therefore most serious caribou conflicts with recreation result from winter activities.

##### Expectations

The Interim Wildlife Guidelines and the Okanagan Shuswap LRMP guidelines for mountain caribou should be reviewed and addressed in the proposed CBR management plan. Any proposed facilities or activities in caribou winter range, foraging areas, sensitive habitats and calving areas will require inventories to determine the potential impact on caribou. It should be noted that most of the old-growth management areas (OGMAs) in the Pukeashun, Seymour, Eagle, Upper Shuswap and Anstey landscape units, as described in the Forest Practices Code, are to be specifically located to assist in mountain caribou habitat protection. OGMA locations will be in draft form by September 2001. Final locations are expected by June 2002. Strategies will be developed to avoid important habitats where at all possible and minimize impacts.

##### **4.3.2 Grizzly Bear**

Grizzly bears are distributed throughout the study area as shown in the [Okanagan Shuswap LRMP](http://www.lrm.gov.bc.ca/okanagan/) (<http://www.lrm.gov.bc.ca/okanagan/>) under the Wildlife - Grizzly Bear Habitat RMZ link. Grizzly bears frequent avalanche tracks, meadow - wetland complexes, subalpine parkland meadows, berry producing sites and riparian areas. For more information on habitat types and their season of use see Table 3 in the above mention link of the Okanagan Shuswap LRMP.

### Issues

Grizzly bears are currently a blue listed species in British Columbia. Potential grizzly bear conflicts occur with summer operations such as heli-hiking in grizzly bear habitat and with facilities located on or near grizzly bear habitat. All CBR operations will be assessed, planned and monitored to minimize cumulative impacts on grizzly bear populations and habitat. The location of all facilities must consider the long term potential impacts to local grizzly bear populations and the potential for human/bear interactions.

### Expectations

Proponents should address the Interim Wildlife Guidelines specific to grizzly bears and develop a grizzly bear management strategy. To minimize the risk of mortality (bear or human) and conflict, facility and access development should avoid critical grizzly bear habitat. When an application has been tentatively approved and the tenure area includes watersheds with high potential for grizzly bear use, the proponent must carry out an assessment that identifies potential impacts and mortality risks to grizzly bears, including cumulative impacts. The assessment will be used to identify whether alterations to the proposal will be necessary in order to avoid conflicts. Proposed facilities may have to be moved in extreme cases.

#### **4.3.3 Wolverines**

Wolverines may be found throughout the study area in the alpine/sub-alpine areas, however the Ministry of Environment is currently lacking specific data. Some incidental wolverine observations have been made during other surveys and a proponent should contact our Ministry of Environment staff (see Ministry Contacts) for these incidental locations.

### Issues

Currently a blue listed species in British Columbia, wolverines, especially females with kits, are very vulnerable to human disturbance. Winter activities such as snowmobiling and skiing have been associated with the abandonment of natal denning areas, can disrupt foraging behaviour and lead to the displacement of wolverines.

### Expectations

The Interim Wildlife Guidelines should be reviewed to deal with the possibility of wolverines in a proposed area. In areas of known presence (tracks, sightings etc.), surveys may be required to look for wolverine dens. A presence/absence survey may be necessary in areas that lack any information on wolverine presence. Specific requirements will be determined in consultation with Ministry of Environment staff.

#### **4.3.4 Mountain Goat**

As indicated on the [Okanagan Shuswap LRMP](http://www.lrmv.gov.bc.ca/okanagan/) (<http://www.lrmv.gov.bc.ca/okanagan/>) under the Wildlife - Mountain Goat RMZ tab, mountain goats are generally distributed along the eastern boundary of the study area. Mountain goats can be found on steep slopes, forested outcrops and wind-swept ridges and are usually at an elevation of 1500 to 2000 metres in the winter, depending on the snow depth. Specific mapping is not available for individual populations nor have the characteristic habitat types been mapped.

### Issues

While not red or blue listed, this species is vulnerable to stress caused by helicopter flights within 2 km, hiking or mountain climbing on summer range, and disturbances on kidding and early rearing areas. The Ministry of Environment has a high level of concern for aircraft flights near all habitats (particularly winter and natal habitats) and frequent hiking near kidding areas and mineral licks. Requirements and restrictions may vary depending on the season and activity proposed.

## Expectations

Any proposals for activities that fall within the general mapped goat range will be subject to the Interim Guidelines for this species. The successful proponent will be required to conduct specific inventories that identify critical seasonal habitats and population distribution within those areas proposed for recreational activities that could cause unacceptable disturbances. Low level activities (eg weekly hiking trips into summer range) may not require extensive inventories but the presence of goats will require specific operational practices being developed which minimize disturbances.

### **4.3.5 Special Management Species**

The study area also includes species of special management emphasis such as fisher (blue listed), martin, gray wolf, northern goshawk, and harlequin duck. Detailed information and distribution of these species is not available. However, if inventories indicate their presence, a site-specific management strategy as outlined in the Interim Wildlife Guidelines will be required. Although grizzly bears should be addressed individually in a management plan, all other carnivore issues may be addressed in a carnivore management strategy. Consult the Interim Wildlife Guidelines and see the above section entitled Wildlife and Resource Information for more details on mitigating possible impacts to these species.

## **5.0 SITE SPECIFIC WILDLIFE LOCATIONS**

Raw flightline data and maps of specific sightings are available for some species. However, this information will only be provided in consultation with Ministry of Environment staff (see Ministry Contacts).

## **6.0 MINISTRY CONTACTS**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Telephone Number</u>
Doug Jury	Wildlife Biologist - Thompson Nicola Sub-Region (3)	(250) 371-6264
Bob Lincoln	Wildlife Habitat Biologist - Okanagan Sub-Region (8)	(250) 490-8254
John Surgenor	Rare & Endangered Species Specialist	(250) 371-6306

## **7.0 OTHER RESOURCE LINKS**

Biogeoclimatic Ecosystem Classification (BEC) Map Data:  
<http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/research/becmaps/becmaps.htm>