

Management of Commercial Recreation in Relation to Mountain Goats and Their Habitat

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Outline

- Commercial recreation – the good, the bad and the ugly
- Background regarding BC management of commercial recreation with respect to wildlife
- Revision process for “Interim wildlife guidelines for commercial backcountry recreation”
- New management framework
- Consequences for management of mountain goats



Commercial Backcountry Recreation – The Good

- Backcountry recreation generally has a lower impact on the landscape than many other uses we accept
- What would be the state of our wildlife habitat with *more* backcountry recreation but *no* legacy of forestry, oil and gas, mining or even hunting?
 - Suitability of wildlife habitat?
 - Road densities and human access?
 - Water quality?
 - Sustainability of key wildlife populations
 - Mountain caribou?
 - Mountain goats?



Commercial Backcountry Recreation – The Bad

- Commercial backcountry recreation is a concern because of cumulative effects on a compromised land base
 - We are forced to live with the legacies
 - Other industries likely continue to have greater impacts
- Are we angry because our backyards are becoming playgrounds for the world's wealthy?
 - Need to separate the visceral from the political from the biological



Commercial Backcountry Recreation – The Ugly

- “Gold rush” mentality pervades
- Economic benefits to local communities sometimes limited
- Backcountry is filling up faster than our ability to understand effects
 - Cumulative effects not understood and difficult to control
 - Basic science is lacking
 - Reaction of animals to disturbance highly variable
 - Little understanding of longer-term habitat use or demographic consequences
- Recreation industry resistant to regulations when biologists don’t have all the answers
 - Consider “precautionary approach” a smoke screen given tacit acceptance of not-so-precautionary logging and hunting impacts

Background

- Province of BC drafted “interim wildlife guidelines for commercial backcountry recreation” in 2001
- Generated significant negative feedback
 - Guidelines prescriptive and difficult to apply
 - Inconsistent with the experience of operators
 - Apply to commercial operators only
 - Inconsistent application among operators
 - Suspicion about industry self-regulation and government commitment to enforcement and monitoring



Updated Commercial Recreation Guidelines

- New process that is involving commercial recreation industry up front
- Based on the principle of shared stewardship
- Guidelines need to be easy for non-technical users
 - Generally ecosystem- and activity-based, rather than species-by-species approach
- Results-based rather than prescriptive
 - Define outcomes or results
 - Default “desired behaviours”
 - Opportunities to vary from defaults if alternatives can be demonstrated to achieve the same results (adaptive management and monitoring program must be in place)

Management Intent

To ensure that recreation activities in the backcountry do not affect the current distribution of wildlife, the sustainability of their populations, or the integrity of their habitats.



Management Framework

Three general management levers:

1. Area-based Prohibition

- Best applied where presence/absence of activity is directly related to impact being mitigated
- Research demonstrates that any activity generates a risk that is too high to the resource
- Relatively simple to enforce

2. Limits on Inputs

- Best applied where impact is directly related to the frequency of activity
- Also relatively simple to enforce

3. Limits on Outcomes

- Best applied where impacts are related to the behaviour of users
- Impacts are often related to multiple causes
- More difficult to enforce

Commercial Recreation and Mountain Goats

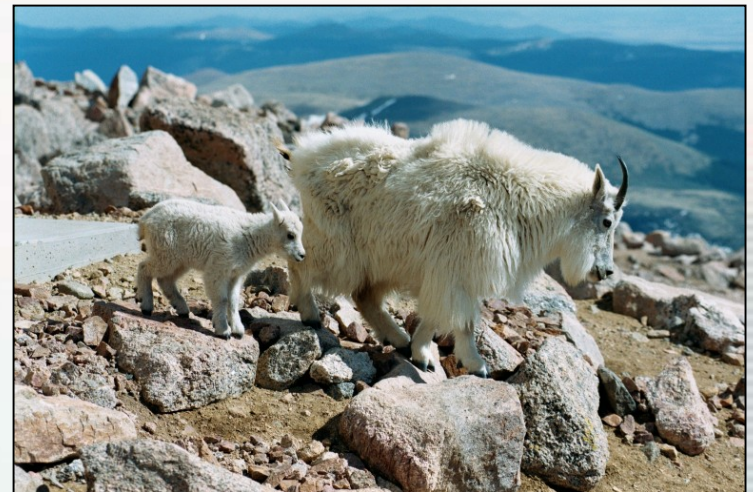
- Focus of concern has been heli-skiing operations and mountain goat winter range
- Also summer heli-hiking but assume impacts are less significant
- Snowmobiling/ATVs might be an issue in specific areas



Consequences for Mountain Goat Management?

Applying 2 km buffers to all mountain goat habitat is not seen as a practical default strategy

- Large areas becomes no-fly zones
- Evidence that helicopter can fly closer under some circumstances and not compromise the continued occupancy of range
- Very conservative management approach is inconsistent with management of other users
 - Forest harvesting continues to affect mountain goat habitat
 - Legal hunting has direct impact on populations and has been implicated in historic declines in abundance



Consequences 2

- Area-based prohibition still a legitimate management tool but mountain goats also fit test of limit on outcomes
 - Reactions of mountain goats to disturbance depend on a large number of variables other than absolute approach distance:
 - Age/sex of individuals
 - Previous experience with similar disturbances
 - Group composition and size
 - Terrain characteristics and distance to escape terrain
 - Weather
 - Aircraft type
 - Approach speed and vector
 - Frequency and timing of disturbance
 - In other words, there is no one science-based answer on approach distance, rather a matter of management risk
 - Industry is asking that management risk be assessed rationally

Opportunities and Threats

- Allowing some flexibility on practices could achieve desired outcomes without limiting recreational opportunities
- Test is continued occupancy of habitats and sustainability of populations
- Management risk is that outcomes might not be achieved (but that is true of other users as well)
- Success depends on sufficient resources for compliance and effectiveness monitoring (also true for other users)
- Shared stewardship implies industry is partly responsible for poor outcomes, although this remains to be defined



Implementation

1. Monitoring is key
 - Several levels of monitoring, depending on industry organization and level of management risk
 - Association
 - Certification
 - Government overview
2. Poor outcomes need to trigger management change
3. Roles and responsibilities for monitoring, reporting and revising need to be defined
4. Requires cooperation of other ministries and agencies (MSRM, LWBC)

