



Wildlife News & Views

Spring 2004

Where the Wild Ones Roam

By Becky Phillips
(E & CC, NWPS)

Outdoor recreation had been on the rise for several years now. More and more people are hiking, skiing or kayaking further and deeper into “untouched” backcountry seeking a tranquil, but wild and exciting adventure. British Columbia has a lot to offer in this regard. BC’s landscapes are big and provide variety: oceanic adventures, dramatic mountain ranges, temperate coastal rainforests, dry desertlike areas, and the vast openness of tundra in northern BC. Each of these landscapes provide a variety of ways to satisfy our hunger for adventure, but they also provide habitats and niches for our rich and unique diversity of plant and animal species.

With the increase in outdoor recreation in BC, many individuals have jumped on the opportunity to create a lifestyle which combines living and working in these areas that so many of us run to when we have the chance. Commercial Recreation is the answer for those seeking this lifestyle and it is a growing part of our tourism economy. Trained Guides take groups of tourists fishing, heli- skiing, snow- mobiling, kayaking or on a ride into the wilderness on an ATV or in a Hummer. It is a great opportunity for people to get out and experience nature and view wildlife, especially for those who are uncomfortable heading out into such areas by themselves. It is also a great way for our economy to attract tourists of all sorts to come, see and experience our beautiful province.

During the past few years, Land and Water British Columbia Incorporated (LWBC) has had a serious backlog of tenure applications. In April 2001, LWBC introduced a 3 year Commercial Recreation Tenure Incentive Program. This program was created to help clear up a backlog of Commercial Recreation Tenure Applications and to up speed the application process, with the incentive to help revitalize the provincial economy through sustainable tourism (LWBC, 2003). The role of LWBC is to “ensure crown land is used in an economical and environmental sustainable manner that balances all industry (LWBC, 2004).” LWBC provides access to crown land and water resources (92% of the province) in order to promote economic growth without compromising environmental standards (Hagen, 2004). After April 2004, when the Incentive program comes to a close, commercial recreation operations will bring more individuals further and more frequently into the backcountry.

This causes us to wonder about the impact of all of these activities on the wildlife and their environment, the very thing that all this “business” depends on. Has anyone calculated the carrying capacity of our wilderness? Has anyone measured the about of human activity a wilderness area or a species can take? How do we intend to sustain our “sustainable” tourism economy if we cannot sustain the wildlife and habitat that this economy depends on?

The effects of tourism and commercial recreation vary case by case. There are many factors which influence the effects and impacts humans have on any environment. The type of recreation, the species being impacted, the time of year during which the activities occur, and the frequency of visitors to the habitat are some of the key questions that must be considered. Data needs to be collected and analyzed before decisions can be made about feasibility and sustainability.



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Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society

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A Passion for Wildlife

Our first annual calendar campaign was a huge success and this has infected us with a lot of energy and new ideas. NWPS has started a project called 'A Passion for Wildlife'. This project is a spin off of our calendar campaign and will be a volunteer based project. We currently have a group of 20 volunteers researching and compiling information on a variety wildlife species and this group continues to grow every week! The information collected by our volunteers will provide details on the animals' characteristics, lifecycle, habitat, distribution, status and threats facing the animal.

This information will be used in many different ways. First off, profiles on many of the species are being added to our website, where we hope to have an information bank on wildlife species. The material will also be used to update our wildlife presentations, for descriptions of the photos in our annual Wildlife Calendars, and in the future, for children's books and a coffee table book. Along with featuring some of the wildlife unique to BC, we will also be writing features on people who have a special passion for wildlife and highlight the work they are doing to protect and preserve the many living species in our province.

This project has only been in the works for a few months and has had amazing results thus far. Our volunteers are enthusiastic and seem to share the passion for wildlife that so many of us have. Thank you for your dedication to our common goals of preserving wildlife in Northwest North America. If you would like to learn more about wildlife in BC, please visit us online at our website: www.northwestwildlife.com. We also welcome your involvement in the 'Passion for Wildlife' project. For more information, please contact us by email at: info@northwestwildlife.com.



Several studies have been done in the past on the effects of backcountry recreation on wildlife. Biologists have found that activities may frighten animals away from critical habitat such as nursing grounds, breeding areas and dens (Harper and Eastman, 2000). Researchers studying radio collared caribou have found that caribou are being pushed out of their optimal winter habitat when snowmobile activity becomes intensive; this pushes the animals into steeper, more rugged habitat where they must expend more energy to forage and remain out of human contact which critically impacts their ability to survive through the winter (Vold, 2000). Increased frequency of human activity can cause animals a large amount of physiological stress, which can compromise the animals' immune systems or upset their very sensitive energy balance, especially during the winter months.

By increasing the reaches and frequency of commercial recreation into the backcountry, the tourism and commercial recreation businesses are risking the decline and potential extinction of the very habitat and wildlife upon which their industry relies. We must be cautious with regards to increasing access to undisturbed environments in our province, and ensure that we are balancing our immediate economic needs with the needs the needs of a sustainable future for wildlife, their habitats and humans alike.

Sources:

Land and Water BC Inc. <http://lwbc.bc.ca>.
Hagen, Stan. 2004. SRM to be Proactive in Resolving future Backcountry Recreation Controversies. www.gov.bc.ca/srm/news/media.
Vold, Terje, 2000. Mountain Caribou and Sledding in BC. Snowmobile Interactive News Magazine.
Harper W.L. and D.S. Eastman. 2000. Wildlife and Commercial Backcountry Recreation in British Columbia: Assessment of Impacts and Interim Guidelines for Mitigation. Ministry of the Environment, Land and Parks BC.

Beautiful British Columbia: Eco- tourist with nothing to see

By Dave Quinn

Wildlife Biologist



Backcountry Skiing- enjoying the last solitude at Jumbo Pass Photo by Dave Quinn

As British Columbia reaches the end of the "glory days" of its now struggling forest industry, the province is turning more and more to its fastest growing business sector – tourism. This diversification of economies is long overdue in BC, and tourism is often viewed as a sustainable, low-impact alternative that communities can turn to to replace resource extraction industries. Unfortunately, many of our wildlife populations have been left so compromised by a century of industrial habitat modification that even the most carefully planned backcountry tourism strategies can have a significant negative impact on dwindling populations of sensitive species.

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FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We are well into 2004 and NWPS has never been busier with presentations to classrooms all around the Lower Mainland. Thanks to the generous donations from Chevron, TD Friends of the Environment, Imperial Oil, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General (Casino Funding), Coast Capital Foundation, BC Hydro, Shell Environment Fund and many others we have over 60 free presentations, 3 walks and 2 stewardship projects to provide to schools, hospitals and community centers. Our sponsors also provided funding for newsletters, equipment for our stewardship projects, and transportation for various classroom activities.

To recap our 2003 year, we were lucky to find Becky Phillips to take over the reins of the Education and Communications Coordinator position which Kyle Margenau left vacant upon his move to Ottawa in August. Becky had a week of training and jumped feet first into her role. She was warmly received by all the schools she presented to and NWPS is very lucky to have such a dedicated and enthusiastic Environmental Educator. Becky has provided over 60 presentations during the fall of 2003 and continues her hard work through 2004. Becky will be facilitating all the programs, nature walks and stewardship projects during 2004.

We had our inaugural year for the NWPS/Keay Wildlife Calendar. Not to brag but we had a huge success! Thanks to Bill and Serena Keay for the magnificent photographic artwork that went into the calendar and special thanks to Wanda Keay for selling a huge quantity of the calendars through her personal contacts and booth at Granville Island Market. We're looking forward to continued success into the future.

Our annual fundraising campaign started January 2004 and completes the end of April. We have been fortunate to continue to receive generous public support of our programs. Thanks to funds raised by our campaign we will be able to augment the funded programs with many more publicly funded programs.

Our 3rd Annual Green Ribbon Campaign commenced April 1st, 2004. Thanks to the generous support of IGA/IGA Market Place, Chevron and many retailers in the Lower Mainland, NWPS has been able to double its reach this year. Look for Green Ribbons at various locations and show your support for the Environment!

We have recently updated and revamped our NWPS website. It now contains more activities for children, information about our programs and ways to get involved with the environment and NWPS. Thanks to the wonderful support of Adrian Wu, who did all the volunteer work on our site. Please take a look at our Volunteer page to see all the opportunities for involvement there are. We can't do this without you.

And finally, I would like to take this opportunity to say Thank You for the wonderful memories and opportunity to serve and support the community and the environment. April is my last month with NWPS as I move on to other challenges. Melissa Tupper, who left to tour Europe last year, has graciously agreed to come back to NWPS and serve as the new Executive Director. She is a wonderful asset to NWPS and I know that I leave the Society in strong hands.

Ann Peters

Executive Director



Volunteer Opportunities at NWPS!

Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society is a volunteer driven organization and we could not accomplish as much as we do without the support of our volunteers. Every month we have a variety of activities with which we need help. As a volunteer, you can choose to become involved with a variety of activities to suit all interests and skills. Our volunteer opportunities range from office administration, fundraising, wildlife research, website design, writing articles, environmental education and of course, working outside helping with our nature walks, the Youth Estuary Stewardship Program and shore line clean ups. If you are interested in helping out the environment and our wildlife, contact us at (604) 713-6686 or info@northwestwildlife.com.

Earth Day Activity

Earth Day brought NPWS an amazing opportunity to play part in restoring and rehabilitating a piece of the North Shores' popular Baden Powell Trail. This year we teamed up with the District of North Vancouver and the Langara Rotaract Club for a fabulous day in Deep Cove. With over 30 volunteers working on this Earth Day project, we all walked away with huge smiles and a great sense of accomplishment. Throughout the day we planted grand fir seedlings, ferns, and salal on an over-used trail, that was suffering from compaction and erosion as a result of the daily traffic of humans and their four legged friends. While working on restoring a section of the trail, a group of us created a new trail to replace the old. This involved clearing the trail, flattening it and building a retaining wall. This gave us a chance to use all sorts of fun tools like sledge hammers and pick axes! All of the vegetation we removed from this area was saved to be replanted elsewhere. Some of the volunteers with carpentry skills assisted in building a set of stairs for the trail. It is amazing to witness just how much a team of 30 can accomplish in a few hours. The Langara Rotaract Club did a wonderful job helping NWPS recruit volunteers for this event. We would like to thank them, the district of North Vancouver and everyone involved for helping us mark Earth Day with such a huge success.



GREEN RIBBON CAMPAIGN

As we wrap-up the third annual Green Ribbon Campaign, we are pleased to announce that it was a huge success! The Green Ribbon Campaign aims to raise the visibility and profile of environmental issues in our community, as well as provide a means to support the environment and celebrate Earth Day. Green Ribbons were distributed in over 200 locations throughout the Lower Mainland during the month of April, including IGA & MarketPlace IGA locations and Chevron service stations. Once again, we would like to sincerely thank everyone who participated in this year's campaign either as a sponsor, distributor or volunteer. We couldn't have achieved such success without your help! If you would like more information about the Green Ribbon Campaign, or to find out how you can get involved for 2005, please contact us at (604) 713-6686, email info@greenribbon.ca or visit our website at www.greenribbon.ca.

SPONSOR RECOGNITION

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#605-1112 West Pender Street
Vancouver, BC V6E 2S1
(604) 713-6686; Fax: (604) 713-6696
www.northwestwildlife.com info@northwestwildlife.com

Edited by Ann Peters and Melissa Tupper
Contributors: Davin Quinn and Becky Phillips
NWPS is a registered charity and a non-profit society. Our mandate is to develop and provide educational, research, and advisory services that advance the public's awareness and knowledge of wildlife and wildlife habitat in northwest North America. In doing so, NWPS works to ensure that healthy wildlife systems throughout North America are preserved for their own intrinsic worth and for the appreciation of all. *News and Views* is intended to be a forum for discussion. Opinions of authors of articles contained herein are not necessarily the position of NWPS.

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Jumbo Creek- Photo by Dave Quinn

Humans need to look at the big picture of a species' decline to appreciate the status of wildlife in British Columbia. A good example of this is the endangered mountain caribou. As recently as 70 years ago, there were enough of these animals to stop trains at Rogers' Pass, and even 25 years ago, large herds of 100 – 200 animals could still be seen throughout their range.

When Kinbasket Lake was created by the Mica and Revelstoke dams, hundreds of caribou caught up in a sea of floating timber in the newly logged and flooded reservoir, and drowned as they attempted to cross the Columbia on their traditional travel routes. Caribou were hunted in what one Creston resident calls a "slaughter" in the 50's, 60's and 70's, as they came to active logging areas in the late fall to eat lichen from the freshly felled trees. And now, nearly every valley that once provided caribou with their critical old-growth habitat now has a forestry road to its far reaches, and clearcuts reaching up to 6000 feet on its flanks.

This habitat modification has pushed caribou and other sensitive species such as fisher, lynx, wolverine, and grizzly into marginal and poor habitats. It has also hastened the redistribution of other ungulate species, as elk, deer, and moose follow new roads into the clearcuts. This brings these animals and their associated predators (cougar and wolves) into contact with the already compromised caribou herds, with predictable results.

The consequence is that the mountain caribou ranges have been reduced to less than half their former area and the population has been fragmented into 13+ sub-populations. There are between 1700 and 1900 mountain caribou remaining in the world today, making the species more endangered than the famed African Black Rhino.

To say that pressures on our sensitive wildlife species are intense would be an understatement so it is not hard to understand that the addition of human recreational activity such as helicopter skiing and snowmobling may well be the "nail in the coffin" for some of these highly stressed populations. This is especially true during the critical winter months, when many animals are already on the edge of survival. Some herds, such as the central Selkirks herd, have commercial recreation tenures overlapping almost their entire range, leaving no room for them to exist in undisturbed areas. Because of this added pressure, caribou biologists are calling for a moratorium on tenures that overlap with critical mountain caribou habitat.

We must become more aware of the needs of wildlife in general and especially of the needs of our sensitive species. More incursions, whether for pleasure or business, into the remaining wild spaces of the province can have disastrous long- term repercussions, not only for wildlife but for humans as well.

Websites related to Commerical Recreation in BC

- <http://lwbc.bc.ca>
- <http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/wld/comrec/crecinto.html>
- www.wildcanada.net
- www.ekes.org
- www.mountaincaribou.org
- www.gov.bc.ca/srm