



BRITISH COLUMBIA MOUNTAIN GOAT SOCIETY

SMITHERS BC CANADA

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Newsletter #18

May 5, 2021

Greetings Members

Watching an Extirpation

It's finally happened. The population of the mountain goat herd on McKendrick Mountain has gone from 22 in 2012 to eight goats in 2021. In the last year, the herd lost 57% of its nannies, juveniles and kids Why?

Sure, we don't really know why. We weren't watching when each of the goats disappeared. But we do know a lot of things. We know that mountain goats are very loyal to their home mountain. Few goats ever leave no matter how difficult things get. Even then, it's 2-year old goats that leave, not mature females. So the missing goats probably did not just walk away.

McKendrick Mountain is one of our smallest mountains and a destination for snowmobiles and backcountry skiers all winter long. We know that snowmobiles and skiers frighten the goats and that as a result, the goats stay in very steep rock for days, in snow up to their bellies, surviving on brush and conifer needles.

We also know that mountain goats prefer to stay on level ground in winter and to feed on grasses and sedges exposed by strong winds.

We know that on a good year, 50% of mountain goat kids may die of starvation or hypothermia, and that 100% of the kids in a herd may perish in a bad year. So that may explain how the herd could lose four kids in one year.

So we can infer from what we know, that recreation has displaced the goats to marginal terrain where the goats barely survive on low-grade feed. And that's the cause of the steep decline in population. In other words, the number of goats has declined to match the decline in the quality and quantity of their winter habitat.

But are we correct? Is that the true reason? Do we have sufficient evidence?

We rely on hours and hours of standing in the snow looking at the herd of mountain goats through a spotting scope. We watched the goats for 62 hours over 31 sessions in the last year just to figure out the population of the herd on McKendrick as accurately as possible and to observe the stresses that affect the herd.

Lastly we calculate that the herd on McKendrick Mountain will recover if the mountain is closed to snowmobiles and backcountry skiers. Only time will tell whether all our assumptions and inferences are valid. But when we see a dramatic decline in the number of goats in a herd, it's time to pull out all the stops and do what we can to fix the problem.

Attached is a paper on McKendrick Mountain that gives an overview.

Surprises

Mountain goats have always surprised us. Often we think we know what how a mountain goat thinks or behaves but, like magic, a goat will prove us wrong. As an example, we thought that nannies never babysit kids other than their own.

We recently watched a nanny with two kids. There were no other nannies within sight. So we thought that's nice – a pair of twins. The next day and there was the same nanny with her kid and a second nanny with her kid. There were only two kids in the herd. So there you are. Nannies do babysit. At least once. While we were watching.



Nanny with her 11-month old kid

The BC Mountain Goat Hunt

The mountain goat hunt is an important topic in the conservation of mountain goats. Approximately 800 goats die each year on average in British Columbia as a result of the mountain goat hunt so the hunt is a major factor in the sustainability of mountain goats. In this newsletter we will attempt to list all the positive aspects of the hunt. In the next issue we will tally the negative effects. You can then be the judge of whether the hunt should be sustained as it is today.

Please let us know if we miss something. Email mtgoats@bcnorth.ca

Pros:

Provides sport and entertainment for trophy hunters from around the world and for resident hunters. The hunt may contribute to appreciation of our BC mountains.

Provides a way for hunters to physically connect with an iconic species.

Provides income for guide outfitters and local businesses that cater to hunters such as restaurants, sport shops, airlines, etc.

Provides income from fees for the provincial government that helps pay the salaries of staff biologists who manage the hunt and who make sure that there are enough mountain goats for the hunt and for biodiversity.

Provides sustenance for some hunters, although mountain goat meat is not highly rated, and packing meat off a mountain can be very difficult.

Provides ceremonial materials for First Nations such as hide, hair, meat, horn and bone.

The hunt continues a centuries-long cultural tradition of hunting.

The hunt is regulated, unlike other poorly regulated activities that can be harmful such as motorized recreation, heli-skiing and logging road development.



Most mountain goats are born in the period from May 21 to June 7

Until the next time,

Jim

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