



## BRITISH COLUMBIA MOUNTAIN GOAT SOCIETY

SMITHERS BC CANADA

MTGOATS@BCNORTH.CA

### Newsletter #19

June 6, 2021

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Greetings Members

In the last newsletter, we listed all the positive aspects of the BC mountain goat hunt. In this newsletter, we will list all the possible negative effects of the hunt.

In BC, hunters harvest about 800 mountain goats each year out of a total estimated population of 45,000.

If you are aware of a factor we missed, please send your comments to [mtgoats@bcnorth.ca](mailto:mtgoats@bcnorth.ca)

Traditional hunt cons:

- Hunters target the largest and healthiest mountain goats. In contrast, predators tend to harvest the young, the old and the sick. Hunters reduce the long-term sustainability of the herd by harvesting the best goats while predators tend to increase the sustainability of the herd by harvesting the weakest and leaving the best. This may be one of the most important long-term consequences of the traditional hunt.
- By targeting the largest mountain goats, hunters may select for a change of genes over the long term toward a smaller body mass. Mountain goats are adapted to arctic conditions and a large body mass is critical for keeping warm. A reduction of body mass may result in hypothermia in very cold temperatures when combined with strong alpine winds.
- Harvesting by hunters can be additive to other negative factors such as avalanches, rockfalls, starvation, low rate of reproduction, predation, displacement by recreation or helicopters, etc.

- Most large ungulates flee when they see a predator approaching. Mountain goats behave differently, if not hunted on a regular basis. Goats move to a nearby cliff and stand on a narrow ledge where the predator cannot follow. Goats stay in place until the predator leaves. This natural behaviour works well with traditional predators but not when stalked by a human hunter. The goat becomes a stationary target and the hunter can take time to make multiple shots. Is this fair sport?
- To avoid predators, mountain goats travel at random over a large tract of open alpine in summer and fall. But goats avoid areas frequented by humans. By traveling extensively in goat habitat, hunters may “push” a herd of goats into a small portion of their range, and may increase the ability of predators to find and attack members of the herd.
- Hunted mountain goats behave differently than non-hunted goats. Hunted goats flee humans at first sight, whether the human is a hunter with a gun or a hiker with a trekking pole. Hunted mountain goats are so sensitive to all human presence that they can be moved off of their preferred terrain, interrupting feeding and rest.
- Some hunters are unable to distinguish the gender of an adult mountain goat from a distance. Mature females often have horns that are longer than the horns on mature males. These two factors contribute to the fact that approximately 30% of the harvest over the years has been mature females. Mature females are more successful at raising young than younger females, so the harvest of mature females has a disproportionate and negative effect on the herd population.
- When targeting a mountain goat, the hunter has no way to know the importance of that goat to the herd. The harvested goat may be the lead nanny or the most dominate mature male, and removal may reduce successful pregnancies or erode the collective knowledge of the herd regarding best locations for feed, rest, safety from predation, escape routes, etc.
- Mountain goats do not need to be hunted unlike some other wild ungulates that require harvesting if the population increases enough to degrade their ecosystem. Mountain goat populations are naturally held in check by all the natural hazards along with predation, low rate of reproduction and limited available winter habitat.
- The mountain goat hunt in most regions of BC ends on November 15. In Region 6 Skeena, the hunt continues all winter and ends on February 28. The Region 6 hunt may interfere with the rut in late November and early December. Hunters

may disturb and/or displace mature males or mature females during the rut resulting in fewer pregnancies.

- Mountain goats move to their winter habitat by October 15. After that date, the goats are restricted to a very small area and have less opportunity to escape from hunters in Region 6, who can be active all winter until February 28.
- If dominant mature males are harvested, will mature females accept the advances of younger less-dominant males during the rut? Or will the females go unbred? This point is important and needs research.
- Disease can be transmitted from mountain goats to humans. Hunters are advised to wear gloves when dressing a carcass in the field.
- A hunter may wound a mountain goat and be unable to retrieve the animal on a steep cliff, the terrain likely favoured by a wounded goat.
- The traditional mountain goat hunt is a trophy hunt. The meat is not highly regarded, is tough and hard to cook. The meat can be very difficult to pack off the mountain, so the hunt is not normally done for sustenance but for private display of a trophy.
- Local realtors advise home owners with wildlife trophies on the wall to remove the trophies before showing the house to a prospective buyer to avoid the buyer's disgust at the sight of trophies. This reflects the increasing lack of respect for trophy hunting by society in general and by BC residents specifically.
- Advances in the technology of hunting rifles allow a hunter to shoot longer distances more accurately. A skilled shooter on a rifle range can keep shots within a 20 cm circle at 1000 meters. While accuracy in the field is less than on a rifle range, the question is whether long-distance shooting is fair sport.
- Hunters often do not venture more than 2 km from the nearest road. The mountains most hunted are close to town. The result is that goat herds near roads on mountains that are close to town are hunted intensively while goat herds on more remote mountains are lightly hunted or not hunted at all. This concentrates the hunt on mountains close to town and adds stress to goat herds already stressed by other forms of recreation such as hiking or motorized recreation.
- Some provincial parks allow mountain goat hunting near popular hiking trails. Hunted goat herds become very sensitive to the presence of humans. The goat

herds are constantly on the move in late summer and fall trying to get away from both hunters and hikers. This forced travel can interrupt feeding and resting.

- If not hunted, goats can be very curious about humans or may ignore people nearby altogether, allowing naturalists and photographers to get within viewing distance.
- Hunting led to extirpation of many mountain goat herds in the northwestern states and southern BC in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- In British Columbia, hunters are able to harvest one mountain goat each year, and to harvest multiple goats in the hunter's lifetime. Other jurisdictions allow each hunter to harvest only one mountain goat in that hunter's lifetime.
- Regulations in the BC Wildlife Act restrict the ability of guide outfitters to conduct non-consumptive hunts to view or photograph mountain goats.
- BC staff biologists are often working with outdated census data. The lack of accurate knowledge about goat populations can lead to over-harvests.
- Staff biologists may make decisions about the mountain goat harvest based on the rate of success by hunters in past years rather than on an aerial census that is more expensive and more accurate. Hunters are persistent and innovative. The rate of success may remain high even though the population is declining, and recovery of the herd may become difficult or no longer possible.
- There is a lack of basic knowledge about mountain goats such as the importance of mineral licks, the importance of mature adults to the herd, the role of dispersal, etc.
- Trophy hunting is partially based on the premise that the wild animal being stalked is to be feared. After observing thousands of mountain goats over the last 50 years, we can assure hunters that mountain goats are not to be feared. (unless you try to rope one)

## Discussion

As you can see from this long list, hunters may affect a herd of goats far beyond harvesting a member of the herd.

Our BC Mountain Goat Society actively supports non-consumptive use of mountain goats such as a wildlife viewing or a photo hunt. In regard to the traditional hunt, we regard the hunt as just another human activity that affects mountain goats, along with

recreation, industry, etc. If it can be demonstrated that the traditional hunt can continue without affecting the sustainability of BC mountain goat herds, then it can be tolerated. But you can see from our list of pros and cons, the traditional hunt has lots of problems, and may already be partially responsible for the long-term decline of the mountain goat in BC.

The following photos are from the first batch of video clips from our trail cameras out last winter. The photos are low resolution but as portraits, they are priceless.





**BC Mountain Goat Society**  
**May 17, 2021**



Until the next time.

Jim

Jim Easterday  
Co-founder and director  
British Columbia Mountain Goat Society  
Smithers BC  
250-847-4802

[mtgoats@bcnorth.ca](mailto:mtgoats@bcnorth.ca)

[www.mtgoats.ca](http://www.mtgoats.ca)

[www.bcmountaingoatsociety.ca](http://www.bcmountaingoatsociety.ca)