



## BRITISH COLUMBIA MOUNTAIN GOAT SOCIETY

SMITHERS BC CANADA

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Newsletter #13

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Greetings to all members

### **Heli-ski Certification**

One of the most significant threats to mountain goats in BC is the heli-ski industry. The majority of operators are affiliated with Helicat Canada. At <http://www.helicat.org/member-operators> they claim 10 million hectares of tenure in BC. Look at the map and you will see that the tenures cover a lot of mountain goat winter habitat. The flight paths of the helicopters used to ferry clients to alpine ridges pass close to goats. Unless closely monitored, we don't have any way to tell whether each helicopter flew a path that affected mountain goats or not. Recorded flight data is only required by the provincial government within NW BC (Skeena Region).

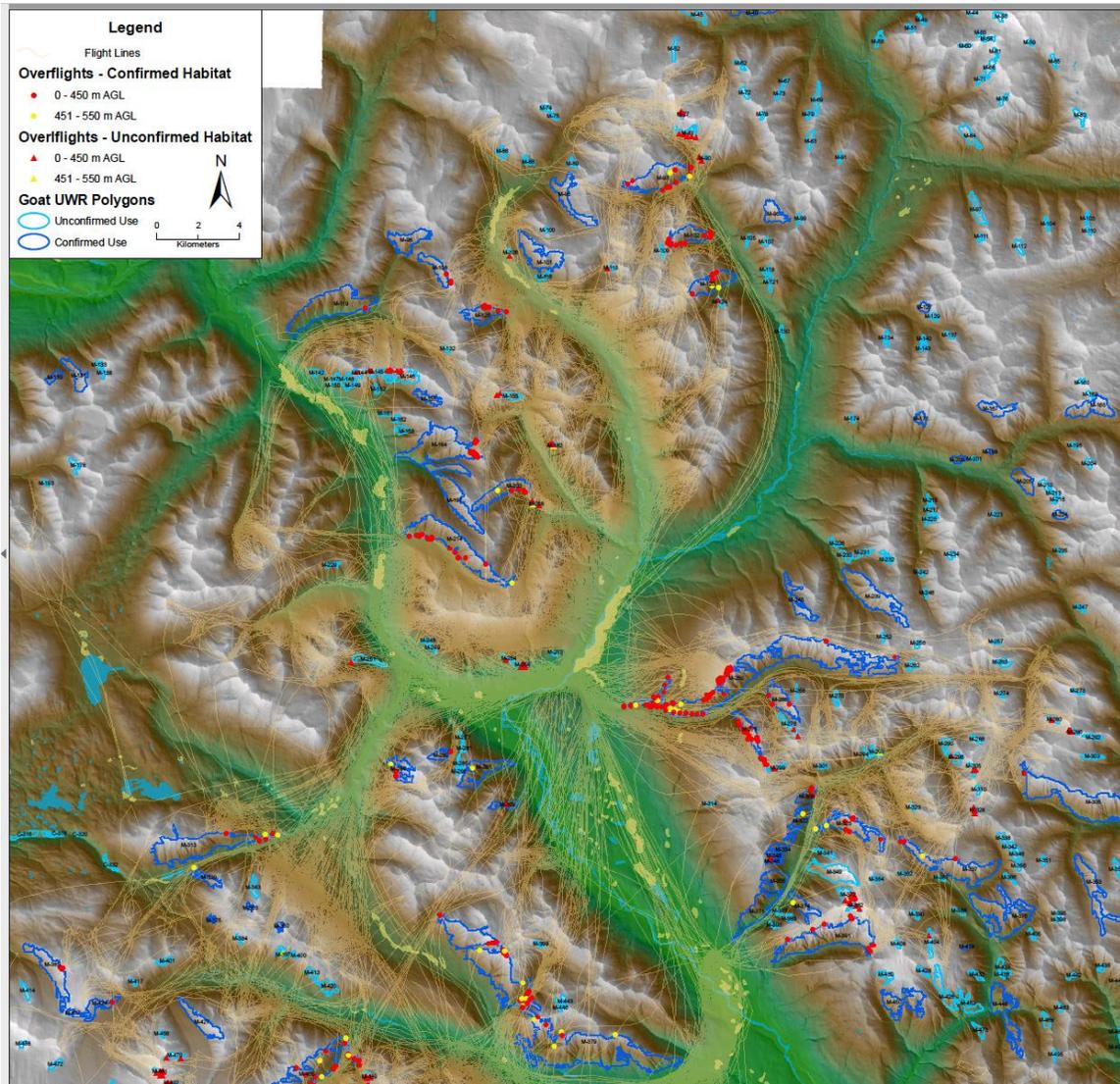
In Skeena Region, government biologists have developed standards for heli-ski flights and a method of keeping track of every flight. Each helicopter is outfitted with an iPad loaded with approved flight paths and known mountain goat winter ranges including horizontal distance buffers. The pilot refers to the map on the screen to fly the correct flight path. At the same time, each flight is recorded by GPS and downloaded upon returning to base. All flights for the entire ski season are available for review by the operator's consulting biologist and government personnel.

One of our BCMGS directors, Len Vanderstar, was the author of the heli-ski performance and reporting system for Skeena. After 25 years with the provincial government as a wildlife biologist, Len has retired to start a consulting service. To continue his work to protect mountain goats, Len has teamed up with our society to offer independent third-party certification to heli-ski operators.

To be approved, the heli-ski operators has to outfit each helicopter with an iPad with approved flight paths. At the end of the ski season, the operator submits their performance report signed off by their registered biologist, along with all recorded flight data to our society. Len reviews the performance report and flight data and recommends approval or disapproval to our directors. When approved, the operator earns the right to display our certification logo on their website and literature. At the end of each year, the

latest performance report and flight data is submitted for approval and renewal of the certification may be granted.

As far as we know this is a first time that independent third party certification has been offered to the heli-ski industry anywhere in the world. Certification is one way we can motivate the heli-ski industry to higher standards and tighter control of helicopter flights. Len is the best qualified person to review heli-ski performance reports and flight paths, and certification is a perfect follow-up to his years of work protecting mountain goats.



We obtained the heli-ski flight path map above by Freedom of Information request. We deleted the name of the heli-ski operator. Each yellow line is a separate helicopter flight. Mountain goat habitat is marked in blue. Zoom in to the map to see how close the helicopters fly to goat habitat and how many flights result from ferrying skiers all day every day. The red and yellow dots are overflights of goat habitat contrary to approved planning.

Heli-ski operators should be able to use our certification as a marketing tool to convey to clients, government, First Nations and the public that they are operating to the highest standards in regard to mountain goats.

We are not sure if members of the heli-ski industry will accept our offer for certification but it will only take one operator to break the ice. At the same time, we are applying pressure for higher accountability and showing government the way of the future.

We have set up a web page at [www.bcmountaingoatsociety.ca/certification.asp](http://www.bcmountaingoatsociety.ca/certification.asp) Attached is a copy of the Certification Criteria.

### **Motorized closure**

Attached is a copy of a proposal to close motorized recreation access to McKendrick mountain, located 25 km east of Smithers BC. Local members will recognize the name of the mountain but BCMGS members from away can read the proposal and get a sense of the problem and the solution. This is our society's second proposal to close a mountain to snowmobiling in the last year.

In general, local snowmobiling does not interfere with mountain goats. The sleds are normally looking for terrain that goats would not like – deep snow on rolling alpine. But once in a while sleds stumble right into the middle of the winter home of a herd of goats. We do not want to see goats harassed every weekend and finally forced to abandon their chosen home to face extirpation.

That's it for now.

Cheers

Jim

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