



BRITISH COLUMBIA MOUNTAIN GOAT SOCIETY

SMITHERS BC CANADA

MTGOATS@BCNORTH.CA

Newsletter #27

April 9, 2023

Greetings Members

McKendrick Mountain

The voluntary closure on McKendrick Mountain is scheduled to end in the fall of 2023. We will recommend that the closure continue for another two years. The number of goats in the herd is stable and younger nannies are almost old enough to produce kids. Local hikers, skiers and snowmobilers have cooperated and stayed off the mountain. The herd is capable of increasing in size but only if they are undisturbed.

By observing and filming the McKendrick herd every week of the winter for the last three years, we are recording behaviour that is seldom reported elsewhere. For instance, Report #7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yaiiVAsb2Sg> showed the herd escaping from skiers. That video had an emotional impact for some viewers and others were concerned about the herd. The mountain was covered by cloud for a week after that event but when we finally spotted the herd, they were all back to where they started.

Unseen

Hiking, skiing, snowmobiling – they all affect mountain goats. But the irony of the situation is that the recreationists often never see mountain goats. We have talked with snowmobilers who have been to the summit of McKendrick Mountain dozens of times and they were surprised to learn that there is a herd of mountain goats. We have hiked on trails and seen a herd of mountain goats moving out of the way far ahead. We talk with other hikers on the trail. They never saw any goats. Mountain goats are shy. They view people as alien and potentially dangerous. Goats move away from humans long before the people arrive. How do we make recreationists aware of the goats around them so that they can avoid disturbing the goats?

Signs

One solution to the disturbance of mountain goats by recreation is signage. This can be signs along trails or pamphlets describing trails. The signs must describe in detail where the goats are and how people can avoid disturbing them. Ideally the sign would indicate how users can view the goats safely but that is often not possible. Viewing can lead to displacement. So we end up telling users about animals they may never actually see. That's a hard sell.

Control

People ignore signs. That's a given. We all do it. When people start ignoring signs and, as a result, mountain goats are disturbed, government has to go to the next step – control by regulation. Locally we've seen all manner of closures. Motorized vehicle closures, hunting closures, even non-motorized closures such as in the Telkwa Caribou Recovery Area. Some closures are for defined parts of the year – from this date to that date. That allows recreation for the balance of the year. Of course, closures must be specific to each mountain and carefully crafted to both protect the resource (mountain goats in this case) and permit some level of recreation.

Ultimately it is the responsibility of the province to protect mountain goats. But the province hesitates to interfere with people's right to recreation on Crown land. Residents in rural BC take outdoor recreation extremely seriously. Other than work, it's simply what people do – all year round. Recreation keeps them healthy physically and mentally. But eventually the province has to decide – goats or recreation? When is control of recreation justified? Do you wait until the herd is almost gone or do you take action while the herd is still healthy? As our human population grows and access to mountain goat terrain becomes easier, we can count on more regulated access for recreation.

Everyone loves mountain goats

The one thing going for mountain goats is – everyone loves mountain goats. Whenever we talk about goats with people, they insist on describing a time long ago when a mountain goat walked right past their picnic site or through their yard. They remember the exact time and day. The event is burned into their memory. Mountain goats are like ghosts. They show up then they disappear. Goats seem magical. And they live on top of the world. Doesn't get better than that. So we start out with public support when we advocate for protection of mountain goats.

Camera census

Population data for mountain goats is vital to management but keeping track of mountain goat herds is difficult. The terrain can be impossible for observers on foot, so most population censuses are done with a helicopter. Until now, observers flew less than 100 meters away from goat terrain, counted the goats in view and recorded the number of kids and adults on worksheets. There was no way to more accurately determine sex or age without alarming the goats by flying repeat passes to take a better look.

We are experimenting with a new method – photograph each mountain goat with a high resolution camera. Photos can be reviewed at leisure after the flight. Photos provide an accurate historical record. The age and sex of each goat can often be determined from photos.



*The white arrow points to a billy in a photo taken with our new camera
(The odd circle to the left is a vent in the window)*

Cameras are now available with enough resolution to photograph goats. The camera we chose is the Fujifilm GFX 100s, a medium format camera. Each photo is 130 MB. A printout of each photo is 45 inches wide (11648 pixels). That means that rather than rely on a telephoto lens that narrows the field of view, we use a standard 45 mm lens that photographs half a mountain side. In post production, we zoom in to see goats that are almost invisible from the helicopter. If we fly at 200 to 250 meters distance, the goats show less alarm and we still have a good chance of determining sex and age.

The image of a billy below is part of an original photo shown in reduced size on the previous page. The white arrow in the large photo points to the billy on the ridge. Zoom in and the billy is barely visible. But if we zoom into the original photo at full size, we can plainly see the billy, shown in the small image to the left. We can tell from the body shape and context that it's a mature billy. This identification would be difficult without the photo.



More about this later.

Until the next time.

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