



BRITISH COLUMBIA MOUNTAIN GOAT SOCIETY

SMITHERS BC CANADA

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Watching an Extirpation – McKendrick Mountain

April 24, 2021

We don't like to be the bearer of bad news but we are witnessing an extirpation of mountain goats on McKendrick Mountain. The mountain is located 28 km east of Smithers BC.

In 2012 we photographed 20 mountain goats in the nanny herd plus two billies for a total of 22. After monitoring a steady decline in the population for eight years, on April 4, 2020 we observed a total mountain goat population of 14 consisting of four kids, seven nannies and three billies.

This year, on January 23, 2021, we observed eight goats on the mountain using a spotting scope at two observation posts on the Babine Lake Road. It seemed hard to believe that the mountain goat population could decrease so much in only one year. On January 30, 2021, once again we counted eight goats. We increased our observations from once per week to twice weekly. On April 18, 2021, we once again counted eight goats.

On April 19 and 20, 2021 we finally observed the entire herd in one place. We are confident that our count of eight mountain goats is accurate. The herd is made up of three nannies, two 11-month old kids and three billies.

Losses

In the last year, the mountain goat herd on McKendrick Mountain has lost all four kids we observed in 2020 plus four nannies. The herd has gained two kids for a net loss of six goats, 43% of the population. Since 2012, the nanny herd, not counting the billies, has declined from 20 to five, a loss of 75%.

The entire herd now depends on three nannies to recover the population. The trend is clear. We are witnessing an extirpation of the herd.

How did this happen?

The mountain goat herd would normally stay on the flat summit of the McKendrick Mountain. Strong wind keeps the snow depth less than 30 cm. Travel on the flat summit takes little energy. The dry grasses and sedges on the summit are high quality feed.

But that is not what happens. The constant snowmobile traffic on the mountain has forced the herd to stay in steep ground about 200 meters below the flat summit of the mountain. The goats' terrain is on a 45 degree slope and covered with 120 cm or more of snow. The goats are more prone to falls and avalanches than they would be on the flat summit.

Starvation

The goats plough through the deep snow up to their bellies to find browse. The goats browse on brush and subalpine fir needles with low food value. The calories consumed may not meet the expenditure of energy. Travelling on such a steep slope takes more energy than on the flat. Goats slowly use up the fat stored in their bodies from summer. The goats may starve or die from hypothermia. This is especially true of young mountain goats. With a small body size, kids and juveniles may not have the fat reserves to survive the winter without a consistent supply of high quality feed.

Predator highway

Snowmobiles can affect mountain goats in more ways than simply displacing the goats onto marginal terrain. Deep snow between the valley bottom and goats in the alpine is often soft enough to stop predators. Snowmobile tracks create a perfect packed trail for predators such as wolves and wolverines to travel from the valley right to the goats' home.

Compaction

Snowmobile tracks compact the snow on the summit of the mountain and make it more difficult for mountain goats to paw through the snow to reach alpine plants for food. This extra expenditure of energy uses up vital reserves when goats get the chance to feed at the summit.

Inbreeding

Another possible factor is inbreeding. Mountain goats are extremely loyal to their home mountain and immigrant goats from other mountains are rare. As the population of the herd declines, the likelihood of males mating with their mothers or daughters increases. Inbreeding can result in congenital defects that weaken the young. With only three nannies and three billies, the McKendrick Mountain herd is at that population level where inbreeding can affect the herd. Young billies that may venture from Babine Mountain Park onto McKendrick Mountain have yet to be observed and will likely not compete for breeding rights with the remaining mature billies.

What can be done?

Protect the resource. All stresses on the herd must be removed so that the herd can retake the summit meadows, and so that they do not have to flee whenever they hear the whine of a snowmobile engine. At this stage, even the occasional hiker or backcountry skier should be banned from the mountain. The mountain goats can recover if we all work together to give them every possible chance. We recommend the following actions:

- Prohibit all motorized and non-motorized recreation on McKendrick Mountain above the 1550 meter elevation by October of 2021, the start of the snowmobile and ski season.
- Avoid all helicopter flights near the mountain as much as possible.
- Four weeks from now, in the third week of May, one or more of the three nannies may give birth. The nannies and any new kids must be protected. No one should visit McKendrick Mountain for any reason during the natal period. All observations can be done using spotting scopes along the Babine Lake Road.

Emergency

We regard this situation as an emergency. Both the long -term and short-term trends are the total loss of nannies and kids on McKendrick Mountain. If that happens, the three billies become irrelevant.

The only salvation for the McKendrick Mountain mountain goat herd is for the entire community to work together to give the herd time and space to recover. Please do your part. Thank you.

Future action

We recommend the establishment of a new Skeena Mountain Goat Committee made up of representatives from Fish and Wildlife branch, BC Mountain Goat Society, Smithers Snowmobile Association and the Wet'suwet'en office. The goal is to review all local snowmobile areas and map out all mountain goat winter habitat. The committee will then recommend closure areas to government to keep snowmobiles from displacing or disturbing mountain goats.

Background

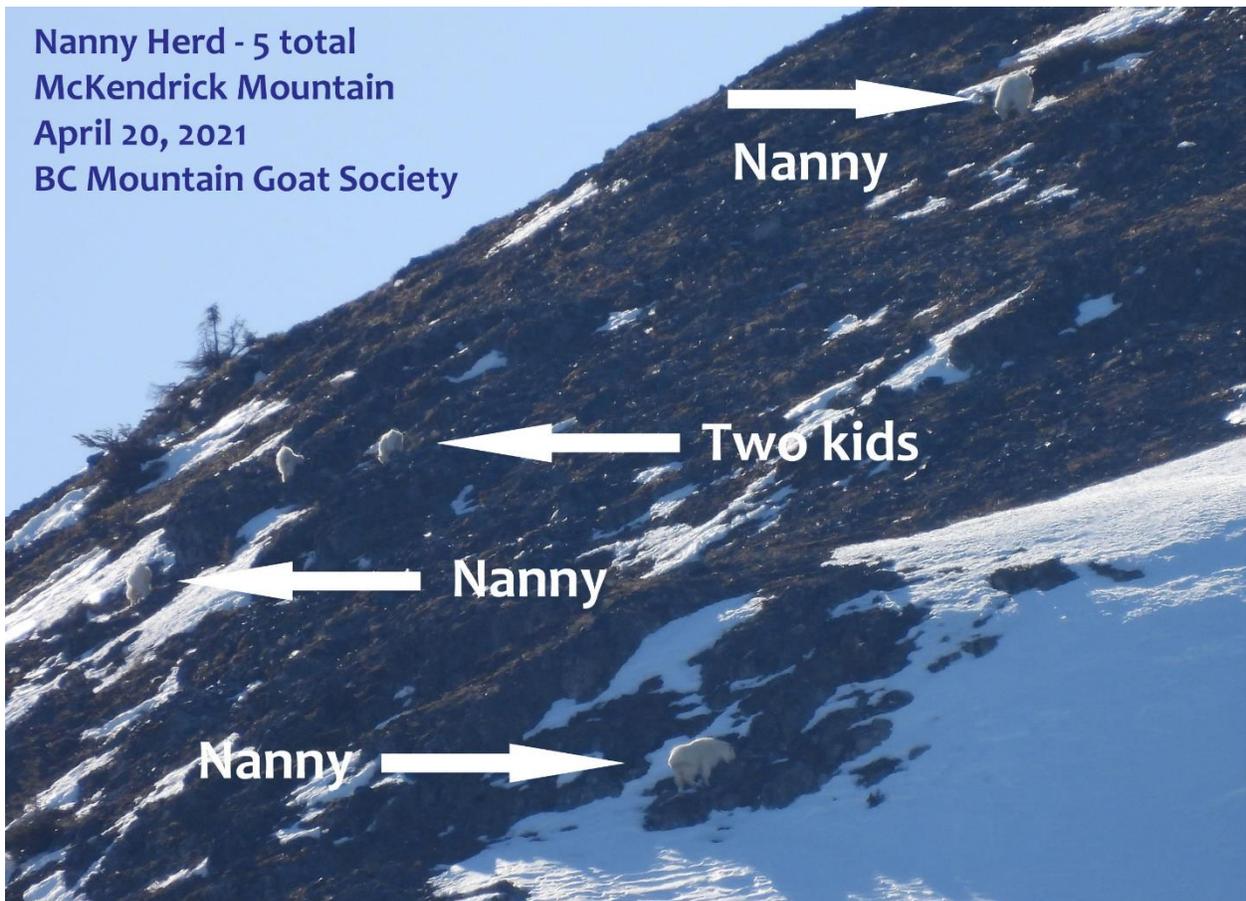
In 2011, we produced a video about the [Mountain Goats on McKendrick Mt - YouTube](#) under the name of the BV Outdoor Recreation Society. That video is especially relevant now.



BC Mountain Goat Society

20 goats - McKendrick Mt - 2012

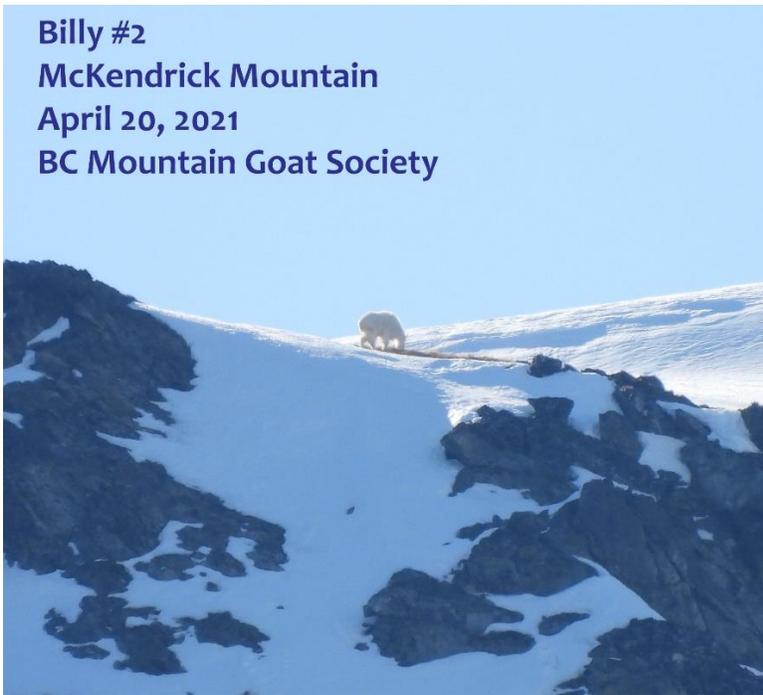
Nanny herd in 2012

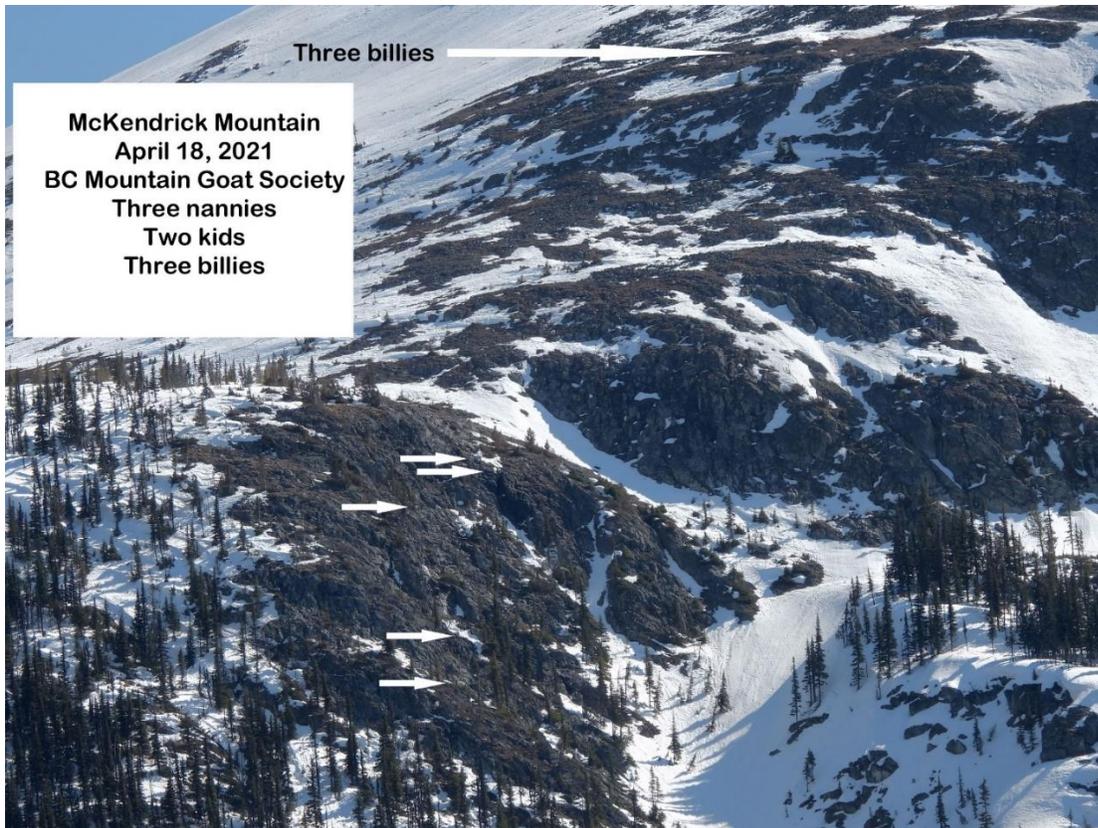


Billy #1
McKendrick Mountain
April 20, 2021
BC Mountain Goat Society



Billy #2
McKendrick Mountain
April 20, 2021
BC Mountain Goat Society





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