

WILDLIFE AND RECREATION- COLVILLE NATIONAL FOREST

Overview

This document is intended to provide information concerning the interactions between wildlife species of management interest and recreation, both motorized and non-motorized. Specifically, this paper provides information on 1) a summary of the effects of motorized and non-motorized recreation on wildlife, 2) overview of current management direction that addresses recreation and interactions for some key wildlife species, and 3) approaches to the integration of recreation and wildlife management.

Motorized and Non-Motorized Recreation and Wildlife

There is a variety of new information (see References below) that has become available since the original forest plans were developed that document the interactions between wildlife and recreation. These interactions influence the recovery and sustainability of Threatened and Endangered (caribou, lynx, grizzly bear) species, Species of Conservation Concern (wolverine), and Species of Interest (deer and elk). The potential affects of roads and other recreation routes (both motorized and non-motorized) on wildlife include:

- displacement of species from important habitats;
- increased human-caused wildlife mortalities;
- disturbance to wildlife during critical periods; and
- reduction in the connectivity of habitats.

While both motorized and non-motorized forms of recreation can have similar effects on wildlife, these interactions vary depending on the wildlife species. For example, some species are more sensitive to motorized trail use (wolverine), whereas others are more sensitive to non-motorized trail use (bald eagle). In addition, these effects can vary by season as some wildlife species are not active during the winter (bears), while for others, the winter becomes a critical time for their survival (deer and elk). Thus the effects of winter recreation vary depending on the species. Because of these effects, it is important to consider the timing (season of use) and amount of area influenced by various types of recreation when addressing the recovery and conservation of wildlife species. Recreation, in all its various forms, can be managed to be compatible with wildlife conservation provided we do careful planning of where and when activities occur. In addition, some forms of recreation such as hunting and wildlife viewing, are dependent upon healthy wildlife populations.

Recreation Interactions with Key Wildlife Species

Winter Recreation

Woodland Caribou

The Woodland Caribou was federally listed as an Endangered species in 1984. In the mid-1990s, to advance recovery efforts, an interagency effort was initiated to augment caribou populations in the Selkirk Mountains of Washington. A caribou habitat land management allocation was included in the Colville Forest Plan. However, new science has identified winter recreational activities as an important issue in relation to caribou recovery; this issue was not addressed in the existing forest plans. A recreation strategy has been developed that can be used to guide how to address caribou and winter recreation in the revised forest plan.

Canada Lynx

The Canada lynx was federally listed as a Threatened species in 2000; however, no recovery plan has yet been completed. In 2000, an interagency team completed the Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (LCAS) that is used as a reference for planning and consultation. As per the Interagency Lynx Agreement signed in 2000, forest plans would be revised to adopt lynx management strategies using the LCAS and other new science. Winter recreation was addressed in the LCAS and identified as a risk factor for lynx. Since the completion of the Interagency Lynx Agreement, the Colville National Forest has been implementing a strategy of “no net gain” in groomed and designated snow routes within lynx habitat.

Wolverine

The wolverine is listed as a “Sensitive” species and has been identified as a species of conservation concern for the forest plan revision. Wolverines use high elevation subalpine cirques to raise their young where winter recreational activities may displace or disturb them. Careful consideration of the location and amount of winter recreation in relation to their denning habitat is needed to provide for their conservation.

Deer and Elk Winter Ranges

Management guidance in the existing forest plans place limits on winter recreation that occurs on deer and elk winter ranges. These were put in place to limit the disturbance of deer and elk during the critical winter period when food resources may be limiting and energy reserves are low. Monitoring has not revealed any reasons to modify these standards in any substantial way in the revised forest plan.

Roads and Motorized Recreation

Grizzly Bear

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Comments: Wildlife and Recreation for Collaboration

Roads and motorized trails have been documented to displace grizzly bears from important seasonal habitats and can lead to increased chances for negative bear-human interactions. The Colville National Forest is currently meeting the conditions set forth by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for management of grizzly bears in the Selkirk Grizzly Bear Recovery Area. There is a need to update the Colville Forest Plan to reflect current conditions for managing this grizzly bear population so that it is consistent with other portions of the Selkirk Recovery Zone; however, these changes are likely to be minor and similar to existing management.

Wolverine

Wolverines are quite sensitive to roads and motorized recreation but are not particularly affected by non-motorized recreation trails. They primarily use mid-and higher elevation forests and non-forested habitats. In general, they will use areas with open road densities that are <1 mile/mile² much more than areas with higher open road densities. Careful consideration of where to manage for motorized versus non-motorized forms of recreation are needed to assure the conservation of this species.

Deer and Elk Winter Range

The Colville National Forest has an open road density standards in key deer and elk winter ranges. Approximately 18 percent of the Forest is allocated to these winter range for these species. Monitoring has not indicated a need for substantial changes to these standards.

Non-Motorized Recreation

Several studies have documented the displacement of grizzly bears from non-motorized trails. Non-motorized trails are considered in the current management strategy for grizzly bears within the Selkirk Recovery Zone and monitoring has not indicated a need for much change to this strategy.

A summary of the important interactions between various forms of recreation and key wildlife habitats to consider.

Recreation Activity	Key Wildlife Habitats
Winter Recreation	Woodland Caribou Recovery Zone, Deer and Elk Winter Range, Potential Wolverine Denning, Lynx Habitat
Roads and Motorized Recreation	Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone, Deer and Elk Winter Range, Wolverine Habitat
Non-Motorized Recreation	Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone

Integration of Recreation and Wildlife Management

In order to facilitate the integration of recreation and wildlife management, several sources of information have been developed. The sources of recreation information are described in the Recreation whitepaper (written by Linda Fee) and include things like the inventoried roadless areas, current motorized and non-motorized trails, and roads and road densities. Resource information on the quality and quantity of wildlife habitat for each of the species discussed above has also been developed and can be made available upon request. For example, the following are available in GIS:

- Caribou and grizzly bear recovery zones
- Deer and elk winter range management areas
- Lynx Analysis Units and lynx habitat
- Wolverine habitat and potential denning habitat

By overlaying the resource information for recreation onto the information for wildlife, it would be possible to identify priority areas for the conservation of various species and for various forms of recreation.

References for Further Reading

Richard L. Knight and Kevin J. Gutzwiller. 1995. *Wildlife and Recreationists: coexistence through management and research*. Island Press.

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USDA Forest Service, Colville National Forest. 2003. *Sullivan Lake Ranger District: Winter recreation strategy*.