

Wildlife Winter Crews

Communications & Safety Plan for 2013

Introduction

Wildlife field crews will be working on the Missoula, Ninemile, Seeley Lake, and Lincoln Ranger Districts (of the Lolo and Helena National Forests, respectively) to conduct carnivore surveys (Seeley Lake and Lincoln RDs), and to live-trap fishers (Missoula RD). The field season will run from 3 January thru 30 March, 2013. The nature of the work will require travel on snowmobiles, snowshoes, and in a 4x4 vehicle pulling a snowmobile trailer.

The crew will work a flexible schedule, generally 4-10's Monday thru Thurs on Seeley Lake and Lincoln RD's. The fisher trapping work on the Missoula and Ninemile RDs will require 7-day-a-week work, since traps will need to be checked daily. Technicians will work an overlapping schedule, with one pair working Mon-Fri, and the other pair working Thurs-Mon. On any given work day, at least two crew members will be working together for the day.

Because of the nature of field work, and to efficiently survey areas and minimize vehicle travel time, their work days will often exceed hours during which radios are being monitored at ranger districts or by dispatch centers. The crews will try to be back to the pickup/trailhead by dark every day, but may not return to the bunkhouse/field station until later. This communication plan has been developed to explicitly address check-in/check-out and other communications for the crew's safety. For details on additional safety measures, including training the crews has received, please see the end of this document, and/or contact Carly Lewis (406-329-3848) for further details.

*** Note: All technicians will carry a copy of this communications plan with them at all times in the field. Copies will also be sent to the District Rangers, District Biologists, and front desk of each of the ranger districts on which crew members will be working, as well as to the Missoula and Helena Dispatch Centers.*

Check-in/Check-out Procedures

Procedures and check-in people will vary slightly depending on which ranger district the crew is working on. It is the crew's responsibility to let district staff (specifically the district wildlife biologist and front desk staff) know when they will be working on the district.

1. Morning Check-out:

- a. Field crew will use the district's sign out board to record the general area in which they will be working for the day (on Seeley Lake or Lincoln RD), or will call Missoula Dispatch

(if working on Missoula or Ninemile RD). The front desk of each ranger district and the Dispatch Centers will have a copy of the field maps indicating the grid cell numbers and survey areas, and the district biologists will each have detailed field maps of where the crew will be working.

- b. The crew is responsible for telling the Ranger District front desk or Dispatch, accordingly, who their **designated check-in person for that day** is. This information will be recorded for future use, if needed. Most of the time this will be the biologist for the district they're working on (Scott Tomson in Seeley Lake, Pat Shanley in Lincoln, or Carly Lewis in Missoula or Ninemile), or another district staff person who has been previously contacted and is expecting to get a check-in phone call from the crew (see phone numbers below)

2. Mid-day Check-up:

- a. Around 12:00 each day the crew will call the ranger station (if working on Seeley or Lincoln RD) or Dispatch (if working on Missoula or Ninemile RD) via radio (preferred) or cell phone (if radios are not working but phones are), and give a brief status report (i.e. "we're still in Cottonwood Creek and all's going well"). The ranger station staff will record the check-in. If the crew does not check in mid-day, the Ranger Station or Dispatch will attempt to contact them on the radio every hour until they are heard from.
- b. If at any point throughout the day the crew makes a major change of plans and leaves the originally indicated area, they will call the ranger station or Dispatch, accordingly, to report the itinerary change.**

3. Afternoon Check-up:

- a. Around 16:00 the crew will once again call the ranger station or Dispatch to check in, and indicate their progress (i.e. "we're headed back to the rig now", or "we're still in Cottonwood Creek following a track, so we'll be later than normal getting in—likely back to the station around 1900").
- b. If the crew did not check in at mid-day, and they have not been heard from by 16:00, initiate **Search Procedure**, as indicated below.
- c. If the crew checked in at noon, but not at 16:00, the Ranger Station or Dispatch will attempt to contact the crew at 15 minute intervals until it is time to leave for the day. If they have not heard from the crew by close of business (usually 16:30), the Front Deks or Dispatch will alert the crew's Designated Check-in Person for that Day (check the log from the morning to see who that person is). That person will continue to try to contact the crew until 17:00, at which point they will initiate **Search Procedure** (see below).

4. Evening Check-in:

- a. Once the crew is safely back in quarters for the evening, they will check in with the Designated Check-in Person for that Day.
- b. If the crew has not checked in with their appointed check-out person by 19:00, the check-in person will first attempt calling the crew on cell phones and/or the radio an/or the two-way communications device (if applicable); if the crew cannot be reached within a half hour, the check-in person will call the other possible check-in contacts (i.e. other biologists or district staff); if no one has heard from the crew by 20:00, or an hour

after the expected check-in time (if the crew indicates it will be later than that). If no one has heard from the crew, the check-out person will call Dispatch.

- c. Dispatch will attempt to contact the crew on the radio. If the crew is unable to be accounted for, then initiate search procedure.

Search Procedure will include the following:

- i. Contact Carly Lewis, the crew supervisor (see contact information below), and the District Biologist for the district the crews are working on. Carly or the District Biologist will contact the District Ranger and the LEO to inform them that crews have not been accounted for, and that a search for them is being initiated.
- ii. Check communications/check-in records from the day, to find the point of last known contact. This should be on record at the Ranger Station's front desk (Seeley Lake or Lincoln RD), or at Missoula Dispatch (Missoula or Ninemile RD).
- iii. Call Search And Rescue to alert them that crews are missing and that Forest Service personnel are going to begin searching for them, but that SAR may be called in the next 1-2 hours for help.
- iv. At least two snowmobile certified, avalanche trained people will head to the last place the crews were known to be, following the most likely travel path. They will let Dispatch know the exact route they will be taking, and that they will contact Dispatch when they (whichever comes first).
 1. Locate the crew members
 2. Leave the pavement/parking lot on snowmobiles
 3. Arrive at the last known check-up point
- v. If the initial search crew does not locate the crew members between the station and the last-known check-in point, then they will advise Dispatch to call Search and Rescue for further assistance.
- vi. The District Ranger and LEO will be kept apprised of the results of all search efforts, and any decisions to initiate further search operations. He/she will also advise as to whom should contact the missing crew persons' emergency contacts regarding the search efforts and results.

Phone Contacts for emergency assistance during or after hours:

Seeley Lake Ranger District

Scott Tomson* (wildlife biologist)
406-880-0724 cell
406-677-3925 office
Shannon Connolly* (resources):
406-370-1273 cell
406-677-3938 office
Amy Vernarsky (front desk):
406-677-2233 office
406-590-1380 cell
Tim Love (District Ranger):
406-677-2233 office
406-677-4158 cell
406-677-3767 home

Lincoln Ranger District

Pat Shanley* (wildlife biologist):
406-362-7006 office
406-438-7628 cell
Jarel Kurtz* (AFMO):
406-362-7031 office
406-439-5781 cell
Emily Gilbert (front desk):
406-362-7000 office
406-362-4852 home
Amber Kamps (District Ranger):
office
home

Missoula Ranger District

Al Hilshey* (Rec specialist)
406-829-1794 home
406-329-3962 office
406-531-3662 cell
Carl Anderson* (recreation)
406-329-3976 office
406-531-9379 cell
406-251-9322 home
Tim Laroche* (WMT Avalanche Ctr)
406-329-3808 office
406-396-8780 cell
Dave Williams* (Lolo Hot Shots)
406-329-3815 office
406-531-8952 cell
Paul Matter (District Ranger)
406-329-3948 office
406-529-8159 cell

Helena Dispatch: 406-449-5475 (use for Lincoln RD emergencies)
Missoula Dispatch: 406-829-7070 (use for Seeley RD emergencies)

Missoula Search and Rescue: (406)258-4810 or 911

Seeley Lake Search and Rescue:

* Indicates the person is snowmobile trained and certified, has avalanche training, and is competent and available to help with rescue or emergencies after hours

Safety Training Plan for Winter Carnivore Crews

All crew members will receive training and/or be certified in the following topics:

Federal driver's license

Defensive driving (good for 3 years)

Snowmobile training—1 day basic, plus an additional day of advanced snowmobile training (every year); snowmobile certification on Govt driver's license (good for 3 years)

Trailer pulling training & certification on Govt driver's license (good for 3 years)

First aid/CPR (good for 2 years)

Blood borne pathogens & zoonotics (annual)

Hazardous communications (MSDS)

Bear spray/wildlife encounters (2 years)

Fleet standards

Radio protocols/repeaters

Winter driving

Winter survival

Communication plan & check in/out process

Some Possible “Things-Went-Wrong” Scenarios, and How to Handle Them:

Both crew members’ snowmobiles break down, stranding them in the field.

1. Contact Ranger Station and/or Dispatch to report your location and situation.
2. If unable to make contact via radio or phone, use SPOT to send an “I need help” message (NOT the SOS message), which will send a text to the following peoples’ cell phones: Carly Lewis, Scott Tomson, and Pat Shanley
3. Contact the District Biologist or other district staff persons who are snowmobile-certified and develop a plan with them to get you rescued (see list of available persons on each district in this communications plan). These folks will work with Dispatch or the Ranger Station on a check-in, check-out plan, and will come to your assistance as quickly as safely possible.
4. STAY PUT, unless otherwise directed or discussed. Be prepared to build a fire to stay warm. If other snowmobilers or anyone else comes along and offers to help you out, do not accept

There is an accident and someone is injured and needs assistance getting out, but is in a non-life-threatening condition:

See above scenario of being stranded in the field. Again, STAY PUT if someone is coming to assist you, unless you make clear contact with them and/or Dispatch.

Someone is severely injured, caught in an avalanche, or otherwise needing immediate emergency assistance:

1. Attempt to contact Dispatch via radio or phone. Be prepared to give them your exact location, the extent of the injuries, and detailed information on how a rescue party can get to you. DO NOT give the name of the injured person over the radio, but rather a description (i.e. male, age 34, with compound fracture to the left leg).
2. If Dispatch cannot be reached via radio or phone, try contacting the local Ranger Station (in Seeley Lake or Lincoln). If you are still unable to make contact, and are unable to use a cell phone to call 9-1-1-, use the SOS button on your SPOT tracker. This will activate an emergency response similar to making a 9-1-1 call, and will include your location. Once again, STAY PUT, unless otherwise directed.
3. Dispatch should contact the District Ranger and the crew member’s supervisor.

List of Safety Gear that wildlife winter crews will have at all times

Personal Gear—always have on you
Helmet
Beacon
Probe
Shovel
Earplugs
Radio
Cell Phone
SPOT Tracker
GPS
Compass
Maps (FS district maps)
Lighter, fire starter
Headlamp
Snowshoes
First Aid Kit
Leatherman or multi-tool
Latex gloves
Ziplock bags
Sharpies, pens/pencils
Extra batteries (radio, GPS, headlamp, camera, beacon, etc)
Clipboard/tatum
Extra clothing, incl. down jacket, hat, gloves, hand warmers, extra food, space blanket and/or sleeping bag
On Snowmobile:
Spark plugs
Tool kit
Webbing or tow rope
Come-along
Extra gas can?
Extra belt
Electrical tape
Bungees
Spare headlight bulb
Extra Backcountry Gear:
Tent fly or wiki-up for shelter
Sleeping bag (0 degree or lower)
Jet boil or compact stove
Cross-country skis (optional)
Therma-rest, p-cord

SPOT Tracker Setup for Winter Wildlife Crews

Check-in messages will be sent to:

Carly's email, Lorraine's email

"Need Help for non-emergency" messages will be sent to:

Carly's email, Scott T's email, Pat S's email, Lorraine's email, Carly's phone, Eric G's phone, Rick's phone, Eric's phone

"I caught a fisher" messages will be sent to:

Carly's email, Carly's phone, Mike's phone, Eric's phone, Rick's phone

SOS messages will be sent to 9-1-1 and calls will be made to:

Carly's phone, Missoula Dispatch

Names, Contact Info, and Emergency Contacts for Lolo NF Wildlife Field Crew Members, 2013

Name	Affiliation	Your Phone #	Supervisor's Name	Supervisor's Phone #	Emergency Contact Person(s)	Emergency Contact Phone #	Emergency Contact Address

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