

# Big Game & Over Snow Vehicle Use Summary

## General Overview of Over Snow Vehicle Use Impacts to Big Game

Big game winter range represents areas where deer, elk, and moose spend the winter months. Winter range habitat exists where elevation, aspect, and vegetation provide animals with food and protection from harsh weather conditions. This habitat is generally found at lower elevations. The definition of winter range in the 2015 IPNF Forest Plan is: The area available to and used by wildlife (big game) during the winter season (Dec 1 to April 30). Generally, lands below 4,000 feet in elevation, on south and west aspects, that provides forage and cover.

Because big game animals live significantly off their stored fat reserves during winter, if they are harassed or disturbed, they burn fat more quickly and have a lower chance of surviving the winter. The negative effect of disturbing big game on winter range is well known (Geist 1971; Lyon 1979; Parker et al. 1984; Cassirer et al. 1992).

## Relevant Forest Wide Guidelines

- FW-GDL-WL-11. Big Game. Management activities should avoid or minimize disturbance to native ungulates on winter range between December 1 and April 30, with the exception of routes identified on MVUM as open to motor vehicle use. Management activities that occur on winter range during the winter period should concentrate activities to reduce impacts to native ungulates.
- FW-GDL-WL-12. Big Game. Management activities should be avoided on native ungulate winter range areas during the critical mid-winter period (January and February) when snow depths most likely influence movement and availability of forage.

## Available GIS DATA

**Big Game Winter Range** - Use to indicate general areas of winter range. Polygon boundaries were built from wildlife MAs from KNF & IPNF 1987 plans, Habitat Groups 1,2,3 from IPNF. Item winter\_rng is coded 'wntrng-fs' for forest service lands within winter range, 'wntrng-pvt' for various other ownerships, 'wntrng-wtr' for large lakes or rivers included in the winter range polygon, or 'outside' if not included in a winter range polygon.