Central Selkirk Caribou Maternity Pen: Kuskanax Creek Forest Service Road Access Plan

Introduction

Current uses/users – Kuskanax FSR is lightly used by recreationists, hunters, trapper and commercial/industrial users.

Rationale for access plan – In co-operation with the BC Government and the Caribou Recovery Program (CRP), a caribou maternity pen was constructed by Arrow Lakes Caribou Society (ALCS) in 2020-2021 that will house caribou cows and calves from late March 2022 to August 2022 as well as similar time periods in subsequent years while the maternity pen project is active. The goal of the maternity pen project is to protect cows and calves from predation during critical times and improve condition by supplemental feeding, in an effort to boost caribou population. Caribou are sensitive to unnatural noise especially sudden noise, so efforts must be made to limit traffic and noise levels in the vicinity of the maternity pen. Gating, signage, increased public awareness and if necessary, enforcement / denial of access will be used to manage road traffic and noise.

Access plan proposal summary

A Controlled Access Area will be established to cover within approximately 1.0 km road distance either side of maternity pen.

FSR to be gated and signed just past the Peter Rolston trailhead to allow ability to restrict access as needed. Signage will read:

Additional signage at advanced staging area 1 km upstream from pen location as a reminder for return trip to gate through Controlled Access Area.

Gate closures (closed and possibly locked) during capture days (1-3 days, March-April), calving period (3 weeks, May-June), and release period (approx 1-2 weeks, July / August)

Gated but with selective/camera monitored access during the rest of penning period. Select access will be allowed to user groups subject to protocols:

- Fill out entry log, CSSMA permit needed for snowmobile users.
- Idle vehicle past pen as quiet as possible keeping RPMs low ie idle.
- Close gate after entry
- No stopping through controlled access area.
- No sudden noises ie: load rattling or scraping, dog barking etc.
- Load/unload snowmobiles/ATV's at advanced staging area only.

Any serious violation of this protocol will result in denial of access and review of access protocol. This may result in denial of access for all members of the public. Access may be denied at any time in response to conditions at the maternity pen.

Historic Use of Kuskanax FSR

Commercial / Industrial Use

There is minimal industrial traffic and no timber extraction activities accessed by the FSR as it accesses Caribou core habitat defined under GAR Order # U-4-012. Side drainages are used for CMH heli-skiing operations from December – April (air access only). There is a CMH heli pad near the start of the FSR and a fuel cache at the back end of the valley, accessed by the FSR.

Club Usage

Arrow Lakes Ridge Riders Snowmobile Club

Kuskanax Creek FSR is used by some snowmobilers to access spring riding terrain in the tributary drainages. Riding terrain is typically 10-30 km away from the maternity pen. The Kuskanax drainage contains high-risk avalanche terrain (the road crosses below several active chutes) and the safest time to ride the area is in the spring after major slide activity has happened. Members of the Arrow Lakes Ridge Riders (ALRR) Snowmobile Club, based in Nakusp, use the area from January to April. There is overlap between the snowmobiling season and maternity pen operations for an approximate 6-week period, from mid-March to the end of April. This period may be shorter depending on the time of capture and weather/riding conditions. ALRR estimates that 0-2 groups of 6-8 riders use the area for four weekdays. On the weekend, ALRR estimates 2-3 groups of 6-8 riders use the area. Usage and group size varies depending on weather and road conditions. The area is also used by some tourists, but all snowmobilers planning to ride in the Kuskanax Creek area must have a permit under the Central Selkirk Snowmobile Management Area.

A gate and signage on the FSR just upstream of Peter Rolston trail head will inform motorized recreation users. The plan is to allow slow, quiet and respectful vehicle traffic past the pen to an advanced staging area 1.0 km past the pen to load and unload. An entry log /camera system will be maintained.

Nakusp Rod and Gun Club

Spring bear hunting season may overlap with penning operations. Anticipated occasional use of road system only.

Nakusp and Area Community Trails Society

Nakusp and Area Community Trails Society (NACTS) operates two tenured, non-motorized trails in the Kuskanax Creek FSR area. The Peter Roulston Cross-Country Ski Trail has a trailhead 700 metres west of the pen fence. The FSR will be gated and signed just upstream of the trail head. The trail has light usage year-round and there is little to no impact on the maternity pen. The Cedar Grove Trail is up the Kuskanax Creek FSR, past the maternity pen. NACTS estimates the trail gets light use in summer and fall. The Club will ask their members for voluntary avoidance of Kuskanax Creek FSR while caribou are in the pen. Any vehicle traffic past the pen will be informed by signage at the gate location.

Arrow Lakes ATV Club

Arrow Lakes ATV Club does not have any recreational tenure in the Kuskanax Creek drainage and no control over road activities. The road system may experience very light/light use by motorized recreationalists on their own initiative. The Club will ask their members for voluntary avoidance of Kuskanax Creek FSR while caribou are in the pen. If necessary, ATVers will use the advanced staging area 1.0 km upstream from the pen to load/unload ATVs using the same protocol as snowmobilers.

Other Usage

Use of the Kuskanax FSR will be discouraged through the gating and signage. There is possibility of usage for cultural activities, wildfire control activities, forest survey activity and other unknown activities.