

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS BETWEEN WILDLIFE AND OVER-SNOW RECREATION IN THE SCOTCHMAN PEAKS/SAVAGE PEAK AREA

SUMMARY

The Scotchman Peaks, including Savage Peak and Savage Basin, contain valuable winter range habitat for mountain goats and important habitat for other species such as wolverines, grizzly bears, and Canada lynx. Winter is a difficult time for wildlife survival, with marginal food resources and higher physiological stress. For mountain goats in particular, winter range is a highly restricted and thus critical area for them, as they require both protection from predators and proximity to limited food sources in mountainous areas. In addition to these wintery challenges, mountain goats are also highly sensitive to human disturbances such as snowmobiles. Their responses to disturbance can change mountain goat population dynamics. Restricting motorized recreational use from mountain goat winter range helps minimize impacts during this difficult season.

Land and wildlife management agencies (Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks and United States Forest Service) have been concerned about snowmobiling in mountain goat habitat in the Scotchman Peaks area, particularly into Savage Peak/Mountain region for many years. Those agencies support the continuation of non-motorized activities and wilderness designation in the Scotchman Peaks and Savage Peak area. Preserving the year-round closure to motorized activity across the Scotchman Peaks including the Savage Peak area, regardless of wilderness designation, will continue to protect the wildlife and wildlife habitat in this unique setting.

THE SCOTCHMAN PEAKS CONTAIN HIGH-QUALITY WILDLIFE VALUES

The Scotchman Peaks Recommended Wilderness Area (Scotchman Peaks) is within the Cabinet Mountains on the border of Montana and Idaho. The Scotchman Peaks sit within both the Kootenai National Forest and the Idaho Panhandle National Forest. Savage Peak (also known as Savage Mountain) and Savage Basin, the basin northeast of Savage Peak, is an important area within the Scotchman Peaks on the Montana side in the Kootenai National Forest. This area contains valuable habitat and supports a variety of important wildlife species such as mountain goats, wolverine, and grizzly bears.

MOUNTAIN GOAT HABITAT IN THE SCOTCHMAN PEAKS

Mountain goats are native to most of the mountain ranges of western Montana (Rideout 1977). They occupy the highest, coldest, most rugged regions of any ungulate in North America (Chadwick 1983). Mountain goats display seasonal altitudinal migrations over short distances (White 2006; Rice 2008), with all mountain goat habitat generally characterized as areas close to escape terrain (steep slopes, usually $\geq 40^\circ$) such as cliffs and away from valleys (Festa-Bianchet and Côté 2008; Shafer et al. 2012). Mountain goats thus are limited to relatively small areas of suitable habitat (Canfield et al. 1999).

Winter is an important season for mountain goats and is characterized by high juvenile mortality (Poole et al. 2009) and restricted, shorter movements (Chadwick 1983; White 2006) that are influenced by snow depth and snowpack (Richard et al. 2014). Winter range is considered critical habitat for mountain goats (Côté and Festa-Bianchet 2003), and their winter ranges are much smaller than summer ranges, ranging from 2%–50% of the size of summer ranges (Taylor et al. 2006; Poole et al. 2009).

Generally, mountain goats winter range occurs in rugged habitat at upper mid-elevations and on warmer aspects, close to escape terrain (Poole et al. 2009). They spend most their time near escape terrain to avoid and escape predation (Chadwick 1983; Gross et al. 2002; Hamel and Côté 2007; Poole et al. 2009) and for shelter from harsh weather (von Elsner-Schack 1986). They also require easy access to summer range and kidding areas. As early as late April, nannies select the most isolated and forbidding terrain to give birth (MFWP 2016).

There are some winter habitat use differences between populations in western North America, with two wintering strategies that occur: (1) populations from interior regions (e.g., the Rockies) spend winter above treeline on windswept ridges and ledges found in steep rugged terrain (Hebert and Turnbull 1977; Côté and Festa-Bianchet 2003; Poole et al. 2009), while (2) coastal populations living in areas of greater snowfall migrate downhill to spend winters in low-elevation forested areas (Hebert and Turnbull 1977; Poole and Heard 2003; Taylor et al. 2006; Poole et al. 2009). There also appear to be different strategies to avoid deep snow within the populations of the interior mountainous regions, with animals wintering either: (1) on high-elevation wind-swept slopes or (2) inhabiting rocky bluffs at treeline in areas of higher snowfall where wind-swept slopes are unavailable (Hebert and Turnbull 1977; Rideout 1977; Chadwick 1983; Poole and Heard 2003). There are also differences of fine-scale habitat use in the winter depending on sex and individual, with some level of differing habitat preferences between the sexes (Festa-Bianchet and Côté 2008; Shafer et al. 2012) and with differences in movement patterns accounting for differences in home range sizes among individuals (Poole and Heard 2003).

Throughout the entire Kootenai National Forest, only the West Cabinet and Cabinet Mountains, within which the Scotchman Peaks is situated, offer mountain goat habitat (KNF 2015a). The Scotchman Peaks, including Savage Peak, contain high-quality mountain goat winter range (Figure 1) and have long had a population of mountain goats (Joslin 1980). Savage Peak and surrounding smaller summits are characterized by very steep slopes with cliffs, offering escape terrain. The Savage Peak area contains both important winter range and summer transitional range, between and within which mountain goats need to move easily to prosper (Joslin 1980; Joslin, G. personal communication, April 6, 2017).

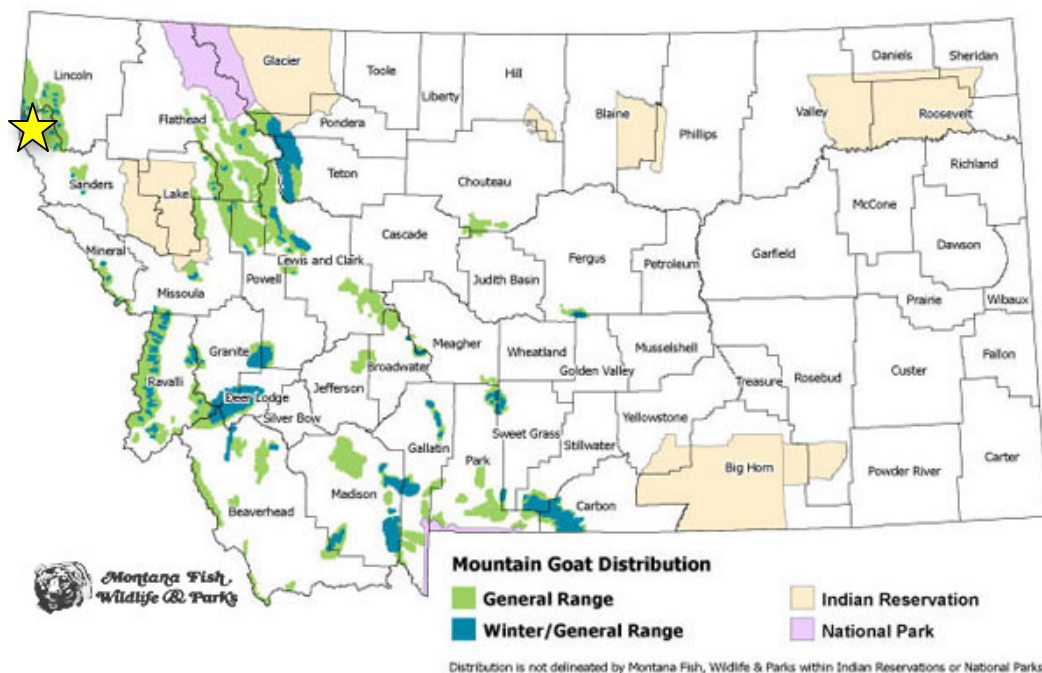


Figure 1 Mountain goat general range and winter range in Montana. Star is Savage Peak area. Data available at Montana Field Guide.

POPULATION AND STATUS OF MOUNTAIN GOAT IN MONTANA

Mountain goats are currently ranked as a Montana Species Ranking Code S4, so they are considered “apparently secure, though it may be quite rare in parts of its range, and/or suspected to be declining.”¹ Similarly to other nearby regions such as Alberta, the overall population declined in the past and now contains some smaller populations that are stable, some that are increasing, and others that are continuing to decline (Gonzalez-Voyer et al. 2003; Koeth 2008).

Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks has documented mountain goats in the Scotchman Peaks area for decades (MFWP 2016). Goat numbers peaked in the late 1930s at 110 animals and steadily declined to 20-25 goats in the 1970s (Burleigh 1978). In the late 1970s, due to concerns over these decreasing mountain goat numbers, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks closed goat hunting in mountain goat Hunting District 101, which includes the Scotchman Peaks. Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks and the Kootenai National Forest then performed research that led to the development of a goat management plan, a joint memorandum of understanding, and a population augmentation project for mountain goats (Joslin 1980). Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks slowly reinstated harvest in the late 1980s, but because mountain goat numbers did not increase to the degree expected and because of concerns over decreasing goat numbers in this area and across their range, the agency again reduced goat harvest quotas in mountain goat Hunting District 101 in 2010 (MFWP 2016). Currently, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks continues to monitor goat numbers and other game species using aerial surveys and hunter harvest information.

GRIZZLY BEAR HABITAT IN THE SCOTCHMAN PEAKS

Grizzly bears are listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Grizzly bear distribution has been reduced to five areas in the western United States, and there are six individual recovery zones delineated in the lower-48 states to include “adequate space and suitable habitat for securing and restoring viable self-sustaining grizzly bear populations in perpetuity” (USFWS 1993). These six recovery zones include the Greater Yellowstone, Northern Continental Divide, Cabinet-Yaak, North Cascades, Selkirk, and Selway-Bitterroot grizzly bear ecosystem.

The Cabinet-Yaak Recovery Zone includes the Scotchman Peaks, which contain core grizzly habitat (Figure 2)(Proctor et al. 2015). The grizzly bear population in the Cabinet-Yaak Recovery Zone was estimated at 48-50 bears in 2012, with 22-24 of those occurring in the Cabinets area (including Scotchman Peaks) (Kendall et al. 2016). To improve genetic diversity and increase the population, population augmentation has been successfully accomplished on several occasions in the Cabinet Mountains since 1979, with the most recent grizzly bear released in 2016 at Spar Lake, near the Savage Peak area (IGBC 2016). Given its small population size and the slow reproductive rate of the species, the Cabinet-Yaak population is highly sensitive to mortality and disturbance.

¹ Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks. Montana Field Guide: Mountain Goat. <http://fieldguide.mt.gov/speciesDetail.aspx?elcode=AMALE02010>

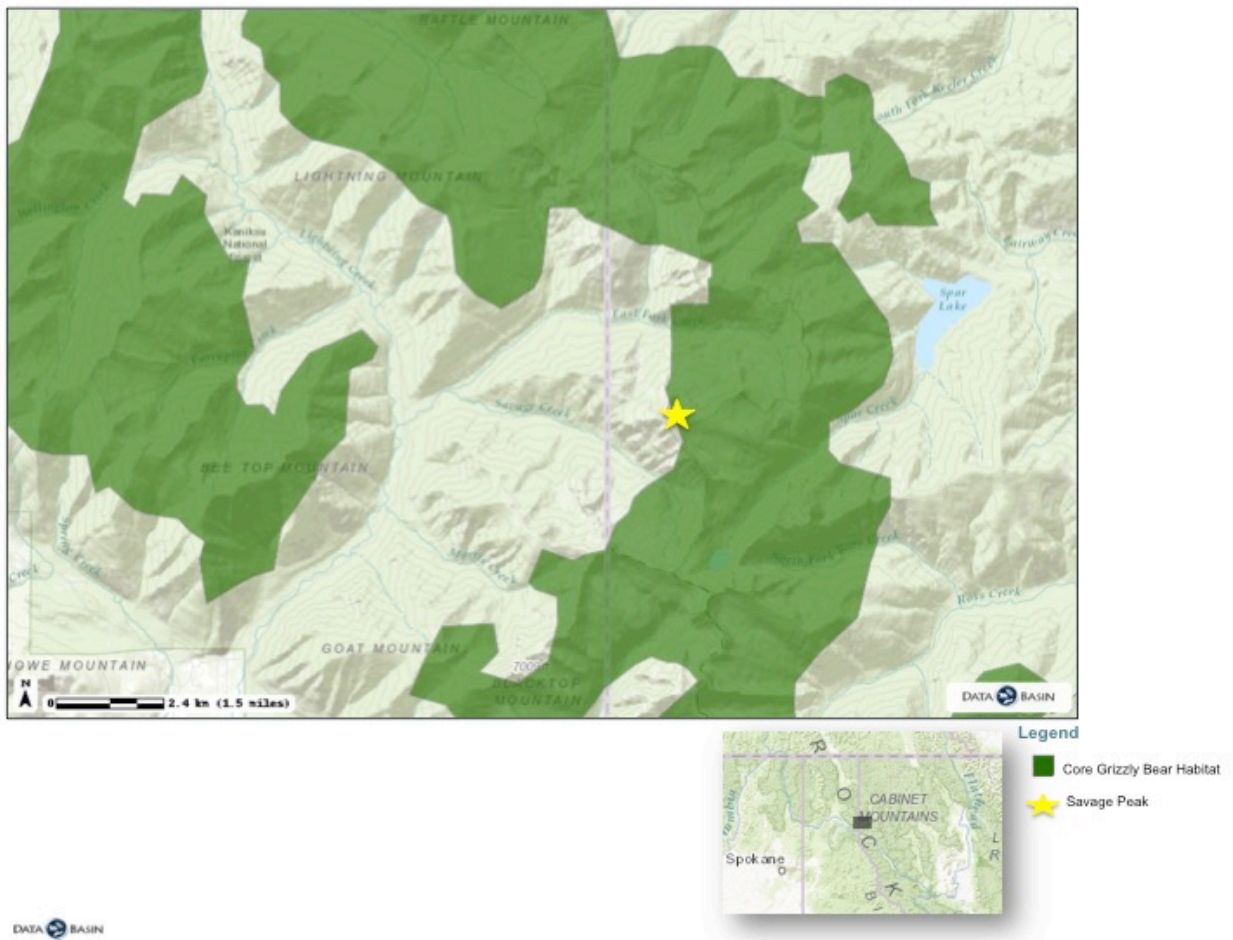


Figure 2. Grizzly bear core habitat in the Scotchman Peaks area. Data from Proctor et al. 2015 on Databasin.

WOLVERINE HABITAT IN THE SCOTCHMAN PEAKS

Wolverines are again under consideration for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Population number and trend in the contiguous United States are unknown, though the population is generally estimated at 250-300 individuals (USFWS 2013).

Wolverines in the northern Rockies live primarily in high-elevation environments that maintain colder temperatures and reduce competition with other carnivores (Copeland et al. 2010; McKelvey et al. 2011; Inman et al. 2013). The Scotchman Peaks contain both primary and maternal wolverine habitat, with the Savage Peak area containing maternal denning habitat, the most limiting and thus valuable habitat type for wolverines (Figure 3).

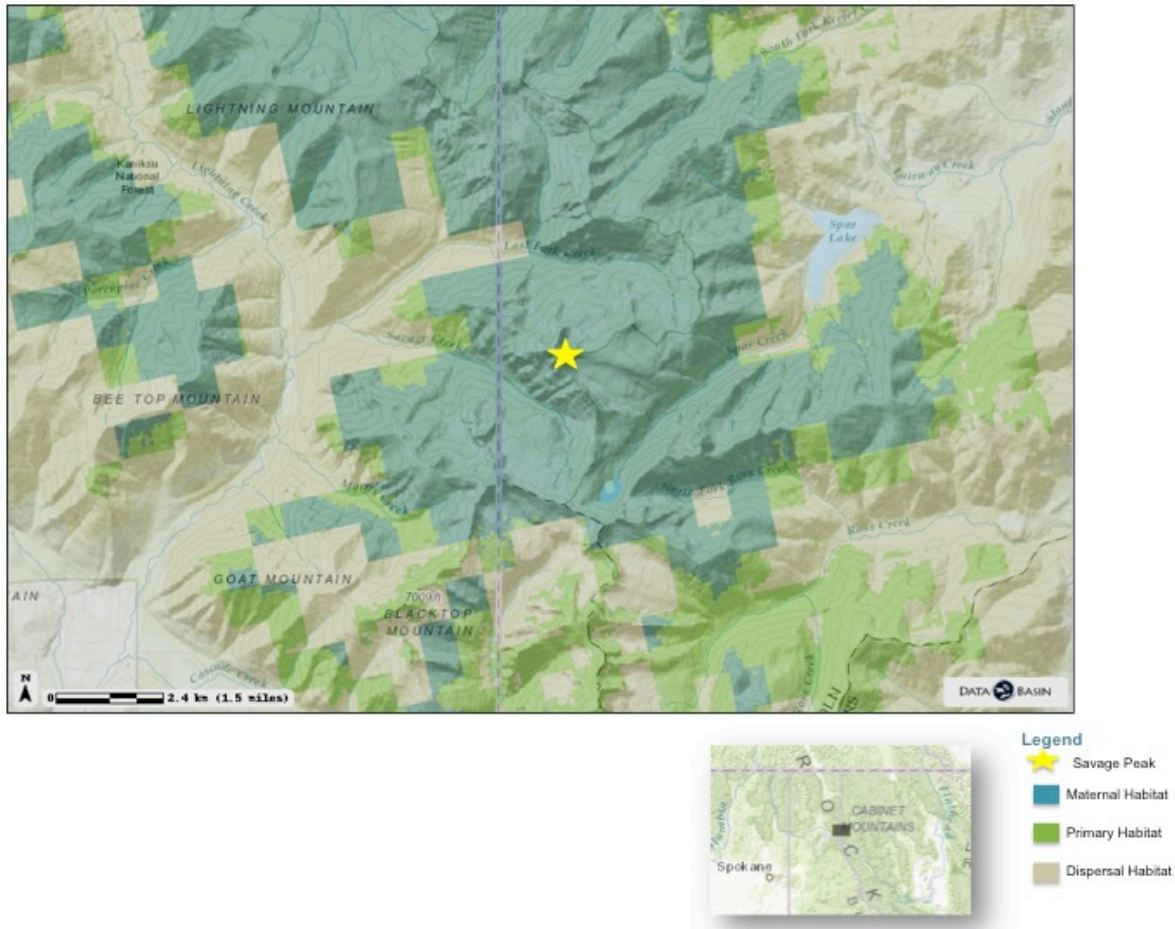


Figure 3. Wolverine primary habitat, maternal habitat, and dispersal habitat in the Scotchman Peaks area. Data from Inman et al. 2013 available on Databasin.org. Primary wolverine habitat is defined as the area within the climactic limits of wolverines that resident adult wolverines are expected to occupy, and maternal habitat is defined as areas that contain attributes consistent with those measured around the known wolverine dens used in the Inman et al. (2013) study.

CANADA LYNX HABITAT IN THE SCOTCHMAN PEAKS

Canada lynx are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Population number and trend in the contiguous United States are unknown.

Lynx habitat is characterized by moist boreal forests that have cold, snowy winters and a high-density snowshoe hare prey base (Interagency Lynx Biology Team 2013). The range of lynx in the West has diminished over the last century, suggesting that lynx may be negatively impacted by human activities (Koehler and Aubry 1994).

The Kootenai National Forest is home to one of just a few known resident lynx populations in the lower 48 states. Critical habitat has been designated within the Kootenai National Forest, and the Forest is designated “occupied lynx habitat” (Figure 4). The entire Kootenai National Forest is in “core area” as described in the Lynx Recovery Outline (USFWS 2005). The Scotchman Peaks are considered occupied and core habitat, though they are not included within Critical Habitat.

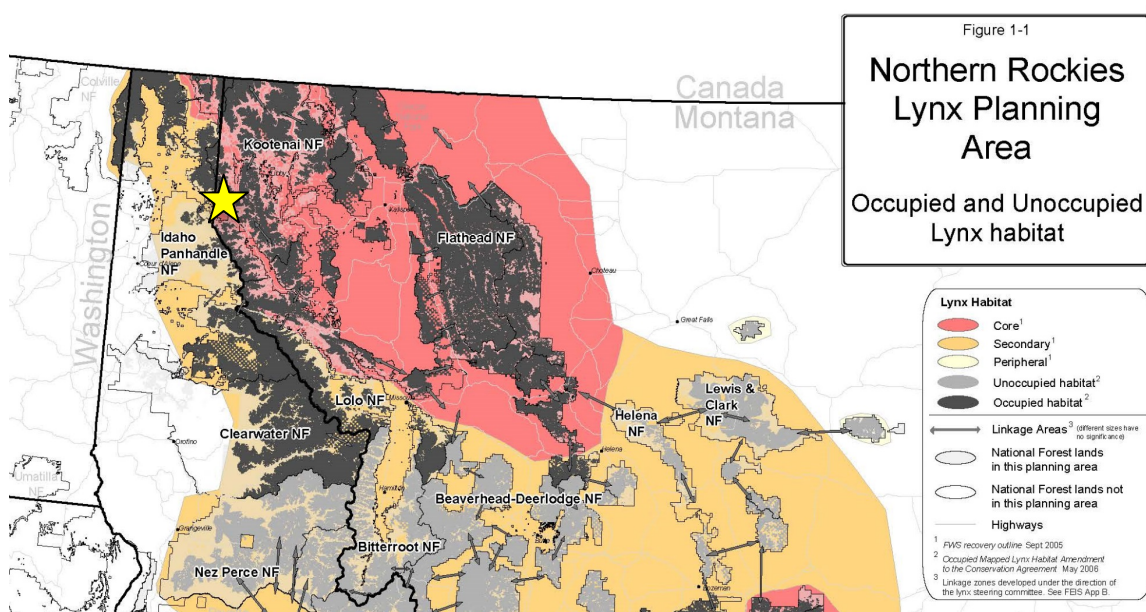


Figure 4 Canada lynx habitat in the Northern Rockies, including Kootenai National Forest and Scotchman Peaks area. Star is Savage Peak area. Map from USFS at www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5446686.pdf

WILDLIFE ARE IMPACTED BY SNOWMOBILES

Motorized winter backcountry recreation is one of the fastest growing recreational activities in the United States (Cook and O’Laughlin 2008). In 1982-83, government surveys put the number of snowmobile participants in the United States at 5.3 million (Cordell et al. 1999). The most recent survey, conducted in 2010, estimates that in the United States, 10.7 million people now snowmobile annually (Cordell 2012). Due to advanced technology with more powerful machines, snowmobiles and new “snow bikes” (modified motorcycles with tracks instead of wheels) are now better able to reach areas that were previously inaccessible.

While snowmobiling continues to grow in popularity, snowpack continues to decline due to climate change. Recent warming has already led to substantial reductions in spring snow cover in the mountains of western North America (Mote et al. 2005; Pederson et al. 2010). This continues to further concentrate motorized winter recreation into the smaller amounts of available, sufficiently snowy areas. Wildlife that require snowy habitats will also have reduced amounts of available habitat and will essentially need to compete for the same remaining snowy habitat as snowmobilers. For instance, numerous studies indicate that global climate change is likely to negatively affect wolverine habitat (Gonzales et al. 2008; Copeland et al. 2010; McKelvey et al. 2011; Peacock 2011; Johnston et al. 2012). Additionally, climate modeling suggests that snow accumulation and duration are expected to decline and that lynx habitat and populations are anticipated to decline accordingly (Carroll 2007) and may disappear completely from parts of their range by the end of this century (Johnston et al. 2012). This leads to increasing concern for wildlife and their ability to find secure winter habitat.

Any disturbance, such as that from snowmobiles, during this important winter period can negatively affect productivity and other vital rates (May et al. 2006; Krebs et al. 2007). Snowmobiles can cause harassment, habitat loss, and mortality of wildlife such as ungulates (Dorrance et al. 1975; McLaren and Green 1985;

Freddy et al. 1986; Tyler 1991; Olliff et al. 1999a; Olliff et al. 1999b; Seip et al. 2007; Harris et al. 2014; Switalski 2016).

OTHER SPECIES ARE IMPACTED BY SNOWMOBILES

This document focuses on snowmobiles and mountain goats – yet other species of concern within this region are also impacted by snowmobiles including wolverines, grizzly bears, and Canada lynx.

Wolverine researchers and natural resource managers have long expressed concerns about effects of winter recreation on wolverine populations, as motorized winter recreation can negatively impact wolverine particularly by disrupting natal denning areas (Hornocker and Hash 1981; Copeland 1996; Carroll et al. 2001; Rowland et al. 2003; May et al. 2006; Copeland et al. 2007; Inman et al. 2007; Krebs et al. 2007; Lofroth and Krebs 2007; Ruggiero et al. 2007; Heinemeyer and Squires 2013). Female wolverines select and enter dens and give birth in February to mid-March (Magoun and Copeland 1998) and the overlap of winter recreation with this energetically taxing period is highly concerning.

Grizzly bears denning habitat often overlaps with winter recreation areas, making them susceptible to disturbance at their den sites and upon emergence (Linnell et al. 2000). Potential effects of disturbance to denning bears include elevated energy use from increased movements in the den (Reynolds et al. 1986; Schoen et al. 1987), den abandonment (Craighead and Craighead 1972; Reynolds et al. 1976; Harding and Nagy 1980; Schoen et al. 1987), potential loss of cubs (Schoen et al. 1987), and displacement from denning areas (Craighead and Craighead 1972; Schoen et al. 1987). Females with cubs may be more vulnerable to snowmobile disturbance following den emergence than during the denning period (Mace and Waller 1997).

Snow-packed trails created by snowmobiles have been considered as possibly serving as travel routes for potential competitors and predators of Canada lynx, especially coyotes (Ozoga and Harger 1966; Murray and Boutin 1991; Koehler and Aubry 1994; Murray et al. 1995; Buskirk et al. 2000) though the causal relationship is not entirely clear (Bunnell et al. 2006; Kolbe et al. 2007; Burghardt-Dowd 2010). As snow levels diminish with climate change, lynx habitat will shrink and winter recreation will continually become a more serious threat to the persistence of lynx.

MOUNTAIN GOATS ARE IMPACTED BY SNOWMOBILES

Research has firmly established that undisturbed winter range is essential for ungulate survival (Canfield et al. 1999). Snowmobile activity disturbs wintering ungulates through physiological stress (Canfield et al. 1999; Creel et al. 2002) from increased movements and higher energy expenditures (Dorrance et al. 1975; Freddy et al. 1986; Tyler 1991; Colescott and Gillingham 1998; Borkowski et al. 2006).

Predation appears to be the main cause of mortality for mountain goats (Festa-Bianchet and Côté 2008). As such, predation risk appears to be the main factor influencing mountain goat space use, as they are strongly associated with escape terrain and aggregate in groups (Hamel and Côté 2007; Gross et al. 2002; Festa-Bianchet and Côté 2008; Richard et al. 2014). To avoid predators, mountain goats rely on detecting them by sight or sound from distance and then moving into escape terrain where predators are unable to follow (Festa-Bianchet and Cote 2008). Mountain goats are particularly sensitive to human disturbances (Festa-Bianchet and Côté 2008; St-Louis et al. 2013; Richard and Côté 2016), using the same anti-predator strategy. They change their behavior (e.g. increased alertness and reduced time foraging) and their spatial distribution (e.g. moving or running) when facing various human-caused activities (Singer 1978; Foster and Rahe 1983; Joslin 1986; Côté 1996; Gordon and Reynolds 2000; Côté et al. 2013; St-Louis et al. 2013; Richard and Côté 2016). These short-term impacts on behavior could translate to consequences to movement rates, range use, and ultimately, survival and population productivity (Festa-Bianchet and Côté 2008).

The trigger for behavioral responses to human disturbances can be quite distant; in one study in Alberta, goats were highly disturbed and increased their alertness behaviors when helicopters flew nearby, with no habituation seen across numerous years of helicopter traffic (Côté et al. 2013). Researchers subsequently recommended helicopter flights should not approach closer than 1,500 m (4,920 ft) from mountain goat groups (Cadsand 2012; Côté et al. 2013).

Mountain goats' struggle to move away from disturbance can be energetically taxing. Living in harsh winter habitat, mountain goats have a low margin for unnecessary energy costs without impacts on survival and reproduction (Harris et al. 2014). As Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks has noted, at winter's end, goats have nearly depleted all their fat reserves, and "goats are right on the survival line in late winter and early spring...That's also when snow is hardest and snowmobilers like to 'high-mark' [climb snow-covered mountainsides]" (Koeth 2008).

These responses to disturbance can change mountain goat population dynamics. One of the factors thought to contribute to declines in mountain goat populations is repeated disturbance (Joslin 1986; Festa-Bianchet and Côté 2008). For instance, the cumulative effects of stress caused by a high amount of motorized human disturbance in one Montana population may have been responsible for reduced kid production, reduced numbers of female goats, and a declining goat population (Joslin 1986). All-terrain vehicle use on trails in mountain goat summer range in Alberta caused moderate to strong disturbance reactions by goats 44% of the time, with potential detrimental effects on fitness-related behaviors such as feeding and parental care (St-Louis et al. 2013).

For mountain goats, winter range is a highly restricted area, as they spend most of their time close to escape terrain (Poole et al. 2009). While these small areas of winter range are often less accessible to humans, the advancing technology of over-snow vehicles offers increased human access to areas of mountain goat winter habitat (Koeth 2008). In general, mountain goats are at risk from snowmobile activity, with their high sensitivity to disturbance and with the ensuing behavioral responses and energetic costs that can negatively impact population dynamics.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS BETWEEN MOUNTAIN GOATS AND SNOWMOBILES IN THE SCOTCHMAN PEAKS AND SAVAGE PEAK AREA

SNOWMOBILE USE IN THE SCOTCHMAN PEAKS AND SAVAGE PEAK AREA

The Kootenai National Forest has long recognized the ecological importance of the Scotchman Peaks area and has supported congressional action for wilderness designation of the Scotchman Peaks. In 1987 and 2015 the Kootenai National Forest recommended the Scotchman Peaks area for wilderness (KNF 1987). Motorized restrictions proposed in the 1987 Forest Plan in recommended wilderness were formalized in 2001, when the Kootenai National Forest created a Special Order (#F14-064S01) that restricted all motorized access year-round in the Scotchman Peaks (KNF 2013a). In the 2015 forest plan revision, the Kootenai National Forest re-evaluated the area and concluded it continues to merit for a recommended wilderness designation (KNF 2015b). The Scotchman Peaks thus remain closed to over-snow vehicles (KNF 2015b).

Over-snow motorized access was legal on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest until 2015, when the Forest signed an Order (#01-04-00-15-001) prohibiting winter motorized access on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest side of the Scotchman Peaks within the Sandpoint Ranger District. This preserved the motorized access restrictions on the Montana side, especially in the areas around Savage Peak, and helped maintain consistency of existing conditions from Idaho into Montana.

Some snowmobilers would prefer to have access into the Savage Peak/Basin area.² However, this is not feasible nor in line with Kootenai National Forest goals, as clarified by the Kootenai National Forest:

The Savage Peak...area [is an] important part of the Scotchman Peaks recommended wilderness area...The Savage Peak area has been closed to over-snow vehicle use since the 1987 Forest Plan was adopted... Under the revised Forest Plan, the boundary for the Scotchman Peaks recommended wilderness area was drawn to be identifiable on the ground and manageable. (KNF 2013b).

CONCERNS WITH MOUNTAIN GOATS AND SNOWMOBILES IN SAVAGE PEAK AREA

The mountain goat population in the Scotchman Peaks has concerned Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks and Kootenai National Forest due to its declining population for decades (MFWP 2016). Research indicates that small mountain goat herds (<50 animals) have a high extinction risk (18%-82% over 40 years) even in the absence of harvest (Hamel et al. 2006), so managing for the factors underlying these population declines is critical.

Scotchman Peaks and Savage Peak/Basin area contain important high quality winter range for mountain goats, and there is concern with human disturbance to mountain goats in the area. The Savage Peak area contains "management situation 1" lands in Joslin (1980), which are areas that provide critical mountain goat range during summer and/or winter. Joslin (1980) states: "Mechanized human activities should not occur in these areas. Human activities on adjacent areas should be kept to a minimum during the seasons when these areas are used by goats."

For over a decade, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks has shared concerns of snowmobiling in mountain goat habitat in the Scotchman Peaks area, particularly into Savage Peak/Mountain region:

The need to maintain mountain goat habitat security in the Scotchman Peaks Area is no less relevant today than it was 25 years ago. It is unfortunate that snowmobiling activity into Savage Mountain, right in the heart of the Scotchman Peaks goat range, has been allowed to continue unchecked over the past several years, despite the illegality of motorized access into this area as identified in the MA guidelines for this area. (MFWP 2004).

FWP concurs with the proposed Scotchman Peaks #662 proposed Wilderness area as identified due to its value as critical native mountain goat habitat, elk and mule deer habitat, and important grizzly bear season-long habitats. FWP will soon be initiating grizzly bear augmentation efforts in the vicinity of this area. This area also satisfies a national demand for a backcountry hunting experience. FWP also concurs with the 5A designations for areas surrounding this proposed wilderness area (MFWP 2005).

There is a mountain known as Savage Peak...that, despite precipitous elevations and forested areas, shows snowmobile tracks nearly to the top of the 6900' peak into March of most years. Despite steep terrain and high tree lines, snowmobilers continue to make advancements into sensitive terrain, areas particularly important to mountain goats such as that on Savage Peak. Because of this, MFWP sees many of the wilderness recommendations, including increased wilderness and backcountry areas presented in Alt. B...as positive (MFWP 2012).

² http://missoulain.com/lifestyles/recreation/scotchman-peaks-straddle-weird-winter-patchy-politics/article_69ebd027-600e-5597-a083-a4f671d3fd0d.html

This closure has “helped maintain habitat security for a number of species including mountain goats, wolverine, elk, and mule deer, to name a few.” If this area were open to snowmobiling, it would “contradict what FWP recognizes as important and what literature suggests is tolerated by species like goats, lynx, wolverine, elk, and mule deer” (MFWP 2015).

Jerry Brown, the now-retired FWP Biologist whose experience dates back to the 70s, created maps of the areas that he recommended remain restricted to motorized access year-round... His map included the area north of Drift Peak and south, through Star Peak - including both the Savage Mountain and Dry Creek areas - and even extended into Idaho, the entire area of which we have had concerns over potential impacts to wildlife security since the 70s. (MFWP 2016).

We would like to reiterate that the entire Scotchman Peaks area contains important winter range habitat. As winter is a time of restricted ranges, limited food resources, and stress for many species, winter range is known as a limiting factor for big game. Containing and/or limiting motorized recreational use on unique habitat like winter ranges can help minimize direct impacts to wildlife (e.g., mortality due to increased human pressure, which results in higher activity rates, increased energy use, and stress). In general, current wildlife literature recommends routing human activities – especially motorized – away from goat winter range when possible... This act [closure to snowmobiles] has helped maintain habitat security for a number of species in this area, including goats, and we at FWP wish to maintain this important status quo. This existing condition of use is especially important because we know that current literature recommends minimizing the impacts of human disturbance on wildlife with standards such as: 1. Minimizing activities outside of currently used sites (Canfield 1999), 2. Concentrating activities within existing and designated sites (Canfield 1999), and 3. Limiting human intrusion into critical area such as winter range (Canfield 1999, USFS and BLM 2007, and Olliff et al. 1999) (MFWP 2016).

The Kootenai National Forest acknowledges the issue of mountain goats, snowmobiles, and the partnership with Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks in the Scotchman Peaks and Savage Peak area:

Even if over-snow motorized recreation does not occur on the exact spot where mountain goats winter, the presence of over-snow motorized recreation near to those mountain goat winter ranges may cause enough disturbance to apply the aforementioned revised Forest Plan. Additionally, if through coordination with the State, and review of the best available information, it is determined that an area was winter range for mountain goats historically but they may no longer be present, it may be desirable to keep those areas available for re-colonization by mountain goats in the future. Again, FW-DC-WL-16 states that the KNF would coordinate native ungulate habitat management with the State. During that coordination the State may help the KNF identify areas of historic mountain goat winter range that are important for future re-colonization by mountain goats. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has repeatedly noted their concern over potential snowmobiling impacts to mountain goats on winter range in the Savage Peak area, including during the public comment period in 2012 on the draft Forest Plan and DEIS. (KNF 2013b).

CONCLUSION

The Scotchman Peaks, including the Savage Peak region, is a special area, containing critical winter range habitat for mountain goats and important habitat for other species. Winter range is a limiting factor for mountain goats, and winter is a time of restricted ranges, limited food resources, and higher stress. As mountain goats are highly sensitive to human disturbances such as snowmobiles, restricting motorized recreational use from mountain goat winter range helps minimize impacts during this difficult season. Land and wildlife management agencies (Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks and United States Forest Service) support

the continuation of non-motorized activities and wilderness designation in the Scotchman Peaks and Savage Peak area. Preserving the year-round closure to motorized activity across the Scotchman Peaks including the Savage Peak area, regardless of wilderness designation, will continue to protect the wildlife and wildlife habitat in this unique setting.



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