

**On Mon, Nov 7, 2016 at 9:42 AM, Derek Poinsette <poinsette.ak@gmail.com> wrote:**

Heli-Ski Map Committee:

I am a resident of Mosquito Lake, as well as an elected member of the Upper Lynn Canal Fish and Game Advisory Committee. I have some concerns about helicopter skiing on Four Winds Mountain.

The Four Winds Mountain area--Mosquito Lake Road, Klukwan, Chilkat Lake Road, Haines Highway from 18-Mile all the way up to Little Boulder Creek--is the most densely (human) populated part of the Valley, and the Mountain stands literally in everyone's back yard. It is what many of us look at through our kitchen windows, and it is a popular destination for backcountry skiing, snowmachining, and hunting. I am certain that a majority of the residents up here are opposed to expanded helicopter skiing on Four Winds. Many are, in fact, opposed to the current level of helicopter activity allowed in the area.

According to ADF&G biologist Kevin White there may be as many as 90-100 mountain goats living on Four Winds Mountain. Furthermore, the herd is genetically distinct from goats in neighboring herds. The goats in the Upper Lynn Canal region are descended from those that survived the ice age in isolated areas of coastal refugia. This means that the regional goat population as a whole contains more genetic diversity and more specifically local adaptation than do goats in other areas of the continent. And within this region there are individual herds like the one on Four Winds (and Hiteshitak also) that seem to show a particular level of diversification and adaptation to a local environment. If this one herd is displaced or injured in some way, a significant portion of the species-wide genetic reservoir will be lost forever.

Based on extensive studies of mountain goats and helicopter disturbance in British Columbia (Cote 1996 and Cadsand 2012), a no-fly zone of 1.5 to 2 km should be established around all known mountain goat habitat. We will be getting more definitive information from ADF&G in the coming year, and hopefully we will then be able to firmly establish the boundaries of known goat habitats. In the meantime, we should not risk damaging the herd on Four Winds by opening more of the mountain to helicopter disturbance, and in fact we should reduce the amount of terrain that is currently open. ADF&G has goat collar location data as well as known brown bear dens that are within the area that is currently open to helicopters. It is my hope that ADF&G can assist the committee in re-drawing the map so that wildlife populations are protected on Four Winds Mountain, and in other critical areas.

Thanks to you all for your service on this committee, and I will see you this evening.

Sincerely,

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**Reply, Date Unknown from Scott Sundberg:**

Derek,

Thanks for your comments, The areas that have been suggested in the AH 4 area are not visible from any where in the Mosquito lake area, all areas are north facing and in the upper elevation zone, having a bottom pickup above 3,000 feet.

Cadsand in 2012, demonstrated that Heliskiing and Mountain Goats can live together in harmony. If you read the document carefully, it shows that there was disturbance in animals up to 48 hours later in areas, and most of the movements were from billies. What it did not conclude was that there was a permanent adverse effect on populations in the Skeena Goat populations, only that they might have some strain as they showed movement after the activity.

The 1.5-2 km zones are suggested for the large kid and Nannies groups in critical winter habitat, the core of the herd. Unfortunately we are not getting that core areas from ADFnG, they are being vague and not so helpful. We have resubmitted reduced maps that show reduced areas of use that could be added to the map.

We could not possibly protect all mountain goat habitat, as this would render heliskiing impossible and this was not the conclusion of the Cadsand study.

The study showed that these are compatible given good coordination between biologists and operators. ADFnG has said that they would like to work with us, but in the 4 years since they began to state this intent, they have not used the \$250,000 in funding, provided by BLM, to work with operators to get more effective data.

I believe that Mt. goat populations are stable as sighted in the newest 75 page update produced by Kevin White in the Haines area. A slight decline is noted for specific areas, but this could be more likely do to lopsided harvests of females in the last 3-5 years from the hunting core. This is a statewide problem that they are trying to work on through education.

Kevin noted estimated populations are around 1152 in the Haines area. This is a very large stable population. We allow hunting of these diverse species, and as of yet, there is not documented proof that heliskiing actually increase fatality rates in Mt. goats, only that it seems to create them to move more. Yes this possibly could have adverse effects, or after 15 years of heliskiing, and 40 years of aviation and winter logging in the four winds area, these amazing animals are not overly stressed by these activities but somewhat habituated to them.

Again thanks for your comments, and if you have areas that you think the heliski industry could use that are not in the map, we could consider exchanging areas.

The other problem is that the borough is allowing three permits in the same area. Both the Canadian government and the United States Heliski association disagree with this. Typically an operator should be given an area that allows it to be financially viable, and have room for growth without the concern of competition for terrain. When this happens areas of biological concern can be examined and removed. Haines needs to give the regulation over to the state, the state needs to create a statewide board to regulate heliskiing on state lands, and provide for areas for each operator based on current and historical use.

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