

OSPIKA MOUNTAIN GOAT ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT TRIAL

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Abstract: Mountain goats (*Oreamnos americanus*) show strong fidelity to mineral licks. Traditional use by successive generations of goats has resulted in well-used trail systems through forested habitat between alpine summer ranges and valley bottom mineral licks. Industrial forest development has the potential to reduce or eliminate access to these mineral licks. Although a designated “regionally important” species under the British Columbia Identified Wildlife Management Strategy (IWMS), operational management options tend to be vague or non-existent due to a lack of technical information.

In 2001, the Peace/Williston Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program (PFWWCP) and Slocan Forest Products Ltd. Mackenzie Operations (SFP) initiated the Ospika Goat Project (OGP) a large-scale, multi-phase, collaborative study focused on the development and implementation of an effective policy to support integrated management of forests and mountain goat habitat in north-central British Columbia. Collaborators from government agencies and private industry are active in the project through participation in a Mountain Goat Management Team (MGMT). In order to develop effective operational management policies for the forest industry, an adaptive management approach is being taken to assess the impacts of forest harvesting on the use of low-elevation mineral licks by mountain goats (the “Adaptive Management Trial” component of the OGP).

The OGP Adaptive Management Trial aims to monitor the impact of 2 different forest harvesting strategies on the behaviour of mountain goats using low-elevation mineral licks and associated access trails in the Ospika River drainage. The study design involves monitoring the goat use of 4 mineral lick complexes and their associated forested trail systems before and after habitat alteration. Two sites are being subjected to timber removal, one employs the retention of a 100 m forested buffer along the primary mineral lick access trail while the area around the other access trail and lick will be clearcut with no forested buffer being retained. The 2 remaining sites, a control lick across the drainage and a lick in the vicinity of the treatment sites that will help assess possible post-treatment goat displacement, will be monitored but will remain untreated. Behavioural responses of goats to the treatments are being determined by monitoring the frequency, timing, and duration of lick visits by radio-collared goats before and after harvesting occurs. Goat visits are being assessed using remote radio-telemetry and camera stations set up at mineral licks and along their access trails.