



Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Study shows Mountain Caribou are not affected by Helicopter Skiing

Blue River, BC - Saturday June 1, 2013 – A study has shown that, contrary to what sceptics think, helicopter skiing has little to no impact on the endangered Mountain Caribou.

The study entitled, *Assessing the Impacts of Heli-Skiing on the Behaviour and Spatial Distribution of Mountain Caribou*, conducted by Thompson Rivers University (TRU) graduate student Katharina Huebel, was a joint venture between Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing, TRU and the province's Ministry of Environment.

The findings of the study show that Mountain Caribou do not abandon areas that are frequently used for helicopter skiing, and that they were not hurt or frightened by the activity. The Mountain Caribou is listed as an endangered species in Canada, with herds only remaining in British Columbia and Northern Idaho in the United States.

Mike Wiegele, owner of Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing, said that the results have proven what they have known for a long time. "We wanted to be sure that our skiing activities did not interfere with or disrupt the Mountain Caribou, and the conclusion is clear," said Mr Wiegele.

"We have recorded every sighting of the Mountain Caribou within our ski area since 1996. We gladly made this data available to Katharina in order for her study to be conducted with the most accurate information.

"Our best management practices were implemented over 20 years ago. We enforce closing areas to skiing upon detection of caribou to avoid disturbances, and it appears that these practices are successful," said Mr Wiegele.

Government studies show that Mountain Caribou numbers are down by 30% in Wells Grey Provincial Park, which borders the tenure for Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing.

“The decrease in numbers can be linked to the loss of old-growth forests, which caribou rely on for food, causing the caribou to abandon areas,” said Mr. Wiegele.

The study was presented at the Canada West Ski Areas Association (C.W.S.A.A) Spring Conference in Kelowna on Tuesday May 7, 2013.

“The presentation was attended, with a number of Government agencies represented, as well as Helicopter and Snowcat skiing operators and representatives from the snowmobile community. We were very pleased with the valuable input and discussions that followed. Unfortunately, it was noted that the Government has not properly conducted predator management operations, or funded new recovery projects as promised. Only \$500,000 has been spent on these projects, when \$2 million is needed,” said Mr. Wiegele.

“This study is not the end of it. More work and collaboration is needed between Helicopter and Snowcat operators and the Government to protect this animal. We will continue to work with the ministry, and train our pilots and guides of awareness procedures such as flying over an area before skiing it, use alternate ski areas if wildlife is sighted, and to maintain a minimum distance of 500 meters from the Caribou,” said Mr. Wiegele.

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For more information, please contact Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing at 250-673-8381.

To view the Thesis in full, please visit the TRU website:

http://www.tru.ca/library/pdf/theses/Katharina_Huebel_MScThesis.pdf .

For more information on Mike Wiegele Helicopter’s best practices, please visit the website:

www.wiegele.com