

2003 Late Winter Survey of the Itcha-Ilgachuz, Rainbow and Charlotte Alplands
Caribou Herds

J. A. Young and N. L. Freeman
April 2003

Woodland caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*) populations in the West Chilcotin were censused in March of 2003. The census focused on locating groups of caribou containing radio-collared animals from each herd, with the objective of obtaining calf recruitment estimates from a portion of each herd. Fixed wing reconnaissance flights on February 18 and March 7, 2003 determined the general distribution of radio-collared caribou within each herd and open alpine areas used in some winters by caribou were searched for animal presence. During most of the census the helicopter flight path was dictated by the distribution of radio-collared caribou. Groups of caribou encountered while travelling between radio-collared groups were also classified. Several alpine ridges within the Charlotte Alplands were also searched for caribou presence, based on observed use in previous winters.

Itcha-Ilgachuz Herd

The survey was conducted on March 8. Classified caribou were generally found north, east and south of the Itcha Mountains. Thirty-seven groups of caribou were encountered during the flight with group size ranging from one to 29 animals. Approximately 10% of the total population was surveyed or 252 caribou. An observed percentage calves value of 17.9 percent suggests a continued stable to increasing trend for the herd.

Calves: 45

Adults: 207

Total: 252

Percent calves in the population $(45/252) = 17.9\%$

Percent radio-collared cows with calves (3 of 12) = 25%

Rainbow and Charlotte Alplands Herds

The survey was conducted on March 9. Although searched no caribou were found in alpine habitat between Whitton Creek and Kappan Mountain with the Charlotte Alplands. As the only radio-collared caribou from each of the Rainbow Herd and Charlotte Alplands Herd were in the same general wintering area, along the Dean River north of Anahim Lake, observations were summarized together. Four groups of caribou were encountered during the flight with group size ranging from four to 20 animals. Approximately one third of the combined population size (both herds) was surveyed or

46 caribou. An observed percentage calves value of 10.2 percent suggests a continued declining trend for both herds.

Calves: 4

Adults: 35

Unclassified 7

Total: 46

Percent calves in the population $(4/39) = 10.2$

Percent radio-collared cows with calves $(0 \text{ of } 2) = 0.0\%$

Summary

Calf recruitment statistics suggest the Itcha-Ilgachuz Herd remains stable to increasing in trend while the Rainbow and Charlotte Alplands Herds likely continue to decline. Census data from these surveys will be stored with other historical population data for these three herds by the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. Population data will be combined with information collected during a June survey of the Itcha-Ilgachuz Herd and summarized in a report detailing long term trends for the Itcha-Ilgachuz and Rainbow Herds.