

TIBBITT TO CONTWOYTO
WINTER ROAD JOINT VENTURE

Updated December 18, 2009

Questions and Answers related to Caribou and the Winter Road

Question: Does the operation of the winter road have an effect on the Bathurst Caribou Herd?

Answer: Commercial use of the Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road (see Figure 1) does not have a significant effect on the Bathurst Caribou Herd. Public access provided by the road to resident and Aboriginal hunters does have a mortality effect on the herd.

The Winter Road is normally shut down before April 15th. Only in the year 2000, did the spring migration begin on the same day the Winter Road closed:

Year	Winter Road Operating Period	Start of Spring Migration (From ENR Collard Caribou)
1996	Jan 15 – April 15	April 19
1997	Jan 21 – April 15	April 27
1998	Jan 19 – April 4	April 20
1999	Jan 28 – March 31	April 29
2000	Jan 29 – April 3	April 3
2001	Feb 1 – April 13	May 1
2002	Jan 26 – April 16	No data
2003	Feb 1 – April 2	April 20-22
2004	Jan 28 – March 31	May 9-11
2005	Jan 26 – April 5	April 27-30
2006	Feb 5 – March 26	April 27 – May 2
2007	Jan 27 – April 9	April 26- May 1
2008	Jan 29 – March 31	April 26 to May 1
2009	Feb 1 – March 22	April 27 to May 3

The spring calving period reaches its peak in the second week of June. Shortly thereafter, the caribou spread out on the tundra to feed during the summer months of June through August.

The fall migration generally begins at the end of August, when the caribou start their migration south to their wintering grounds. Unlike the spring migration, the fall migration is gradual; there is not a concerted effort to reach the wintering grounds until late September or early October. By November, most caribou have reached the wintering grounds. The caribou are on their winter range before the winter road starts each winter. The Bathurst herd spends the winter months of November through April in their wintering range, which is in the area of the boreal forest. While caribou have a high fidelity to their calving areas, their seasonal movements and their winter ranges are known to vary annually. In the year 1997 to 1998, the Bathurst did not winter along the Winter Road at all.

Once the caribou have reached their winter grounds, they move little. They generally occupy a large area, and travel in small groups within the winter range, rather than as a directed migratory movement. They spend the winter moving short distances between the boreal forest (where they forage for food), and the surface of the frozen lakes (where they seek security from predators, such as wolves, which are an important mortality factor for caribou). The surface of the frozen lakes provides increased security for the caribou, because they can see the wolves from a distance, as opposed to in the boreal forest, where the wolves hunt caribou more effectively. When the caribou winter near the winter road, recreational and subsistence hunting can have a significant effect on animals that are within a few hours snowmobile distance of the ice road. While the lakes may provide protection to the animals from carnivores, resting on the lakes makes the animals very vulnerable to rifles.

In relation to the herd migrations, and the period of time the herd is in its winter grounds, the Winter Road is in operation for a relatively short period of time.

Caribou are complicated but highly adaptable creatures. Like many wildlife species, they can adapt to industrial activity, provided that activity is predictable and consistent. In particular, studies have shown that caribou can adapt to road traffic, provided it is predictable and consistent. Moreover, potential negative effects of traffic disturbance on caribou can be successfully mitigated by appropriate wildlife protection measures.

The Bathurst herd has had a long time to habituate to the presence of the Winter Road, which has existed in their wintering grounds for 27 years. Caribou can be observed crossing the Winter Road, walking on the road and feeding beside the road, which suggests that the caribou have habituated to the traffic on the Winter Road. Further, caribou continue to use habitats adjacent to the Winter Road during winter, and have used those habitats since the Winter Road began to operate.

The Joint Venture has implemented various measures to minimize energetic disturbance and collision mortality for caribou and other wildlife along the road:

- a. Under the Wildlife Plan, all wildlife has the right of way on the Winter Road. Vehicles are required to slow down or stop and wait to permit the free and unrestricted movement of wildlife across the Winter Road at any location.
- b. Under the Rules, the speed limits for commercial trucks travelling along the Winter Road are kept low. For example, the speed limit for trucks travelling on and off lakes is 10 km per hour; south of Lockhart Lake the speed limit for loaded trucks is 25 km per hour and 35 km per hour for empty trucks (basically speeds are similar to a school zone); and north of Lockhart Lake the speed limit for loaded trucks is 30 km per hour and 40 km per hour for empty trucks. In addition, drivers are required to maintain at least 500 m spacing when traveling in convoys. The slow speed limits and spacing between trucks provide the caribou with ample time to see the trucks from a distance, and give the drivers time to react to any caribou on the Winter Road.

Snow bank height is also important because the caribou may not cross the road if they cannot see over the snow bank. In areas and times of known caribou distribution and occurrence, snow bank height should be minimized to allow caribou passage.

Under the environmental management system implemented by the Joint Venture (which includes the WPP; the Rules; the speed limits; spacing of commercial traffic; granting wildlife the right-of-way; snow bank height; education programs developed for Security personnel, truck drivers and camp operators; and any other mitigative measures) the impact of the commercial trucks on caribou is kept relatively low.

Question: What is the effect of hunting along the winter road on the Bathurst Caribou Herd?

Answer: When the caribou winter near the Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road, the road provides public access to the animals. Caribou hunting by both residents and Aboriginals along the winter road is the

single largest road related effect on caribou. To better understand the potential effects of hunting along the winter road, the Joint Venture, which operates the winter road, contributes to ENR's wildlife check point at Ross Lake. The check point data is available from ENR. This effect could be largely mitigated by the control of public access to the winter road.

Question: Has the Joint Venture considered restricting public access to the Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road?

Answer: The terms of the Licence of Occupation issued by the DIAND to the Joint Venture to operate the road does not allow for the restriction of public access. While the JV must provide public access the JV has no authority to regulate use. ENR has the mandate to enforce the NWT Wildlife Act. DIAND may restrict public access for reasons of conservation but has never exercised that prerogative. The JV has on several occasions with the support of the Aboriginal communities, over the years suggested to DIAND that access should be restricted particularly when the caribou are near the road. Government has not responded to these requests. However, on December 18, 2009 the Minister of ENR Mr. Miltenberger announced a ban on hunting the Bathurst Herd from the North Shore of Great Slave lake to the boundary of Nunavut (which would include the winter road). This applies to both non-aboriginal and aboriginal hunters until such time as the Wekeezhii Renewable resources Board comes up with a recovery plan of its own. Since this is a GNWT – ENR initiative it is assumed that ENR enforcement personnel will be responsible for enforcement patrols on the winter road.

The commercial traffic does not have an effect. Low speeds for commercial traffic (10 to 30 km/hr) and giving caribou the right of way prevented any incidents in recent years and limits the potential for incidents in the future.

Question: The JV has operated an alternate return route for south bound trucks via the old Discovery Mine Winter Road (see Figure 2). Did this new route have any effect on caribou?

Answer: The Discovery Mine Road was built about 1965. It has been open to the public most winters since that time. The JV contracted RTL Robinson Ltd to re-open a section of road from Discovery to Gordon Lake in 2007 and 2008, which had not been used in recent years. RTL Robinson holds valid land use permits for the road Discovery Road including the section to Gordon Lake. Given there has been regular public access to Discovery and the entire route is an established winter road route, the JV use of the road is not creating new access. While the JV is using an existing route, the companies involved realize the importance of understanding the effects of public access on to the caribou winter range and therefore as they have done for years at Ross Lake on the main Tibet to Contwoyto Road, they also contributed to the establishment of an ENR Wildlife Check Point on the Discovery Mine road on a portage between Prosperous and Bluefish Lake. Management of caribou is a GNWT responsibility.

Question: How many incidents have there been between commercial traffic and caribou on the Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road?

Answer: There was one collision between a commercial truck and six caribou in the late 1990's before the Joint Venture was formed to manage the road. That is the only incident that has either been reported to the JV or observed by winter road security. The low speeds that commercial traffic are allowed to travel and providing caribou the right-of-way has prevented any incidents in recent years and decreases the potential of any incidents in the future.

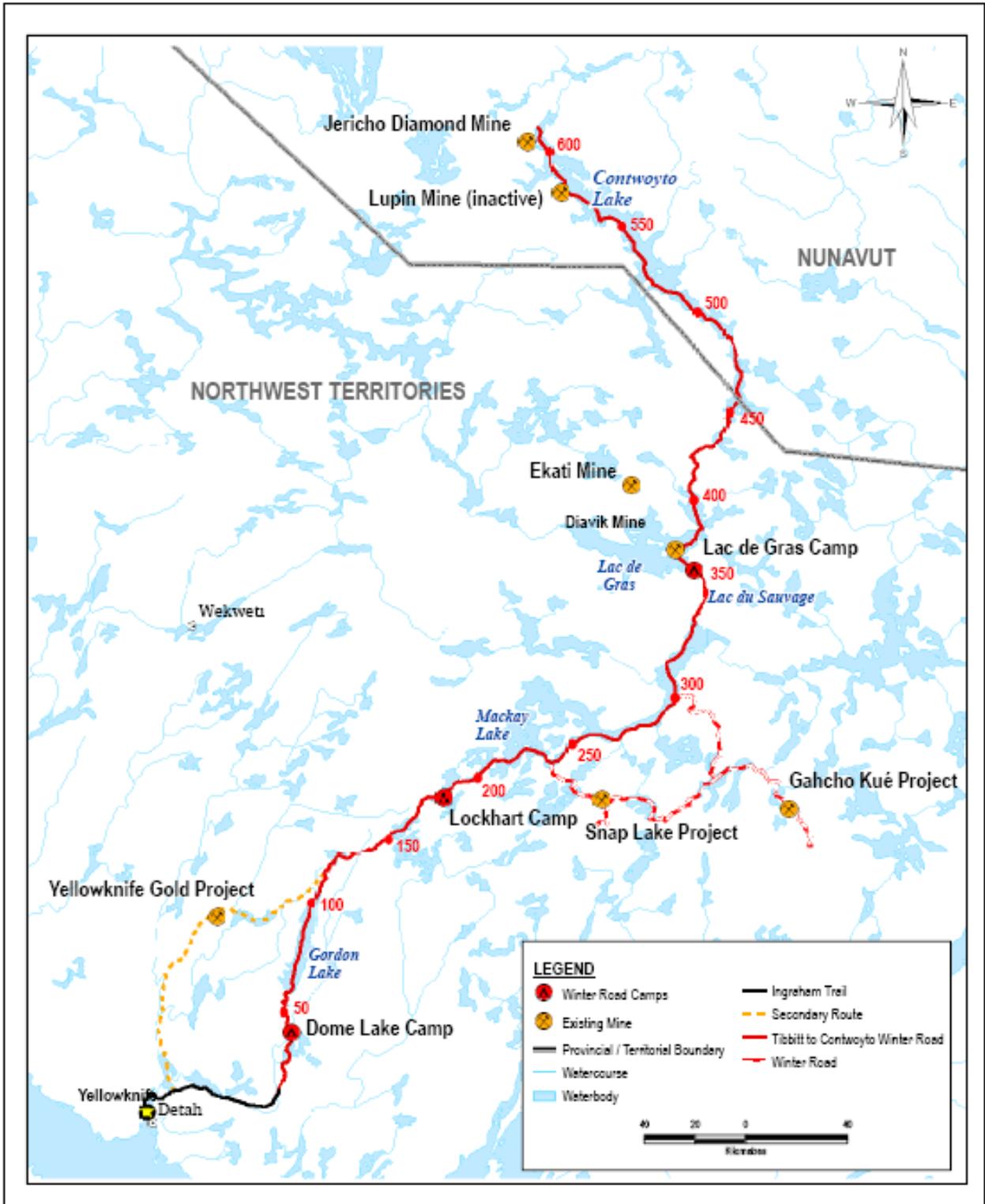


Figure 1 – Tibbitt to Contwoyto Winter Road Route

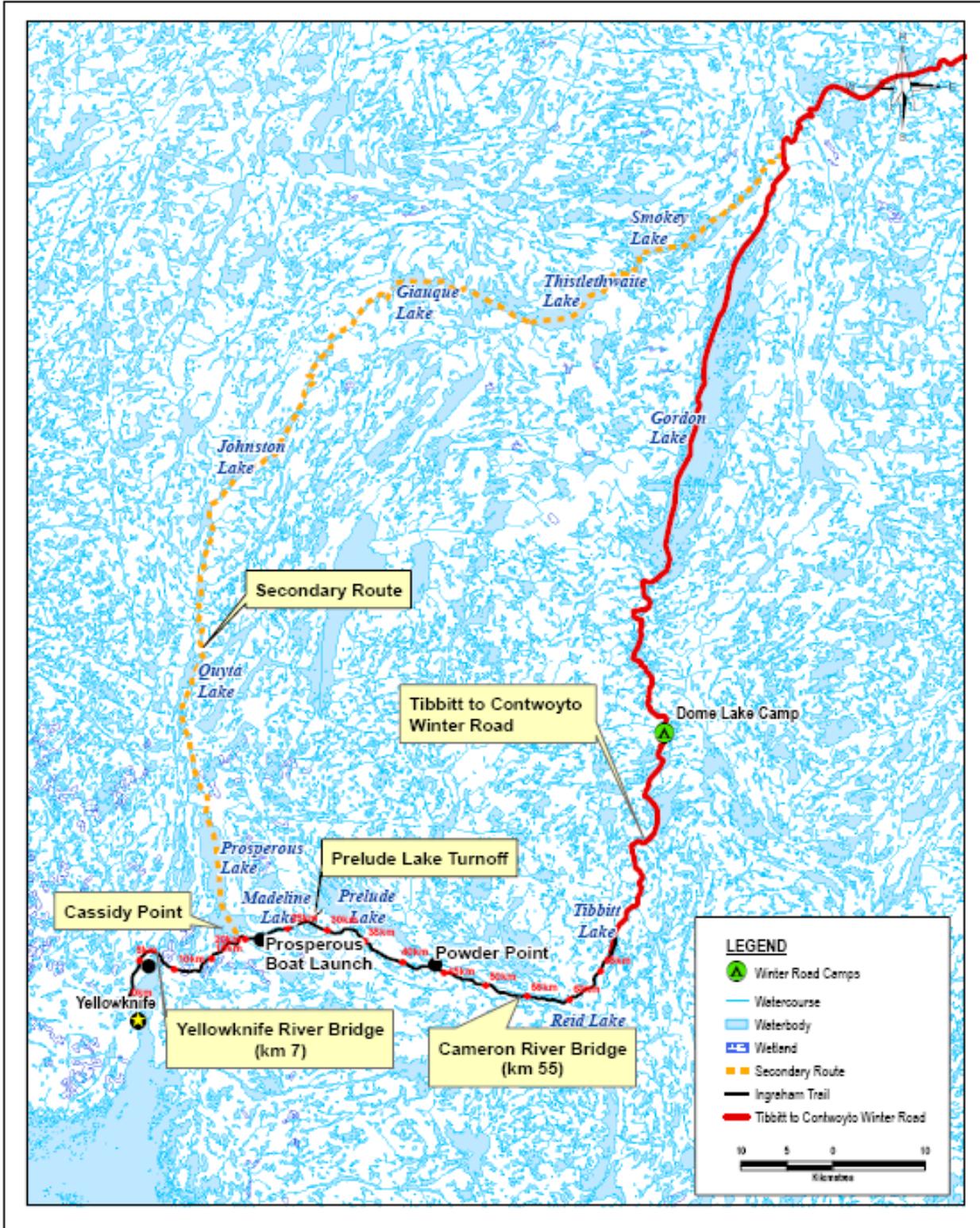


Figure 2 – Alternate – Secondary Route (Discovery Mine Route)