

CMH WILDLIFE OPERATING PROCEDURES (WINTER)

The mountains in which we operate are home to a wide range of animal species. We recognize that there are key species – because of the nature of their needs or the fact that they are classified as “rare” or “endangered” - that are of specific concern. These include mountain caribou, wolverine, mountain goat and grizzly bear.

It is our policy to minimize the potential direct and indirect impacts of our activities on all wildlife. This means ensuring that negative associations and impacts are avoided, and that animals can continue their normal habits – and continue to use necessary habitats - without disturbance. The following procedures are designed to assist us in meeting the following goal:

Our goal: to fly and ski in mountain ecosystems without displacing (*) key animals () from the habitats that they need to survive.**

**Displacement is defined as a detectable change of use from higher quality habitats to lower quality habitats, on a time scale of days to months and a spatial scale of hundreds of meters to several kilometers.*

***While these procedures are meant to address the needs of all wildlife species, we recognize that mountain caribou, mountain goats, wolverines and grizzly bears require special attention.*

These procedures are consistent with the HCC’s “BEST PRACTICES FOR SUSTAINABILITY: STEWARDSHIP OF MOUNTAIN ECOSYSTEMS.” They are also consistent with the HCC – government Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding mountain caribou.

A.) WILDLIFE HABITATS

The area manager and assistant manager are accountable for ensuring that all guides and pilots in their area are aware of the key habitats where – based on previous observations and information gained from other sources (government, research, on-going inventories) – key wildlife species are, or may be commonly seen in the winter.

CMH will work annually with the Ministry of Environment (MOE), the Integrated Land Management Bureau (ILMB) and/or the Species at Risk Coordinating Office (SaRCO) to acquire new wildlife data, incorporate it into CMH mapping, and to ensure that managers, assistant managers and guides are aware of it for proactive use of digital wildlife flags (see below). Of particular concern are critical habitat areas for the red-listed mountain caribou.

It is important that these key habitat areas be discussed within each area’s guiding/pilot team in daily morning and evening meetings to assist in planning for use of ski runs and flight paths.

B.) WILDLIFE OBSERVATIONS AND USE OF SNOWBASE

Maintaining an on-going program of wildlife observations is a key part of our role as stewards. *SnowBase* has become, and will continue to be the main tool that we will use to record, track and report these observations. *SnowBase* continues to be refined so that each data entry field provides useful information for these purposes.

The area manager and assistant manager are accountable for ensuring that the use of *SnowBase* for this purpose remains a key part of the daily discussions in the guiding team (including pilots), and that data is entered in all wildlife-related fields in *SnowBase*. All guides and pilots are to be encouraged to record all observations; the value of this information cannot be over-stated.

In each evening meeting, the area manager or assistant manager are accountable for ensuring that one of the guiding team records all wildlife observations for that day in *SnowBase*. These observations should:

- be **consistent** ... they should be recorded on daily basis; make entries even if they are of animals seen regularly, or even when no animals are observed;
- be **accurate** ... where are the animals (using 6-digit and 7-digit UTM coordinates), what are they doing when observed, and how did they react to our flying and/or skiing?
- accurately record the **operational decisions** we made and actions we took as a result of animal sightings ... what operational changes did we make as a result of those observations to ensure non-displacement?

C.) USING WILDLIFE OBSERVATIONS TO MAKE OPERATIONAL DECISIONS

From a wildlife perspective, *SnowBase* has been set up as a tool to assist decision-making; it allows for the use of digital "flags" on the daily run list (on individual ski runs or groups of ski runs) to highlight specific areas of concern, and to track our operational decisions in those areas. It also provides a logical sequence and context for discussion of wildlife issues in the daily meetings.

The two types of wildlife "flags" (below) have been developed to address the needs and presence of the key wildlife species listed above. The normal use of the flags is shown on the decision trees at the end of this document.

In these procedures, we use the term: "identified value for wildlife" for specific runs or groups of runs. Areas can be classified as having identified value for wildlife when:

- we have seen wildlife there previously (normally within the previous three seasons), or when they have been "seen" there previously via radio-telemetry; or
- the area is on provincial government maps showing areas of priority for wildlife management; or
- we see wildlife as we are operating.

In all situations, our actions should be appropriate for the presence and responses of wildlife. And in all cases, the reasons for each decision around the use of these flags should be clearly outlined in *SnowBase*.

ALERT - these flags are placed on runs (or groups of runs) where wildlife have been seen in the past, or where they are likely to be seen at some point during the winter. As an example, these are used on mountain caribou and mountain goat habitats that are commonly occupied during the winter. The flags can be set prior to the season, or at any point during the season (after observations show animal activity in area). **Guides should not take groups to these runs until a check has been done to verify (through lack of sign of animals or recent tracks) that animals are absent from the area.** In most cases, the flags will remain set throughout the winter to recognize the potential use of the area by wildlife.

CLOSED - these flags are placed on runs (or groups of runs) where specific needs of animals preclude our use. This includes runs that are occupied by wildlife, or where animals are close enough to the run or flight path that our use might cause displacement. Specific examples include known wolverine dens (mid-late winter) or grizzly bear dens (early spring). **Guides should not take groups to these runs.** The flags can be set prior the season or at any point during the season. The flag can be removed from the runs (or groups of runs) only by the area manager or assistant manager only when they are confident that the animals are no longer in the area and have been absent from the area for a minimum of 48 hours. **The reasons behind this decision to remove a closed flag should be clearly noted in SnowBase.**

D.) THE ROLE OF THE GUIDES AND PILOTS

One of the key foundations for our approach to wildlife is the process of verifying that wildlife are absent from ski runs or flight paths (or their immediate vicinity) prior to their use. Much of this verification occurs as a result of regular operating practices ... guides and pilots should check specific runs or groups of runs when they do over-flights on their way to other skiing or when flying for other purposes (fuel, lunches, snow safety work, etc).

It is suggested that all guides and pilots play a part in this verification process in the field. However, the snow safety guide may play a particularly important role. In those areas/runs where **ALERT** and **CLOSED** flags are set and where skiing might occur in the near future, a guide or pilot should visit these areas as close to the time of use as possible (for closed runs, this is only after a minimum 48 hour period has concluded). These visits should normally occur as high-level reconnaissance flights, and the "flags" should remain set if any evidence (tracks or animals) of the continued presence of wildlife is observed.

If it appears that animals are no longer in the area, the pilot or guide should verify that assumption through a closer reconnaissance. This might include lower-elevation flights or verifying – on the ground - that tracks or animal are not present or that any tracks that are present are older than about 48 hours (through signs of wind action, melting, new snowfall, faceting and formation of surface hoar, etc.). The guide's and/or pilot's observations should then become a key part of the wildlife discussion in the morning or evenings meeting that day and in subsequent meetings about those locations. In all cases, this information should be clearly recorded in *SnowBase*.

E.) FLIGHT PATHS AND FLIGHT PRACTICES

Except where client or staff safety is an issue, guides and pilots will choose helicopter flight paths to maintain at least 500 m. horizontal or vertical separation from areas of occupied habitats and – where operationally possible – those habitats where animals (such as mountain goats, mountain caribou, moose, etc) are regularly seen by pilots or guides. This separation distance should be increased if the animals occupying these habitats show any evidence of being displaced (via “flight or fright” behaviours) by our presence.

Guides and pilots will make all possible efforts to use regular and predictable flight paths (as per the mapped flight plans on the management plan maps as approved by government) to minimize disruption of animals and maximize the predictability of our presence.

Except where staff or client safety is an issue, appropriate flight practices (speed, elevation, rate of ascent/descent, rate of turn, etc.) will be used in the vicinity of habitats commonly used by key wildlife species to further minimize potential noise impacts on wildlife and to maximize the ability of animals to predict our presence and intent.

In all cases, mother-and-young groups will be completely avoided, particularly in early spring.

In particular, guides and pilots will choose flight paths with commonly occupied habitats in mind to avoid situations where helicopters might “surprise” animals (such as mountain goats or caribou) by suddenly flying around corners or over ridges.

We will not use helicopters to “flight-see” any wildlife species such as mountain goats, caribou or wolverine.

F.) HELICOPTER LANDINGS/PICK-UPS

Except where client or staff safety is an issue, guides and pilots will choose the trajectories of helicopter approaches, landings, pick-ups and take-offs to maintain at least 500 m horizontal or vertical separation from closed runs. This separation distance should be increased immediately if animals are observed to be occupying those habitats, and – particularly - if animals occupying these habitats show any evidence of being displaced (via “flight or fright” behaviours) by our presence.

In all cases, avoid mother-and-young groups, particularly in the early spring.

G.) SKIING

If a guide observes animals on, or in the immediate vicinity of a ski run once he/she is on the run with guests, it is important to do all necessary (within the bounds of safety) to ensure that the presence of the group does not displace the animal(s). This will include any or all of the following:

- ✓ Choosing a line and/or pick-up that will take the group away from where the animal(s) is located
- ✓ Holding the group until the animal(s) has continued its intended path
- ✓ Immediately contacting following groups by radio to ensure that they use other lines or runs to avoid further disturbance to the animal(s)
- ✓ Ensuring that the run is appropriately flagged during the evening meeting.

It is recommended that guides use these situations as an opportunity to educate our guests about what it is we're doing to avoid displacing wildlife.

H.) USE OF ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

It is the intent of these procedures to ensure that we meet the non-displacement goal. On a daily basis, the area manager and assistant manager are accountable – with the assistance of other CMH and Alpine staff – for making decisions (and records of those decisions) which show that we're continually adapting our operations to ensure that this non-displacement goal is met.

The ideal scenario is that we are able to continue to offer safe, quality skiing experiences to our guests in a way that does not result in any changes to animal behaviour or to their use of preferred habitats.

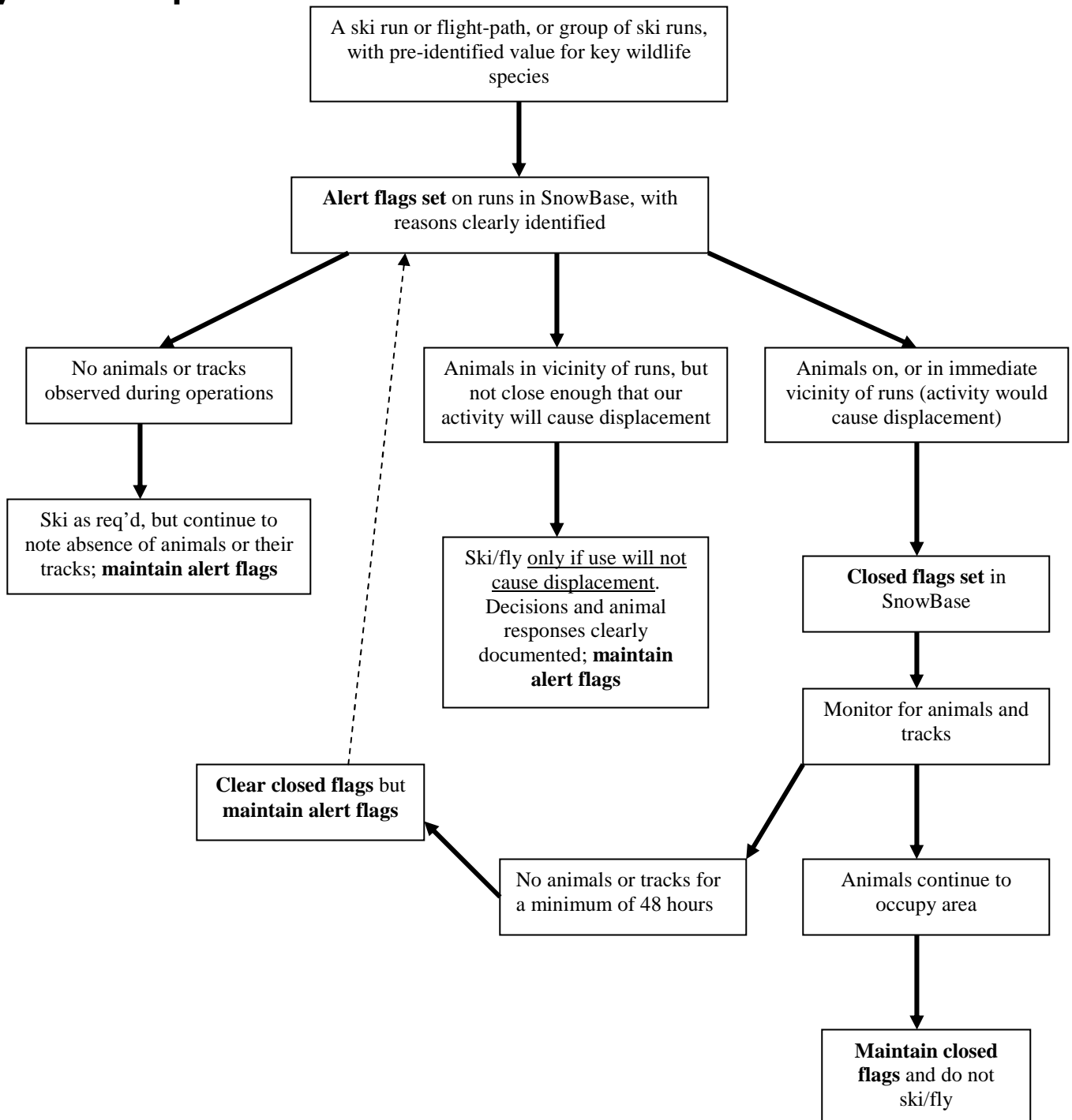
At the end of the season, or at any point during the season, area managers should identify and be prepared to discuss:

- ✓ any specific locations where it appears that animals "see" our existing activities as a neutral influence or where our activities do not appear to cause displacement;
- ✓ any specific locations that pose specific operational problems with respect to wildlife; or
- ✓ any areas/topics where additional training or information would help guides and pilots to achieve our goal.

These operating procedures will continue to be refined and improved as we learn more about our interactions with wildlife. This will happen through sharing information with each other in meetings and training sessions, by incorporating expert advice, working with government and through incorporating the results of relevant research.

CMH - Use of Wildlife Flags in SnowBase

Scenario #1: runs or groups of runs with identified value to key wildlife species



CMH - Use of Wildlife Flags in SnowBase

Scenario #2: runs or groups of runs without specifically pre-identified value to key wildlife species

