

Public Registry Notice for s.83 Exceptions – Mount Revelstoke National Park and Glacier National Park

Mount Revelstoke National Park and Glacier National Park

Site:

Mount Revelstoke National Park and Glacier National Park

SARA Competent Department:

Parks Canada Agency

Date of Notification:

May 26, 2016

Species:

Little Brown Myotis
Northern Myotis
Olive-sided Flycatcher
Woodland Caribou, Southern Mountain Population
Whitebark Pine

Exceptions

Period for the Exception:

This exception applies as long as the avalanche control activities described below are required. The exception will be reviewed occasionally as required, for example, if additional critical habitat is identified or if species are added to Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*.

Area where the Exception Applies:

134 avalanche slidepaths covering 18,920 ha of Mount Revelstoke and Glacier National Parks

Activity:

Operations required for the avalanche control program: avalanche control with artillery fire using Howitzers, Remote Avalanche Control Systems and heli-combing; helicopter activity year-round to monitor and maintain sites; slope stabilization using snow nets; avalanche path deflection using berms or mounds; snowsheds; slope monitoring using Glide Slab Monitoring Systems; construction and maintenance of avalanche control infrastructure including gun rings, Remote Avalanche Control Systems, snow nets, Glide Slab Monitoring Systems, snowsheds and deflection berms; and detonation of unexploded ordinances during summer months.

Rationale for the Exception:

To ensure the safety of users of the Trans-Canada Highway and Canadian Pacific Rail line, the Mount Revelstoke Glacier Avalanche Control program manages 134 avalanche slidepaths. From 1885 to 1962, when avalanche defence of the railway was limited to snowsheds, more than 200 people died in avalanches on the railway line. Between 1966 (when Parks Canada's avalanche control program was initiated) and 2014, 1,039 avalanches have reached the Trans-Canada Highway, 953 of which were predicted and controlled by the program. During this period, there have been two deaths, four instances of injuries and 52 near misses with damage to vehicles or infrastructure and five incidents where there has been serious damage to old growth forest.

These incidents reflect the need for continued application and improvement of the program and Parks Canada continues to explore new methods to increase the effectiveness of the program, including installation of new technologies to predict and control avalanches. However, program activities may kill or harm individuals of SARA-listed species and/or destroy identified critical habitat.

As per the Regulations Governing Highway Traffic in the National Parks of Canada, the federal Crown controls the use and management of roads and highways within national parks. Section 14(3)(c) of the *Canada National Parks Act* authorizes Parks Canada to conduct activities in wilderness areas for the purpose of public safety. Parks Canada and the British Columbia Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure work closely to maintain and operate the Trans-Canada Highway. Additionally, a November 26, 1976 Agreement between Parks Canada and Canadian Pacific states that avalanche mitigation controls for the Canadian Pacific Railway within Mount Revelstoke and Glacier National Parks are to be completed under the existing Parks Canada program.

Alternatives

Alternatives Considered:

Not implementing avalanche control activities in this area is not a reasonable option. If the program did not exist, the challenging terrain through which the Trans-Canada Highway and Canadian Pacific Rail line travels through Mount Revelstoke and Glacier National Parks and the long history of destructive avalanches through this transportation corridor would mean that the highway and rail line would need to close over winter months to ensure safety of the public.

Mitigation Measures Implemented or to be Implemented:

Avalanche control activities follow Mount Revelstoke and Glacier National Parks approved Best Management Practices, including: 1.00 Vegetation Removal; 4.00 Detonation of Unexploded Ordinances; and routine mitigations for flying in caribou habitat which includes restrictions on landing when caribou may be present. Caribou are rarely observed on avalanche paths; however, any observations of caribou in debris at the bottom of avalanche paths will be reported.

Mitigations for Olive-sided Flycatcher also include consultation with Resource Conservation staff to determine the best course of action if active nests are detected during surveys and if nests are found on Remote Avalanche Control Systems or Glide Slab Monitoring System towers. Helicopters will be shut down when stopped at a site for more than 15 minutes.

Mitigations for Little Brown Myotis and Northern Myotis also include consultation with Resource Conservation staff to determine the best course of action if active bat roosts are detected during surveys and if bats are found roosting in or near the Remote Avalanche Control Systems or Glide Slab Monitoring System towers. Any storage areas required for the Remote Avalanche Control Systems will be secured to prevent bats from using them as a roost. Whenever possible, large living and dead trees will be retained on site, and artificial lighting, increased noise and increased activity near dead and dying trees that are potential bat roosts will be avoided.

Mitigations for Whitebark Pine also include site surveys and avoiding harm or killing of apparently healthy trees wherever possible. Soil piles and backfill material will be set outside of areas with Whitebark Pine to avoid damage to individuals. If activities on site are likely to affect Whitebark Pine, an environmental monitor will be on site to help ensure protection of trees.

Any mortality of apparently healthy Whitebark Pine trees caused by this program will be compensated through support for recovery work, for example, via harvesting and testing of seeds for resistance to White Pine Blister Rust, and planting blister rust resistant seedlings in appropriate areas.

Signatures

"I, the Field Unit Superintendent, am of the opinion

- That the activity qualifies for an exception under s. 83 of the *Species at Risk Act*;
- That all reasonable alternatives to the activity that would reduce the impact on the species have been considered and the best solution has been adopted; and
- That all feasible measures will be taken to minimize the impact of the activity on the species or its critical habitat or the residences of its individuals."

Nicholas Irving

Superintendent, Mount Revelstoke and Glacier National Parks

Date: 26 May 2016