Canadian Wildlife Service
Artic Ecology Map Series
Critical Wildlife areas

Descriptive report

Lockhart River

LOCKHART RIVER
(Sheet #2113)

The Lockhart River map sheet (scale 1:1,000,000) encompasses an area of about 82,000 square miles. It includes most of the east arm of Great Slave Lake and extends east to 104° West Longitude. The southern boundary is 60° North Latitude (the Alberta-Saskatchewan Boundary).

The area is divided into two distinct ecological regions by tree-line which extends southeast across the area. The region north of the tree-line is typical sub-arctic tundra while the southern region is boreal or northern coniferous forest (taiga).

The chief features of the tundra portion are the headwater tributaries and upper valley of the Thelon River which contains the only large forest trees in the tundra region.

The major geographic features of the southern forest area are the east arm of Great Slave Lake and three quarters (about 300 miles) of the Talston River complex.

Several resident and migratory wildlife species are common in the region. Thousands of Barren-Ground Caribou winter in the forest region and migrate into the Thelon River region for the summer. Several herds of Muskoxen reside in the upland tundra during the winter and migrate to the green

valleys of the Thelon and Hanbury Rivers for the summer months. Many flocks of Canada Geese rest, breed and molt on the numerous lakes and along the Thelon and Talston River systems.

Arctic Fox dens are found on the eskers that are scattered throughout the region, while marten and mink and otter are plentiful in forested areas. The lower Talston River is also an excellent producer of beaver and muskrat. In general, there is a good beaver population throughout the entire south half of the map sheet.

Human populations make much use of the western and southern portions of the region. Occupied settlements are located at Snowdrift and Reliance. Trappers from Saskatchewan hunt caribou and trap fox, mink and marten in the extreme southern and southeastern region.

The most important wildlife areas are the east arm of Great Slave Lake, the Thelon River system and the Talston River. Active mineral exploration and development has started at the east end of Great Slave Lake and a hydro-electric power dam has been installed on the Talston River (62° 25'N. 111° 23'W.). The dam on the Talston has flooded several excellent muskrat and beaver areas above it and has caused excessive drainage and drying of the rich trapping and fishing areas that are included in the downstream portion.

The region east of Artillery Lake is historically

significant as it was formerly the route north from Great Slave Lake onto the Barren Grounds. Exploration parties such as Seton and other early explorers used this route.

The confluence of the Thelon, Clarke and Hanbury Rivers constitutes a distinct ecological unit with beautiful scenery and varied wildlife including Grizzly Bear, Arctic Fox, Caribou, Muskoxen and Wolves. Some observers have suggested that this area should be established as a National Park.

The following text provides additional information on units mapped on the Lockhart River sheet.

UNIT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
1	A common caribou migration route occurs along the east side of Artillery Lake in August. The herds move south towards the Porter and Gray Lakes area to winter range. (Kuyt, Pruitt) Animals move in a broad front towards the Nonacho Lake wintering ground (McEwan). Estimated approximate population of the Beverly Lake Herd is 159,000 animals. (Thomas)
2	Important Muskoxen area west of Thelon River and north of Hanbury River. Several herds frequent river valleys in summer and higher ground (toward Moraine Lake) during winter. (Hoare 1930, Tener 1965) A recent herd of 50-60 animals was observed in 1963. (Kuyt 1964) An estimated population of 100+ animals occur in the area. (Tener and Kuyt 1966). Part of this area is encompassed by the Thelon Game Sanctuary.

UNIT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
3	This unit continues onto the Thelon River map sheet. It does not constitute a major movement and is not as important as the main Beverly Herd migration route. During the fall the animals move down along the Back River and south through this area. This movement takes place July 20th to 30th and the animals move into Alymer Lake region further south. Many herds split and go further south across the Thelon River. (Kuyt)
4	Peregrine and Gyr Falcons nesting in cliffs. (Kuyt)
5	Breeding and molting area for Canada Geese within the treed area of this unit, i.e., the forest grove area above the junction of the Hanbury and Thelon Rivers.
6	This is a Barren-Ground Caribou migration route for large numbers of the Beverly Herd. This unit is a duplication of Unit 20 on the Dubawnt River sheet where a full description is provided.
7	Gyr and Peregrine Falcons breed at Granite Falls on the Thelon and Clarke Rivers within the area delineated. (Kuyt)
8	An important range and probable denning area for Barren Ground Grizzly Bears. (Loughrey)
9	The Clarke River and Beaverhill Lake areas are important molting areas for Canada Geese, estimated population of 2,100 in 1966 (Sterling and Dzubin) The breeding area for small Canada Geese is widely dispersed in this unit, which includes a few breeding White-Fronted Geese as well. It may have high breeding potential, however additional surveys are required. Eyeberry and Beaverhill Lakes each contain 2,000 to 5,000 molting Canada Geese. These are highly important areas. (Sterling)

UNIT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
10	This area contains both Arctic Fox and Grizzly Bear. Fox denning occurs in the region. Ground Squirrels are numerous along the eskers of this region. (Pruitt)
11	Large numbers of Barren-Ground Caribou, part of the Beverly Herd, frequent the area during May and June and migrate southward through the area from early August until early winter. The area around the junction of Hanbury and Thelon Rivers is a preferred area during June for the non-breeding population. (Banfield, et al.) This is a Caribou migration and calving area. The herds move from the lower portion of the map sheet along the Thelon River and between the Thelon and the Dubawnt Rivers towards Aberdeen and Beverly Lakes. This is commonly known as the Beverly Lake Herd and these animals calve all around Beverly Lake. Some very critical water crossings exist along the Thelon River and between Beverly and Aberdeen, and Aberdeen and Schultz Lakes. The area should be considered critical. (Kuyt) The estimated population size of this herd as of 1967 was 159,000 animals. (Thomas 1969) The spring migration is more concentrated, both in terms of time and space. Herds enter the region in large numbers. The fall migration is more leisurely, and the animals are scattered more widely. (Kuyt)
12	Arctic Fox den in sandy eskers which are numerous between Whitefish and Lynx Lakes and the Hanbury and Thelon Rivers.
13	This is a thinly treed spruce grove area used by approximately 1,000 molting Canada Geese. (Sterling)
14	Major molting area for medium size and large Canada Geese. Breeding possibly occurs in the northern portion of this area. The area contains 10,000+ large Canada Geese. (Sterling)

UNIT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
15	The entire area from Great Slave to the south-east corner of the map sheet is good Caribou winter range. The largest concentrations occur in the southeast corner of the map sheet. (Thomas, Kelsall, Loughrey, et al.)
16	This is a critical wintering area for the Beverly Lake Herd. Although wintering takes place generally throughout the map sheet, the area in the vicinity of Brooks Lake, Gray Lake, Porter Lake and Penylan Lake is considered to be prime wintering range. (Kelsall) Boundary data incorporated from Kelsall, Hall, Pruitt and McEwan.
17	The Talston River is a good river for Lake Trout. (Kuyt)
18	Tsu Lake is an important sport fishing lake for Lake Trout. Numerous sportsmen fly in from Ft. Smith for this purpose. (Fuller, Stevens)
19	This unit contains important habitat for Beaver and Muskrat. The lower Talston River is a high producer of Muskrat and Beaver. This area has been effected by low water caused by the power dam on the Talston River. Generally good populations of Beaver are common throughout the Talston Lake region. (Fuller) This unit extends westward to the Slave River sheet.
20	A critical breeding area for Peregrine Falcons. "A common breeding bird on the east arm of Great Slave Lake and in the pre-Cambrian area north and east of Yellowknife". (Fyfe 1969) Bald Eagles nest along the cliffs on the islands in this region. Good populations were found in the early 1960's. (Fuller)

UNIT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
21	A spring migration route for Caribou which move along the east side of Artillery Lake, Snowdrift River and straight northeast as indicated by the arrow to the Beverly Lake calving ground. This is the Beverly or Saskatchewan Herd and is an extremely critical movement. Herds generally return along the same route in the fall but more fanned out,and movement takes place over a much more general area. (Kelsall)
22	Wintering Caribou were seen in 1968-1969 in this area around the east arm of Great Slave Lake. This is likely part of the Beverly Herd. (Hall)
23	An important area for Lake Trout. The water stays open in this area for some time in the fall, and provides good sport fishing. (Fuller)
24	This is a critical wintering area for Barren-Ground Caribou, which extends westward on the Slave River sheet. This area has been burned over in the past. Caribou are found most frequently here, although they may move south-east across the lake after freeze up. Movements occur both ways, but this unit contains the greatest numbers of wintering animals. (Kelsall) Additional boundary data from Hall and Loughrey.
25	A migration movement that takes place July 20th to 30th. Animals move towards Alymer Lake then south. Many of this group split and go east across the Thelon River. (Kuyt)

REFERENCES

Personal Communication

J. P. Kelsall	
E. Kuyt	
A. G. Loughrey	(Canadian Wildlife Service)
E. McEwan	
N. S. Novakowski	
W. A. Fuller	University of Alberta
R. B. Hall	Northwest Territories, Game Branch
W. O. Pruitt	University of Manitoba
T. Sterling	Ducks Unlimited

Note: Unpublished data with permission of T. Sterling and A. Dzubin.

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