

**Verbatim Transcript
CBC Almanac
12:17 p.m.
Wednesday, October 15, 2003
Host: Mark Forsythe
Reporter: Jeff Davies
"Guy Woods" WLAP Sr. Wildlife Biologist - Kootenay Region
"Ross Clarke" CBFWCP Wildlife Biologist
"Barry Bartlett" CBFWCP Public Communications Co-or
"Terry Hanik" President Trail Wildlife Association**

Forsythe: Well, there's another species to add to the list of wildlife in BC. It's the off-roaders with their quads and dirt bikes - they're boldly going where no motorists have ever gone before. There are a lot of places to drive an off-road vehicle in BC without causing problems. And most of the time that's what happens - there are no problems.

But there are also off-roaders who ignore signs and damage wildlife habitat. And now, some outdoor enthusiasts fear landowners will start putting up gates and fences all because of the irresponsible actions of a few.

Jeff Davies takes a look at a growing conflict in rural BC.

(Sounds of people walking through brush)

DAVIES: We're walking through a meadow bathed in sunlight near Limpid Creek, high above the Pend d'Oreille River south of Trail. The fields slope into a giant bowl towards the valley.

WOODS: So we've got fields like this that we have been trying to maintain because in spring they get a lot of use of grass by the deer. They come out onto these fields when they start to green up. And there's not an abundance of them... (voice fades out)

DAVIES: It would be hard to imagine a better place to watch wildlife in silence. But it's evident some come here in search something other than solitude. (Voices in background: "You can break an ankle in here. Yeah...")

At the bottom of the hill there's a dried up marsh with deep ruts plowed through it. The wetland has been discovered by mud boggers - people who's idea of fun is to drive off-road vehicles into a swamp.

WOODS: It disturbs the ecosystem that is developing. And in an ecosystem like this, it takes quite a while for itself to develop. We interfere with that by digging it up and set it back in its successional stage.

DAVIES: Guy Woods is the Senior Wildlife Biologist with the Ministry of Water, Land & Air Protection in Nelson. There's a tone of resignation - even sadness - as he and fellow biologist Ross Clarke survey the damage. It's not just tire tracks that are left behind. A couple of years ago, an old cabin in the meadow was burned to the ground. The biologists have no idea who did that, but they do know off-road vehicles scare away elk and deer, spread noxious weeds with their big tires and, as Ross Clarke observes, they destroy the tiny creatures living in the wetland.

CLARKE: It's home to a couple of amphibians: spotted frogs that would lay eggs in this area; we have boreal toads and ... (voice fades out)

DAVIES: Barry Bartlett from the Columbia Basin Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program says tens of thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours of work went into preserving this wildlife habitat.

BARTLETT: There hasn't been any enhancement work done again since this happened because it's a matter of just throwing up your hands. Why would you go and then spend more time to try and bring it back when you're going to find that when you do it people are right back in here again. So, it's almost....(voice fades out)

DAVIES: There's only one road into this area and it's clearly marked with a sign that says: "Please respect this wildlife habitat. No tree cutting or motorized access on this property".

WOODS: Right now, this is not legally closed to vehicular access. So, it's not a situation where we can actually charge somebody with doing anything much.

DAVIES: But Guy Woods says that may have to change if the damage continues. This is Crown land and Woods says the Government would like to keep it open but it has the right to halt public access.

Meanwhile, not far north of the Pend d'Oreille Valley... (sounds of dirt bikes revving)... a coupe of dirt bikers load up their truck after an outing at their favourite spot - Fort Shepherd along the Columbia River south of Trail.

Steve Young and Gord Bojacko say they just like to get a little air on their bikes.

Dirt Bikers: We don't go and trash anything or chase deer through the bush or nothing like that. We stick to the trail if we find one. Once in a while, you will venture off road but nothing that would go tearing up the place up or nothing like that.

DAVIES: It's those who don't follow that rule that worry Terry Hanik, the President of the Trail Wildlife Association. Not far below us, off-roaders have beaten what looks like a series of toboggan runs through the undergrowth and down the sandy banks.

HANIK: If they stay in the right places and don't go off the road - that's fine. But once you start going off the road, then we end off in problems. By the looks of it here, you can see they make their own roads.

DAVIES: Hanik is a hunter and sportsman who works at the smelter in Trail. Not the typical profile of an environmentalist, but after a lifetime in the outdoors, Hanik is concerned about the impact of all these off-road vehicles.

HANIK: It's beautiful out here. And being the wintering grounds for the animals - the deer down here just come straight over whether...(voice fades out)

DAVIES: This is private property owned by Teck Cominco. So far, they've tolerated the off-roaders here .

HANIK: It's a nice area. The guys have got to appreciate what we have. If it's ever taken away, then we're going to be in dire straits of going someplace.

DAVIES: Hanik fears the owners may have to close the Fort Shepherd lands if the abuse continues.
Back in the Pend d'Oreille Valley meanwhile...

DAVIES to CLARKE: Have they not discovered this one, yet? (voice fades out)....

I set out with the biologists for higher ground to find another wetland - this one we believed untouched by the mud boggers. In the distance, it's lush and green...

CLARKE: Oh, it looks like the dirt bikes have been in here. (voice fades out)....

DAVIES: When we get closer we find a few tell tale tracks through the muck. It's not as pristine as we thought - yet still intact. A rich and delicate aquatic environment and for now still open to the public.

The biologists agree it's a minority of off-roaders who are responsible for the damage - maybe five percent.

But they say if it doesn't stop, nature lovers may find special places like this off limits in the future.

For CBC Radio, I'm Jeff Davies in the Pend d'Oreille Valley south of Trail.

Forsythe: Well, if you are an off-roader, or if you are an anti-offroader, we would sure like to hear from you on this piece. What do you think about the situation? What have you faced when you've headed into the backcountry, either on some kind of vehicle or on your feet.

Give us a call: 861-3748, that's our talkback line. Or you can email us:

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