

On Tuesday February 19th 2008, Steve Alder, flew the North Fork of the Clearwater River to check the status of our Elk. With the deep snow this year forcing the elk down along the river, which occurred also in the winter of 96-97, we have been concerned that wolves could potentially kill far more elk than normal in this region and it merited a flight. We knew that units 10 and 12 lost at least 50% of their elk populations during the winter of 96-97 and this occurred without the presence of wolves. With the combination of deep snow and the number of wolves we realized that these conditions could have a very severe impact on an already declining elk herd.

We needed the best guide and pilot in the region who knew the country well and also understood the winter range, migration patterns and where the elk may be hiding based on the various conditions such as deeper snow and predation. I asked Lewis Turcott from Orofino to join us. Lewis is a former guide and outfitter in the Clearwater and in more recent years has been photographing the extreme predation that has occurred along the river during the winter months. For a Pilot, Lewis recommended Johnny Stewart. Johnny has been flying this region for 31 years and he knows the North Fork country as well as anyone in the area. Johnny fly's commercially for the **Clearwater Potlatch Timber Protection Agency** (CPTPA)(<http://www.cptpa.com/index.html>) and he owns his own plane, which is a Cessna 170, which is what we used. Johnny told me he gave up hunting years ago after he moved up from Southern Idaho, as I was pleased because I wanted an objective, non-biased pilot for this trip regarding wolves.

I brought along my Garmin 60CS Global Positioning system with mapping capabilities including topographical maps for this region that were installed in this device. The attached map shows exactly where we flew (the yellow lines). Johnny made a direct flight towards Aquarius where Beaver Creek enters the N.F. and then we flew up the NF going east and began studying the North Side of the River where the elk normally winter. Usually these Southern ridges don't receive a lot of snow due to the wind and the Southern exposure but not this year, as it was very deep. We flew up the river to almost Kelly Forks and did not spot one elk. Johnny then indicated the elk must have migrated to the reservoir so we turned around and went back down and continued to glass and scan for elk with no luck. We did see a few tracks but couldn't make out if they were elk, deer or wolf. Johnny indicated this was the first trip in 31 years that he hadn't spotted an elk in this region this time of year and he couldn't believe it. We then followed the NF down to Dworshak reservoir and Johnny flew us to where he said historically a lot of elk winter during heavy winters. We again could not find an elk. We flew farther towards Orofino and spotted a few elk close to town and next to Lewis Turcotts home. Johnny had flown a few days earlier to Elk River and had spotted 4 elk. He had also flown around Dworshak reservoir recently without seeing elk so he is very concerned also with the elk population.

We plan on making another flight in a few weeks in the same region along with flying the Saint Joe River a few miles North that received even more snow and has us concerned. When the F&G lifts the ban on snowmobiling along the North Fork we will spend some time on the ground to find out more.

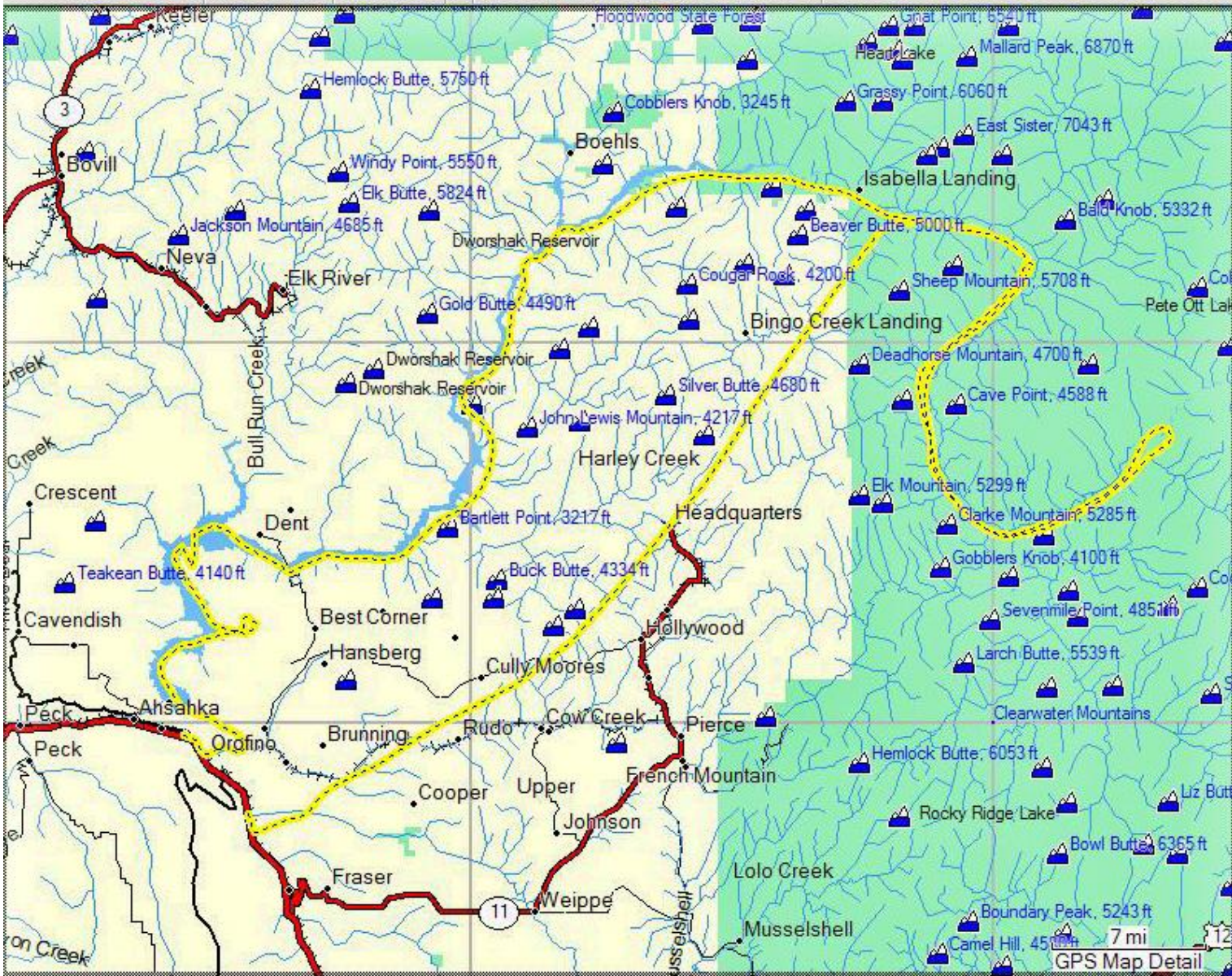
We hope IDF&G will be more proactive in their monitoring programs. In the winter of 96-97, the department initially claimed the winterkill was within the normal average range of 7-10%. When the winter was over people were finding a lot more winterkilled elk than normal and a approximately a year later the department began mentioning in newspaper articles that the losses were a lot higher, (50%). The elk never could recover because the previous year (1995) was when the wolves were introduced and in addition the Fall Bear hunts were also suspended during this time by the recommendation of predator manager Steve Nadeau who was concerned about the lack of mature male bears in this region. Many of us felt the incredible elk herds could have returned in 5-7 years but with the presence of the Canadian wolf, the already diminished elk herds could never rebound regardless of habitat or any other element. Maybe our biologist's could consider going a foot during these harsh winters as Bud Moore depicts in his wonderful book, "The Lochsa story", where USFS and IDF&G officials collaborated together and actually walked and monitored the elk during the terrible winters of 48-49, 68-69.

We also believe if we can educate the public through all forms of media we can help win this battle in court, which is where this is headed. If necessary I will personally deliver our research and findings to the judges who

will be involved with the lawsuits that are going to begin soon to suspend the delisting process so we can't hunt wolves and manage them as a state.

Sincerely,

Steve Alder



***Yellow lines indicate exact route of plane**



Lewis Turcott on Left with Pilot Johnny Stewart on Right

The following pictures are video frame grabs, which don't have as high of resolution as the actual videotape.

