

Recreation and Tourism Assessment  
for  
Kusawa and Agay Mene Territorial Park Areas

Prepared for:

Yukon Parks, Department of the Environment

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## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

Kusawa and Agay Mene Territorial Park areas were identified in First Nations final agreements. The Kusawa park area, a product of the final agreements of both the Carcross / Tagish First Nation (CTFN) and the Kwanlin Dun First Nation (KDFN), is about 3000 km<sup>2</sup> and encompasses much of the Kusawa watershed between the Yukon/BC border and the Takhini rapids just upstream of Mendenhall Landing. It also lies within the Traditional Territory of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nation (CAFN). The three first nations and the Yukon Government (YG) will comprise a Steering Committee for developing a management plan for this park area.

The Agay Mene park area, identified in the final agreement the CTFN, is about 700 km<sup>2</sup> and is located east of the Atlin Road between the Alaska Highway and the Yukon/BC border, and lies west of Teenah Creek and Dalayee Lake. It is also within the Traditional Territory of the Teslin Tlingit Council (TTC) and the Taku River Tlingit First Nation (TRTFN). The Steering Committee that will draft a management plan for the Agay Mene park area will be comprised of YG, CTFN, TTFN, with TRTFN as an observing member.

### **1.2 Purpose of Project**

As stated in the Terms of Reference, the objective of this project is to provide comprehensive background data on the recreation and tourism resources, values, and use of the Kusawa and Agay Mene park areas for use in the management planning process. This report will contribute to the planning process, and additional information will be collected as it proceeds. This report is based on currently available information, consultant expertise and opinions, and considers views and information from targeted interviews. The report does not necessarily represent the view of the Yukon Government in their role in the planning process.

### **1.3 Methods**

The research considered three sources: literature, government employees, and private sector users or residents of each park area.

A base map, bibliography, a collection of reports, and an initial set of Websites were provided by Parks Yukon and Tourism Yukon. Additional internet sites were researched to identify activities, tourism operators, reports of recreational activities in each park area. The following data sets were provided by the Yukon Department of the Environment: campground fee data for Takhini and Kusawa Campgrounds, sheep and moose harvest data by subzone for each park area, and the registration book for the Rose Lake Cabin.

This project made use of the "Recreation Features Inventory of Southern Yukon" (1987) which systematically studied, inventoried, and mapped the landscape assets of the Kusawa and Agay Mene areas. The inventory examined the landscape of the area and classified and mapped its main features as they related to recreation using a methodology developed by the B.C. Ministry of the Environment. For example, the

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maps located sites of angling, canoeing, boating, historic sites, vegetation, forest cover, interesting landforms, rock formations, glaciers, and other features of interest. The recreational significance of each feature was assessed on a four-tier scale.

Yukon Government employees likely to have information about these park areas were identified and interviewed. These included regional and species biologists, conservation officers, natural resources officers, habitat managers, parks branch staff, and tourism staff. Lands, heritage, and natural resources branch at CAFN, CTFN, KDFN, and TTC were contacted. In each case, the topics inquired after included present, previous and possible future uses of the areas, activities observed, resources and assets of note, trails and access, and a discussion of concerns and issues.

Area residents, trappers, hunters, Yukon recreational users, and commercial tourism operators were interviewed. Initial contact was by telephone or email; interviews were conducted either over the phone or in person depending on the breadth and detail to be provided.

Information was transferred to use maps created for each park area, showing former and existing trails and overland routes (summer and winter), water routes, common camps, important hunting areas, wildlife viewing, and activities of special interest.

*Note on data limitations.* Very little numerical data has been collected for activities in either park area. Big game harvest information is the most complete, but this does not tell us how many hunters are in the region for how many days. Campground registrations are incomplete because the many residents possessing season permits often do not register, and the data sets do not specify the number of visitors per party and the number of visitor-days. The registration book for the Rose Lake Cabin is similarly vague with respect to party size. All other information about the park areas must be inferred from partial data, anecdotal reports, and the personal experiences and observations furnished by interviewees.

### **1.4 Approach**

Information about outdoor activities is naturally divided between winter and summer (non winter) seasons, as the presence of snow cover and frozen water surfaces fundamentally determine what occurs in Yukon landscapes. For each season, activities were divided between recreation and tourism (guided and self-guided). In practice, the actual activities of recreationists and tourists may be virtually the same, but the interests and the information base of the participants may differ. Hunting (resident, First Nation, and outfitter), and home and cabin ownership merit separate attention.

### **1.5 First Nation Perspectives**

Each First Nation has its own interests and perspectives concerning the park areas, which will be largely conveyed during the management planning process. Information about specific locations of First Nation use of the park areas was not provided, but some common values can be described at this initial stage.

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*Heritage.* First Nations want to ensure that heritage values in the parks are respected and protected. These include archaeological sites, traditional trails, traditional cabins and campsites, graves, and spiritual sites. Some sites are extraordinarily sensitive, such as the artifacts associated with high elevation snowfields, and the still extant brush shelters and stone axe-cut stumps, which could easily be mistaken for forest debris or kindling by the uninformed, or as targets by vandals.

*Recreation.* First Nations citizens do not go to the park areas for “recreation” in the sport and leisure sense of the term. On average, they do not camp, hike, canoe, or ride snowmobiles for fun or sport, as much as they engage in these activities while out on the land as an accessory to hunting, fishing, gathering, or trapping. This is not to say that these are not enjoyable activities, but that there is a cultural difference between First Nation uses and those of recreationists.

*Use, Overuse, and Abuse.* First Nations would like to see that recreation and tourism activities respect an environmental carrying capacity in which wildlife, habitat, vegetation, and water resources are not diminished, and a social carrying capacity in which First Nation enjoyment of the land is not impaired. Social carrying capacity reflects not only number of visitors to any site, but the type of use, the intensity of use, and the respect conveyed by visitors.

*Park Management and Regulations.* First Nations recognize that park designation increases the profile of a landscape, and is thus likely to increase the number of visitors. This can be expected to require increased management and regulations to ensure environmental stewardship and to minimize conflicts. This said, First Nation governments intend to uphold the rights of their citizens to the use of the land and its resources as set out in the Umbrella Final Agreement. The Champagne & Aishihik letter to the Minister of the Environment regarding the proposed General Parks Regulations reflects a common First Nation concern about maintaining their rights in parks.

## **1.6 Note on Maps**

With only a few exceptions, most interviewees were protective about the locations of trails, wishing them not to become common knowledge and more heavily used. Some trails such as the Fish Lake – Mud Lake – Rose Lake route (outlined as such on maps appended to First Nations Final Agreements) or the Teenah Creek trail are well known, while others are known to relatively few. Interviewees were comfortable with the promise that the maps would show general routes with approximate locations rather than detailed trail descriptions.

## **PART ONE**

### **2.0 Kusawa Park Area:**

#### **Overview of Recreational and Tourism Features**

Kusawa Territorial park area is an outstanding landscape by any measure. The Recreation Features Inventory refers to Kusawa Lake as “the scenic highlight of the ...area.” The Inventory refers to the “dramatic scenery” of Jo-Jo Lake and the “major recreational use potential ... for canoeing, kayaking, and small craft use” of the Takhini River. It assesses “the ranges east and west of Kusawa Lake ... suitable for hiking, riding, and skiing [and] wildlife observation.”

The potential of the Kusawa Park area to provide wilderness and outdoor experiences for tourism and recreation is immense. The Kusawa watershed offers opportunities for mountain and river wilderness travel with outstanding scenery and wildlife viewing, world-class sheep hunting, and a 50 km long lake penetrating the very heart of the Coast Range. Only an hour drive from Whitehorse, Kusawa Lake with its campground and its boat launching ramp offers a front-country recreational experience to conventional tourists, and a jump-off point to the wilderness for the adventurous.

The Takhini River, between Kusawa Lake and Mendenhall Landing, is a popular canoe and kayak river well-used by recreational paddlers, instructional groups, and training courses. Anglers are attracted most to Kusawa Lake and to the Takhini River; the other major lakes also offer fine fishing. The Primrose River, flowing north from the southeast corner of the park, is considered by guides to be one of the most scenic and technically interesting wilderness whitewater rivers of its class, and all the more unusual because it is but a 20 minute flight from an international airport. The Department of Environment cabin on Rose Lake is a favored retreat for both summer and winter recreationists.

The Recreation Features Inventory states:

“Scenic uplands and highly attractive alpine areas are a major attraction of the ... area. Of particular significance are large areas of rolling alpine terrain distributed throughout the Boundary Ranges. They offer good opportunities for hiking, wilderness travel, nature appreciation and wildlife viewing. These areas ... provide access to areas of more rugged terrain containing dramatic scenic features. Consequently, there are excellent opportunities to view small glaciers, rock glaciers, distinctive peaks, cirques, alpine lakes, and tarns.”

The mountains in the north end of the park are relatively gentle, and rise about 1300 meters above the lake; in the south, closer to the spine of the Coast Ranges, they are higher – up to 2000 meters above the lake - and more rugged. The trails and snowmachine routes in Kusawa Park reflect this rough division. To the north, many summits can be reached by snowmachine, and trails cross most of the uplands. In the south, trails and overland routes tend to be confined to valleys and passes. Although semi-permanent snowpatches can be found on north faces through the park, only the southern sector has glaciers and sculpted, vertical rock faces.

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Sheep hunting in the Kusawa area is world-renowned as a reliable source of record-book trophies. Non residents can hunt the western side of the watershed with the licensed outfitter; the most sought-after ranges on the east side are managed for resident hunting by a permit system. Moose are hunted only by permit; grizzlies and goats are the other main game animals. Goats and sheep offer outstanding wildlife viewing opportunities.

### **3.0 Kusawa Park Summer Activities**

Use of the Kusawa Park area has increased dramatically in the past two decades, due in part to improvements in the Alaska Highway and the Kusawa Road and perhaps to increasing appreciation of the Kusawa area. Traffic counts for the Kusawa Road are the best data available to illustrate the increase in park area use; average daily traffic for each summer month is shown:

#### **Average daily vehicles, Kusawa Lake Road (Yukon Dept. Highways)**

Mo. \ Yr.	1988	2003	2006
May	17	66	109
June	30	77	110
July	29	107	119
August	29	99	63
Sept.	18	51	70

Values for 2006 are 400% higher than 1988.

### **3.1 Campgrounds**

The Kusawa Road follows the Takhini River to the north end of Kusawa Lake. It has two campgrounds: the Takhini River Campground at km 15 and Kusawa Lake Campground on the lake itself. Managers, attendants, and the available campground data indicate that use of both campgrounds is increasing.

#### **Takhini River Campground**

The Takhini River Campground has 13 sites, all within view of the fast, clear, Takhini River, which contains both trout and grayling. The season begins with the May long weekend when this campground is full (or over full). It remains at 90%-100% weekend occupancy throughout the summer and perhaps 50% occupancy during the week. It serves in part as a preferred location for people wanting a quiet experience and in part as overflow from the larger and busier Kusawa Lake Campground. Assuming an

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average party size of 3, the approximate level of use between Victoria Day long weekend and Labor Day is **2500 person-days**.

The Takhini River Campground is also a congregating point for people fishing the river and it is the most commonly used launching point for canoe and kayak parties paddling to Mendenhall Landing. Hiking and berry picking are lesser activities pursued from this campground.

### **Kusawa Lake Campground**

On an attractive beach near the northwest end of Kusawa Lake, this campground is the most intensively used location in the park area. With 56 sites, Kusawa Campground can have as many as 800 people on a holiday weekend, as most sites will have more than one vehicle.

Rough estimates are that Yukoners make up as much as 70% of Kusawa Campground clientele overall. From Victoria Day to the end of June, the weekends are about 90% full; In July they are full, in August 90% full. Weekday use is between 40% and 60% with a larger proportion of nonresident visitors. Assuming an average party size of 4, with overfull capacity on the four long-weekends of the summer, the level of use for this campground is **28,000 person-days/year**.

Activities at the Kusawa Campground include fishing, boating, hiking, some off-road vehicle use, in addition to the socializing, leisure pursuits, and relaxation customary to vehicle camping. In August and September, some sheep hunters stay at the campground, glassing for sheep across the lake on the west faces of Mt. Coudert. If a legal ram is spotted, it is relatively straightforward to boat across and ascend the peak over a suitable stalking route. (Note: because of this unusually easy vantage, some sheep hunters suggest that Mt. Coudert should be a permit hunt area.)

If use of both campgrounds continues to increase, park managers should consider either expanding the number of sites or instituting a reservation system.

### **Tourism Activities.**

Non-resident campground users are, by definition, tourists. As campground attendants estimate that 30% of campers are visitors, tourists total approximately 9150 person-days/year. It is not known what percentage are RV rental customers, nor could it be determined how many are participants in guided van-camping tours.

### **Campgrounds Concerns.**

- At maximum level of use on long weekends, the Kusawa Lake Campground facilities are barely sufficient.
- The Kusawa Lake Campground is heavily used by Yukon families, many of whom will leave their campers in place for weeks, even though they may be present only for the weekend. The tactic involves returning at mid week just to reposition the vehicle to another site.
- Local residents and cottage owners would prefer no expansion of the campground or increase in its level of use.
- First Nations have concerns about campground regulations that are best stated in their own memoranda.

### **3.2 Kusawa Lake**

Kusawa Lake is one of the most beautiful – and violently windy – lakes in the Yukon. It is easily divided into three segments:

- the outlet to the narrows just below the Primrose River,
- the narrows to the Frederick Lake valley where it bends to the southeast, and
- the upper lake beyond the bend including Ark Mountain, the upper Takhini mouth, and the outfall of the Kusawa River.

Each section of the lake has attractive beaches for picnics and camping, and each section provides access to hiking and hunting opportunities. Fishing is a common activity; in view of its popularity, some interviewees have questioned why Kusawa is not managed as a trophy lake with mandatory release for certain size classes.

Kusawa is considered to be dangerous for boating. Strong prevailing winds can blow up or down lake, while mountain winds can blow crosswise from side valleys and slopes. The resulting waves and cross chop can be violent. Because of this, and because of the length of the lake (about 70 km), most boating occurs on the accessible northern section between the campground and the narrows. Campground visitors with cartop boats are restricted to this section of lake almost by necessity. Larger motorboats (16' and up) are better for the rest of the lake. A trend in recent years is the increasing use of “cruising” boats with large engines and cabins or semi-cabins. Up to 15 boats of this caliber will be launched from the campground ramp during a summer weekend. The use of larger boats has increased visitation to the southern stretches of the lake, although it is not clear if this is day-use or overnight use.

Because of its winds and waves, Kusawa is not a favored lake for canoeing, but it has a growing reputation for sea-kayaking expeditions. These are typically beach-camping excursions of between 4 and 8 days. The lake is also used for access by sheep hunters and to transport or re-supply long-distance backpacking parties.

#### **Tourism Activities.**

Kusawa Lake supports a modest amount of guided fishing (estimated to be under 5 groups/summer season) and is a destination for a larger but still modest number of boat, canoe, and sea-kayak rentals. Records show no more than 2 guided sea kayaking groups per season. Perhaps the greatest present contribution of Kusawa Lake to tourism is its destination appeal to tourist campground users. Many of the tourism operators interviewed agree that Kusawa Lake has exceptionally attractive assets that could become more valuable by Park designation.

#### **Kusawa Lake Concerns**

- Management of sport fishery – some feel this should be a “trophy lake” with catch and release only of certain age classes;
- Noise: some suggest jet boats be prohibited;
- Pollution: some suggest only four-stroke engines be permitted.
- ❖ A creel census for Kusawa Lake was completed in 2006, Data will be available from the Fish and Wildlife Branch, Department of Environment.

### **3.3 Takhini River**

The Takhini River, between Kusawa Lake and Mendenhall Landing, is the next most intensively used portion of the park area. Fast, clear, easy, very scenic, and just over an hour's drive from Whitehorse, the Takhini is one of the favorite recreational rivers in the Yukon.

#### **Canoeing and kayaking.**

The Takhini River is an ideal day-excursion for canoers and kayakers, because of its proximity to Whitehorse, its fast current and the one entry-level rapids that can be easily portaged (the magnificently and ironically named "Jaws of Death" and occasionally, "Gums of Despair"). Most parties put in at the Takhini Campground, although some parties start 7 km higher at Kusawa Campground. Starting at the lake can be hazardous: some parties have capsized in large waves that can unexpectedly blow up. This hazard can be avoided by carrying directly down from the road to the start of the river at the lake's end.

Commercially organized instructional groups primarily serve clients from Whitehorse. Instructional courses have as few as 4 people and as many as 15. They are operated or sponsored by private companies; some are sponsored by municipal recreation departments and clubs. Approximately 10 courses operate per season, each course is at least 2 days, some are 4 days.

Many parties combine canoeing with fishing, berry picking, hiking in the dunes, and picnics. Some parties camp at unorganized sites downstream of the Takhini Campground. With fast, braided channels, the river has many places for instructing and for practicing moving water techniques. The rapids, about 7 km above Mendenhall Landing, are excellent for instructing whitewater maneuvers and river rescue techniques. The level of difficulty varies with water level and with the route chosen; inexperienced parties can avoid the rapids with an easy portage. Instructional parties include school groups, cadets, and church groups, as well as commercially organized courses.

Long-time residents of the valley estimate that the number of canoe parties has doubled or possibly tripled in the past 20 years. A busy summer weekend used to see about 10 parties (1-4 canoes each) per day; and scarcely any trips on weekdays. Now this is the norm for a weekday and busy weekends may have 15 or so parties per day, some quite large.

#### **Power boats and jet boats.**

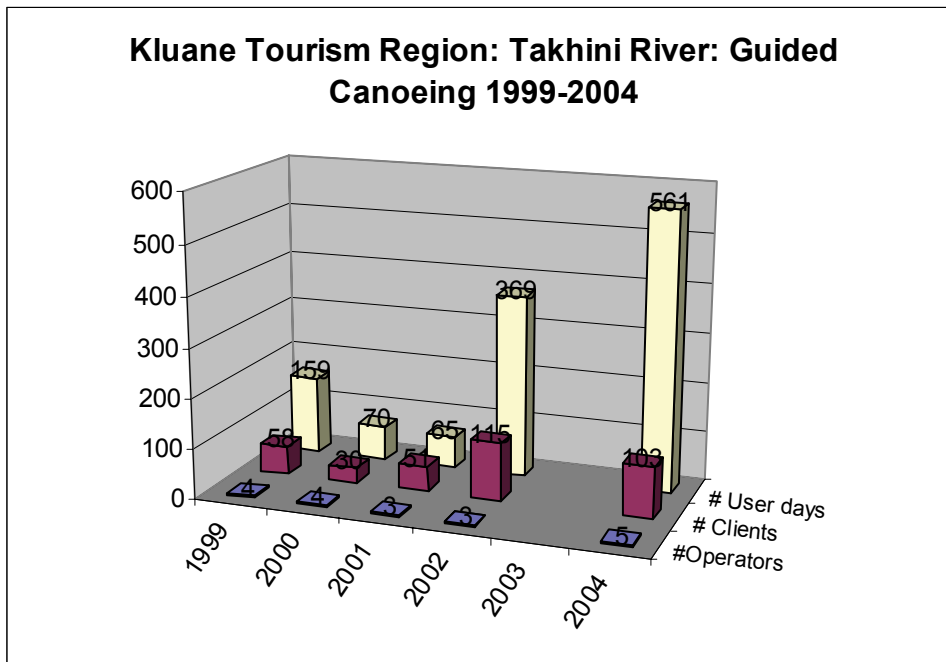
Some powerboats and jet boats operate on the river; according to reports, mostly between the lake and some distance below the Takhini Campground. Jet boats, formerly a rarity, are seen more often, some even running the rapids.

#### **Tourism Activities.**

Canoeing the river is occasionally sold to tourists and convention participants as an add-on day trip by Whitehorse companies. It also features as a final activity for some guided parties that descend the Primrose River. These are occasional, "one-off" uses. An unknown number of self-guided tourists also paddle the river using their

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own or rented canoes; others enjoy fishing from the banks, mostly near the Takhini Campground.



The graph illustrating guided canoeing on the Takhini shows a 350% increase in commercial use of the Takhini River in a six-year span. (WTLA data, Yukon Parks, Dept of Environment)

**Takhini River Concerns.**

Estimating a conservative average of 20 persons per day (canoeers, boaters, shore fishers) over an 80-day season, the Takhini River has approximately **1600 person-days per year**, up perhaps 50% from the previous decade. As visitation of the Takhini River increases, signs of social and environmental stresses are appearing.

- Jet boats concern some valley residents because their excessive noise detracts from “quiet enjoyment “ of homes and cottages. There are also concerns that shorelines and fish habitats (including salmon redds) may be damaged by large wakes. A safety issue has been flagged by canoeers and kayakers over the instances when jet boats have ascended or descended the rapids, which have a blind curve. None have landed to scout for canoes in the rapids, or to warn canoeers to wait. As canoes are often operated by novices and capsizes are not uncommon, the interviewees are convinced that collisions and injuries could occur because of a jet boat in this stretch of river. Suggestions include motor size limitations on the entire river, prohibiting jetboats from the river, prohibiting powerboats from negotiating the rapids.
- The dunes on both sides of the river (on east, upstream of Takhini Campground, and on west downstream of it) are popular stops for river travelers and host unusual vegetation and extremely fragile soils. Local observation over the past decade indicates that river parties and shoreline

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walkers have been largely low-impact, but on several occasions, ATVs and dirtbikes have tried to reach the dunes or have been asked to leave them. Residents are emphatic that motor vehicles should be strictly prohibited from fragile soils.

- Virtually every canoe and kayak party stops on the eastern bank at the rapids. Most parties scout along the portage path, many carry along it, and most picnic at the foot of the rapids. Some camp. Site impacts are to be expected. Although litter is not a serious problem, human waste is a concern for some instructors who use the site frequently. A chemical privy has been suggested for the site; it could be serviced by a launch operated out of Mendenhall.
- Little appears to be known of the fish resources on the Takhini river and residents suggest that efforts should be made to ensure stocks are not overfished.
- The river egress parking site at Mendenhall Landing, used by all canoe and kayak parties, has no chemical toilet and human waste is distributed through the nearby woods despite efforts to scoop “catholes”. Although this site lies outside of Kusawa Park boundaries, it services Takhini River visitors originating in the Park.
- Much of the Takhini Valley is a tinderbox with highly flammable forest fuels and abundant surface fuels. A human-caused fire could sweep the valley in severe fire conditions. A fire incident in 2007 in mature timber at Km 8 on the Kusawa Road was considered to be a “near thing”.

In 2006, Yukon Parks were approached by the Yukon Canoe & Kayak Club regarding some form of cooperative maintenance agreement for an outhouse, however, no agreement has been reached.

### 3.4 Hunting

Hunting is the most frequent activity in the backcountry of the park area. The Kusawa Park area contains some of North America’s finest sheep habitat, with populations renowned for trophy rams. Subzones that are both accessible and highly productive are managed by permit (see map). The park area also has relatively robust populations of grizzlies, but a diminished moose herd, which is managed by permit for **the non-aboriginal hunt**. Until recently, two outfitting concessions operated in the area. Today one remains, Devilhole Outfitters operating on the west side of the watershed.

Because of harvest reporting requirements, good data exists on the number of sheep taken each year, and on the general location of hunting activities. The data do not report on the number of hunters nor the number of days spent in the field. This can be estimated from aggregate data on sheep permits throughout the Yukon, which record the number of permits issued, the number of people who hunted, the number who did not hunt, and the number of kills.

- Each year over a 10 year period, an average of 77 permits were issued, 52 permit hunters were in the field, killing an average of 18 sheep/yr. Thus for each sheep killed, there were three permit hunters in the field. Assuming an average sheep hunting party size of 2 and an average hunt of 7 days, this

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amounts to 6 persons in the field for 42 person-days for each sheep taken in the Yukon.

- Applying this methodology to reported sheep kills in the Kusawa Park area (243 over 10 years, or 24/yr) yields an estimate of 144 persons/yr hunting for **1008 person-days**.
- The same approach to the reported moose harvest yields a 10 year average of 2.5 permitted moose/yr, 15 persons/year, for **105 person-days**.
- Devilhole Outfitter's clientele are between 15- 30/year with an average of 23/yr. At an average of 9 days per client, this represents 207 person-days, with an additional 240 person-days from the staff over a 60 day season.  
**Total: 447 person-days.**

Total estimated non-aboriginal hunt (moose, sheep, outfitter):  
**186 persons for 1560 person-days.**

\* Limitations: this estimate is built on several assumptions; that the ratio of sheep permit effort to success is valid in all areas, that the average party size is 2, and that the average hunt length is 7 days, and that these assumptions hold for moose permits. The estimates do not consider First Nation hunting, nor do they consider resident hunting for other big game species and for small game species.

### **3.5 Backcountry recreation and activities.**

The backcountry occupies the largest portion of the park area. For purposes of this report, it is the remote sectors as defined by access: those areas more than 3 km from the Kusawa Road and Campground, and beyond the shoreline of Kusawa Lake. Virtually all of the upland areas of the park are sheep habitat; from Ark Mountain south there are pockets of goat habitats as well.

#### **3.5.1 Trails.** \* See map.

Apart from boat access on Kusawa Lake, trails are the most common way to reach the backcountry. Most horse trails are used by hikers and backpackers, but not all hiking trails are used by horses, if only because some trail heads are reached by water or are typically used by parties brought into the country by aircraft. Some horsetrails are used yearly by the outfitter, but are visited by few if any backpacking parties. In many areas, it is more accurate to describe overland routes through valleys and passes and along ridges rather than trails, as one party to the next will select variations on routes to the same destination. Snowmachine routes will be discussed in the "Winter Uses" section.

The Kusawa Park area is criss-crossed by ancient travel routes; some have given rise to contemporary trails, some are mapped as routes, but have been obliterated on the ground by fires, vegetation, and deadfall. These include the two main variants of the "Chilkat Trail" from the coast to the interior that follow the Primrose Valley and the upper Takhini Valley. These trails interconnected with trails from several areas, including Bennet Lake, Fish Lake, and Dezadeash Lake. The narrows below the

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mouth of the Primrose River was a common crossing of Kusawa Lake; an absence of trees on adjacent shores testifies to generations of raft-building.

Most of the trails on both sides of Kusawa Lake bear witness to decades of outfitting and trapping. The approaches to the park area from the east side make use of winter cat trails or mining roads. These include the Ibex valley road, the cat-trail east of the Takhini River that runs partway up the valley between Mt. Vanier and Mt. Coudert, the route from Fish Lake to Rose Lake as far as Mud Lake, and various spur trails from the Watson and Wheaton valleys. On the west side, an old winter equipment trail provides rough access to the Kluhini River below Frederick Lake.

Apart from hunting parties, a small number of backpacking parties hike in remote sections of the park area. Some hike in, but most groups fly in. Air charter companies estimate perhaps 24 people a year, comprising about 6 parties, mostly from Whitehorse.

**West of Kusawa Lake.** The west side of the Kusawa park area can be considered in two sections: to the north and to the south of Frederick Lake.

- The Northern section is composed of two massive uplands on either side of Jo-Jo Lake. Trails ascend the upland west of the two campgrounds. From the Kusawa Campground a hiking and horse trail reaches the alpine zone giving access to a route over to Jo-Jo Lake. From behind the Takhini Campground, a trail provides access for ORVs to reach the same upland. Another ORV trail is located about midway between the campgrounds. It should be noted that this is one of the uplands containing significant archaeological values found at melting snowfields. Starting at the Mendenhall River, a horse trail runs the length of the Jo-Jo Valley to Kusawa Lake. An ORV trail forks off this trail to ascend the north side of the upland to the west. Other horse trails traverse this same upland, dating from the early years of outfitting on this side of Kusawa. These trails originate at the outfitting base camp.
- The Southern section has horse trails leading from the Frederick Lake valley up Devilhole Creek, the Kluhini River, and most of the accessible side valleys and passes. Several of these trails interconnect with a trail leading up Pass Creek from the Haines Highway to the west. They are used by the outfitter, who has spike camps in these valleys, by Yukon residents with horses, and by a small number of resident backpackers and sheep hunters. Overland routes lead off this rugged upland down to the trench containing the Kusawa River and Kusawa Lake. These are access routes used by resident sheep and goat hunters who enter the country by boat.

**East of Kusawa Lake.**

This sector can be divided into northern and southern sectors by the valley connecting Rose Creek to the Watson River valley (see map).

- The Northern Section has horse trails leading to “Moose Hollow” - once the site of an outfitter camp. Trails enter from the Takhini River to the west via the creek between Vanier and Coudert; from the Ibex Valley to the north via Arkell Creek and Trout Lake; from Fish Lake to the east via Mud Lake; and from the Primrose River to the south. This trail connects to Rose Lake; another foot or horse trail runs from Kusawa Lake along the north (east)

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margin of the Primrose River; another goes from the mouth of the Primrose to the end of Rose Lake on the west (south) side of the river. The horse trail down Rose Creek from Mud Lake and the horse trail to Rose Creek from the Watson Valley are common access routes. Several routes ascend Primrose Mountain and the mountains west of Rose Lake (Sandpiper Creek group); both are important sheep hunting ranges. An Argo route exists from Kusawa Lake into the Sandpiper Creek basin.

- The Southern Section has winter and summer trails connecting Rose Lake and Kusawa Lake at the mouth of the upper Takhini River. These trails can be obscure, especially in the summer. Other trails, branches of the historic Chilkat Trail, run south through the Primrose Lake valley and the upper Takhini valley. Connecting trails and routes lead east from the Primrose valley to Bennet Lake, to the Wheaton River, and to the Watson River. The southernmost of these routes is used by BC hunters to access sheep terrain just south of the border.

### **Tourism Activities on Trails**

Apart from big game outfitting, there is little tourism use of backcountry trails. Some self-guided tourists likely hike the uplands west of the Kusawa Campground, and a smaller number may hike in other backcountry areas. While not tourism *per se*, at least one school group makes a yearly hike from Jo-Jo Lake to the Kusawa Campground. The National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) operates a 30-day backpacking trip for a group of 18. The route is mostly in the park, starting at the Kusawa Campground, proceeding south to Devilhole Creek and following it to its headwaters, then east across the Kusawa River and north on the east shore of Kusawa Lake to the Takhini River, thence to Rose Lake, up Rose Creek to Mud Lake, and then east to Alligator Lake. The expedition has food resupply at three places. The CTFN has exclusive commercial use of the Bennet Lake-Primrose Lake heritage trail identified in their settlement agreement, but have not operated any tours to date.

**Trails Concerns.** Information about trails is spotty. Few individuals have comprehensive, on-ground experience with all or even most of the trails, and many people guard their information. Because of this reserve, the trails and routes are mapped as generalized lines only.

- Trappers hope that their trails will not be “discovered” especially during trapping season, and most are concerned about vandalism to cabins and caches.
- Devilhole Outfitters operates in remote country that sees few other visitors, but the owner dreads the possibility that ORVs might intrude into his area, spoiling the pristine experience that he markets.
- Horse packers, backpackers, and “traditional” sheep hunters believe that ORVs should not be permitted in the park backcountry. They cite the visual damage from tracks and ruts, an erosion of the traditional wilderness experience, and the impact on game stocks that they say accompany ORV intrusion into new areas. YTG biologists agree that access management is a critical topic for the management plan. ORV access is still minimal in the park area but the following areas have been reached by them: the highlands on either side of Jo-Jo Lake, the west end of Frederick Lake, Sandpiper Creek, and the Mud Lake trail, possibly as far as Rose Lake Cabin. ORV

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access has spread to a number of areas west of Fish Lake and at the top of the Wheaton. Several of these areas are outside of the park, but make the park vulnerable to penetration by ORVs.

### **3.5.2 Primrose River.**

The Primrose River is one of the most beautiful and exciting wilderness rivers in the North – even more remarkable as it is only a 15 minute flight from Whitehorse. Although the river contains difficult rapids and an impassable 50' waterfall which must be portaged, the short flight makes it financially feasible to charter an aircraft to carry a party around some or all of the difficulties. Expeditions typically start at Primrose Lake, although Rose Lake is sometimes used. Craft include rafts, kayaks, and covered canoes. The exit is at Kusawa Campground or Mendenhall Landing and the trip is between 3 and 7 days depending on how much air support is used. Aviation companies estimate there are an average of 2 trips a year with group sizes varying between 8 and 18.

### **Tourism Activities.**

The Primrose River is more frequently advertised than it is run. Four companies appear to market it, but only one runs it regularly; this as a wilderness education / guide training course. This company hikes into Primrose Lake and has its boats flown in. It is possible that it is an awkward trip length for wilderness travelers: too short for a full vacation expedition; too long for an add-on. Some operators suggest that the trip may be more marketable if its profile is raised due to park status.

### **Primrose River Concerns**

At present the Primrose River is not heavily used by any measure. If use increases, it may be desirable to install a system that ensures spacing between parties, especially since the trip is so easy to arrange and there are several air charter companies which can provide access. Not all wilderness tourism operators are park supporters, as they expect increased costs, time inputs, and uncertainty due to park management and regulations.

### **3.5.3 Rose Lake Cabin, Primrose Wilderness Lodge**

The Yukon Government Conservation Officer Services Branch maintains two cabins on the east shore of Rose Lake. Both are on a site formerly a base camp for the now retired outfitting concession. Non commercial parties are permitted to use the facilities and registration data is available from the early 1990s. The data show the dates and length of stay, but rarely the number of people in the party. Use of the site has held steady for the past decade, varying between 12 and 16 parties per year, with length of stay between 3 and 10 days. There are two distinct seasons: June – August (access by float plane), and mid December – end of March (access by ski, snowmachine, dogsled). If the average party size is four, and the average length of stay is 5 days, and the yearly number of parties is 14, Rose Lake Cabin hosts 56 visitors / year for 280 person-days.

Primrose Lake Wilderness Lodge exists on the east shore of Primrose Lake. It has not operated commercially for many years; it has occasional personal use by the owners.

#### **3.5.4 Climbing and Mountaineering.**

The southern part of Kusawa Park has several outcroppings and faces of firm, clean granite, ideally suited for rock climbing. Ark Mountain and the large wall above Rothwell Lake have seen some notice from Yukon climbers. Other rock walls exist, but have not been documented; the mountaineering opportunities for mixed rock and ice climbing are also thought to be significant, but are similarly unexplored. The level of climbing activity is minimal.

#### **3.5.5 Floatplane Access Lakes**

Air access is important to reach remote areas of the park. They are used by hunters, the outfitter, backpackers, climbers, ski parties, recreational campers, and some trappers. As there are no airstrips, floatplanes are required, and suitable landing lakes are important. These include:

West of Kusawa, Northern sector:

- Jo-Jo Lake

West of Kusawa, Southern Sector:

- Kusawa Lake at Devilhole Outfitting base camp
- Lakes on upper Kluhini River

East of Kusawa, Northern Sector:

- Trout Lake (just outside of park boundary, draining into Arkell Creek)
- "Upper Rose Lake" on mountain above Rose Lake (GMZ 7-23)
- Rose Lake
- Lakes in GMZ 7-22 (Sandpiper group)

East of Kusawa, Southern Sector:

- Johns Lake
- Primrose Lake
- Takhini Lake
- Rothwell Lake
- Use of other lakes in the Mt. Porsild and Hendon River area not known, but likely restricted for access by confined valleys.

### **3.6 Cottages / rural homes**

Four families live more or less full time on the Takhini River between Kusawa Lake and the rapids. Another 13 recreational properties are located near the Kusawa Campground; and another four are in remote locations up the Lake – two at the Narrows, one at Devilhole Creek, and one near the mouth of the upper Takhini.

The four permanent families built their places in the '70s and early '80s. They have similar interests: quiet enjoyment, no new neighbors, and a continuation of their lifestyles with minimum interference. The main threats they see to these objectives come from a drastic increase in road traffic and more people, possibly including intruders and vandals; noisy and soil damaging ORVs and snowmachines; and noisy and possibly habitat damaging jet boats.

The cottage owners at the north end of Kusawa Lake near the campground have similar interests. The campground itself does not seriously affect the property owners that were

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interviewed, but the ORV traffic running up and down the beach is noisy and disruptive. These people are wary about the potential of new park regulations to diminish their customary activities, but they also recognize the need for a safe and quiet campground. They report that people using the beach in front of their properties are generally respectful and do not leave messes. They would not like to see campground use increase beyond its current levels.

The property owners farther up the lake visit their cabins occasionally for recreation and hunting; the property at the mouth of the Takhini is a trapping base camp. Their main interests are quiet enjoyment, no new neighbors, and security from theft and unauthorized use.

**Tourism Activities**

A Yukon company that recently advertised a rental cabin by the Narrows on Kusawa Lake has decided not to pursue further rentals.

**Cottages and Homes, Concerns.**

- ORV activity on the beaches is disruptive and noisy.
- ORV activity in the campground may be dangerous to minors.
- Cottage owners want assurances that their current enjoyment of their properties will not be impaired or restricted.
- Cottage owners want to maintain current conditions re: development and level of use in the area.
- Cottage owners want to be kept informed of management planning activities.

#### **4.0 Kusawa Park Area: Winter Activities**

##### **4.1 Campground**

The Kusawa Campground is closed after the summer season, but it sees some use in the autumn by occasional campers enjoying the autumn lake, fishing, picking berries, hiking, or hunting grouse. Bear hunters and owners of cottages up the lake use the boat ramp. After winter sets in, the campground is used as a focal point for weekend snowmachining and ice fishing, particularly after mid February. The lake itself and nearby peaks have trails; most activity occurs north of the Narrows. Residents comment on high levels of weekend activity and noise from snowmachines, but there are no reliable estimates of use.

##### **4.2 Backcountry routes**

The most heavily used winter trail in the park area is between Fish Lake and the Rose Lake Cabin. The visitor log book records eight parties per winter season staying over at the cabin, others visit as a day-return trip. Snowmachines are most common, dogsleds and ski parties also occur. An alternate route follows the Watson River and joins the Rose Creek trail about 5 km from Rose Lake. Groups and individuals from both Whitehorse and Haines Junction traverse the park area in either direction on a route that links Fish Lake and Dezadeash Lake via Rose Lake, Johns Lake, upper Takhini River, Kusawa Lake and Frederick Lake. A school group ("Sled-Ed", between 10 and 30 people) takes this route each year, staying at the Rose Lake Cabin, and at the base cabin of Devilhole Outfitting. Other parties traverse the entire route in one day. An alternate access or exit point for this trail is the Kusawa Campground. Jo-Jo Lake is another common winter destination.

More remote snowmachine and ski routes are occasionally taken up Primrose Lake to Bennett Lake or to the White Pass; another crosses the park area south of Ark Mountain, reaching the Haines Road via Pass Creek. A trapper from the Annie Lake Road takes a dog team to reach his cabin on Johns Lake; another reaches the upper Takhini valley by snowmachine from his cabin on Kusawa Lake. The trapper active in the northern section uses a deliberately obscure trail system he cut east of the Takhini River and north of Mt. Vanier. Other traplines in the park area appear to have little recent activity. No trapper is eager to have other users on a trapline trail, especially ones cut by the trapper.

A small but energetic set of snowmobilers is exemplified by one of the cabin owners just south of the Narrows. He has followed or found routes up and over remote highlands in almost every sector of the park area. He and associates have used most routes identified on the activity map; noting that the summer and winter trails often diverge where winter trails follow open bogs, stream courses, and lakes.

##### **Tourism Activities.**

One company operates group snowmachine excursions in the park area for tourists and for Ranger patrols, typically running about two per season on either the Fish Lake – Dezadeash Lake route or the Primrose Lake – White Pass or Bennett Lake route. Since commercial parties may not use the Rose Lake Cabin, tourist snowmachine groups that do not intend to camp must either do day trips on the periphery of the park area, or commit to a long one-day transit. A small number of dogsled trips occur in the park, mostly as one-off events. Devilhole Outfitting is

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interested in offering snowmachine tours. The owner has cooperated with a Whitehorse-based school group that does snowmachine trips across the park area.

Tourism operators consider the Kusawa park area to have great winter tourism potential, but there are two schools of thought: one advocates no development and expedition-style tours (ski, dogsled); another sees potential if hut-to-hut facilities are built.

**Backcountry trails concerns and issues.**

Winter makes the landscape more accessible than in summer, and accessible to larger numbers of people. Snowmachines can go where wheeled vehicles cannot pass in the summer. Compared with ORVs, snowmachines generally leave few impacts on soil or vegetation but several types of concerns have been raised:

- increased concerns about security for people who own backcountry cabins;
- concerns by trappers for undisturbed use of trapline trails;
- concerns about increased stress and disturbance to wildlife in an especially vulnerable season;
- concerns about increased subsistence hunting pressure;
- concerns about potential for conflict between non-motorized and motorized recreation – the level of noise and activity surrounding the Kusawa Campground and the northern part of Kusawa Lake is mentioned as an example.

**5.0 Summary: Recreation and Tourism in Kusawa Park Area**

Kusawa park area has superb recreational and tourism assets with a well established set of activities and user-groups. The two campgrounds and the road that services them are the focus of activities as they host a large number of campers, and they also are jump-off points for fishing, boating on the lake and river, hiking, and access for some of the Yukon's finest sheep hunting ranges. Recreation and tourism, including the use of Territorial Campgrounds, hunting, boating, and all other activities (excluding cabin stays), total approximately **33,000 person-days/year**. Most of this is campground use and 30% is estimated to be visitors.

Winter recreation has increased in the past decade as the reach, reliability, and capability of snowmachines have improved, enabling more people to visit the backcountry. Winter excursions include day trips around the Kusawa Lake Campground (ice fishing and snowmobiling) as well as multi-day backcountry trips by snowmachines, by dogsleds, and by skis.

Tourism potential is thought to be significant in the park area and could be enhanced by the added visibility of park status. The following activities are cited:

- self-guided campground use, including fishing, hiking, paddling day-uses
- boating and sea kayaking on Kusawa Lake
- wilderness expeditions (hiking, horses, snowmachines, dogsleds)
- the Primrose River – rafting, kayaking, canoeing

Several operators consider that the lack of accommodations to significantly inhibit tourism potential, particularly for winter products. Currently there is no land disposition process that allows for new commercial remote backcountry tenures.

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Based on experiences in other parks, some operators identified potential negative impacts of park status, such as party size limits, restrictions and uncertainties that affect viability and profits, increased direct and indirect costs, and increased paperwork – “red tape.”

Apart from activities on Kusawa Lake and the Takhini River, most backcountry recreation involves hunting, and to a far lesser extent, hiking, horse packing, and snowmobiling by a small number (less than 250) of Yukon residents. Knowledge of trails and of the country may be a limiting factor.

Early signs of issues are evident. These include the perception by residents and “old timers” of increasing crowding at the campgrounds, along the Kusawa Road, and on the river. Managing or limiting the use of ORVs is important to many interviewees, including biologists. The noise, intrusiveness, and impacts of ORVs, snowmachines, and jetboats diminish the recreational experience of non-motorized visitors, even as their convenience, power, and range appeals to those who use them.. It should be pointed out that snowmachine use outside of the neighborhood of the Kusawa Lake Campground is extensive in range, but limited in numbers. The potential of ORVs to damage sensitive sites such as the Takhini River Dunes concerns residents. Concentrated site impacts at congested areas such as the Takhini Rapids and Mendenhall Landing require attention. The potential of forest fire to create serious public safety threats in the mature stands and windy environment of the Takhini River should be considered.

## **PART TWO**

### **6.0 Agay Mene Park area: Summer and Winter**

The Agay Mene Park area will be a natural environment park that will balance wildlife and resource protection with recreation, tourism, hunting, trapping, and traditional uses. The northern end contains White Mountain and Dalayee Lake; the central and southern section has Haunka Creek, the lower Snafu lakes, and Tarfu Lake; and the eastern portion contains upper Snafu Creek, Snafu Lake, and the surrounding forested hills. The great Teslin Fire of 1958 burned most of what is now the park area, creating highly productive moose habitat that is thought now starting to decline. This same fire resulted in dense regeneration and deadfall that has obscured or obliterated many of the traditional trails in the area.

White Mountain, the site of a successful transplant Rocky Mtn. Goats in 1983-84 is an interesting limestone peak thought by some to contain caves. Its alpine uplands are a well known hiking area. The Haunka-Snafu-Tarfu system of creeks and lakes have complex and varied shorelines with many small islands, the result of Ice Age glacial melting acting on gravel deposits. These are favored by residents of southern Yukon for camping, fishing, and canoeing. The mountains to the east are heavily wooded and contain two large lakes, Dalayee and (upper) Snafu; both are reached by trails from the east.

### **6.1 Snafu, Tarfu Campgrounds**

#### **6.1.1 Occupancy**

The Yukon Government maintains small campgrounds at (lower) Snafu Lake and at Tarfu Lake. Because the ultimate status of each site has been uncertain, neither has been much developed: Snafu Campground has 9 sites and Tarfu Campground has 10. Solid data for the campgrounds and for use of the adjacent lakes is sparse, but the campground attendant reports that use of both areas has increased over each of the past three years.

The recreation season begins for these campgrounds in mid-May and runs to the end of September with the last of the hunting parties. They appear to have a regular clientele of Yukoners who come to camp, fish, and boat on weekends. Weekends are generally full, meaning each site is occupied, frequently with more than one vehicle. Campers and RVs are the norm, but many extended family groups also have tents. Mid week occupancy is less, between 40% and 80% and contains a larger proportion of non-residents (about 50% tourists) than on weekends, when Yukoners predominate. A number (not estimated) of parked vehicles represent people who are canoe-camping or boat-camping on the lakes. A portion of the parked vehicles are no doubt those of day-use boaters.

**Campground Estimate 6308 person-days**, approximately 2000 person-days would be visitors. Assumptions are based on discussions with the attendant. The two campgrounds have 19 sites between them. We assume group sizes of 6 on weekends: 4 long weekends and 10 regular weekends and 100% occupancy. Weekdays, we assume group sizes of 4, 14 weeks, and 50% occupancy.

### **6.1.2 Snafu Lakes chain, Tarfu Lake activities.**

The (lower) Snafu Lakes chain and Tarfu Lake are fishing lakes well known and well-used by local anglers. Fisheries biologists report these are among the most heavily fished lakes in southern Yukon; both open early and both merit special management regulations. Tarfu has whitefish, pike, and lake trout (now in reduced numbers). Upper Snafu has whitefish, pike, and lake trout; Lower Snafu is mostly pike. Grayling are found in all the lakes.

#### **Fishing.**

A creel survey from 1999 estimated a total of 4634 total hours of fishing effort on the Snafu Lakes and 2446 total hours of angler effort on Tarfu Lake for the season. Assuming an average time of 6 hours of fishing per person per day, this would represent **1,158 person-days** and **611 person-days** per season respectively. Fishing effort increased by 60% over 1990 levels; it is reasonable to expect that angling increased another 50% in the last 8 years. Weekends were shown to be nearly twice as busy as weekdays. Averaging data from both lakes, Whitehorse residents were 77% of the anglers, while other Canadians were 11%; Americans 8%, and Europeans 3%.

#### **Canoeing, boating, camping.**

These lakes are also known as scenic, sheltered waters suitable for family and novice canoeing and kayaking, and for small car-top motorboats. They are used for introductory instructional clinics and courses for canoeing, kayaking, and fishing offered to school groups and to commercially organized groups. Instructors and canoe-sport instruction companies generally use the lakes no more than once a season; an estimated 5-4 instructional groups in total each year.

Anglers, paddlers, and some hunters use the dozen or so well-established campsites found on both lower and upper Snafu lakes and on Tarfu Lake.

#### **Tourism Activities, Snafu-Tarfu lakes area**

At present, most tourist use of this area is related to self-guided visitors using the two campgrounds. The instructional use of the lakes may arguably be considered a form of tourism especially if the concept were specifically marketed to visitors.

Whitehorse companies report that a modest number of canoe and kayak rentals are taken to these lakes by Whitehorse residents. One operator suggests that "An Introduction to (Canoeing, Sea Kayaking, Kayak angling...)" course may be marketable especially if the park profile is elevated. This same operator suggests that tourism opportunities would be increased if there were structures built, either accommodations or an interpretive center with eating and warm-up facilities.

#### **Snafu-Tarfu lakes area, Concerns**

Fisheries data show a decline in lake trout since 1990, possibly indicating a management question to be addressed.

## 6.2 Hunting

The Agay Mene park area is largely included in the Teslin Burn of 1958, which resulted in exceptionally high moose populations for many decades. The average number of moose taken by resident hunters (excluded FN hunters) in the 8 years between 1992 and 1999 was 9.4; the average yearly harvest for 2000-2007 was 3.9 – a 60% reduction. Moose hunting has generally occurred at fly-in lakes, although some are taken from road-accessible locations (this includes the Snafu lake chain, Tarfu Lake, and woodcutting roads).

Two explanations are offered for reduced moose harvests:

- lower moose populations because of changing habitat as the Teslin Burn regenerates into pine,
- changing hunting pressure now that an air charter service is no longer based in Teslin.

There is not enough data to estimate hunting activity as person-days for the park area. Although 9 moose per season represents approximately 90 person-days (each taken by a party of two out for 5 days), we have no estimate for the number of unsuccessful hunting parties.

The most consistent hunting activity may occur on lakes just outside of the park area on which various families have maintained camps for many years. These include Teenah Lake, Sterling Lake, Pike Lake, and Spawn Lake. Some incidental small-game hunting occurs along the Atlin Road, the campground roads, and the various woodcutting roads in the park area.

### Summary of Agay Mene Park area Users

Campgrounds	6308 person-days
Fishing (1999 data)	
- Snafu Lakes	1158 person-days
- Tarfu Lake	611 person-days
Licensed Resident	
Moose hunters (successful)	90 person-days

## 6.3 Backcountry recreation and tourism

### 6.3.1 Trails: hiking, horses, ORVs

It has been reported that before the 1958 fire, a network of trapping and horse trails existed throughout the park area. Since then, most have become obscured by regeneration and by deadfall. The lynx study staff which studied the top of the Snafu Creek watershed in the 1980's reported that even then, many of the trails were overgrown. Today overland travel involves much bushwhacking while piecing together game trails with fragments of old horse trails. The map indicates the general location of travel routes without much information about their contemporary status.

The clearest routes in the general area are the horse trails up Teenah Creek to Teenah Lake and on to Snafu Lake, the ORV trail to Dalayee Lake, and the woodcutting roads

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south of Tarfu Lake. In the northern sector of the park area, a snowmachine/trapline trail is reported in the valley east of White Mountain, and a trapline trail to the southern end of Dalayee Lake over the height of land starting at Squan Lake on the Alaska Highway. These trails have winter use by snowmachines and by occasional ski parties.

White Mountain has a well known hiking trail that ascends its south ridge and reaches the alpine zone. It provides access to goat-viewing as well as to wonderful ridge walking. White Mountain is said to be a launch site for parawings; at its base off the Atlin Road is a small rockclimbing and bouldering site.

### **Tourism Activities**

One Whitehorse company ran a commercially guided hiking group on the White Mountain trail, escorted by a nationally known naturalist with the object of viewing goats. Department of Environment biologists have expressed their concern that the goat population should not be stressed by hikers. While outside of the park area, the Teenah Lake trail and the Seaforth Creek trail have potential for snowmachine excursions. Teenah Lake and Snafu Lake has had some guided fishing parties; both horses and aircraft have been used to bring clients to these destinations.

### **Concerns**

The users of horse trails are especially anxious that these trails to not become ORV routes as it would diminish the remoteness and the wilderness experience valued by current non-motorized users.

### **6.3.2 Lodges and Camps**

There is only one tourism facility near the park area on the west side of Seaforth Creek where it leaves Dalayee Lake. Although this is outside of the park boundary, its clients can be expected to visit the park as they hike, paddle, snowmachine, or ski in the area. Currently only cabin rentals are offered and the owners have modest plans. There are three cabins on their property. Two can house four to six people; the third can house two staff. They intend to build a sauna and offer a quiet wilderness experience that offers hiking and paddling, or skiing in the winter. They will not promote fishing. Access will be by floatplane in the summer, snowmachine in the winter. The owners are especially concerned that if the access trail is improved, the area could become increasingly busy.

A few permanent camps exist in the park area; one is on the lake east of White Mountain, the other is on the south end of the trapline trail from Squan Lake.

## **6.4 Tourism and Recreation Potential in Agay Mene Park area**

Presently, recreational use of the Agay Mene Park area is dominated by use of the Snafu-Tarfu lakes and their associated campgrounds. Fishing, canoeing, and boating are the main activities. The next most significant recreational activities are moose hunting on the parks lakes, and hiking on White Mountain. Tourism is currently limited to:

- self-guided camping and fishing in the Snafu-Tarfu area,
- a few instructional canoe courses in the same area,
- occasional guided hikes on White Mountain,
- use of adjacent Park lands by clients of a small lodge on Dalayee Lake,

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- occasional guided and self guided fly-in fishing excursions on (upper) Snafu Lake.

It is unlikely that the Agay Mene Park will become a significant destination for wilderness tourism. Compared to other, competitive destinations, the park landscape does not possess the attributes of a wilderness destination: scale, scenery, visible wildlife, terrain, and/or waterways. Having said this, it is possible to design niche products – such as cabin rentals at Dalayee Lake, or perhaps fly-in or horseback fishing excursions – but these are not likely to be major destination products. Opportunities may exist to use this landscape as an environment in which to operate an educational experience that emphasizes First Nation cultural history, or natural history, survival, art, personal growth, or some other topic. Commercial tourism destination products such as these might benefit from an improved trail system, or facilities such as a base lodge or base camp.

Another set of potential tourism products might be found in designing short commercial trips: day trips or trips up to three days that can be used as a component of a longer northern vacation. Agay Mene Park may have some useful assets: the added visibility of Park designation, ready access to the road and short air charter flights, and proximity to the several large tourist segments visiting southern Yukon. Short, niche products can in principle be designed for summer or winter tourism.

The recreational potential of the Agay Mene Park will most likely be to continue serving residents of Whitehorse. This potential can be readily increased by enlarging the campgrounds; or by developing a trail system. Increased use will place additional pressure on the fisheries of the Snafu-Tarfu systems.

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