

BC Ecological Reserve Warden Report

ER Name: Torkelson

Ecological Reserve # 73 **Report Date:** 14 Feb 2025

Warden Name: Kevin Tyler

Overview. Participants on this Friday 14 Feb 2025 visit to BC Parks' Ecological Reserve #73, "Torkelson", were Kevin Tyler (BC Parks volunteer; ER Warden), David Innes-Wiens (BC Parks Supervisor), and Anne Hetherington (retired ecosystems biologist Skeena Region, and Bulkley Valley Naturalists, President).

Travel / Timings. Using a BC Parks pick-up Truck with "Ranger" markings, driven by David Innes-Wiens the route to the ER was along Babine Lake Road for 51 kms, and then the 4000 [Nilkitkwa] Forestry Service Road (FSR) for 23 kms. We departed Smithers at 10:30 am, arriving at 1:15 pm. A heavy volume of loaded oncoming logging trucks, ~25, passed us during the travel to the ER. The wide plowing width along Babine Lake Road allowed for safe travel without radio warning of oncoming vehicles. However narrower plowing of the 4000 FSR necessitated stopping at plowed side pull-outs three times. Using the vehicle two-way radio to listen for logging trucks calling down, and our driver calling up was important to safe travel for this part of the trip. We parked at a plowed parking area on the east side of the ER where the 422 spur FSR (un-named on some maps) branches off the 4000 FSR and continues north and west. At the ER we walked Torkelson Creek on snowshoes to the un-named small lake / large pond just west of the ER, and returned. Departing the ER at 3:15 pm, arriving back in Smithers at 4:30 pm. No oncoming vehicles were encountered on the return drive along the FSRs.

Weather / Conditions. Air temp was -12 Celsius at the start and -10 Celsius at 3:30 pm; wind chill made it feel colder. A mix of sun and cloud. A light breeze from the ESE with occasional gusts. The snow was dry, fluffy and crystalline, about 12" to 18" deep on top of a hardened crust of compacted melt/freeze snow of approximately 4" depth. Snowshoes were of assistance.

Visit. Our party of three walked on snowshoes 300M north along the 422 FSR, then through ~20M of woods onto Torkelson Creek, and along the creek for 2 kms to the un-named lake immediately west of the ER. During the walk to the west we took our time, observing and photographing signs of life. The return walk was directly back with few stops.

Wildlife notes: No mammals or birds were physically seen or heard. However snow tracks from multiple mammals were observed – otter, fox, rabbit/hare, squirrel, mouse, wolverine and a small mustelid (likely a mink). Scat of moose and otter were found. Recent otter tracks were numerous all along the creek, up and down, and side-to-side, and on the lake to the west. Only one set of moose tracks was observed, crossing the creek mid-way in our transit; this was likely a female based on the shape of the moose droppings. Some of the tracks indicating sliding young otters, may have been adult minks. No signs of recent beaver activity above ground / above ice. A couple of the entry holes into the beaver dams may have been from muskrats rather than otters. One faint sound was heard near an otter/muskrat entry hole, possibly made by an inhabitant, but it may have been from ice shifting under our weight.

Plant notes: The shrubs and trees were in winter dormancy, with no sign of mid winter early budding. Snow covered the grasses and sedges. The black lichen on the black spruce trees that line the creek edge boggy areas appeared in healthy condition.

Human Activity / Public Access Issues. There were no signs of human visitation within the ER. However snowmobile tracks went from the parking spot along the spur FSR to the north and west. It is believed (and needs to be confirmed) that the 422 FSR is designated as a non-motorized area for ATVs and snowmobiles – on previous visits there was a “Non Motorized Area” sign at the start of the 422 FSR.

Maintenance. The signs along the 4000 FSR from just north of the 20 km marker to the 23 km mark, are still in good condition. The former “Non Motorized Area” sign/map at the beginning of the 422 FSR is no longer there, possibly fallen down in the ditch and covered by snow – for referral to Forestry or Highways to replace.

Communications and Safety. There is no cell phone coverage in this ER, nor for most of the FSR travel to it. David Innes-Weins sent Mini-Spot messages to his office informing of the party’s arrival at the ER, mid-walk progress, and departure from the ER. The BC Parks truck being a high clearance pick-up equipped with a 2-way radio made the road travel safe in this situation with oncoming loaded logging trucks. In future if a vehicle without a 2-way radio is used during winter trips to this ER, visitors should conduct the travel to/from during timings when there is no logging traffic. BC forestry can be contacted to get a forecast of log truck travel; also early daytime travel to the ER and late afternoon from the ER, would make encountering large vehicles unlikely.

Photos. Selected photos have been inserted below, presented chronologically from start to end of the walk. Additional photos available upon request.



20250214KT_ER73_View west to Creek from FSR; Squirrel and hare tracks



20250214KT_ER73_Looking west up Torkelson Creek



20250214KT Otter tracks parallel and overlaid, adult and juvenile, sliding down a small knoll;
Squirrel tracks



20250214KT_ER73 Otter scat with aquatic vegetation; Tracks of fox or small coyote



20250214_ER73 Otter activity 2nd beaver dam; Otter entry 3rd beaver dam; Wolverine tracks.



20250214KT_ER73 Otter entry, going up and into an otter/muskrat lodge (6' diameter, 3' tall), on edge of creek.

20250214KT_ER73 Otter activity 4th dam



20250214KT_ER73_Black lichen on spruce; Moose tracks and droppings; mouse tracks and hole