

# The Woods Don't Rest The Winter

BY SANDY RANGILA AND CYNTHIA STOWELL

## Snow Surveying Is For The Hardy

Blizzards, cold winds and heavy snows don't stop the hardy souls in the Natural Resource Department from venturing out into the high country during winter months.

In fact, the deeper the snow, the better they like it - particularly this winter. The snowpack this year must be above average to make up for last year's lack.

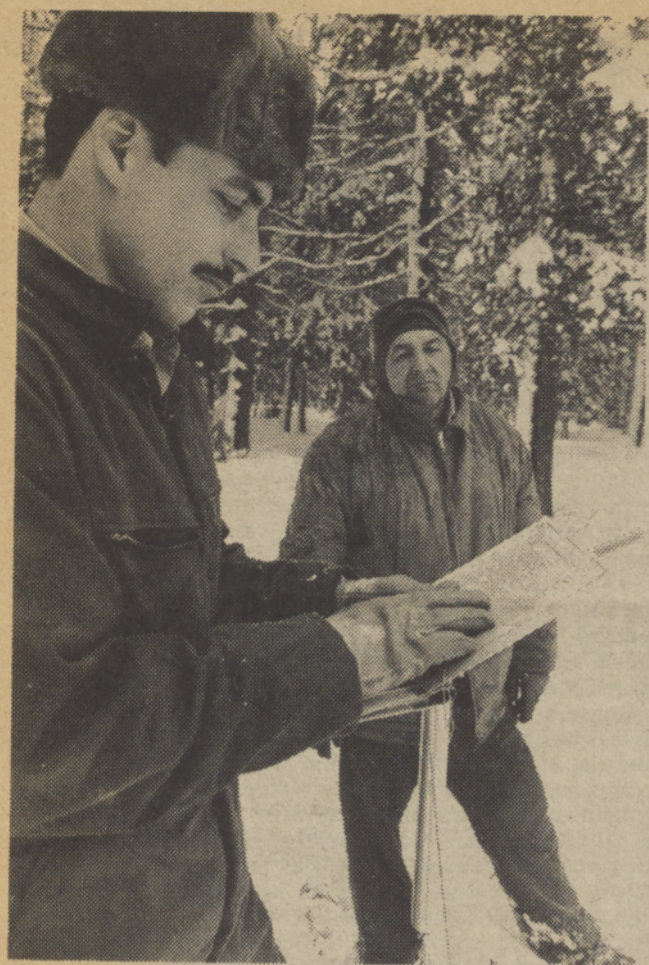
This year's snowpack "is not up to snuff," according to Roscoe Smith. It is down somewhat from the average, but a vast improvement over last year.

For example, on January 30, 1978, the snow depth at Racing Creek was 27 inches with a density of 31 percent, and at Bald Peter it measured 60 inches in depth with a density of 35 percent.

But in January of 1977, the depth at Racing Creek was only six inches with a density of 26 percent, and at Bald Peter there was 9.1 inches of snow with a density of just 18 percent.

Once a month, between November and March, a pair of snow surveyors set out on snow mobiles to collect samples and record the data at two different sites here on the reservation, Racing Creek and Bald Peter.

The four men who usually make the trek are Gene Greene, Roscoe Smith, Earl Miller, and Terry Luther. Since the snow survey takes nearly all day and



Always conducting a snow survey in pairs, staff members of the Natural Resource Department make a monthly trek to Bald Peter and Racing Creek to obtain vital data from the snowpack. Here Tribal Wildlife Biologist Terry Luther (left) records the depth and weight data given him by instrument handler Earl Miller. Luther then computed the density - indicating the amount of water in the snow. The snow surveys are done from November through March each winter. Randy Rangila Photo



Snow surveyors Earl Miller (foreground) and Terry Luther, having measured and weighed the snow at one location, strap their red plastic snowshoes on the back of each snow mobile, pack away their instruments, and head out for the next site. Sandy Rangila Photo



After measuring the snow depth, Miller weighs the core sample on scales suspended from a ski pole while Luther records the reading. Both wear snowshoes, not only to keep from sinking into the snow, but so they won't disturb the snow or cause future readings there to be inaccurate. Sandy Rangila Photo

## For Foresters and Foresters Winter Poses Hazards

Bears may hibernate during the winter, but the forest is busy.

Piles of snow on trees and tracks are evidence for the saws, chugging whine of spinners again!

If not for days of BIA and private tree reservation's (and the bears) per.

Harvesting seasonal activity and improving the around work. Growth, guided removal in a log set, and trees for cutting.

Imagine being carried out in snow or mud. Observation has this year, and the time. At times of activity in the time and mud hole of course.

The BIA's abilities fall into areas: pre-sale registration, and management. Walt Dis pre-sale men, evaluate and log sales, sit out their desks making up

cutting of the sale. Deepers said his department has appraised \$12 million worth of timber so far this winter while staying nice and dry.

Following the guidelines produced by pre-sale, Bob Bolton's timber sales administration crews roam the forest armed with spray paint guns, marking the trees to be cut by loggers the next season.

Necks craning, the foresters train their eyes on foliage, bark and treeshape to determine the vitality of the trees in a laid-out sale. They look for misshapen boles (trunks), the condition of tree tops and other outward signs of disease.

Blue stripes at eye level and at the base are painted on the trunks of those trees that pose a hazard or no longer contribute to the stand. Age is less a factor than health, said crew member Les McConnell. Unhealthy trees will give in to loggers' saws when the good weather arrives.

Good silvicultural practices may not be in the best interest of loggers, noted McConnell. Maintaining the delicate balance of the forest and ensuring its future health may mean marking trees that are not ideal for lumber.

A forester trekking through the woods in winter sees more than the average person. Bark rubbed raw by elk's new horns, a tall tree "overtopping" a nearby tree, a trunk healing an old fire scar, and he can envision the forest in thirty years when entry might again be made for logging.

In April or May a logging crew will receive a map and a list of guidelines and will set off into the woods in pursuit of blue-striped trees.

Bill Donaghue's crews concern themselves with timber



Mature Douglas Firs, that this winter dwarf forester Les McConnell, will next summer be loaded onto the bed of a log truck. Blue stripes of paint mark their demise. CDS Photo

stand improvement. In good weather that may mean planting or rehabilitation. In winter it means the lay-out and supervision of thinning areas.

This winter eight thinning outfits, all owned by tribal members, are braving the snow and mud to weed out the smaller trees and give the bigger timber a chance to develop into

strong healthy stands.

Staying within the ribboned boundaries, the rugged-looking thinners sweep through the previously quiet thickets with their chain saws and mow down anything less than 5" in diameter (hopefully excluding their partners' ankles). A standard 18 feet must be left between standing trees but this may vary with conditions and elevation.

Thinning is a year-round job but is necessarily slower in winter. Thinning supervisor Jim Cranford said that all the crews were shut down for four or five days during the first snowstorm in November. Thinners have been "snowed out" of the Jefferson Creek area since then and the Camas Prairie area since December.

When the snow piles up higher than 12", chain saw operators can't reach their footholds. Saws stall when snow gets into the gasoline or chain. Unsafe footing can add an extra element of danger to handling a hungry chain saw. Wind blows the snow or blows down trees, making the woods unsafe. A sudden storm could strand a thinning crew.

Victor Smith has laid off his crew temporarily due to mud and snow. It's not worth the hassles of getting stuck and digging out, he said. "You can only break even," observed Smith, "and you can do that by parking your equipment and staying home."

Transportation is also a big headache for the BIA crews,

according to McConnell. "Everybody gets stuck at one time or another," he remarked.

Pickups are abandoned where the road is still good and tracksters are unloaded. Looking like little tanks, the amphibious vehicles roll across the surface of the snow, negotiating the steepest of slopes.

When on foot the foresters may don snowshoes or if it is too crusty they may have to simply wallow in the deep snow "digging post-holes" as they go.

Marking must be curtailed when the snow falls heavily or a thick fog settles because the foliage can't be examined for vitality.

Advised forester Arnie Browning, "Then you'd better have some office work to do."



Swing a swath through a forest thicket, the young firs falling sticks to make room for other older trees. Amos Switzer's work year-round but find that winter slow them down at times. CDS Photo



"Everybody gets stuck at one time or another." A way of life for BIA forestry crews in the winter woods is digging out pickups, as Arnie Browning, Bill Williams and Jim Strong demonstrate here, loading and unloading tracksters, and strapping on snowshoes. The transporting of men and equipment in the winter can take a sizable chunk out of a workday. CDS Photo