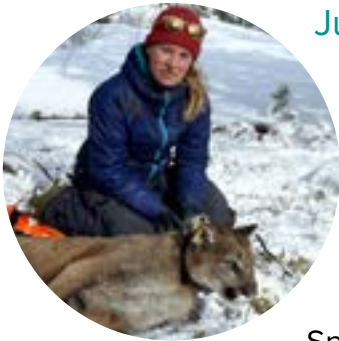




Al Martin HCTF Conservation Scholarship Recipient 2025



Julie Thomas

Julie Thomas is a PhD candidate at the University of Northern British Columbia where she conducts her research under the guidance of Dr. Chris Johnson. She is based in the coast mountains of northwest BC on Tsimshian territory.

Julie completed her MSc at the University of Calgary where she used camera traps to understand the effects of forest disturbance on mammal communities. She relocated to Whitehorse and spent several years as Species at Risk Biologist for the Yukon Government. There, she led applied research projects and developed conservation plans for everything from bats to bison and grizzly bears. Her love of the mountains and ocean eventually brought her to Terrace BC, where she worked as a contract wildlife ecologist and an instructor at Coast Mountain College, teaching the next generation of scientists.

Currently, Julie is completing her PhD research on predator-prey dynamics of cougars and declining woodland caribou. Her work occurs on the Cariboo-Chilcotin plateau of central BC, on the traditional territories of the T̓silhqot'in, Ulkatcho, and Southern Dakelh Nations. Recent observations suggest that cougar predation of caribou is increasing in central BC, facilitated by the northward range expansion of cougars. Julie's research investigates multiple hypotheses about human-mediated predation of caribou. Specifically, she is examining landscape disturbance (forestry and wildfire) and introduced feral horses as potential disruptors of predator-prey dynamics between cougar and caribou. Her work focuses on caribou from the Itcha-Ilgachuz population, which has declined by 80% in the past 20 years.

Cougar-caribou research in the Chilcotin is an ongoing collaboration between UNBC and the Government of BC, with support from the T̓silhqot'in National Government and Ulkatcho First Nation. Julie and the team are broadening our understanding of cougar diet, behaviour, and predation of caribou by deploying GPS collars on cougars and tracking them to kills. In addition, she is monitoring cougar prey with a large network of wildlife cameras – a collaboration with the Wildlife Coexistence Lab at UBC. Julie's research will have direct implications for the recovery of woodland caribou and will contribute to habitat or population management for other prey such as feral horse, moose, and deer.



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