



Ministry of
Forests, Lands, Natural
Resource Operations
and Rural Development

TOGETHER FOR WILDLIFE

Improving Wildlife
Stewardship and
Habitat Conservation
in British Columbia



August 2020

It is a great pleasure for me to share British Columbia's *Together for Wildlife* strategy, which sets us on a path to improve wildlife and habitat stewardship in this province.

The diversity of wildlife in British Columbia is one of our province's greatest treasures. The variety of species, ecosystems, and habitats is greater than in any other province in Canada, and some species are not found anywhere else on earth.

Wildlife is of utmost importance to British Columbians, providing social, economic, environmental and cultural benefits. For many of us, the simple existence of wildlife is a fundamental value. Our rich natural diversity is inextricably linked to our way of life, and we need to ensure that wildlife and their habitats are resilient as we face challenges like climate change.

We built this strategy together with Indigenous peoples, rural communities, academic institutions and a wide range of resource industry, conservation, hunter, trapper, guide, recreation and tourism stakeholder organizations. We asked you to share your concerns and ideas for change. We heard your calls for sufficient funding, effective legislation, clear objectives, and meaningful on-the-ground work. And we heard this urgent work needs to start now.

In the *Together for Wildlife* strategy, we outline our vision and principles, and commit to 5 goals and 24 actions to achieve this vision. The issues facing wildlife and habitat in this province are complex and can only be resolved through reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and ongoing collaboration with industry, stakeholders, and the public. British Columbians must work together on shared priorities with the right tools and sufficient funding to achieve better outcomes for wildlife.

This strategy will be the foundation of our work now and beyond. This is our path forward, together for wildlife.

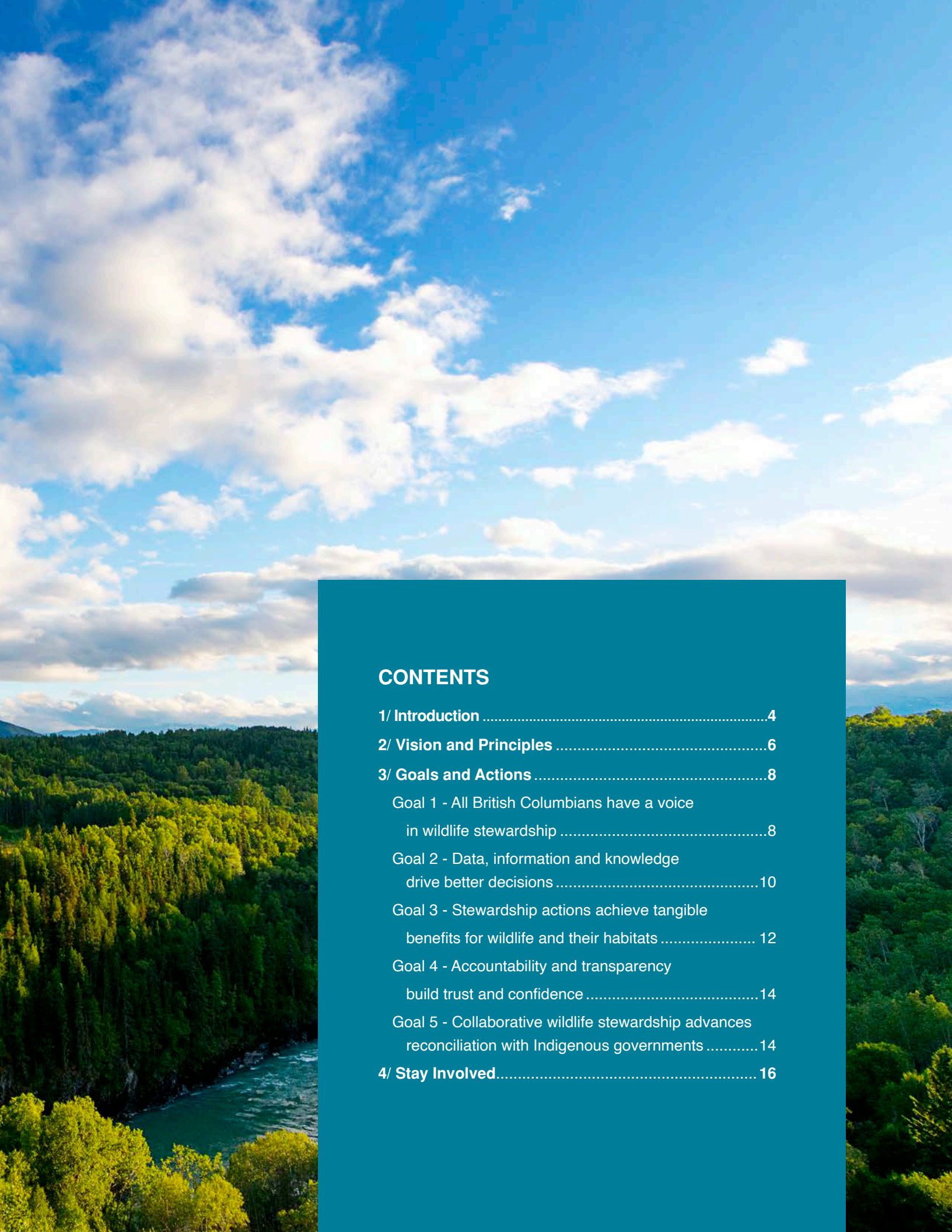
Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Doug Donaldson". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Doug Donaldson

Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource
Operations and Rural Development



CONTENTS

1/ Introduction	4
2/ Vision and Principles	6
3/ Goals and Actions	8
Goal 1 - All British Columbians have a voice in wildlife stewardship	8
Goal 2 - Data, information and knowledge drive better decisions	10
Goal 3 - Stewardship actions achieve tangible benefits for wildlife and their habitats	12
Goal 4 - Accountability and transparency build trust and confidence	14
Goal 5 - Collaborative wildlife stewardship advances reconciliation with Indigenous governments	14
4/ Stay Involved.....	16

1/ Introduction

British Columbia's biodiversity is globally significant: we are home to the broadest diversity of wildlife and ecosystems of any province or territory in Canada, including some species not found anywhere else on earth.

This rich natural abundance is a gift and a responsibility. It provides the people of British Columbia with a wealth of environmental, cultural, social, and economic benefits that are intrinsically linked to our history, our way of life, and the prosperity of future generations. We have opportunities and values that no other jurisdiction enjoys.

Our rich and diverse landscapes, many of which were sustainably managed by Indigenous peoples long before the arrival of Europeans, are indispensable to people and communities across the province. They provide food, fresh water, clean air, and natural resources, while also moderating our climate, regulating disease, cycling nutrients, and forming soils.

A growing body of evidence shows that wildlife and natural ecosystems make significant contributions to mental and physical well-being through aesthetic, spiritual, educational, and recreational values. Wildlife populations are an important source of food and culture to Indigenous peoples. Wildlife contributes to provincial and local economies through hunting, guide outfitting, trapping, wildlife viewing, photography, wilderness tourism, and research.

British Columbia's wildlife and their habitat face unprecedented and accelerating challenges due to climate change, increasing human activity, and competing pressures on the land base. These pressures are resulting in significant declines in some wildlife populations throughout the province. Along with our responsibility to build true and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, evolving societal expectations require a new and dynamic way of managing our wildlife and habitat. We need to be inclusive, adaptive, and agile.

Wildlife stewardship¹ and conservation practices have evolved over the past century. We need to continue to adapt and improve how we approach this work.

British Columbia is geographically, ecologically, and culturally diverse, and our collaborative approaches to wildlife stewardship must reflect these diverse interests and aspirations. Wildlife does not recognize the boundaries of any government. Also, solutions that work in one part of the province might not work elsewhere. Wildlife stewardship practices and policies must reflect this reality.

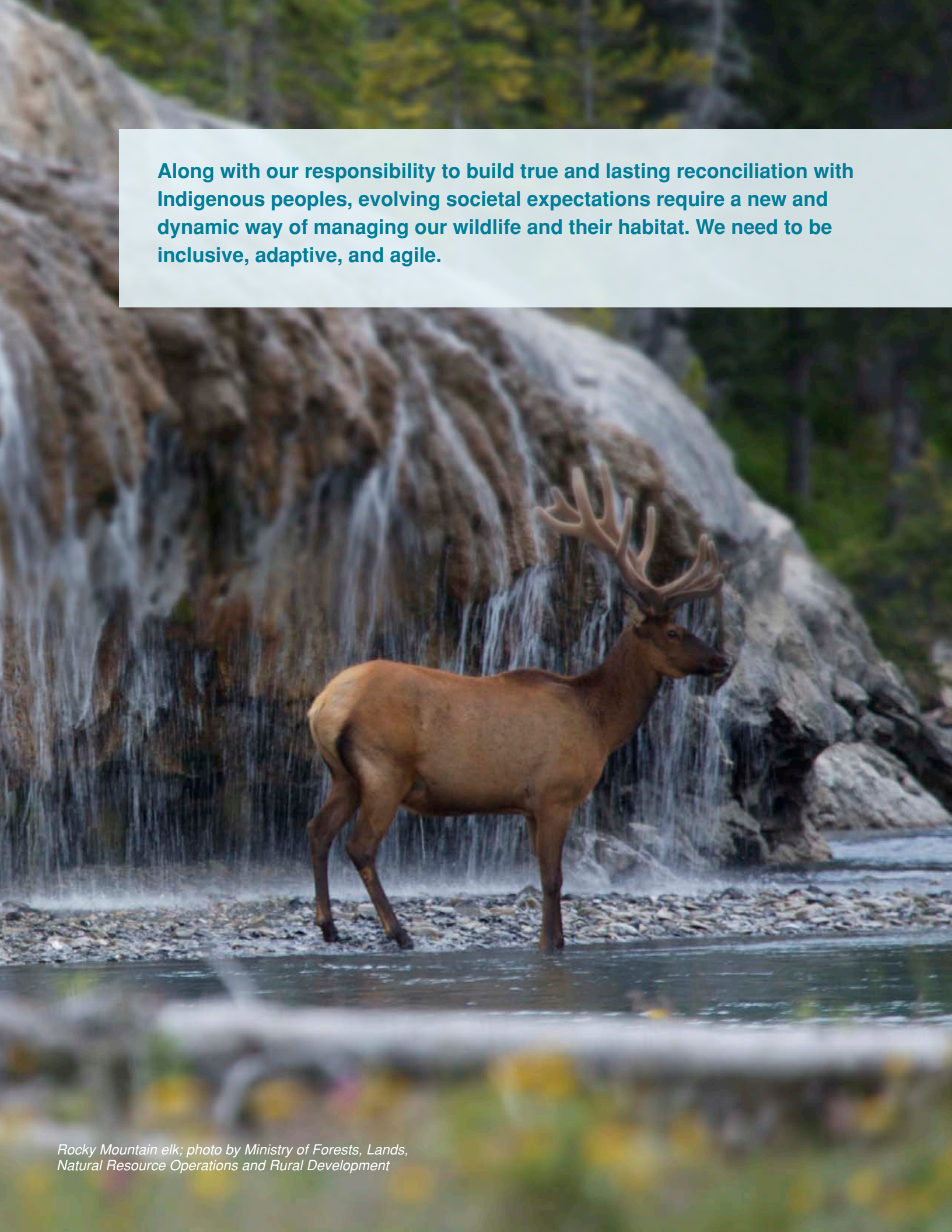
Given all the issues and opportunities we face today, there is simply too much for any one organization or one government to do. More than ever, we need to work together on shared priorities with the right tools and sufficient funding to achieve our desired outcomes on the ground.



Steller's Jay; photo by Rick Skerry

¹ For the purposes of this strategy, we define "wildlife stewardship" as the responsible care of wildlife and habitat, including protection, conservation, restoration, recovery, regulation of human activities, administration, and enforcement. Wildlife stewardship accounts for the interests of current societies and future generations.

Along with our responsibility to build true and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, evolving societal expectations require a new and dynamic way of managing our wildlife and their habitat. We need to be inclusive, adaptive, and agile.





River otter; photo by Roy V. Rea

2 / Vision and Principles

The Province is committed to making significant new investments and developing new partnerships to collaboratively deliver wildlife stewardship. We recognize that we must build on success while continuing to adapt and improve our approaches. We will make these changes in collaboration with Indigenous governments², local governments, and partners, supported by engagement with all British Columbians.

We built this strategy over 21 months through an unprecedented conversation with British Columbians. We held comprehensive discussions with Indigenous communities, rural communities, academic institutions, and a wide range of resource industry, conservation, hunter, trapper, guide, recreation, and tourism stakeholder organizations, as well as with the public. We asked British Columbians what actions we should undertake to improve wildlife stewardship. We believe this strategy reflects the rich dialogue and diversity of ideas we heard.

Our *Together for Wildlife* strategy lays out a vision and principles to guide the 5 goals and 24 actions that are the foundation of our path forward. We are committed to deliver this strategy together to benefit all British Columbians as we implement our vision.

Our Vision

Wildlife³ and their habitats thrive, are resilient, and support and enrich the lives of all British Columbians

Our Principles

Interconnectedness	We recognize that all living and non-living things and communities are integrally dependent on each other.
Trust	We will build public trust and confidence in wildlife stewardship through our actions to deliver this strategy.
Collaboration	We will collaborate and form partnerships to deliver this strategy.
Respect	We recognize and respect that people hold deep and sometimes differing intrinsic, ecological, social, cultural, and economic values for wildlife stewardship.
Responsiveness	We will be proactive and adaptive in responding to new information, and changes to wildlife populations and their habitats. We will learn continuously by doing.
Reconciliation	We are committed to advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples to support wildlife stewardship and access to healthy, wild foods.
Transparency	We will improve accessibility to information across all aspects of wildlife stewardship, including decision-making and administration of funding.
Accountability	We will define measures of success for this strategy, report our performance, and promote actions that improve implementation and the likelihood of success.
Evidence-Based Decisions	We will use evidence gathered through research, monitoring, and experience to inform decisions.
Balance	We will work together to improve a balance to ensure that wildlife stewardship and the economy thrive.
Innovation	We will embrace new technology and approaches to collect, apply and share information, deliver services, and implement practices.

²For the purposes of this strategy, the term “Indigenous government” refers to the representative or governing body of a group of First Nations individuals who share collective Aboriginal rights.

³Although this strategy focuses on terrestrial, not “at risk” wildlife, the actions identified will, in many situations, also benefit aquatic species and species at risk. Strong linkages with the programs responsible for these species will help to ensure coordinated delivery.

3 / Goals and Actions

Goal 1⁴ – All British Columbians have a voice in wildlife stewardship

Wildlife stewardship is a shared responsibility and requires that everyone have a voice. This strategy is the Province's commitment to develop inclusive and cooperative governance structures and to make existing engagement processes more transparent and effective. We will build new relationships to ensure that we work in partnership with all British Columbians to improve outcomes for wildlife stewardship.

Together, we will undertake the following actions:

Action 1

In 2020, we will establish a Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council with members from across British Columbia. Council members will bring a wide range of expertise in natural resource stewardship and will have a passion for wildlife and habitat. They will be drawn from First Nations, the public, local government, academia, natural resources and other industry sectors, and conservation organizations. The Council will advise and support the Minister on implementation of this strategy, as well as on new and existing provincial legislation for wildlife and habitat stewardship, provincial initiatives across government that affect wildlife stewardship, and other priority wildlife stewardship matters identified by the Minister.

Action 2

By 2022, we will create or expand existing Regional Wildlife Advisory Committees to represent a variety of perspectives and provide opportunities for collaboration to improve wildlife stewardship.⁵

We will tailor committees to meet the unique needs and priorities of each region and ensure the committees can influence and be involved in processes that affect wildlife stewardship (e.g., land use planning, cumulative effect assessments, wildlife and habitat monitoring, etc.).

The First Nations–B.C. Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Forum

The First Nations–B.C. Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Forum (the Forum) was formed in December 2018 in response to the Province's Improving Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Initiative as an innovative way to obtain perspectives from First Nations across British Columbia on wildlife stewardship issues.

The Forum is comprised of participants from more than 40 B.C. First Nations. Their work is not consultation, and members do not represent any other First Nation.

In 2019/20, the Forum provided input for the *Together for Wildlife* strategy and, with the Province, co-developed a proposal for *Wildlife Act* amendments that aims to advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in British Columbia.

⁴ The numbering systems of goals and actions do not reflect order or priority—all goals and actions are similarly weighted.

⁵ Existing regional hunting and trapping advisory committees may become sub-committees.



Mule deer; photo by Roy V. Rea

Action 2
(cont.)

Regional Wildlife Advisory Committees will provide opportunities for dialogue with provincial government programs, industry, stakeholders, local governments, and the public that complement the government-to-government relationships the Province is committed to pursuing with Indigenous governments. Indigenous governments will be encouraged to join Regional Advisory Committees as the Province's government-to-government partners.

Action 3

Over the life of the strategy, we will increase opportunities for the public to learn about and engage on wildlife stewardship issues that are important to them. We will update and expand wildlife and habitat communications, conduct province-wide surveys to better understand priority issues and opportunities, and hold public open houses in different areas of the province.

Goal 2 – Data, information, and knowledge drive better decisions

The right data, information, and knowledge are essential for successful wildlife stewardship. Acquiring and sharing the right data, information, and knowledge will require that our data and knowledge systems be modernized in collaboration with Indigenous governments, local governments, resource industries, stakeholders, non-government organizations, and the public.

Under the strategy, we will make new investments in biological, social, and economic data collection, cumulative effects assessments, monitoring, innovative population modelling, and information management systems. These tools, processes, and systems will improve the availability, accessibility, and reliability of wildlife stewardship data for all users. This renewed approach will better inform resource stewardship decisions and will support the relationships and structures that enable investments from other organizations and partners.

Together, we will undertake the following actions:

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| Action 4 | Starting in 2020, we will expand biological, social, and economic data and information. For example, we will fill critical gaps in wildlife monitoring and inventory, develop wildlife population and habitat supply models, and better understand the effects of climate change on wildlife. We will ensure consistent standards are followed to collect and analyze this information. |
| Action 5 | Starting in 2020, we will support priority research for wildlife stewardship through contributions to post-secondary institutions. These contributions will leverage other sources of funding and build stronger partnerships between independent and government researchers, and managers. We will broadly share the results of this research with British Columbians. |
| Action 6 | In 2022, we will develop a citizen science framework to provide new opportunities for British Columbians to partner in wildlife stewardship data collection and monitoring. We will build on existing citizen science initiatives in British Columbia and examples from other jurisdictions and use this information to support decision-making. |
| Action 7 | We will ensure wildlife and habitat data are accessible to everyone, are reliable and integrated, and include wildlife harvest statistics, wildlife inventory and monitoring data, and research findings. Between 2020 and 2025, we will complete the ongoing Fish and Wildlife Data and Licensing Transformation project ⁶ and collaborate on other initiatives, such as the Species and Ecosystems Information System Modernization project, to consolidate, replace, or enhance outdated information systems for wildlife and ecosystems. |

⁶ *Together for Wildlife* will focus on the wildlife components of the Fish and Wildlife Data and Licensing Transformation project.



Pacific tree frog; photo by Shari Willmott



Red fox; photo by Chris Hamilton



Townsend's Solitaire; photo by Rick Skerry



Canada lynx; photo by Dexter Hodder

Goal 3 – Stewardship actions achieve tangible benefits for wildlife and their habitats

To improve wildlife stewardship, we need the right tools to deliver tangible, on-the-ground changes in a timely way. We need to ensure our existing tools—whether policies, legislation, financial mechanisms, land designations, or restoration and enhancement activities—are effective in achieving the intended outcomes and, where needed, develop new tools, including legislation, policies, and procedures, to respond to our changing world.

We will be guided by clear and transparent objectives for wildlife stewardship that are developed collaboratively with Indigenous governments and through engagement with stakeholders. Science, Indigenous knowledge⁷, local expertise, and the needs, values, and perspectives of all British Columbians will inform these objectives. Our objectives will be specific, measurable, relevant, and time bound. They will be set at appropriate scales to reflect local differences and will enable the actions needed to achieve our vision.

Together, we will undertake the following actions:

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|-----------------|--|
| Action 8 | Beginning in 2020, we will establish clear, measurable objectives for wildlife stewardship that take into consideration the interactions among species. In 2021, in collaboration with the Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council and the First Nations–B.C. Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Forum, we will draft a renewed approach for setting objectives and linking wildlife populations and habitat. We will implement this approach after broad engagement, by developing provincial stewardship frameworks and regional stewardship plans for priority species and populations. |
| Action 9 | Starting in 2020, we will invest in on-the-ground stewardship to meet wildlife objectives, and ensure wildlife and their habitats are resilient to change. Examples of stewardship actions include enhancing and restoring priority habitats such as wetlands and grasslands; reducing wildlife mortality on highways and railways; working with industry to improve practices; reducing wildlife conflicts with communities; deactivating and reclaiming resource roads, and; managing key threats to wildlife and habitats, including invasive species, interspecies interactions, and disease. We will use evidence to guide actions and funding allocation decisions, and we will strategically leverage other funding opportunities (e.g., Forest Carbon Initiative, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, and Fish and Wildlife Compensation programs) to maximize benefits for wildlife. |



Pacific coast rainforest; photo by Christina Toth

Action 10

In 2021, we will complete a comprehensive review of land designations under the *Land Act*, *Wildlife Act*, *Oil and Gas Activities Act*, and *Forest and Range Practices Act* that contribute to conservation to ensure they effectively target the intended habitats, now and in the future, and in light of climate change impacts and habitat alterations. The results of the review will identify gaps and opportunities to improve the effectiveness of those designations for wildlife.

Starting in 2022, we will complete more detailed assessments for 10 percent of these designations every year. In collaboration with Indigenous governments, local governments, and key partners, we will recommend changes to these land designations (e.g., boundaries and stewardship) to improve their value for wildlife and to meet established wildlife and habitat objectives. Proposed changes will undergo socio-economic assessments and consultation, as required by the applicable legislation.

Action 11

Starting in 2020, we will make investments to manage existing Conservation Lands⁸ and acquire new priority lands for wildlife stewardship. We will use these funds to leverage additional investments, and we will strengthen ties with Indigenous governments, conservation partners, resource industries, and stakeholders to better secure and manage Conservation Lands to achieve wildlife objectives.

Action 12

In 2021, we will review the *Wildlife Act* and make recommendations to address priority issues, such as reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, determination of objectives, improved wildlife stewardship, effective and accessible service delivery, and dedicated funding. Proposed changes will contribute to wildlife stewardship and support strong, innovative, and sustainable local communities.

Action 13

In 2021, in collaboration with the Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council and the First Nations–B.C. Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Forum, we will review existing and potential new creative funding models and make recommendations to ensure sufficient, dedicated, long-term funding for wildlife and habitat stewardship in British Columbia.

⁷ Indigenous knowledge generally refers to knowledge systems that are embedded in the cultural traditions of Indigenous peoples and are based on observations and interactions with the environment. In many cases, Indigenous knowledge has been passed on from person to person over generations through stories, legends, rituals, songs, laws, or other means. The meaning of Indigenous knowledge differs among societies and cultures. Additional information can be found at: <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/what-does-indigenous-knowledge-mean>

⁸ Administered Conservation Lands include Wildlife Management Areas designated under the *Wildlife Act*, Crown acquisitions, privately owned land leased to the Province, and Crown transfers of administration (between Ministries)—all for the purpose of wildlife and habitat conservation.

Goal 4 – Accountability and transparency build trust and confidence

Our success depends on making sure we are on the right path, which means assessing whether we are delivering the actions identified in this strategy and whether the impacts of these actions benefit wildlife. This requires a robust and transparent system for reporting our actions, measures of success, and plans for future investments.

Together, we will undertake the following actions:

Action 14	In 2021, we will implement a robust performance management framework with goals, actions, and performance measures to monitor and report publicly on the success of this strategy to all British Columbians.
Action 15	Starting in 2021, we will produce annual financial reports that document all expenditures made to deliver this strategy, and we will share these reports with all British Columbians.
Action 16	We will document and share with all British Columbians the rationale for significant decisions related to wildlife stewardship and how evidence was used to inform decisions. In 2021, we will develop an approach for publicly reporting on significant decisions, and we will implement this approach over the life of the strategy.
Action 17	In 2025, we will complete a comprehensive review of this strategy and revise it appropriately based on the knowledge gained.

Goal 5 – Collaborative wildlife stewardship advances reconciliation with Indigenous governments

Our *Together for Wildlife* strategy will create new opportunities to work collaboratively with Indigenous governments to effectively and efficiently deliver wildlife stewardship. We will know that our work together is successful when Indigenous rights are recognized by society as foundational to how the Province and Indigenous governments steward wildlife and when Indigenous peoples can meaningfully practise their traditions and customs.

The Province has a special constitutional relationship with Indigenous peoples. The *Constitution Act, 1982* recognizes and affirms existing Aboriginal and treaty rights. Indigenous governments are not stakeholders. It is the Province's intention to shift our relationship with Indigenous governments to ensure our work is based on recognition and respect for the inherent right of Indigenous peoples to govern themselves and play an integral role in the stewardship of our shared natural resources.

The Province acknowledges that, consistent with existing laws and provincial policy, First Nations have first access to wildlife to meet their food, social, and ceremonial needs, now and in the future.

Success also means that wildlife stewardship is delivered in partnership with Indigenous governments and that we continually endeavour to help build their capacity. Together, we must always work to improve government-to-government relationships, inform ourselves about Indigenous worldviews, perspectives, and approaches, and ensure that all British Columbians understand the rights of Indigenous peoples and their role in wildlife stewardship.

Together, we will undertake the following actions:

Action 18	We will continue to develop policy and legislative proposals to advance co-management and shared decision-making ⁹ with Indigenous governments in British Columbia. As co-management partners, Indigenous governments and the Province will together define the scope, mandate, and function of the arrangements to be used.
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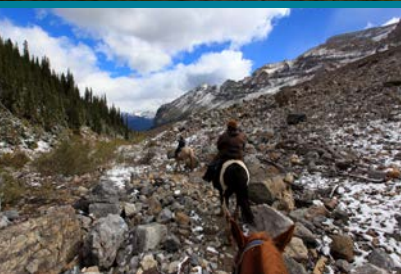
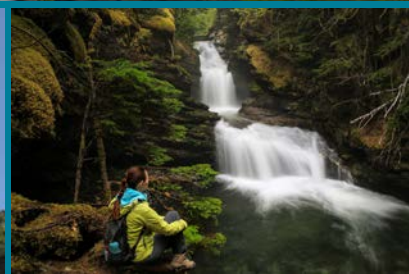
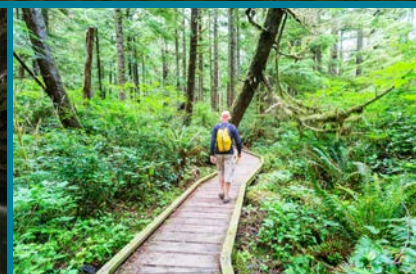
Action 19	With the First Nations–B.C. Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Forum, we will jointly develop communication and extension materials to educate and inform British Columbians about the nature of Aboriginal rights and title, modern and historical treaties, Indigenous worldviews, and Indigenous use of wildlife and wildlife stewardship approaches. In 2021, we will engage with Indigenous governments on draft communication materials.
Action 20	We will incorporate Indigenous knowledge into statutory and non-statutory wildlife stewardship decision-making through the collaborative development of policies and procedures. These policies and procedures will provide direction and guidance for provincial government staff in order to ensure a consistent approach across the province. In 2020 and 2021, jointly with the First Nations–B.C. Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Forum, we will draft a policy and engage with Indigenous governments.
Action 21	We will evaluate, in collaboration with participating Indigenous governments, existing guardian and compliance projects with a focus on wildlife and habitat stewardship. Starting in 2021, and building on successes identified in the evaluation, we will support guardian and compliance programs (e.g., through developing approaches) that will be implemented locally with Indigenous governments at their request.
Action 22	We will invest to develop models and approaches for sharing wildlife and habitat data and information with Indigenous governments. These models and approaches will include agreements and technologies that allow Indigenous governments to share Indigenous knowledge and community and food-security needs with the Province in order to support co-management and shared decision-making.
Action 23	We will invest in capacity to ensure Indigenous governments can effectively and efficiently participate in all aspects of wildlife stewardship. We will develop pilot initiatives to involve collectives of Indigenous governments to deliver trusted information to support shared stewardship.
Action 24	Starting in 2020, we will support the operation of a formal First Nations–B.C. Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Forum to provide one source of Indigenous perspectives on the development of policies and legislation that will support wildlife and habitat stewardship across provincial government programs and with Indigenous governments throughout British Columbia.

⁹ Although shared decision-making and co-management are often understood as meaning the same thing, for the purposes of this strategy, they are distinct. With shared decision-making, Indigenous governments and the Province work together to make decisions over wildlife and habitat conservation, with both parties sharing decision-making roles under provincial legislation. Shared decision-making may require changes to legislation, with supporting policy and direction. With co-management or co-stewardship, Indigenous governments and the Province work collaboratively through the entire system of resource management—from inventory and supporting methodologies, engagement, analysis, decision-making, and effectiveness monitoring.

As partners in shared decision-making and co-management, Indigenous governments and the Province will necessarily engage with stakeholders and tenure holders, industry, and the public. It is up to each Indigenous government or group of Indigenous governments to determine, in partnership with the Province, what shared decision-making and co-management look like.



*Dall's sheep;
photo by Ministry
of Forests, Lands,
Natural Resource
Operations and
Rural Development*



Second photo from left: Hoop Dancer Youth; Northern Secwepemc te Qelmucw

4 / Stay Involved

For more information about the *Together for Wildlife* strategy, please contact:

Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource
Operations and Rural Development,
PO Box 9391 Stn Prov Govt Victoria, B.C. V8W 9M8

engage.gov.bc.ca/wildlifeandhabitat
wildlifeandhabitat@gov.bc.ca

TOGETHER FOR WILDLIFE

Cover: Mountain goats; photo by David Burwash