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Re: Wildlife and Habitat Engagement

To whom it may concern:

On May 22nd 2018, you opened a process for the public to engage in wildlife and habitat (<https://engage.gov.bc.ca/wildlifeandhabitat/>) with the goal to find creative and practical ways to improve wildlife management and habitat conservation in British Columbia. I applaud the government's efforts to meet this goal and to use the knowledge and experience of the community to help develop solutions.

As you have noted in the primer (https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/377/2018/05/WL_DiscussionPapers_FINAL_May-22.pdf), there are widespread concerns over loss of habitat and the decline of populations across this province. People have witnessed changes that do not meet their expectations for how the ecosystem should function. The loss of biodiversity, access to wild plant and animal foods, and tourism opportunities are impacting First Nations, naturalists, resident hunters, commercial hunters, and other communities. You have also identified eight challenges that are impeding society's ability to respond to these concerns.

The eight challenges identified in the primer:

1. Advancing Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples
2. Increasing Involvement and Shared Stewardship
3. Declining Wildlife Populations
4. Increasing Human Activity
5. Wildfires and Extreme Weather
6. Better Information
7. Human-Wildlife Conflicts
8. Funding

While I anticipate that you will receive a number of opinions on all of these challenges, Challenges 1, 2, and 8 pertain to social science, governance, and reconciliation. These challenges are critical, and I support the government's perspective that action is needed on these issues. However, I do not have advice to offer these challenges because they are outside of my expertise. I hope that Indigenous communities and stakeholders will provide you the guidance needed to make a good decision on these challenges. I offer discussion on the renaming challenges, many of which seem intertwined.



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The most important challenge – “Declining Wildlife Populations” – requires an understanding of why animals are declining (i.e., including “Human-Wildlife Conflicts”) and evidence (i.e., “Better Information”) to inform policy that would lead to restoration of populations. While wildlife and habitat management agencies in BC are staffed by experts with a background in science, the province as a whole, had limited research capacity for wildlife. Currently, there are only a handful of researchers at BC-based universities that conduct research on BC wildlife. Moreover, even fewer (i.e., < 5) have strong, working relationships with wildlife managers to answer critical questions to improve policy. For this reason, I would like to two approaches to resolving the challenges posed above.

First, a direct forum for engagement between science, funding, and policymakers. For example, the BC FLNRORD could convene a **standing technical panel** of researchers and other scientists to help evaluate policy options and help translate current knowledge (i.e., peer reviewed literature) into policies and practices. The panel would need to have independence from government when it comes to policy evaluation, otherwise the credibility of the panel would be compromised. This is not to say that science/evidence is the only basis for making decisions, but that the best-available evidence used to make policy is accessible to decision makers.

Second, dedicated support for wildlife research to mobilize knowledge on key issues. Borrowing from co-op models used by the United States Geological Survey or the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (i.e., and Trent University), this approach would fund a chaired research endowment (i.e., professorships) targeting priorities such as caribou recovery, moose management, and inland fisheries. These research chairs are needed because current research efforts (e.g., including myself) at BC-based universities are at or near capacity.

By combing support for research with a direct link between research and policy, we can create and use the best available evidence to make more efficient decisions to conserve BC’s wildlife.

Thank you,

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