

Below please find our responses to the request to respond to your questions for “Improving Wildlife Management and Habitat Conservation in BC”. We would be happy to provide additional information if requested.

Sincerely,

Decker Butzner, Sally Hammond, Ann Meidinger

Members BBC working group and SLSS Directors

Improving Wildlife Management and Habitat Conservation in BC

Challenges Outlined in the Discussion Paper

This is a submission from the Bonanza Biodiversity Corridor (BBC) Working Group, a committee composed of members of the Slocan Lake Stewardship Society (SLSS) and the Kootenay Conservation Program (KCP). The BBC, an approximately 140 km² ecologically sensitive habitat (mostly wetland), at the headwaters of Slocan Lake is recognized by local residents and multiple biologists as an area of exceptional biological diversity that requires conservation protection. It provides wildlife corridors between two provincial parks (Goat Range and Valhalla) and between Slocan Lake and Lower Arrow Lake. The BBC area is 98% crown land. The Valhalla Foundation for Ecology largely supported by local residents recently purchased a 35-acre marsh nature preserve at the head of Slocan Lake, a portion of the BBC. Slocan Lake is the largest natural lake in SE BC. SLSS and KCP are NGOs that have sponsored scientific research on the BBC, that is threatened by multiple developmental pressures including resource extraction, recreational and land development. This wetland at its head is not subject to artificial reservoir fluctuations of the dammed lakes of the Columbia River System. The BBC is ideal to study climate change effects on wetland habitat and compare results to other Columbia River reservoir

wetlands that are subjected to artificially fluctuating water levels.

Our goal is to develop a means to conserve the watershed of Bonanza Creek that contains a unique natural wetland habitat.

1. How to advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in wildlife management and habitat conservation?

- * We have confirmed interest and have obtained collaboration from the Okanogan Nations Alliance (ONA biologist) and the Sinixit band.

- * Exploration of the indigenous history and archeology of the headwaters of Slocan lake.

2. How to increase the involvement of non-governmental conservation organizations as well as a broad range of wildlife and habitat stakeholders and the general public in wildlife management and habitat conservation?

- * SLSS and KCP are NGOs that has identified and sponsored scientific research to evaluate the biological diversity of the BBC corridors. 98% of this area is crown land. Researchers have identified species at risk, both flora and fauna, that require protection from developmental pressures. In a “bio-blitz” conducted by researchers, many unique species to SE BC were identified. To support conservation and continued research NGO’s require:

- * Mechanism(s) to protect sensitive crown land habitat by area in addition to that provided for individual species (WHA).

- * Provincial funding and identification of other funding sources to support scientific research.

- * Platform to support collaboration between academia, First nations researchers, environmental groups, and local governments. Ie. connecting scientists to practical questions about monitoring and

sustaining valuable ecological areas.

- * Home for database management and maintenance across the province.

- * Means to facilitate connections with other groups across the province with similar interests and goals

3. Some wildlife populations are declining across the province.

- * Kokanee, westslope cutthroat western toads, multiple bat species grizzly bear, wolverine, caribou and multiple water bird species inhabit the BBC corridor

4. Habitat loss, alteration and fragmentation are increasing due to human activity.

- * Logging, motorized ATV trails, highway and risk of land sales for recreation development threaten the BBC.

5. Climate change is resulting in more wildfires and extreme weather, contributing to wildlife diseases, forest health issues, and the spread of invasive species, affecting wildlife populations and altering habitats.

- * Because Slocan lake is the largest natural lake in southeastern BC, the BBC contains wetlands not subjected to artificial fluctuations of reservoir levels. How will climate change alter natural wetland habitat? Species studies completed and planned will provide a baseline to monitor effects of climate change.

6. There is a growing need for better information on wildlife and habitats to inform management and conservation outcomes and achieve robust compliance and enforcement.

- * We have started this and need funding for further studies

- * The BBC working group has established ties with a variety of scientists interested in this unique wetland area and we have facilitated networking opportunities.

7. Concerns about human-wildlife conflicts are increasing, including those related to agricultural impacts, urban wildlife, wildlife-vehicle collisions and dangerous wildlife.

- * The corridor is bisected by a Highway, Rte. 6, and wildlife protective areas need to be developed and instituted. Measures have already been taken to begin to protect Western toads, a species at risk.

- * Recreational pressures such as off-road vehicle damage and forest fire risk.

- * Subdivision and development of private properties.

- * Selling Crown Land for recreational development.

- * Improve mechanism for communication with non-governmental conservation organizations, the provincial government and timber and resource industries for protecting sensitive and critical habitat.

8. Wildlife management and habitat conservation are funded through annual Ministry budgets, contributions to the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation from surcharges on hunting, trapping and guide outfitting licenses, and through partnerships (e.g., academia, non- governmental organizations, industry, etc.). Current funding levels may not meet expectations for improved wildlife and habitat conservation.

- * Provincial funding sources to support scientific research.

- * Platform to support collaboration between academia, First nations researchers, environmental groups, and local governments. ie connecting scientists to practical questions about monitoring and sustaining valuable ecological areas.

- * Home for database management across the province.

- * Facilitate connections with other groups across the province with similar interests and goals

Our data demonstrate that the protection and continued study of the Bonanza Biodiversity Corridor represents a solution to issues that need to be addressed for all for the above challenges. A provincial conservation designation with enforcement provisions needs to be created to preserve valuable at-risk habitats. We propose that the BBC become a pilot project for the Province to take a holistic approach to conservation of a unique habitat that contains multiple plant and animal species rather than the existing species-specific approach. For further information please contact us at: butzner@ucalgary.ca

Respectfully submitted,

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