British Columbia
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers

July 26, 2018

RE: Engage BC – Wildlife and Habitat in BC

To whom it may concern,

The British Columbia Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BCBHA) wishes to submit comments on the new era of wildlife and habitat management in BC. From our perspective, this initiative is extremely important and a change is long overdue. We are encouraged that this review is now taking place and we hope that it leads to real and meaningful changes to the wildlife and habitat management system in BC.

Wildlife and its supporting habitats are being degraded at an alarming rate. There are many factors contributing to this current state (together these are often referred to as cumulative effects), but whatever the multitudes of impacts are, we are now at a critical crossroad in BC and have a choice to do something now. Will wildlife and habitat conservation become a priority or will we see the collapse of these systems? This is the state we feel wildlife and habitat are in BC right now.

We feel strongly that wildlife and habitat management is the government's responsibility. We are not here to tell government how to manage wildlife and habitat; government employs professional personnel who are educated in this regard. We can only make suggestions as to what we feel needs to be addressed and offer insight and observations. BCBHA facilitated and participated in a Wildlife Management Roundtable in March of 2017 in Cranbrook. The public attendance was unprecedented and the many groups and organizations represented at this roundtable all had a very similar and strong message. Here are 5 main points and recurring themes that were highlighted at the Roundtable:

1. Wildlife and habitat management need to be a government priority and appropriately funded through a dedicated and adequate funding model.
2. BC needs clear management plans with defined objectives that are sustainable, enforceable and resilient to 4-year political cycles.
3. Setting management objectives must be prioritized within FLNRORD or it will not happen.

4. This requires having appropriate data that supports science based wildlife objectives and management plans.
5. Implementation of these plans will require changes to natural resource policy and legislation as wildlife and habitat are presently largely managed under legislation shaped to accommodate other priorities. ie: Forest and Range Practices Act

BCBHA would also like to emphasise the following points:

- Government needs to prioritize wildlife and habitat management and bring it forward in all landscape decisions. Large intact wild landscapes support healthy, vibrant and resilient wildlife populations and provide sustainable hunting opportunity.
- Science based wildlife management plans need to follow the North American Wildlife Conservation Model.
- We cannot manage wildlife and habitat in isolation. It needs to be a factor in all landscape management decisions – from resource extraction, industrial use and recreation use.
- One plan cannot work for the entire province. We need to develop regional plans and even sub-regional plans to address the diverse landscapes and varying issues around the province.
- An overall provincial access management plan and various regional plans need to be developed as part of any wildlife and habitat management system. We have road densities that are well above recommended sustainable levels, and that is before we include the many illegal trails that are being built into the backcountry.
- The new model needs to recognize that hunting is an integral part of conservation and this important heritage should continue.
- Huntable wildlife populations need to be an objective of wildlife management plans.
- The fundamentals of fair chase need to be established in management plans to address the present and future effect of technology on wildlife vulnerability and loss of hunting opportunity.
- Wildlife exclusion fencing/migration corridors needs to be addressed.
- Online licensing – hunter profile, compulsory reporting, LEH priority system, data inventory can all be acquired through e licensing.
- Habitat burns, invasive weed management, habitat enhancement plans to support and sustain wildlife populations.

Over the past few years government has taken on numerous initiatives that have outlined what needs to be done to make wildlife and habitat management a priority in BC. These reports include, but are not limited to;
The Gorley Report - A Strategy to Help Restore Moose Populations in British Columbia
The Morris Report – Getting the Balance Right: Improving Wildlife Habitat Management in British Columbia

Along with these reports, the discussion paper included in this review process already identifies the key components that should be included in any new wildlife management plan. BCBHA encourages government to take the message already presented and start making changes to legislation soon that will improve the conservation of our wildlife and habitat now.

BCBHA would like to reiterate this important premise:

To ensure the sustainable utilization of our wildlife resources in BC, the new model MUST establish that hunting is ensconced in the conservation fundamentals of the plan. Hunting is applied conservation.

The British Columbia Backcountry Hunters & Anglers look forward to collaborating with stakeholders and engaging government on this important initiative. Thank you for the opportunity to engage.

Yours in Conservation,

Bill Hanlon
Provincial Chair, British Columbia Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

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Backcountry Hunters & Anglers seeks to ensure North America's outdoor conservation heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting, through education and work on behalf of wild public lands and waters. ***We are "boots on the ground" hunters and anglers, standing up for quiet experiences in wild habitats, entirely removed from the disturbance of crowds and machines.***