

BC Wildlife Federation Wildlife & Habitat Engagement Response

Introduction

Our fish, wildlife and habitat are what makes B.C. special. As the province's largest and oldest conservation organization, the BCWF is alarmed by the loss and degradation of wildlife habitat, and the associated decline of fish and wildlife. A number of our fish and wildlife populations, and in some cases species, have experienced multi-decadal declines with no meaningful effort to change the trend. Concurrent with these declines, lack of political will to adequately conserve and manage what makes B.C. special has resulted in a long-term defunding, offloading (professional reliance), and dismantling of the Fish and Wildlife branch, as well as natural resource management in British Columbia. While the BCWF is excited for this review, a number of our wildlife populations cannot afford to wait until 2020 for recovery plans to be initiated – we need action today.

The BC Wildlife Federation views wildlife conservation through the lens of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (NAMWC). The tenets of the model are:

- Wildlife is held in the Public Trust
- Commercialization and sale of dead wildlife is illegal
- Allocation of wildlife is by law
- Everyone has the opportunity to access fish and wildlife under the law
- Wildlife can only be killed for legitimate purposes
- Wildlife is an international resource
- Science is the proper tool for the discharge of wildlife policy

For a summary of the NAMWC see: <http://wildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/North-American-model-of-Wildlife-Conservation.pdf>

While habitat and wildlife conservation are increasingly complicated and needs to focus more to include public outreach and education, the NAMWC continues to be one of the most successful conservation movements in the world.

It should be acknowledged that all stakeholders, including industries and the public, have an impact on wildlife. This applies to urbanization, development, road building, logging, bear watching, heli-skiing and hunting to name a few. People have an impact on wildlife. These tenets support the traditional concepts of consumptive and non-consumptive use of wildlife.

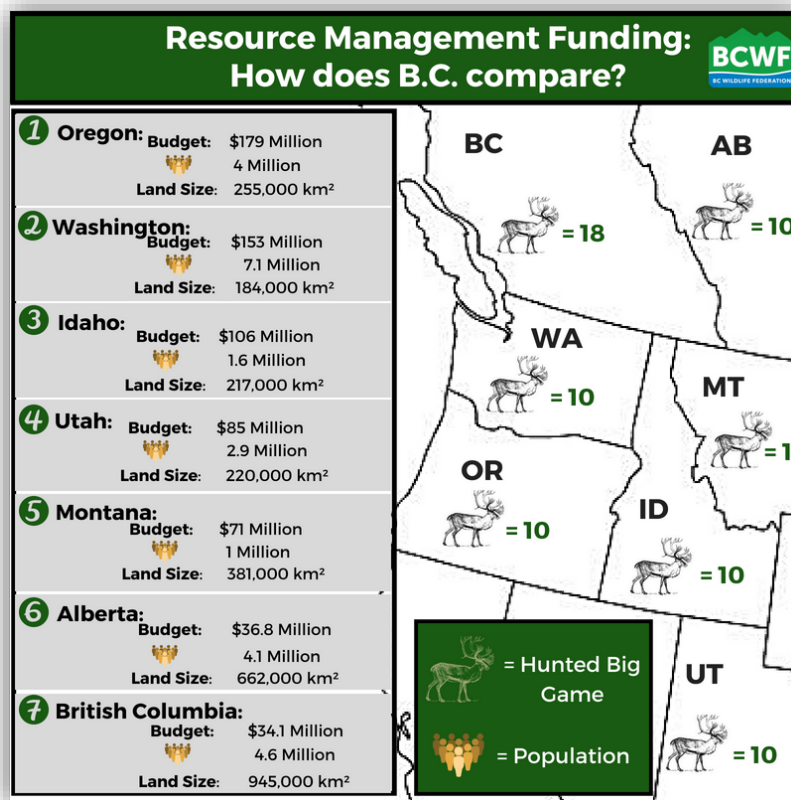
Funding

While the human population, resource extraction and threats to habitat and wildlife have increased significantly, the funding and capacity to support natural resource management have declined – this is the opposite of other jurisdictions, and the opposite of what British Columbians expect. By 2010, there were 21 percent fewer staff working in renewable resource ministries compared to 1984. While the provincial budget increased by nearly 500 percent between 1974-2010, the budget for natural resource management increased only by about 50 percent.

The same trends are found in the Fish and Wildlife Branch budget. In 1954, B.C. spent approximately 0.63 percent of the provincial budget on the Fish and Wildlife Branch. By 2017, the estimated expenditure had declined to 0.06 percent of the provincial budget, a 95 percent decline.

Also See: <http://www.jem-online.org/index.php/jem/article/view/556>

Comparing B.C. to other Fish and Wildlife agencies, nearly every other jurisdiction in North America spends more per capita, and per kilometre. The following is a rough comparison of agency spending which shows the disparities between B.C. and neighbouring jurisdictions.



Jurisdiction	Size (000s Km2)	People (M)	Hunted Big Game	Budget (M)	\$s/Person	\$/Km2
BC	945	4.631	18	34	7.36	36.08
Idaho	217	1.634	10	106	64.87	488.48
Oregon	255	3.97	10	179	45.09	701.96
Montana	381	1.024	11	71	69.34	186.35
Utah	220	2.943	10	85	28.88	386.36
Washington	184	7.062	10	153	21.67	831.52

Alternative Conservation Funding Sources

The same can be said about B.C. hydroelectric development compensation. The Columbia basin, which is shared between B.C., Idaho, Oregon and Washington State, has been heavily impacted by dams, affecting fish and wildlife. Both Canada and the United States decided to invest in fish and wildlife to attempt to offset the negative impacts of dams and reservoirs. In 2016, B.C. spent \$5.8 million trying to compensate for the losses to Fish and Wildlife; south of the border, Bonneville power spent \$534 million. While B.C. houses approximately 30 percent of the Columbia basin, it spends only 1 percent of the total hydro compensation dollars. In the United States, they are busy improving fish and wildlife populations, reintroducing and restoring salmon populations – in B.C. we are counting populations as they disappear.

Recommendations:

1. The BC Wildlife Federation recommends that the Government of BC show leadership by placing a priority on wildlife and their habitats, and by increasing funding to the related government agencies. Dedicating all hunting license revenue and increasing license fees is the first step.
2. Funding is placed at arm's length from government to increase transparency, public confidence, and the ability to leverage funding from other sources.
3. Require all who use and benefit from our natural resources to give back to conservation, including but not limited to: hydro-electrical development, rail, heli-skiing, ski hills, logging, mining, oil & gas, ecotourism, hunters, anglers and naturalists. Natural resource conservation funding should be based on a pay to play approach, which increases legitimacy and provides stable, predictable and long-term funding.
4. A wildlife license plate, similar to the B.C. Parks license plate, will create additional, incremental funds.
5. Wildlife collisions should be mitigated via the Ministry of Transportation budget to build wildlife fencing and overpasses. This is common practice in some jurisdictions and is becoming more popular. It protects people, insurance rates, and wildlife.
6. Research into the feasibility of a Pittman Robertson-like tax, or redirection of existing tax, on outdoor goods.

7. Financial incentives should be created to support and encourage consolidation of wildlife friendly large land holdings, and incentives which encourage smaller holdings to manage for wildlife values.

Science

Our fish and wildlife populations, as well as habitat values, have paralleled or exceeded the downward trends in funding for wildlife management. Vancouver Island black-tailed deer have declined 75 percent since the 1970s, with no sign of recovery; Thompson and Chilcotin steelhead are classified as endangered; resident hunter moose harvest peaked at over 13,000 in 1979 and had declined more than 60 percent to less than 5,000 in 2016. In the East Kootenays, we are experiencing record low mountain sheep, mountain goat and elk populations and harvest. A number of goat populations in the Okanagan region are now extirpated. We are in a crisis.

While record lows are the norm in B.C., many of our neighbouring jurisdictions have not been experiencing these same largescale long-term declines. In 2014, Idaho State experienced a 10 year record high harvest of over 20,000 elk, 30 percent above the 50 year average. Meanwhile, across an imaginary line, B.C. hunters in the Kootenay Region harvested just over 1,000 elk, a 40 percent decline over 10 years, which is also 40 percent below the long-term average. These long-term declines in hunter harvest in B.C. across multiple species and across multiple parts of the jurisdiction are simply not what other jurisdictions are experiencing.

Monitoring and Inventory

In B.C. we “fly when there’s money,” which is not meaningful for wildlife. B.C. has relied on “dead side data” for most species for over 40 years, with no long-term ground-truthing. In many cases, the models to monitor and inventory wildlife have not even been developed in B.C.

Recommendation: B.C. needs spatial and temporal plans which ensure wildlife health, and that abundance is tracked via traditional knowledge, science and citizen science.

Reporting

A focus on hunting trends, dead-side data, reporting and record keeping is another important component of wildlife management which is currently lacking.

Recommendation: Create a reporting system which tracks hunting trends and dead side data (road kills, rail kills inclusive). This must include all hunters (regulated and unregulated) and industries.

Management levers

In wildlife management we can manage what kills wildlife and what makes it grow. Landscape-level planning, predators, linear features, plant species and weeds, silviculture practices, fire suppression, hunting, disease, habitat quality and quantity all affect wildlife populations.

The generally accepted tools for wildlife management include: Access management, predator management, prey management, hunting regulations, compliance and enforcement, habitat restoration/enhancement/protection, land management, and landscape-level planning. The only management lever wildlife managers are currently able to exercise in a meaningful way is regulated hunting. Both government and non-government wildlife experts continually tell us, changes to hunting regulations are not meaningful to change the trends in wildlife populations and all the other tools (which they have no access to) are what is needed.

Recommendation: Land, habitat, fish and wildlife managers are given statutory access to the tools which conserve or restore habitat and populations.

Role of Research

The current approach to research is: B.C. doesn't do it. The Wildlife Research Section of the B.C. Fish and Wildlife Branch was eliminated two decades ago. While there are a few projects which have stood the test of time, B.C. relies on the rest of North America to shoulder the load as it relates to wildlife research. For example, Idaho State spends more money on mule deer research and monitoring every year, than B.C.'s entire species and habitat funding envelope in the Natural Resource Science Section budget.

The B.C. government currently does not have the funding to attract and retain researchers, never mind to conduct research. When research is conducted, reports are often kept in draft form, communications between the researcher and the public is limited, and the research often does not drive legislative or policy change. The lack of public education with regards to the value of hunting and angling, sustainable resource use, and science-based decisions has not done well by conservation. While making decisions for habitat and wildlife, research should be independent of government and should be available and communicated to the public.

Recommendation: The BCWF would like to see major research housed outside of government in an academic institution, or cooperative wildlife unit, which would minimize big "P" politics and provide focus and the rigour required to inform and guide science-based decisions. Funding for a position should occur for both fish and wildlife.

Ministry and Management Agency Structure

The current government structure, which has pulled the Ministry of Environment (BC Parks, Conservation Officer Service, Species at Risk) apart from related agencies housed within the Ministry of

Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (habitat, ecosystems, fish and wildlife branch), has not supported effective land use planning, habitat restoration and protection or fish and wildlife conservation. Nor has the governance structure, and budgeting procedure with FLNRORD.

Functionally and structurally, the experiment of this one shop Ministry has left habitat and wildlife interests, as well as a balanced approach to resource extraction and conservation, out. The structural, authoritative, and budgeting approach within FLNRORD leaves the Fish and Wildlife Branch broke, under-staffed, and without effective tools to conserve or restore populations.

Recommendation: The appropriate agencies be housed in one Ministry, with budgeting, line-of-sight authority, legislation, regulation and policy flowing via the respective agency.

Objectives

There are currently no meaningful objectives for wildlife in B.C. For the most part, wildlife managers manage wildlife via sex ratios, such as the number of bucks:100 does. Wildlife populations are affected principally by adult female and juvenile survival rates, and there are no objectives for these two components of the population. The result is a long-term decline in wildlife populations, which ensure only that sex ratios are managed via hunting regulations.

Recommendation: Legislated objectives for fish, wildlife and habitat, which are included and balanced with development and other relevant pieces of legislation.

Social Support

Government's historic top-down, divisive and authoritative approach creates social dysfunction, and environmental values which are failing. The flow of information from credible scientists to the public does not exist, which has left a significant void that has been replaced by cause-based approaches to wildlife management, which have led to mistrust, instability and a lack of public trust in government.

Furthermore, B.C. is becoming more urbanized, and, as a province, our connection to nature is disappearing. There is a significant need to get British Columbians onside with a new approach that connects individuals, communities, and regions to wildlife and conservation.

The BCWF has written to the provincial Ministers of Forests and Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation to request them to direct their senior staff to respect the public's right to access fish and wildlife in their management decisions and initiatives. The BCWF wants guidelines to be provided to senior Ministry staff outlining that any agreements relative to fish and wildlife must include principles for allocation between First Nations and the general public.

The BCWF intervention in the recent Ahousaht Decision resulted in the BC Supreme Court decision in April 2018 requiring that the delineation of Indigenous fishing rights must include consideration of the rights and interests of all stakeholders.

Recommendation:

1. The BCWF would like to see a roundtable approach, similar to the current Mountain Caribou Recovery Implementation Plan where legitimate interests are represented. A roundtable would include First Nations, NGOs, experts, scientists, the public sector, and industry. Represented interests should be B.C.-based, be provincial in nature and non-governmental organizations should be involved in on-the-ground conservation and stewardship projects. The roundtable would add to the legitimacy of the process, and minimize free-riding, mistrust, and instability.
2. The BCWF would also like to see the formation of a non-partisan MLA committee included in this process.
3. The BCWF recommends that the government of BC take an active role in promoting the activities of hunting and angling as legitimate means for putting food in the freezers of First Nations and licensed hunters and anglers.

Conclusion

The BC Wildlife Federation is excited that this review is occurring and that there has been a short-term commitment to funding. For wildlife to continue to exist in B.C., we will have to do things differently. The status quo approach, which is actively managing wildlife out of existence, cannot continue. B.C. needs to innovate by looking outside the historical funding and governance structure. The BCWF is prepared to be a part of the solution, to provide funding, expertise, and support for First Nations, government, industry and stakeholders to move forward. **B.C. has to change its approach: we need a new model which is well-funded, placed where funding can be leveraged, has legislated objectives, can be trusted by British Columbians and which puts wildlife first.**