



a place of mind

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Forest Resources Management

2045 – 2424 Main Mall

Vancouver BC Canada V6T 1Z4

Tel: 604.822.1283

Email: cole.burton@ubc.ca

Honourable Doug Donaldson

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

PO BOX 9391 STN PROV GOVT

Victoria BC V8W 9M3

Submitted to: WildlifeAndHabitat@gov.bc.ca

30 July 2018

RE: Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Strategy in B.C.

Dear Minister Donaldson,

I would like to commend the Government of British Columbia for initiating this process aimed at improving the management of wildlife and their habitats in British Columbia. Our province's wildlife resources are internationally renowned and provide tremendous local, national, and global value whether considered from an economic, ecological, or cultural perspective. Yet many wildlife populations are declining in BC, and many wildlife management issues are contentious. There is thus a great need for improvement in the processes and outcomes of wildlife conservation activities in the province.

As a member of the British Columbia Chapter of The Wildlife Society, I contributed to their separate letter that includes several recommendations and responses to the discussion questions raised in the Wildlife and Habitat engagement document. I am submitting this additional letter to further emphasize the need that I perceive for greater research and monitoring of BC's wildlife populations and habitats, and particularly for greater partnerships between government staff and university researchers.

In my opinion, a fundamental component of effective wildlife management involves the design, implementation, and uptake of rigorous science as part of the decision-making process. Scientific studies can not only guide management decisions and evaluate their effectiveness, but can also increase their public acceptance by providing a transparent foundation of evidence on which decisions can be built. Wildlife management is often incredibly complex, being intertwined with interacting social and ecological dynamics and clouded by uncertainty. While management decisions may not be based solely on science, there is great potential to improve their effectiveness by linking decision-making to long-term ecological and social science research.

Wildlife biology has a long and accomplished history as an applied science, closely linking rigorous research with management challenges. And British Columbia has a strong tradition of wildlife science pursued by both government and non-government scientists. Nevertheless, from my perspective, recent decades have seen an erosion of provincial support for applied wildlife science to support effective management of BC's wildlife populations and habitats. But there is now great potential for, and interest in, changing this trend. Several BC universities now have strong and growing research and training programs in wildlife and conservation science—programs which have or desire close linkages with other wildlife researchers and practitioners in government, industry and non-profit sectors. As one example, we have recently launched the Wildlife Coexistence research group in UBC's Faculty of Forestry, with a goal of creating and supporting rigorous research and training in human-wildlife coexistence in BC and around the world. This group is supported by a Canada Research Chair in



a place of mind

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Terrestrial Mammal Conservation and complemented by many interdisciplinary researchers in UBC's Faculty of Forestry and Biodiversity Research Centre, as well as collaborators at other institutions.

Since starting this group in 2017, I have been impressed by the quantity and quality of undergraduate and graduate students who are motivated to learn about wildlife conservation and create positive change in wildlife management in BC. But many of these students lack suitable opportunities to gain research and work experience on provincial wildlife management challenges. At the same time, I have interacted with government and non-government practitioners who have identified critical gaps in knowledge or action regarding wildlife management, yet lack the capacity or resources to collect, analyze or synthesize data that could help address these challenges. I see great potential to help address these two shortfalls by better integrating university-based research and training with government-focused implementation of wildlife science and management.

Prior to starting my position at UBC, I spent several years working on wildlife issues in Alberta, where I perceived closer collaboration between university researchers and government practitioners. Through work with the Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute, I gained first-hand experience in the value of large-scale, coordinated wildlife monitoring for improving understanding of wildlife population changes and informing regional land-use planning. However, in some instances, I also experienced the frustration of disconnect between monitoring efforts and management needs. I believe we have a tremendous opportunity in BC to learn from the successes and failures of other jurisdictions, and to develop a world-class initiative in the adaptive management of wildlife and their habitats. I envision this initiative as a close partnership among academic, government, and non-government contributors, who collaboratively identify, develop and implement applied research and monitoring efforts designed to inform, evaluate, and improve wildlife management in BC.

I believe that such an initiative would foster the spirit and substance of collaboration that is necessary to tackle wildlife management challenges in such a large and diverse province as BC. Through focused research projects guided by an overarching socio-ecological vision and linked to management needs, this initiative could help address many of the challenges identified in the government's Wildlife and Habitat document. These include: enhancing collaboration among stakeholders, providing better information on the status of wildlife and habitats, diagnosing wildlife population declines, characterizing impacts of human activity and climate change, mitigating human-wildlife conflicts, and leveraging funding opportunities for wildlife science and management across multiple sectors.

As I strive to advance my research and training program in Wildlife Coexistence at UBC, I am truly excited by the opportunity to do so in close collaboration with other researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders working on the management of BC's unique wildlife resources. I am pleased to see the Government of British Columbia's efforts to engage the public in improving wildlife management, and I look forward to seeing the outcomes of this process. I would relish the opportunity to become more involved in the government's planning and implementation efforts, so please do not hesitate to follow up with me. And thank you for considering this letter.

Sincerely,

A. Cole Burton, PhD
Canada Research Chair in Terrestrial Mammal Conservation
wildlife.forestry.ubc.ca