

July 31, 2018

To:
Honourable Doug Donaldson
Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

RE: Empowering British Columbians to conserve, restore and enhance wildlife and wildlife habitat

Dear Minister,

The revision of wildlife and habitat management approaches in British Columbia has the potential to be the most significant policy change in British Columbia enacted in decades, and along with the proposed Species-At-Risk Act, will substantially alter the lives of British Columbians. I applaud the efforts of this government to engage British Columbian's on how to preserve their vital wildlife resources. Changes to the way we manage wildlife and habitat will certainly change British Columbian's interaction with their environment, how they make a living, and ultimately the quality of life for all. I would like to offer my input to this process in this letter, as a stakeholder at upcoming meetings, or in any other capacity you see fit.

As a professional working in the natural resource and conservation industries these changes significantly alter my business and my profession. I am a scientist and wildlife professional active in British Columbia and Yukon (www.hcwildlife.ca) and a director of the BC Chapter of The Wildlife Society (www.bctws.ca). My work includes helping design, implement and analyze large scale ecological experiments on northern goshawk, grassland birds, bison, and Fraser River sockeye. I provide expert advice on the management of wildlife and wildlife habitat to government, First Nations, Crown Corporations, and the agriculture, forestry and mining industries. Currently, my company is leading collaborative projects identifying and managing habitat for wolverine, maintaining functional connectivity in habitat for lynx in northern forests, and reducing hydroelectric and fishing impacts on Fraser River salmon, among others. I believe that through the process of collecting and communicating wildlife data we can bring communities together.

Past efforts to manage wildlife and wildlife habitat have failed British Columbians. Despite years of land-use planning and improvements in metrics such as Wildlife Habitat Areas, Ungulate Winter Range, Old Growth Management Areas, etc. there are still precipitous declines in many wildlife populations (e.g., caribou, moose, songbirds, goshawks) and real or perceived overabundance of others (e.g., deer, bears, cougars, wolves). There is a disconnect between the abundance of wildlife and the achievement of habitat objectives that makes population declines seem, on the surface, surprising. For example, over 60% of the land in the Kootenay region has already received some form of conservation or management designation for wildlife. Despite this there is continued decline of mountain caribou and grassland songbirds, conflicts between predators, deer, and people, and calls for both reduced regulation and



more protected areas. In the Omineca and Skeena regions declines in moose and northern goshawk worry many. Grassland songbird declines continue, and there are many other examples.

How can there be such broad wildlife and habitat protections and still so many declines in key wildlife species including keystone herbivores such as moose?

British Columbia needs leadership from the Province that will empower us to develop resilient wildlife management policies and institutions. These policies and institutions must be adaptable to change and responsive to communities, while still following a long-term vision to maintain intact functioning ecosystems. New wildlife management policy must balance threats to wildlife and discord between users or suffer perpetual political conflict; conflict between conservation and industrial users, conflict between urban and rural communities, and conflict between the north and south regions of the province.

New wildlife policies and institutions must be developed to create resilient ways of managing wildlife that are inclusive of First Nations, local communities, growing populations, and changing demographics. These efforts must be responsive to the ever-changing environments and receptive to the need for communities to support themselves by taking an active role. Climate change alone will require a dynamic, not static, view of ecosystems that has not been incorporated into previous management frameworks. However, the only way to combat ever changing environments is to promote the health and resiliency of current ecosystems; climate change only heightens the need to protect the remaining intact undisturbed ecosystems of British Columbia from disturbance and fragmentation. At the very least, we need these remaining ecosystems as baselines to know what we've lost and determine the influence of climate change on what was there.

There are many models from within British Columbia and beyond to use as guides to develop effective management frameworks that are resilient and responsive. The Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation (<https://hctf.ca>), Fish and Wildlife Conservation Program (<http://fwcp.ca/>), the Columbia Basin Trust (<https://ourtrust.org/>) all remain as pillars of wildlife management despite years of underfunding and a lack of coordinated effort between programs. Forest Renewal BC and subsequently The Forest Science Program of the Forest Investment account managed millions of dollars in inputs to inventory, mitigation, and conservation through their science programs before being disbanded. The Fish and Wildlife Branch Research Section, Biogeoclimatic Ecosystem Mapping, and other ecosystem mapping programs were either severely contracted or disbanded and no longer provide valuable support services to researchers, communities, or industry.

Programs such as the First Nations Fisheries Council (www.fnfisheriescouncil.ca/), Skeena Fisheries Alliance (www.skeenafisheries.ca/), Lower Fraser Rivers Fisheries Alliance (www.lffa.ca/) and the Okanagan Nations Alliance Fisheries (www.svilx.org/fisheries/) provide good examples of how to work with First Nations or local communities to manage conservation, harvest and monitoring of wildlife. These cases are fisheries orientated but could be easily extended to terrestrial wildlife. In the Yukon, Renewable Resource Councils (RRCs) developed under the Umbrella Final Agreement (<https://cyfn.ca/agreements/umbrella-final-agreement/>) provide an integrated community voice and guidance into local resource management issues. RRCs and the Inuvialuit Final Agreement

(<https://wmacns.ca/>) are two examples of effective co-management models currently operating. They also link First Nations with other communities and government in an active and ongoing process.

Back in British Columbia Farmland Advantage (www.farmlandadvantage.com/) seeks to do conservation work to improve the relationship between producers/farmers and biodiversity by linking science and conservation with agricultural practice through Payment of Ecosystem Service programs. What links these examples together is their reliance on active First Nations or community engagement that is supported by larger level provincial, territorial, and federal governments.

With these examples in mind, a new approach to wildlife and habitat management in British Columbia must include:

- 1) Strong leadership from the Province both in strategic planning, policy guidance and support services. This will help develop the coordinated long-term vision and provide required backing to local conservation, restoration, and enhancement efforts.
- 2) Incorporating First Nations, local communities, and local non-profit organizations into a diversity of management boards, co-management projects, and active efforts to conserve, restore, and enhance wildlife.
- 3) Reviving scientific research, particularly restoration science, as an integral component of the provincial Provinces wildlife program. We cannot restore our degraded systems to some previous state, instead we must use science to learn about the cause of precipitous declines and how to conserve, restore and enhance wildlife.
- 4) Develop monitoring and support programs that provide information to researchers, restoration and enhancement projects, management boards and industry. This program should be an integrated component of all conservation, restoration and enhancement projects.
- 5) Training for the next generation of wildlife professionals. Developing a community-of-practice for wildlife professionals and providing jobs that have British Columbians actively employed in wildlife and wildlife habitat management is essential. Training programs must be participatory, innovative, incorporate First Nations, and link students from post-secondary institutions to careers conserving, restoring, and enhancing wildlife in British Columbia.

These are admittedly lofty goals, but they must be addressed. The arduous process of integrated resource management began at the Committee on Resource and the Environment (CORE) and Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMP) tables, this has left communities with a strong legacy but limited hope. Many of the benefits of this long process have been left languishing as rural communities struggle. Efforts to renew management must be cognisant of the past, but must incorporate new approaches that recognize changing climates, new demographics, and altered economies. We need a new paradigm.

We must revive strategic management of wildlife and habitat in British Columbia by empowering communities to move beyond planning exercises and into active conservation, restoration, and enhancement. It is only through empowerment and active engagement, led and supported by the Province, that we can revitalize wildlife management and bring communities and constituencies together. The hope is that in the process we will also conserve and promote wildlife and the natural history of our home.

Again, I applaud these efforts of the Province to engage British Columbians and I would also like to offer any further help I can provide in any way you see fit, specifically through direct conversation or participation as a stakeholder in the continued engagement process.

Sincerely,



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cc'd Honourable George Heyman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Policy