

July 25, 2018

The Honourable Doug Donaldson
Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations,
and Rural Development
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C.
V8V 1X4

The Honourable Scott Fraser
Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C.
V8V 1X4

Dear Ministers Donaldson & Fraser,

Over the last few months, your government has announced a series of initiatives with First Nations concerning Recognition and Reconciliation, as directed through the 2017 mandate letters to Ministers where your government will be fully adopting and implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

More recently your government has adopted Draft Principles that Guide the Province of British Columbia's Relationship with Indigenous Peoples. This is, of course, a long overdue responsibility of government that the BC Wildlife Federation (BCWF) supports.

We observe a common theme in the negotiations provincially is the desire by First Nations to have control over and or manage fish and wildlife populations. It appears your negotiators are all too keen to hand this over to gain agreements at a variety of levels. These actions, in turn, have resulted in First Nations demanding the cessation of hunting by resident hunters, especially in the Cariboo region.

There are also similar examples in fisheries.

The BCWF is concerned your senior staffs do not consider non-Indigenous interests in fish and wildlife important and leave it to your field staff to consult with us after the fact. Government is making decisions on the access to the landscape and wildlife populations in isolation of our interests in the absence of clear and consistent policy direction. Often the focus is on securing improved access and allocation of fish and wildlife for First Nations and not the long-term sustainability of the resource.

Within the Ministry of FLNRORD, regional fish and wildlife staff are set adrift in their dealings with First Nations after negotiations are well advanced which results in poor decisions and escalating tensions between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples. To be candid, it appears your Ministry, and especially Minister Fraser's Ministry, are willing to give all rights and responsibilities for fish and wildlife to First Nations without any consideration of the general public's interests. I remind you in the recent Ahousaht Decision, Chief Justice Humphries stated that non-Indigenous interests should be involved in the development of fisheries management plans that affect their interests; this involvement is required for true reconciliation and recognition.

I write this letter with regret as I feel we do have a good working relationship with your government. I do foresee growing bitterness amongst non-Indigenous people over what appears to be an attitude within your senior ranks that the public has little consideration or involvement in discussions that affect our access to fish and wildlife and are distracted from addressing the larger and potentially unifying sustainability issue.

The BCWF spends a lot of money and volunteer time on wildlife habitat and our members are starting to question to what end? The message here is that your senior people need to be reminded that they have a responsibility to represent all interests in fish and wildlife not just satisfying the demands of First Nations.

The BCWF proposes that guidelines be provided to your senior staff that any agreements relative to fish and wildlife must include principles for allocation between First Nations and the general public. That is, after FSC there will be a guarantee of fish and wildlife for use by residents of BC assuming of course that there is no conservation concern. We are aware that FSC requirements have significantly increased from a decade ago and believe that the factors limiting abundance should be addressed. The need for agreements across the landscape between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities will be necessary at some point if residents are to have reasonable access to fish and wildlife.

I would like to discuss these issues with you, as I am concerned with the blowing winds of discontent on the uncertain future for the access to fish and wildlife.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours in conservation,



Harvey Andrusak
President
BC Wildlife Federation

Copies to:

Dr. Andrew Weaver, Leader of the Green Party of British Columbia
Andrew Wilkinson, MLA, Leader of the Liberal Party of British Columbia