



**PRESENTATION TO THE BRITISH COLUMBIA LEGISLATIVE
SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

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June 2019**

On behalf of its 43,000 plus members, The BC Wildlife Federation welcomes this opportunity to address the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services on the vital issues that relate to natural resource management sustainability in British Columbia.

Investing to create a legacy of fish and wildlife diversity and abundance

The BC Wildlife Federation (BCWF) is the leading conservation organization in British Columbia. The BCWF promotes the conservation and wise use of British Columbia's fish, wildlife and their habitats and is recognized as such by stakeholders' province wide.

Throughout its history and under various names, British Columbia's fish and wildlife management agency has been among the most understaffed and underfunded of any of the fish and wildlife agencies in North America.

From 1974 to 2010, B.C.'s population nearly doubled from 2.4 to 4.5 million people. While the provincial budget increased nearly five times, the budget for natural resource management barely moved. When we bring this up with our elected officials, we are told that all the money goes to the big three; health, education and social services, yet when we remove the big three from the budget, we find out everything else tripled. From 1998-2011 the renewable resource ministry budgets declined by nearly 56 per cent and from 2002-2010 the number of full-time equivalent employees declined by 27 per cent. It isn't that health care, education and social services are taking up the entire budget; it is that everything other than natural resource management takes up the entire budget.

We are seeing this lack of investment in many of our fish and wildlife populations. Mountain caribou are in decline across most of the province; some populations are so low they will likely disappear in the next two decades. Chilcotin and Thompson river steelhead, once iconic runs in British Columbia, have gone from 3,000 to 4,000 fish returning annually with a catch and kill fishery, to being under threat to imminent extinction. Moose populations in the central interior have experienced 50-70 per cent declines in the last decade.

Mule deer and elk populations are also declining in parts of the province. British Columbia is failing to adequately protect its natural resources, which is being exacerbated by the mountain pine beetle epidemic, forest fires and climate change effects on forest ecosystem structure and productivity.

Meanwhile, after years of decline, the number of people taking up hunting has increased from 86,000 in 2005 to 112,000 in 2015 – more than a 30 per cent increase. This year 68,000 resident hunters applied for only 8,500 moose hunting lottery opportunities. Hunting in British Columbia has changed for both indigenous and non-indigenous communities. For the former, it is becoming increasingly difficult to exercise constitutionally protected rights to harvest wildlife. For non-indigenous communities hunting continues to be a family activity, where people are increasingly looking for sustainably and organically grown wild game. Both communities have a unifying interest in the sustainability of wildlife and wildlife habitat as highlighted by the Moose Solutions Round Table in the Cariboo hosted by the Tsilhqot'in National and provincial government.

While most jurisdictions in North America have dedicated funding models for Wildlife, B.C. does not. Currently 100 per cent of freshwater fishing licence fees are dedicated between the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation and the Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC; only \$2.6 of \$14.5 million of hunting licence fees are dedicated to Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation.

Despite this disparity, we recognize the significant potential for the province's fisheries and wildlife resources to contribute to future regional economic development and are confident that the government is recognising this fact. The BCWF congratulates the provincial government in contribution to the BC Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund over the next five years. There needs to be a more permanent and strategic approach to watershed sustainability for all values including fish and wildlife.

The BCWF is encouraged the government has increased the commitment of improving wildlife management by 3 million dollars this fiscal year and 10 Million dollars next year and to look at revenues generated by wise use of our fish and wildlife resources beyond that of solely using revenue from licence sales – as licence and tag fees are not the only revenue generated by the use of fish and wildlife. There has not been recognition of revenue generated by anglers and hunters who spend on everything from vehicles, fuel, boats and motors to gear and clothing, in addition to hotel and restaurant meals expenditures.

In 2013, freshwater angling was worth nearly one billion dollars and 2011-12 expenditures by resident hunters generated \$230 million dollars per year. This is in addition to the hundreds of millions generated by park visitors and ecotourism. We believe that successive governments have not adequately taken this economic activity into account when budgeting for resource management, particularly fish and wildlife and their habitats.

Natural resource use and extraction has an impact on British Columbia's shared natural capital. Government should be collecting rent and dedicating a portion of it to fish and wildlife conservation. Activities such as ecotourism, wildlife viewing, mining, heli-skiing, oil and gas, and logging should all contribute to natural resource conservation. Non-renewable natural resource extraction will have a long-term negative effect on biodiversity and there is currently no funding mechanism to compensate for these losses at a landscape or watershed level.

We see the bond is breaking between our young people and the natural world. Hunting and fishing are a fundamental part of Canadian society. A growing body of research links our mental, physical, and spiritual health directly to our association with nature. i.e. “nature deficit disorder” due to an increasing lack of connection to the land.

The following BCWF recommendations to the Standing Committee of Finance come at a critical time. Economic diversification is highly desirable especially during this current period of environmental uncertainty in rural B.C. Socially, we need to continue to have our youth connected to nature. Furthermore, now more than ever we must address the increasing human footprint on our province and work collaboratively to ensure conservation of our landscapes and watersheds for future generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION # 1 – Establish a Wildlife Governance and Funding Models in 2020

The Premier mandated Minister of Forest Lands and Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD) to: *“Improve wildlife management and habitat conservation and collaborate with stakeholders to develop long and short-term strategies to manage B.C.’s wildlife resources”*

Consistent with the feedback from consultation with stakeholders to improve wildlife management conducted by FLNRORD, the BCWF supports the establishment of a Wildlife Advisory Committee to provide advice to the Minister on wildlife policy issues and the expenditures through a permanent Wildlife Management Fund to support wildlife management activities by government, the private sector and First Nations. The 10 Million dollars per year increase committed to improving Wildlife to 2020 should be used to initiate the fund and opportunities pursued to diversify the sources of income. The fund would be an effective means to leverage community technical and financial support from both indigenous and non-indigenous communities that would support multiyear initiatives. The following principles should apply:

1. Those who contribute funds should have a say in how they are allocated; those who contribute funds should get clear information on how those funds were spent
2. Allocating funds must be transparent and accountable and will be subject to freedom of information requests.
3. First Nations must be included in allocations, in their role as wildlife and habitat managers

RECOMMENDATION # 2.- Improve the Forest and Range Practices Act

Improve landscape level management of forest resources through the introduction of regional management planning to increase opportunities for collaboration with indigenous and non-indigenous communities;

Establish objectives that support the sustainability and resilience for important forest values at the landscape level particularly, aquatic and terrestrial habitats and fish and wildlife populations.

Ensure governments has the authority and capacity to manage B.C. public forest resources including the ability to evaluate revise and approve operational plans and requirements that require forest tenure holders to protect the environmental, social and cultural values.

Increase public confidence in forest and range management by increasing transparency and public access to forest management information. Ensure that Forest inventories and science are available to inform forest policy and management direction.

RECOMMENDATION # 3 Natural Resources Practices Board

Increase the effectiveness of water and land management through the establishment and funding independent Natural Resources Practices Board reporting to the legislature that expands on the role of the existing Forest Practices Board to cover all legislation administered by the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations.

Independent performance and compliance audits and reporting should be provided by the Natural Resources Practices Board to the public on key sustainability issues at a landscape and watershed scale to increase the effectiveness and performance of resource management in the province.

Government should establish and fund a science secretariat to serve as a resource for research and knowledge to assist the Natural Resources Practices Board in collaboration with universities, technical colleges and private and public sector professionals with the required scientific expertise.

RECOMMENDATION #4 –Water Sustainability Fund

Establish a 75 Million-dollar BC Watershed Sustainability Fund to support watershed stewardship groups, educational institutions, agricultural producers, industry, fisheries interests and others, alongside federal, provincial, First Nations and local governments focus on collaboratively protecting maintaining the functioning of BC's watersheds.

A Water Sustainability Fund would be a permanent fund raised to invest in initiatives and efforts that deliver long-term water and watershed sustainability across B.C., including:

- collaborative partnerships at the watershed scale;
- modernized watershed-based land-use plans;
- community-driven restoration initiatives, and;
- innovation supporting province-wide advancements in watershed protection.

Healthy forests and wetland systems provide a host of **watershed services**, including water purification, ground water and surface flow regulation, erosion control, and streambank stabilization, to the benefit of fisheries and wildlife.

- The importance of these **watershed services** will only increase as water quality becomes a critical issue and be more expensive to deal with in the face of climate change.

SUMMARY

British Columbia is fortunate to have a rich diversity of fish and wildlife resources, but it is starting to disappear. We are adding more people to British Columbia's population every day, putting more stress on our natural resources, and at the same time cutting funding and capacity to steward those natural resources. Without proper funding this downward trend in our natural capital will accelerate.

The 43,000 and growing membership of the BC Wildlife Federation firmly believes it is our collective responsibility to conserve these resources. It is critical that we recognize the challenges and opportunities that we face in maintaining B.C.'s diversity of species over the long-term, including investing in measures now that will prevent future costly species or habitat recovery such as the mountain caribou recovery project or others. We also strongly believe in the benefits of building on existing fish and wildlife management and education programs as well as investing in new initiatives.

We invite the B.C. government to join us in maintaining the province's wealth through sound strategy in conserving our diverse wildlife and fish resources and providing education and awareness in conservation and the outdoors. We look forward to working together on the recommendations made on behalf of the membership of the BC Wildlife Federation.