

Q4 Regional Roundup

Keep up to date with the pressing issues in your region. Here is an overview of the major projects, initiatives and conservation issues that are happening in the regions across British Columbia.

Region 1: Vancouver Island

- **Access:**

Access is still an issue but now there seems to be a little movement. Mosaic has been communicating with various user clubs on the island to renew access agreements. Access through gates is still an issue as more and more of them are locked up. The shut down of timber companies due to the poor markets has created a lack of communication as to what areas are open and what are closed.

- **The Cowichan River and Chinook:**

The Cowichan river had more than 10,000 Chinook up the river. This has been the fourth year in a row with over 10,000 Chinook in the river, yet there are still no closures being relaxed that were originally put in place to improve the returns. In addition, the DFO have provided no communication as to the opportunities for salmon fishing this summer. The speculation is that it will be the same as last year, if not worse.

- **Elk Populations:**

There is talk about another elk population explosion on the island. Some of the herds in the Cowichan Valley are starting to show up in different areas that they were not seen in the past. This usually means a bull has taken some cows for himself from the main herd and has started his own herd in a new area. This may cause some issues as the elk get pushed into urban areas, such as in the town of Yubou where elk have taken up residence.

Region 2: Lower Mainland

- **Waterfowl Heritage Day:**

The regional president is refining a submission of opposition regarding the Provincial Hunting and Trapping Advisory Team (PHTAT) recommendation to repeal Waterfowler Heritage Days. Since the 1990's, when Waterfowler Heritage Days were introduced, the region has used these days as a tool to mentor hundreds of youth in the sport of waterfowling. That is a substantial amount of new hunter recruitment for not only the region, but for the clubs that take advantage of this opportunity for youth. The recommendation to repeal Waterfowler Heritage Days and dump the 2 days back into the regular season would be very short sighted.

- **Firearms Closure along Sea to Sky Corridor:**

In 2019, Region 2 had the opportunity to comment on a proposed 400 metre firearms closure in the Sea to Sky corridor from Squamish to Pemberton. Feedback was provided to the regional president, Mark McDonald, by the Squamish Valley and Pemberton clubs, to provide balanced comments and suggestions that will hopefully avoid a full 400-meter closure in the Whistler to Pemberton section. The region's submission to the Regional biologist was considered, and as a result there are less closures than originally proposed.

Region 4E: East Kootenays

- **Regional meeting topics:**

At the recent regional meeting several noteworthy topics were brought up for discussion including:

- The Provincial government's Improved Management Plan (or lack thereof), especially considering the recent "Together for Wildlife Strategy" draft document.
- The Regional Forest, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development's (FLNRORD) plans to move the needle forward. Again, there is a primary concern around the lack of any actual pathway to implementing productive change. There is a lot of recommendations from the FLNRORD biologists, but absolutely no landscape-level plans.
- Whether or not to support a River Alliance organization to ban jet boats on some of the rivers in the area.
- Aligning our Antler Fund Educational scholarship with those provided by some of our local clubs.
- The importance of optics and the monetary value of advertising our message to the general public.
- Hunting and fishing regulations with much discussion on the current LEH for Big Horn Sheep in WMU 4-22.

- **Additional tasks being covered:**

Over the quarter, the regional president has been assessing and responding to various applications for recreational and commercial developments in the area. He has been sending letters and following up with the regional FLNRORD Section Head and their senior biologist on issues concerning fish, wildlife and habitat in the East Kootenays. In addition, the region is attempting to make headway with First Nations regarding the direction of wildlife management in the region.

Region 4W: West Kootenays

- **Regional Meeting:**

The next regional meeting will be on March 8th, 2020 in Nelson at the Nelson District Rod and Gun Club.

- **Concern for Wildlife:**

The morale of the clubs and members in region remains low regarding fish and wildlife being managed for increased populations and enhanced harvest opportunities. While wildlife populations seem to be slowly increasing in some areas, we have a long way to go to enjoy viable hunting opportunities. Things are looking better in the East Kootenay, resulting in West Kootenay hunters often traveling there for their hunts.

Region 6: Skeena

- **Cuts in daily limit of shrimp and prawn:**

The year started off with the cut in the daily limit of shrimp and prawn from 200 a day to 125. In the north this has nothing to do with conservation but a reallocation of the resource. This follows the reallocation of chinook on tidal licenses. The question for 2020 is what further actions can we

expect from DFO this year? If we are lucky maybe we will get a small fishery on the Skeena, but the Ocean will likely see in season closures.

- **Skeena River:**

Regarding the Skeena there is a proposal to implement a Pound Trap for the purpose of testing and research to see if it is a feasible option in protecting specific runs. This is loosely based on the Columbia River project which is shared by several First Nations and the commercial industry with limits and monitoring in place. The pound trap on the Skeena is for one band with the plan of using the pound trap to replace the Tye Test Fishery. We could likely see multiple pound traps on the Skeena and its tributaries by the other bands throughout the region.

- **Dungeness and Halibut:**

The region saw one of the largest commercial Dungeness Crab harvests of all time. Instead of closing the season the harvest continued to record numbers. We will see how this record-breaking harvest will play out over the next couple of years. The region is also anticipating reductions in Halibut harvest in the upcoming season. This will be decided once the International Halibut Committee Commission meets.

- **Hunting Restrictions:**

The region is facing a multitude of cuts and restrictions for hunting. The proposals that were accepted by the local ministry was from their office, guide outfitters and First Nations. When the Skeena Hunting Advisory Committee was eliminated by the ministry, it seems like residents have no longer been involved in the process. As the rules continue to change, will we have future opportunities let alone the next generation?

- **Buried Wetlands:**

In Kitimat, there is rising concern and an aim to prevent wetlands and critical habitat being decimated for a rail yard.

Region 7A: Omineca

- **Regional and Provincial Priorities:**

- Increase pressure on the Provincial government to provide the necessary resources (financial and human) to address the following concerns but not limited to within the Forest Range Practices Act:
 - a) elimination of glyphosates spray
 - b) harvest practices
 - c) cut blocks
 - d) mono-cultured forests
 - e) FSR roads blocking fish access
 - f) development and implementation of land use planning for resource extraction that considers all values

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- Increase pressure on the Provincial and Federal governments (DFO) to address the collapse of Salmon populations throughout the Province of British Columbia to include adding Interior Fraser Steelhead to the Species at Risk Act listing.

Region 7B: Peace

- **Region 7B AGM:**

The 2019 AGM was held in Hudson's Hope on Sunday, December 1, 2019. The election resulted in Gerry Paille voted in as President, Carl Rose voted in as Vice President and Royce Stark voted in as secretary. The AGM was a "marathon" meeting with FLNRORD's biologist Mike Bridger providing an update on his caribou recovery work and leading the discussion on the proposed regulations changes for the 2020-2022 period. Newly appointed Director of Resource Management, Diane Chisholm also attended, as did Member of Parliament Bob Zimmer.

- The proposal that prompted the most discussion was the one to open the last week of October to any mule deer buck followed by four-point only mule deer season for the entire month of November. The concern with mule deer is a lack of mature bucks post hunting season. Locally, BCWF members and the public have been encouraged through social media and local news outlets to submit their comments, for and against, on the government's engagement website.
- Mike Bridger described the wolf radio collaring and removal efforts that, along with maternal penning of caribou, have had a positive impact on calf survival and caribou numbers for the Moberly or Klinse-Za herd. Wolf removal will continue in the South Peace, Chinchaga and north of Pink Mountain, and possibly be expanded to include the Graham River area, all efforts aimed at caribou recovery.
- MP Bob Zimmer fielded questions about the implications of Bill C-71 and the Liberal Party of Canada's election commitment to ban "military-style assault rifles" and to allow cities to regulate handguns. One big concern is that the election commitments will be implemented through an order in council rather than through debate in the House and Senate. The BCWF has launched a member campaign to let the prime minister and other MPs know its position on firearms ownership by law abiding citizens.

- **Northeast Roundtable:**

The website related to this initiative is now live: <http://nestakeholderroundtable.ca> The meeting calendar and minutes from previous meetings are on the website. The purpose of the Roundtable as Described on the Website:

"The Roundtable serves as a communication and engagement vehicle to support discussions related to provincial and regional land and resource initiatives in Northeast BC, and to assist the Provincial Government in identifying community and stakeholder interests."

- **Land Transfers Via Treaty Land Entitlement:**

The statutory decision maker has given the go ahead for the establishment of a Section 16 Land Act Withdrawal at Charlie Lake and a Section 17 withdrawal at Red Creek near Fort St. John to support Blueberry River First Nation (BRFN) Treaty Land Entitlement Negotiations. This is an early, but next step in the land transfer process. The transfer of these lands has become of great concern to residents in the Charlie Lake and Red Creek areas and has some implications for wildlife, as these

are undeveloped parcels that are currently good wildlife habitat. The BRFN and the BCWF both have concerns about the habitat loss resulting from the building of Site C and making the Charlie Lake and Red Creek parcels available for development would seem to be counter to those concerns.

- **North East Stakeholders (Stakeholder Led):**

Two representatives from the NE Stakeholders group recently met with council and the chief of the Doig River First Nation (DRFN) to provide some background on what the stakeholder group is all about. Engaging First Nations directly is a positive initiative, which was confirmed by the response of the DRFN group. There is no confirmed date for the next meeting of the North East Stakeholders group.

- **Upcoming Club Events:**

- Chetwynd Rod and Gun Club: Date to be determined (late March) Dinner Fundraiser; Father's Day Sporting Clays Shoot June 21, 2020
- Dawson Creek Sportsman's Club: Gun Show April 4 & 5, 2020
- North Peace Rod and Gun Club: Kid's Day February 1, 2020; CORE for Youth and Women February 10, 12, 14 & 15, 2020; Fundraiser March 7, 2020

Region 8: Okanagan

- **Southern Interior Mule Deer Project:**

The Southern Interior Mule Deer Project continues to be one of our main efforts. Our volunteers have worked hard to recover most of the cameras we deployed over the summer, swap cards and batteries, and re-deploy the cameras to winter range targets. Some preliminary camera captures show that some areas are predominately white-tailed deer, while others are skewed to mule deer. Predators including black bears, grizzly bears, lynx, cougar, coyotes, and wolves have all been found to frequent our camera target areas. The SD cards are in the process of being analyzed by the project's research team, and we're eager to get a look at the preliminary results.

- **Purchase of Gilpin Range Land:**

We have sent a letter of support for The Southern Interior Land Trust's (SILT) funding request to purchase a 109-hectare tract of land in the Gilpin Range area near Grand Forks. The property is year-round habitat for a healthy herd of 200-300 California bighorn sheep. Rams and ewes of all ages use the land. It is also excellent winter and spring range for mule deer and white-tailed deer. It also provides habitat for several species at risk, including rattlesnakes, gopher snakes, spadefoot toads, tiger salamanders and badgers.

- **Chronic Wasting Disease:**

Regional clubs stepped up and provided freezers for drop off locations in the Okanagan for voluntary sampling for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) on ungulate heads. Heads collected thus far are being delivered to our regional biologists shortly, with sampling to take place for both CWD and tuberculosis infections. So far, none of the heads tested in B.C. have come back positive for CWD.

- **Southern Interior Cougar Collaring Project:**

The region provided letters of support to Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation (HCTF) and to the BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF) for funding for the Southern Interior Cougar Collaring Project. We're planning to assist with in-kind volunteer efforts to capture and collar up to 20 cougars this winter. The region donated \$5,000 to the project, and individual clubs have also donated funds. All the funding will go to boots-on-the-ground efforts on this project.

- **Invasive Species:**

The region is going to work with our fisheries biologists to host a town hall meeting this winter on invasive species. We feel public education is essential to raising awareness of the impacts of invasive species on our ecosystems.

- **Conservation Officer Service Update:**

The region is encouraged by the results of a largescale investigation into moose poaching incidents on the west side of Okanagan Lake. Several charges have been laid, with some prosecutions and hopefully more to come. The COS is thanking local concerned hunters who helped with the investigation. Without our eyes and ears, their job is virtually impossible to conduct. The COS has also reported that cougar and bear conflicts are down this year. Wildlife conflict issues have soaked up considerable time for the COS the past few years, so it's good to see that our officers are able to devote more time on enforcements and patrols, and less time dealing with "garbage bears." With the past summer seeing lots of rainfall, we suspect that the bumper crop of berries this fall kept many bears where they belong – in the wild.

- **Fishing Regulations Cycle:**

Our clubs have been tasked with providing input on the upcoming fishing regulations cycle, with local FHAC meetings to be held in April/May 2020. We expect regulations harmonization on kokanee fisheries in Wood and Kalamalka Lakes to be a topic of discussion. We're also looking at the battle against invasive fish species, especially yellow perch, and exploring regulation options to counter the spread of these fish into our native ecosystems.

- **Invasive Mussels:**

With the federal election now over, we're engaging with our local MPs to seek more funding to combat the potential introduction of invasive zebra and quagga mussels into our waters. The potential impact to our local fisheries should an infestation occur would be catastrophic. Estimates of \$42 million annually to deal with mussels in Okanagan Lake should make the plea for preventative funding a no-brainer, but it's up to us to outline the importance of this issue to those holding the funding purse strings.