
Background on Budget 2020

On August 7, 2019, the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services made the following recommendations to the to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

Environmental Protection and Conservation

28. Advance water sustainability in British Columbia by providing a dedicated, sustainable, annual funding source for First Nations, local government, local watershed protections agencies and community partnerships.

Fish and Wildlife Conservation and Management

29. Increase funding for fish and wildlife conservation, management and data collection, including exploring potential revenue sources such as fees from hunting, fishing, natural resource and nature-based tourism enterprises for this purpose.

Budget 2020 Consultation Report 2019-08-07 Page 28

Fish and Wildlife Conservation and Management

Several organizations expressed concerns about BC's fish and wildlife resources, and funding and capacity to steward those resources. The BC Wildlife Federation noted that as the human population increases, more stress is being placed on natural resources. One of their chapters, Region 7B (Peace-Liard), shared that it is difficult to determine expenditures in this area as responsibilities are shared across multiple branches and ministries; they also reported that stakeholders are increasingly paying for activities, such as wildlife inventory and prescribed burns, which should be core government responsibilities. They further highlighted issues with staffing, particularly with filling positions in the northeast and with turnover in the conservation office service.

Another BC Wildlife Federation chapter, Region 5 (Cariboo-Chilcotin), observed that fish and wildlife are an integral part of the lifestyle for many residents, pointing out challenges with the decline in a number of species, including mountain cariboo, mule deer, and chilcotin steelhead. They emphasized a need to increase funding for fish and wildlife management, conservation, protection and restoration, as well improving data collection to make well-informed decisions and management plans for all species. Several organizations also specifically identified establishing and funding comprehensive species-at-risk legislation as part of the solution.

The BC Wildlife Federation, their regional chapters 5 and 7B, and the Spruce City Wildlife Association, suggested directing fees from hunting and fishing to fund conservation and management. The Spruce City Wildlife Association further recommended requiring all users, including wildlife viewing, ecotourism, forestry and mining, to contribute.

The Committee also learned about the impacts of flood infrastructure and diking infrastructure on local ecology. The Watershed Watch Salmon Society explained that floodgates, pumps and dikes impede the passage of fish, noting that in the Lower Mainland alone, 1,500 kilometres of waterways are impacted by

these structures. They suggested adopting fish friendly criteria for infrastructure funding as well as providing incentives for municipalities to carry out comprehensive flood management planning in their communities. The City of Port Coquitlam supported these recommendations, noting that the BC Wild Salmon Advisory Council identified reconnecting waterways impacted by flood infrastructure as an immediate action to improve salmon populations, and that upgrades and improvements require provincial support. The Spruce City Wildlife Association brought a broader provincial lens to the issue, sharing that anywhere from one-third to one-half of the fish stream crossings in the province likely impede fish passage. They highlighted this as a critical issue for sockeye, chinook, trout and kokanee to reach spawning and rearing streams, and encouraged government to provide funding to fix these crossings.

Budget 2020 Consultation Report 2019-08-07 Page 30

Conclusions

The Committee agreed with the concerns of many British Columbians that invasive species are a critical issue requiring aggressive, urgent action, and strongly urged government to make this a priority. They shared the view of invasive species organizations about the potentially significant impact on local ecology and the provincial economy if sufficient investments and resources are not provided for prevention and response.

Another area the Committee acknowledged as underfunded is fish and wildlife conservation and management. Committee Members discussed the potential of directing hunting and other fees for this purpose and having all natural resource users contribute equitably. They also considered ideas such as establishing an arms-length agency, accountable to government, with responsibility for conservation and management. While the Committee did not come to a conclusion on the best model, they agreed that increased funding for conservation and management was required. They further supported the development of comprehensive species-at-risk legislation.

Committee Members recognized the passionate and compelling input of local watershed protection agencies and greatly appreciated their critical work in advancing water sustainability. The Committee shared their views about the importance of protecting watersheds and water supply, and recommended the provision of dedicated, annual funding to support this work.