



**Presentation to the British Columbia Legislative
Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services**

**Michael Fowler
President Region 5 BCWF
(Cariboo, Chilcotin, Coast)**

I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to address the Standing Committee on finance and Government services on behalf of those I represent. My members hope you will appreciate the merits of their concerns and wish to express their appreciation to the Committee for acknowledging part of their 2019 submission.

The British Columbia Wildlife Federation is the oldest conservation organization, with approximately 45,000 members province wide. We believe in science-based decision making as the key tool to manage our resources.

We wish to point out that the wildlife resource including fish as an integral part of the lifestyle for many residents. There are families that strictly rely on fish, wildlife for food; this is a long-standing tradition. This was recognized as a principle for discussion in the Region 5 Roundtable on Moose. In the Cariboo Region many residents feel the province is managing wildlife and fish populations to zero as the availability of wildlife has significantly declined. Examples: Mountain Caribou populations in the Itcha-Ilgachuz have declined from a population of 2800 animals to a current population of 640 animals. Cariboo Chilcotin Moose populations have declined by an estimated 50-70 percent in the same time period. (Moose are a meat and potatoes species for consumptive users) The amount of Limited Entry Hunting Authorizations available for bull moose highlights this fact.

Mule Deer populations are declining and resulting in less harvest opportunities. Resident hunters saw a reduction in bag limit of 2 bucks to a 1 buck limit along with reduction in the provincial mule deer bag limits. There is also a corresponding reduction in Limited Entry permits for antlerless Mule Deer due to low populations. Loss of wild sheep harvesting opportunities for several herds in Management Unit: 5-03.

Chilcotin Steelhead are nearing extinction, fewer than 100 fish returned to spawn from historic levels of 3000 to 4000 fish and only an estimated 38 to June 2020. This, despite concerns being raised by First Nations and resident anglers. Unfortunately, First Nations and residents are all impacted by the lack of wildlife!

COVID-19 has changed our lives significantly and it was refreshing to see the province deem hunting and fishing as essential activities. Our wildlife resource is a valuable commodity for many First Nations and resident families throughout the province as well as their mental well being.

My predecessor participated in the Cariboo Moose Solutions Round Table, hosted by the Tsilhqot'in First Nation and the Provincial Government. The following is from the facilitators of the meeting:

Attached is the final report of the April Moose Solutions Roundtable workshop in Williams Lake. It reflects the more detailed action planning done for the three top priorities identified which were:

1. Plan and undertake **access management**, especially for non-status roads, combined with forest licensee road deactivation and habitat restoration.
2. Develop a multi-faceted and integrated approach to understanding and addressing **predator impacts on prey** while also improving habitat. There is a strong desire for timely action on reducing impacts from predators.
3. Enhance population assessment methods to include Indigenous and local data sources and develop **common and accessible information platform** to inform decisions.

These three recommendations were endorsed by all the attendees! To date, no action has been taken on the recommendations as part requires funding from the province. Several of these recommendations are part of wildlife management. The Province needs to step up to the plate. First Nations frustration in lack of wildlife management is evident by blockades and other civil disobediences because of declining wildlife populations. The fact remains, if we grow moose and other wildlife populations, then many conflicts between stakeholders should disappear throughout the entire province. A key component to the current state of Wildlife Management in Region 5 is the need for sufficient and sustainable funding for wildlife management over time.

There needs to be consistent and adequate funding provided over time. If the province is to properly manage our wildlife resource, then funding is required to collect data to provide for sound scientific decisions.

British Columbia needs to have dedicated funding for wildlife management. Other jurisdictions have all implemented dedicating funding and our province is falling behind.

An example to consider is the State of Alaska which recognizes the need of its residents to access wildlife for food. The Alaska State Subsistence Act provides for their resident needs. It provides for reasonable funding and recognizes and guarantees the right of **all** Alaskans to hunt, fish and forage for food.

Wildlife in British Columbia belongs to **all** the residents of the province, and the Provincial Government has an obligation to provide fish and wildlife for **all** residents to use. My members feel the province has forgotten that many residents harvest wildlife to feed their families.

It is imperative that data be collected on both ungulates and predators to make well informed decisions and management plans for all species. There must be an effort to monitor the impacts to the land base from development. The lack of investment in our wildlife resource has led to the current state where wildlife has been negatively impacted throughout all regions. How can the wildlife be responsibly managed without required data to inform management decisions?

Lack of dedicated and sufficient funding for fish and wildlife management has gotten us to the above situation. Please review Trends in Renewable Resource Management in British Columbia – 2014. (Archibald/Eastman/Ellis/Nyberg). This document is still very relevant.

British Columbia has gone from being the best managed wildlife jurisdiction in Canada at one time to being one of the poorest. Our funding is inadequate to comparable jurisdictions to our neighbours to the south.

The solution is simple for Indigenous and non-indigenous residents: There needs to be real and sustained investment over time in wildlife management for our great province.

Our residents are also concerned that if changes are not made to wildlife management the Federal Government will assume jurisdiction and direct management of wildlife under the provisions of the Species at Risk Act, such as they have threatened to do with the Mountain Caribou. (Hunting was not responsible for the current declines.)

Recommendations:

General

To help reverse the current declines in wildlife: A Provincial Wildlife Committee be established with input from all stakeholders and provide advice to the Minister responsible on wildlife policy issues and on expenditures from a dedicated fund. My members are grateful to see the call by the province for committee representation. We have NOT seen progress on this initiative currently.

That there needs to be an overview process for resource extraction and the impacts of such activities on fish and wildlife be considered before extraction permits are granted. There should be a follow-up at completion of the project. (E.g. - The decline in our regional Caribou herds, Chilcotin Steelhead and red listing of Fisher have been due to resource extraction impacts.)

My members warned of the consequences of these actions! These consequences are not just felt by the residents by reduced opportunities but also in a flattened economic future as areas are protected or primary resource extraction permits denied to save some habitat for a long impacted but recently listed species. They believe that there needs to be balance to how we manage and impact the landscape!

Current scientific doctrine shows that fish and wildlife management is best accomplished by managing on the biological unit basis. This can often be accomplished by dividing the landscape along

watershed boundaries, however, occasionally, biological units spread across two or more watershed and larger watersheds may contain multiple biological units.

Only by performing the required scientific work (E.g. - DNA analysis, population and distribution studies) can the various subspecies be identified to ensure the vigor and variability of populations to adapt to the unexpected changes that inevitably occur in our constantly evolving natural environment.

If we were to begin assessing our resources along a biologic unit basis, the cumulative impacts of all our decisions combined with natural challenges (climate change) to our fish and wildlife will begin to highlight themselves.

We recommend that Government commit to conveying this direction to all ministries; that total cumulative impacts must be considered for all actions, proposals, and projects. This would be a long-term multi-year commitment; we would therefore like to see funding dedicated to performing the preliminary planning work this fiscal year.

There should be a permanent and sustainable Wildlife Management Fund established to support wildlife management activities by government, the private sector, and First Nations. My members feel it is essential to have the following three principles apply to the Wildlife Management Fund:

A) Those who actually contribute funds should have a say in how the funds are allocated and should receive clear information on how those funds are spent.

B) Allocating funds must be transparent, accountable and will be subject to freedom of information requests.

C) First Nations must be included in allocations, in their role as wildlife and habitat managers.

Currently, 100% of freshwater fishing fees are dedicated and divided between the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation and the Fresh Water Fisheries of British Columbia, whereas only a

very small portion of hunting license fees, Trapping royalties and Limited Entry Applications are allocated to the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation.

We propose that all hunting license fees, Trapping royalties and fees, species authorizations (tags) and LEH application fees be dedicated to fund Wildlife Management.

Anglers and hunters also contribute to the regional and provincial economy by purchasing boats, vehicles, motel stays, food, fuel, and hunting gear etc. We do not believe that the province recognizes these expenditures or connects them to hunting and fishing wildlife activities. The continued decline in opportunities have a direct impact to the economics of the province and the Cariboo Region where my members reside. The current government committed to increased wildlife funding which did NOT occur this year.

Specific

As Chilcotin Steelhead are in imminent peril of extinction, it is stridently recommended that an immediate “Emergency (Conservation) Fish Culture Intervention” as identified in the Provincial Steelhead Management Plan be instituted. First Nations and resident individuals and conservation groups should be consulted for their local knowledge and assistance to insure the project the greatest opportunity of success.

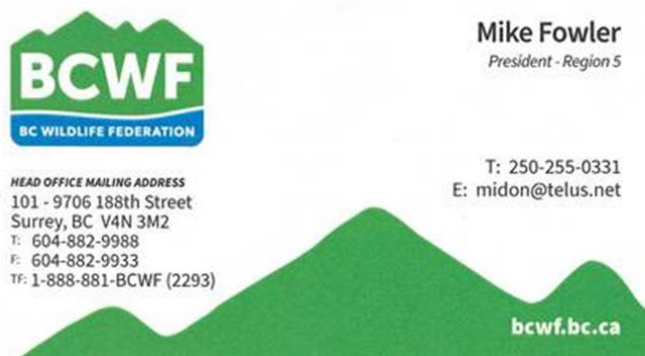
Summary:

I have directed my remarks primarily to the Cariboo Chilcotin Region and the situation as it currently exists. My membership is as frustrated and concerned as our Indigenous peoples by the lack of wildlife management.

It is plain, that if the Province wants healthy, expanded fish and wildlife populations, more funding is required since fish and wildlife funding has lagged all other provincial ministries for many years.

Please remember there are both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities that rely on these natural resources. If the province focuses on investing in growing fish and wildlife, then the needs of these communities will be met, and an important tradition sustained!

Yours in Conservation,



References:

British Columbia Limited Entry Hunting Regulations Synopsis 2019 – 2020, pages 5-13.

Alaska Subsistence Act 1978.

Trends in Renewable Resource Management in British Columbia – 2014.
(Archibald/Eastman/Ellis/Nyberg)

Recommendations from the Cariboo Chilcotin Roundtable on Moose 2019

Provincial Steelhead Management Plan for British Columbia - 2015