



2020 Provincial Election Questions

In preparation for the next provincial general election on October 24, 2020, the B.C. Wildlife Federation is asking political parties and individual candidates how they will address the conservation and management of fish and wildlife and their habitats.

British Columbia is fortunate to have a wealth of biodiversity, but it is disappearing. On behalf of our 43,000 members, the BCWF calls for a renewed commitment to the provincial motto Splendor Sine Occasu (Splendor without Diminishment).

B.C.'s inventory of wildlife and habitat continues to be one of the most poorly funded in North America. For the past decade, the proportion of the provincial budget spent on renewable resource management has been less than two percent.

The result is diminishing fish and wildlife populations, with iconic species at risk of extinction.

- Mountain caribou are in decline across most of the province; some populations are so low they will likely disappear in the next two decades.
- Moose populations in the central interior have experienced 50-70 percent declines in the last decade.
- Mule deer, elk and sheep populations are also declining in parts of the province. British Columbia still does not have a model to census mule deer.
- The world-renowned Thompson River steelhead that numbered in the low thousands a few decades ago now number less than 200. The Chilcotin River steelhead numbers in 2020 are less than 50.
- Over 85 percent of wetlands in the Lower Mainland and the South Okanagan have been lost. Wetlands provide critical habitat for amphibians, reptiles, fish, birds and other wildlife and serve as the "canary in the coalmine" for landscape and watershed sustainability.

The B.C. Wildlife Federation is concerned that we are failing to protect our province's natural resources adequately. While each electoral district in B.C. has its unique challenges, we need to work collaboratively to ensure that our province's increasing human footprint does not diminish our natural capital. The following questions address the policy challenges we face and the initiatives we need to implement to maintain the diversity of species over the long-term locally and provincially.

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES AND POLITICAL PARTIES

1. FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

In B.C., we now have endangered steelhead, endangered caribou, record low salmon and moose populations, and in parts of the province, declining sheep and mule deer populations. Dwindling fish and wildlife values mean increased social conflict and a loss of food security and tourism-related jobs, all while leaving today's British Columbians wondering if they will leave this province better than they found it.

Fish and Wildlife Questions: What do you feel is the most critical factor negatively impacting B.C.'s fish and wildlife and their habitats? If you are elected, what legislative changes or initiatives will you commit to in order to reverse the declining trends for B.C.'s fish and wildlife, and how do you envision that change making a positive impact? Please include costing and timeline for your plan.

2. HABITAT AND WATER SUSTAINABILITY

The BCWF, in partnership with the Watershed Security Coalition, is calling for increased investment in watershed security in British Columbia. Population growth, increased development and a warming climate are putting pressure on watersheds in every region of B.C. The solution is to invest in wetland and streambank restoration, invasive species removal, indigenous and local government watershed monitoring programs, and fish and wildlife stewardship. We need to ensure we have sufficient water left in rivers to support salmonids' migration to their spawning grounds in regions most impacted by climate change.

Habitat and Water Sustainability Questions: Will you establish a B.C. Watershed Security Fund to fund local and regionally-led clean water initiatives and create good, sustainable, local jobs for British Columbians of all ages and backgrounds in watershed restoration, monitoring, technology, training and education? Please provide costing and timeline for your water security plan.

3. PARKS AND PUBLIC ACCESS

The BCWF is calling for the government to increase funding for B.C. parks and to build new campsites with a B.C. resident priority to catch up with the current heavy demand. Additional funding is required to hire more park rangers and conservation officers. Public access to public resources such as fish, wildlife, public roads, and campsites is a growing British Columbia issue.

Parks and Access Questions: Will you increase funding for B.C. parks and Conservation Officer Service and implement resident-priority booking processes? If so, how much will you allocate for these budgets, when and how many more campsites will be built? Is public access to public resources and activities such as fishing, hunting, camping and hiking important to you? How will you protect British Columbians access to crown land and address attempts to restrict public access to B.C. parks and wild spaces?

4. FISH AND AQUACULTURE

The BCWF joins with other sports fishing and conservation groups to push for full implementation of the Cohen Commission's recommendations. The aquaculture industry needs to be transitioned to closed containment where possible.

BCWF members and partners have been doing salmon enhancement for years. Citizen scientists and Indigenous communities know what needs to be done to help the fish both as smolts and returning adults. We need to engage all parties to work on sensible solutions to issues. The community fishers need to have a place at the table when discussions are held between governments. There are roughly 9,000 jobs created by community fishing service providers.

Fish Management Questions: With the collapse of salmon populations happening across B.C., how do you anticipate the rebuilding of these populations? How will you ensure the recovery of the endangered steelhead? Will you ensure aquaculture moves to closed containment? Please provide the resources you will dedicate and a timeline for all three questions.

5. PREDATOR MANAGEMENT

Many mountain caribou populations are at a record low and moose populations are in significant decline in parts of B.C. Science has shown anthropogenic change as the leading cause, as wolf predation has become a major source of mortality.

The growing grizzly bear population has become a major concern in many of the northern rural and First Nations communities recently. There have been close-call bear encounters and attacks including human and livestock losses. While this scenario may not be important to most of the population that lives in the southern part of the province, it is of serious concern to the northern portion.

Question: Do you support predator management as a part of sustainable science-based wildlife management?