



# **Progress Report on the Province of British Columbia's Wildlife Platform**

**By Jesse Zeman, BCWF Director of Fish and Wildlife Restoration Program**



# INTRODUCTION

British Columbia's remarkable landscape and biodiversity continues to be at risk and key fish and wildlife populations are in decline because of a lack of adequate investment by government. This review of the government's platform, of Minister mandate letters and of the implementation measures taken over the past three years demonstrates the government has made a concerning lack of progress on its commitments to renewable resource management.

## Highlights:

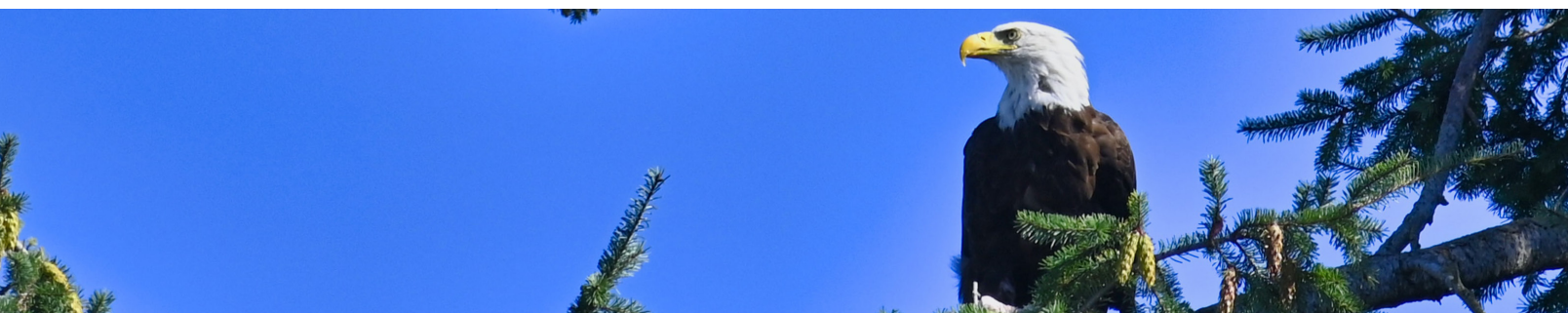
- When the government took office it made 14 commitments related to renewable resource management but only one of those commitments has been fulfilled, and two others partially fulfilled.
- The proportion of the budget spent on renewable resource management has declined by 70% over the past 30 years and despite promises to change that trend, little has changed since 2017.
- Real dollars spent on renewable resource management has declined by 65% over the past 20 years
- The government promised an endangered species law, but didn't enact one. A number of fish and wildlife populations have been in decline for decades and are currently at record lows. Most notable are: endangered mountain caribou, moose, endangered Interior Fraser Steelhead, Fraser River salmon, and sturgeon.
- Despite significant commitments around funding, policy, and science changes to wildlife management, minimal progress has been made since 2017.

Following is a report on the 41st parliament in British Columbia, comparing the government's 2017 party [platform](#) related to natural resource management, BC Parks, fish, wildlife and habitat conservation, and public access to public resources. The pre-election party platform centred around the following Government Policy Statement:

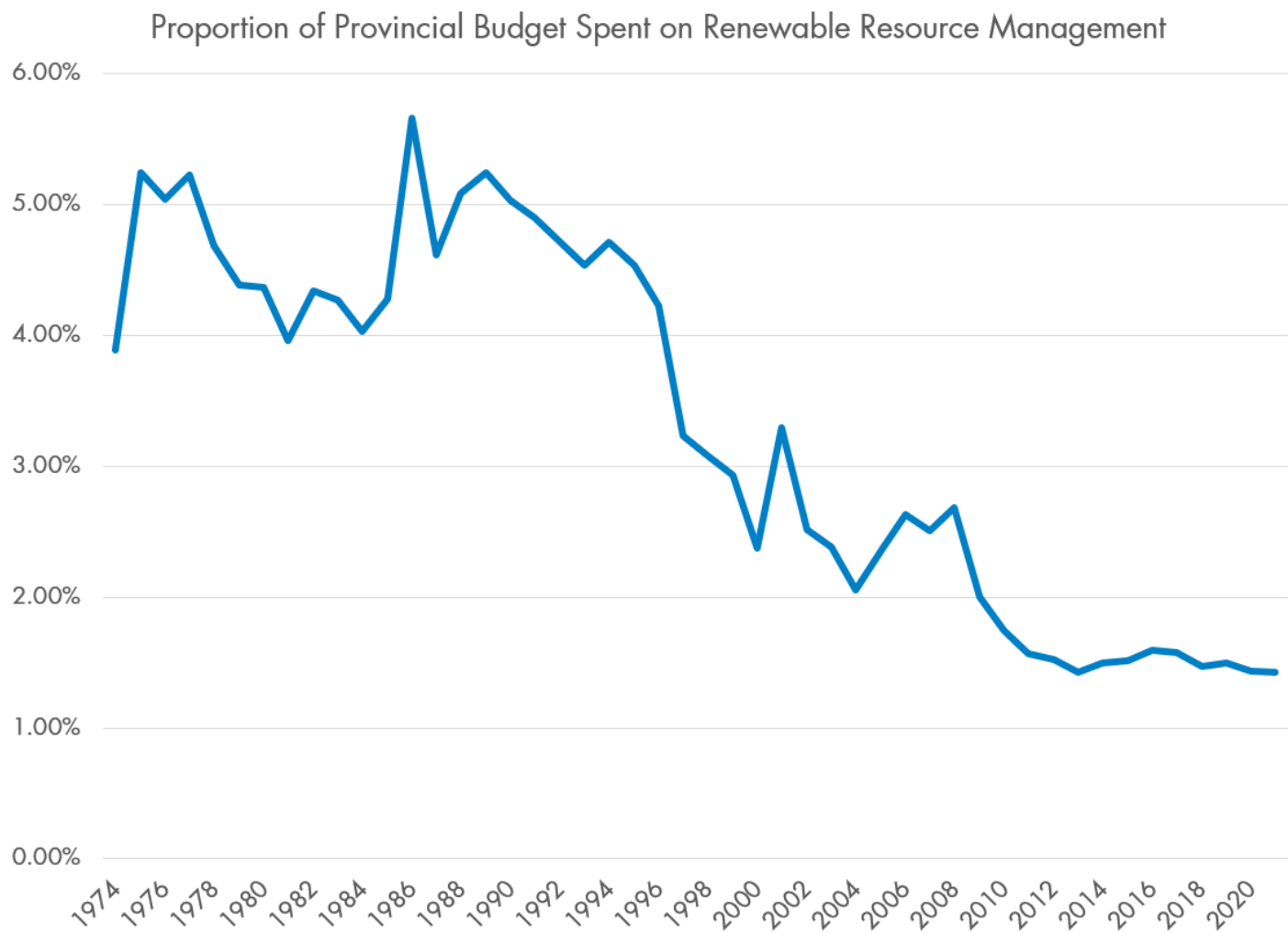
*"British Columbia's biodiversity, fish and wildlife populations and the habitat upon which they depend are under threat due to lack of funding, government cuts to staff and ineffective policies."*

This statement is accurate and supported by [Archibald et al](#) (2014), which found legal responsibilities (complexity) related to renewable resource management had increased significantly while funding and staffing had decreased. A number of fish and wildlife populations have been in decline for decades and are currently at record lows. Most notable are: endangered mountain caribou, moose, endangered Interior Fraser Steelhead, Fraser River salmon, and sturgeon.

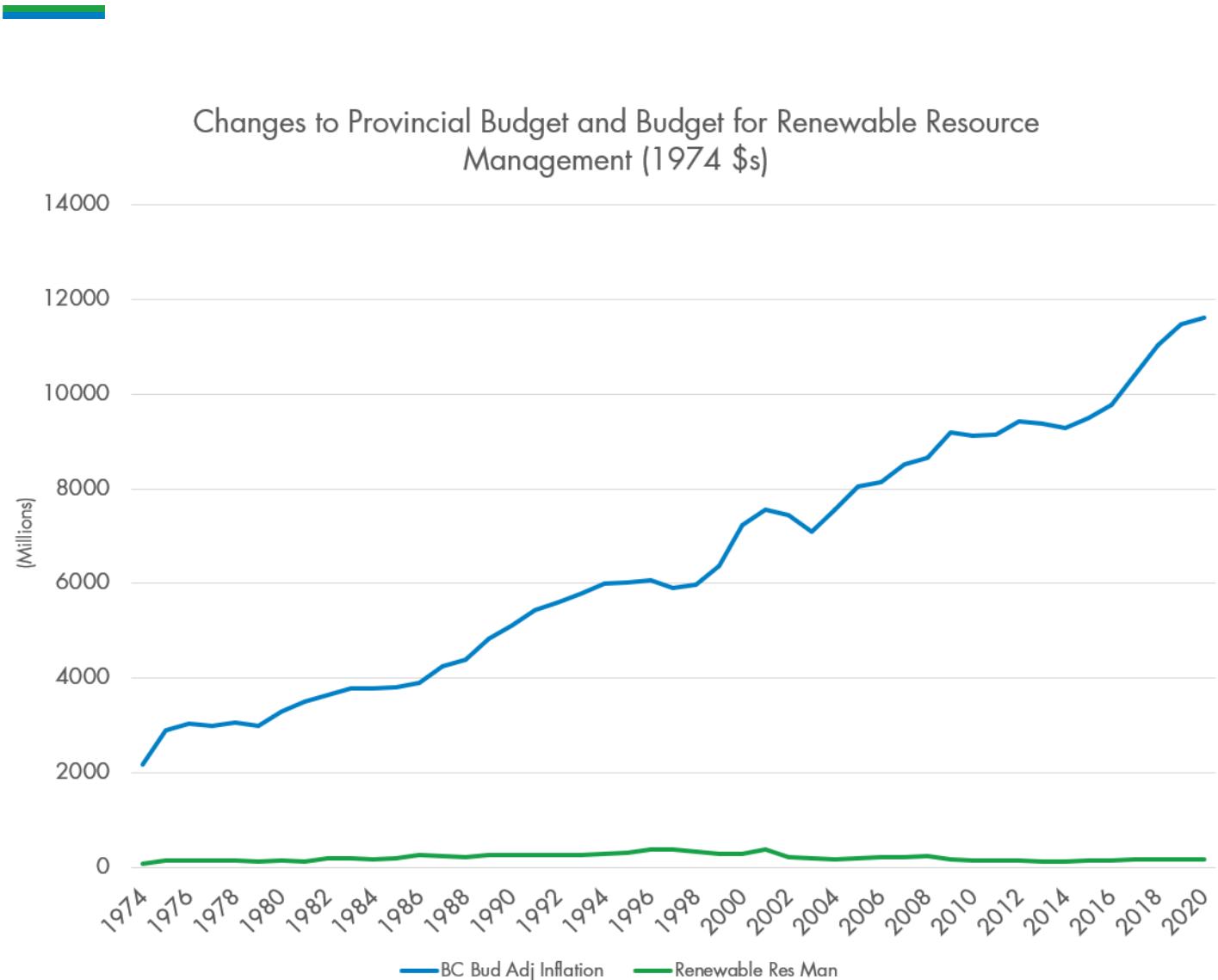
The following is a summary of funding for renewable resource management in British Columbia from 1974-2020. Metrics will be provided to give the reader a better understanding of changes to funding. These estimates do not include estimated spending on Rural Development (~\$28M / year) within the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resources, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD), and the CleanBC Industry Fund in the Ministry of Environment.



# PROPORTION OF THE PROVINCIAL BUDGET SPENT ON RENEWABLE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT BETWEEN 1974-2020.

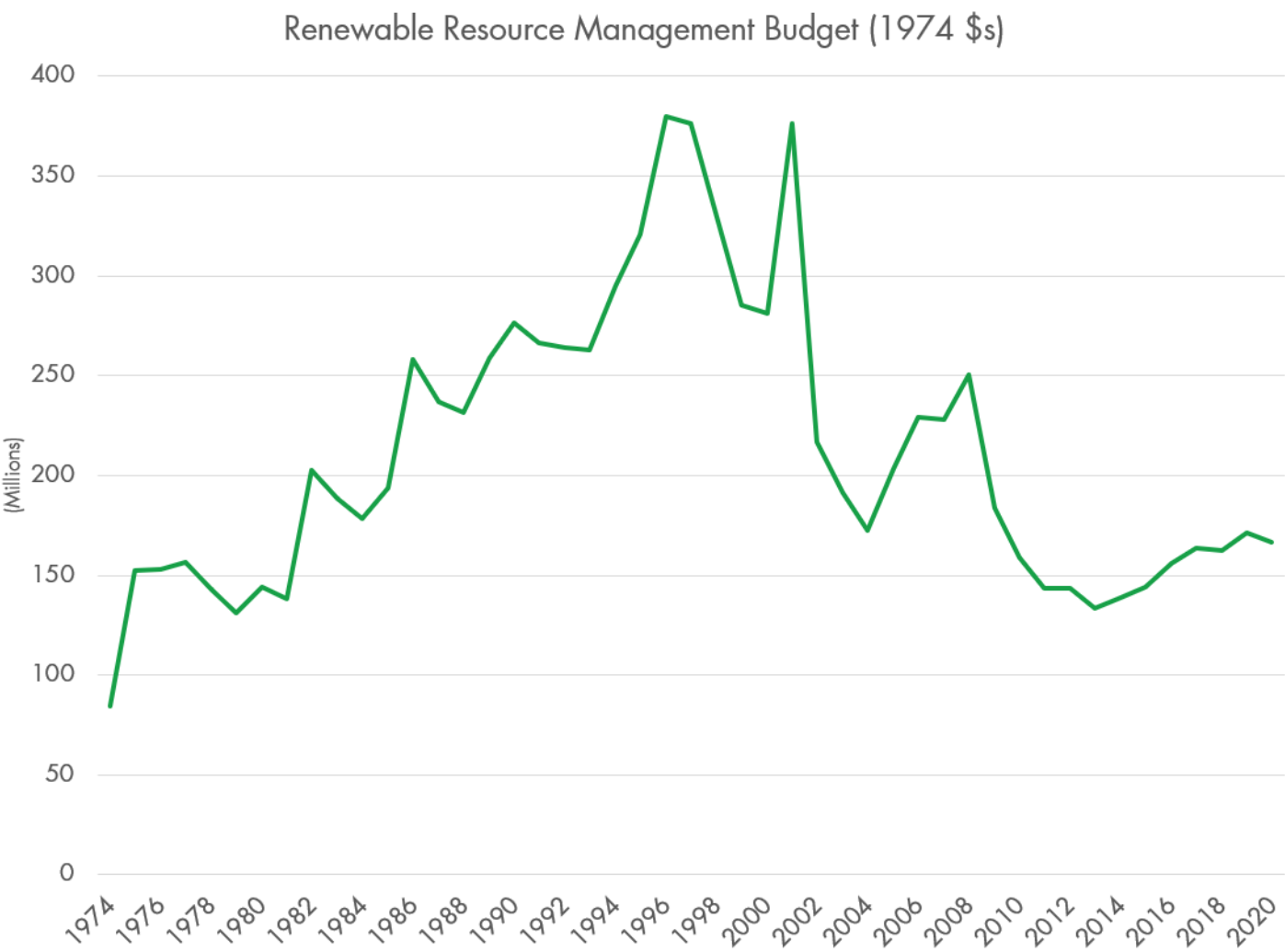


# COMPARISON OF THE PROVINCIAL BUDGET COMPARED VERSUS RENEWABLE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (1974 \$S)





# NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT BUDGET ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION.



# ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE ON ITS 2017 ELECTION PLATFORM AND WILDLIFE POSITION

While the number of statutes, legislative responsibilities and human population have increased significantly, provincial government spending on resource management is like that from four decades ago. Renewable resource managers' jobs have never been so complicated, threats to our air, land, water and fish and wildlife never so high, and at the same time there are fewer staff and dollars to responsibly manage these resources. As a proportion of the provincial budget, spending on renewable resource management may have never been lower in the last 46 years.

The following includes BCWF's brief analysis of the government's performance on its 2017 election platform and its "Wildlife Position" document before the last election.

## Protecting our Air, Land and Water, Creating Jobs

*Statement: "We will ban the grizzly bear trophy hunt."*

The province banned the grizzly bear hunt in December 2017. Since the ban, the province of B.C. has lost two of its top research and management ecologists to attrition. The conservation outcomes for our threatened and endangered populations in Southwest B.C. have not been improved, and populations continue to dwindle. Cumulative effects from resource extraction, and recreation continue to dominate the landscape. Grizzly bears continue to suffer due to government policies and legislation which favours resource extraction over grizzly bear conservation.

## Protecting Species at Risk

*Statement: "Bring in an endangered species law and harmonize other laws to ensure they are all working towards the goal of protecting our beautiful province"*

While this commitment was included in the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy's [mandate letter](#) (2017) it was never enacted. Public consultation related to species at risk and/or endangered species occurred in 2010, 2014, 2016 and [2018](#), yet there has been no movement on endangered species legislation, nor have there been amendments to existing laws to support endangered species.

## Investing in Parks and Camping

*Statements:*

- *"Restore funding for BC parks"*
- *Hire additional park rangers and conservation officers*
- *Built new campsites to catch up with current demand*
- *Put B.C. residents first in line of campsite bookings"*

	2017	2020
BC Parks	49.26 M	40.68 M
Conservation Office Service	\$15.48	\$19.01

Between 2017 to 2020, the BC parks budget declined by \$8.58M. This was due in part, to a \$10M one time grant to support the establishment of the BC Parks Foundation in 2017. Additionally, in 2017 there were significant increases in staffing including 25 new ranger positions and 5 new Community Liaison Officers. Supplementary estimates show BC Parks salary of \$16,840,000 in 2017 and \$16,825,000 in 2020 (not adjusted for inflation). BC Parks continue to be under-staffed; parks use is forecast to increase another 6% by 2022. The COVID-19 related closures of BC Parks this spring are attributable in part to a lack of staffing, particularly in the Lower Mainland.

The Conservation Officer Service (COS) budget increased from \$15.48M in 2017 to \$19.01M in 2020. The COS supplemental estimate for salaries was \$10,352,000 in 2017 and \$13,394,000 in 2020. The increase is due in part to additional resources funded by caribou recovery. In 2018 the COS increased hiring by approximately 10 new positions, but budget clawbacks in 2019 have likely resulted in a small reduction of officers via attrition.

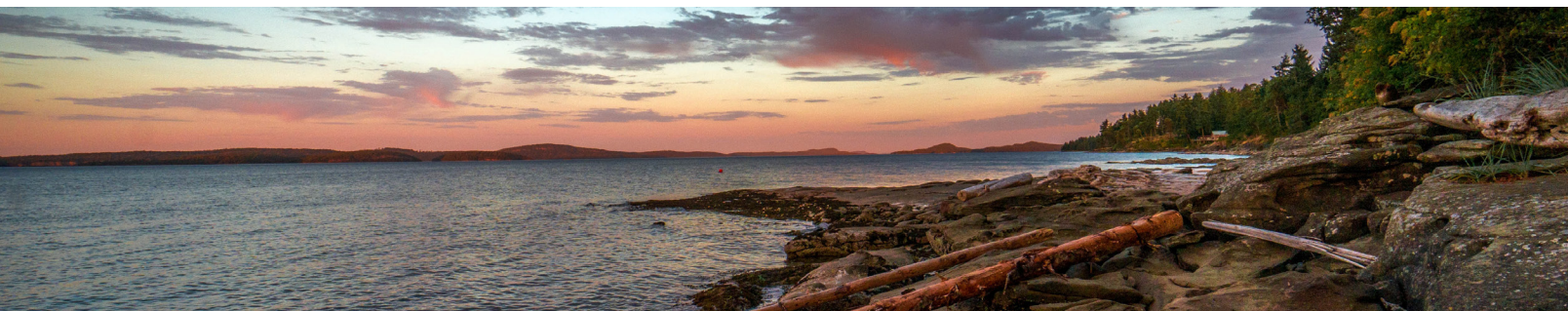
In 2016, there were 10,700 campsites in BC Parks. The former provincial government committed to 1,900 new campsites to meet increasing demand. In 2017, 350 new campsites were added. In 2018, 431 new sites were added; in 2019, 594 new campsites were added and in 2020 180 new campsites were added, increasing the total to 1,555 new campsites over 4 years. With COVID-19 demand for camping has soared; the reservation website crashed when it was reopened this spring, and campsites across the province are often full before the weekend. Reservations for popular destinations are fully booked well in advance. Even without COVID-19, is it unlikely that the number of new campsites would have kept up with increased demand.

While there has been some preference given to residents this year due to COVID-19, there was never a policy shift to put British Columbians first in line for campsite bookings.

## **Improving Wildlife Management**

### *Statements:*

- *"Ensure dedicated funding for wildlife and habitat conservation, give wildlife and habitat priority, and engage concerned groups to work collaboratively towards short- and long-term plans for our wildlife"*
- *Put all funds from hunting licenses and tags into a dedicated fund for wildlife and habitat conservation*
- *Bring people who rely on our wildlife resources together and ensure they all participate in and contribute financially to conservation. This way we will not only ensure dedicated funding for habitat conservation but have the funds required to do the work needed*
- *Base hunting decisions on science*
- *Making sure we have the boots on the ground to have proper inventories*
- *Work to make permits for hunting fairer for B.C. residents right across the province"*





The Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD) mandate letter included: “improve wildlife management and habitat conservation and collaborate with stakeholders to develop long and short-term strategies to manage B.C.’s wildlife resources. Additionally, the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, a group of MLAs from all parties reports recommended government increase or dedicate funding for fish and wildlife conservation, dedicate fees from hunting, fishing, natural resource and nature-based tourism in [2017](#), [2018](#), [2019](#), [2020](#).

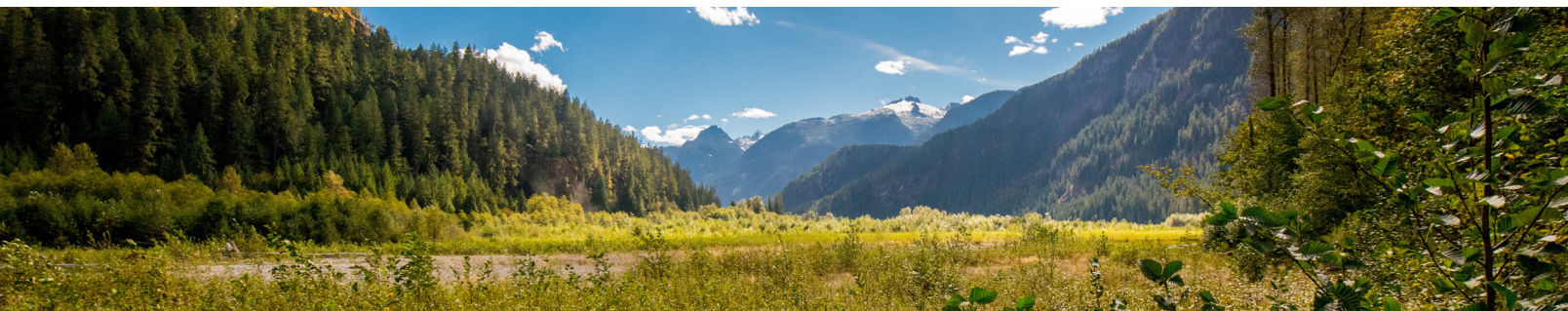
After the election, the provincial government committed to increasing funding in wildlife and habitat conservation by \$1M (2018), \$3M (2019), and \$10M (2020). These increases were tempered by clawbacks to 2019 base budgets, resulting in some hiring freezes and wildlife inventories that were not completed. The total reduction inside the FLNRORD Ministry appeared to be 4-6% in 2019; despite requests, the details of how that budget cut was applied has not been made public. Additionally, funding from the Forest Enhancement Society of BC to the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation was expected to be \$6M between 2018-2020 – the most recent actual and forecast spending indicates only \$3.7M of the \$6M will be invested via the HCTF.

For the 2020-21 budget, BCWF is aware of significant reductions to base budgets, and the Land Based Investment Strategy in parts of the province, as compared to the 2019-20 budget. Additionally, clawbacks for the Land-Based Investment Strategy have already occurred for this year. Practically, this means that the \$10M commitment is not an additive investment in wildlife and that funding pots are simply being reorganized.

Over the past three years, the province has spent well over \$1M in consultation for the [Together for Wildlife](#) strategy process. After three years, the strategy now has several future commitments – yet there has been no meaningful on-the-ground effort to restore dwindling wildlife populations.

From a food security perspective, the most demanded and widely distributed species is moose. Moose harvest for British Columbian licensed hunters declined from a high of over 13,000 in 1979 to ~5,000 in 2014. As a result, the province engaged in a strategy to restore moose. In 2016, the province released [“A strategy to help restore moose populations in British Columbia.”](#) By 2018, the moose harvest had further declined to 4,017, the lowest in recorded history and 20% lower than the previous record low in 2014. Four years after the strategy was published there has been no meaningful effort to restore moose populations in British Columbia.

The province has not dedicated all of the license and tag fees into a dedicated fund. Hunting license sales excluding GST and HCTF surcharges averaged \$11.4M annually between 2017-2019; this commitment, which remains unfulfilled, would have dwarfed the \$14M in additional dollars the government has spent over the past three years.





B.C.'s inventory of wildlife and habitat continues to be the most poorly funded in North America given the number of species and size of the province.

There has been no work on making hunting permits "fairer" for B.C. residents.

### **Sustaining Aquaculture and Commercial and Recreational Fishing**

#### *Statements:*

- *Ensure that the salmon farming industry does not endanger wild salmon by implementing the recommendations of the Cohen Commission, keeping farm sites out of important salmon migration routes, and supporting research and transparent monitoring to minimize the risk of disease transfer from captive to wild fish*
- *We will also provide incentives to help the aquaculture industry transition to closed containment where possible"*

Most salmon farm sites in the Broughton archipelago are being phased out. This was a historic move, which includes indigenous led monitoring for a number of sites which remain. Despite this, salmon farms continue to occupy Discovery islands. The outcome of this commitment has been a patchwork approach, which may or may not increase salmon populations.

To the BCWF's knowledge there has been not been any work or incentives to transition to closed containment.

Of note, related to salmon conservation, the province did announce the British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation fund. The province's commitment is \$42.75M over 5 years. While some of the projects have been unrelated to salmon restoration, this is an extraordinary investment considering wild salmon conservation is the responsibility of the Government of Canada.



## CONCLUSION

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Supernatural British Columbia is known all over the world for its diverse landscapes, and unparalleled biodiversity including fish and wildlife populations, but a lack of investment, impacts of resource extraction and a growing human population is jeopardizing the future of B.C. and the values that makes it special.

Our mountains, rivers, lakes, and forests are suffering from decades of mismanagement and unsustainable use. For example, in B.C. there are over 700,000 kms of roads. That is a footprint large enough to wrap around the earth more than 50 times or cover an area 80 times bigger than Vancouver, which has permanently impaired our landscape, fish, and wildlife. Habitat degradation, and loss, has reduced our landscapes ability to produce and sustain abundant fish and wildlife.

Mirroring habitat loss and degradation, we have moved from abundance in fish and wildlife to scarcity in a generation of people. We now have endangered steelhead, endangered caribou, record low salmon and moose populations, and declining sheep, and mule deer populations in parts of the province. Declining fish and wildlife values means increased social conflict, loss of food security and tourism-related jobs, and an uncertainty if today's British Columbians will leave this province better than they found it.







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B.C. Wildlife Federation  
Corporate Office  
101- 9706 188 Street  
Surrey, BC, V4N 3M2

1-888-881-BCWF (2293)  
604-882-9988  
officeinfo@bcwf.bc.ca  
bcwf.bc.ca