THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY
Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

Honourable Doug Donaldson
Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development
PO Box 9360 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria BC, V8W 9M2

Sent by email to: WildlifeAndHabitat@gov.bc.ca

25 July, 2018

Re. Improving Wildlife Management and Habitat Conservation in British Columbia

Dear Minister Donaldson,

The British Columbia Chapter of the Wildlife Society (BCTWS) commends the Government of British Columbia for striving to improve wildlife and wildlife habitat management in the province. We offer our support and perspectives to further advance wildlife and wildlife habitat management. We request the opportunity to be invited as a stakeholder in future discussions on this issue.

The BCTWS is a diverse and growing group of wildlife professionals and student organizations (www.bctws.ca) comprised of over 50 members that reside throughout British Columbia. We support three University student chapters, each with tens to hundreds of members, based out of the University of Northern British Columbia, University of British Columbia-Okanagan, and University of British Columbia-Vancouver. We operate in conjunction with the Canadian Section of the Wildlife Society (CSTWS) and The Wildlife Society (TWS, www.wildlife.org) which has more than 10,000 members from across the globe. Our mission is to: "To inspire, empower, and enable wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and habitats through science-based management and conservation."

We have read the government of British Columbia's engagement document "*Improving Wildlife Management and Habitat Conservation in British Columbia*". Below we offer responses to the Discussion Questions (in *italics,* with our responses beneath) outlined in the document that are of relevance to our membership:

1. *What programs and policies are most important to advance meaningful and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and help implement UNDRIP?*

BCTWS strongly supports the opportunities identified in the engagement document which are needed to facilitate involvement of Indigenous people critical to fulfilling their constitutionally mandated rights and title.

2. *How should a broad range of stakeholders be involved in wildlife management and habitat conservation decisions? What are your suggestions for a new governance model for wildlife management and habitat conservation?*

The application of science in decision making is a core value of our membership. We acknowledge that decision-makers must consider multiple factors in wildlife management decisions, and we believe that any decision should be informed by science. Thus, any governance model must be supported by scientific information from wildlife professionals (please see attached standing position on the use of science in policy and management decisions). Here, we include both social and ecological sciences as fundamental pillars of wildlife management and governance.

We are supportive of inclusive planning processes that represent the diversity of wildlife values held by British Columbians and Indigenous peoples. This diversity includes consumptive and non-consumptive wildlife users. By providing an inclusive process and emphasizing transparency in decision-making, the governance model can overcome some of the misinformation and mistrust that often foments conflict around potentially contentious management decisions.

Given the value of wildlife in British Columbia, there is a need to fix the current fragmentation of wildlife management responsibility across multiple agencies and to address the deficient funding which is resulting in insufficient levels of research, inventory, analysis, monitoring, management, restoration, and enforcement. Governance responsibility should not be delegated to any non-government agency which would be dominated by narrow interests, as was recently advocated by the previous government administration. There is a need to revitalize governance mechanisms providing effective planning, information capabilities (e.g., inventory, monitoring, research, and analysis), development oversight and enforcement, and public education.

Ongoing planning mechanisms need to be resurrected at both strategic and landscape levels to promote effective stakeholder engagement negotiating conflicting values and access to resource opportunities (e.g., conservation, resource development, wildlife harvest, etc.).

3. *What measures need to be taken to proactively manage wildlife and habitat and prevent wildlife from becoming species at risk?*

Proactive wildlife management is supported by scientifically robust wildlife and habitat information. Such information requires an adequately funded wildlife and habitat monitoring and restoration program. Wildlife become species-at-risk when we fail to identify population declines or habitat degradation because we do not monitor those species or habitats, or when we lack adequate resources to understand and then reverse causes of declines. We urge the government of British Columbia to invest in and support their wildlife management staff so they are empowered to seek out and provide the information that decision makers need to make evidence-based decisions.

In addition, we strongly support collaboration between Universities and government wildlife biologists to develop robust wildlife and habitat science. New processes are needed to guide cooperation with scientists at academic and other research institutions directing funding towards key strategic priorities.

A systematic analysis of the effectiveness of wildlife management systems put in place through strategic land use plans, the protected areas strategy, and legislation governing forestry, mining, oil and gas development, and recreational access is needed.

4. *What is the most effective way of ensuring that wildlife and habitats are healthy while fostering a healthy economy to ensure life is affordable for British Columbians?*

Wildlife and habitat are highly valued by British Columbians, and we encourage the government of British Columbia to create programs that recognize and foster that value in local communities. Effective wildlife and habitat management supports functioning and resilient ecosystems that humans rely on for food, shelter, health, and quality of life. We urge the government of British Columbia to ensure that any management program properly values the contribution of wildlife and habitat to the livelihoods and well-being of British Columbians including not only the commercial value of hunting, fishing, and trapping, but fundamentally, the ecosystem services, health benefits of nature, and intrinsic value of species and ecosystems. This includes supporting a robust research and monitoring program, but also the development and use of tools to deliver information on wildlife and habitat to the public.

At times, economic and wildlife values can be opposing. In such cases it is the responsibility of the government to acknowledge and transparently consider the trade-offs between economic development and wildlife conservation. Where there is legitimate uncertainty on these trade-offs, the government should support science to better understand the current consequences and future risks of development to wildlife. Ultimately, this allows decision makers and the public to effectively evaluate the consequences of wildlife management decisions.

5. *What are the most effective ways to proactively adapt to the impacts of climate change on wildlife and habitats?*

Climate change undoubtedly has and increasingly will have profound impacts on wildlife. There needs to be a broader and clearer appreciation that our wildlife resource is facing acute risk from climate change. A paradigm shift is required to refocus wildlife and habitat management toward a resilience and adaptive management approach. This has significant implications for how species are managed. For example, current approaches for protecting, recovering and managing wildlife and habitat based on the 'historic range of variability' will fail. It is important to acknowledge that ecosystems are dynamic and thus management must be nimble in its ability to respond to change (including climate change).

We believe that the government of British Columbia should foster partnerships between wildlife and climate scientists to summarize and develop information on how climate change could influence wildlife and habitat. This will support 'climate-informed' decision making that ultimately acknowledges the dynamics of ecosystems and the parallel need for active wildlife and habitat management. It will also enable earlier assessment of climate vulnerabilities and potential mitigation tools. Our call for more integration between research, monitoring, and management will also improve understanding of linkages between climate change and wildlife responses.

6. *How can Traditional Ecological Knowledge, citizen science and other forms of knowledge complement science to support decision-making?*

A key tenent of good science and information is peer-review. Any source of information is potentially useful, but it must be independently vetted by wildlife and habitat experts, including from Indigenous communities, prior to being applied in decision making. There are an increasing number of examples of incorporation of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and citizen science into evidence-based decision making; such integration is an active area of applied ecological research. Monitoring and assessment of wildlife and their habitats across large spatial and temporal scales is challenging and costly. An ability to incorporate diverse sources of information while maintaining high standards of rigour is key.

7. *What are the best ways to share information broadly so that there is transparency and trust is gained among all parties?*

Wildlife and habitat management decisions must be transparent and therefore they should be publicly documented. Similarly, the information and data that is used to rationalize decisions should be open and transparent. A key aspect of robust wildlife and habitat management decisions is that it is supported by an open and transparent science program. However, we recognize that traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) from Indigenous peoples and other sensitive information (e.g., the location of species at risk) must be curated appropriately. These situations are the exception, and the rule should be that data collected and managed in the public trust should be freely available. Likewise, decision-making processes should be made transparent.

8. *What are the most effective ways to reduce wildlife human conflicts in British Columbia?*

Damage to people and private property from wildlife should be dealt with using techniques that are biologically, socially, environmentally, and economically valid, effective, and practical. Those techniques should balance real risk to people (not perceived risk and irrational fear) with the benefits conveyed by maintaining wildlife species on the landscape. Research to improve techniques for mitigating damage, particularly the prevention of damage, and to understand people's tolerance for damage, and what causes them to become tolerant, are also important. Effectiveness will depend on context (e.g., the seasons, species, human activity involved), so research targeted at understandings and quantifying the influence of these contexts is vital. The results of such research must be shared with the public.

Public education to combat fear of wildlife (e.g., grizzly bears), to educate on their importance, and train people how to safely live with wildlife should be top priorities.

9. *What are the best funding models, funding sources, and creative financing ideas that could increase resources for wildlife management and habitat conservation and provide additional flexibility for how funding is prioritized and allocated?*

Wildlife and habitat are a public resource, and funding for wildlife and habitat management must be supported by the public. However, it is also important that the impacts of resource development on

wildlife and habitat are internalized into the cost of doing business. This requires that the government of British Columbia acknowledge the value of wildlife and habitat and ensure that impacts to these resources are accounted for when private industries are permitted to operate on public land. Economic tools that adequately compensate the public for resource development costs may be used to support wildlife and habitat management in the long-term, including the restoration of wildlife habitat. Government-university and government to non-government partnerships present another opportunity to leverage and develop expertise on wildlife and habitat. Similarly, many citizens that value wildlife can more directly support wildlife conservation. Currently, a portion of hunter licence revenues is directed towards wildlife management, but we lack a consistent channel for non-consumptive users to directly contribute. In general, non-consumptive users are shaping policy in BC, and yet are not contributing via a straightforward funding mechanism, to solutions. We therefore encourage non-traditional funding mechanism for non-consumptive users to pay into wildlife management such as the special licence plate program that is being used to fund BC provincial parks.

We look forward to hearing from you, and for the opportunity to discuss the future of wildlife and habitat management in British Columbia in more detail.

Sincerely,

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President, British Columbia Chapter of the Wildlife Society
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cc. Jennifer Psyllakis, Director – Wildlife and Habitat Branch, Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development