

# Valhalla Wilderness Society

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DELIVERED BY FAX

January 27, 2009

Honourable Pat Bell  
Minister of Forests and Range  
Room 137  
Parliament Bldgs  
Victoria, BC, V8V 1X4  
Fax: 250-612-4191  
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Dear Minister Bell:

This letter is to notify you that the allegations you made about the Valhalla Wilderness Society, reported in the January 13, 2009 *Nelson Daily News*, are grossly untrue and damaging to this Society. This letter provides documentation that your comments were untrue. Hereafter we hope that you will stop making such comments, and we believe you have a responsibility to write a letter to the *Nelson Daily News* correcting what you have said.

We refer specifically to the following comments reported in the *Nelson Daily News*:

"The New Denver-based Valhalla Wilderness Society has been openly critical of the provincial government's plans to protect the endangered mountain caribou by setting aside land for their habitat - saying much of the land chosen by the province is unsuitable for caribou habitat.

"But Bell said the Valhalla Wilderness Society has refused to cooperate in the process and is simply antagonizing from the sidelines. 'We worked closely with 10 different environmental organizations, including the Dogwood Initiative, ForestEthics, and Wildsight, who really do represent the broad interests of the environmental community,' Bell noted. "Valhalla chose not to participate in that.

"I have a lot of respect for environmental organizations that are prepared to come to the table, be productive and be creative. But I have very little respect for organizations that sit on the side and take pot shots."

Government files on the mountain caribou process from 2003 to the present time contain a substantial amount of material from the Valhalla Wilderness Society's participation in every level of the mountain caribou public process. This includes several letters to you when you were Minister of Agriculture and Lands.

The only aspect in which we did not participate was the secret backroom deal between the ten groups of the Mountain Caribou Project and a number of vested interests responsible for the demise of the caribou. Your Ministry made sure we could not participate in that, by requiring groups to sign confidentiality agreements in order to participate. This was not public process at all. Nor would the Valhalla Wilderness Society have been able to sign the agreement because our members believe that public resources are a matter for public process, not secret negotiations. You may be aware that a number of other parties in this province asked to sign confidentiality are repudiating these agreements as an effort to silence dissent against your government's policies (ie, *Vancouver Sun*, January 24, 2009, "Kamloops prison advisors quit over 'muzzle' policy.")

When the Valhalla Wilderness Society learned about the secret negotiations, we immediately sent a complaint to the Species at Risk Coordination Office (under your Ministry at that time) stating that we believed these negotiations had made the public process into a facade of deception, and that the confidentiality agreements may constitute a violation of the *Freedom of Information Act*.

Your comments to the *Nelson Daily News* also erroneously used the name of the Dogwood Initiative. Throughout the period leading up to and following the secret negotiations, Dogwood Initiative was never listed as one of the ten groups in the Mountain Caribou Project, either by you or by the MCP. And Dogwood Initiative has denied that it had anything to do with the mountain caribou plan agreement. Many in the environmental community regretted to see Dogwood Initiative's name mentioned in this connection. Some believe that it is not an error at all because, seen in the context of your remarks, it substantiates (albeit falsely) your claim that groups that negotiated the plan agreement (behind closed doors) "really do represent the broad interests of the environmental community." As a result, there are many who wish to see the Minister correct this false use of Dogwood's name in a public statement.

Your comments seem to use the names of the three environmental groups as a shield to deflect criticism of your government's procrastination that is dooming the mountain caribou to extinction, and as a weapon against Valhalla. This occurred shortly after Valhalla's public release of a submission (Dec. 18, 2008) it made to the government on the slaughter of wolves and wild horses and how it is linked to the government's abject failure to protect mountain caribou habitat from destruction by logging. A more natural response to public criticisms might have been to tell the public when the commitments of habitat protection that you personally made on October 16, 2007 are going to be fulfilled.

The Valhalla Wilderness Society requests a public statement from you correcting the errors in your statements in order to reverse the discredit you have brought on our organization. Attached you will find a list of the key ways in which the Society participated in the process. Most or all of these items are documented by information in government files.

This list of our involvements in the government process is, in itself, a shocking revelation of the disgraceful and totally unjustifiable delays that have kept the mountain caribou without any significant new habitat protection during six years of obstructed and subverted public

planning process. I have also attached copies of two clippings from the *Nelson Daily News*; one is your comments, the other is Valhalla's refutation published on January 22, 2009.

Sincerely,

Anne Sherrod  
Chair

Attachments: "Record of the Valhalla Wilderness Society's Participation in the Mountain Caribou Recovery Process."

"Forest Minister Taints Valhalla Wilderness Unfairly," *Nelson Daily News*,  
Jan. 22, 2009.

Cc: Premier Gordon Campbell  
*Vancouver Sun*  
*Globe & Mail*  
*Valley Voice*

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## Record of the Valhalla Wilderness Society's Participation in the Mountain Caribou Recovery Process

1. The process started in 2003 as a federal-provincial public process under the Canadian *Species at Risk Act*. For the first two years a Valhalla Wilderness Society director attended all-day meetings of the Mountain Caribou North Kootenay Recovery Implementation Group (NKRIG) in Revelstoke, traveling for hours to do so, and was a major participant in the discussions.
2. After two years of being blocked by vested interests while the logging of mountain caribou habitat continued, VWS withdrew from the NKRIG. However several environmental groups remained at the table, and their three years of work went up in smoke when the BC government shut it down when it was on the verge of completing a plan. The government claimed it was going to “fast-track” the plan. Responsibility for doing this was put in the hands of your Ministry and its Species at Risk Coordination Office (SARCO). Five years later, there is no plan.
3. Throughout the years at the NKRIG table and during the SARCO public consultation, Valhalla Wilderness Society attended many conferences and meetings with government scientists working on the plan, made several presentations to SARCO, and traveled to Ottawa to make a presentation to the federal committee on Species at Risk.
4. November 30, 2005 - VWS submission to SARCO entitled “**VWS submission regarding SaRCO’s October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2005 request for public input on recovery options for Mountain Caribou.**”
5. July 2006 - Valhalla hosted a conference of 26 environmental groups and activists working on the Inland Rainforest, and invited a representative from your ministry, Pat Field, to make a presentation. Mr. Field told us that the government would make a decision on the plan soon. The groups gave verbal input on a number of issues. Mr. Field informed us that henceforth the government would only talk to two groups, ForestEthics and Wildsight. All the rest of us had to feed our input to them. The groups protested this as an unprecedented infringement on equal rights, and an attempt to manufacture consent from the environmental movement by putting selected groups in a position of power with exclusive access to government.
6. Upon the request of SARCO scientists, Valhalla Wilderness turned over to the government habitat maps worth hundreds of thousands of dollars that our scientific consultants had created with a major proportion of volunteer labour. The SARCO scientists told us that there was no way they could undertake a similar endeavor. VWS received in exchange some digital data on forest cover. This exchange was facilitated by the Integrated Land Management Bureau under Minister Bell’s department.

7. November 9, 2006 – This is the date of a letter from SARCO announcing a “targeted stakeholder consultation process” between Nov 9, 2006 and November 30, 2006. VWS was invited to an NGO meeting on November 30. We trusted this letter in its statement that consultations would end on Nov. 30. It made no mention of further public involvement after that, no mention of any stakeholder negotiations. This important document not only shows that public involvement was about to end, but also indicated that the result of the process would be an “Action Plan,” terminology referring to the federal *Species at Risk Act*.
8. November 30, 2006 - VWS director Colleen McCrory flew to Richmond for the meeting. She presented a “**Joint Submission to the Species at Risk Coordination Office on the Draft Mountain Caribou Recovery Strategy.**” It was signed by 19 environmental groups. It called for a halt to logging all old growth forest in the Inland Rainforest Region, and expressed total opposition to predator lethal predator control to increase the caribou population.
9. November 30, 2006: VWS submission to SARCO, “Analysis of the proposed mountain caribou recovery plan for the Central and Southern Herds.” Due to extensions on public input, the new deadline for public input was February 28, 2007.
10. October 9 2007: Between February and October the public had heard no more about the plan for the better part of a year when VWS discovered that secret negotiations were in process. VWS called SARCO and asked to see the draft plan and was told we would have to sign a confidentiality agreement to do so. VWS sent SARCO a letter on this date listing six complaints about this. One item, citing discrimination in access to information and public process, stated our belief that it was a violation of the *Freedom of Information Act*.
11. October 16, 2007: The so-called “plan” was announced by government. But it was not a plan, nor is there a plan as of this writing. It was really a deal between the MCP and the vested interests agreeing that the habitat protection would be constrained to the point of “no net loss” to the timber industry, no reduction in AAC for the next five years.
12. October 17, 2007: VWS sent Minister Bell a letter requesting further information and informing him that we wished to see compliance with the *Species at Risk Act*, and asking him when he intended to post an Action Plan on the SARA registry. We never received a reply.
13. There was a notable exception to the overall failure of the plan agreement to protect habitat at risk from logging, and that was 76,094 hectares of Timber Harvesting Land Base slated for protection. Minister Bell’s ministry set up science teams to show where that protection should be located. The Valhalla Wilderness Society was listed as a stakeholder in the scientists’ consultation process and participated intensively.
14. December 18, 2007: VWS sent Minister Bell a letter (Dec. 2007) telling him we had reviewed all of the habitat maps and asking his help in correcting gross deficiencies in the plan for the Central Selkirk herd. So far as we are aware, Minister Bell did respond, since the Herd Expert was sent back to the drawing board to revise his plan.

15. February 28, 2007 – Valhalla Wilderness Society sent the government submissions on three drafts of the Central Kootenay maps. VWS also provided input for the southern planning units and the Wells-Gray/Thompson area. On February 28 we made our final submission, a two-part of the plans for the central and southern herds. This included VWS maps of what we believed to be the highest priority areas for protection for the central and southern herds, as well as detailed comments on the SARCO maps.