

Valhalla Wilderness Society

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NOTES FROM THE FIELD BY WAYNE MCCRORY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The last two years have been busy ones for the Valhalla Wilderness Society (VWS). Our apologies for not issuing a newsletter in 2014, but VWS was one of the charitable organizations audited by the Canada Revenue Agency and it took up much of our time in the later part of the year. This newsletter will cover the past two years.

In October 2014, protection of one of our park proposal areas took a significant leap forward: the Tsilhqot'in First Nations announced protection of the 321,300 ha Dasiqox Tribal Park in BC's Chilcotin region thanks, in part, to a VWS-supported conservation study. While VWS respects the First Nations' Tribal Park designation, we have strongly recommended that it be a legislated Tribal Park, like the Stein Valley Nlaka'pamux Heritage Park.

On the BC coast, it appears that the Green River will finally receive partial protection under the final Great Bear Rainforest (GBR) Agreement. A decision by the province and First Nations is expected in late November. Protection of the Green River will certainly be a cause for celebration after VWS's many years of work in that watershed and all our submissions to the planning tables. Eight new "protected" areas are expected, but some or all of these may be protection from logging only, with mining and tourism development allowed.

This is one of several ways VWS feels that provincial standards for what is considered "protected" are deteriorating. Most of the habitat that the province claims is "protected" for mountain caribou is actually only protected from logging. In the South Peace region, "protection" under BC's mountain caribou recovery plan isn't protected at all!

In February 2014, VWS issued an action alert to rally opposition to the proposed *Park Amendment Act 2014* (Bill

4). Despite massive public opposition, it was passed in March 2014 without any amendments or public consultation. This Act allows the BC government to permit feasibility studies for industrial development in our parks by defining it as "research," and facilitates the removal of park land for industrial activities. Almost every kind of provincial protected area in BC, including those with the highest level of protection, is now at increased risk of industrialization. Already 63.5 ha have been deleted from the Nisga'a Memorial Lava Beds Park for a gas pipeline, while Kinder Morgan's proposed pipeline expansion could affect nine provincial parks. VWS will continue to be a voice for strong standards of protection.

In 2014, the final map for our Quesnel Lake Wilderness Proposal was completed and approved by two First Nations bands claiming that territory. The biggest event of 2015 for our proposed Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park was an expedition with a science team and an award-winning documentary filmmaker to film the ancient forest of the Incomappleux Valley. Stay tuned for the release of the 15-minute documentary in early 2016!

VWS has worked all year alongside many other environmental groups to stop the scapegoating of wolves for the decline of mountain caribou which, instead, is caused by humans. Killing wolves will not result in the protection of mountain caribou habitat, which is what they need most if they are to survive.

Much of our ongoing research and advocacy work could not have happened without your incredible support and generosity. The Board of

Directors sincerely thanks you and wishes you all the best in 2016. Should you wish to support our ongoing work, please fill in the membership/donation form or donate online at www.vws.org.



Duane Starr photo

SHOOTING WOLVES WILL NOT SAVE BC'S DWINDLING MOUNTAIN CARIBOU

In February 2015, the BC government embarked on a five-year "experiment" to exterminate 80-100% of wolves that share the same habitat as BC's endangered mountain caribou herds by shooting them from helicopters. To date, 84 wolves have been cruelly killed from the air to "save" the South Selkirk herd and several herds in the South Peace region. Countless other wolves suffered a similar fate with the relaxation of BC's 2014-2016 hunting and trapping regulations. Wolves in mountain caribou habitat can now be hunted and trapped during denning season, which even the BC Trappers Association opposes. The pups starve to death in their dens when their parents are killed.

The BC government intends to expand this wolf slaughter to other herd areas, ignoring unanimous scientific opinion that logging, energy development, and motorized winter recreation are causing the mountain caribou declines. Killing wolves flies in the face of the critical ecological roles that wolves play.

VWS and our environmental allies have raised a large outcry about the wolf cull, keeping the media's spotlight on the issue throughout 2015. Louise Taylor, who joined the VWS team as a researcher/writer in early 2015, helped to keep the ball rolling with research as well as networking with other groups to generate joint letters to government and joint press releases. With the expanded research capacity enabled by Taylor, VWS Director Pettitt's field work, and VWS spokesperson Anne Sherrod's writing, VWS pumped out scandalous facts and figures about the dismal failure of BC's mountain caribou recovery plan, including the deaths of at least seven mountain caribou in "caribou maternity pens," and the hundreds of kilometers of groomed snowmobile trails in mountain caribou habitat. These trails pave the way for predators to access caribou that would otherwise be out of reach due to the deep powder snow.

Even top government caribou managers reported that the recovery plan is failing to keep snowmobilers out of critical winter habitat. Pettitt's field work discovered that some "protected" areas closed to snowmobiles consist of extremely steep slopes and avalanche tracks, which caribou avoid in the

winter whenever possible. You can see VWS' press releases with more detail about these issues on our website.

Research into the BC government's financial and habitat off-setting program introduced in 2012 in the South Peace region exposed another double-faced mountain caribou "recovery" policy. Under this program, industry must pay to offset industrial activities in prime caribou habitat and, for every hectare of caribou habitat destroyed, set aside four hectares that they cannot disturb. There is so little intact caribou habitat left that the loss of every hectare pushes them closer to extinction. These losses cannot be compensated for by protecting habitat elsewhere. Historically, vast caribou herds



Mountain caribou using their late fall-early winter habitat in our Quesnel Lake Wilderness Proposal.

roamed the South Peace region, but their habitat is now criss-crossed by hydro-electric projects, cut-blocks, roads, seismic lines, open pit coal mines, and widespread oil and gas activity. Is it any wonder that the Burnt Pine herd has been wiped out and the Moberly herd reduced to just 16 animals in 2013 from 191 animals in 1997? Site C dam construction will flood yet more caribou habitat.

It is crystal clear that wolves are being wiped out because the BC government refuses to curtail destruction and invasion of mountain caribou habitat by humans. As a result, we have lost 500 caribou during the last seven years of "recovery" efforts; by 2014, only 1,358 mature animals remained. Scientists are warning that the survival of BC's mountain caribou is questionable. VWS can not say that creating more parks will "save the caribou," but two of our park proposals—the Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park and the Quesnel Lake Wilderness—will give two herds their best chance and will benefit the 40 other known species at risk living in these same forests.

While both of our park proposals contain significant areas of partially protected caribou habitat, this protection could be removed if the caribou do not recover. British Columbians need to demand that the government establish the large, fully protected areas that conservation biologists say are urgently needed to protect biodiversity before more species disappear forever.

INCOMAPPLEUX CAPTURED ON FILM BY AWARD-WINNING BC FILMMAKER

Due to canyon rockfall hazard, the BC government has closed the road into the Incomappleux Valley with a locked gate. Behind this gate is the most extraordinary tract of Inland Temperate Rainforest in existence, and the jewel of VWS's Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal. For years, VWS has worked to protect the valley's 1,800-year old trees, and has sponsored ground-breaking biodiversity research by Dr. Toby Spribille and his fellow lichenologists. Their discoveries greatly revised the scientific world's knowledge of biodiversity in BC's Inland Temperate Rainforests.

To create a lasting record of this legacy on film, VWS recruited BC environmentalist Damien Gillis, who is co-publisher of The CommonSenseCanadian™ and has made four documentaries, including *Oil in Eden* and *Farmed Salmon Exposed*. His most recent film, *Fractured Land*, won Best BC Film at the 2015 Vancouver International Film Festival and was voted one of the top ten audience favourites at the 2015 Hot Docs Film Festival.

This July, Gillis, VWS directors, Dr. Spribille and associates, and the support team set up camp in the Incomappleux Valley. Access to the giants in the upper valley was made possible thanks to machete-wielding volunteers who slashed brush and cleared avalanche debris off the road for days under Pettitt's tireless supervision. VWS directors are thrilled with the stunning footage shot by Gillis. VWS will release a short documentary online in 2016 to bolster the ongoing campaign for the park proposal. With enough funding, the Society would like to expand it to a full-length feature film to inform a broader public about the urgent need to protect all remaining old-growth forests in the province.



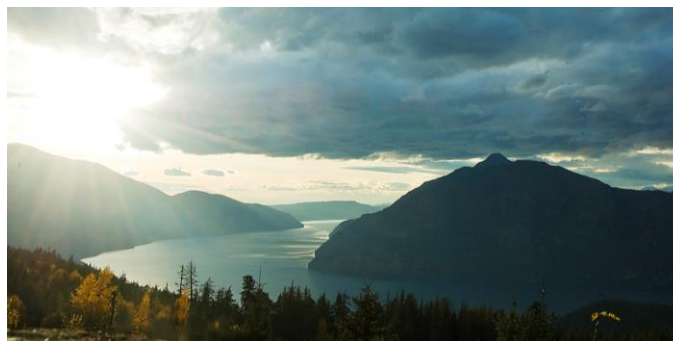
Damien Gillis at work in the Incomappleux. Piotr Lukasik photo.

Inland Rainforest/Caribou Habitat Monitoring

When VWS speaks about conditions on the ground in the Inland Rainforest Region, we are not just making assumptions. Since our last newsletter at the end of 2013, director Craig Pettitt has visited old-growth forest and caribou habitat from the US border up to the North Thompson River and beyond. Because of this, VWS has been the only environmental organization in the province to uncover and bring attention to situations such as the destructive cottage industry of groomed snowmobile trails into prime mountain caribou habitat; or recent logging in mountain caribou habitat up to the boundaries of a national park and close to an ecological reserve. We continue to correspond with government about these issues and provoke public debate through our media releases, which you can see at www.vws.org.

TWO FIRST NATIONS FULLY SUPPORT THE QUESNEL LAKE WILDERNESS

VWS is delighted that both the T'exelc (Williams Lake Indian Band) and the Xatsull (Soda Creek Indian Band) have given their full support for our Quesnel Lake Wilderness Proposal following meetings in 2014. Field work in the proposed park in 2014 by Pettitt and McCrory helped to fine tune the boundaries and identify good caribou habitat, such as Cameron Ridge with its abundant subalpine parkland vegetation. The proposed park contains significant stands of old-growth Inland Temperate Rainforest and has outstanding wildlife values. It also has perhaps the highest biodiversity of lichens in the Interior Wetbelt.



The proposed Quesnel Lake Wilderness along the upper North Arm of Quesnel Lake. Craig Pettitt photo.

The BC government continues to downplay the devastating environmental impacts of Imperial Metals' Mt. Polley mine tailings spill into lower Quesnel Lake. Despite local residents complaining of the mining company's superficial clean-up of the estimated 24 million cubic metres of contaminated mine waste, the government has allowed the mine to partially re-open. VWS and the First Nations believe

the spill will help to garner broad public support for the proposed park. In 2016, VWS will present the park proposal to the Canim Lake Indian Band and escalate the campaign.

VWS HAS KEY ROLE IN CONSERVATION OF WESTERN TOADS IN WEST KOOTENAY

VWS has been active locally in the conservation of western toads (*Anaxyrus boreas*, aka *Bufo boreas*) at two key areas where highway mortality of migrating toads and toadlets is of increasing concern. Western toads have already disappeared from much of their historic range in the USA; the species is blue-listed (at risk) in BC and is a species at risk federally. The West Kootenay still has a western toad population of provincial significance. Summit Lake and Bear-Fish Lakes have become important focal areas for research and conservation efforts, and VWS is making an important contribution.

The western toad has a fascinating and complex life cycle that makes their conservation challenging. They have three annual migrations: In Spring, adults migrate on warm nights to their natal lakes to breed, after which a second migration happens as they move from the lake back to terrestrial habitats. Later, in Summer, there is a third separate migration event when hundreds of thousands of baby toads (toadlets) leave their natal lakes for the surrounding mountains to hibernate before winter sets in. Most toadlets are no larger than a dime, yet have inner compasses that tell them which way to go. Unfortunately, as with the adult migrations, they must cross local highways and thousands are crushed by traffic. Toadlets that survive take 2-3 years to become adults before they migrate back down the mountain to breed in their same natal lake and complete nature's cycle.

All migrations pose significant risks. Although predators, such as garter snakes, wait along toadlet migration paths for their next meal, the worst threat to toad conservation involves crossing a busy highway during migration.

At Summit Lake, a major study has been ongoing since 2006. This research and ongoing mitigation measures like the annual ToadFest event have greatly raised our understanding and public support for conservation of western toads. ToadFest involves hundreds of families bucketing tens of thousands of toadlets across Highway 6 to help reduce traffic kills. Unfortunately, proposed clearcutting by a local logging company owned by the Village of Nakusp threatens to undo much of these conservation efforts. NACFOR (Nakusp and Area Community Forest) claims that by logging the forests where toads and toadlets hibernate (near the ToadFest area) in winter, it won't cause any harm. We don't agree. Winter logging with ground skidders and bulldozers is bound to have a harmful effect and jeopardize tens of thousands of hibernating toads and toadlets that people had previously bucketed across the highway. VWS is working with local citizens to try to stop the logging and instead have the mountain protected as a toad reserve.

On another front, in order to help reduce road kills at Fish-Bear Lakes, VWS biologists began a 2015 study with a small grant from the Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program (FWCP) and VWS donors. This study identified the high density of toads at Fish Lake as regionally significant but threatened, as at Summit Lake, by high mortality when the adults and toadlets stage their different migrations across the highway. In the past, VWS has organized volunteers to bucket migrating toadlets across the highway at Fish Lake but this was not enough. We are hoping to continue the research for another two years in order to get enough information to design safe highway underpasses and other structures so that this toad population will be able to survive for a long time. In 2015, thousands of tourists stopped at the Fish Lake rest stop and visited our western toad interpretive site.



Volunteer students bucketing toadlets at Fish Lake. Photo: Wayne McCrory.



Youth helping toadlets across highway at Fish Lake. Plastic fence in background is designed to direct toadlets to cross under highway bridge to help reduce mortality. Western toads play an important role in the ecosystem food chain. They eat worms, slugs, spiders, and insects and in turn become important food for many other animals, including various birds and snakes. Tadpoles are also important as part of the food chain in lakes and for recycling lake nutrients. Photo: Wayne McCrory

New Dasiqox Tribal Park ‘Nexwagwez?an’ (321,300 ha) in BC Chilcotin: Part way there but needs legislated protection

The great news is that, supported by the conservation efforts of Friends of Nemaiah Valley (FONV), VWS, and others, on October 4, 2014, the Xenigwet'in and Yunesit'in First Nations announced protection of the Dasiqox Tribal Park ‘Nexwagwez?an’, which means “It is there for us” (<http://dasiqox.org>). The formation of the park was based partly on a conservation study by Wayne McCrory, Alice Williams, Linda Smith, and Baden Cross that was supported by the Wilburforce Foundation, VWS, and others. Management and terms of the new tribal park are still being worked out by First Nations. Although the McCrory et al. report recommended legislated protection in the form of a provincial conservancy or a legislated tribal park like the Stein Class A Tribal Park, the First Nations decided to go with a tribal park. Unfortunately, this designation is not recognized by either the federal or provincial governments. While respecting the tribal park designation, VWS is continuing to encourage legislated protection.



Landscape of Dasiqox Tribal Park. Fish Lake, where Taseko's open pit mine was turned down twice by a federal environmental review panel, is in the foreground. Photo: Jeremy Williams

Sadie Parr's research shows mule deer and wild horses are important to diet of Chilcotin wolves

A wolf feeding ecology study and outreach program by Sadie Parr was initiated in the BC Chilcotin in May 2013. The project is a partnership between VWS, FONV, Wolf Awareness Inc., and the Xenigwet'in First Nation. Sadie has done an incredible job with presentations to the community and schools, and by distributing the *Rancher's Toolkit* to help livestock communities understand that wolves are an integral part of the ecosystem; that killing them only makes matters worse. She is slowly making inroads in the local community, where wolves are aggressively trapped and hunted due to old prejudices and misunderstandings, along with a regressive and misinformed provincial wolf policy that is causing widespread trapping and hunting.



Biologists Wayne McCrory and Sadie Parr count spawning Chinook salmon in Elkin Creek. Jeremy Williams Photo.

Sadie's study involves collecting and analyzing wolf scat and using stable isotopes from wolf guard hairs to better understand their dietary habits. Although the study is far from over, early results indicate that deer, followed by wild horses, moose, and small mammals are important food items. In September, Sadie, with the help of Wayne McCrory, documented evidence of wolves feeding on Chinook salmon in the study area.

This may be one of the first times that wolves have been documented eating salmon in the BC Interior. Isotope analysis of wolf guard hairs will provide further evidence and reveal if the wolves are eating the super-salmon that spawn after making their extensive journey up the Fraser River.

DNA study shows Chilcotin-Brittany Triangle wild horses have unique ancestry

In 2014, VWS, FONV, and the Xenigwet'in First Nation released the final DNA report on the wild horses of the Brittany Triangle in the Eagle Lake Henry Cayuse Wild Horse Preserve. The study, by Dr. Gus Cothran of Texas A & M University and Wayne McCrory, found that the foundation bloodlines are the Canadian horse and an ancient bloodline from Siberia, the Yakut horse (see www.vws.org).

The study will help protect the Brittany wild horse ecosystem, although how the bloodlines of the Yakut horse got into the Chilcotin remains a mystery. Further DNA testing is planned for next year on the east side of the Taseko River. The 2014 study brought considerable interest and publicity, including a proposal by Genome BC to do the first genome sequencing on BC wild horses based on our study.

IMMINENT GOVERNMENT DECISION EXPECTED TO INCREASE PROTECTION OF THE GREAT BEAR RAINFOREST (GBR): GREEN RIVER WATERSHED MAY BE INCLUDED

As this newsletter goes to press, a second and final stage of negotiations on the fate of the Great Bear Rainforest has come to an end and the final decision by government is expected soon. By the time this newsletter reaches you, there could be eight new areas in the GBR protected from logging but not from mining and tourism development. There is a good chance the Green River Watershed may be included. VWS has worked for 25 years on protection of the Green River, and we have provided abundant input into further protection of the GBR. The Board of Directors is glad to see these important steps forward, but we warn that there are numerous shortcomings to the deal that has been struck. Our coastal representative bear biologist Wayne McCrory gives his analysis below of what is in the works:



New protection areas as part of the final GBR Agreement. Source: www.for.gov.bc.ca/TASB/SLRP/GBR_BMTA_LUOR.html

In 2006, after a prolonged international controversy surrounding clearcut logging of BC's ancient coastal rainforests, the provincial government, along with coastal First Nations and the "Joint Solutions Project" (a coalition of three major environmental groups and five forest companies), announced the Great Bear Rainforest (GBR) Agreement, saying its goal is to achieve ecological integrity and a high quality of life. This included setting aside 106 new protection areas, mostly as conservancies, resulting in protection of about one-third of the GBR. The 2006 GBR Agreement also laid out the framework for new ecosystem-based management (EBM) logging guidelines to protect biodiversity through "results based forestry." At that time, previous no-log moratoria on sensitive islands and watersheds that did not receive protective status were dropped, leaving them wide open to logging. This and the often stalled "talk and log" EBM negotiations led to many

globally significant ancient rainforests being logged and the trees shipped out as raw logs with no jobs to BC sawmills.

The EBM negotiations between the forest companies, the three environmental groups (Sierra Club of BC, Forest Ethics Solutions, and Greenpeace), and coastal First Nations have "only" taken nine years, mostly behind closed doors. The government opened up the *Proposed Great Bear Rainforest Order* EBM process to public input twice: once in 2009 and again this past summer. VWS and others made recommendations for improvements but few appear to have been followed, making the public input process a window-dressing farce. What does the *Proposed Great Bear Rainforest Order* look like so far? (www.for.gov.bc.ca/TASB/SLRP/GBR_BMTA_LUOR.html).

New Protected Areas: Mixed good and bad news

Another eight areas comprising 295,000 ha are proposed for partial protection, including a key VWS-proposed protected area, the Green River (see below). If the government agrees, the overall good news would be that these eight new areas would increase the total area of the GBR protected from logging from 33% to 38%. However, if the new proposal areas are only partially protected in the government's final decision, only 28% would be fully protected as legislated parks and conservancies.

Currently, the proposed GBR order identifies the new 2015 areas to be only partially protected in a new category called *Biodiversity Mining-Tourism Areas (BMTAs)*. These would exclude logging but not mining and tourism. Also, they won't be protected under the *Park Act* but rather the weaker *Environment and Land Use Act*. One of these new BMTAs, the Kimsquit, has already been heavily logged out. It can be said that 38% of the GBR could end up being off limits to logging if government agrees. This is close to 40%, the minimum agreed to in the 2004 agreement signed by all environmental groups working on the coast, which was to protect 40%-60% of the GBR. VWS asked government to give full *Park Act* protection to the BMTAs, which would protect them from both logging and mining.

Final Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) logging guidelines

The EBM guidelines are intended to mitigate the impacts of logging on biodiversity, and cover everything from marbled murrelets to tailed frogs and grizzly bears. There is not enough space in this newsletter to provide a comprehensive review. From the outset in 1999, VWS biologists have had major input into the proposed guidelines. Recently, we provided evidence from an independent scientific study that proposed EBM no-log protection buffers along salmon streams and coastal estuaries need to be doubled in width to

300 m. We also provided a background study on the need to protect bear den habitats. These have been incorporated into the new EBM guidelines for bear dens. Coastal bears of both species rely on old growth trees for winter survival; previously, there were no guidelines. While the new EBM guidelines offer some improvements over the old coastal logging methods, we do not feel they are ample enough to protect overall biodiversity due to too many concessions being made to the forest companies.

The claim that overall protection of old-growth forests across the landscape will go from 50% to 70% must be understood in the context that there is already very heavy fragmentation in many low-elevation areas of the coast. This is reason to protect 100% of what old-growth remains. Worse, under the agreement, old-growth in parks and conservancies would be used to reduce the overall amount of old-growth needed to protect biodiversity in lands where logging is allowed.

This will lead to over-cutting in some areas.

It is good news that the new EBM guidelines include increased protection of rare and endangered forest types (called “forest site series”) for old-growth representation for maintaining landscape biodiversity. However, where these sites have not been mapped, the logging companies have 50 years to map them. Unbelievable. There won’t be much left in 50 years; companies have already taken out huge swaths of ancient forest during nine years of negotiations.

Mixed good news: Green River will be protected

VWS feels it is very good news that the Green River Watershed will be protected—more or less. Our 2001 conservation report with the Sierra Club showed that the Green River Proposal encompasses an incredible grizzly bear-spirit bear-salmon ecosystem and the largest stand of ancient Sitka spruce on the central coast.

At tidewater, the Green River flows into a lovely fiord with a reversing tidal river. However, in the latest GBR Order, one-half of the fiordal inlet is excluded from proposed protection. We have asked that it be included. The Kitasoo Xai’xais First Nation supports protection of the Green River Watershed and fiord, not as a weaker BMTA but as a provincially legislated, fully protected Tribal Park like the Stein. Protection of the Green will be an important addition

to the already protected half-million-acre Spirit Bear Conservancy complex.

Not so good news: Gribbell Island, mother island of the spirit bears, still has no protection

The rocky shores of tiny Gribbell Island (20,000 ha) rise steeply from the Pacific Ocean at the intersection of Douglas Channel and the Inside Passage. Its mountainous granite peaks tower well above treeline. An estimated 150 bears of



Small and rugged Gribbell Island is home to the Pacific Coast’s most genetically unique and rare black bear population. Ian McAllister photo.

the Kermode subspecies have eked out a living here since the last Ice Age, even though there are only two small salmon streams and overall habitat values are low. Much of Gribbell’s best ancient rainforests have already been clearcut.

Genetic studies show that over 40% of Gribbell’s bears are all white, the highest white:black ratio on the coast. Scientists consider Gribbell the likely birthplace of the unique gene that makes some

bears all white. They call it the mother island of the white bear. In 2006, the government refused to protect Gribbell Island in spite of overwhelming public and scientific input. Instead, they made it a *Kermode Bear Stewardship Area* that allows logging and mining. VWS then produced a major conservation report recommending full protection (www.savespiritbear.org). So far, our input into the two GBR public input processes to have Gribbell protected has fallen on deaf ears. As a final plea to getting Gribbell fully protected as a conservancy, VWS recently submitted our conservation report to the BC government and the Gitga’at First Nation, along with a petition asking for full protection signed by 88 scientists from around the world. It would be an international travesty if it was not protected.

Support VWS’s coastal campaign. Book a 2016 spring bear viewing trip to the Great Bear Rainforest. Eric and Trish Boyum, owners of Ocean Adventures Charter Company, will donate a portion of the income from one of their spring bear-viewing trips to VWS’ coastal campaign. If you take one, you will be able to view and photograph grizzly bears as you cruise past misty islands and up beautiful inlets on BC’s central coast—areas that VWS helped to save thanks to the support of you and others. Contact www.oceanadventures.bc.ca. Explain that you are a VWS supporter.

An Urgent Call for Letters to Stop the Wolf Cull This Winter and for Increased Habitat Protection for Endangered Mountain Caribou

This winter, when snow makes the wolves easy to spot from the air, the BC government plans to waste your tax dollars to hire sharpshooters to slaughter the wolves from helicopters. Please help us end this inhumane wolf cull and protect caribou habitat. Here are some points to consider for your letters:

Unanimous scientific opinion says that human activities that remove old-growth forest—including logging, road-building, energy development, and access via snowmobiles and off-road vehicles—are the cause of the decline of the mountain caribou.

Killing wolves while continuing to allow industry to destroy caribou habitat and snowmobilers to swarm all over critical winter forage areas creates the illusion of “saving” caribou as they are being pushed ever closer to the brink of extinction through increasing disturbance and habitat loss.

Killing wolves will further damage the ecosystems, as all large predators play vitally important roles in ecosystems that protect numerous smaller species. When the wolves go, other species will be lost, too. There are 40 species known to be at risk that are listed in the lower elevation caribou forests—the Inland Temperate Rainforests—and scientists believe there are many more at risk. The best thing we can do now is protect these forests.

Please send letters to the four MLAs listed in the box on the right and demand that the BC government establish the proposed Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park. For more details on our caribou-wolf work in 2015, please see our Home Page at www.vws.org.



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MANY VOICES TOGETHER MAKE A RIVER OF CHANGE

The Valhalla Wilderness Society has been operating for 35 years. Our directors are aging, but we are still blessed with good enough health to have had a phenomenal year in 2015. Hopes of retiring evaporate in the heat of so many environmental crises, where it seems that our voice is still crucial. Several of our staff support team gave out after many years of faithful service. This year we needed new help to manage membership and accounting. But other kinds of help arrived just when we needed it. We give a big thank you to new recruit and ardent campaigner, Louise Taylor, who has some years of experience working with humanitarian aid agencies. We also continue to have the indispensable assistance of biologist Sadie Parr; biologist, writer, and editor Maggie Paquet; and GIS analyst Baden Cross.

Just when we were trying to figure out how to get two directors, three scientists, and a filmmaker and all his gear into the Incomappleux forest many kilometres into the backcountry along a washed-out logging road, along came two hardy adventurers, Simon Shave and Sean Elkink, who volunteered as sherpas. And believe us, the filming would not have been possible without them carrying gear and slashing through an enormous avalanche on the road. A big thank you

also to Henry Hutter and Hank Hastings for the days they spent slashing brush on the road.

VWS continues to have the generous assistance of professional scientists and technical experts. For the filming, Dr. Toby Spribille arrived from Graz University in Austria, with graduate student Veera Tuovinen and Dr. Piotr Lukasik of the University of Montana. Their efforts turned up insects, orchids, and moss species we had never seen before. With help like this, the river that has been the Valhalla Wilderness Society flows on, and our faithful members and supporters have been its bedrock. Needless to say, we greatly appreciate your donations, which poured in even when we missed the 2014 year-end newsletter.

The message we want to stress at the end of this year is the urgent need for you to use your voices to demand better environmental protection, particularly about the triple crises of climate change, fossil fuel development, and loss of biodiversity. Protecting old-growth forests is critical for ameliorating climate change and species loss; it is VWS's specialty, and we continue doing it as best we can with all the resources invested in us.