

Photos and video reveal Blue-Listed Western Toads found throughout forest slated to be logged in Nakusp

Toadlets found squashed in the road while NACFOR prepares to log

NAKUSP, BC – A recent photo and video expedition has revealed thousands of Western Toads are dispersing into their forested habitat that is slated to be imminently logged. The images and video show toads under logging equipment, on logging roads as well as on branch roads into the logging cut blocks. Branch roads were constructed in February 2016.

In the fall of 2015, Nakusp Community Forest (NACFOR) was given permission by the BC government to log the habitat of one of the province's most important populations of Western Toad, a blue-listed species at risk in BC.

"British Columbia spent \$750,000 to build a tunnel to protect these toads from highway deaths as they migrate from Summit Lake to the surrounding forest," says Gwen Barlee, national policy director with the Wilderness Committee. "Now, the government is allowing their forested habitat to be destroyed. Toads are already getting squashed on logging roads as NACFOR moves in logging equipment right while the toads' spring dispersal is in full swing."

On May 11, NACFOR had started grading the logging roads while hundreds of toads were migrating across it.

"Now they have brought in a feller-buncher, which means logging could begin at any time," says Craig Pettitt, a director of the Valhalla Wilderness Society. "We recorded young toads all around their machine. We are outraged that the government and NACFOR would allow logging in critical toad habitat when it is clear toads will be killed left, right and centre."

At an Open House held May 19, the public was shocked to hear NACFOR foresters state that they knew that their logging operations would kill toads, but that they are going ahead with logging regardless. The statements by these foresters shows a total disregard for any of the best management practices literature they have provided the public on NACFOR's website.

"The Western Toad is disappearing from the U.S. and parts of southern BC, and habitat loss and fragmentation are recognized by scientists as one of the primary causes," says Wayne McCrory, a biologist with the Valhalla Wilderness Society. "The Summit Lake population already suffers serious mortality on the main highway, and the logging activities will increase mortality. Whole populations of these toads have disappeared elsewhere which is why we must protect this provincially important population of western toads."

The BC government's Management Plan for the Western Toad recommends that as much forest habitat as possible be maintained, 'adjacent to breeding sites to allow for hibernation, foraging, and other essential life functions.' Government scientists acknowledge that the Summit Lake region is one of the key breeding areas for western toads in the Kootenay region, if not the entire province. In natural situations 99 per cent of young western toads will not survive their first year. For the Summit Lake toads this number is even higher because of highway mortality.

"Signage at Summit Lake proudly declares 'BC the global keepers of the Western Toad,' said Debbie Pitaoulis who lives near Summit Lake. "The BC government deserves to feel proud for investing time and money to get these toads off the highway and into the forest where they live more than 95% of their lifespan. But allowing the

destruction of that very habitat is shameful and irresponsible. The BC government needs to step in and protect their core habitat for the toads, for the province and for the world.”

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