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**Valhalla Wilderness Society – Save-the-Cedar League —
Applied Ecological Stewardship Council — Purcell Wilderness Alliance**

PRESS RELEASE

**Environmental Groups Slam Misleading Statements
by BC Minister of Forests Pat Bell**

BC Minister of Forests Pat Bell has making erroneous, politically-slanted characterizations of environmental groups in the media. On January 13, the Minister made untrue, disparaging remarks about the Valhalla Wilderness Society (VWS) in the *Nelson Daily News*. On January 27 VWS notified the Minister that his comments were untrue, and sent him a detailed refutation of his claims (see www.vws.org.) But a few days later Bell made a similar attack on the Wilderness Committee (CBC News, Jan. 31, 2008). Both organizations have been advocating an end to logging the province's oldest trees and forests.

The Minister praised ForestEthics, Wildsight, Dogwood Initiative, Greenpeace, and Sierra Legal Defense Fund (now Ecojustice) as having superior credibility. ForestEthics, Wildsight and Greenpeace are partners in government conservation programs that allow extensive destruction of old-growth forest. Such programs, in the mountain caribou range of the Interior Wetbelt, and in the Great Bear Rainforest on the coast, are under intense criticism from other environmental groups.

“Mountain caribou are endangered today because the BC government would not protect enough commercial old-growth forest,” says Gary Diers, head of the West Kootenay-based Purcell Wilderness Alliance. “Some of the grassroots groups in the this part of BC naturally expected that a mountain caribou recovery plan would protect a substantial amount of commercial forest. Imagine our shock when the government announced a backroom agreement that the new plan would involve ‘no net loss’ to the logging industry. Two of the organizations praised by Bell were part of that deal, and the taxpayers are now paying Pat Bell’s salary to promote them.”

The Minister also alleged that a third organization, Dogwood Initiative, was involved in an agreement for the recovery of the endangered mountain caribou. However, Dogwood Initiative was never known to be part of that agreement and has firmly stated in writing that it had nothing to do with it.

“Minister Bell’s remarks should be recognized as abnormal and improper government behaviour,” says Anne Sherrod, Chair of the Valhalla Wilderness Society. “If the Minister of Forests wishes to praise environmental groups for truly meritorious achievements, that’s one thing, But in these cases he has used the names of specific groups to attack others as lacking equal credibility. These attacks are clearly related to the large and growing public demand to stop logging old-growth forest. It appears the logging industry is getting a free PR campaign from the Minister. But almost all of the groups praised by Bell have written one form of letter or the other repudiating the Minister’s remarks.”

“I represented the Applied Ecological Stewardship Council at the West Kootenay C.O.R.E. planning table, and the North Kootenay Mountain Caribou Recovery Implementation proceedings, and at every opportunity in between and since,” says Glada McIntyre. After years of participating in what we thought was a sincere public process to protect the mountain caribou, in October, 2007 we were shocked to learn about the secret negotiations. Minister Bell’s Ministry at the time, the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, betrayed our trust by simultaneously holding secret negotiations with some environmental groups. They signed confidentiality agreements to keep the information secret until the agreement was finalized. The worst thing is that the government has claimed that the organizations that sold out by agreeing to far less than those of us who participated in the public process were actually representing the interests of the entire conservation community. This was simply not true.”

“Local people in the Robson Valley have worked for decades to protect mountain caribou and old-growth,” says Rick Zammuto of Save-the-Cedar League. “But very little of the protection is of old-growth commercial forest. As the logging becomes more severe, our caribou will suffer. We have worked for many years with Valhalla Wilderness Society, Wilderness Committee, and other groups to protect ancient Inland Rainforest, but we have never received any help from the groups being promoted by Minister Bell. We have huge community support in the Prince George TSA for preserving old-growth Inland Rainforest, yet the Minister isn’t even representing the thousands in his own Riding that want an end to Inland Rainforest logging East of Prince George.”

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