



June 27, 2017

OPEN LETTER TO ALL BC MLAs CONCERNING A PLAN TO TURN THE MANAGEMENT OF OUR WILDLIFE OVER TO A NON-GOVERNMENT AGENCY

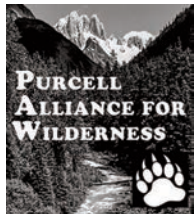
On March 22, 2017, the BC government announced a decision to transfer wildlife management from the provincial government to a separate agency funded by sales of hunting licences and potentially donations from private interest groups. The government said it had allocated \$200,000 for a public consultation process to determine the governance model and funding sources of the new agency. However, the creation of the agency, itself, was presented to the public as a done-deal after consultations solely with hunting interests. Media reports stated that “local hunting, conservation and wildlife groups will establish the framework for a new independent group.”

The wildlife of the province belongs to all British Columbians, and has by law been held by the government in trust, to conserve the wildlife itself, and to ensure the rights of all members of the public. The British Columbia Wildlife Act states that “Ownership in all wildlife in British Columbia is vested in the government.” That means that elected representatives can be held accountable for their wildlife decisions through general elections and in courts. Indeed, a groundswell of public unhappiness with the way our wildlife has been mismanaged (grizzly bear trophy hunt) was a significant issue in the recent election.

In announcing the proposed new agency, Energy and Mines Minister Bill Bennett stated in the media that “The government is afraid to manage wolves, or afraid to manage grizzly bears in some cases because of the politics of that. Hopefully, an agency that is separate from government can make decisions that are in the best long-term interest of wildlife and just forget about the politics and do what is best for the animals.”

We are sorry to learn that Minister Bennett believes our government representatives cannot apply the wildlife laws and science in an unbiased manner, since we believed that’s what they were elected to do. However, they are accountable to voters, whereas an independent agency would not be. It would have no duty to represent all British Columbians, and would be far more susceptible to influence by special interest groups.

BC does not need a new wildlife agency to ensure that fees paid by hunters will support wildlife management. Currently, these fees go into the BC government’s consolidated revenue pool. There has never been any reason why the government cannot forward an equal amount and more to wildlife management projects, since commercial wildlife viewing brings in more revenue as well. But if the fees for hunting licences were to go directly to a non-government agency



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that decides hunting quotas, the agency can then increase its own funding, staff and salaries by selling more hunting tags; this would induce managers to turn a blind eye to the scientific facts governing wildlife populations, and the focus would be on increasing the numbers of game animals, rather than on ecosystem health. We're told the new agency would be able to accept donations from "outside groups that have an interest in wildlife". In the past US hunters groups have poured hundreds of thousands of dollars into BC to influence wildlife management (Van. Sun, Mar. 10, 2003), but they have never been able to pay the government wildlife ministries directly. This funding source would increase the risk of outside control.

We recognize that bias has already had a negative impact on wildlife management in BC. For instance, the province maintains grizzly bear trophy hunting despite the disapproval of a huge majority of the urban and rural British Columbians surveyed; despite scientists' warning that the animals are imperilled, and despite the fact that grizzly bear viewing brings in far more revenue than grizzly bear hunting. Meanwhile, over the last decade the staff and funding for our wildlife stewardship ministries have been slashed to the bone, with a great loss of conservation officers, biologists, and research capacity. The plan for a non-government agency can only make all these important matters much worse.

We call your attention to the fact that BC has a serious biodiversity crisis. It has over 1,500 species at risk. Scientists have said that the rapid demise of species can cause ecosystem collapse, and is actually a threat to the future survival of life on the planet. Never at any time has it been more important to manage wildlife, forests, and all our natural resources to promote biological diversity and ecological integrity. Yet hunting fees and donations from private interests are unlikely to fund the research and actions on non-game species and habitat that are required.

The undersigned organizations and businesses call on all government representatives to recognize that wildlife is a critical public interest that needs to be safeguarded from exploitation by private interests and supported by our tax dollars. We urge you to:

- 1) Cancel the plan for an "independent" agency.
- 2) Increase the wildlife management staff and funding of government ministries.
- 3) Recognize that BC has a biodiversity crisis; it requires a shift in focus from juggling numbers of game animals for hunters, to applying the science of ecology.
- 4) Recognize that all British Columbians are stakeholders in our wildlife. All interest groups should be equally empowered. Only about 2% of the total BC population are registered hunters, whereas a huge majority of British Columbians care about the welfare of our wildlife and ecosystems.

Sincerely,

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Barb Murray, Bears Matter

Bonny Glambeck, Clayoquot Action

Rhonda Bachelor
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Valerie Murray, Justice for BC Grizzlies

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Eric Boyum
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Gary and Ronda Murdock
Pacific Rainforest Adventure Tours Inc.

Ian McAllister, Pacific Wild

Gary Diers
Purcell Alliance for Wilderness

Chris Genovali
Raincoast Conservation Foundation

Dr. Rick Zammuto
Save-the-Cedar League

Adrian Nelson, The Fur-Bearers

Craig Pettitt, Valhalla Wilderness Society

Emily Pickett, Vancouver Humane Society

Joe Foy, Wilderness Committee

Tommy Knowles, Wildlife Defense League

Sadie Parr, Wolf Awareness Inc.

Julie Woodyer, Zoocheck Canada

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