

# Valhalla Wilderness Society

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## LOGGING DEFERRAL FOR THE INCOMAPPLEUX

Dear Members and Supporters,

Just recently the Incomappleux was one of nine areas that received two-year logging deferrals from the BC government. The Incomappleux part of VWS's 156,460-hectare Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal is 37,000 hectares. The deferral is 40,000 hectares, so we are optimistic (but not certain) that the deferral covers the whole Incomappleux unit of our proposal. VWS has requested to see the deferral on a map, but we have not received a reply from government.

We hope that the government would not announce deferrals for areas and then end up not protecting them. But the process is subject to negotiations with logging companies and First Nations. If the negotiations fail to approve a park, would that mean a green light for the international logging company Interfor to log these forests with trees up to 1,800 years old?

The deferrals drew controversy because the announcement was linked to the recent report on old-growth forests by a BC government-appointed panel. In reality very little of the "deferred" 353,000 hectares is old-growth. The government acknowledged that the areas chosen were not slated for imminent logging, thus the deferrals come at no loss to the logging companies. Environmentalists trying desperately to protect old-growth from imminent logging were upset, to say the least. VWS calculates that the Incomappleux Valley needs only 8,000 hectares of logging deferrals to prevent old-growth from being logged. We have written a letter to government asking for the other 32,000 hectares of Incomappleux deferral to be applied to old-growth forest elsewhere.

A rumour has circulated that a rockfall on a bridge has made logging the Incomappleux impossible, which is untrue. The only thing keeping the road from being repaired is the cost. If government offers a subsidy, such as more approved cutblocks, Interfor could fix it. There are already five approved cutblocks in the ancient forest that can be legally logged at any time. It is a great relief to know that the forest is safe for the next two years.



**The Incomappleux rainforest remains unparalleled in interior British Columbia for its combination of antiquity, biodiversity, low elevation, and intact extent.**

### **Why does the Incomappleux have so little old-growth?**

The Incomappleux has the most extensive intact stand of giant trees, ranging up to 1,800 years old, in a wet Inland Temperate Rainforest, currently known to exist. About two-thirds of the forested area of the valley were logged before efforts began to protect it.

VWS included some of the logged portion in our park proposal, as it is interconnected with valuable habitats. A glacier-fed river, host to one-fifth of the spawning bull trout from the Arrow Reservoir, runs through both the ancient forest and regenerating clearcut areas. The river crosses an extensive wetland where five species at risk have been found. North of the ancient forest, the valley has huge avalanche chutes with jungle-like vegetation which provide a rich haven for grizzly bears that wander in and

out of Glacier National park. Within the 37,000-hectare Incomappleux part of the proposal, 27,000 hectares are completely intact wilderness contiguous to the large national park.

VWS believes the highest priority for protection is the few remaining large intact areas that have old-growth forest. Biological diversity and connectivity between varied ecosystems must be considered, so the Incomappleux proposal includes diverse habitats. The area retains all of its native large carnivores. These wide-ranging species need travel corridors. The inclusion of some of the old clearcuts offers the hope of a recovering forest that will connect with old-growth in the adjacent Westfall and Duncan Valleys, which are also part of the Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal.

When VWS presented the full park proposal to the Deputy Ministers of Environment, they called it a "gold standard" park proposal. The Incomappleux part alone would make an excellent park teaming with biodiversity. However, this newsletter presents the urgent need for a drastic increase in the protection of old-growth forest, and tells why new, fully protected parks are needed to play a key role.

# FIELD INVESTIGATIONS SHINE A LIGHT ON FOREST MISMANAGEMENT

## Destroying the Rarest of the Rare

VWS continues to maintain a strong field component to our work, to tell the truth about what is happening in our forests and to our wildlife. In the West Kootenay Region, where VWS is located, endangered mountain caribou tracks are being seen in many locations that the BC government says they don't use. This justifies the logging of these areas, especially by BC Timber Sales, the government's own logging company that sells off forest to private operators. This is one of the reasons why VWS director Craig Pettitt maintains a presence in the region's forests.

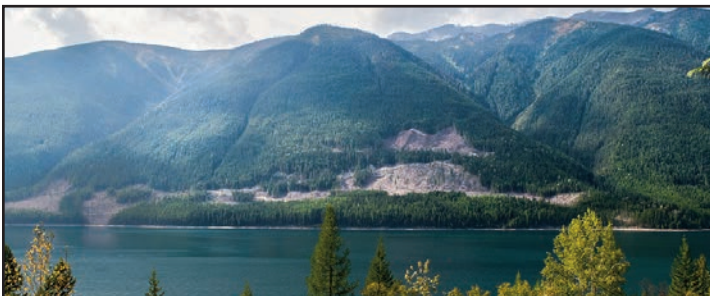
As a former forest technician and foreman of a fire-fighting crew for the Ministry of Forests for over 20 years, Craig's knowledge of these mountains is extensive. He has found caribou or their tracks where they weren't supposed to be a number of times over the years. He monitors logging of mountain caribou habitat, and guides journalists, film-makers and other interested persons to see the rare old-growth Inland Temperate Rainforest and its destruction.

Craig and VWS Biologist Amber Peters escorted Sadie Parr of Wolf Awareness and film maker Ramey Newell to the Downie Creek area north of Revelstoke this summer, in the range of the North Columbia Caribou herd, to film clearcutting of Inland Rainforest with 700 year old trees that would otherwise be destroyed with no one ever knowing they existed. (The film teaser can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/481051698>).

A second filmmaker, Daniel Pierce, was guided into Downie Creek to see the ongoing destruction of the remaining old-growth. The trees ranged up to 3m in diameter and were 1,000-1,800 years old. The valley is now too fragmented to support caribou or make a park, but what kind of greed does it take to reduce an ancient forest to shreds, leaving no patch of significant size for present and future British Columbians to even have a hike along the creek, much less a place for caribou?

## Forest and Range Practices Act is a sham

British Columbians should know that, as our remaining old-growth forest dwindles, forest practices have become worse, not better, as deregulation subsidizes the logging of ecologically sensitive areas. A key example is the logging in our Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal, shown below.



C. Pettitt

Clearcuts eat away at the edge of VWS's Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal, above the Duncan Reservoir. The forest is mature and soon to become old-growth, and is near known mountain caribou locations.



Downie Creek: Logging the oldest of the old near Revelstoke in the habitat of endangered mountain caribou. [C. Pettitt]

The road was pushed in despite professional assessment that the slopes were steep and unstable, and VWS's vigorous objections. A landslide reported by Craig to the Forest Practices Board (FPB) was inspected by the FPB this year. The investigators said the road-building and logging were allowable under the *Forest and Range Practices Act*, which has no prohibition against operating on unstable slopes, even above fish habitat such as Duncan Reservoir. VWS forwarded more information on the fish habitat and the FPB responded that the Forest and Range Practices Act has no binding constraints on logging practices and that the landslide is permissible.

Craig's work this year took him from photographing grizzly bear diggings on London Ridge for our campaign to stop the Zincton mega-ski development, to monitoring toads at two lakes, to inspecting damage by poorly built mountain bike trails. Along the way he had four separate encounters with another important species at risk: grizzly bears. Though they are always a pleasure to witness, the bears face greater threats as clearcut logging and roading fragments the habitat they need to survive and increases their conflict with humans.

**"Now it is only preserved as an image in Ramey's not-yet-released film; another ancient ecosystem with trees estimated at 700 or 800 years old has been taken from BC's scarred landscape; its unfathomable biodiversity reduced to another tree farm. Though it is hard to bear witness to these crimes against the next generation, it is only by acknowledging the massive political tragedy of our time, and daring to tell the true story, that BC people might rise up to preserve the very last of this natural legacy."**

**- Amber Peters**



# PARKS EXPANSION NECESSARY FOR REAL ACTION ON BIODIVERSITY LOSS

The call for an increase in fully protected areas has become urgent as BC's last wild ecosystems have been pushed to the brink. Every year new groups of scientists warn that the climate change and biodiversity crises require greatly increased protection of ecosystems. Some scientists recommend 50% of the Earth to be fully protected. Others recommend 30% fully protected, plus 20% in conservation zones. In 2020 the UN called for protection of 30% of the planet.

British Columbians this year have fought hard to protect remaining old-growth forest. But how should it be protected? BC has a number of semi-protection designations under weak legislation, often with loopholes for logging: Old Growth Management Areas (OGMAs) are often not legally designated at all, and there are cases where OGMAs have been declassified for logging. Wildlife Habitat Areas and Ungulate Winter Ranges may contain a mixture of no-logging zones and conditional harvest zones, which results in ongoing fragmentation of these areas.

The problem with all of these designations is that they are created under the Forest and Range Practices Act (FRPA), which does not regulate energy, mining or tourism development. Fortunately, in British Columbia, there is a legacy of parks that were fully and permanently protected under the BC Park Act. Although the Act was weakened by past governments, it is still far more protective than the FRPA. This legacy must be revived and expanded.

## Grow BC Parks Rally Cancelled by Covid-19

In 2019 VWS biologist Amber Peters worked with Barb Murray of Bears Matter to form a coalition with 56 other ENGOS, scientists and advocates across the province to petition for an expansion of our Parks and Protected Areas system. We formed a movement entitled Grow BC Parks, with the goal of increasing parks from under 15% to 30% of the province in Class A Parks and legislated Tribal Parks. With many in the global scientific community pleading for protection of half of the landbase, it is reasonable for the people of BC to expect that our remaining intact ecosystems would be preserved for future generations.

VWS and other coalition members had been planning to take a stand in the spring of 2020 in Vancouver, BC, at a rally to call on governments to increase our parks system to stem the decline of biodiversity, but these plans did not come to fruition when the province went into Covid lockdown. Since then environmental

groups have turned to online campaigning.

The campaign to protect our three park proposals of the Inland Temperate Rainforest with Class A status has continued this year despite the restrictions, and we have been blessed with the help of many VWS supporters who have continued to raise awareness at various community events and through personal projects inspired by the movement to protect what

remains. Amber also had the opportunity to present the case for a parks expansion to kids across Canada through the Virtual Learning Center this year. Though a rally may not be in the cards for some time we thank our coalition members and supporters for collecting signatures for the petition to 'Grow BC Parks' as well as the Glasswaters Foundation for helping us distribute thousands of decals with a link to our petition.

What we are finding is that the demand for full park status

is mostly coming from scientists and not from the public, because because years of pro-industry government betrayals have led the public to believe it can't have them anymore. Yet we have never had more powerful support from the scientific community, nor more compelling reasons to demand that the work of full protection must go on.

Today, only about 11% of BC is protected with Class A status, the highest protection status for parks, and much of that 11% protects high alpine areas that have far less biodiversity than the ancient valley-bottom forests that are being rapidly clearcut. It has now been ten years since the Auditor General of BC said that BC Parks would not protect biodiversity because our parks are too small, too few and far apart. Yet a significant parks increase has not come. Instead, we have lost more than ever over the years, with BC Parks funding on a steady decline that has led to the loss of rangers, increased park privatization, and reduced maintenance.

What BC needs now is to recognize the long term ecological and economic benefits of having this irreplaceable heritage preserved for future generations, and to stand up instead of foregoing the opportunity to preserve the last of our old growth forests and other ecological gems through permanent parks and biodiversity corridors.



Start the conversation in your community by displaying a Grow BC Parks bumper sticker. You will receive a decal with your tax receipt when you make a donation.



**BC's temperate rainforest is one of the greatest carbon-sequestering forest types on the planet. These forests are infinitely more resilient and biodiverse than plantation forests. [Photo: Ramey Newell]**

# MOUNTAIN CARIBOU: DEATH BY TALK-AND-LOG

The Deep Snow Mountain Caribou have been assessed as unique, Endangered and irreplaceable by Canada's ultimate authority on the status of species, COSEWIC. No other caribou in the world spend winter at high elevation in deep snow. No other kinds of caribou can be transplanted into their herds because they would not be adapted to deep snow and a diet of hair lichens on trees. But to survive, the Deep Snow ecotype also needs lower elevation old-growth Inland Temperate Rainforest. These caribou are Endangered because of logging, snowmobiles and heli-skiing.

In May 2018, the federal Minister of Environment made an emergency declaration of "imminent threat to recovery" for some mountain caribou populations, including the Deep Snow ecotype. She declared that so much habitat had been destroyed that recovery would soon become impossible; to save them, destruction of habitat must stop. Two-and-a-half years later, BC has not protected one hectare of additional habitat for the Deep Snow Caribou. The chief actions on the ground have been extensive killing of wolves, yet a new scientific study says that predator control has not and likely will not work for the Deep Snow Caribou.

## The Current Situation

Six out of 18 subpopulations of these caribou have already been wiped out. Five others are on the brink of disappearing. The total population ranges from an estimated 1,217 to 1,247 animals. In 2008 the government did protect some caribou habitat for these herds, but it was not enough. The federal and BC governments are allowing logging to continue destroying some of the already-decimated habitat of these herds.

BC has spent two-and-a-half years consulting First Nations, local governments, industrial interests, snowmobile and heli-skiing interests — this being the *second* multi-year round of consultations in twelve years. While they talk, the trees the caribou need are cut down and hauled away.

North of the Interior Wetbelt, the Central Mountain Caribou population of the South Peace region is also Endangered and has received a small amount of new habitat protection. Caribou in regions other than the Interior Wetbelt seek shallow snow in winter so they can dig for ground lichens. Because of this, they can't be used to augment the southern herds.

When BC government officials and scientists tell you that maternity pens will save the caribou, they are omitting that the only pen for Deep Snow Caribou, near Revelstoke, was shut down after five years due to 17 caribou cows and calves dying inside the pen, plus two pregnancy failures. The BC government says it is working on "herd plans" for Deep

Snow herds. What will the plans look like after the logging and heli-ski industries and snowmobile clubs have had their way for two-and-a-half years? Canada's *Species at Risk Act* is a casualty of this charade. Both governments are circumventing the law and stringing the public along with endless public consultations.



## What Is VWS Doing About It?

VWS action on caribou fell in the following categories:

1. In 2017 four environmental groups and biologists filed separate petitions under Canada's Species at Risk Act with the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). These petitions were responsible for the flurry of activity by the provincial and federal governments on caribou recovery during 2019.
2. In 2020 VWS worked with scientific and legal professionals to file a second, 60-page petition to Environment Canada on behalf of VWS, describing deficiencies in the federal and provincial response to the first petition. The VWS lawyer is researching a lawsuit.
3. VWS promotes three park proposals for old-growth forest that is also habitat for Deep Snow Caribou.
4. Field presence to document logging of caribou habitat.
5. VWS gives special attention to our local Central Selkirk herd, including submissions to the BC government opposing maternity penning, wolf culls, and excessive snowmobiling, with Action Alerts to our supporters calling for letters. Snowmobiling and heli-skiing are believed to be a major cause of the decline of the Central Selkirk herd. Using government reports, telemetry data and GIS mapping, VWS presented a proposal to double the amount of high quality caribou habitat closed to snowmobiles and heli-skiing. It was submitted to government with a petition signed by 500 local residents. (The increase was very small, but it was rejected).



# FLAWED SCIENCE AND CIRCUMVENTED LAW

**2020: 498 wolves shot from helicopters; 0 new habitat protection for Deep Snow Caribou**

When the federal Environment Minister declared mountain caribou at “imminent threat”, the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) required a recommendation from the Minister to Cabinet, to issue an order to BC to protect habitat. No order happened, nor has there been any public mention of a recommendation. An agreement between the federal and provincial governments did not commit to new habitat protection for the Deep Snow Caribou.

VWS consulted former Environment Canada biologist Dr. Lee Harding, who advised that the federal government had not followed the procedures prescribed by the SARA. When VWS obtained the assistance of a lawyer, Patrick Canning, Dr. Harding (who provided his services free of charge) worked with the lawyer and VWS to take apart piece-by-piece the mechanisms and subterfuges that had undermined the federal government’s responses.

Canada’s legal authority on the status of species, COSEWIC, had determined that the different kinds of caribou should have separate designations so that their varied ecology and population status could be taken into account to put the pro-



Jim and Jamie Dutcher, Livingwithwolves.org.

**VWS would like to thank Dr. Lee Harding, Dr. Viktoria Wagner and Dr. Toby Spribille for their leading roles in restoring truth to caribou/wolf science. Many thanks to the Edmonton Community Foundation for enabling VWS to have the services of an excellent lawyer, Patrick Canning.**

tection where it is needed. Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) has delayed adopting COSEWIC’s assessment of the Deep Snow Caribou as Endangered, and failed to meet legal deadlines for responding to COSEWIC. By law the Endangered designation should now be automatically in force. Disgracefully, the Deep Snow Caribou have no designation on the SARA Registry!

In May Mr. Canning filed a new petition under the SARA, documenting 30 errors and instances of invalid science that undermined the federal analysis of our first petition. The government had mixed the Central, and part of the Northern groups of mountain caribou with the Deep Snow ecotype, to get a population almost three times that of the Southern group. We believe that the failure to consider the ecotypes separately, and to recognize the Endangered status of the Deep Snow ecotype, resulted in a flawed analysis and weak response by the federal government.

The federal government’s failure to accept COSEWIC designations has occurred with many other species. VWS has asked Mr. Canning to investigate the grounds for a lawsuit to enforce the *Species at Risk Act*.

## Bombshell Study Exposes Flawed And Biased Science Behind Expanded Wolf Culls

Like many environmental groups, VWS objects to mass slaughter of wolves on ecological and humanitarian grounds. But our movement’s defense of wolves will never be successful until we all recognize that these “culls” are being driven by the logging of old-growth forest. BC caribou science has likely always been influenced by the fact that Deep Snow Mountain Caribou need old-growth Inland Temperate Rainforest that provides some of Canada’s most lucrative logging.

When the *Species at Risk Act* was passed, obeying it would have meant removing forest from the logging industry’s timber supply to reserve for caribou, thus reducing the Allowable Annual Cut (AAC). Instead the industry fired up its propaganda machines, and government rhetoric began to incorporate that propaganda. The public was led to believe that killing wolves is interchangeable with protecting habitat for saving caribou; ie, if you kill enough wolves, you won’t have to save much habitat for the caribou. This was so successful that BC’s first official mountain caribou recovery plan did not limit the timber supply or reduce the AAC.

Old-growth Inland Temperate Rainforest is a caribou-lichen ecosystem. The caribou eat lichens, and so need the forest for food and shelter at certain times of the year. Moose, deer and elk eat young trees and shrubs. These animals prefer young forest caused by fires and other conditions. Clearcuts have vastly increased young forest and depleted old forest. They have increased the animals that use young-forest ecosystems, and nearly wiped out the caribou and other species.

Wolves prefer to eat larger animals — moose, elk and deer. But as clearcuts consume old-growth forest, the wolves come closer into contact with caribou. Isolated in patches of forest left between the clearcuts, the caribou can easily be found by predators. But slaughtering the wolves doesn’t save caribou because, over time, this system destroys the forest they need for food and shelter. Unfortunately, the situation in BC has been fertile ground for a field of wildlife biology that focuses on manipulating predator and prey populations while largely dismissing the crucial role of habitat in the survival of species.

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## Bombshell Study Reveals Flawed Science Behind Wolf Culls (continued from page 5)

There are very good caribou biologists in BC government departments that are expert in their grasp of mountain caribou and their habitat; but decision-makers have found most attractive those scientific views that wolves are the primary cause of caribou decline, and the problem may be solved by killing the wolves.

Despite the failings of the federal government response to the various 2017 petitions, the petitioners did receive some valuable support in Environment Canada's "Imminent Threat Assessment". It made it clear that *killing predators without protecting more habitat will not save the mountain caribou*. It cited decades of studies showing that caribou populations decline in proportion with the percent of their range that's been disturbed.

As a result, in spring of 2019 the federal and provincial governments scheduled public meetings around the province to discuss the need for increased habitat protection and receive public input. But just before the meetings were scheduled to start, ten BC and Alberta biologists — most of whom had been advisors or managers to the two province's mountain caribou recovery programs — published a research paper in a prestigious scientific journal, presenting a statistical analysis that appeared to show that the previous wolf culls had improved caribou populations, whereas changes in habitat condition had had no effect.

A press release on the new study hit the media shortly before the meetings, with headlines across Canada such as: "Wolves must die to save Canada's caribou" (Calgary Herald, March 12, 2019). Citing this scientific study, the BC government shot 498 wolves from helicopters that winter.

Meanwhile glaring contradictions had caused retired Environment Canada biologist Dr. Lee Harding, as well as Drs. Viktoria Wagner and Toby Spribille at the University of Alberta, to begin separate, independent analyses. Eventually a team of researchers from five universities joined Dr. Harding's effort. They spent months re-running analyses on the data. Their study was peer-reviewed and published online in *Biodiversity and Conservation* this July, with the title:

### **"No statistical support for wolf control and maternal penning as conservation measures for endangered mountain caribou"**

Harding et al. found many errors in the study touted by the BC government. Using the same data and methods as the government biologists, they could not reproduce the same results. In summary, statistical analysis doesn't work the way the previous study used it. The Harding team says the results of

the original analysis may have been skewed by mixing four ecotypes of caribou. The Deep Snow ecotype is more dependent on old-growth forest and lichens, more sensitive to snow-pack conditions and wolves are not their primary predator, cougars and bears are. A multi-year wolf sterilization program in the Quesnel Highlands that failed to significantly increase the herd had been omitted from the original analysis. The potential impacts of snowmobiling on Deep Snow Caribou in particular were omitted.

This blasted a hole in the flawed scientific methodology, and widespread coverage in major media helped to unweight the damage done before the public meetings. VWS documented it all and sent a complaint to Environment Canada, to be attached to our second petition. It can be found on the VWS website.



### **Why should we care?**

There are cases of species sinking very low due to habitat loss, but through protection of remaining habitat and recovery of disturbed areas, being recovered. This is important because Deep Snow Mountain Caribou are the flagship species of hundreds of others that also stand to be lost as our old-growth Inland Temperate Rainforests are destroyed. It's the law in Canada to protect habitat for Endangered species, but a law is nothing if citizens will not demand its enforcement.

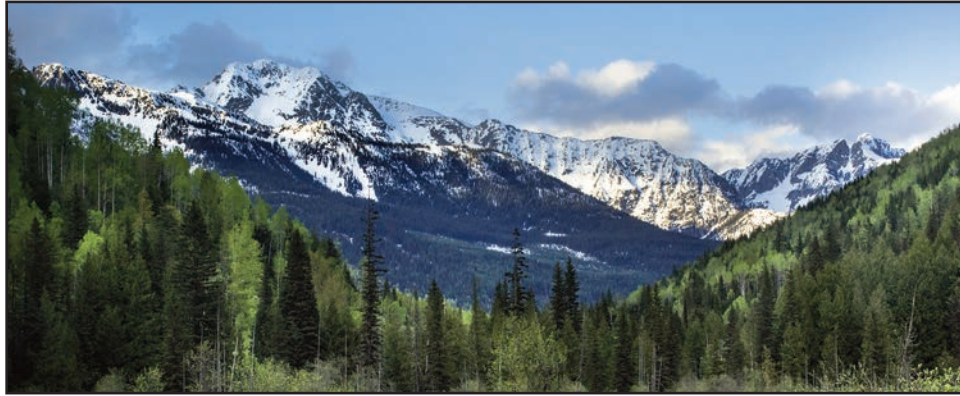
However, VWS sees single-species protection as a mistake. *Protection for species at risk should be consistent with maintaining biodiversity*. There are detailed records of what happened to Yellowstone Park after it lost its cougars and wolves: the elk population exploded and stripped the park of their favoured foods, especially young trees. Over the next 60 years the park lost an estimated 80-85% of its aspen trees, 50-95% of its willows, and almost all cottonwood seedlings. The loss of vegetation caused soil erosion that destabilized stream beds. Researchers believe that the numbers and species of songbirds were likely reduced due to habitat loss. The loss of willows and aspens all but wiped out the beaver population. With the return of the wolves, some willows and beavers have returned, but due to hydrological damage, much of the wetlands that were lost can never be recovered, thus the willows and beavers cannot fully recover.

"Save one species, kill the ecosystem" is not acceptable and in the end won't work. With much increased protection of Inland Temperate Rainforest, we would not only be giving the caribou their best chance to survive, but helping other species and also improving our own chances of surviving climate change and ecosystem collapse.



# PROPOSED MEGA-RESORT THREATENS IMPORTANT WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

VWS's work was urgently redirected this year when an Expression of Interest (EOI) for an all-seasons mega-resort in the remote mountain pass between New Denver and Kaslo was made public. The proponents of the Zincton Mountain Resort wish to span the mountains from Highway 31A up to Goat Range Provincial Park, between Three Forks and Retallack, with a massive commercial development that would include a lodge, a village, ski runs and mountain bike tracks. The proposal is the largest of an onslaught of land-grabbing commercial recreation tenure applications that have just popped up in this still-functional wildlife corridor in BC, and it has already passed through the initial public comment phase of its approval. Initial comments on the EOI will be used to guide the proponent through developing a formal proposal that will be subject to further public consultation before moving on to the next stage of the approval process.



**The mountain habitat above Fish and Bear Lakes where an all-seasons resort threatens multiple species at risk and local conservation efforts [Photo: Anne Sherrod]**

Western toad highway mortalities has just completed its sixth year. It is home to the rare white grizzly bear that is of great cultural importance to local First Nations, and other at-risk species like mountain goats and wolverine. The Expression of Interest promises a "green" operation, but fails to even mention

at-risk species. Such an influx of visitors would be devastating to the region's wildlife, regardless of efforts to mitigate harms.

VWS Chairperson Wayne McCrory developed a risk assessment of the proposal this year for submission to government, highlighting

the grave threat that a resort would pose to species at risk including local grizzly bear populations that depend on movement through the corridor to interbreed. Severing their connection would almost certainly mean extirpation of the South Selkirk grizzlies, now down to about 30 animals.

In the early 90's, while VWS and our supporters fought to achieve protection of Goat Range Provincial Park, Wayne undertook grizzly bear habitat assessments in Whitewater Valley, now a part of the proponent's application area, and helped the Ministry of Forests design a safe wildlife viewing trail that rerouted a trail originally designed to enter prime grizzly feeding areas. The Whitewater trail has since become a cherished public wildlife viewing area. But the proponents' tenure would reroute commercial operations back through grizzly feeding habitats and seize the remaining unprotected land on the outskirts of Goat Range Park, putting people at high risk of conflict and wildlife populations at risk of extirpation.

When VWS developed a review of the proposal in June and campaigned for public input to the BC government Mountain Resorts Branch, VWS was told that government had heard overwhelming opposition to the proposal. However, it is the Resorts Branch mandate "To develop British Columbia as a world-class, all-season resort destination," by approving of these business plans regardless of impacts to wildlife and BC's last wild ecosystems. It is now unfortunately up to the public to fervently oppose this much unneeded development. Much like BC's fight to stop the development of the proposed Jumbo Resort, a costly and long drawn out battle to protect prime wildlife habitat in the midst of a climate and biodiversity crisis is the last thing that the public needs, especially when a green recovery from the damages of a global pandemic should be our greatest focus. VWS will keep our supporters informed of the next public comment period and encourage engagement.



Lorna Visser

**Wayne McCrory and his granddaughters view grizzly bears from across Whitewater canyon where a new resort is being proposed.**

Any new adventure tourism tenure in this corridor would be a major step backward for the ongoing conservation efforts that the surrounding communities and our supporters have contributed to in one of BC's last truly biodiverse places. Year-round the resort would drive up to 1,750 people per day into a diversity of intact ecosystems where sensitive species depend on low human interference for their survival.

The application area is where VWS's project to reduce



## THOUSANDS OF WESTERN TOADS SAVED FROM HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AT FISH LAKE

This was the sixth year of VWS's Western toad conservation project at Fish and Bear Lakes between New Denver and Kaslo. Each spring thousands of adult toads move down from the surrounding mountains and cross Highway 31A to breed and lay eggs in Fish Lake, and then return across the highway to their mountain habitat later in the summer. Highway traffic along this popular destination route poses a particular risk to gravid (egg-bearing) females that can carry clutches of over 12,000 eggs. Below, VWS biologist Amber Peters tells about the experience this year of helping the toads safely across the road, and explains the significance of the work to biodiversity conservation in general, and to VWS's campaign to protect the area, which is some of the highest value wildlife habitat and recreation lands in the southern Interior of BC.



Migration warning signs and deflection fencing will remain permanent at Fish Lake to help with future migrations. [Photo: A Sherrod]

VWS biologists and volunteer "Toad Ambassadors" spent many nights this year scouting the study area in the remote mountain pass of Highway 31 A to record breeding toads and save them from highway mortality. The adult toads crawl across the highway, snatch worms on their way to and from Fish Lake, and are recorded in data sheets before being moved to safety. Approximately 650 adult toads were carried across the highway this year, and almost 5,000 have been helped since the start of the project.

Each nighttime survey was an adventure to look forward to. In the spring we witnessed many bears and their cubs feeding on the roadside vegetation, and a general diversity of wildlife that was truly remarkable. We observed moose peacefully feeding in the wetlands that we came to know individually and always anticipated meeting again, and sometimes we would have to patiently wait as they occupied the highway with no apparent intention to move. There were many herds of elk and deer, bats zipping by to catch mayflies, otter, mink, beaver, waterfowl, loon, great blue heron, and other amphibians and reptiles. At times, as the night fell, we couldn't help but pause from our focus on the highway to gaze at the vast constellations of stars over the wild and beautiful mountain range that is now being considered for a major resort-town. To lose this place of beauty would be nothing less than a tragedy for British Columbia.

In late summer, another incredible event occurs with hundreds of thousands of toadlets hatching in their aquatic habitats and crossing Highway 31A to migrate into the mountains.

This migration occurs in the heat of the day, so highway traffic is heavier and many travellers stop to see what's happening at the Fish Lake rest stop. Here we offer public education about the project and the risks facing it.

Western toads are a particularly special species because they are a bridge between the aquatic and terrestrial worlds, bringing nutrients from the lakes and wetlands through the mountain forest and even into the high alpine, feeding fish, leeches, birds, snakes and frogs along the way. The toadlets that survive spread out across the landscape before burrowing to overwinter below the frost line. This impressive migration is truly a force of nature, like the great migrations of wildebeests and caribou, and it is clear that our help is needed to make it a safe journey.

With the ongoing support and involvement of the Columbia Basin Trust, the Regional District of Central Kootenay - Kootenay Lake Local Conservation Fund, the Yellowstone

to Yukon Conservation Initiative, the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program, local businesses, volunteers and biologists, this project has been a significant community effort to protect the provincially yellow-listed Western toad; a Species of Special Concern in Canada. The Western toad is just one



A mass of tadpoles metamorphose into toadlets at a staging area in preparation for their migration at Beaver Lake. [Photo: Craig Pettitt]



## THOUSANDS OF WESTERN TOADS SAVED FROM HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AT FISH LAKE

important species in the beautiful wetland, lake and mountain ecosystems of the New Denver Kaslo corridor, and they play an important role in the delicate ecosystems they represent. An overwhelming concern for this place of abundant life would be the unmanageable level of traffic that would come with the proposed Zinton Mountain Resort that would operate on the very mountain that is core terrestrial habitat for the Fish Lake toad population. The massive increase in highway traffic and human use of this core mountain habitat would surely spell the end of the benefits achieved from this community conservation project.

This year, an exciting discovery was made that raised further concerns regarding the impacts that the proposed commercial tenure would have on the extraordinary migrations of Western toads at Fish Lake. When a hiker alerted VWS of toadlets moving at snow line on London Ridge in late spring, researchers rushed to document the phenomenon and, given the time of year, concluded that this was the continuation of last years' toadlet migration. Then later in the summer toadlets from last year's hatch were found at the summit of London Ridge at about 2200m elevation. This finding further demonstrated that the vast migration extends over a long seasonal and spatial scale, and that toads are important landscape connectors.

In late summer, the deflection fence that was finalized in 2019 guided tens of thousands of migrating toadlets away from their usual high-mortality highway crossing to a toadlet migration bridge under the Goat Creek bridge on Highway 31A. Hundreds of tourists now visit the Fish Lake rest stop to view the toadlets in their various stages of metamorphosis, and to see them migrating along the low-level fence. A VWS interpretive sign, brochures and interactions with toad researchers and volunteer ambassadors create an integrative learning experience.

VWS is now in the process of analysing the Western toad

population dynamics from six years of study, and looking into bringing similar mitigation efforts to the region's Beaver Lake where we have continued to monitor a significant breeding population of Western toads that are also at risk of road mortality. With pressures of climate change, habitat loss and degradation, and disease having a particularly negative impact on global amphibian populations, efforts must be taken to preserve these remaining significant populations.

To date the Fish Lake toad project has been a huge success, and we are very grateful for our supporters and for everyone who stopped to learn about Western toads and their incredible journey this year.



**Amphibians are sensitive to environmental change and are therefore considered indicator species. Habitats where amphibians are still found in healthy populations should be of high priority for preservation. [A. Peters]**

**VWS would like to thank Bradley Higham of Collabo Consulting Inc. for the contribution of a beautiful new website this year. Please visit [www.vws.org](http://www.vws.org) for more information on our projects.**

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### **Slocan Valley Bear Smart Program** **Strengthening Coexistence between Humans and Bears**

VWS has had another successful year building coexistence between humans and bears in the rural Slocan Valley. Coordinator Kim Frederiksen consulted 25 residents of Area H on electric fencing installations, with at least 65 fence chargers sold through our retail partners this year.

Kim monitored human-bear conflict issues online and found that electric fencing is becoming recognized as a useful tool for coexistence, with every incident resulting in fencing recommendations. VWS also contributed to Gillian Sanders' Grizzly Bear Solutions project for the Kootenays with 50:50 cost sharing for 4 of the 12 fences installed through the project.

Kim held an electric fencing workshop in partnership with Grizzly Bear Solutions and WildSafe BC, and maintained a Bear Smart Hotline to answer residents' questions about coexisting with bears. Thank you to our supporters, including Area "H" Director Walter Popoff and the Winton Bear Foundation for helping to increase coexistence between humans and bears in the Slocan Valley.



C. Pettit

## 2020 UPDATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND OLD-GROWTH FORESTS

Despite Covid, the most menacing and shocking event of this year was the monster fires that travelled up the west coast from California to Washington, devastating forests and whole towns, and killing at least 35 people. The cause was worsening climate change. This foretold that, with increased global heating, fires on this scale may strike BC, and soon.

Despite growing danger, small, weak climate actions are taken while the core of the problem — the mining, transporting and burning fossil fuels — is allowed to grow bigger. While BC taxpayers pay a carbon tax at the gas pump to reduce demand and production of fossil fuels, in just two years the BC government has doubled fossil fuel subsidies to \$1 billion in order to expand it. These subsidies were mostly for liquefied natural gas (LNG) which is produced by fracking. The government has approved expanded LNG production and sales under the misleading claim that LNG is “clean” energy. The truth is that LNG infrastructure leaks and deliberately vents methane into the atmosphere. Methane is over 80 times more potent a cause of climate change than carbon dioxide. There has been a massive increase in methane in the atmosphere that has been traced to fracking (Natl. Geographic, 2019). And research in Alberta has recently discovered over twice as much methane coming from the oil and gas industry as previously thought.

### Logging is the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in BC

This same government imperviousness to science in an emergency situation exists in forestry. In BC logging emitted 72.7 megatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent into the atmosphere in 2007, compared with 54.1 megatonnes by the oil and gas industries. Forests store large amounts of carbon that are released into the atmosphere when they are logged. This contributes to climate change, while losing the capacity of the trees to continue absorbing large amounts of carbon.

New research released in 2020 has reaffirmed what we reported in our last newsletter: that larger diameter trees absorb and store much greater amounts of carbon than smaller trees. Researchers in Oregon and Washington have found that, despite representing only 3% of the total number of trees in their study plots, large trees stored 42% of the total above-ground carbon. A tree was considered large if it was equal to or greater than 21 inches in diameter. Imagine the carbon

stored in British Columbia’s Inland Temperate Rainforests, where some trees currently being logged are up to 117 inches in diameter like the one shown in the photograph below.

### VWS has taken the message to the Ministers

In March of 2019, VWS personnel travelled to Victoria to meet with the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, and the Minister of Forests. We presented the case for protection of old-growth for both climate change and biodiversity, and offered three park proposals for Inland Temperate Rainforest. (A few new “parks” have been created in the province, but they

are insignificant in size). The meeting was positive in tone, but later VWS could perceive no underlying intent in government to protect a significant amount of forest anywhere.

In 2020, VWS directors and staff had a teleconference with the BC Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Once again we stressed the urgent need to protect old-growth to mitigate climate change and the biodiversity crisis, and we asked the Minister what were the government’s plans for new parks.

Confirming our worst fears, he said that our park proposals were part of the logging industry’s “Working Forest”, and that the government had already created parks in our region in the 1994 land use plan. Apparently BC’s park system was to be frozen at what it was 26 years ago, even while many scientists around the world are pleading for protection of up to 50% of the planet!

We were stunned at the wall our government has built against protecting old-growth. Insofar as the recent logging deferrals go, how ever inadequate, they are encouraging signs of a small crack in this wall. The rest will take your help.



Violet Brown

### Old-Growth forest in VWS’s Inland Temperate Rainforest Park Proposals

- 37,792 hectares of old-growth in our Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal;
- 168,472 hectares of old-growth in the Quesnel Wilderness proposal; and
- 5,527 hectares in the Rainbow-Jordan proposal.

You can find the 3-park proposal briefing document we gave the Ministers on our website at [www.vws.org](http://www.vws.org).



# OLD GROWTH REVIEW PANEL PRESCRIBES IMMEDIATE ACTION

After months of meetings with concerned British Columbians, including the team at VWS, BC's Old Growth Review Panel released a report in April highlighting the need for immediate action to protect the last of our dwindling old growth forests. As we waited for the release of the report the painful consequences of forest mismanagement continued to ripple through the province, with wild-fires, water scarcity, flooding, loss of cultural livelihoods and biodiversity collapse increasingly threatening the wellbeing of British Columbians.

Before the release of the government's report, a team of three forest researchers (Price et al.) conducted an independent analysis and found that less than 1% of the province, about 415,000 hectares, contains productive old growth: the type of forest with large, old trees and structure that can host a high level of biodiversity. The province has been falsely claiming that 23% of BC's forest is old growth, but the researchers concluded that only a small fraction of that area can support the productive old growth forests that have large trees.

After the release of the government's Old Growth Review Panel report, the province announced 352,739-hectares of logging deferrals. Desperate for good news, many began to celebrate until independent researchers concluded that just 1% of the logging deferral area, about 3,800 hectares, contained the productive old growth forest (older than 140 years) that the Review Panel identified as being in need of immediate deferrals.

*Over a quarter of the area in the deferrals is not considered forest where, at most, stunted and sparsely growing trees occur, and another quarter includes younger forest and clearcuts, but no old growth.*

In order to save BC's last old growth, the Panel's 14 recommendations must be implemented in full, including the immediate deferral of development "where ecosystems are at very high and near-term risk of irreversible biodiversity loss". The Panel also recommends that the province bring old growth forest management into compliance with provincial biodiversity targets, and allocate proper age classes for ancient

forests, as trees that are 250 years old are currently lumped in the same class and are given the same treatment as 1800 year old trees. In short, government needs to stop treating these ecological wonders like waste products and take them out of the province's Allowable Annual Cut (AAC) for the future of all people.



**VWS director Craig Pettitt mourns the loss of these ancient monarchs cut down this July while the BC Government was deliberating on its old growth panel report. These 2 to 3m diameter trees are upwards of 1800 years old and are amongst the rarest of the rare of BC's remaining old growth. [C. Pettitt]**

At this time the majority of our old growth still remains in the Timber Harvesting Land Base, mostly under the tenure of BC Timber Sales that has claimed about 20% of the province's Allowable Annual Cut. The vast majority of this remaining old growth is subject to clearcutting and raw-log export to overseas corporations as the province honours outdated trade deals claimed too costly to dissolve. But the Review Panel received an overwhelming flood of support for the end to old growth logging in BC.

Our ancient temperate rainforest, once knocked down, is largely unmarketable due to the hollow nature of old cedar trees. These are the same trees that are utilized as dens by species such as black bears and the red-listed fisher. That our government allows and actually partakes in liquidating these forests to make space for pine and spruce plantations should be considered a crime against humanity. In reality, the argument that old growth logging must be upheld to sustain BC's economy is grossly inaccurate. David Broadland reported this year that data from publicly-available accounts published by the BC government show that the cost of allowing forest companies to operate on public lands in BC exceeds forestry revenue by an average \$365 million per year. In other words, BC taxpayers are subsidizing the destruction of the very landscape that sustains us, causing irreparable damage to our ecosystems and accelerating the climate crisis, and it is costing us a whopping \$3.65 billion every 10 years.

By continuing to delay the difficult decision to break BC's foreign trade deals, reduce the AAC and end old growth logging, the province is ignoring an overwhelming scientific consensus.

The voice of the people matters now more than ever to push for the full protection of BC's last old growth through the implementation of the Review Panel's recommendations.

# IT'S TIME TO STAND UP FOR BC'S IRREPLACEABLE OLD GROWTH LEGACY

"Because of the urgency of reversing the loss of nature, we are pleased to join the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People, which calls for protecting at least 30 percent of the world's land and ocean by 2030. Canada is uniquely positioned to contribute to this important goal both at home and abroad. We have both the responsibility and the opportunity. We have the second largest land mass, a fifth of the world's freshwater, and the longest coastline in the world, that together are critical for biodiversity and for securing carbon in nature in the fight against climate change."

**The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson**  
**Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada**

## 3 Massive Threats To Humanity: One Cause

Climate change, species loss and pandemics are all now bearing down on humanity with enormous loss of human life as well as massive loss of wild species that form our web of life. All these threats have been linked by scientists to the destruction of nature. In response to urgent warnings by scientific experts around the world, the UN, Canada, the UK and EU have all pledged to protect 30% of the planet by 2030 — a promise celebrated by National Geographic.

This year saw the start of a collective movement for change as BC's last, most precious forests continued to be rapidly exploited. Various actions took place across the province including old growth blockades, a forest march that took place in 17 cities across BC, even amid the thick wildfire smoke from the Western United States, and a class action lawsuit against government and logging companies, filed by the people who lost their homes to flooding in Grand Forks due to severe over-logging of the surrounding landscape.

## LETTERS URGENTLY NEEDED!

All our successes over the years were made possible through public letter-writing campaigns. Your voice really matters. A new BC government administration is starting, so it is important to renew your expression of support for full protection of BC's remaining old growth forests. Please consider the following points for letter writing:

1. Immediately stop harvesting the rarest of the rare. That means a) the old forest in any ecosystem that has less than 10% of its old forest remaining. BC's Old Growth Panel has recommended that the government defer logging in such ecosystems until a final decision can be arranged. b) any forest with trees 300 years old or older.
2. One quick and easy way to stop logging old growth forest: The Old Growth Panel recommends that the government instruct BC Timber sales to stop development and sale immediately.
2. Some of the protected old-growth forest should be in fully protected parks. Support the Grow BC Parks campaign and its goal of expanding BC Parks to 30% of the province.



A. Sherrod

## HOLD THE GOVERNMENT TO ITS PROMISE!

In election campaign ads, our new BC government promised to fully implement the recommendations of BC's Old-growth Panel. Be sure to express your support for Recommendation #6:

"Recommendation 6: Immediate Action ...Until a new strategy is implemented, defer development in old forests where ecosystems are at very high and near-term risk of irreversible biodiversity loss."

3. The remaining old growth forest of BC's Inland Temperate Rainforest should be of the highest priority for protection, as it is habitat for many species at risk including BC's critically endangered Deep-Snow Mountain Caribou.
4. VWS's 3 park proposals would help fill the gap with the Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal, Quesnel Lake Wilderness Proposal, and the proposed Rainbow-Jordan Park.

Everyone at VWS would like to thank you for your continued support. We rely on your donations and your responses to our calls-to-action to maintain a strong and independent voice. Please fill out the included membership form to update your membership, and email [info@vws.org](mailto:info@vws.org) if you would like to be on our contact list to receive occasional email updates and calls to action.

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