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HOW EXCESSIVE LOGGING AND CLIMATE CHANGE ARE COMING TOGETHER TO BRING DISASTER TO BRITISH COLUMBIA

By July 29 of this year, 569 British Columbians had died as the result of a “heat dome”, a weather event never before heard of in BC. Around the same time, BC declared a state of emergency as 1,610 fires burned 8,682 square kilometres of land, including the towns of Lytton and Monte Lake. Approximately 32,000 people had to be evacuated. Within a couple of months an “atmospheric river” dropped torrential rain on southwestern BC, flooding a vast area of farmland, killing hundreds of thousands of farm animals, spreading toxic waste over the area, carrying away houses. Whole towns had to be evacuated again. Landslides damaged or destroyed 200 highway sites and killed a number of people.

The flooded areas had had fires in their watersheds. The capacity of forest fires to cause flooding and landslides due to the loss of trees and vegetation that normally absorb and hold water on the slopes — is well known. But before the fires and extreme weather arrived, excessive clearcut logging had already set the stage for hydrological disasters. In the recent events, massive clearcutting combined with the burned areas and heavy rain to create a catastrophic amount of runoff. The role of clearcuts and logging roads in causing landslides and floods has been known for decades. Modern research has shown that logging 20% of a large watershed causes large hydrological events to happen four to ten times more frequently. (Prof. Younes Alila, CBC Daybreak South, Dec. 6) And we now know that it takes a clearcut 80 years to recover hydrologically.

An interrelationship that receives less attention is how clearcutting contributes to climate change. For quite a few years now it has been known that in BC logging emits more climate-changing carbon dioxide than fossil fuels. Thus clearcut logging is contributing to climate change as well as worsening its effects.

A 2019 report by a retired BC government forest ecologist, Dr. Jim Pojar, urged that beetle-killed forests should not be logged because their understory contains young trees that will be released to immediately start a new forest. The roots

and soil and other vegetation will remain intact and able to hold both water and a great deal of carbon. But this has been ignored, and beetle-killed forest, which has become extensive due to climate change, is logged in huge clearcuts.

MANY DECADES OF GOVERNMENT NEGLIGENCE

The catastrophes of 2021 reveal decades of incompetent government administrations. VWS has a long history of documenting landslides and consulting hydrologists and engineers.

Our field staff have investigated many landslides on unstable slopes that logging industry engineers, hydrologists and foresters had approved as safe for road building and logging. We learned that the professional standards for hydrology practice in BC were very poor compared to those in the US.

But most complicit in this is the policy of deregulation over the last 20 years, in which anti-environment governments virtually turned the forests over to the logging companies and changed regulations to remove responsibility for environmental damage. At one time there was a limit of 25% on how much of a watershed could be logged, but the limit isn't followed anymore and many BC

watersheds have been massively clearcut. Our last newsletter reported a landslide from a logging road within our park proposal. When the Forest Practices Board inspected it, we learned that the present *Forest Range and Practices Act* has no prohibition against operating on unstable slopes, or causing landslides. Various BC government administrations have also gutted the staff and funding of the Forests Ministry to the point that it no longer has the capability to oversee the management of our forests.

This year one of the “atmospheric rivers” set off a landslide from a 30-year-old logging road that had never been properly deactivated. It wiped out BC's highway 99 and killed five people. This landslide is an ominous warning of decades of lax road building and logging, on overly steep or unstable slopes, that wait like time bombs for larger and more frequent storms caused by climate change to set them off.



Mamailikulla guardians

Humans aren't the only ones suffering from combined climate change and excessive logging. Salmon are declining all over BC, partly because climate change has warmed water and erosion from logging has covered fish eggs in silt. Now the recent storms have washed away many salmon eggs. One result is starving grizzly bears seen on the coast. The Mamailikulla First Nation has declared an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA) to protect bears and salmon.

2021 CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE

Readers may have heard about some encouraging agreements to reduce emissions of climate-changing pollution (carbon dioxide and methane) at COP26, the big meeting of 120 nations at the UN. Ask a climate scientist how reliable the promises to cut emissions are, and they might bring out a graph showing how, over many years of such promises, the amount of carbon in the atmosphere just keeps steeply rising.

Scientists also say the focus shouldn't be on emissions, it should be on cutting the production of fossil fuels, using a carbon tax and transitioning to electricity and small nuclear reactors that have a high safety record. The issue of production reveals dishonesty in the promises of Canada and BC. According to Canada Energy Regulator (CER), crude oil production will keep increasing until 2039. And while Canada has banned coal-fired electricity plants, BC exports coal for that purpose to other countries. The exports are to be ended by 2030, but activists are demanding an end by 2023.

CANADA AND BC ARE SUBSIDIZING FOSSIL FUEL

Canada provided nearly \$18 billion in subsidies and financing to fossil fuel companies in 2020 (Environmental Defense, April 15, 2021). Tax breaks in 2019 provided an additional \$2.4 billion subsidy. (Parliamentary Budget Officer, Dec. 2021). Since 2018 Canadian governments have poured at least \$23 *billion* into three fossil fuel projects alone: Coastal Gaslink, TransMountain and Keystone XL pipelines. (Intl. Inst. for Sustainable Development, 2021).

BC trumpets a new plan, "CleanBC Roadmap to 2030" that promises to reduce emissions 40% below the 2007 level by 2030. But the environmental group Stand.earth has calculated that BC will have given the oil and gas industry \$1.3 *billion* in subsidies by the end of 2021, including \$421 million in tax credits for fracking wells.

A LEGAL SYSTEM BUILT TO ENFORCE CORPORATE POWER

Coastal Gaslink is mowing down a vast strip of pristine forest for a 670-kilometre pipeline to deliver the fracked gas to an export terminal on the coast, where it will be liquefied and shipped abroad. Fracturing the earth to liberate natural gas ("fracking") is suspected of causing health problems for residents of northeastern BC, including a high rate of brain cancers; it is causing earthquakes, and wildlife are drinking out of water contaminated with oil and chemicals. The wells themselves emit methane, one of the most powerful greenhouse gasses. The pipeline will deliver the gas to the LNG Canada plant in Kitimat, which would become one of the largest greenhouse gas emitters in Canada, responsible for 9.6 megatonnes of carbon per year (Narwhal, Mar. 3, 2020).

A new study published in *The Lancet* medical journal says there have already been five million deaths worldwide from abnormal hot and cold temperatures. Both the Wet'suwet'en blockade of Coastal Gaslink near Houston, and the Fairy Creek blockade on Vancouver Island, show how industrial activities leading to death and destruction of living things are paraded in BC as "justice", as "law and order", imposed by the government, the RCMP and the courts with an im-

As countries set net-zero emission targets, and increase their climate ambitions under the Paris Agreement, they have not explicitly recognized or planned for the rapid reduction in fossil fuel production that these targets will require. Rather, the world's governments plan to produce more than twice the amount of fossil fuels in 2030 than would be consistent with limiting warming to 1.5°C. The production gap has remained largely unchanged since our first analysis in 2019.

—The Production Gap, UN 2021

placable face if not an iron fist; while those trying to stop these activities are cast as criminals, violently arrested and thrown into jail.

Consider the Wet'suwet'en First Nation people blocking TC Energy from crossing their land to continue building the Coastal Gaslink pipeline. The company wants to bury the pipeline underneath the Morice River, a fish-bearing river where people have worked for decades to restore the salmon runs. TC Energy has violated the conditions of its permit numerous times for polluting or threatening wetlands and water; the Environmental Assessment Office (EAO) has issued orders for it to correct damage and comply with the permit conditions, which the company has ignored. Though a penalty has been threatened, we have heard of none exacted.

In contrast, scores of Wet'suwet'en people and other protesters have been arrested for blocking the road to the river. In Dec. 2019 the London *Guardian* newspaper reported that the RCMP were given authority to use lethal force on Wet'suwet'en blockaders. RCMP carrying assault rifles dismantled the blockade. Arrests occurred in early 2020, again this November, and are continuing as we go to press.

COST OF CLIMATE CHANGE DISASTERS

Canadians are being misled that expanding fossil fuel production is good for our economy. The following are figures for U.S. weather disasters costing \$1 billion or more:

	Events	Events per yr	Cost	Deaths
1980s	29	2.9	\$187.2 billion	2.9
1990s	53	5.5	\$288.6 billion	5.3
2000s	63	6.3	\$547.0 billion	3,091.0
2010s	123	12.3	\$858.4 billion	5,224.0

In 2020, just one year, there were 22 events (almost double the average for the previous 10 years) costing \$100.2 billion and 262 deaths. [Source: NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) U.S. Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters (2021). <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/>, DOI: 10.25921/stkw-7w73.]

Canadian figures: The number of disasters has increased, fluctuating between a low of eight in the early 1970s, and a high of 27 in 2016. There have been \$14.5 *billion* in disaster costs from 2010 to 2019, while the total for the 40 years previous was \$21 billion. (Source: Canadian Institute for Climate Choices, *The Tip of the Iceberg*, funded by Environment and Climate Change Canada.)

PROPOSED ZINCTON SKI RESORT WOULD ADD TO CLIMATE IMPACTS

Zincton Farms Ltd. has proposed a major ski resort on London Ridge, a valley-bottom to alpine ridge along Highway 31A, between Kaslo and New Denver in the West Kootenay region of British Columbia. The proposal consists of a residential development with vacation homes, restaurants, etc, on private land; and a tenure application for 5,500 hectares of Crown land — heavily used by grizzly bears — on which the proponent would develop ski lifts and a 50-bed backcountry lodge. The project has exposed very troubling provincial implications to wildlife and the environment of the BC government's All Seasons Resorts policy which falls under the Forest Ministry. This development program is no more environmentally sound than the province's logging policies.

BC's Mountain Resorts Branch was formed to increase new and expand existing ski resorts, hoping to attract the international ski crowd. But such resorts are now being recognized as an industry with high carbon emissions and many kinds of cumulative environmental impacts. Predictably, large ski resorts are bending over backwards to brand themselves as "sustainable", chiefly by claiming to use "green energy" from small hydro plants, solar panels, wind and electric vehicles. But the carbon pollution avoided on one relatively small patch of ground cannot compensate for the increase in carbon emissions required to build these developments, and then the carbon emissions of vacationers travelling to ski meccas all over the world. Worse, because of climate change most ski resorts now have to make artificial snow. This requires a huge amount of energy and water, and results in serious hydrology problems and water pollution.

There are a number of ways that the Zincton resort could worsen the impacts of climate change. For instance, studies have shown that ski resorts decrease the ability of the ground to absorb and hold water, thus increasing the rapid flow of rain or snowmelt down the slopes, worse than logging. Skiing itself compacts the ground, making it less permeable, while hard surfaces such as roads, parking lots and roofs are impervious.

VWS recently submitted to the Mountain Resorts Branch and local governments a 19-page review of the obvious predictable impacts. We pointed out that the storm runoff from Zincton resort would pour into Carpenter Creek, an unstable watershed notorious for past floods and landslides, threatening the downstream Village of New Denver. We submitted an engineers' report done for the Village that warned of flood hazards to New Denver from heavy runoff. Carpenter Creek, New Denver, and Slocan Lake are sitting ducks for a debris torrent or flood caused by a combination of clearcuts, old resource roads, climate change and (if it proceeds) a ski resort.

The tenure would be adjacent to Goat Range Provincial Park that was successfully advocated by this Society in the mid-1990s. The grizzlies of the park travel outside park boundaries in spring to feed on early vegetation emerging from the snow, and in summer and autumn to feed on the



Craig Pettitt

large amounts of huckleberries, glacier lilies and ground squirrels on London Ridge. Having large home ranges, some still travel to the Kokanee range to the south where the grizzly bear population has dwindled and is considered threatened, keeping that gene pool healthy while recovery is hopefully occurring with the trophy hunting ban several years ago. The resort would mean serious displacement of grizzlies from critical habitats and travel corridors, as well as mortalities from human-bear conflicts and increased traffic on the highway. The area is renowned for its rare whitish grizzly colour phase enshrined by the ancestral name Piq ki?lawn? ("White Grizzly") of the Sinixt Nation.

In 2020 VWS director Wayne McCrory, a grizzly bear expert and registered professional biologist who has done fieldwork on London Ridge, submitted a report showing how the resort would be harmful to four imperiled species. Many of you responded to the government's online comment process in 2020. We are sorry to say that, despite clear evidence of serious environmental harm, the government gave the developer a green light to draw up a formal proposal for the resort. And it has refused to do an Environmental Impact Assessment.

This year VWS asked grizzly bear expert Dr. Brian Horejsi to study the situation and make a submission to the Mountain Resorts Branch. Dr. Horejsi concurred with the opinions of Wayne and another grizzly bear expert. We also sent out another Action Alert asking members to respond to the second online comment forum. (If you want to receive VWS Action Alerts, send an email to info@vws.org.) Thank you to everyone who wrote letters or comments. Your generous donations also helped us pay for seven half- or full-page ads in local newspapers, informing residents on the extensive harm the development would do. The comment period is over now, let's hope for the best.

WESTERN TOADS REVEAL BIODIVERSITY THREATENED BY A PROPOSAL FOR A LARGE SKI RESORT

Highway 31A runs between Kaslo and New Denver, crossing a remote mountain pass south of Goat Range Provincial Park where a significant breeding population of at risk Western toads at Fish Lake plays an important role in a wide range of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems that span the landscape. Their three yearly migrations are much-celebrated events for locals, tourists, dedicated researchers and volunteer Toad Ambassadors who are needed to keep them off of Highway 31A. Aquatic invertebrates, fish, reptiles, birds, mammals and other amphibians also welcome these important migrations, as they feed on the huge annual flush of nutrients brought by different stages of the toad's life cycle. For the past 5-6 years VWS has carried out baseline research on Western toads at Fish Lake as well as Beaver Lake, both regionally important breeding areas in the West Kootenays. Our research now plays a key role in highlighting biodiversity at risk in a major conservation battle against the proposed Zincton resort in the Highway 31A corridor.

Fortunately our Fish Lake toad project was expanded this year to document migrating adults and mortality on another 7 km of highway that partly crosses through private land slated for a large townsite development by the proposed Zincton Mountain Resort. In 2021 toad researchers and volunteer Toad Ambassadors documented 319 adult toads on the highway here, while removing them to reduce highway mortality; another 28 were found killed by traffic including gravid females that carry up to 12,000 eggs each. A University of BC (Okanagan) student's modelling of our Fish Lake toad study indicated that an increase in road traffic by 30% would threaten this regionally significant toad population. We expect over time with the ski development that traffic level increases will be even greater than 30%.

The government did not require an independent Environmental Impact Assessment on Zincton, so it was important that VWS could submit authoritative scientific research proving that the toads exist in wetlands the full length of



Marcy Mahr

A breeding adult Western toads gets a hand across Highway 31A during a night time survey.

the developer's proposal, migrating across the highway and up to the alpine, and would be seriously threatened should the project go ahead.

FISH LAKE TOADS TO GET TWO TOAD TUNNELS UNDER HIGHWAY 31A

Observations of numbers of tadpoles and toadlets in 2021 suggest that by reducing traffic mortality, the population may now be increasing. This year Toad Ambassadors removed nearly 500 breeding adults from the highway at Fish-Bear Lakes and an estimated 30,000-40,000 toadlets were deflected from crossing the busy highway by our 500m. migration fence to a highway underpass. Still some mortality could not be avoided with approximately 50 dead adults documented on the highway.

After years of discussion on the need for 2-3 toad migration tunnels under the highway at Fish Lake, a big breakthrough came this summer when the environment department of the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI) designed detailed engineering plans to build - hopefully in 2022 (if they get funding) - two large box culverts under the highway at toad migration mortality hotspots identified by VWS research. VWS has agreed to pay for and install the toad deflection fencing for the new tunnels, which have been found to also be used by a variety of other species.

We also engaged with hundreds of people at the Fish Lake Rest Stop and gave presentations to raise awareness about the amazing life cycle of toads and their journey from valley bottom to the surrounding mountain and alpine habitats. Public support has been overwhelming.

The Kootenay Lake Local Conservation Fund, Columbia Basin Trust and Toad Ambassador volunteers are thanked for making this project possible. In particular, volunteers



Craig Pettitt

The two lakes and wetlands support many resident species as well as migratory waterfowl

WESTERN TOAD PROJECT continued...

Kim and Peter Vella are thanked for their numerous night toad surveys.

FIVE YEAR VWS BEAVER LAKE TOAD STUDY MAY LEAD TO MORTALITY MITIGATION BY GOVERNMENT IN 2022

For the past five years, VWS director Craig Pettitt and biologist Amber Peters studied the significant toad breeding at Beaver Lake in Wilson Creek. A report by Amber in 2021 identified mortality and disturbance from human recreation at the Beaver Lake Recreation Site boat launch and on the adjacent forest service road. Recommendations to mitigate toad mortality, included redirecting recreation from Beaver Lake during the main toadlet staging and migration period to Little Wilson Lake Rec Site where no

toad activity has been documented, a new box culvert under the major toadlet road crossing area and a seasonal closure of the main boat launch.

After a field tour in September with FLNRORD biologist Kat McGlynn she prepared a summary report with mitigation recommendations and agreed to liaise with Recreation Sites and Trails BC and the Forest Service road managers. It is hoped that some of this mitigation will be implemented in 2022 and that we can continue sharing more stories of progress with our generous supporters in the New Year.

Readers can find video presentations of the Western Toad project by biologists Marcy Mahr and Amber Peters on the VWS website at:
<https://www.vws.org/toads/>

CRITICAL WILDLIFE CONNECTIVITY CORRIDORS AT RISK OF PERMANENT LOSS

None of our parks, even large ones like Goat Range Provincial Park, are big enough to maintain large, wide-ranging species. Often they don't include the critical connectivity corridors that wildlife need to survive. This is why BC's Auditor General said in 2010 that BC parks would not maintain our biodiversity into the future, because they are too few and far between. Partially protected corridors were recommended between parks.

One way that VWS is working to connect wildlife habitats is through our park proposals. The Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal would join Goat Range and Bugaboo Provincial Parks with Glacier National Park, to make a protected complex big enough for large wildlife. To connect those parks we had to take into our proposal four rivers, which had considerable clearcutting. Despite the clearcutting, valley bottoms have the highest biodiversity because they offer large wildlife easy travelling while the rivers and wetlands host many small species.

In some parts of the province now, a greater threat than clearcutting is the onslaught of new commercial recreation tenure that threaten to sever wildlife connectivity with per-

manent town sites and a mass influx of human activity in the corridors.

London Ridge, on the southern boundary of Goat Range Park, is in a highly important regional connectivity corridor for grizzlies and other wildlife, designated in the Kootenay Boundary Land Use Plan but never protected. It is now besieged by commercial recreation applications including the large Zincton ski resort proposal. We have urged government to do a Cumulative Effects study to assess the impacts of proposed new developments with existing heli-skiing, heli-

biking and extensive non-commercial recreation which is getting driven out by commercial operators.

New and expanding commercial tenures, particularly the proposed Zincton Resort tenure, now threaten to replace not only a way of life for locals and tourists who have enjoyed quiet nature-based recreation and wildlife viewing in the 31A corridor for decades, but also the lives of countless species that rely on the creeks, rivers and lakes, forest, wetlands and avalanche tracks that form an irreplaceable biodiversity reserve that adjoins a major provincial park.



Max Karpinski

On a mission to retrieve trail cameras, VWS biologist Amber Peters and her dog Rona stand amidst the wild mountains in Whitewater Canyon - currently at risk from the proposed Zincton Resort.

LOGGING CONTINUES ON SOUTHERN EDGE OF SELKIRK PARK PROPOSAL

There are some encouraging things to remember about our Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal. It is large, at 156,461 hectares. In 2009, the BC government set aside 46% of it as no-logging Ungulate Winter Range for mountain caribou. In 2020 the BC government deferred (postponed) logging of another 40,000 hectares. But neither all the caribou habitat nor all the big trees have been set aside or deferred from logging. The result is that logging is occurring along the Duncan Reservoir just inside the proposed park boundary, and just outside the boundary of the Ungulate Winter Range. We estimate that the development has affected around 1% of the park proposal.

What is the value of that 1%? It is in one the largest stands of intact forest left in the Kootenay-Columbia region. It is also low-elevation forest. These attributes make it high in biodiversity and wildlife values. And it is way more than 1% of the low-elevation forest in our park proposal. It is also within federally designated matrix caribou habitat. Matrix is meant to be a buffer zone around core caribou habitat — places for them to travel and forest to be kept intact so that wolves cannot reach the caribou. To keep wolves away, matrix does not have to be old-growth; this forest in the Duncan Valley will soon be mature.

Unfortunately BC Timber Sales doesn't recognize the federal government's matrix caribou habitat designation. The government is planning to kill all the wolves it can find, but meanwhile BC Timber Sales is opening the forest up for wolves. For many years some caribou spent time in winter on top of the ridge where this valley-bottom logging is taking place; but it appears they have now abandoned that area.

Early this year VWS Director Craig Pettitt viewed new logging plans by BC Timber Sales one valley over from the Duncan Valley. They showed clearcuts within 220 metres of known radio-collar positions of caribou in the Central Selkirk



Craig Pettitt

herd. The plans will also push road and clearcuts further into our Selkirk park proposal. The main Central Selkirk herd was known to be wintering in a nearby valley. VWS responded with a protest letter to BCTS and the Forests Ministry, a press release, and Action Alert asking for letters from the public. One cutblock that was closest to the caribou has been removed from the plans, but it's obviously not enough.

BRINGING PEOPLE TO AN OLD-GROWTH FOREST

Craig continues guiding people to experience old-growth Inland Temperate Rainforest. This year he was approached by forest ecologist Rosanna Wijenberg, who was seeking to verify big trees for the provincial government's Special Tree Protection Regulation, which institutes a protective status for all cedar trees in the interior of BC over 2.9m diameter measured at 1.3m from the ground. This protection can only be initiated by logging companies.

They visited old-growth along the Duncan River in the Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal. The measurements of the tree shown here were submitted to the BC Big Tree

Registry maintained at UBC. It is now the largest registered cedar in the interior of BC. It measures 3.76 m (11.08') diameter at 1.4m from the ground and has a circumference of 11.89 m (39'), while standing 54m (177') tall. An approximate age derived from two increment bore samples places this tree at approximately 2000 years old. Trees of this stature have no protection unless logging companies designate them.

The big tree registry should not be construed as protecting old-growth forest, because a tree is not a forest and the registry does not even protect the trees. But VWS is happy to have the size of our oldest interior cedars recorded while we continue to work on protection of all old-growth forests, including three major park proposals in the Inland Temperate Rainforest.



Craig Pettitt

NEW OLD-GROWTH DEFERRALS: HOPES, QUESTIONS AND DISMAY

Throughout 2020 and 2021 there has been a great public outcry about the logging of old-growth forest. In the Inland Temperate Rainforest, while VWS was focused on the logging in our Selkirk park proposal, Wilderness Committee worked to stop a new logging road and planned cutblocks in Argonaut Valley, in the habitat of the Columbia North mountain caribou herd. Protesters from Revelstoke, under the name Revylution, and from New Denver, set up a blockade which they have intended to maintain through the cold weather.

This autumn Craig Pettitt investigated logging proposals on Frisby Ridge, above VWS's Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness proposal. It was federally-designated "critical" caribou habitat with old-growth forest. He found abundant caribou sign in some of the old-growth patches, where the caribou have apparently been corralled by clearcutting and roads. Unfortunately, this is a small remnant group of caribou cows that is quickly disappearing.

The government boasts that it has protected habitat for mountain caribou, but that is for the Central and Northern ecotypes that are not so dependent on old-growth forest, and do not inhabit the more southern Inland Temperate Rainforest that is so lucrative to log.

Last year the government finally announced old-growth logging deferrals for nine areas. As stated earlier, the Incomappleux part of our Selkirk park proposal was granted a 40,000-hectare, two-year logging deferral. It covered all the big trees in the Incomappleux part of our park proposal. Overall, the nine deferrals contained very little old-growth, causing anger in many parts of the province. This summer the government granted deferrals for two of the five areas that the Fairy Creek protesters were trying to protect, but it wasn't enough for the protesters — and rightly so, because the existing tragic fragmentation of the coastal rainforest created an urgent need to save what was left. The protesters at Fairy Creek are absolutely right to insist on retaining as much intact old-growth as possible. Forest fragmented into small patches can lose many species.

Now, just as we were working on this newsletter, the province has announced a plan to defer logging on 2.6 million hectares of old forest. Three cutblocks in Argonaut Creek have been deferred, which is a big relief in that the logging has been ongoing. These are the first deferrals for the habitat of the Deep Snow Mountain Caribou in a dozen years. On the whole, however, it is not known whether these postpone-

ments of logging will end in protection, partial protection or a return to the logging companies.

HOPES

VWS asked expert GIS mapper Baden Cross, of Applied Conservation GIS, to calculate how much deferral area is in our three park proposals, but outside of the caribou Ungulate Winter Ranges (UWRs), which are already off-limits to logging. In the Selkirk Mountain Caribou proposal there are 7,789.32 hectares of old-growth deferrals. This was puzzling because of the earlier 40,000-ha deferral. A government contact has acknowledged there is a mistake that will be corrected, but we aren't sure yet. In the Rainbow-Jordan proposal, almost 500 ha. are marked for deferral. And in the Quesnel Wilderness proposal, almost 17,000 ha.

QUESTIONS

So far the map of the new deferrals available to the public covers the whole province, making it impossible to get accurate, detailed information on specific areas. We will be asking why there are deferrals shown inside of existing parks, and also in the Ungulate Winter Ranges for caribou, which are already protected (mostly) from logging. No reduction of the Allowable Annual Cut has been mentioned. This would mean that the postponed logging on these deferral areas would then become concentrated on the undeferred areas, which could mean rapid fragmentation of remaining intact forest.

DISMAY

An analysis by Wilderness Committee shows that at least 50,000 ha of at-risk deferred old-growth areas are already approved for logging, have approvals pending or may already be cut down. (Nat'l Observer, Dec. 3, 2021) Some of the cutblocks were approved this month, when the government ought to have known about the discrepancy.

Even more disturbing is the question of what will become of the valid deferrals. These are essentially proposed deferrals, pending First Nations consultations. The government has given them 30 days to approve or reject them, and they don't begin to have the resources to do that over such a huge area. And even if deferrals are approved, they will still just be deferrals, which means that logging will be postponed pending further decisions. The areas can either be fully protected, partially protected or returned to logging.



This tree is in VWS's proposed Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness near Revelstoke.

HOW INDUSTRY BIAS IN GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN THE LAW OUT OF CANADA'S SPECIES AT RISK ACT

Canada's Species at Risk Act (SARA) has nothing in it that says that the Act does not apply to species that cost too much to protect. But that is how it works. BC's mountain caribou has become an icon of something that is seriously wrong with the SARA. A recent scientific study found that the mean annual loss of Woodland Caribou habitat has increased by 262% since the federal government released its various caribou policy statements and plans under the Species at Risk Act (Nagy-Reis et al, 2021).

For the last three years VWS representative Anne Sherrod has been working with lawyers, and caribou expert Dr. Lee Harding, to try to get Canada's *Species at Risk Act* (SARA or "the Act") to help the mountain caribou. After a number of petitioners, including VWS, achieved a declaration by the federal Environment Ministry that the caribou were at imminent threat to recovery, we believed there would be some action on caribou habitat protection. When it was not forthcoming, we consulted lawyer Patrick Canning. VWS stood ready to sue the government, but it was first necessary to exhaust our non-legal remedies; so we pursued another petition, exhaustive research by Mr. Canning and Dr. Harding, and a number of letters that confronted the government with the legal provisions of the Act. Our case condensed into two main issues:

- 1) The failure of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) to send a recommendation to Cabinet to write an emergency order for BC to protect mountain caribou habitat, as prescribed by the Act.

- 2) The failure of the federal government to list the Southern Group of mountain caribou (ie "Deep Snow Mountain Caribou") as a separate Designatable Unit with "Endangered" status.

For species-at-risk status to be legal, the species must be listed on Schedule 1 of the Act. The Act designated the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC or "the Committee") as the ultimate authority on the classification and assessment of the status of species. Seven years ago the Committee said that the Deep Snow ecotype was unique, irreplaceable and Endangered, and should be listed separately. However, the listing of some species has



Karl Grfoerer

This veteran bull of the Central Selkirk caribou herd of Deep Snow Mountain Caribou is shown in his valley-bottom spring habitat. The herd is down to 27; it gained one calf this year, which is not very significant. This is the herd on which BC Timber Sales cutblocks have been advancing. In the winter of 2020-21 the BC government killed 23 wolves and 10 cougars in a broad area around the Central Selkirk herd. The BC government revoked stationary snowmobile closures and depends upon mobile closures obtained by tracking the caribou with radiocollars.

been endlessly delayed, and researchers have demonstrated a bias against listing species that are harvested, or whose habitat overlaps commercially valuable natural resources. We learned that this is accomplished by the Minister receiving COSEWIC's assessment and simply sitting on it. The Minister had been sitting on the Southern Group caribou assessment for *seven years*. We hoped that the declaration of imminent threat to recovery would add legal weight to our effort to get the Southern Group listed.

Seven months after our second petition, which threatened to sue the government, on March 18 of this year, we received notice that the Minister had made a recommendation to Cabinet for an emergency order. It stated simply: "The Government of Canada declined the making of an emergency order at this time, and opted to take a collaborative, stewardship-based approach to work towards addressing the imminent threats facing the species." Although we requested a copy of the Minister's recommendation, we were told that that is confidential information not available to the public.

So the caribou will now have "stewardship" by the same parties who have driven it to the edge of extinction. What law is there, if a species at imminent threat to recovery is put at the mercy of the opinions of various groups, many of whom log or snowmobile in caribou habitat? The whole purpose of the sections of the Act describing imminent threat of survival or recovery, is to allow the Cabinet to write an emergency order to the provinces; but if Cabinet is allowed to take economic considerations into account and it can just refuse to write an order, what law is there in that part of the Act?

The most recent letter from the federal government dismissed COSEWIC's assessment, on one hand because it lacked updated genetic research, and on the other hand, it lacked input from Indigenous peoples. It's easy enough to claim the data isn't up to date if you have sat on the assessment for seven years. But what science is there in the *Act*, if the careful assessments of legally designated scientific authorities can be dismissed?



SLOCAN VALLEY BEAR SMART PROGRAM:

Orphan black bear cub sent to Northern Lights Wildlife Shelter. Regional District's Rosebery waste transfer station becomes chronic black bear garbage feeding station.



VWS Bear Smart coordinator Kim Frederickson continued her public outreach into 2021 thanks to support funding from Area H, Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK). She found that knowledge of the VWS program to coexist with bears has become widespread in Area H. Kim's work focused on public education and queries about electric fencing. She also collaborated with WildSafe BC on a workshop teaching bear safety and proper use of bear spray.

Thankfully, 2021 was a relatively quiet year for human-bear conflicts in the Slocan Valley. One exception was the Regional District of Central Kootenay's (RDCK) Rosebery transfer station where after many years of few bear problems despite it not having an electrified perimeter fence/gate system, chronic black bear garbage feeding problems occurred from spring to late fall. Bears pried open the lids of large bins and helped themselves even after RDCK repairs. Garbage was left strewn about the surrounding slopes for months creating negative messaging. The situation was monitored by VWS bear biologist Wayne McCrory who has recommended to RDCK for years an electric perimeter fence be installed but they have consistently refused to do so even though McCrory pointed out that it would make the site safer for RDCK workers from intruding garbage-seeking bears. After numerous complaints to RDCK's waste manager very little was done but a promise to have newer, bear proof bins next year. Ironically RDCK funds the VWS bear smart program to educate the public about reducing bear attractants including 50:50 cost sharing for electric fencing on rural properties. McCrory also told RDCK that the spike in problem bears at Rosebery was likely related to the transfer station becoming a bear garbage feeding station and if the problem continued next spring he would have to file a formal complaint to the Conservation Officer Service.

Whether it was related or not, in late summer Rosebery resident Janet Ott was fishing at the mouth of Wilson Creek when she was approached by a small black bear cub by itself. When she checked with neighbours she found it was always sighted without its mother. Some felt a disgruntled land-owner may have shot



Bear Smart Coordinator Kim Frederiksen presents a secure electric fencing setup for compost and fruit trees in the Slocan Valley.



"Ebbe" (a Scandinavian name for brave or strong), is being well fed and cared for at Northern Lights Wildlife Shelter. Eventually, she'll be released back in her home region in the West Kootenays.

its mother. The bear was very small and thin and Janet contacted the Conservation Officers (COs) and requested it be captured and sent to Northern Lights. Eventually an underweight cub was caught at Nakusp, which may or may not have been the same cub. Thanks to local Northern Lights Volunteers Sue Wrigley and Karla Kuharic, WildSafeBC coordinator Cora Skaen and the COs the cub was sent to the Northern Lights Wildlife Shelter in Smithers. When it arrived it was found to only weigh 16 pounds, about half of what it was supposed to weigh. Once it recovers in the spring the bear will be returned to the area and released in a remote location. VWS sent a small donation to Northern Lights to help

support this tiny cub and we hope others will make a donation either on-line at:

<https://www.wildlifeshelter.com/p/donate.html>

or mail a cheque to Northern Lights Wildlife Society, 17366, Telkwa Rd., Smithers BC. V0J2N7.

HUNTING IS PART OF THE CUMULATIVE IMPACTS ON WILDLIFE

Any hunter will tell you that habitat loss is the greatest threat to wildlife. This is why VWS has always thought that we could save more wildlife by focusing on habitat, rather than on hunting. However, habitat loss is not the only cause of species decline. Snowmobiling, heli-skiing and ATVs are key threats to mountain caribou; and predator killing can cause other species to disappear. Today it's recognized that *cumulative effects* on the environment must be considered.

Hunting is a Canadian heritage. By far most hunters do so to put meat on the table, and many families need it. VWS has never opposed that, though we have been against hunting in parks, predator culls, trophy hunting, and hunting grizzly bears. However, it has become obvious that the degree of habitat destruction influences how much hunting can be considered sustainable, when and where. Various scientific reports point out that the expansion of resource roads has left wildlife more vulnerable to hunting and poaching.

Habitat loss has become so severe that, today, even the species most sought by hunters are declining in certain areas. The most alarming case is the dramatic decline of moose in BC's central plateau region, due to massive clearcut logging of beetle-killed trees. Deer, elk and mountain sheep are also dwindling in certain areas. This results in hunts being limited or, in a few isolated instances, closed for the season while the animal populations recover. Many hunters agree with these controls and demand them. But the continued spread of hugely excessive clearcut logging, oil and gas pipelines, roads and ski resorts threatens further wildlife population declines.

BC wildlife managers are fully capable of state-of-the-art management. But an old, ignorant ideology that saw wildlife management as figuring out how many predators to kill to enable hunters to shoot so many game animals without diminishing the game population for the next year, remains entrenched and institutionalized amongst government wildlife biologists. This is devoid of modern knowledge about the value of predators to ecosystems. Because they tend to take injured or sick prey, hunting by predators is beneficial to the health of the populations of their prey, whereas human hunting has detrimental effects on their health.

BC's major hunting organizations openly deplore habitat loss, but the solution they most adamantly seek is killing more of BC's large carnivores — Grizzly and Black Bears, Wolves and Cougars, even Lynx and Bobcats. Well-funded hunting organizations have been lobbying heavily. In the winter of 2019-20 the government announced new wolf culls for Caribou over a greatly expanded area, having sent the consultation document to a list of "stakeholders". The list included four environmental groups, five hunting/trapping organizations, ten heli-skiing, cat-skiing and snowmobile groups (mostly commercial), four logging companies and various government reps. The public interest is being overwhelmed by vested interests at the government's planning forums.



Craig Pettitt

Government figures show approximately ten times more Moose than Caribou in BC. But there's been a serious decline of Moose in areas of massive salvage logging of beetle-killed forest. While moose do use vegetation on clearcuts, they also need some old forest for thermal cover and nutrition.

Furthermore, the government's new Grizzly Bear Stewardship Team overseeing the new BC grizzly bear management plan and commercial bear viewing is stacked with mostly government or retired government grizzly biologists who fought hard for decades to keep the grizzly bear hunt alive. Reliable sources say their new draft grizzly plan, not yet released to the public, makes provisions for re-opening the grizzly hunt, falsely claiming it was closed solely based on public sentiment and not conservation. This ignores that many independent grizzly bear experts made numer-

ous scientific submissions to government on the many threats to grizzly bear conservation by trophy hunting.

It's been obvious that all the people who enjoy their wildlife alive have to speak up. In February VWS organized a letter to the Forests Minister that was signed by 28 environmental and animal care organizations and conservationists. This was the third of three joint letters that VWS has organized in the last few years, asserting that BC's wildlife is a public trust, belongs to all British Columbians, and that we expect to have fair representation in wildlife decisions.

Also in 2021 VWS produced a 28-page report on the contribution of hunting to the cumulative impacts on our wildlife, as well as trapping on fur-bearing animals. The report and cover letter were sent to every Member of the BC Legislature and resulted in a meeting with one MLA. We hope to do more with it in the future. You can find it on the Home Page of our website.

COP26: “ENDING THE GLOBAL CHAINSAW MASSACRE”? REALLY?

Ending the “chainsaw massacre” was the rallying call for the nations at COP26 to sign an agreement promising to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030. Prime Minister Trudeau signed it. He stated:

“Canada is home to one of the largest continuous forests in the world, and we have a responsibility to protect it. We’ve seen the impact of global temperatures rising; they’ve been rising twice as fast in Canada as in the rest of the world on those forests. We have a responsibility to be stewards of them.”

CANADA’S BIG LIE

In signing the pledge Canada, and all the signator countries, adopted a false pretense that clearcut logging is not deforestation if the trees are replanted. This highlights a huge gap between what politicians say and what science has actually told them. The science on the massive carbon emissions when a forest of giant, old trees is completely cut down, and replaced with tiny seedlings, is very well known, but the BC and Canadian governments cloak themselves in logging industry misinformation and biased research. They say clear-cutting isn’t deforestation because the wood

goes into long-lasting wood products, and therefore the carbon is still stored away from the atmosphere. In previous newsletters we have cited direct quotes from scientific reports that refute this. We won’t repeat it much here, but suffice it to say that only a minority percentage of the carbon stored in large old-growth trees remains stored in the wood products; the rest goes into the atmosphere. What’s more, while wood products contain carbon, but they cannot continue absorbing it from the air, as the living trees would do; and wood products don’t last thousands of years like temperate rainforest.

ENFORCING A SUICIDE COURSE ON HUMANITY

The enormity of the question that is placed before us no longer can or should be avoided: as Fairy Creek protesters were being arrested for trying to save some of the very little ancient forest BC has left on Vancouver Island, huge fires caused by climate change were burning down 8,682 sq. km. of BC forest. BC experienced its hottest day on record as a whole town burned down.

On the very day (November 11) that the RCMP used an axe and chainsaw to crash through the door of a small cabin where Wet’suwet’en protesters and several legal observers and journalists were sheltering — and pointed assault rifles at them while arresting them all — a huge area of BC was under water, with thousands of people driven from their homes, and BC under a declared state of emergency. Emergency indeed. *This disaster was the very kind of fossil fuel-driven consequences the blockaders were trying to prevent.*

A BC Supreme Court judge had already denounced the RCMP behaviour and refused to grant the logging company an extension of its injunction against the blockade because of it, though the injunction was restored by an appeals court. But there is a deeper issue: when people break the law, does it matter why they are doing it? What about trying to save life on the planet from extinction?

Protesters on a logging blockade are enduring extremely stressful, uncomfortable, and sorrowful conditions, usually watching everything they’ve been trying to protect be destroyed. Whatever the cause of unfortunate or outrageous behaviour by police, logging company or protesters, the ultimate cause of the conflict can be traced to land use policies and decisions so outrageously unjust and



Does this look like a forest to you? It would take the trees many hundreds of years to grow back to that size.

destructive that real human conscience can no longer bear it. The BC government’s excuse that it doesn’t control the police is devious: it engenders and controls the situation that brought the police there. For a scathing account of how the BC government has treated the First Nations of the area, see the remarks of MLA Adam Olsen at:

<https://adamolsen.ca/2021/06/forest-agreement-betrays-premiers-commitments-on-indigenous-reconciliation/>

How have we, the people, created elected governments, a legal system and police forces that are so impervious to the consequences of their decisions and actions? There are many people in our society who are concerned about the climate disasters, but when faced with rising gas prices, they shake their fists at government and vow vengeance on election day. There are people who want “sustainability” but demand new ski resorts regardless of how they contribute to climate change or how many grizzly bears they kill or displace.

AN AROUSED AND INFORMED PUBLIC

Fortunately there is a whole other layer of humanity that is coalescing into an increasingly powerful force for good. There is the formidable youth climate movement—the Extinction Rebellion, Greta Thunberg and all the students demonstrating. There are the incredibly courageous, committed First Nations and non-native blockaders, and the journalists and legal observers who are standing there with them. There are scientists who have left their ivory towers to help young people battle the disastrous future that now confronts them, and lawyers working day and night for little or no pay.

Observers at COP26 said that the massive protests there did make a difference in what the nations achieved. And we can see that our provincial government, as a result of a province-wide outcry, is now bestirring itself to defer the logging of some old-growth forest. The Union of BC Indian chiefs has issued an urgent call upon the provincial government to “stop investing in LNG and fracking expansions, and to implement crucial measures that will support the just transition to a clean-energy economy.” Hundreds of signators from universities across Canada have signed an open letter demanding that the charges be dropped against the protesters, and the permits for the Coastal Gaslink pipeline be cancelled, and Indigenous rights and territory be respected.

We are up against huge forces. Multi-billions of dollars have been invested in the fracking wells, pipeline and LNG plant in Kitimat. Canceling them will be a financial disaster for a few; not cancelling them will increase a colossal cost accruing to everyone in the world. *Our governments need to count the cost of the climate change disasters, past and fu-*

ture. The welfare of the human race, its communities, the planet, its animal life and ecology should no longer be sacrificed for the profits of the 1-5% of the obscenely wealthy and the multi-million dollar salaries and bonuses to the corporate executives who preside over policies that are already costing millions of human lives and annihilating species.

As the cost to the corporate financial world is confronted by the costs to humanity of their practices, our human and civil rights are in jeopardy. Something had changed in our world when, in 2019, the RCMP were given directions to aggressively remove First Nations protesters from a blockade using assault rifles, helicopters, snipers and drones. When confronted by the London *Guardian* newspaper with documents showing that the RCMP were instructed to use lethal force if necessary, the authorities blithely admitted and justified it, as if it would be merely normal to kill any peaceful protesters so that a pipeline company can get on with its business, even indigenous people standing on land the Supreme Court had recognized as their own. Even as late as November this year police used assault rifles and snipers to arrest protesters while many Canadians gasped in shock at the hypocrisy, given that at that very time our federal and provincial governments were apologizing for decades of horrific abuse of native people and proclaiming a great “Reconciliation”.

This was not contemplated by RCMP 20 years ago, nor would the public have tolerated it. The government and police appear to be serving the pipeline company, doing everything they can to intimidate and abuse the protesters to get them out of the way. Every person concerned about justice in BC should write the government about it, because BC representatives are responsible for using their position to censure abusive behaviour by employees of our societies’ legal system.



Our children deserve the future that nature provided for them.

Please write Premier John Horgan, with a copy to Forests Minister Katrine Conroy. VWS is taking the following position:

1) End logging of all old-growth forest including at Fairy Creek. 2) Revoke the permits for Coastal Gaslink; 3) Drop all charges against the protesters; 4) End aggressive police tactics; 5) Drop the deceptive wolf culls and address the actual causes of mountain caribou decline: habitat loss, snowmobiling and heli-skiing. 6) Immediate, full protection of ecosystems instead of promises.

Premier John Horgan / Premier@gov.bc.ca

KatrineConroy/FLNR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

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A great way to finish this newsletter is to go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaTgTiUhEJg>

where the UN has a few minutes’ message we all need to hear, in just the way we need to hear it.