

Valhalla Wilderness Society

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SAFE HAVEN TOURS BC WITH PLEA FOR NEW INLAND RAINFOREST PARKS

This year, VWS's new film, *Safe Haven: The Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness*, made its way to 19 communities across British Columbia and one international community through the Colorado Environmental Film Festival. The 30-minute short documentary was produced by award-winning filmmaker Damien Gillis, whose previous film, *Primeval: Enter the Incomappleux*, was important in helping to bring the Incomappleux ancient forest to protection as a new conservancy in 2023.

The success of *Primeval* as a campaign tool from 2015-2023 led VWS to commission Damien to produce a film about the ancient forest of the Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness in 2023. Filming north of Revelstoke, BC took place over two years, with interviews by founding director Craig Pettitt, Inland Rainforest expert Dr. Toby Spribille and VWS biologist Amber Peters. This resulted in an educational and heartfelt account of the state of one of Earth's rarest ecosystems, and a plea for its full protection.

Safe Haven first premiered at the Rio Theatre in Vancouver in November 2024 through the Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival (VIMFF) where it won Best Environmental Film and was selected for the festival's world tour. The film was toured around BC in 2025 with a presentation on three park proposals of the Inland Temperate Rainforest (ITR) - the result of 25 years of research and campaigning in the ITR.

VWS's early research at the start of the campaign revealed globally significant biodiversity in the magnificent forest of the Incomappleux, where hundreds of species, some new to science, were documented with help of lichenologists, mycologists, botanists and even malacologists (biologists who study snails). The Incomappleux revealed that the most significant remaining cathedrals of millennia-old trees in BC's Interior cedar-hemlock forests were home to extraordinary constellations of smaller lifeforms that had largely been overlooked by the scientific community. Meanwhile, some of the rarest jewels of the unique rainforest found 500 kilometers from BC's Pacific Coast were lost to rampant clearcutting, extinguishing irreplaceable lifeforms and wiping out the most southern herds of the world's only Deep Snow Mountain Caribou.

Today, much more public support is needed to bring the Inland Rainforest to greater protection, with 15% currently



Courtesy of Wildsight

The audience for the screening of *Safe Haven* in Revelstoke. It was a pleasure and inspiration to bring the film to people who lived so close to the Rainbow-Jordan park proposal and feel their enthusiasm. Wildsight Revelstoke has launched a petition for its protection.

protected compared to 33% of BC's coastal temperate rainforest. VWS is dedicating a major focus toward three areas that still remain intact: the Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness, Selkirk Mountains Ancient Forest and Quesnel Lake Wilderness. Each is proposed as a new, fully legislated park of the Inland Temperate Rainforest.

Safe Haven, along with photographs from 25 years of research, was brought to theatres, festivals and educational centres this year, with the help of many supporters and hosts like the West Kootenay Naturalists Association, Birds Canada, the Johnsons Landing Community Association and the Capilano University EarthWorks program.

One of our most important presentations of the film was in Revelstoke, B.C., a town whose surrounding landscape is overwhelmed by industrial activity and motorized recreation tenures, yet still includes the majestic, intact wilderness of the Rainbow-Jordan Valleys. Revelstoke's very close proximity to the Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness made it crucial to get support within the community for a new park.

The first advertisement of the film was met with the spread of misinformation in which people were told that the cre-

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ation of a park would take away a popular route for snowmobiling. With assistance from Wildsight Revelstoke, VWS was able to ascertain where the popular snowmobile routes are, and to map them alongside the park proposal. The map showed that the proposal does not overlap with the adjacent snowmobile areas. A film screening was rescheduled for October 10th at the Revelstoke Performing Arts Centre.

A day prior to the screening, VWS campaigner Amber Peters had the opportunity to guide a reporter into the park proposal. An enthusiastic article appeared in local media the day of the film. That night 250 guests attended to learn about their backyard reservoir of ancient biodiversity, which had received little to no attention prior to VWS's initial study in 2017. Amber described visiting the rainforest and then bringing its message to the people of Revelstoke as an inspirational experience.

The presentation included information on the effects of snowmobiling on the region's caribou, including the Frisby-Queest herd, now down to 6 animals, whose habitat on Frisby Ridge now sees 80,000 snowmobiler-days per year. Though the crowd included motorized recreationists, the presentation and film received a ton of positive feedback, and guests stayed for a lengthy question and answer period after the show. Attendees asked about best practices for stewardship of the forest which many had not known about prior to the film, and were provided with tools for letter-writing - still the most effective thing supporters can do to



VWS always has a table at events with fact sheets and reports to assist people with writing letters to government to support the park proposals, plus the VWS posters.

help the campaign. While the government has substantially raised the allowable cut of our last remaining old growth, Safe Haven and our three Inland Rainforest park proposals will continue to tour communities in BC and beyond.

In the uphill climb to get new parks protected in BC, we ask our supporters to be the voice for more rainforest protection as a part of the government's promise to protect 30% of the land base by 2030. Protection of the Incomappleux in 2023 revealed that your voice matters and your letters are still working.

Generous public-spirited funders made it possible for VWS to work with a talented film maker

Damien Gillis carried out the filming, editing, artistic composition, and narration of the films *Primeval* and *Safe Haven*. Besides the interviews in *Safe Haven* with Dr. Toby Spribille, Amber Peters and Craig Pettitt, an important part of the film is Damien's interpretive narration, as both camera and narrative take viewers on a walk through an ancient forest. Damien worked cooperatively with VWS directors, who had input into the film and its music. Of the two films, *Primeval* is perhaps more poetic, whereas *Safe Haven* incorporates more science and vividly portrays the conservation action on the part of the public that is necessary to bring about a protected area.

There is very, very little ancient, high-biodiversity forest left in BC and very few people ever get to experience the feeling of being in one. VWS believes it is essential for the public to be able to at least see these magnificent examples of BC's natural heritage. We feel very grateful to the funders of VWS who made it possible to work with Damien.



Left: Damien Gillis; Right: VWS Director Craig Pettitt. Damien is also the creator of documentaries on the tar sands and farmed salmon, as well as the award winning film *Fractured Land*.

REPORT ON THE INCOMAPPLEUX CONSERVANCY

It's vital to remember the successes we have achieved — the proof that what we are doing actually works. Our 50-year old Society has successfully advocated the establishment of half a million hectares of wilderness parks, all with high values of biodiversity, wildlife and forests.

One of the most recent additions to BC's protected areas was the 58,000+ ha. Incomappleux Conservancy, which our Society persistently spearheaded for 21 years before it was established by Order in Council under the *Park Act* on January 30, 2023. Its newness naturally leads members, supporters, directors and staff to wonder, "How's the new Conservancy doing?" But our team at VWS can only answer: "We don't know." For one thing, we can't get there because the government has closed the only road access. From the nearest road access, one must walk 30 kilometres through clearcuts along an old logging road to get to the big trees.

Soon after the Conservancy was announced, BC Parks met with the directors where we learned that there would be co-management of the Conservancy with around eight different First Nations. VWS enthusiastically supported this. The government assured us that talks with the First Nations would take time, but within some months or so, we would be advised about management issues and there would be input by the general public. Now almost three years have gone by, still with no word. The BC Parks website for the Conservancy has only rudimentary information; it is still telling the public that it is working on a collaborative management deal with First Nations and will eventually let the public in on it.

The fact that they have barricaded the road was tolerable as a temporary situation. But then VWS received a notice from the Ministry of Forests saying that it was going to pull out two bridges that provide the only vehicle access to the Incomappleux. That meant permanent inaccessibility.

Our directors were initially split between those who wanted access totally closed, and those who wanted vehicle access to be maintained within a reasonable walking distance. Parks can suffer serious damage when too many people want to go there and have road access. The Incomappleux is a haven for Grizzly Bears, which could be impacted by too many people. The forest is teeming with sensitive species such as lichens, mushrooms and rare plants. All of our team knew that access had to be limited to some extent.

However, making it accessible only to people who can walk 30 km — approximately a three day backpack for many people — was objectionable to some of us. We have advocated for wilderness parks that do require long walks to get to special features. But the primeval forest of the Incomappleux is a profound natural heritage of humanity. Taking out the bridge and forcing people to walk 30 km would inevitably turn the big tree area into a helicopter destination for the rich, or for whatever guests BC Parks wished to bring in by helicopter. There could even be a new lodge in the Conservancy, and with the road closed, it could be a long time before the public would even know about it. There was a gut feeling that it should not be allowed to become the playground of the extremely fit or the extremely wealthy.

On the other hand, no one would be able to truly experience the forest if there are 100 people in it at the same time because of easy access. These and other issues finally led to a resolution that the Society would support closing the road 13 km before the big trees, where there is parking space. That would cut the walking distance down by almost two-thirds.

Unfortunately, when we wrote to BC Parks and the Ministry of Forests that VWS opposes pulling out the bridges we learned that it was apparently a "done deal". The Environment Ministry told us that the road was in disrepair and a safety hazard, and there was no money to repair it, so the bridges had to be pulled out. The Ministry representative told us that road access was not being closed because it had never existed. Perhaps

Artificial Intelligence wrote the letter? Previously, VWS was able to drive almost up to the big trees for many years to enable scientific research.

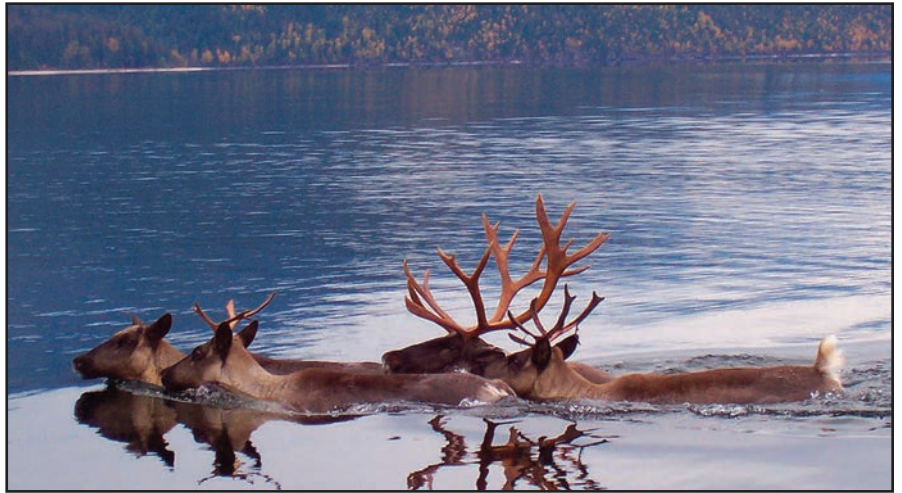
As it is, there have been several parties visiting by helicopter. There was a big movement by people who lived in the nearby town of Camborne to fight the road closures, including hiring a lawyer; but the Ministry of Forests has pushed the road closures through anyway. There is nothing anyone can do about it at present, but we believe that this is not the end of the issue. The bridges and roads can and should be repaired and rebuilt to allow partial road access. In the meantime: the trees are still there, the bears are happy, and the river is flowing free.



Craig Pettitt

THE IMPORTANCE OF VWS'S QUESNEL LAKE PARK PROPOSAL

Among the outstanding attributes of the Quesnel Lake park proposal is that it hosts the second largest herd of Deep Snow Mountain Caribou in existence. The government website says there are 236 caribou in the Wells Gray North herd that centers in the VWS park proposal. That herd also has exchange with the Wells Gray South herd of 135 caribou. These caribou are among the few Inland Temperate Rainforest herds that have a reasonable chance of being recovered.



The largest of the three VWS park proposals encompasses the forest around Quesnel Lake. It has received less field presence by VWS personnel, and less scientific study than our Selkirk Mountains and Rainbow-Jordan proposals, which are closest to where the directors and staff live. Although Quesnel Lake is far to the north, bordering the Wells Gray and Caribou Mountains Provincial Parks, it is equally important.

VWS put in a lot of field work and consultation with First Nations during the years 2003-13 when it was exploring the area. This included, among other things, a week-long trip on Quesnel Lake by Director Craig Pettitt with representatives of the Xat'sull (Soda Creek) and T'exelc (Williams Lake) First Nations as well as Inland Rainforest expert Dr. Toby Spribille. The area was determined to have very high values for First Nations and biodiversity, and the two First Nations supported the proposal for a Class A BC park.

During the Mountain Caribou Recovery Process of those years, VWS advocated for caribou protection within the initial boundaries of its park proposal. Today, Wildlife Habitat Areas (WHAs) for Mountain Caribou cover 72% of the park proposal, but much of the low-elevation caribou habitat was excluded from protection. The WHAs are mostly closed to logging, but do not offer protection from mining, energy and recreational development; and they can be declassified with the stroke of a pen.

This summer VWS renewed its presence on the ground in the

Quesnel proposal, with trips by VWS biologists Wayne McCrory and Amber Peters. In addition, Gary Diers, a director of Mt. Willet Wilderness Forever, and a wilderness explorer who has been an invaluable aid to VWS for many years, explored the proposal and provided important new photographs.

They found that a wildfire had burned one of the Mountain Caribou Wildlife Habitat Areas, and there was also new logging within the park proposal. Back home in the office, Director Craig Pettitt worked for weeks with mapping expert Baden Cross of Applied Conservation GIS, using new technology to identify the exact location of the new wildfires and clearcuts, to learn what implications they might have to the park proposal boundaries.

The original proposal already had some clearcuts in it, but the large patches that were left had very high conservation values. The new clearcuts allowed by the government are outrageous, as clearcuts destroy Mountain Caribou habitat. But despite that, this is one of the province's most important protected area proposals. Among other things, because the proposal is adjacent to Wells Gray and Caribou Mountains Provincial Parks, its protection would represent the largest contiguous protected wilderness west of the Rocky Mountains and east of the Great Bear Rainforest.



Gary Diers

The park proposal has big-tree, old-growth Inland Temperate Rainforest with high values for wildlife and for rainforest lichens.

For more reasons why the Quesnel Lake Wilderness should be protected as a park, read on.

SALMON NEED PROTECTION FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE OCEAN

Of great significance in BC environmental affairs today is a little-known sorry story engaging killer whales, salmon, Canada's biggest mining disaster, the BC government signing mining permits without proper environmental review, and a First Nation that went to court to get one — and was turned down.

An independent science panel on the Southern Resident Killer Whales in BC's coastal waters has determined that, unless more is done to help them, they are likely to go extinct. These whales depend almost totally on Chinook Salmon for their food. Scientific studies have shown that a lack of food, due to the decline of Chinook Salmon, is the main cause of the whale's decline.

In 2018 Canada's leading authority on species-at-risk, COSEWIC, reported that half of Canada's 16 populations of Chinook Salmon are Endangered. Four others are Threatened.

VWS's Quesnel Lake Wilderness park proposal hosts four species of ocean-going salmon, including Chinooks. Their life cycle takes them all the way down the Fraser River to the ocean, and back to the streams where they were born, to reproduce. In 2018 three Chinook Salmon subpopulations in the park proposal, in the Mitchell River and Quesnel Lake (Designable Units 7, 8, 9 and 10) were listed by COSEWIC as Endangered; a fourth is Threatened.

The 2018 assessment of Chinook Salmon by COSEWIC listed declines in fresh water and marine habitat quality as one of the threats, stating that "placer and hard rock mining, acid mine drainage, and contaminant leaching occurs at several locations in the Quesnel River and Cariboo River." The 2014 Mount Polley mining disaster, which dumped 25 million cubic metres of toxic mine waste into Quesnel Lake from a failed tailings containment area, is listed as one source.

The BC government permitted the mine to continue operations in less than a year. It allowed the statute of limitations for prosecuting the company to go by without filing charges. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans prosecuted the company years later. Ten years after the disaster, scientific studies showed that toxic waste settled on the bottom of the lake is stirred up every spring and fall when wind churns the lake, bringing the contaminants to the top and making the lake cloudy. The researchers found contamination in various small species that serve as food for the salmon.

The mine was originally approved in an environmental review process, but in recent years it applied to expand its operations and increase the holding capacity of the tailings



Wayne McCrory

Also known as Orcas, Killer Whales are treasured by residents and visitors to BC. Increased tanker traffic in BC coastal waters, predicted as an impact of expanded exports of liquified natural gas (LNG), threatens the whales with collisions and underwater noise, which is already impacting all whales and dolphins near the coast.

pond that had catastrophically failed in 2014. The government rewrote the terms of the permit and rubber stamped the expansion without an environmental review. The Xat'sull (Soda Creek) First Nation filed a lawsuit primarily asking for a new Environmental Review of the proposed expansion and repaired tailings pond. They had much evidence on their side, but the court turned them down.

Quesnel Lake and its tributaries also contain a quarter of the natural spawning sites of Fraser River Sockeye Salmon. The 2017 COSEWIC assessment listed some Quesnel Lake subpopulations as Endangered and said the Mount Polley mine disaster is a threat to them.

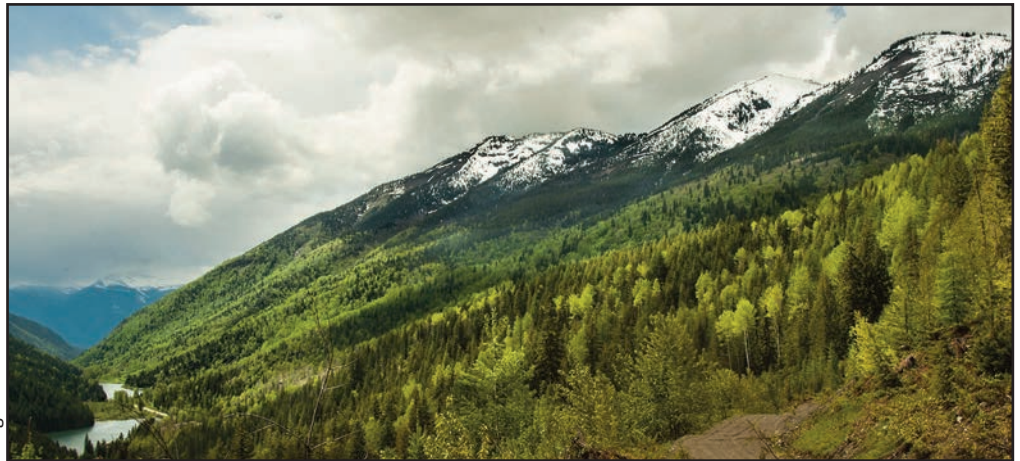
By 2020 Sockeye Salmon returns in the Fraser River were the lowest on record. Emaciated Grizzly Bears were being seen on the coast, and in 2021 at least one First Nation fed hundreds of hatchery-raised salmon to the starving bears. Then this year Sockeye Salmon ascended the Fraser River in historic numbers. It was attributed to increased conservation measures, but 2021 was a dire warning that the salmon need better protection.

Among other reasons, salmon in the Fraser River and on the coast overlap with more than 170 First Nations and are of great significance to their culture including the three Northern Secwépemc (Shuswap) First Nations whose territory includes the Quesnel Lake park proposal. It is folly to ignore salmon as a key human food source, but that is exactly what provincial politicians and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans have done for many years, allowing salmon to be cumulatively impacted by a combination of mine contamination, headwater clearcutting and excessive commercial fishing while ignoring the need for long-term sustainability and protection of the watersheds on which they depend upstream.

PROPOSED ZINCTON RESORT STILL POSES A PERILOUS THREAT TO WILDLIFE AND COMMUNITIES

West Kootenays — In 2020 Zincton Farms Ltd. proposed a ski village on London Ridge, a valley-bottom to alpine ridge along Highway 31A, between Kaslo and New Denver. Part of the proposal is an application to create a new town on private land along Highway 31A, with vacation homes, restaurants, shops and temporary rentals. The other part is a tenure application for 5,500 adjacent hectares of Crown land for a gondola, roads, and ski lifts.

Craig Pettitt



A scientific paper just published in the *Journal of Environmental Management* by the Ktunaxa

First Nation scientists and knowledge keepers concluded that the combined effects of proposed recreation developments, with existing land uses in the area, would substantially negatively impact both Wolverine and Grizzly Bear habitat and population connectivity. This study confirms previous submissions by independent biologists.

London Ridge, site of the proposed resort, would have a backcountry lodge in the midst of prime grizzly bear denning and feeding grounds.

Request for an Environmental Assessment refused

Although the proposal is now in its sixth year, the government continues to ignore mounting scientific evidence concerning the high cumulative impacts of the project on wildlife, and has kept the public largely in the dark about the multi-stage evaluation process. However, Zincton is perhaps more in danger of being developed now than at any time in the previous years. For one thing, the government turned down a 2023 petition signed by 1,400 people and organizations asking to have an Environmental Assessment (EA) of the proposal.

Secondly, the threat and reality of US tariffs has sent the BC government into a frenzy to “fast-track” development proposals. Even without those factors, the government approval agency, the Mountain Resorts Branch (MRB), has never turned down one ski development. Expanding them is its formal mandate!

That being said, public pressure may be more powerful than what could be expected from an Environmental Assessment. The public has very substantial reasons to keep writing letters objecting to the development.

Scathing assessment by Transportation Ministry

For instance, in 2020 the Ministry of Transportation and Transit [MOTT] informed the proponent that the area of the proposal may be subject to flooding, erosion, landslides or avalanches. It listed extensive studies by professional engineers and geologists that were lacking in the assessment of

the proponent’s own consultants. No such studies have been made public, if they have occurred at all.

The MOTT review also said the plan of the proposed village was not sufficient. The plan proposed future expansions of the housing and road development, but did not specify how they would be achieved and managed.

MOTT also expressed concern that the proposed ski resort would make people prone to the danger of the many avalanches that come down on Highway 31A every year. MOTT carries out yearly bombing of the start zones to make the highway safer for winter travel. It recently closed off the whole side of the mountain, part of Zincton’s ski proposal development, to any winter access due to this risk.

Regional District’s request for an EA rejected

The request for an Environmental Assessment by many people was supported by the Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK). In a Feb. 25, 2025 letter to the Environmental Assessment Office, the RDCK reminded the government that in 2021 it had requested a “cumulative effects study, socio-economic impact assessment and environmental overview third party review.” None of these have been done.

The RDCK pointed out that the proponent’s references to future expansion would mean increased environmental impacts in the future that are escaping review. It cited inconsistencies between the developer’s environmental overview and its promotion for the project.

In summary, the government is keeping the public in the dark and the situation is set up for a shock announcement approving the project one of these days. That is one pressure. But letters from the public constitute another pressure that has and can continue to achieve a lot for BC’s environment.

VWS PROPOSED GRIZZLY BEAR WILDLIFE HABITAT AREAS FOR LARGE CONNECTIVITY CORRIDORS ACCEPTED BY GOVERNMENT FOR REVIEW

VWS successfully advocated for both Valhalla and Goat Range Provincial Parks in our home area, but the issue of protecting wildlife connectivity between the parks has remained critical. These parks have roadless wilderness, which is core security habitat for bears; but bears range very widely and must depend upon food and mating opportunities outside of parks.

The Central Selkirk region has, to date, the most southerly Grizzly Bear population that is reasonably healthy, but it is imperiled by logging and roads severing connectivity crucial to the bears' long-term survival. VWS Director and professional biologist Wayne McCrory has been studying bears for most of his life. For several years he has worked to achieve legal protection of Grizzly Bear cross valley corridors through semi-protected Wildlife Habitat Areas (WHAs).

Grizzly Bears can thrive in disturbed habitat, where fires and clearcutting have made open areas with berry bushes. But the common belief that logging is good for bears is very far from the truth, because logging roads are deadly for them. Many bears that die do so near roads, where they are shot. Although hunting them is now banned, poaching continues to be a problem. Roads also open areas to human presence, which can cause accidental encounters, human habituation, and bear deaths. Certain levels of motorized use cause some bears to avoid critical habitats near roads. These factors fragment the travel corridors where Grizzly Bears can be safe, and as a result many habitats are now void of Grizzly Bears, or the populations are threatened.



Wayne McCrory

Subadult grizzly bear in the proposed Valhalla Park-Goat Range Wildlife Habitat Area

But industrial activities can be modified to reduce negative impacts on bears, and this is what WHAs can do. They are legal designations that can regulate the time of year that logging activities can take place, the road density and proximity to locations of prime Grizzly denning and feeding areas.

In 2024, Wayne (who has field experience in the proposed WHAs since he was a child) and GIS analyst Baden Cross prepared a background decision-support report for a proposed 11,000+ ha. White Grizzly Corridor Wildlife Habitat Area (WHA) that connects Goat Range Park across Highway 31A to the internationally significant Grizzly Bear corridor in the Kokanee Range. The area includes all of the proposed Zincton ski development but not private land. Our proposal was reviewed and accepted by government biologists and is currently undergoing a referral process. If so, it will help raise a red flag as to the danger of the proposed Zincton ski development to Grizzly Bear and other wildlife connectivity across the landscape.

This year Wayne prepared a second application for a 14,000+ hectare Valhalla Park-Goat Range Park Grizzly Bear Corridor WHA that included a 70-page background decision-support report with detailed GIS maps by Baden Cross of Applied Conservation GIS. The area has long been under threat from clearcut logging, roading as well as recent plans for a commercial heli-lodge just north of Valhalla Park. VWS is currently opposing several new proposed clearcuts in the proposed WHAs. This second WHA application has also been reviewed and accepted by government biologists and is to also undergo a referral process. It connects to the proposed White Grizzly WHA and represents core habitat used by the bears.

Western Toad Highway 31A Mortality Mitigation Project



VWS's study of the provincially important population of Western Toads at Fish Lake continued for an 11th year, as we experimented with different methods to reduce high levels of toad mortality when they cross Highway 31A during their spring and summer migrations. Since our last report, VWS completed additions to the migration fencing, bringing the total to about 700 meters. The new fence keeps migrant toads, snakes, salamanders and other species off the highway and directs them to cross through the two new large concrete underpasses installed by the Ministry of Transportation and Transit (MOTT). In the spring and summer of 2025, the fencing-bridging system directed a large number of migrating spring adult toads to safely breed in Fish Lake, and the resulting 30,000-50,000 offspring to migrate safely under the busy highway, to hibernate on the nearby mountain. Although toadlets are tiny, seeing their migration is one of the wonders of the region.

ON THE FAST TRACK TO HELL

Politicians Condemn the World To Increasingly Deadly Climate Change

Politicians create a grave threat to human life when they favour corporate profits at the expense of making climate change worse. Extreme weather and monster fires caused by climate change have already killed hundreds of people in BC. During the 2021 heat dome, 619 people died from extreme heat. A recent study concluded that Canadian wildfire smoke in 2023 caused an estimated 5,400 acute deaths and about 82,100 premature deaths worldwide. Wildfires have destroyed many houses and even whole towns.

This spring the U.S. put high tariffs on Canadian goods. That was all our federal and provincial governments needed to claim a crisis and justify weakening or eliminating environmental assessments (EAs) of major industrial projects. Meanwhile, reductions in climate change-causing carbon dioxide and methane are not only being slow-walked, it is doubtful that BC is going in that direction at all.

“Providing cheap electricity for the expansion of the oil and gas industry” — West Coast Environmental Law

In response to the US tariffs, the BC legislature passed two new laws, Bills 14 and 15, to speed up or eliminate environmental review of specified major industrial developments. The list of developments whose approval will be “fast-tracked” includes the North Coast Transmission Line, which is part of BC’s ongoing endeavor to greatly expand the export of liquified natural gas (LNG) from its coast. With the LNG Canada facility now operating in Kitimat, it will be expanded and two more have already been approved.

The expansion will demand increasing amounts of the gas by fracking in northeast BC. It would also enormously increase BC’s greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change. Some sources say that the intended expansion could amount to two or three times more greenhouse gas emissions than the amount BC committed to by 2030.

Bill 15, was passed to “expedite” mines, pipelines and dams. BC immediately identified 18 energy and mining projects for fast tracking, and more projects can be exempted in the fu-

ture. The federal government also enacted Bill 5, which enables it to designate particular projects in the national interest for “streamlined” review. In reality the language of both BC and the federal government clearly indicates that the specified projects are already approved.

Climate scientists have warned that Canada must keep remaining tar sands oil in the ground or risk a catastrophic future for life on the planet. To many people’s dismay, Canada has just signed an agreement that supports Alberta increasing the production of tar sands oil and building a pipeline to the BC coast for export abroad. The agreement is full of shameless sales hype, pledging that the oil will be produced with low carbon emissions — but the carbon emissions happen when the oil is burned. Canada has pledged to amend the ban on tankers in BC coastal waters to enable oil exports. The threat of oil spills in the habitat of BC’s salmon, other fish and whales is horrifying to many British Columbians. The BC government opposes it but ignores the threats of LNG and the associated impacts of greatly increased tanker traffic.

LNG is worse than coal in causing climate change

In reality research at Columbia University has shown that the effect of LNG on climate change is 33% worse than coal when processing and shipping are considered. LNG emits methane and carbon dioxide during fracking, processing, transportation and storage. Methane is 80 times more harmful to the atmosphere than carbon dioxide.

A warning about the health impacts of LNG

This year the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) issued an 11-page letter to the BC government, signed by hundreds of health professionals. They said that if we do not lower our greenhouse gas emissions, **climate change will cost the Canadian healthcare system an estimated additional \$110 billion per year within the next 25 years.** Multiple recent scientific studies have linked proximity to fracking and LNG facilities to birth defects, childhood leukemia, asthma, heart disease and premature death.

Politicians ignore the cost of climate change.

Insured losses caused by severe weather across Canada in 2024 shattered records at a cost of \$8.5 billion. The events included a severe deep freeze, severe storms, floods, the Jasper wildfire, hail storms, and remnants of a hurricane.

However, that was only the costs incurred by insurance companies. It does not include direct costs, such as the cost of fire-fighting, evacuations, uninsured losses, recovery efforts, and more. For instance, the *total* of these costs for BC wildfires in one year alone in BC, 2017, has been estimated at 1.2 *billion* dollars. The 2017 fire fighting alone cost \$676 million, and that was before BC’s worst fire seasons.

Canada’s worst fire season was in 2023 when more than 230,000 people were evacuated from their homes and communities. Fires caused an estimated \$945 million in *insured* damages.

In 2024, Alberta’s Jasper fire caused over \$1.2 billion in insured damages, second only to the Fort McMurray fire that caused insured losses of \$4 billion and nearly \$1.1 billion in total direct and indirect cost.

This summer was Canada’s second worst fire season. Tens of thousands of people had to evacuate. In addition Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces also suffered extreme heat waves with temperatures reaching 35°C. Scientists examined 10 of the most extreme heat waves and concluded that 9 of them were “much more likely” because of climate change.

Scientists have warned that climate change is getting worse and severe weather will get worse. The cumulative cost is huge and getting bigger, yet the government is giving billions to the fossil fuel industry that makes it worse.

ANOTHER CONVENIENT CRISIS

Using Wildfires As An Excuse for Logging Old Growth Forest and Parks

Forests are considered to be one of the very few effective means of removing and storing atmospheric CO₂ at a scale that is meaningful for reducing climate change. Studies have shown that the oldest forest and biggest trees store the most carbon and absorb the most carbon from the atmosphere as long as they live. Scientists say that mitigating climate change requires protecting more forest. Yet the Premier of BC has ordered a large increase in the Allowable Annual Cut (AAC) for logging, and plans to double the speed at which logging permits are signed. The new Minister of Forests is advocating the logging of old growth management areas and parks to protect them from fires, as if trees can be protected by cutting them down. Don't believe it!

The logging industry and its governmental patrons have a history of exploiting disasters to whip up a sense of emergency that will break down environmental protection. The mountain pine beetle outbreak that peaked in 2006 was a symptom of warming global temperatures that sent the forest industry into a logging frenzy. The province increased the AAC, causing companies to ramp up logging to levels maintained for many years following the outbreak, under the guise of "salvage" of infested forests. Much of the forest logged did not even have pine beetle, but corporate messaging continued to use the beetle as the reason to log.

That was part of the decades of overcutting that have led to companies running out of economically accessible wood, bringing about a number of past and pending mill closures. Once again the logging industry is crying "EMERGENCY!!". But as one forester has commented, there is no emergency, this problem has been occurring for decades."

A newly leaked study conducted by forest experts in collaboration with the BC government and First Nations has revealed that the BC Ministry of Forests has been exaggerating the amount of loggable forest BC has, in order to maintain unsustainable levels of cut. The AAC is being dictated by political levels of government to please logging companies, which have demanded an AAC of 45 million cubic metres. This year the Premier ordered the Ministry of Forests to raise the AAC to exactly that, representing a 50% increase over the old level of 30 million cubic metres.

MINISTER OF FORESTS ADVOCATES LOGGING IN PARKS

Clamoring to log parks and Special Management zones has long been the forest industry's response to running out of wood. Now, in a speech to a convention of logging interests in Prince George, BC's Minister of Forests, Ravi Parmar, has claimed that parks and old growth forests are going to burn down unless their forest is "selectively thinned".

Selective thinning would bring roads, skid trails and heavy



Amber Peters

There is a misbelief that the BC coast has Canada's only rainforest, but scientists have confirmed rainforest in BC's Interior Wetbelt.

equipment that are extremely damaging to parks. Someone needs to tell Minister Parmar that old growth forests are old because they haven't burned in 140-1,000 years or more. This doesn't mean they can't burn, but they tend to burn less often and less severely than younger forest.

Unfortunately it appears that Minister Parmar gets his forestry education from the logging industry. A film called "BC is Burning," sponsored by logging companies, was screened at the legislature to the Minister and a group of MLAs last month. The film is touring BC with an urgent call to log our old growth forests, because they are supposedly dying and need to be managed – another convenient but false crisis.

This is refuted by numerous reports by forest researchers that say that the closed canopies of older forests provide shade, reduce temperature, hold in moisture and reduce wind speed, making them relatively resistant to fire. Thinning trees opens the canopy, letting in heat and wind which makes thinned forests drier and more susceptible to fires.

In his speech in Prince George, Minister Parmar told the audience: "We did not create provincial parks to see them burn down. We did not take the important steps to protect our ancient forests to see them burn down." Actually, Mr. Parmar has not created any parks and, so far as we know, has never asked for any either.

The Ministry of Forests is an arm of the BC Government. What the Minister says represents the government administration. The public has a right to expect that he is not inciting logging corporations to break down the doors of BC Parks that represent more than a hundred years of BC citizens protecting them. Premier Eby and his cabinet cannot claim they have no part in this. They must disagree with Parmar's remarks or be seen to be supporting them.

WAYS THAT LOGGING DAMAGES BC'S CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Besides contributing to climate change, logging makes the effects of extreme weather much worse. This year a study at the University of BC determined that logging and roads can make catastrophic floods up to 18 times more frequent. A separate study found that nearly half of the landslides in BC in the 2021 atmospheric river event started from burned or logged areas. These events dump heavy rain where decades of clearcutting and fires on steep slopes have left time bombs of potential landslides and floods.

Heat and drought are affecting all of BC's forests. A recent scientific study explains that even when we receive a normal amount of rain, trees are in a moisture deficit because the warmer weather has increased the evaporation of it. Moisture deficit has increased their flammability.

Temperate rainforests such as exist on the BC coast and in the Interior Wetbelt are very rare. They are our wettest forests and our highest biodiversity forests in Canada. In 2024 a group of scientists calculated that, even if the world takes effective action to mitigate climate change, it could lose almost 10% of its temperate rainforests by 2100. If we fail to take effective mitigation actions, 68% could be lost by 2100. Deforestation has already destroyed 43% of the current temperate rainforest biome. Only 37% of primary (unlogged) temperate rainforest is left, and some regions like Europe have virtually none. (Silver et al, *Earth's Future*, 2024).

BC'S OLD GROWTH FORESTS ARE CLIMATE CHANGE REFUGES FOR BIODIVERSITY

Recognizing that old growth forest is relatively fire resistant, at least two teams of scientists have been identifying old growth forests that may serve as refuges for wild species as the climate changes. The idea is to prioritize these areas for conservation, to save as much biodiversity as possible in the future. One of these projects was carried out at the University of Alberta. It was focused on BC old growth forest and funded by the Canadian Forest Service and the BC Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship.

The US Geographic Survey is developing maps that identify "climate refugia" — places that "can protect wildlife from regional changes in temperature and precipitation". They are creating maps for "Fire Refugia in Old Growth Forests". They have also mapped "drought refugia" — places where the climate may change less and so maintain biodiversity.

The study of BC's old growth forest (Pochailo, N, et al, *Ecosphere*, Jan. 2025) acknowledges that: **"Old growth forests are recognized as areas of buffered microclimates with resistance to natural disturbance."**

The researchers designated 64% of BC's old growth as climate refugia. Only 17.4% of BC old growth is already protected, representing 3.5% of BC's total forested area. But only 11.5 % of old growth refugia is in protected areas. The

Deferred Old Growth Now Incinerated for Foreign Electricity

In the last newsletter VWS reported the extensive logging of BC's last primary forests, with whole trees being ground into pellets and shipped to the U.K. to be burned for electricity at Drax power station.

This year a report by Conservation North and others revealed that from all trackable spatial data in 2023, nearly 40% of the land that Drax sourced logs from that year was old growth, including ancient forest, and nearly 20% of the land was within the provinces Priority Deferral Areas identified as in most need of protection by the Old Growth Technical Advisory Panel.

A 2025 report by the Environmental Paper Network (EPN) states that Canada is actually subsidizing biomass operations at an average annual cost of \$248 million. BC provides an average of \$44 million annually, calling biofuel "renewable energy". BC's claimed intent to put ecosystem integrity as a top priority is a very Big Lie when it is paying companies to log our forests for wood pellets to be sent to Europe and Japan, whose governments are also heavily subsidizing this travesty.

While BC's forest policies ignore or deny that old growth forests are relatively fire-resistant, some people in government know better than that, as the next article will show.



Craig Pettitt

researchers point out that this means over 88% of BC's little remaining old growth is vulnerable to climate change, logging, or development. The authors state:

"On its own, BC's existing network of protected areas appears insufficient to address this vulnerability. At just over 17% protected, BC's old growth generally fails to reach Canada's area protection target of 30% by 2030 (Government of Canada, 2021), which has been proposed to apply equally to all ecosystems."

THE BIODIVERSITY CRISIS AND THE BC GOVERNMENT'S BIG LIE

The greatest concern about the loss of species has always been that life on this planet is built from the bottom up. Humans are not independent from the web of life that begins with the very small life forms that feed larger forms. Scientists say that the losses at the lower end of the food chain pose the most threat of ecosystem collapse.

The near extinction of Deep Snow Mountain Caribou is based on a loss of lichens in old growth Inland Temperate Rainforest. The forest around and north of Revelstoke in the BC interior is host to the Columbia North herd of Deep Snow Mountain Caribou. With 184 animals, it is the third biggest herd of endangered Deep snow Mountain Caribou in existence. It represents one of BC's last, best chances to save this unique and irreplaceable type of caribou.

In 2023 VWS commissioned an analysis of government data on logging in the herd's range. It showed that at that time there were 1,917 hectares of active logging in federally-designated critical habitat for the Columbia North herd. Out of the 1,917 hectares, 1,764 ha. were old growth

forest 140 years or older.

This year, Wildsight, Stand.earth and Wilderness Committee used satellite data to get an up-to-date, more extensive reading. They found that 57 square kilometres of old growth forests are either approved or pending approval for logging in the ranges of three endangered caribou herds: the Columbia North, Groundhog and Wells Gray South herds.



After waltzing the public through years of caribou recovery processes, the same BC government that spent millions of tax dollars on shooting wolves and penning pregnant caribou turned a brazen and almost psychopathic face toward the plight of the caribou. Despite overwhelming scientific evidence that the logging of old growth Inland Temperate Rainforest is killing them, the government keeps logging what little habitat they have left, destroying their food supply and their protection from predators. There are good people in our governments, but it's clear that the logging corporations are pulling the strings.

BC'S FOREST BETRAYALS, DENIAL, DECEPTION AND COVER UP

Valhalla Wilderness Society has always respected the democratic principles of government even when it could not respect the people occupying particular offices. That is what drives our organization to expose government betrayals of the principles it is supposed to serve.

Unfortunately at the end of 2025 VWS can only acknowledge that current governments, which appear to be our most environmentally enlightened governments, have learned, more than any previous administrations, how to put on big media events that promise to reform resource management, while doing the exact opposite under cover. This lulls the public to sleep while corporate barons reap the last of our old growth forests and profit from fossil fuels sure to lock in catastrophic climate change events in the future.

As evidence, consider a 2025 report on the state of BC forests, entitled "**Closer to the Brink**" by forester Dave Daust and ecologist Dr. Karen Price. Dr. Price was a member of BC's Old Growth Technical Advisory Panel. The following information from their report has been edited and summarized for brevity:

◆ BC's "Old Growth Strategic Review recommendations have not yet led to significant new protection of old growth."

- ◆ "Nearly 5 percent (510,000 hectares) of the 11 million hectares of old growth identified in 2021 has been logged, burned, or removed from the public land base."
- ◆ Despite the recommendations of BC's Old Growth Technical Advisory Panel to defer logging of at-risk big-tree old growth, "Logging was four times more likely inside at-risk old growth forests that were recommended for deferral than in other old growth."
- ◆ The government invited the public to comment on the provisions of a Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health policy that would make these values a top priority in BC. That was January 2024. It hasn't been heard from since.
- ◆ VWS agrees with some of our colleagues in the environmental movement that the promise to protect 30% of Canada and BC by 2030 was blown off the table by the frenzy to fast track industrial development.

VWS has watched BC's government give itself, not one, but multiple media hits congratulating themselves for each of these reforms which, five years later, have never happened. In previous newsletters we warned that there were signs of insincerity and lies in these promises, but hoped we were wrong. The media releases and background reports associated with those announcements now sit on the websites of the resource ministries as window dressing.

Yes, there IS a crisis in BC and Canada today:

A crisis in which monetary interests in industry and government are using US tariffs to justify racing to gain profits from major industrial expansion regardless of the damage to the environment, the health of people, the lost species and the bleak future of worsening climate change.

And yes, there IS an emergency, in that our governments are not taking the destruction of British Columbia's homes by fire and flood seriously, nor are they heeding the scientists who say these impacts are going to get much worse. A flood of letters from the public is very much needed at this time. Please consider the following key points:

- ◆ Addressing climate change and the biodiversity crisis requires immediate, drastic levels of protection for old-growth and primary (unlogged) forest. Logging should only occur in second growth forest.
- ◆ Environmental Assessments for major projects, as determined by existing provincial and federal laws, should

be reinstated for all major projects.

- ◆ Subsidies for the oil and gas industry and the wood pellet industry should be stopped.
- ◆ The governments must keep their promises to protect 30% of the land by 2030. Protection should mean full protection under the BC Park Act.
- ◆ The logging industry is about having a lucrative profit margin; it is not interested in removing little trees from parks, but in logging the 17.4% of BC's old growth that's in protected areas. Only your voice stands between our parks and protected areas and industry's chainsaws. Please tell the government absolutely NO!

Why New Parks? Why FULL protection?

Advocacy for the protection of remaining big-tree old growth forest is one of the top priorities of today's environmental movement. VWS's current proposals for new parks specifically target big-treed, intact, old growth forest. Partial protection that allows such things as new roads, independent power projects, tourism lodges or "a little" logging, may be profitable to humans, but they fragment wild ecosystems and are not good for grizzly bears, caribou, salmon, lichens or endangered plants. The vast degree to which humans have fragmented and invaded nature creates a dire need for wildlife to have places that are at least as strongly protected as the BC Park Act.

The promise to protect 30% by 2030 seems to have evaporated, but Canadians should not let the federal and provincial governments get by with such brazen promises they don't intend to keep, which is basically fraudulent. Keep in mind that the cards are not in: It is not 2030 yet and there is **STILL TIME** to demand that government protect new parks and reform forestry practices.

Please write your letter today and support the Quesnel Lake Wilderness, Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness and Selkirk Mountains Ancient Forest proposals for Inland Temperate Rainforest.

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VWS's Rainbow-Jordan Park proposal is an extensive, intact tract of rainforest with this and many other trees like it. It is featured in the film *Safe Haven* that will be put on the VWS website soon.

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