



Ministry of
Forests, Lands, Natural
Resource Operations
and Rural Development

IMPROVING WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AND HABITAT CONSERVATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

A Primer To Support A Conversation
With British Columbians



April 2018

The diversity of wildlife in British Columbia is one of our province's greatest treasures. The variety of species, ecosystems, and habitats in B.C. is greater than in any other province in Canada, and some species are not found anywhere else in the world. Our rich natural diversity is an integral part of British Columbia and is inextricably linked to our way of life. We want to protect that diversity and ensure that future generations will continue to enjoy the many social, economic, environmental and cultural benefits that our wildlife provides.

Our government is committed to improving wildlife management and habitat conservation and have committed an additional \$14 million over the next three years to do so. For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples have relied on wildlife to help meet sustenance as well as spiritual needs. As part of our commitment to implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, we want to build a new framework to help sustain and manage wildlife together with Indigenous peoples as well as stakeholders and wildlife and habitat advocates.

Our province's wildlife management practices have evolved significantly throughout history, and have not been without challenges, such as responding to wildfires, pine beetle infestation, and fragmented and lost habitats resulting from human activity. These, and other issues, such as climate change, are being faced by wildlife and their habitats today.

The purpose of this paper is to open up a discussion among Indigenous peoples, rural communities, wildlife and habitat organizations, natural resource development industry stakeholders and the public, so that together we can identify ways to effectively sustain wildlife and habitat, both in the short and the long term. We invite you to review this paper and to share your comments and suggestions. We hope that with your knowledge we can create a new wildlife management and habitat conservation strategy for B.C.



Honourable Doug Donaldson

Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations
and Rural Development



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1/ Introduction

British Columbia is a place of breathtaking natural beauty, from the Rocky Mountains and interior plateaus to the towering coastal rainforests and stormy Pacific shores.

This spectacular terrain is home to the greatest diversity of wildlife species in any province or territory in Canada. These include iconic species like grizzly bears, bald eagles, bighorn sheep, mountain goats and mountain caribou as well as rare plants and animals that are found nowhere else on the planet.

B.C. also contains most of the global range of 99 wildlife species, and supports 22 types of big game animals and many intact large mammal predator-prey systems.

Sixteen distinct large ecosystems (known as biogeoclimatic zones) occur in B.C.: 12 major forest ecosystems, a grassland ecosystem, and three kinds of alpine ecosystems. Each ecosystem includes a diversity of habitats that support various life stages for many wildlife species.

B.C.'s diversity of wildlife provides abundant environmental, cultural, social and economic benefits to all British Columbians. Wildlife is especially important to Indigenous peoples for food and for cultural, social and ceremonial purposes. Wildlife populations support activities such as hunting and guide outfitting, angling, trapping, wildlife viewing, photography, research and field study. Wildlife also has an inherent value to most people.

Wildlife-related activities generate considerable revenue and support for conservation. The province's habitats and ecosystems provide numerous ecological goods and services associated with native plant and animal species such as photosynthesis, soil production, clean air and water, flood control, moderation of climate and greenhouse gases, and cycling of energy and nutrients.

In recent decades, the loss, fragmentation and alteration of wildlife habitats due to human population growth, expanded economic development, climate change, extensive mountain pine beetle outbreaks and catastrophic wildfires have placed increasing pressures on certain wildlife populations, some of which are now in decline.

These challenges, along with the need for true and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples; changing societal expectations; declining wildlife populations; and increasing involvement and engagement of conservation groups, stakeholders and the general public in wildlife management and habitat conservation, have prompted the provincial government to review the way it manages wildlife and habitat.

The provincial government, Indigenous peoples, communities, industries, and all British Columbians share responsibility for sustaining our natural endowment for future generations.



*Steller's Jay (Cyanocitta stelleri),
Rick Skerry photo*

Multiple provincial government statutes govern the management of wildlife and wildlife habitat to ensure the benefits and impacts of resource development are balanced. These include the *Wildlife Act*, *Forest and Range Practices Act*, *Land Act*, *Oil and Gas Activities Act*, and the *Environmental Assessment Act*. Other management activities such as inventory and monitoring help inform how practices should be modified to better achieve objectives. Government-to-government strategic land management agreements with Indigenous peoples help ensure management at the landscape level account for Indigenous peoples' interests. All of these tools are supported by policies and procedures.

Over the past decade, the provincial government has taken progressive steps toward an integrated approach to land and resource management. Today there are several related initiatives underway in the province that are aimed at strengthening our system of land and resource management to ensure better social, cultural, economic and environmental outcomes for British Columbians for generations to come. Some of these include the modernization of land-use planning, enacting of B.C.'s own species-at-risk legislation, caribou recovery planning, environmental assessment revitalization, professional reliance review, and reinvestments in provincial parks and the Conservation Officer Service.

This paper is intended to promote open discussions with Indigenous peoples, rural communities, wildlife and habitat organizations, natural resource development industry stakeholders and the public to find creative and practical ways to improve wildlife management and habitat conservation in British Columbia.

The Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development invites you to contribute your knowledge and ideas.

This paper is designed to promote discussion. We want to hear your thoughts on:

- The engagement approach and how you would like to be involved in the future;
- Questions posed in the challenges section;
- Issues or concerns you think we should be aware of;
- Ideas or solutions you or your organization wishes to share;
- Anything you wish to share on the topic of how wildlife management and habitat conservation can be improved in B.C.

You are invited to participate in the online discussions and to submit your ideas through engage.gov.bc.ca/wildlifeandhabitat until **July 31, 2018 at 4:00 p.m.**, or email wildlifeandhabitat@gov.bc.ca.

2/ Your Participation

We are in the early stages of a four-phase process that will help the Province consider potential changes to improve wildlife management and habitat conservation in B.C.

The process will unfold as follows:

- During Spring 2018, the provincial government is hosting face-to-face sessions with Indigenous communities and key stakeholders on how to improve wildlife management and habitat conservation.
- Policy options to address priority concerns will then be developed.
- Next, a policy intentions paper will be released for public engagement.
- Implementation of the new wildlife and habitat management strategy is targeted for 2020.

Information for all phases of this initiative, including discussion papers, will be available online at:
<http://engage.gov.bc.ca/wildlifeandhabitat>



*Pacific Tree Frog
(Pseudacris regilla),
Shari Willmot photo*

Phases of Participation:

The four phases are described in more detail below. We will use your feedback to inform subsequent phases of the engagement process.

It is also important to recognize that, while the Province will be engaged in a broad strategic discussion on improving wildlife management and habitat conservation over the long term, implementation of short-term strategies and the Ministry's important operational work on the ground will continue.

Phase One: Initial Discussions – Spring and Summer 2018

This phase will seek perspectives from Indigenous peoples, rural communities, wildlife and habitat organizations, natural resource development industry stakeholders and the public on the issues and concerns they believe should be considered in any new approaches to wildlife management and habitat conservation. We also want feedback on the process for how our review should be conducted.

Input will be summarized in a discussion paper focused on “what we heard” that will discuss major themes and issues received through our initial engagement. This will enable us to refine, clarify and communicate the engagement process going forward.

You are invited to take part in the online discussions and submit your ideas through engage.gov.bc.ca/wildlifeandhabitat or email wildlifeandhabitat@gov.bc.ca until **July 31, 2018 at 4:00 p.m.**

Phase Two: Analysis and Collaborative Policy Development – Fall 2018 to Spring 2019

Based on the feedback from Phase One, we will develop policy options and ideas for consideration in collaboration with Indigenous peoples and stakeholders. The collaborative process will be designed based on input received in Phase One.

Phase Three: Validation of Policy Options – Spring to Fall 2019

We will outline policy options and policy intentions into a policy options paper. This paper will be the focus of comprehensive discussions with Indigenous peoples, rural communities, wildlife and habitat organizations, natural resource development industry stakeholders and the public.

Phase Four: Implementation – 2020

We anticipate the release of a new wildlife and habitat management strategy for B.C. in 2020 that will provide a broad vision for wildlife management and habitat conservation in the Province. Although improvements to wildlife management and habitat conservation will be implemented throughout all phases of this initiative, full implementation will likely begin in 2020.

3/ Challenges and Opportunities

The Province seeks a better understanding of the challenges facing wildlife management and habitat conservation, and ways to develop more effective management tools.

The section below lists some of the challenges currently facing wildlife management and habitat conservation in British Columbia. This list has been informed by discussions with Indigenous peoples, rural communities, wildlife and habitat organizations, natural resource development industry stakeholders and the public over the last number of years. This list of challenges and the corresponding potential opportunities is by no means exhaustive and is provided as a starting point for discussions.

Challenge One: How to advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in wildlife management and habitat conservation.

Opportunities

- Build on and enhance existing collaboration on wildlife management and habitat conservation.
- Develop and implement new approaches for government-to-government collaboration and decision-making.
- Update programs and policies to advance the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, and the results of the Tsilhqot'in Nation decision.
- Other solutions developed in collaboration with Indigenous peoples.

Discussion Question

What programs and policies are most important to advance meaningful and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and help implement UNDRIP?



Mountain goat family, (*Oreamnos americanus*) photo from Ministry of Forest, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development



Red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), photo courtesy of Ministry of Forest, Lands, Resource Operations and Rural Development

Challenge Two: How to increase the involvement of non-governmental conservation organizations as well as a broad range of wildlife and habitat stakeholders and the general public in wildlife management and habitat conservation.

Opportunities

- Support and enhance the long-standing role and contributions of non-governmental conservation organizations in habitat protection and shared stewardship.
- Engage a wider range of stakeholder groups to provide advice to government through proven and new approaches (for example, provincial/regional wildlife boards).
- Improve understanding and communication of the social, economic and environmental values of wildlife and their habitats within functioning ecosystems.
- Develop new governance models for making wildlife management and habitat conservation decisions.

Discussion Questions

How should a broad range of stakeholders be involved in wildlife management and habitat conservation decisions?

What are your suggestions for a new governance model for wildlife management and habitat conservation?



Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*) in beauty berry bush (*callicarpa bodinieri*), Rick Skerry photo

Challenge Three: Some wildlife populations are declining across the province.

Opportunities

- Set measurable objectives for wildlife populations and ecosystems in collaboration with Indigenous peoples, wildlife and habitat organizations, natural resource development industry stakeholders and the public.
- Address habitat loss, alteration and fragmentation where required to meet wildlife population and ecosystem objectives.
- Improve understanding of wildlife population dynamics through improved and more frequent information collection, as well as incorporation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and citizen science to complement existing inventory and monitoring programs.
- Improve understanding of the links between habitat conservation and healthy wildlife populations.
- Address other mortality factors, such as hunting, predation and road/rail collisions, that are contributing to population declines.

Discussion Question

What measures need to be taken to proactively manage wildlife and habitat and prevent wildlife from becoming species at risk?



Hoary marmot (*Marmota caligata*), Frazer Willmott photo

Challenge Four: Habitat loss, alteration and fragmentation are increasing due to human activity.

Opportunities

- Integrate wildlife and habitat values into decision-making about land and natural resource use on Crown and private land.
- Expand the use of cumulative effects assessment and habitat modelling to better understand the effects of human activity on wildlife habitats throughout B.C.
- Use land use planning, access management and other landscape-level tools to reduce the impacts of human activity on wildlife and their habitats.
- Consider consolidating habitat conservation provisions in provincial natural resource legislation so that they apply to all industries and human activities across B.C.
- Review the effectiveness of current land conservation designations on both Crown and private land and consider changes to increase their effectiveness.
- Increase public awareness about the importance of conserving biodiversity and habitats to maintain environmental sustainability, human health, and the provincial economy.
- Foster individual, industry and community actions that contribute to conservation and habitat stewardship on Crown and private land.

Discussion Question

What is the most effective way of ensuring that wildlife and habitats are healthy while fostering a healthy economy to ensure life is affordable for British Columbians?

Challenge Five: Climate change is resulting in more wildfires and extreme weather, contributing to wildlife diseases, forest health issues, and the spread of invasive species, affecting wildlife populations and altering habitats.

Opportunities

- Assess the potential implications of climate change for wildlife and their habitats.
- Proactively manage hazards (e.g. wildfire) associated with climate change by using prevention, preparedness, mitigation and recovery measures.
- Increase wildlife and ecosystem resiliency and adaptation to changing climate by applying forward-looking strategies.
- Enhance research, monitoring and management of climate change impacts on wildlife health, ecosystem and forest health, and invasive species.
- Increase awareness and research about wildlife health issues such as Chronic Wasting Disease in deer.

Discussion Question

What are the most effective ways to proactively adapt to the impacts of climate change on wildlife and habitats?

Challenge Six: There is a growing need for better information on wildlife and habitats to inform management and conservation outcomes and achieve robust compliance and enforcement.

Opportunities:

- Review the need for natural resource management legislation to ensure natural resource management decisions consider information about wildlife and their habitats.
- Improve decision-making by gathering and considering a wide range of information sources about wildlife and their habitats, including scientific information and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.
- Revitalize the wildlife and habitat research program by obtaining additional financial and human resources and establishing greater ties with academia and Indigenous peoples.
- Improve the sharing of scientific information and wildlife data with Indigenous peoples, stakeholders, academia and the public and consider ways to formalize the use of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and citizen science in wildlife and habitat conservation decision-making.

Discussion Questions

How can Traditional Ecological Knowledge, citizen science and other forms of knowledge complement science to support decision-making?

What are the best ways to share information broadly so that there is transparency and trust is gained among all parties?

Challenge Seven: Concerns about human-wildlife conflicts are increasing, including those related to agricultural impacts, urban wildlife, wildlife-vehicle collisions and dangerous wildlife.

Opportunities

- Improve understanding of human-wildlife conflicts, and address the underlying causes such as the presence of attractants in communities.
- Encourage individual and community prevention and mitigation of human-wildlife conflicts by providing incentives and disincentives.
- Expand programs to reduce conflicts with agricultural communities.
- Provide safe passage for wildlife to move across barriers such as roads.

Discussion Question

What are the most effective ways to reduce wildlife-human conflicts in British Columbia?

Challenge Eight: Wildlife management and habitat conservation are funded through annual Ministry budgets, contributions to the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation from surcharges on hunting, trapping and guide outfitting licenses, and through partnerships (e.g., academia, non-governmental organizations, industry, etc.). Current funding levels may not meet expectations for improved wildlife and habitat conservation.

Opportunities

- Provide stable and increasing funding dedicated to wildlife management, habitat conservation and compliance and enforcement.

Discussion Question

What are the best funding models, funding sources, and creative financing ideas that could increase resources for wildlife management and habitat conservation and provide additional flexibility for how funding is prioritized and allocated?



4/ Conclusion - Send us your comments

We want to hear from you. Participate in the online discussions and please submit your ideas through engage.gov.bc.ca/wildlifeandhabitat or email to wildlifeandhabitat@gov.bc.ca until **July 31, 2018 at 4:00 p.m.**

Moss campion (Silene acaulis), Shari Willmott photo

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