

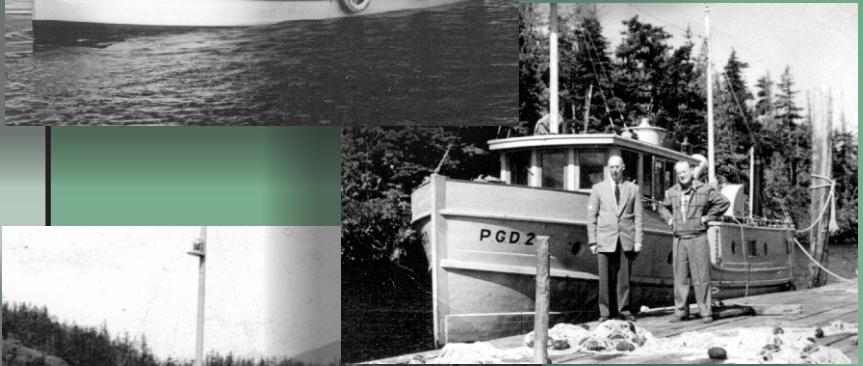
The "Branch" 1957-1980

The late 1950's were a time of growth in the marine fleet of the Fish & Game Branch. The **Provincial Game Department (P.G.D.) No. 1** was in Powell River, and the **P.G.D. No. 2** was now in Alert Bay. The aging **P.M.L. 3** was still operating out of Vancouver and the **P.M.L. 4** was in Prince Rupert.

In 1957 a fifth vessel was temporarily added to the marine fleet. It was a 20 foot former police boat, the **PML 2**. It was stationed in Sidney, near Victoria to patrol the Gulf Islands and was operated by Game Warden Bob Sinclair. In 1958 it was replaced by a former provincial Department of Fisheries vessel, the "**Black Brant**."

In February 1958 the jewel of the fleet was launched to replace the thirty year old PML 3. The **P.G.D. 3** was 45' 8" long, with a beam of 12 feet. She would be skippered by Corporal Roy Allan of Vancouver.

In December 1959 the Game Department reacquired a former BC Police motor launch, the former **PML 17** which had seen service with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police since 1950 as the MP 78. She was renamed the "**M/V Otter**" and put into service in Prince Rupert to replace the aging PML 4.





***Game Wardens in
action around B.C.
late 1950s and early
1960s.***



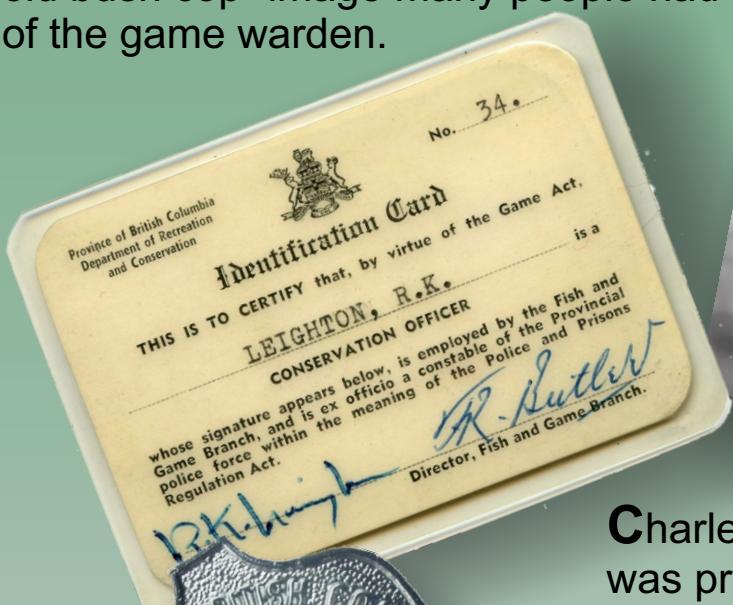
The first in-service Training School for Fish & Game Branch staff was held at Green Timbers in Surrey. It was three weeks in duration. The program was not designed just for game wardens. Twenty-one Game Wardens, four Inspectors, two Predatory Animal Hunters, fisheries staff and representatives from other branches within the Department attended. The focus of the training was not on law enforcement techniques, but on a wide range of topics that affected the Branch as a whole.



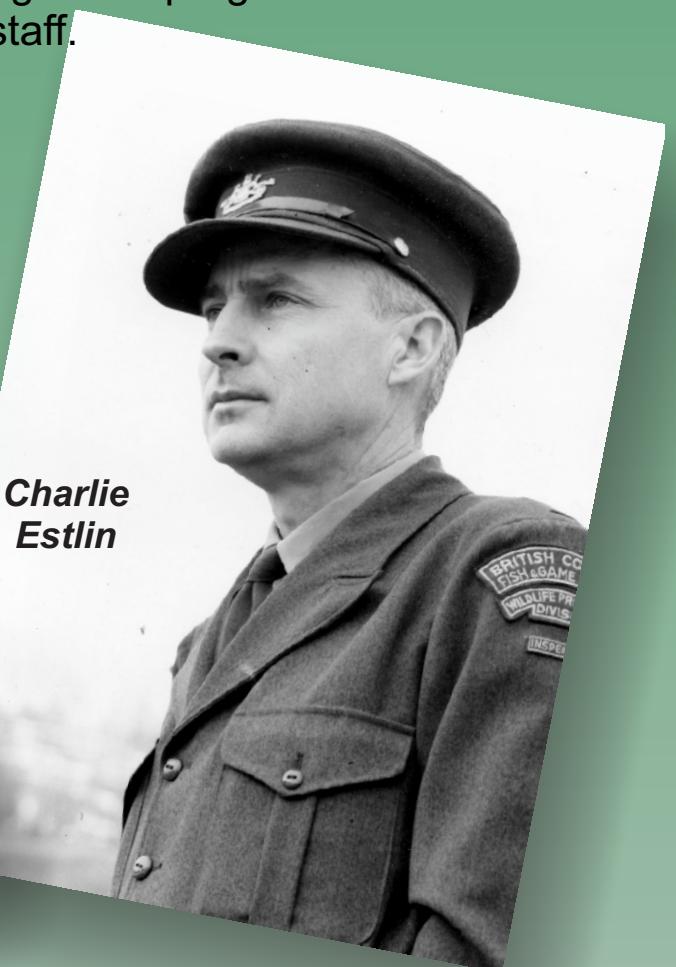
The Game Commission shoulder flash was replaced in 1959 with the new Branch name, and a cloth flash was now worn on the left sleeve of the uniform shirt

Branch management wanted to see a higher level of participation by conservation officers in all functions of the Branch. The objective was to have field staff identified with the Branch as a whole, rather than with the particular division to which they belonged. It was felt that through integration of activities, “*work satisfaction would be stimulated and greater efficiency achieved.*” Biologists held great stature within the Branch and many, including Assistant Director Dr. Jim Hatter, did not truly appreciate law enforcement as part of a wildlife management programme and wanted to “soften” the image of the enforcement staff.

In 1961 the **Game Warden** title was discontinued and replaced by **Conservation Officer**. It was felt that this title reflected a greater scope of responsibility, was a better fit with the now popular conservation movement, and was a departure from the “nasty old bush cop” image many people had of the game warden.



Charlie Estlin



Charles Estlin, Game Inspector in Nelson, was promoted to the new position of Chief Conservation Officer in Victoria in 1962. The post was created to provide an administrative head for the Wildlife Protection Division, who unlike the game and fisheries divisions, had never had a headquarters supervisor since the Branch was created. Chief Estlin was to be the direct supervisor of the Inspectors commanding the five divisions.

Frank Butler retired in July 1962 after 48 years of service with the Provincial Government. Assistant Director Dr. James Hatter became the first Director of “the Game Branch” without an enforcement background.



In 1963 the Predator Control Division was absorbed into the Wildlife Protection Division, and predator officers were now doing other game management work and enforcement, as well as their primary duties. The former Game Divisions were now called Game Districts. Chief Estlin still supervised four Inspectors, but former Supervisor of Predator Control Al West, who was a biologist, was promoted to a newly created District Supervisor position in E District (Lower Mainland) and he reported directly to the Director. All staff in E District, including conservation officers, reported to West.



C.O. George Ferguson transferred to Victoria in 1963 as Assistant Information Officer to Bill Ward. He would assist Ward with the Wildlife Review, organize public relations events, and put together the Branch newsletter.



Wholesale removal of predatory animals was no longer on the agenda, and all officers were responsible for dealing with nuisance bears and cougars, and the “specialist” predator officers focused primarily on livestock depredation and wolf control.

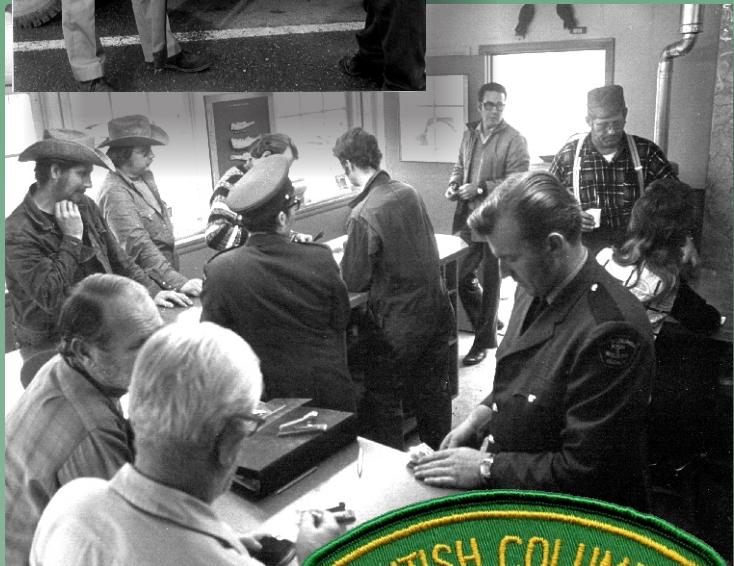
Over a two year period the entire marine fleet of large displacement hull boats was replaced with faster lapstrake sea-skiff vessels built by Clark Bros Boat Works in Sidney. The 28 foot MV Marten was launched in the spring of 1963 and sent to Alert Bay, replacing the P.G.D. No 1. By 1964 the Black Brant and the Otter had been disposed of and replaced by 30 foot vessels, the MV Snipe and MV Sorex. The P.G.D. 3 was then renamed the MV Otter II.

In January of 1965 the Forest Service took over the MV Otter II and renamed her the Dean Ranger. The new MV Otter, a 32 foot sea-skiff replaced the former PGD 3 in Vancouver on May 17, 1965. That same month the P.G.D. No. 2 was traded in and by November had been replaced in Powell River by the 30 foot MV Nerka.



By 1966 the former Inspectors, renamed Regional Protection Officers, were reporting to Regional Supervisors, who in turn reported to the Director. Management (Dr. Hatter) felt that the Regional Supervisors would be better able to coordinate the activities of the various divisions of the Branch. Chief Protection Officer Charlie Estlin was now a staff position at headquarters with no direct authority over the field Conservation Officers. Chief Estlin was not even included in management discussions or decisions that ultimately affected the fate of the field Conservation Officers.

The Cache Creek Checking Station continued to collect harvest and creel data, and act as an enforcement checkpoint. It served as a valuable training centre for new recruits and seasonal officers.



The Game Act, which had received its last overhaul in 1948, was repealed in 1966 and replaced by the Wildlife Act and a separate Firearms Act. In conjunction "the Game Branch" was renamed the **Fish & Wildlife Branch**. It was felt that these name changes better reflected the concept of wildlife conservation and protection, and not simply the propagation of game species for the purpose of hunting.

Conservation Officers were conducting game and fish management activities and acting as the face of the Branch carrying out public relations duties, but they were still referred to as enforcement staff. They spent no more time carrying out enforcement duties than they did carrying out non-enforcement functions. In some regions conservation officers spent as little as 20% of their time, on average, on enforcement.



The early years of the 1970s were a time of substantial growth and development for the Branch.

In 1970 four graduates of the new British Columbia Institute of Technology's Fish and Wildlife Technology Program were hired - Andy Ackerman, Doug Pierce, Bill Crystal and John Merriman would all go on to have long careers with the provincial government.

An in-service training program for field staff was also designed by BCIT and the Branch in 1971 in an effort to improve effectiveness and capability in resource management work. Twenty-one staff members completed this program that year.

A law enforcement training program was also designed and instituted by the Vancouver Police Academy and the Branch. Forty staff members, including biological staff, attended the two courses in 1971.



Vancouver Police Academy Class 1971

Back Row: D. Wilders, W. Hazledine, R. Rogers, B. Wilson, J. DeLair, unknown, J. Merriman
Middle Row: Al Frisby, F. Renton, J. Lay, J. Lesowski, F. Richter, H. Mulligan, J. Rissling
Front Row: P. Ewart, D. Pierce, C. Walker, A. Ackerman, W. Crystal, D. Adolph



Eleven temporary special conservation officers were hired to assist the seventy-one regular officers in seasonal and high-density enforcement situations in 1971. In 1972 sixty-five auxiliary conservation officers are hired to increase the enforcement presence.



In May of 1971 the Branch leased a Cessna 180 floatplane for use in northern BC patrols. Doug Adolph was the pilot-conservation officer of CF-IDI. The plane had 74 days of airtime and contacted 946 persons. Forty-seven charges were laid, and 27 warnings were issued.

In 1972 the Branch leased a Cessna 185 (CF-RID), which was again quite active. It saw 68 flight days where 845 persons were contacted. Thirty-four charges were laid and 20 warnings issued.

Nine new offices were opened and 31 permanent positions were created between 1972 and 1974. The number of auxiliaries was increased to 114, but the average amount of time spent provincially on enforcement of the Branch's legislation was still only 40%.



A short-lived K-9 Detector Dog program ran from 1976 to 1980. Conservation Officer Tony Grabowski with K-9 Bud in Fort St. John (below), and C.O. Brian Baldwin with K-9 Sage in Smithers (right), were the two teams that were trained and certified at the RCMP Kennels at Innisfail, AB.



A study of the Fish and Wildlife Branch was completed in 1977 by W. Winston Mair, who had been B.C.'s first Supervisor of Predator Control and subsequently the Chief of the Canadian Wildlife Service. It recognized the need for conservation officers to be distinct from biological staff. It stated that conservation officers had lost their status and their specialized role within the Branch and changes were required in order to improve their position.

Mair stated that if the Conservation Officers had not been a well disciplined group with an extremely high devotion to duty, their situation might have been even more desperate than it was. Mair's recommendation was that a separation of the two functions was necessary because staff who carry out enforcement require entirely different skills and aptitudes from staff in fish & Wildlife management.

Among his other recommendations was that conservation officers be issued with a distinctive uniform complete with rank insignia, service stripes and shoulder flashes identifying them as Conservation Officers. He also recommended that a trained police officer be hired to head the Enforcement Program at headquarters.

Chief of Enforcement Estlin retired in 1978. In December the Ministry of Recreation and Conservation was disbanded, and the Fish & Wildlife Branch was transferred into the Ministry of Environment.

A new uniform for Enforcement Conservation Officers was proposed which would consist of blue shirts, gray pants and a gray Stetson. It was also suggested that they would wear a brass hat badge with the wording Conservation Department.



1979 and 1980 were turbulent years. In 1979 a new Chief Conservation Officer, Ralf Aldrich, who was a retired member of the RCMP, was appointed. Steps to separate the enforcement group from the rest of Fish & Wildlife were well underway.

Enforcement work was still fish and wildlife related, but eventually would include all of the Ministry of Environment's legislation.

The Enforcement Procedure manual was completed and a copy was distributed to each CO in the province. The manual outlined the authorities conferred upon COs by seven provincial and federal statutes.

Many officers had been carrying sidearms since the early 1970s, and their game warden predecessors had been armed. Interim regional policies on the wearing of sidearms were implemented, which required them to be worn inconspicuously and not at meetings, the office or while on city streets.

In January of 1980 the Wildlife Control Officers, who had been reporting directly to the Regional Wildlife Biologists, became part of the new enforcement group, reporting to the Senior Conservation Officers in their respective sub-regions. They were advised that even though they were now conservation officers, they were not to become involved in enforcement matters at the expense of their own specialized duties.

By the end of June 1980 the **Conservation Officer Service**, with a contingent of 109 officers, was operating within the Ministry of Environment, but completely separate from the Fish and Wildlife Branch, where it had been deeply rooted for 75 years. However, the duties of enforcing the wildlife and non-tidal fisheries laws of the Province would remain as the core function of the new Service.

Conservation officers were now responsible for provincial and federal environmental law enforcement and problem wildlife control. These duties remain central to the Service to this day.

This change from being resource management generalists to "environmental policemen" would not be without its detractors and critics. The new Service would experience growing pains and some members would have difficulty adapting.

