

## Together for Wildlife - Interior Universities Research Coalition Student Research Grant - Interim Reports

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*Designing and implementing a stakeholder and rights-holder consultation process to understand and support communities impacted by an Indigenous-led Grizzly Bear (ki?lawna? / Ursus arctos horribilis) reintroduction in southern British Columbia*

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*Question 1. What activities have been completed on this project to date?*

- **Ongoing support of the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Stewardship planning process.** I have joined both the Working Group (broader coalition of interested stakeholder groups) and Steering Committee (narrower coalition of agencies and partners leading the stewardship planning) for this process. I participated in a 2-day/2-night planning retreat and at least ten 2-hour long strategy planning meetings, and a half-day communications workshop since the start of the T4W grant in addition to one-on-one meetings with my partners. My contributions to these discussions have mostly been to add (1) social science experience and frameworks, and (2) relevant ideas/experiences that I have derived from my literature review and expert interviews (more about that below).
- **Literature review.** I conducted a literature scan and review of peer-reviewed and gray literature on the topic of public engagement and large carnivore reintroduction at the start of this project. I drafted an annotated bibliography and synthesized key findings/ideas into a brief summary (slide deck) that I shared with the Steering Committee. I have continued to review peer-reviewed and gray literature as I have prepared for and followed up from my expert interviews and will continue to build upon this literature review throughout the project so I can include it in my final product.
- **BREB approval.** I gained approval from UBC's Behavioral Research Ethics Board to conduct interviews with experts involved in reintroducing or recovering large carnivore populations around the world.
- **Expert interviews.** I have conducted 15 interviews with large carnivore recovery experts. These experts have included people working on a variety of large carnivore reintroduction, recovery, augmentation, or coexistence projects across mostly North America, South America, and Europe, with also some involvement in Africa, Asia, and Australia. I have six additional interviews scheduled and will continue adding interviewees through my snowball recruitment strategy until I approach a saturation of themes/ideas. My interviewees have identified another ~20 experts who may be appropriate to include as interviewees. I will assess my capacity to add more after I complete the first round of interviews.
- **Facilitating connections.** I am an international, transboundary graduate student working on both the US and Canadian sides of the border. In addition to working on this project with BC government and Okanagan Nation Alliance, I frequently attend related meetings in the USA, such as the North Cascades Bear Aware Event, public meetings, and meetings with agency staff. One unexpected role that I have

been able to play is that my awareness of efforts on both sides of the border have helped me be able to help forge connections between people working on similar efforts.

*Question 2. Is the project progressing as planned? If not, why not and what are you doing to mitigate or adjust?*

The project is progressing mostly as planned, with some slight differences. The differences are, in large part, due to the much greater leadership from the Province and Okanagan Nation Alliance, and much greater momentum and wider scope for the stewardship planning effort than I anticipated. Our planning collaborative is already leading (much faster, and with much broader involvement, than I planned!) some of the work that I proposed helping to spearhead/initiate. For example, in my proposal I said that later in my grant I would host "up to three workshops with the Ministry and partners" to help develop a communications plan based on the information gathered in my interviews. However, since that proposal, the Together for Wildlife program has designated a dedicated staff person to facilitate stewardship strategy planning meetings, including communications planning, and a communications consultant has developed a draft communications plan. As a Steering Committee we have convened many more than three times to discuss communications planning, and much earlier in the year than I had proposed. I am participating in all of these workshops and offering social science technical support to inform these collaborative planning processes. My dissertation will include the implementation of one or more of the engagement needs we identify.

Other deliverables in my proposal included a literature review, expert interviews, help developing a communications strategy, and help implementing that strategy. All of these deliverables have progressed as planned.

*Question 3. How have you been working with your research partners, including Indigenous communities, to ensure meaningful collaboration and participation?*

As I outlined above, I have been embedded in the collaborative planning processes with my partners (BC Ministry of Forests, Okanagan Nation Alliance). This has included attending many meetings and workshops, inviting the Steering Committee to contribute to the design/implementation of my interviews, and ensuring that the findings of my work can feed directly back into planning discussions. Prior to engaging in interviews, I invited partners and members of the Steering Committee to share ideas about what they would like to know about public engagement from carnivore recovery experts in other places. I integrated their feedback into my interview questions. I also invited them to contribute ideas about potential interviewees to my initial recruitment list. I have been sharing back relevant anecdotes from interviews in our planning discussions, and I will present preliminary findings to them after I finish the interviews (but before I conduct my formal coding/analysis) so that the findings can be quickly integrated into the ongoing, accelerated planning work. I will present a formal analysis back to them and to interviewees prior to the end of the Together for Wildlife grant.

One unexpected research partner that is emerging is the community of large carnivore practitioners around the world. I am discovering that many people in that community would like to co-create and use the findings from my expert interviews. I am considering proposing a session at the IUCN Conservation Translocation meeting to present (and possibly workshop) the preliminary findings from the expert

interviews into a formal publication targeted for this community of practitioners and researchers hoping to initiate large carnivore recovery efforts in other contexts.

*Question 4. Tell us about one success, one challenge or difficulty and one thing you would do differently if you could go back?*

One success of this effort has, I think, been to offer social science context, theories, frameworks, concepts into the planning process. The group has welcomed my different background and training as a social scientist. Offering a language and structure to help formalize their thinking about the social dynamics involved and inform future plans has been an unexpected success.

Another success has been interviewee recruitment. I have been fortunate to speak to many global leaders on large carnivore conservation translocations. They have been very interested in contributing to this conversation, including several interviewees who offered to help co-author and promote any work about public engagement and large carnivore recovery that emerges from this effort. They have also offered many ideas for engagement.

The biggest challenge has been navigating the sensitivity of this issue and sequencing of communications efforts, especially given efforts by the USA to reintroduce grizzly bears in Washington State. Large carnivore stewardship is understandably a sensitive topic, and the group wants to be thoughtful and careful in their planning and outreach. At the same time, the USA has initiated a very public Environmental Impact Statement process to evaluate grizzly bear reintroduction alternatives in the same contiguous landscape as the BC effort, which creates pressure to quickly initiate engagement efforts on the Canadian side of the border. My expert interviews are contributing a useful set of experiences and observations to inform the engagement plan, but our need formal plan is happening very fast -- faster than I am able to conduct and analyze the interviews.

One thing I would have done differently is to either exclude from my proposal or try to more clearly scope the work that I will do over the summer to help implement the plan. I designated part of the stipend funding to hire an assistant to accompany and assist on some kind of social science field work (i.e., landowner interviews, community workshops) this summer. However, building out the communications plan is, in and of itself, a big task – much bigger than I understood! And, implementing any part of the plan this summer is dependent on there being an approved plan and social license from the Steering Committee to begin research. I am in the process of scoping summer work, but it may happen that the Steering Committee will not be comfortable with me doing social research on the grant timeline.