



T O G G E T H E R

for Wildlife Strategy
Public Consultation

What We Heard

Final Report
February 2020

Prepared for: Government Communications and Public Engagement
Government of British Columbia

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Executive Summary

Background

The Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD) is in the process of developing a ten-year wildlife management and habitat conservation strategy for British Columbia. The draft strategy, titled *Together for Wildlife*, was open for public comment and feedback from November 2019 to January 2020.

Consultation Methods and Results

Feedback was solicited from members of the general public via an online survey, as well as the invitation to provide longer form comments in written emails. Stakeholder organizations were encouraged to submit written letters detailing their feedback and recommendations for the draft strategy. Over the public consultation period, 733 survey completions were received, of which 713 were identified as unique (i.e., non-duplicate) and valid responses. In addition 18 emails submissions from the general public and 20 letter submissions from stakeholder groups were received.

The majority of survey respondents identified as being involved in hunting, trapping, and/or guiding in some capacity (65%). Further, 45% of survey respondents reported that they were involved in non-motorized recreation, and 31% in motorized recreation.¹ Regions outside of the Lower Mainland / Fraser Valley and Vancouver Island / Coast were over-represented among survey respondents; respondents from outside of these two regions represented 62% of all survey respondents, while populations in these regions comprise only 22% of B.C.'s total population.²

Gaps in the Together for Wildlife Strategy

Responses from both survey completions and written submissions identified a number of areas where British Columbians believe there to be gaps in the current draft of the *Together for Wildlife* strategy. While a large number of topics were raised, three main themes were identified as major gaps in the current strategy.

- **Insufficient funding allocation.** Survey respondents and stakeholder organizations both emphasized that the current funding allocated to conservation and stewardship in the *Together for Wildlife* strategy, \$10 million, is insufficient to meet critical goals to sustain B.C.'s biodiversity and address major threats to species at risk. Many respondents also noted that the funding identified in the strategy is not dedicated, and therefore cannot be trusted to be stable over the long term in the face of shifting political priorities and changes in governments.

¹ Proportions add to more than 100% due to respondents being able to select as many stakeholder groups as applied to them.

² Population counts and proportions are taken from Statistics Canada's 2016 Census data.

- **A need for stronger government commitment to valuing biodiversity.** Both survey responses and written submissions identified the need for a systematic approach to valuing biodiversity, habitat conservation, and wildlife management in B.C. beyond simply the economic value that these activities bring through tourism and harvest. Responses touching on this theme noted that without a strategic method to place a value on land and wildlife conservation, these activities will lose land and investment to economic and social development projects such as forestry and mining projects.
- **Lack of clarity and leadership from government.** A number of survey responses and written submissions noted that the draft *Together for Wildlife* strategy fails to identify any specific targets for the government to hold itself accountable to, and its future plans for action are vague. Many felt that the government has failed to deliver on campaign promises in this strategy, and urged the government to take more decisive action to address critical challenges in preserving B.C.'s habitats and wildlife.

Suggestions and Recommendations for Improvements

In addition to identifying gaps and shortcomings in the draft *Together for Wildlife* strategy, respondents provided suggestions for changes to the strategy. While a wide range of suggestions were provided, there were four that were most common among both survey responses and written submissions.

- **Involvement of local communities.** There was strong support for initiatives that would empower local communities in wildlife and habitat conservation. In particular, respondents wanted to see: support to municipalities and regional districts to do work associated with conservation, such as public education and enforcement; and, involvement of local communities and experts in setting wildlife and habitat conservation goals, to ensure that policies align with the unique conservation needs of a region and its local communities.
- **Increase funding.** As noted in the “Gaps” section, insufficient funding was noted as a major shortcoming of the draft strategy. Many respondents recommended actions and strategies to address this gap, such as: fully dedicating all tag and license sale revenues to conservation; increasing provincial funding for wildlife and habitat conservation generally; increasing funding for enforcement; and, implementing a revenue generation stream that would collect funds from non-consumptive outdoor recreation users, such as a tax on outdoor equipment.
- **Decision making informed by science.** Many survey respondents were supportive of the principle of “science-based decision making”. In particular, it was common for respondents to indicate that relying on population counts and available best practices would be preferable to what they perceived as the current norm in B.C., wildlife decisions driven by political needs and public sentiment. However, some stakeholder groups noted that “science-based” does not mean that values will not come into decision-making regarding wildlife and habitat conservation. While data such as population counts will inform decision-making, it cannot drive it as decisions will ultimately be made based on what the



deciding body values and supports as its overarching mission. For these reasons, a greater commitment to transparency in target- and policy-setting is recommended.

- **Whole-of-government approach.** Finally, respondents to the consultation noted that a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach is needed to address critical issues facing wildlife and habitats in B.C. Strong support for updating a variety of Acts (e.g., *Land Act*, *Wildlife Act*, *Oil and Gas Activities Act*, etc.) was noted. Many respondents also noted that all land users, regardless of sector or industry, should be held to the same standards for land use and impacts; updates to these pieces of legislation may be an opportunity to ensure this consistency. Some respondents identified a need for standalone legislation to protect B.C.'s biodiversity, such as a *Species at Risk Act*. Finally, it was noted by some survey respondents as well as stakeholder organizations that there is a strong need for non-partisan, independent oversight of conservation activities, and such a position should be created and funded as part of a revised *Together for Wildlife* strategy.