

Valhalla Wilderness Society

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VWS DIRECTOR WINS LAND CHAMPION AWARD, CALLS ON BRITISH COLUMBIA TO PROTECT REMAINING WILDERNESS

On behalf of his colleagues and many supporters over almost 50 years of dedicated conservation work, VWS director and chairperson Wayne McCrory received the Land Champion of BC award through the Real Estate Foundation of BC this fall. The award recognized a lifetime of achievements, including protection of over half a million hectares of wilderness (and his work with the separate Valhalla Foundation for Ecology in the acquisition of private lands for conservation). Wayne has used this opportunity to inspire others, reminding BC people that Valhalla Wilderness Society has always been a small group with a vision. He is now calling on the province and its people to once and for all protect many new large parks and our last old growth forests to help alleviate the biodiversity and climate crisis we are in.

We are now at a time when many of our original ecosystems have been developed, and our remaining wilderness is being rapidly clearcut or lost to luxuries like large recreation resort operations that gravely damage ecological stability. Even our protected areas themselves are at risk because they are becoming increasingly fragmented from surrounding logging and from over-development of recreational facilities within their boundaries.

A vast majority of BC residents recognize that our biodiversity and landscape health are hugely dependent on these irreplaceable ecosystems, and many insisted on major change when the province commissioned its Old Growth Strategic Review Panel in 2019. We are now past the two year anniversary of their final recommendations report which called for a total “paradigm shift” in the management of our forests and recommended immediate logging deferrals of at-risk old-growth forest.

Since 2020 the BC government has been announcing two-year logging deferrals so that it can work with First Nations on an old-growth protection plan. However, to date no permanent protection has resulted from them. The first two-year deferrals in 2020 that included the Incomappleux part of our Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park proposal have expired

without any publicly evident action. The 2021 deferrals required the agreement of 200 First Nations; but after a year has passed negotiations are ongoing.

The federal government offered \$50 million in funding to protect old growth forests and transition from managing for corporate profits to ecosystem health; but the offer requires matching funds from the province, which has ignored the offer. More than anything else, this exposes the BC government’s lack of intent and willingness to undertake meaningful protection of old growth. Since then, the war in the woods has continued with many blockades attempting to defend the high-value old forests that should all be protected, not logged.

Meanwhile, BC’s growing wood pellet industry has been caught turning primary forest into pellets to be burned for electricity production in Europe and Asia. The BC Minister of Forests publicly denied that whole trees are being turned into pellets, but an investigation by The Fifth Estate revealed whole log decks stacked at Meadowbank pellet plant near Prince George, which is owned by Drax Power Station, Britain’s largest power plant. They are just one pellet company with a license to clearcut old growth forests, and they plan to almost double their production by 2030.

With so much of our surviving old growth under serious threat of logging, the province had the audacity to proclaim that old growth logging is at an all time low due to their deferrals. Sadly, many professionals say this is due to a dwindling supply created by past unsustainable logging.

Though we are being told otherwise, the change that is needed has not occurred and so this becomes our decade of reckoning. BC people now have a decision to make about whether we will pass any more of this precious forest legacy on to future generations. Amidst the issues we now face, we must be courageous and keep the preservation of old growth forest at the forefront, for it is the foundation of the greater world that is possible. Read on to see how your support has contributed to our campaigns this year and how you can further support our efforts.



L. Visser

At 80, senior biologist and director Wayne McCrory has no plan for retirement, acknowledging that some of our most precious ecosystems are still unprotected, and it is our responsibility to the planet and future generations to protect them.

WAVE OF SUPPORT NECESSARY FOR OLD GROWTH ACCOUNTABILITY

It is now time to recognize that the value of old growth forests to British Columbia is infinitely greater than the price of wood fiber. Economists have sought to put a dollar value to these reservoirs of life, the benefits of which include clean water and climate regulation, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, fresh oxygen, flood and fire suppression, wild food and medicinal products, and opportunities to learn about ancient cultures and our natural history. But the truth is that these ecosystems are irreplaceable and therefore priceless. Countless species have survived thousands of years to build BC's web of old growth biodiversity, and it has taken only 100 years at the hands of greed and ignorance for it to nearly disappear.

Some British Columbians know that what we are losing is worth fighting for, and a movement of activism was awakened through the Fairy Creek blockade. The protestors faced police brutality, arrest, loss of their livelihoods and property, and witnessed the breakdown of our democracy through media exclusion. This triggered actions in other parts of the province including Revelstoke and the West Kootenay where a police brigade from Fairy Creek was brought in to make arrests and dismantle a camp protesting logging in Mountain Caribou habitat on Mt. Willet.

The province's own logging company, BC Timber Sales, is one of the worst offenders of wasteful and irreparable old growth clearcutting. The greenwashing and denial has only gotten worse, as seen with the pellet industry's takeover of old growth timber tenures for international "biofuel," and the growing promotion of a massive increase in use of wood building products as a fraudulent cure to climate change.

BC's Misleading and Meaningless Logging Deferrals

BC's Old Growth Technical Advisory Panel identified 2.6 million hectares of "priority at-risk" old-growth forest and recommended logging deferrals for all of it until a new approach to forest management could be achieved in collaboration with First Nations. Most of it was 2.1 million hectares of big tree and ancient forests. These forests occur at low elevations and to have the highest biodiversity, but they have been targeted for logging for going on 100 years, and less than 3% of them remain. A smaller area of 0.5 million ha. was for remnant fragments in heavily clearcut ecosystems.

The Ministry of Forests has said it has deferred only half of what the Panel recommended; and it has done that by "de-

ferring" logging that wasn't going to happen during the time-frame of the deferrals anyway. There was also a significant amount of forest that was remnant fragments. Thus much of the highest quality forest continues to be targeted for logging. Meanwhile the clock is running out on the two-year deferrals, there is no sign of the development of a "new approach" to forest management. And, to make matters worse, over 7,000 hectares of the deferrals have since been logged, and no buffer has been allowed around the deferrals, putting the old trees at risk of windthrow and loss of moisture.

Logging deferrals are meaningless without an immediate reduction in the Allowable Annual Cut, a dissolution of the trade deals made with foreign countries to ship our old growth overseas, and permanent protection of our remaining old growth forests, including through the creation of new major parks, especially needed for the carbon sequestration critically necessary to mitigate climate change.

Caribou decline signals interior old growth ecosystem collapse

In the Interior Wetbelt of BC, the collapse of our globally rare Inland Temperate Rainforest is highlighted by the demise of its

iconic umbrella species, the Deep-Snow Mountain Caribou, which depend on old growth for part of the year. In under two years, three herds were wiped out, and this spring, the females of the Central Selkirk herd were put in a pen. Valhalla Wilderness Society has campaigned for protection of their habitat for over 40 years, and strongly opposed maternity penning after 18 caribou died in the pen north of Revelstoke. Yet the province went on to work with the local logging and recreation-based group that popped up in 2019 to ensure that logging, snowmobiling and heli-skiing continued while the caribou were penned and wolves were shot from helicopters.

Now, amidst increasing fires, floods and drought brought by an intensifying climate crisis and loss of global rainforest, protestors of the DRAX power plant in Europe are asking why Canadians are allowing these forests to be ground into pellets, shipped overseas and burned for electricity production in the UK. This is our last chance to see that we don't end up like the European countries that logged all of their primary forest long ago. They will never again have in the history of the human race what we still have. What we need now is for our supporters to demand that the BC government protect our remaining old growth and create new major parks, where these forests can be safe from industry-generated changes in protection. Please see the last page for addresses.



A. Peters

Ancient cedars slated for clearcutting at Russel creek were deferred, but with some "deferred" forest getting logged, there was no guarantee they would be left standing. They were the only big-tree remnants in a valley that had been heavily clearcut, and clearcutting had gone up to the boundaries of the old-growth. Local activists are keeping watch to ensure the deferred area remains unlogged, but in other areas logging is going unnoticed.

LET'S MAKE NEW MAJOR PARKS A PRIORITY FOR BC!

One of the best ways to preserve our remaining intact old growth forests in BC would be through the creation of large new provincial parks. Not only do we need to protect these rare old growth ecosystems, we must also preserve landscape connectivity corridors so that wide ranging and migratory species can travel between them and continue contributing to healthy ecosystem cycles.

Many of our parks are too small and are not connected enough to other parks to provide the reservoir of life we need to continue in the coming dangers of climate change. To scientists, these small, isolated parks on the landscape are known as “islands of extinction”. We are told that 14.4% of BC is secured in Parks and other Protected Areas. But how much of that is fully protected in complete ecosystems to maintain biodiversity?

→ As of 2016, almost 2% of our Parks and Protected Areas land-base had been developed for lodging and recreation, the impact of which radiates far beyond the locations of the developments.

→ Between 2014 and 2019, documented visitor use increased by 23% to over 26 million visits per year.

→ A steady decline in funding for BC Parks has led to BC being the lowest-funded parks system in Canada per hectare.

The result? Canada’s most biodiverse province is crashing, with over 1,800 known Species At Risk, though unknown losses are also inevitable due to very limited monitoring and rapid ecosystem destruction.

The province’s response has been to increase funding to add over 1,900 campsites in Parks and Recreation Sites, which only facilitates greater human impact. We should celebrate that BC people and visitors love our parks so much, but while trails and campgrounds extend further into these ecosystems and severe wildfires and pest infestations destroy some of the forest the parks were meant to protect, it is becoming clear that we have not secured enough of our landscape to maintain our natural heritage into the future.

In 2021 the province boasted about the protection of 229 hectares since 2020, which is only about the size of 3-5 clearcuts. What is needed is to greatly expand our parks and protected areas system. While some of our most biodiverse ecosystems remain unprotected and subject to clearcutting, BC people must make this a priority and call on governments to preserve our most valuable resources once and for all through Class A designations.

THREE PROPOSALS, ONE FUTURE FOR HUMANITY

For over 50 years VWS has done extensive biodiversity research and park proposal development to identify the areas most critical for protection. Over the past several years, the three VWS large park proposals for one of our rarest ecosystems, the under-protected Inland Temperate Rainforest, have languished in the hands of the provincial government while allowing parts of some to be logged.

What is protected of BC’s Inland Temperate Rainforest is 17% of the Interior Wetbelt region, including only about 11% of our Interior Cedar Hemlock forest. This is compared to 37% of BC’s coastal temperate rainforest which is largely protected under the framework of Ecosystem Based Management, a model that was promised to be applied to the entire province by the premier in 2017, but wasn’t.

Highly troubling is that the ancient, intact remnants of the rare Inland Temperate Rainforest ecosystem are mostly unprotected (and the only recent protection was a small part of the Robson Valley). Our Quesnel Lake Wilderness, Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness and Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park proposals represent three major biodiversity hotspots. All three must be protected to see the most biodiverse remnants of this globally rare ecosystem persist into the future. More information on the proposals can be found at www.vws.org/action.



VWS’s three Inland Rainforest proposals were designed with the preservation of wide-ranging and old growth-dependent species in mind. The Quesnel Lake Wilderness would protect habitat for a population of about 500 Deep Snow Caribou. Despite declining caribou in the other two park proposals, they contain nearly 200 other known species at risk.

OLD GROWTH & PARKS CAMPAIGN AMPLIFIED AS LOGGING CONTINUES

In 2022, Valhalla Wilderness Society has continued a major campaign for much more protection with on-the-ground efforts now amplified after a time of being unable to meet publicly due to Covid-19. This year, director Craig Pettitt and Campaigners Anne Sherrod and Amber Peters shared their knowledge of the importance and rarity of our old growth forests, including those in VWS’s three park proposals, through major newspaper ads, production of new films, consultations with local old growth action groups, radio

interviews, presentations and film screenings, scouting of at risk old growth with scientists and activists, and field trips with local government, teachers and members of the public.

VWS Engages Government & Logging Companies

For decades, director Craig Pettitt has sought evidence to dispel the province’s false claims that ancient cedar trees of the interior wetbelt are much younger than they really are.

Old growth and parks campaign continued...

This year his efforts focused on the Duncan Valley ancient forest stand in our Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal. While the ancient forest is protected as an Old Growth Management Area, VWS has been urgently calling attention to the fact that clearcutting and road building in the surrounding younger forest is turning this ancient forest stand into a small fragment which will be exposed to a warmer, drier microclimate from the clearcuts, and will not be able to maintain rainforest species that require moist conditions.

This summer, Craig found a 2.3m diameter cedar which he was able to age at close to 1,000 years. This provided strong evidence that the rare 4m diameter trees could be as old as 2,000 years. He shared his finding during a field trip with local and provincial government representatives, forest ecologist Dr. Rachel Holt, and managers of BC Timber Sales. The BC Timber Sales people scoffed, saying that this forest was subject to a 350-year wildfire cycle. Craig drew their attention to ancient cedar nurse logs that had almost fully decayed into the forest floor, including one with a 500 year old hemlock tree growing out of it, which made it evident that the Duncan stand and other ancient forests in our park proposal have survived for thousands of years without any fire. This is important because the argument that these forests “will burn anyway” has been used as a justification to log them, when they are actually the least likely to burn and our best chance at preserving biodiversity.



Sarah Newton

Director Craig Pettitt shows an 803 yr. old tree ring sample taken 24m from the base of a 2.3m diameter cedar tree that suggests it is in the 1,000 year age class.

Craig also attended meetings between old-growth defenders and the logging company, Interfor, regarding concerns for clearcuts planned in old-growth forests, but these did not result in any protection. VWS believes that old-growth protection must be focused on protecting our last remaining large intact forests, including mature and younger forest to provide connectivity and preserve moist interior forest conditions.

VWS also worked to get recognition of the ancient forests of the Rainbow Jordan Wilderness when biologist Amber Peters guided forest ecologist Rosanna Wijenberg, who is working on BC's Big Tree Registry, into the proposal area to record some of its most accessible giant cedars. Although Rosanna has visited surviving old growth forests all over the province, she expressed that she had never seen a forest as biodiverse and flourishing as the vast ancient forest of the unprotected Rainbow-Jordan.



A. Peters

Amidst a drought-stricken October all across BC, the ancient rainforest of the Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness proposal remained incredibly humid and flourishing with a diversity of autumn macrofungi species.

Public Awareness Campaign Reaches a Broader Audience

VWS reached a large audience with three full-page articles in the Victoria Times Colonist this year focusing on the critical role of old-growth in carbon storage to mitigate climate change, and in the survival of old-growth dependent species, especially mountain caribou. The ad campaign led to an invitation to VWS by Elders for Ancient Trees to join the old growth rally planned for next February 25 (details on last page).

VWS also worked with the Revelstoke Wildsight chapter to provide several old growth talks and field trips into old-growth forest near Revelstoke. Amber presented two talks on VWS's parks proposals to teachers in Revelstoke for their professional development day.

Director Craig Pettitt led an ITR field workshop for cross-Canada environmental science teachers in the Downie Creek area north of Revelstoke.



Craig Pettitt draws attention to a coral lichen, which indicates very wet and extremely old rainforest conditions. Not far out of the photo are the stumps of huge trees in clearcuts that have rendered the standing grove a tiny fragment left after 50 years of rapacious logging in the Downie Creek valley. The logging has wiped out a significant population of mountain caribou that was known to inhabit the valley until the early 1990's. [Photo courtesy of Sarah Newton]

TWO NEW FILMS HIGHLIGHT BC'S RARE INLAND RAINFOREST

By Damien Gillis, Filmmaker

I grew up in a forestry town, Campbell River, where I live today with my young family. When I was a kid here in the 80s, we were taught in school about the “circle of life”: Loggers cut down trees; tree planters come along; and decades later, the whole cycle begins anew.

Even then, I sensed something missing in this narrative. My environmentalist aunt sent me a poster of the Carmanah-Walbran Valley and I would fall asleep staring up at giant sitka spruce on my bedroom wall. I was hooked. I took petitions to save Carmanah around town. I grew up to make documentary films about ancient forests—magical places full of life, death and rebirth; rich with lichens, fungi, bears, caribou, and ever-unfolding wonders, like trees that talk to each other through intricate underground networks.

None of these things exist in a tree plantation, which is why the gaps in our education system haunt me to this day. How do we get people to understand just how unique and important our ancient forest ecosystems are?

In 2015, I had the privilege of visiting the Incomappleux Valley with VWS to direct a short film called *Primeval*. I remain proud of that film and how it supported their campaign which resulted in a logging deferral of the Incomappleux (sadly, a deferral is not permanent protection). This got me thinking about how to help people experience an ancient forest in a more visceral way. So in September of 2021, I was delighted to return to the Inland Temperate Rainforest with some very special equipment and people—Squamish artist and ethnobotanist T'uy't'tanat-Cease Wyss, and Olivier Leroux, a leading virtual reality cinematographer.

Together, we had begun by creating a 360 degree film about an ancient forest in Cease's unceded territory on the Sunshine Coast—Stalkaya (a.k.a. Dakota Bear Sanctuary). The film was done to support the Elphinstone Logging Focus group who had long been fighting clearcutting of the area. They also had commissioned two reports by biologist Wayne McCrory which documented yellow cedars over 1,500 years old and black bear dens that were part of the film. The film helped secure protection of the area through negotiations between the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) First Nation and the province.

Now, we would train our 360° camera on the West Kootenay. I was thrilled to team up again with Craig Pettitt, and to introduce him to my colleagues. Together, we all ventured into an ancient forest just west of the Duncan River, where we would document a 2000-year-old matriarch tree, bear dens and nurse logs. We also captured nearby clearcut logging all along the west banks of the Duncan Reservoir and the giant tree tombstones that still haunt the shores below, more than a half century after this valley was flooded.

We edited this material into a 12-minute 360° film, which premiered, alongside our Sunshine Coast film, at the Vancouver International Film Festival this past October, projected inside a geodesic dome which we built ourselves. The reaction from audiences was fantastic

and we used this opportunity to help raise the profile of the Inland Temperate Rainforest (ITR).

In parallel with this immersive experience, it was my honour to create a new, conventional short documentary, also featuring Craig and generously supported by Valhalla: *Walking Among Giants*. Telling the story of Valhalla's three park proposals to preserve what remains of the ITR's ancient forests and habitat for endangered mountain caribou, this film has been the cornerstone of a new online campaign. In just the first few months, thousands of people have visited VWS.org/action, where they find letter writing tools to urge our provincial government to enact these protections and live up to their promises for old growth.

Both of these films will continue to screen around BC and well beyond over the coming year as we harness the power of different media to shine a spotlight on the ITR. The 360° film will live on as part of a larger interactive experience our team is building with support from Creative BC and the BC Arts Council. It is my dream that with these tools, children like mine, growing up in BC today, will have a very different education than I once experienced—learning how rare and irreplaceable our ancient forest ecosystems are and why we must work together to preserve what remains of them.

I am proud to work with Valhalla—now and into the future—as they lead the way on the ground to creating these vital protections...for the caribou, the bears, our watersheds, airsheds, Indigenous cultural practices, and the global climate.



Damien Gillis

A highlight of VWS's old-growth forest campaign this year was director Craig Pettitt's work with award-winning filmmaker Damien Gillis in the Duncan Ancient Cedar Grove to produce the film *Walking Among Giants*. A social media ad campaign for the film reached over 115,000 people and the film was shared over 550 times on Facebook.

This November, VWS signed a declaration for old growth protection with the group Elders for Ancient Trees and others who will be hosting a Super Rally at the BC Legislature on February 25th (Details on the last page). The declaration calls on the province to implement the 14 recommendations of the Old Growth Strategic Review Panel, which was promised to the BC people following the Panel's final report published over two years ago.

U.N. CONVENTION ON BIODIVERSITY IN MONTREAL EXPOSES CANADA'S BIG FOREST LIE

The UN Convention on Biodiversity, called COP15 (the 15th meeting of the UN's "Conference of the Parties") will begin in two days as we write this newsletter; but it will be over by the time you receive this. By then we will know whether it has brought real gains for biodiversity, or more hot air from countries that have never before honoured their UN biodiversity commitments.

One of Canada's commitments that will come under scrutiny at COP15 was made at last years UN climate change summit (COP 26). There Canada joined the countries that swore to "end the chainsaw massacre" with an agreement promising to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030. Prime Minister Trudeau signed it. He stated:

"Canada is home to one of the largest continuous forests in the world, and we have a responsibility to protect it. We've seen the impact of global temperatures rising; they've been rising twice as fast in Canada as in the rest of the world on those forests. We have a responsibility to be stewards of them."

As we all can see, Canada's chainsaw massacre continued unabated and is well on its way to rendering the Spotted Owl, the Deep Snow Mountain Caribou and many other species extinct. In the past this has escaped international attention because Canada's government insists that clearcut logging is not deforestation, because the trees are replanted. Our forests do grow back after clearcutting, but it can take hundreds of years to recover the degree of carbon absorption and storage that was lost, and species that are decimated may never be recovered.

Canada's Science Denial

Nevertheless, the BC and Canadian governments peddle logging industry disinformation and biased research, claiming the wood they log goes into long-lasting wood products that store the carbon away from the atmosphere. They know very well that scientists have shown that only a minority percentage of the carbon in trees that are cut down remains stored in the wood products; the rest goes into the atmosphere. And while wood products do contain some of the carbon, they cannot absorb it from the air, as the living trees do. Nor do wood products last thousands of years like temperate rainforest. Yet both our timber industry and our federal government ludicrously promote the grossly false idea that building skyscrapers with wood is a way to reduce climate change.

Canada holds that "deforestation" is not the right word for what it does, then what is the right word? European environment ministers have decided it is "forest degradation", de-

finied as "the replacement of primary forest by plantations or other wooded land." (*The Guardian*, Jul 5, 2022) The ministers are looking to eliminate unsustainably sourced wood products from their countries, by requiring wood to be labelled with the geographic location of its source, so that customers can choose to buy from only sustainable sources. *This could mean significant protection of Canada's old-growth forests.*

Canada's Effort to Block International Forestry Reforms

Now, Canada has been caught in a supreme act of hypocrisy: trying to block international recognition of industrial clearcutting as part of the problem that must be changed — this from the country that promised to help "end the chainsaw massacre."

According to leaked documents, weeks before COP15, Canada sent a letter to the European Commission asking for the tracking of the geographic locations of wood sources to be reconsidered. It wanted review of plans to include "degraded" forests in the legislation, and a "phased" approach that would slow down the changes. (*The Guardian*, Dec. 1, 2022). The letter openly acknowledged that the proposed legislation could cost over \$1 billion in trade of wood shipped from Canada to the EU. The letter argued that Canada's annual deforestation is only 0.2%, so it should be given special consideration as a "low-risk" nation. Try telling that to mountain caribou, or the spotted owls, or those of us who have flown across the province and looked down on an unending sea of clearcuts.



Craig Pettitt

Lungs of the planet: Old-growth forest stores carbon for hundreds of years.

Meanwhile, prominent retired BC forester, Herb Hammond, has resigned from his professional association in a letter that states:

"BC forests have now become a target for the wood pellet industry that supplies wood pellets to burn for the production of electricity in the United Kingdom, Japan, and elsewhere. Burning wood pellets to produce electricity emits significantly more greenhouse gas emissions per unit of electricity produced than burning coal. At best, burning wood pellets is a misguided attempt to lower greenhouse gas emissions. At worst, it is blatant greenwashing ... there is abundant, credible evidence that intact BC forests, including old-growth forests, are being logged to produce and export wood pellets. Protection of these intact forests, particularly old-growth and other primary forests, is extremely important to mitigate climate change and slow biodiversity loss."

DRASTIC DELINE OF THE DEEP SNOW MOUNTAIN CARIBOU IS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF PUSHING SPECIES TOWARD EXTINCTION BECAUSE IT'S PROFITABLE

As an example of how Canada allows economic profits to subvert commitments at U.N. Conventions to protect biodiversity, few cases surpass the case of BC's Deep Snow Mountain Caribou for sheer audacity. BC's *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) was passed to implement Canada's commitments under the 1992 Convention on Biodiversity. Its stated purpose is to prevent wildlife species "from being extirpated or becoming extinct."

In 2017, with the mountain caribou steeply declining while BC ravaged their old-growth forest habitat, four independent parties in BC appealed to Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) to enforce Canada's *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). It is now five years since the groups provided expert scientific evidence that herds of the Deep Snow Mountain Caribou were under imminent threat to survival, yet so far as we know little, if any, habitat has been protected for the caribou. The province's whole caribou "recovery" programs consists of killing wolves and cougars and chasing down pregnant caribou with helicopters, netting them and penning them to have their calves.

We had expected that the SARA would compel the federal environment minister to issue a recommendation to Cabinet to order BC to protect more caribou habitat. What we discovered instead was a long trail of manipulation with the SARA and its processes that had been going on for years before we sought protection for the caribou.

Not long after the SARA was passed into law, its flaws became a topic of legal research and analysis in scientific journals. For species-at-risk status to be legal, the species

"The *Species at Risk Act* is federal legislation designed to meet Canada's commitments under the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity. Regardless of how the caribou at issue are defined, their continued precipitous decline evidences Canada's failure to meet those obligations."

—Richard Cannings
MP, South Okanagan/West Kootenay

must be listed on Schedule 1 of the Act. Researchers have cited loopholes in the Act that allow ECCC to endlessly delay adding species to the list. As early as 2007 Mooers, et al. identified a bias against listing species that are harvested, or whose habitat overlaps commercially valuable natural resources.

BC's mountain caribou have long been hailed as icons of Canada's natural heritage; but by 2020 they had become icons of the ineffectiveness of its *Species at Risk Act*. Palm, et al, published a case study of Southern Mountain Caribou showing that "909 km² of critical habitat identified on provincial lands were logged in 5 years after it was legally identified under SARA." (Conservation Science and Practice, 2020).

Another study published in 2020 found that market conditions that control timber sales by Canada to the US have more influence on the rate of habitat destruction for Boreal Caribou than the conservation measures under the *Species at Risk Act*. (Fortin et al, 2020)

More recently, a scientific study found that the mean annual loss of Woodland Caribou habitat has increased by 262% since the federal government released its various caribou policy statements and plans under the *Species at Risk Act* (Nagy-Reis et al, 2021).

This is the bitter truth we have learned: that there is no law to actually protect mountain caribou because it is too profitable to let resource industries annihilate them. What chance do humans have if it is too unprofitable to implement measures to mitigate climate change?

HOW PREDATOR KILLING RAVAGES BIODIVERSITY

Our wild large carnivores *are* key parts of our biodiversity, but they also foster the presence and health of many other species. One of their crucial roles is regulating the populations of large plant-eating species. When top predators have been eliminated from an area, the plant-eaters may suffer a boom-and-bust existence in which they multiply beyond the carrying capacity of their range, strip it of available food, and then face a slow death by starvation. The loss of vegetation removes habitat for other species, which dwindle or disappear when top predators are not present.

Grizzly bears eat salmon from streams and carry the nitrogen-rich protein into the forest in their urine and feces, as well as by leaving the remains of their salmon meals. One result that has been observed was a very high diversity of tree lichens along the shore, including rare species, of lavish size and abundance. Wolves patrol sensitive riparian areas along streams, so large prey species stay away to avoid them. The presence of wolves produces more richly vegetated riparian

zones with plentiful habitat for birds, beavers and other smaller animals. The vegetation decreases soil erosion and can stabilize streams hydrologically. Wolves and cougars also protect many kinds of small animals by reducing the number of mid-sized predators such as coyotes and foxes, which prey on the smaller animals.

It is unlikely that we will be hearing at COP15 that BC is devastating its biodiversity by slaughtering wolves en masse over large areas. It is unlikely that Canada will admit it is ignoring climate change dangers by pandering to its largest corporate supporter, the logging industry; unlikely it will recognize it has confirmed its hypocrisy by fervently pledging one thing and contradictorily delivering another, or that it has already had to spend billions of tax dollars to meet the consequences of ignoring climate change. The legislation being drafted by the EU has been hailed as the most important forest legislation of the decade. Let's hope Canada doesn't embarrass itself and all of us by opposing it.

MEGA-RESORT THREATENS FRAGMENTATION OF FOUR MAJOR PARKS AND DECIMATION OF AT-RISK WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

People in the West Kootenays are awaiting a decision by BC's Mountain Resorts Branch (MRB) about whether they will approve Zincton Mountain Resort, the major all-seasons recreation development proposed in a wildlife travel corridor between four major protected areas between New Denver and Kaslo (Highway 31A). The operation proposes to bring up to 1,750 guests per day into the ecosystem at the base of Goat Range Park, where a 50-bed alpine lodge would be built in prime grizzly bear huckleberry feeding habitat. A village capable of hosting three times the population of New Denver would have shops, new roads, waste infrastructure, and vacation homes.

VWS biologists have submitted several scientific reports to MRB showing how the development would cause degradation of surrounding protected areas and other habitats that are home to wide-ranging species such as the rare white-phased grizzly bear, mountain goats and wolverine. We have received nothing but a generic response from MRB stating that concerns of our biologists and other experts would be reviewed by the proponent over many months. What is troubling is that MRB has never rejected a resort application in BC, and the public consultation routine appears to be nothing more than the semblance of a democratic process.

Part of our dismay is that the province hasn't commissioned an Environmental Impact Assessment for such a large development that would clearly impact the surrounding parks and protected areas that British Columbians fought for decades to protect. Instead the government is relying on an environmental report by the developers' consultant. Major impacts to terrain stability and the hydrology of steep mountains that feed water into New Denver and Slocan Lake would be inevitable, as would a decline in local wildlife populations. Increased human-bear conflicts would also lead to mortality and displacement of bears into residential areas by bringing hundreds of people per day into prime grizzly habitats.

And what for? The pipe-dream is one of economic growth for the region, but studies show that every time a slice of BC wilderness is turned into a resort town, generations of locals are driven out of their homes by an outrageously inflated cost of living raised by wealthy non-residents buying secondary vacation homes. The region becomes a commodity for people who aren't invested in preserving its biodiversity, because they aren't rooted here in the way that we are. Some low-paying jobs are provided to young travellers but the cost is the legacy of clean water, wildlife and quiet enjoyment of nature

that our region is built on, being taken from everyone.

Climate impacts are unavoidable.

The proponent of Zincton is pitching a carbon neutral development, but these claims are unfounded. Even if the entire operation runs on green energy, the initial construction would require a huge amount of fossil fuel use to clear forest, terrace slopes, build roads and parking lots, dig septic, water and power lines and build homes and businesses.

The huge increase in people driving or flying to ski at the resort or access their vacation homes in the remote mountain pass from within and outside of Canada, would increase fossil fuel use significantly.

Due to climate change, an estimated 95% of ski resorts around the world already rely on making artificial snow, which greatly increases their energy and water consumption. While resorts say they are shifting to "green" energy, there is no data to show to what degree this is satisfying their vast energy needs.

After a year of some of the worst floods and wildfires ever experienced in BC, which cost an estimated minimum of \$9 billion in damage and repairs from the flooding alone, added to unprecedented extreme temperatures, it became clear to many of us that the days of frivolous growth and development at the expense of ecological stability should be over.

What is preposterous is that the province has allowed Zincton Resort to progress to the formal proposal stage not long after Jumbo Resort, proposed for development in the nearby Jumbo Valley, was finally thwarted in its development after 30 years of BC people battling to save the habitat of grizzly bears and other wildlife it threatened. As local opposition to Zincton grows with various petitions climbing in numbers far greater than on the petitions created by the proponent, we will soon find out for sure whether the province intends to represent the people or profits.

With so many compounding effects of climate change now plaguing BC, it would be unthinkable for the province to push us back into another 30 year battle to protect this natural wonder. In reality we should be taking steps to reverse the damage we have already caused and plan for community and ecological resilience in the face of intensifying droughts, fires and floods, instead of wasting our energy and resources continuing to fight the old paradigm of endless exploitation.

Like with Jumbo Valley, the threat of a mega-resort to the wild species and ecosystems we still have here cannot be mitigated, nor can the climate impacts, regardless of promises of a "green" development. BC people must rise up and say NO! to Zincton Mountain Resort, to leave behind the more important legacy of biodiversity for the next generation.



A. Sherrod

Moose are just one of many species that utilize the wetlands along Highway 31A that would be heavily impacted by Zincton Resort. Unfortunately, one of these calves was killed by a truck on Highway 31A. A massive increase in traffic would be detrimental to wildlife populations.

WESTERN TOAD CONSERVATION PROJECT - A SIGNIFICANT COMMUNITY EFFORT AT FISH AND BEAR LAKES

Western toads are a little-known, important link in the food chain and the health of ecosystems. They are a federally listed species at risk. All amphibians are in peril and some populations in BC have disappeared. Recently scientists have discovered that far more species have gone extinct than were previously known. Snakes had the most missing species, and amphibians had the second most. The healthy population at Fish Lake is at risk from highway traffic and road contaminants, but its gravest danger is the proposed Zincton ski village and all-seasons resort. The mountain ridge proposed for the resort is where the toads spend most of their life cycle, and the lake at the base of the slopes is where they breed.

This year VWS biologists and local volunteers put forth a significant effort to protect biodiversity at Fish and Bear Lakes through year eight of VWS's western toad conservation project along Highway 31A. A total of 700 live breeding adult toads (and 26 killed by traffic) were moved off the highway at night in the Fish Lake study area during the adult migration. Another study area directly adjacent to the proposed ski village was monitored for toads, with many helped across the road. The 500m toadlet fence was maintained and monitored throughout the migration season to also ensure that thousands of toadlets could safely make it to their terrestrial mountain habitat without being killed trying to cross Highway 31A.

Monitoring also continued at another regionally significant breeding hotspot at Beaver Lake where we are hoping the Ministry of Forests will build migration infrastructure under the adjacent logging road to keep toadlets from being killed while migrating to upland habitats from one of the region's other significant western toad breeding hotspots.

In July, researchers surveyed the high alpine mountain of London Ridge, adjacent to the Fish Lake breeding area, and found toads of various age classes from low to high elevation, including on the snowy alpine ridge at over 2,000 meters. Land clearing for lifts, tree cutting for ski runs, as well as the skiing itself, would remove or change much vegetation and compact the soil in this habitat. Since the toads burrow into the soil for safety and hibernation, these impacts to the ground could drastically reduce the population if not wipe it out entirely.



Cora Skaaien

Western toad researcher Amber Peters explains to a crowd at Fish Lake how the toadlet migration fence works to stop highway mortality and facilitates their migration toward their mountain habitat, which is now proposed as a Controlled Recreation Area (CRA) for Zincton Resort.

The researchers found toads in the vicinity of the proposed Zincton 50-bed lodge, where summer use would bring mountain biking and hiking trails. These activities would compact and degrade the low to high elevation habitat that the toads depend on. In the valley bottom, the resort would significantly increase highway traffic and road mortality beyond what volunteers are able to prevent by carrying toads across the road.

This year saw a major increase in tadpoles at Fish Lake that filled a whole bay with tens of thousands of their tiny black bodies - such a sight never witnessed in the eight years of research. VWS biologists attribute this significant increase to the return to Fish Lake of an increased number of breeding adults that are of the same generation of toadlets that were able to migrate safely four years ago because of the VWS toadlet migration fence and volunteer efforts.

Our researchers and volunteers continue dedicating themselves to keeping these critical ecosystem cycles functioning. We thank our volunteers for their contributions to the project this year, especially Kim Frederiksen and Peter Vella who have put in significant time.



C. Pettitt

Bald eagles and western toads are connected in a complex aquatic predator-prey system at Fish and Bear Lakes. The tens of thousands of tadpoles that grow into toadlets in the breeding lakes provide an abundant food source for a host of species including mergansers, trout, spotted frogs and even the Common garter snake that hunt tadpoles underwater. Bald eagles will also hunt in wetlands with the garter snakes and fish being among their prey.

The toadlets eat algae, keeping it under control and cleaning the waters where they breed. They also eat mosquitoes and flies. Although they are tiny, their presence in the tens of thousands represents a huge energy source going into the food chain. When they grow larger, they may eat snails, snakes and mice and even when they die their bodies pour nutrients back into the ecosystem.

BC Government Closes Black Bear Trophy Hunting in Core Area of the Spirit Bear on the BC Central Coast

For over 30 years VWS and our biologists have worked with many others including First Nations to stop trophy hunting of grizzly bears in BC. Thanks to the work of many and the overwhelming support from the residents of BC including many First Nations, in 2017 the BC government was finally forced to ban the hunting of grizzly bears except for First Nation's traditional uses. This still left open the trophy hunting of black bears. This is especially a concern on the BC central and north coast, where some black-phased black bears carry the recessive



This black cub with a white mother will carry her recessive gene for the white-phase colour and if the black bear hunt had not been closed would have been vulnerable to being shot by a bear hunter once it was a grown black-phased bear.

gene for the rare white-phased spirit or Kermode bear. As part of the VWS spirit bear research and conservation campaign that started 30 years ago with the Kitsoo Xai'xais and Gitga'at First Nations and others, large areas of spirit bear habitat were finally protected on the BC coast in 2016. However, spirit bears were not fully "protected" so long as the government still allowed spring trophy hunting of the black-phased bears to continue that might impact the gene pool (white spirit bears also used to be hunted).

VWS examination of the statistics of black bears killed by trophy hunts in the spirit bear core coastal areas showed it was sometimes excessive and may have already impacted the white bear gene pool. Subsequent genetic research sponsored by the Kitsoo Xai'xais and Gitga'at First Nations with the University of Victoria showed that the allele that creates white spirit bears was rarer than found in an earlier study. Two mating black bears carrying this recessive gene can create white offspring and hunters can't determine which black individuals carry this gene and which

don't. Through recent negotiations with the province, the two Nations were finally successful in July of this year (after the spring trophy hunt) in having a large area of core spirit bear habitat closed to trophy hunting on the central coast. However, black bear hunting was still left open in the majority of the range of the spirit bear and the rest of the province, and hunting for meat is still allowed in the range of the spirit bear, which leaves the trophy ban unfortunately open to interpretation as the hunting is legal as long as the meat is reportedly utilized.

BC-Tahltan Agreement Initiates Unregulated Bounty Hunting of Grizzly Bears for "Predator Control"

The 2017 ban on grizzly bear hunting across BC followed consultations with 200 First Nations, stakeholder groups and the public, in which 78 percent of respondents, including many First Nations, recommended the hunt be stopped entirely. The ban did not apply to First Nations' Aboriginal or Treaty rights to kill grizzly bears for food, social or ceremonial purposes. There was no mention of allowing First Nations' killing of grizzly bears for "predator control".

Shortly after the announcement, the Tahltan First Nations in northwestern BC announced their opposition to the ban, later claiming that the ban increased the grizzly population in their territory that had "thousands" of grizzly bears and that they were implementing a Tahltan "predator control program" offering their members \$1,000 for each grizzly bear (male or female without young) they killed and making provisions that they utilize the carcass properly under their cultural laws. In actual fact, the grizzly bear is North America's slowest reproducing mammal and extremely vulnerable to any human-induced mortality. The Wildlife Branch estimates about 1,640 grizzlies in Tahltan Territory and the surrounding region, and not "thousands". While claiming the bears were killing too many ungulates that the Tahltan depend on for food, no scien-

tific data was provided to British Columbians to justify such a wide open bounty hunt on grizzly bears. Efforts by the VWS bear biologist to access information on the Tahltan website as to how many grizzly bears they have killed to date and to obtain their predator management control plan were blocked by the requirement that you had to be a Tahltan with an access code.

Since the trophy hunt ban, the provincial government has not only kept silent about the Tahltan's grizzly bear bounty hunt for "predator control" but also recently signed an Accord with the Tahltans for joint wildlife stewardship that will of course include the Tahltan's rights to pay their members a large bounty to kill grizzly bears for "predator control". The Tahltan wildlife management policy now requires their members to kill large predators, including grizzly and black bears and wolves. This goes far beyond the BC government's power to force citizens to kill wild animals, so it is additionally shocking that the BC government, representing all British Columbians, signed the Accord.

VWS has never opposed the hunting of some game animals to put meat on the table. However, we oppose trophy hunting and predator killing. We are not alone in this. A recent poll by Research Co. has shown that 60% of British

continued...

Columbians are in favour of hunting wildlife for meat, but *only 7% are in favour of hunting for sport (trophy hunting)*. The vast excess of clearcutting in the province has reduced even the common species that hunter's seek, ie, deer, elk and moose. The solution the hunting lobby most often seeks is killing more of BC's large carnivores — Grizzly and Black Bears, Wolves and Cougars resulting in wildlife declines from causing reductions in human hunting. But killing pred-

ators aids habitat destruction, by disguising its impact and diverting attention into false solutions and false hope. Trophy hunting is killing animals to display their parts. Please write the BC government and thank them for the ban on trophy hunting of black bears on the BC central coast but demand an end to trophy hunting of both black and grizzly bears throughout BC, and to withdraw any support for hunting under the guise of predator control.

Please Write BC Government to Protect Black Bear Old Growth Tree Dens

For decades VWS biologists have been documenting old growth black bear tree dens in the very old and large western cedar trees in the Inland Temperate Rainforest (ITR) - some estimated to be at least 1,000 years old - and working with others to ask for their protection. Director Wayne McCrory was a scientific advisor on the ecosystem-based logging guidelines for the Great Bear Rainforest, and authored a major report that allowed VWS's input into the protection of old-growth black bear and grizzly tree dens in the Great Bear Rainforest (GBR) which saw implementation of small legal den tree buffers in the 2016 GBR Order. However, no protection has been given old growth tree dens in the remainder of the coast and the rest of BC where clearcutting of old growth continues to be rampant.

Impetus for legal protection of all



Sinixt man Robert Watt in an old growth cedar bear den tree.

black bear tree dens in BC escalated in 2022 with an excellent report submitted to the BC government by the BC Environmental Law Centre recommending den tree protection, with the help of expert bear den research biologist Helen Davis, RPBio. As a result the province is currently reviewing possible legal protection.

As part of the VWS research & campaign to protect large parks and all old growth in the Inland Rainforest VWS also continues to document and work to get protection of all old growth black bear tree dens. Please add your voice by writing the BC government in support of legal protection of all BC black bear dens, including old growth cedar trees in our Inland Rainforest. We are recommending large buffers around each den tree of at least one hectare (addresses at end of Newsletter).

Canada Allows Poisoning of Wolves, Bears, Coyotes and Species At Risk

The legal use of indiscriminate wildlife poisons like Strychnine and Compound 1080 continues in Canada despite dangers to wildlife, people and pets. The detection of these poisons in many different species over decades of their use has proven that they kill more non-target species, such as eagles, than the ones they were meant to exterminate.

Although BC no longer allows the legal use of these poisons, Alberta still allows their widespread use on ranch lands where they are often used to kill wolves, coyotes and black bears, although claims that these apex species are causing significant loss of livestock are unfounded. The poisons are also used in fruitless efforts to try to increase caribou numbers through baited predator control. Saskatchewan and Manitoba are also registered to use the poisons, but the poisons are also showing up in other places

where they are not permitted, which raises serious concerns about their availability and distribution in Canada.

The inhumane poisons cause immense and drawn-out suffering to wolves and other species that ingest them. They do not break down quickly in the environment. Instead, they stay in the food chain causing widespread damage to our ecosystems, killing eagles, badgers, bobcats, raccoons, bears, wolves, coyotes and various other species. There has even been accidental loss of human life in the U.S. from use of Compound 1080, and many people's pets have been killed. It is time that we end this barbaric practice of exterminating wolves and other keystone species, and protect the many Species At Risk that are unintentionally killed through the outdated use of wildlife poisons in Canada. To take action against the poisoning of our wildlife visit www.wolfawareness.org/poison-free

BC PEOPLE, TAKE A STAND! - CALL ON THE PROVINCE TO CREATE LARGE PARKS AND PRESERVE OUR LAST OLD GROWTH!

Our remaining wilderness and old growth forest is invaluable. When we visit these still untouched places, we remember what it means to be truly human, and to live in harmony with the Earth. Our nervous systems relax, our minds become quiet and we experience a sense of freedom not found in the places that we as humans have constructed.

Beyond the many measureable benefits of the ecosystem services they provide to us in this time of climate and biodiversity crisis, our last old growth forests are libraries of life for BC people and people from other places who come to visit them. They offer us the opportunity to remember our place in the interconnected web of life.

These primary ecosystems are fountains of biodiversity. If we lose them now, we will lose a precious key to our evolution, and an antidote to our profound ailment as a people. Our way forward now must be to allow them and their countless lifeforms to persist.

In our campaigns for the protection of our most precious wilderness, it has always been a wave of letters of support from BC people and others that brought the parks to fruition.

Now more than ever, we need a tidal wave of supporters and leaders to stand with us and choose to be a voice for the protection of BC's remaining wilderness and old growth forest. The paradigm shift will only happen when enough of us speak up.

LETTERS URGENTLY NEEDED!

With the addition of new ministers to the BC parliament this year, it is important to inform these new ministers of your support for full protection of BC's remaining old growth forests. Please consider the following points for letter writing:

1. Ask for a drastic increase in the percent of fully protected ecosystems in BC, with highest priorities being old-growth, intactness and connectivity. This should include new and expanded parks. Support our goal of expanding BC Parks to 30% of the province through the Grow BC Parks campaign.
2. One quick and easy way to stop logging old growth forest: The Old Growth Panel recommends that the government instruct BC Timber sales to stop development and sale immediately.
3. The remaining old growth forest of BC's Inland Temperate Rainforest should be of the highest priority for protection, as it is habitat for many species at risk including BC's critically endangered Deep-Snow Mountain Caribou.
4. VWS's three park proposals would help fill the gap in protection of the rare Inland Temperate Rainforest, with the Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal, Quesnel Lake Wilderness Proposal, and the proposed Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness Park.



RALLY FOR OLD GROWTH ACTION

PLEASE JOIN US - FEBRUARY 25 - VICTORIA BC

Please join Elders for Ancient Trees at 12 p.m. on February 25th at Centennial Square in Victoria, BC to demand full implementation of the Old Growth Review Panel's recommendations. All will march from Centennial Square to the BC Legislature where speakers will present at 1 p.m.

That evening, at 7 p.m. at the Vic Theatre (808 Douglas St, Victoria BC), VWS Campaigner Amber Peters will give a presentation on the Inland Temperate Rainforest and a screening of Damien Gillis & Valhalla Wilderness Society's film *Primeval: Enter the Incomappleux*.

Tickets will be available at www.vws.org/action

Everyone at VWS would like to thank you so much for your continued support. We rely on your responses to our calls-to-action to maintain a strong and independent voice.

Please email vws@vws.org to be added to our contact list for occasional important updates and action alerts. Thank you!

The Hon. David Eby/ Premier of British Columbia / East Annex, Parliament Buildings / Victoria, BC V8V 1X4 / Fax: 250 387-0087 / E-mail: premier@gov.bc.ca

The Hon. George Heyman/ Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy / PO Box 9047 Stn Prov Govt / Victoria, BC V8W 9E2 / Fax: 250 387-1356 / E-mail: ENV.Minister@gov.bc.ca

The Hon. Bruce Ralston / Minister of Forests / PO Box 9049 Stn Prov Govt / Victoria, BC V8W 9E2 / Fax: 250 387-1040 / E-mail: FLNR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

The Hon. Nathan Cullen / Minister of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship / Room 310, Parliament Buildings / Victoria, BC V8V 1X4 / Phone: 778 405-3094 / Fax: 250 387-4312 / E-mail: LWRS.Minister@gov.bc.ca