

Valhalla Wilderness Society

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INCOMAPPLEUX PROTECTED AS A CONSERVANCY!!

Dear Members and Supporters,

Those of you who receive VWS emails will know this already: the famous primeval forest of the Incomappleux Valley is now protected as a Conservancy under the BC *Park Act*. It is a rare, rare year when the members, directors and staff of an environmental Society can celebrate protection of an area that has been the subject of over 20 years of campaigning, scientific research, letter writing, and film making. We should not let 2023 pass away without feeling encouragement that the trees are safe because of the actions we all took.

At 58,000+ hectares, the Conservancy includes the entirety of the Incomappleux portion of VWS's Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park proposal. The Conservancy is actually a third larger than our Incomappleux unit, but the extra is mostly clearcuts, inoperable terrain, rock and ice. However, this extra area contains important connectivity for wildlife such as mountain goats, grizzly bears and wolverines.

It is unfortunate but true that the creation of protected areas in BC and Canada has devolved into public-private partnerships (P3s). These entail backroom negotiations in which a lot of money and other benefits change hands between private parties and the governments. VWS is a public interest organization that holds that affairs regarding public land should be open and transparent. Requiring environmental groups to raise money to pay for protection is an enormous obstacle to achieving protection. Protected lands benefit the whole planet, and it is a government duty to balance land use with protected areas. P3s can also potentially lead to agreements hidden from the public that would compromise protection.

That being said, we are very lucky that Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) contributed funds to help buy out the timber rights of Interfor, an international logging company. NCC funding was joined by International mining company Teck-Cominco, a company that has been fined

repeatedly on pollution charges.

NCC had never before been involved in the Incomappleux Valley. BC Government media announcements thanking Interfor, Teck-Cominco and NCC for saving the Incomappleux must have been puzzling for our supporters, who have poured letters into government offices and dona-



VWS Chairperson Craig Pettitt led the field aspect of VWS's 20-year campaign to protect the Incomappleux as part of the Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal. After many years of research by biologists, the Incomappleux rainforest remains unparalleled in BC for its combination of antiquity, biodiversity, low elevation, and intact extent.

tions into VWS for 20 years. A few major media did recognize VWS as the group that championed the proposal. Minister of Environment George Heymann mentioned that his office had continuously received letters for protection of the Incomappleux. Most of those would have been generated by the VWS campaign since about 2005, and especially by the 2015 film *Primeval*, which has been viewed online by well over 100,000 people. So, well done to all of you!

VWS director Craig Pettitt guided numerous visitors and film crews through the forest. It required him to repair and slash brush on 20 kilometres of old access roads, and devise a replacement for a washed out bridge. Local Slocan Valley volunteers too numerous to name here sometimes helped. Enormous credit also goes to biologists Dr. Toby Spribille, Curtis Björk and Trevor Goward; Baden Cross of Applied Conservation GIS; filmmaker Damien Gillis, conservationist Gary Diers; and our major funders who stood by us for 20 years.

The Conservancy is already legislated and will be co-managed by BC Parks and eight First Nations. One concern is that conservancies have a significantly lower standard of legislated protection than Class A parks. Government officials visited VWS in November. They have been vigorously working on complex issues regarding hazardous, deteriorating roads, mining claims, mine waste, and much more. We are encouraged that so far hunting will not be allowed in the Conservancy. The government representatives also warmly expressed their knowledge that the Conservancy could not have happened without the work of our Society.

EVENING FOR INLAND RAINFOREST FOLLOWS OLD GROWTH RALLY

Valhalla Wilderness Society's Inland Temperate Rainforest campaign was brought to the capital city this year following the United for Old Growth Rally at the BC legislature in Victoria. The rally was organized to hold the province accountable to their promise to implement the 14 recommendations of the Old Growth Strategic Review Panel appointed in 2019.

Following extensive consultations across the province, the panel called for a paradigm shift in how BC manages its forests. However, by the date of the rally in February, not one recommendation had been fully implemented, and they still haven't been. In fact, to this date the government website states that to address the Strategic Review Panel's recommendations it will: "plan to guide the implementation of all 14 recommendations" in 2023 and "continued engagement" in 2024.

This never-ending process of talk-and-log while our ancient forests fall led thousands of BC residents, including biologists, non-profit organizations, doctors, nurses, educators and other fed-up citizens, to march and congregate at the legislature on February 25th, to demand protection of our remaining old growth. BC's remaining coastal old growth was well-represented by the various coastal groups organizing the event. However, it has been the case for decades that our interior old growth has been given little attention or protection. To bring the most ancient remnants of one of our most vital ecosystems to the forefront, Valhalla Wilderness Society hosted an Evening for BC's Ancient Inland Rainforest at the Vic Theatre following the rally. Filmmaker Damien Gillis presented *Primeval: Enter the Incomappleux*, and the crowd was given an update on the new conservancy designation and our push for Class A Park status for the remainder of the Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal. Renowned forest ecologists Rachel Holt and Andy MacKinnon gave short presentations on the state of old growth in BC and the ecological significance of the inland rainforest, with its incredibly high biodiversity value compared to many other old growth forests.

Biologist and Campaigner Amber Peters shared a 45-minute presentation on the Society's decades of work identifying the most ecologically significant forests that still remain of true, ancient rainforest in the Interior Wetbelt, which are encompassed in our three park proposals. The presentation told a story about the history of the campaign, the decline of the world's only Deep-snow Mountain Caribou due to logging of interior rainforest, and the scapegoating of wolves and other wildlife. Photography and biological findings from over 22 years of exploratory and biodiversity research were shared with the crowd in a presentation of VWS's three park proposals of the Inland Temperate Rainforest. The crowd stayed for an expert panel at the end, and many showed significant concern and amazement for an ecosystem seldom considered in BC's major city centers. The evening was followed by a drop-in letter writing event and information session in downtown Victoria. At least 70 people who were at the event or were walking by came in to show support and ask questions. Since then, Amber has been invited to bring the Inland Rainforest campaign to eight different venues in BC.



A. Peters

A crowd starts to gather at the BC legislature after marching down the streets of Victoria this February to call on the provincial government to hold true to their promise of old growth protection. Since the Review Panel's recommendations were made, clearcutting of some of the province's most at-risk remaining old growth has continued, even in deferral areas.



C. Ross

Presentations and film screenings by biologist Amber Peters and director Craig Pettitt played a significant role in bringing the ancient rainforest to the awareness of audiences across BC. A presentation on the three park proposals and screening of *Primeval* took place at the Vic Theatre this year following the United for Old Growth super-rally.

INLAND RAINFOREST CAMPAIGN REACHES AUDIENCES ACROSS BC

Following a significant effort to bring the Evening for BC's Ancient Inland Rainforest to Victoria, invites to share the presentation began flooding in from across southern BC, from Salt Spring Island to Revelstoke.

After extensive public canvassing, advertisements and radio interviews required to pull off the event in Victoria, biologist and campaigner Amber Peters returned home to speak at the old growth rally in Nelson, BC. The march and rally was organized by Andrea Fox, a forest campaigner who helped organize the Victoria event. Both events had a large turnout and led to increased awareness and letters to the provincial government in support of the Quesnel Lake and Rainbow-Jordan Class A park proposals and the unprotected portion of our Selkirk proposal after protection of the Incomappleux Conservancy. Rallies were held in cities across BC that week, and Amber was also invited to speak at the rally in Revelstoke.



Biologist Amber Peters speaks on the ecological importance of the ancient rainforests and VWS's three park proposals.

Soon after, the presentation was brought to Song Sparrow Hall in Salmon Arm, where owners Clea Roddick and Craig Newnes brought in a full house, many of whom had not known about the Incomappleux announcement. The guests were thrilled by the news of the new Conservancy following a screening of *Primeval* and stayed after the show to get materials for letter writing. Clea distributed information sheets at the Earth Day event the next day.



On September 27th, residents of Revelstoke were excited to learn about the globally significant ancient rainforest in their back yard: The Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness.

In the same week, the Gulf Islands Secondary School on Salt Spring Island hosted Amber for a live virtual presentation and discussion on the Inland Temperate Rainforest. The students gathered in their gymnasium to watch the film and presentation, and had their questions answered about how to become involved in the cause.

This summer, Amber was also invited to set up an information booth at Slocan Harmony Festival where she campaigned for 10 hours with a continuous flood of visitors from Canada, the U.S., Spain and South America.

Finally, two presentations took place in Revelstoke, including one hosted by local sustainability group Thuja, and one hosted by Wildsight Revelstoke. Over 130 people showed up for the latter, including a city councillor and a Parks Canada representative. The presentation included stunning photography from 6 years of expeditions, and explained how parts of the proposal may have been occupied by large herds of Mountain Caribou at one time, but that regional clearcutting and intensive recreation on the adjacent Frisby Ridge have had a major impact on the local herd. The presentation was an opportunity to expel the myth that wolves are to blame for their demise, and informed the crowd of the counter-analysis produced by biologist Toby Spribille and others who found serious flaws in the research paper that claimed at least 80% of wolves must be exterminated to save caribou.

Amber and the hosts from Wildsight Revelstoke agreed the talk was pivotal for old growth awareness in the region. The crowd had many meaningful questions and Amber spent over an hour speaking with guests after the question period, many

of whom were eager to support the proposal. Since then, VWS has started a petition to assist those interested in helping the campaign. As for the other two proposals, the Inland Rainforest tour will continue into the new year. Amber hopes to bring the presentation back to Victoria where she was invited to present at Vancouver Island University, and to organize talks and letter-writing events in other parts of BC.

RHETORIC V. REALITY: THE PROMISE TO PROTECT 30% OF BC BY 2030

In the midst of winter, it is possible to forget the extremity of danger and catastrophe that was prevalent due to Canada's record-breaking 2023 fire season. The total area burned was over 18 million hectares — more than six times the average over the past 10 years, and a clear result of climate change. Scientists are alarmed about the drastic increase in carbon emissions, with smoke plums reaching Europe. Thousands of people had to be evacuated.

Dire danger requires drastic action, and science has shown that reducing climate change requires dramatically increased protection of forests. Forests absorb and store massive quantities of carbon from the atmosphere, and old-growth forest excels by far in this capacity. What has received little attention is that old-growth forest in moist ecosystems, such as the Inland Temperate Rainforest, are also more resistant to wildfires.

Over the last two years the BC Government has designated deferrals of logging on 2.4 million hectares of old growth forest. Deferrals only mean that logging is postponed until a decision is made on the fate of the forest. *In two years the only real protection that has come out of those deferrals is the Incomappleux Conservancy.*

For some years the BC government has been stealthily degrading the standard for what can be called “protected”. Most recently its statements have been dishonestly conflating deferrals with “protection”. This year BC has made grand announcements of reform: a 3-way agreement with the federal government and First Nations to provide \$500 million to protect 30% of BC by 2030 (“Tripartite Agreement”); and a “Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework”. But on close inspection, by far most of the “actions” promised are carried out on paper or in meeting rooms, not on the ground. If protection continues to be stalled, by 2030 logging companies may be able to finish off the remaining accessible old-growth. The government should stop talking about protecting old-growth and actually protect some: the Incomappleux is not enough to dampen the ravages of climate change looming before us.

Some environmental groups have equated the promise to protect 30% by 2030 with doubling the park system, but that is far from true. Some First Nations support fully protected areas, and have collaborated with the province to protect some good ones. But many other First Nations do not support fully protected areas that are legislated, and so the Tripartite

agreement appears to be mostly based on conservation projects that would allow some development and possibly motorized recreation.

The designations that qualify under the Tripartite Agreement are “Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas” (IPCAs), and “Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures” (OECMs). IPCAs are not legislated, and according to the Indigenous Leadership Initiative, they will be managed however the sponsoring First Nation wants to manage them. The question immediately arises, wouldn't that make IPCAs exempt from Canadian and provincial laws such as the *Species at Risk Act* or the provincial Forest Acts? In view of this, it is a great concern that the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework has a provision that BC and First Nations will work together to amend existing BC environmental laws.

OECMs already include a project to identify biodiversity on the Canadian Forces Base at Shilo in Manitoba. Another example suggested would be native grasslands managed for beef production. Tree planting of already clearcut areas appears to qualify for some of the funding.

The crucial need for truly full protection is to prevent the destruction of our remaining intact, frontier and old-growth forests. Restoring clearcuts and inventorying biodiversity on a military base while allowing existing old-growth to be cut down across BC is a terribly misleading kind of “conservation”. Too much of this agreement seems to point to a buyout of logging companies running out of wood.

VWS has worked closely with some First Nations to protect new provincial parks and conservancies, but we are very disappointed with these agreements. Protected areas should be chosen, not to serve this or that segment of the population, but to serve what are the highest, most urgent needs of the environment by designating areas with the fullest protection possible. This, in turn, would provide protection to our province and nation from climate change.

For these reasons VWS will continue to promote the necessity of fully protected, legislated provincial parks. BC has a grand legacy of great provincial parks, they are just too few and too small for current needs. British Columbians should feel proud of the legacy they have already created, and continue building on a REAL protected area system that leaves no side doors for industrial/corporate exploitation.



Hollingsworth-USFS

FEDERAL DOUBLESPEAK: The BC-Canada-Indigenous agreement promises to work to protect the Spotted Owl. But Wilderness Committee just filed a legal petition seeking enforcement of protection of Spotted Owls under the *Species at Risk Act*. Environment Canada recommended it, but the federal Cabinet rejected it. The same thing happened to BC's rare Mountain Caribou.

SHOWCASING THE RAINBOW-JORDAN WILDERNESS PROPOSAL

A major effort was put forth this year to bring awareness to the Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness proposal north of Revelstoke. Countless VWS supporters have reached out over the years for directions into the Incomappleux ancient forest, but few have made the journey because of its remoteness. The Rainbow-Jordan proposal on the other hand, is a relatively accessible example of one of our most spectacular biodiversity hotspots of this rare ecosystem type.

In early summer, VWS and volunteers cleared a low-impact route through the largest valley in the proposal. It mostly followed an old wildlife trail and was designed to lead visitors to some of the province's most intact remaining rainforest within an hour of hiking. Four trail cameras were also installed in areas expected to have particularly high value to wildlife, and the visitor trail avoided these areas.

Another route was cleared into a smaller valley, to lead through increasingly spectacular old growth; it has been maintained by local people, including Sarah Newton, a school teacher in Revelstoke. Both of these paths have been utilized throughout the hiking season by local explorers and youth groups that have been eager to experience the ancient wilderness upon learning about the proposal.

The trail work also came in handy when director Craig Pettitt and biologists Toby Spribille and Amber Peters guided Damien Gillis and senior Narwhal reporter Sarah Cox into the ancient forest this summer. The three-day expedition involved carrying heavy video graphic equipment into the depths of two valleys, as far as the daytime expeditions would allow, to showcase the

cathedral of cedar trees, the pristine waterways and the towering rainforest understory. Tévan Wilson and Louis Bockner also captured film and photography while the science and conservation team shared their biodiversity findings.

Dr. Spribille shared a vast knowledge of lichens and ecosystem processes of the Inland Rainforest while Damien and film partner Tévan captured his expertise on film. Sarah interviewed him for a story that will soon be published in the award-winning Narwhal magazine, complete with stunning images by Louis Bockner.

Amber guided the group to giant cedar bear dens and sandy riverbeds where animal tracks led to fallen old growth trees used by wildlife to cross the water.

A particularly exciting aspect of the expedition was that the old growth was documented through a 360° camera. The unique imagery captured on the expedition will provide an immersive experience of the proposal. This will likely include a dome projection, similar to the Sanctuary experiences Damien co-created, which have screened at the Vancouver International Film Festival, UBC's Museum of Anthropology and other locations. Some VWS directors had the opportunity to view Damien's previous 360° film work and were deeply moved and excited about the impact they felt this type of media could have in bringing the rainforest to a larger audience in a visceral way.

Because of the great success of the film *Primeval* in raising awareness about the Incomappleux, we feel this year's work has the potential to do the same for the Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness and are eager to share the outcomes of the filming and reporting in the new year.



S. Fabien

An ancient cedar tree in the Rainbow-Jordan that was added to the big tree registry in 2022.



T. Wilson

Dr. Spribille's tree crown cover analysis of the Interior Wetbelt in 2017 alerted VWS of the ancient forests of the Rainbow-Jordan, an intact biodiversity hotspot not previously known to science.

FISH LAKE WESTERN TOAD HIGHWAY 31A MORTALITY MITIGATION PROJECT

BIG NEWS: BC government installs two cement highway culverts for safe toad/wildlife passage

For the past eight years VWS biologists and volunteer “Toad Ambassadors” have been researching and saving thousands of migrating Western Toads annually from being killed on Highway 31A at Fish Lake, in cooperation with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI).

The mitigation work involves biologists and volunteers going out at night several times a week during the spring migration of breeding adults, to count and move toads off the highway. Saving gravid adult females on their journey to breed is considered vital since each carries 12,000 or more eggs. Years ago VWS also designed and constructed a ½ km long toadlet migration fence that provides baby toads a safe passage under the busy highway and prevents thousands from being slaughtered.



Left: New box culverts being installed under Highway 31A that will help reduce traffic mortality to Western toads and many other species. Black bears will also be able to use them. Right: Worker installing sand for the floor of the cement culvert.

This year we saw many, many thousands more tadpoles and toadlets than we have ever observed, suggesting our mitigation is providing greater stability to this mountain toad population. This is only going to improve with the successful installation this fall by MOTI of two large cement box culverts to replace aging metal culverts to facilitate toads and many other wildlife species safe passage under the highway. Both new structures were installed at adult and juvenile toad mortality “hot spots” identified by our years of research.

VWS is very grateful to all of the volunteers, donors and Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure who continue to make this project such a rewarding conservation and restoration success story.

BOOTS ON THE GROUND

If readers notice something new about VWS campaigns over the last 3 or 4 years, it’s been a wealth of short and long videos contributed by a top-notch environmental filmmaker, Damien Gillis. The young biologist that’s been with VWS for six years now, Amber Peters, has collaborated with Gillis to use the films on Facebook, Youtube and the VWS website, to make a carefully focused plea for letters. And when the Society needed letters quickly on the grizzly bear issues, Amber created her first film ever on grizzlies that was very moving. The video sent 2,065 people to a VWS letter writing page for the Grizzly Bear Stewardship Framework. VWS also sponsored full-page articles in the Victoria Times Colonist and the local Valley Voice, by writer Anne Sherrod and director Richard Caniell.

Bringing together old-growth forest expert Professor Toby Spribille, journalist Sarah Cox and two excellent photographers, guided by Amber, in the Rainbow-Jordan park proposal was momentous. It meant focusing the best expertise we could ever imagine finding, on two



T. Wilson

Amber and Damien in the Rainbow Valley during filming of the Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness ancient forest this summer.

spectacular, intact Inland Rainforest valleys with ancient forest. It also meant further recording Dr. Spribille’s scientific expertise on the biodiversity of ancient Inland Temperate Rainforest. We’ve been told there are good things to come out of it in the not-too-distant future.

“GRIZZLY BEAR STEWARDSHIP FRAMEWORK” OPENS THE DOOR TO A RETURN OF GRIZZLY BEAR HUNTING

A sizeable part of VWS activities this year has been networking with other groups and conservationists to oppose a government program called “Together for Wildlife” and its “Grizzly Bear Stewardship Framework” — a planning document that would give hunting, industry and political interests increasing influence over BC wildlife management. Those members and supporters who are on the VWS email list are already well informed about this, but many are not.

Hunting organizations, such as the BC Wildlife Federation and the Guide Outfitters Association of BC, have lobbied to reopen grizzly bear hunting in BC since it was closed in 2017. Guide outfitters can make at least \$20,000 by guiding a hunter to kill a grizzly bear. The hunting ban has an exclusion to allow First Nations to hunt grizzlies, but only for food and ceremonial purposes. However, a few First Nations have been seeking to restore the hunt to earn guide-outfitting income.

Under “Together for Wildlife”, the government is already setting up a system of local, regional and territorial wildlife advisory committees across BC, for the purpose of creating their own, separate grizzly bear management plans. Currently management plans are enacted through recommendations by professional bear biologists hired by the BC government. VWS does not always agree with their decisions, but these professionals do provide some degree of centrality around the welfare of the bears, and the mandate of government ministries.

Under the Grizzly Bear Stewardship Framework, hunting, industrial and political interests would be on the committees. They stand to receive a personal or financial benefit from the management of grizzly bears. Yes, there will doubtlessly be environmental groups on these committees, but experience shows that they will be outvoted. Reopening grizzly bear trophy hunting will be on the table for these committees to decide. The Grizzly Bear Stewardship Framework contains NO conservation objectives whatsoever, despite the fact that grizzly bears are listed under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA).

How can citizens’ committees scattered all over the

province result in management consistent with the SARA or any of BC’s wildlife laws? The SARA required a single management plan for grizzlies to be posted on the SARA registry three years ago; the province says it has one, but it has never been publicly released or posted.

This situation was revealed when the government put the Grizzly Bear Stewardship Framework up for public comments. VWS joined forces with Pacific Wild and a small group of independent conservationists to alert the public to the danger facing the bears, and the opportunity to provide input to government. Together we organized an 11-point letter to government that was signed by 55 organizations and individual conservationists. VWS also sent out Action Alerts, Facebook posts and a full-page newspaper ad. Biologist Amber Peters helped Pacific Wild with public letter writing sessions, and created a short film for Facebook and our website.

There are a number of key reasons for opposing grizzly bear hunting. One is conservation: They are listed under the SARA as Special Concern. They have one of the lowest reproductive rates of all terrestrial mammals in North America. About half of cubs die during the first years, so replenishment of a population is very slow. Secondly, there are humanitarian reasons. Animals as big as grizzlies are shot with high-powered, semi-automatic weapons; they usually have to be shot more than once with bullets that explode inside them. They die in agony.

The joint letter with 55 signatories gained prominent coverage in media, including the Vancouver Sun, Globe & Mail, and video on CTV News. In reply, the BC government claimed that it had no intent to reopen grizzly bear hunting. Of course it didn’t! It intended for committees loaded with vested interests to make those decisions. The letter by 55 signatories called that “inconceivably irresponsible”, recognizing the “stacked deck” the government is assembling.

Readers can find the 11-point letter along with more information by following the links on the Valhalla Wilderness Society Home Page at www.vws.org.



Craig Pettitt

CARIBOU HABITAT OMITTED FROM INCOMAPPLEUX PROTECTION

VWS's Incomappleux proposal was only about 23% of our 156,461-hectare Selkirk Mountain Caribou park proposal. The total park proposal contained 37,792 hectares of old-growth forest. The Incomappleux portion contains 17,000 ha of that, along with another 6,000 ha of young and mature forest.

The Incomappleux lost its mountain caribou almost 20 years ago due to massive clearcutting in the lower valley. Unfortunately, the new Conservancy omitted the habitat that is used by caribou. In 2009, with advocacy from VWS, the majority of the caribou habitat was set aside from logging as Ungulate Winter Range (UWR). That designation is only partial protection, and can be removed if the caribou cannot be recovered — a real concern since they are almost gone. Some of the intact forest of value to caribou in our park proposal did not receive UWR. Over the last several years a sizeable chunk of that has been heavily logged under BC Timber Sales (BCTS).

After the Incomappleux was protected, the VWS mapping



Gary Diers

This area in Lake Creek is mountain caribou habitat within the Selkirk Park Proposal. Can you see the person's head peeking between the trees? Six mountain caribou have been using this drainage.

team spent much time revising the boundaries. So far BCTS logging covers probably less than 2% of the whole proposal. There is still much valuable old-growth, connectivity and biodiversity needing protection. BC's Conservation Data Base shows 184 species at risk are native to the area. Major known species-at-risk in the proposal include Grizzly Bears, Wolverines, Bull Trout and Western Toads. When it was first proposed, there were 90 caribou in the Central Selkirk herd. Last year only 25 were counted.

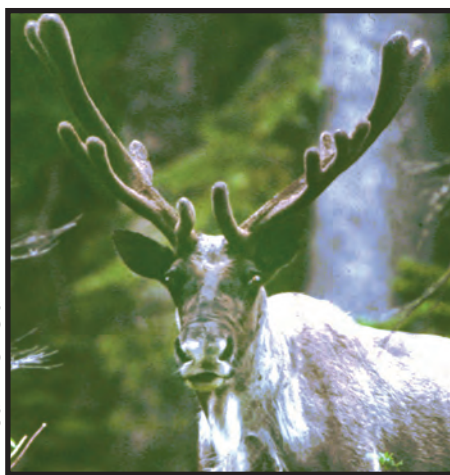
Films Put the Focus on Mountain Caribou Habitat

Last year's newsletter reported much work that was done by filmmaker Damien Gillis and VWS Director Craig Pettitt to capture on film the part of the Selkirk proposal that is caribou habitat. The result was *Walking Among Giants*, a 9-minute film shot in spectacular old-growth forest. After the Incomappleux was protected, Damien added a 3-minute film on the caribou herd for online advertising. To date these two films together have drawn nearly 4,000 people to our letter writing page at www.vws.org.

THOUSANDS OF HECTARES OF ACTIVE LOGGING IN CRITICAL HABITAT OF THE NORTH COLUMBIA MOUNTAIN CARIBOU

North of the Central Selkirk herd is the Columbia North herd. With 184 animals, it is the third biggest herd of endangered Deep-snow Mountain Caribou in existence. It represents one of BC's last, best chances to save this unique and irreplaceable type of caribou. Early this year VWS commissioned an analysis of government data on logging in the herd's range. It showed that currently there are 1,917 hectares of active logging in federally-designated critical habitat for the Columbia North herd. "Active logging" refers to approved cutblocks throughout operations, from logging to replanting.

Out of the 1,917 hectares, 1,764 ha. are (or were) old-growth forest 140 years or older. Four companies account for three-fourths of the logging of old-growth critical habitat. These are Canoe Forest Products Ltd., Downie Timber Ltd.,



R. Summerfield

Louisiana-Pacific Canada, and Revelstoke Community Forest Corporation.

121.7 ha. of the active cutblocks are in provincial Ungulate Winter Range (UWR). This UWR is legally designated "no logging", but loopholes allow companies to log and build roads inside them if they find it profitable to do so.

This was the reality underneath the government's repeated promises to save more old-growth forest in May of this year. It shows the fatal trap in which penned caribou are caught. Every year for five years the government captured caribou cows from this herd and penned them to have their calves and keep them safe from wolves; but when they are released from the pens each year, they have less habitat than before and they are more vulnerable to predators than ever.

CONSUMPTIVE MENTALITY DOMINATES BC'S WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

VWS is not against hunting game species for meat. However, the Society opposes the hunting of species at risk and predators, including grizzly and black bears, wolves and cougars. Given the critical ecological functions of predators in keeping nature in balance, killing predators can do great harm to ecosystems.

Recently hunters have been shaken by a drastic loss of their favourite game species, moose, in a large swathe of the province. Government scientists put out bulletins showing that these moose declines coincided with massive clearcuts. Another favourite game species, elk, is in decline, in some cases also due to excessive logging.

As a result large hunting organizations are starting to demand habitat protection, but they are also seeking to prop up diminishing populations of game species by killing predators. Black bears, wolves, cougars, and a whole list of *smaller predators are already hunted and/or trapped in BC*, and on wolves there is no bag limit. What the large hunting organizations are seeking is *state-sponsored mass killing*. VWS knows hunters who do not approve of this. But the campaign in BC includes such powerful and wealthy groups as the Safari Club International (SCI), a club for wealthy hunters who hunt big game species in Africa and other countries.

Studies have shown that large carnivores are not only biodiversity in themselves, but they also foster healthy populations of small wildlife and plants, and stabilize whole ecosystems. Not surprisingly, logging and mining industries are allies to predator killing advocates because they want predators to be killed for caribou rather than have to save old-growth forest. The government has engaged in massive slaughter of wolves for this very reason. Cougars are also being tracked down by dogs and killed.

Now scientific reports that grizzly bears sometimes eat the calves of caribou or other ungulates have been seized upon by

hunting groups to advocate the killing of grizzly bears to protect mountain caribou (and other ungulates). The pernicious effectiveness of this ploy is illustrated in a recent New York Times report that **in 17 days government agents in Alaska slaughtered 94 grizzly bears, 5 black bears and 5 wolves from helicopters — to save caribou.** First Nations cannot be stereotyped on this issue. For instance, some of them are very

against killing grizzly bears and in some cases wolves, while others have been and are continuing to be major forces for restoring the grizzly bear hunt and killing other predators. For instance, the Tahltan Central Government, has already signed an agreement with the BC government in 2022, to hunt grizzly bears under the claim of needing to protect caribou. This was apparently part of a deal with a mining company, Skeena Resources Ltd., to allow a gold-silver mine in Tahltan territory. Sadly, this shows the BC government's readiness to trade off grizzly bears and other wildlife to aid environmentally destructive industries. The Tahltan have put up a bounty to induce its members to

kill grizzlies. The public has no access to information regarding how many bears, including females, have been killed.

Despite boasting about high-tech science, a detrimental frontier mentality is still alive and dominant in BC, even in government wildlife management ministries: treating wildlife — and forests — as if they are endless; and when it becomes apparent that they are not, refusing to cut back on consumption even when the resource is almost gone (like most of our old-growth forests). The frontier mentality sees some species as worth protecting, because they profit humans directly, and other species as dispensable — to be destroyed as needed. BC urgently requires a transition from managing wildlife for human short-term profit, to managing it for the survival of species.



Wild Horses of the Chilcotin now available

The long-awaited book by VWS director Wayne McCrory, RPBio, is now available. Based on 20 years of research partially funded by VWS, the book chronicles the origin of the horses and their centuries old link to packs of wolves; as well as the efforts of ranchers and government to kill them both, and of the local First Nation to save the horses. The book is now #2 on the BC best seller list. For more information contact mccrory-wildlife@netidea.com.

GET WILDLIFE POISONS OUT OF CANADA

Did you know that in 2021 the Pest Management Regulatory Agency of Health Canada announced they would continue to authorize the use of predacides, the poisons used to kill wolves and other wildlife species? Hundreds of non-target species like birds, mammals and even pets are also being killed in an extremely cruel way because of the outdated policies that allow Strychnine and Compound 1080 to plague our ecosystems in Canada. A final decision will be announced in February of 2024. Make your voice heard! Visit www.wehowl.ca/how-can-i-help

PLEASE HELP TO EXPAND OUR BC PARKS LEGACY AND PRESERVE OUR LAST OLD GROWTH FORESTS

In 2023 British Columbians and all Canadians watched in dismay and fear as massive amounts of their forest burned down and homes were destroyed in fires that were unstoppable until the weather changed. Why aren't our governments doing more to protect us from climate change?

Scientists urge that protecting our remaining old-growth forests is crucial to combatting climate change. Both provincial and federal governments are apparently waiting for private parties to put up money to help buy out logging corporations; and requiring lengthy negotiations with numerous First Nations. While they all bargain, the forests we need for protection are being cut down.

We have to repeatedly ask ourselves why our forests and unique animal populations, as well as our hope of enlarged protection from climate change, have to be endangered and most often lost or destroyed to feed the coffers of the multi-million dollar salaries of corporate executives. Many logging, mining and oil & gas companies have long collected huge benefits for the past 50 years, making sure they contribute large sums to the political campaigns of officials who support them. During that time these same corporations have spread disinformation and doubt about climate change, and our governments have complied with their demands by unconscionable foot-dragging to protect forest.

In almost 50 years of campaigning BC, we have to recognize that the fate of our remaining wilderness and old growth forests *rests in the hands of those willing to push for change*. A decades-long commitment of thousands of people brought the Incomapleux Conservancy to fruition, but the province-wide scale of change required to truly turn the tide of BC's biodiversity and climate crisis will require persistent, intense, detailed resistance to the obstacles presented by our government.



Old growth forests are complex systems of regeneration where both living and dead structures support flourishing biodiversity.

Valhalla Wilderness Society is one of few groups willing to push for major landscape protection through Class A parks, the designation that offers the highest level of ecosystem protection in BC. For some of our campaigns, this has meant decades of work to see that a precious wilderness was protected. But we have shown that it works. Our one organization, over nearly 50 years, has achieved protection of 453,382 hectares of large, forested wilderness areas. Leaving a legacy of parks for future generations is our greatest hope for a healthy future. Please help by speaking up for fully protected areas in British Columbia in legislated Parks!

LETTERS URGENTLY NEEDED!

It is important to keep old growth and new parks protection at the forefront of conversation in BC. Please inform the ministers of your support for full protection of BC's remaining old growth forests, and 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.

2. Supporting VWS's three park proposals would help fill the gap in protection of the rare Inland Temperate Rainforest, with the remaining unprotected portion of the Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal, as well as the Quesnel Lake Wilderness and Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness proposals.

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.



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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