

# Valhalla Wilderness Society

P.O. Box 329, New Denver, British Columbia, V0G 1S0  
Phone: 250-358-2333; Fax: 358-2748; vws@vws.org; www.vws.org

Newsletter No. 67

December 2024

## RAINBOW-JORDAN FILM PREMIERS AT VANCOUVER FESTIVAL

Dear Members and Supporters,

Following the protection of the Incomappleux as a conservancy in 2023, in large part thanks to the success of Damien Gillis and Valhalla Wilderness Society's 2016 film *Primeval: Enter the Incomappleux*, directors and staff guided Damien deep into another area VWS has been working hard to protect since 2017, the Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness, to document what British Columbia still has, and stands to lose, of its rare Inland Temperate Rainforest.

The resulting documentary was chosen as a Saturday night environmental feature at the Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival and was presented to an audience of close to 300 this November at the Rio Theatre, followed by a Q&A panel that included Damien and VWS biologist and campaigner Amber Peters.

Amber and Damien worked tirelessly to fill the seats of the Rio in the weeks leading up to the screening, inviting local organizations, university professors, student and alumni clubs and other local people. Amber plastered downtown Vancouver with posters and spoke with local film professors and students, researchers and science and art faculties at the universities.

The film was attended by some long-time supporters as well as many people who learned for the first time about the history of Valhalla Wilderness Society and its involvement in the protection of the Incomappleux and several major BC parks.

Many guests were surprised to learn about how many campaigns VWS has spearheaded, and that so much of the success achieved by the Society and its supporters was made possible through letter-writing campaigns.

Safe Haven was well received by the audience. Several guests said that they were unaware that the interior of BC had big, old cedar trees and temperate rainforest. Others stated that they were blown away by the beauty of the Rainbow-Jordan and the passion and persistence of the people working to protect it.

Following the screening, a Q&A panel discussion was led by long-time Wilderness Committee Campaign-

Director Joe Foy. Amber stated that in the mid-seventies to early eighties campaign, letters in support of Valhalla Provincial Park had filled a whole filing cabinet at the BC legislature.

She encouraged listeners to recognize that the designation of new cabinet ministers this November was a perfect opportunity to highlight the Rainbow-Jordan as a priority through a flood of letters in support of its protection.

Attendees were asked if they would write a letter, and the majority of the crowd pledged their support for the cause. Most of the guests stayed after the show to ask questions about the campaign and the work of the Society, including over 70 festival-goers who shared their contact information to stay in touch.

VWS has since been invited to present the film at other venues in the lower mainland, Okanagan, Kootenays and a film festival in Colorado. The trailer can be viewed and our supporters can sign up to be on our email list to hear about more

screenings as they are scheduled through our website, at: [www.vws.org/action](http://www.vws.org/action).

VWS is eager to share the proposal with a greater audience to inspire a wave of support needed to achieve protection of the Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness and VWS's two other Inland Temperate Rainforest park proposals. We are asking our supporters to please contact us if opportunities arise to host the film in their town, and to refer to the



Jack Goodison

Filmmaker Damien Gillis and VWS biologist and campaigner Amber Peters presented VWS's new film *Safe Haven* at the Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival this November.



Jack Goodison

Film festival attendees stayed after the show to learn more about the work of VWS and how they can help protect three proposals for new parks in the Interior Wetbelt.

final page of this newsletter for letter-writing materials.

## A CREATIVE FOCUS ON THE INLAND RAINFOREST CAMPAIGN

The completion of a new film and two proposal briefing documents were achieved this year in support of the Valhalla Wilderness Society's Inland Temperate Rainforest (ITR) parks campaign. Following these developments, collaborations of multimedia artists and biologists set out on expeditions to bring greater provincial awareness to the forest of the Rainbow-Jordan proposal and the ITR ecosystem. These initiatives all lay the groundwork for our next phase of campaigning for three new major parks in the richest forests of B.C.'s Interior Wetbelt.

### Filming in the Rainbow-Jordan completed in 2024

Completing the new 30 minute documentary film Safe Haven was an exciting development for the Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness park proposal campaign this year. Filmmaker Damien Gillis took part in two expeditions into the rainforest starting in July of 2023 to interview director Craig Pettitt, VWS biologist Amber Peters, and University of Alberta Inland Rainforest expert Dr. Toby Spribille about what they have come to learn in the intact wilderness since VWS began studying it in 2017.

The film is an expression of VWS's 25+ year study of BC's rare Inland Temperate Rainforest, and its decades of advocacy. It takes viewers on a journey through the ancient rainforest near Revelstoke, BC where VWS-commissioned surveys first identified significantly high levels of biodiversity with help of lichenologist Dr. Toby Spribille, botanist Curtis Bjork and mycologist Tyson Ehlers in 2018. The Rainbow-Jordan has since become a 10,493-hectare park proposal of rich wetlands and giant cedar trees that have miraculously remained untouched in a sea of surrounding clearcuts.

The film offers a glimpse into the Frisby and Rainbow valleys through the lens of the biologists, and founding VWS director Craig Pettitt, who have come to know the forest of the Rainbow-Jordan intimately in the eight years that VWS has been studying it. The proposal's rich species diversity is highlighted through their magnifying glasses and trail cameras, and with photographs generously provided by Curtis Bjork and photographer Douglas Noblet. They have documented the biodiversity from the smallest lichens to the largest wildlife that inhabit the two rainforest valleys, each of which has a unique microclimate, species composition and understory.

The film sheds light on the countless organisms and ecosys-



A. Peters

Director Craig Pettitt with an ancient cedar tree in Frisby Valley. This tree is estimated at over 1,500 years old and is one of three cedar trees in the Valley added to the B.C. Big Tree Registry in 2022. Many giants of this size and larger exist deeper in the valley.



A. Peters

Damien Gillis interviews temperate rainforest expert Dr. Toby Spribille in the ancient forest of Frisby Valley - where he estimated 250-300 species of lichens following surveys in 2018.

tem services that persist under the rainforest canopy - both increasingly important in a time of unprecedented change. The release of fresh water and flood mitigation, the wet and wide-open forests' capacity for fire suppression, the harbouring of pollinators and the production of wild food and medicine are some of the benefits of preserving the forest that are celebrated in the film.

Achieving the film expeditions was a huge accomplishment that required the collaboration of each committed crew member with unique skillsets and strengths. Toby travelled from the University of Alberta and took time away from his responsibility to advise several graduate students. Craig ensured that the crew and all of their heavy gear made it safely across the reservoir and into each of the valleys by boat, requiring invaluable mechanical skills. Years of trail routing and maintenance by VWS and volunteers allowed for continuous footage to be captured amongst the old growth, but Damien still had to carry 70 lb of camera gear in his pack to do so. Amber also completed a 90-hour Wilderness First

Responder course and developed safety protocols, emergency response and preliminary medical planning.

The care that went into the successful mission allowed each crew member to relax into the experience and truly enjoy their time sharing their love of the rainforest with the camera.

## A CREATIVE FOCUS ON THE INLAND RAINFOREST CAMPAIGN

Everyone involved in the creation of Safe Haven is very excited by the opportunity for a much larger community to experience the park proposal, which has been the focus of extensive research, trail work, media and film expeditions, public presentations and other forms of advocacy since the wilderness became known to science through the first VWS expedition. The film will eventually be released online after a tour of film festivals and other events.

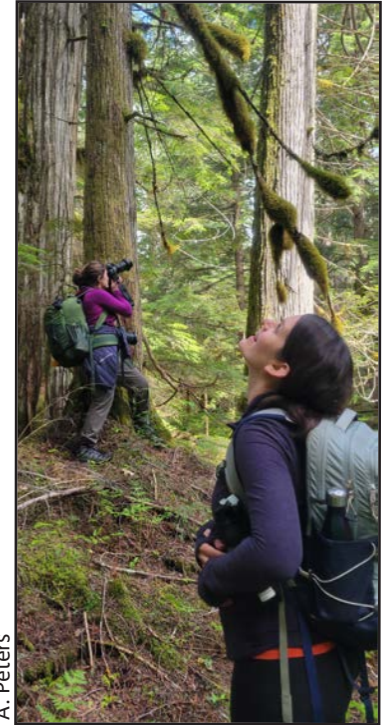
### Inland rainforest proposals upgraded for submission to governments

VWS's three inland rainforest park proposals were updated this year to account for the protection of the Incomappleux portion of our Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park proposal and for new findings made in the Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness since the first proposal was submitted to government in 2019. Read on for the changes made to the Selkirk proposal, now called the Selkirk Mountains Ancient Forest Park proposal. The Rainbow-Jordan document includes stunning new photography from eight years of exploration, new biodiver-

sity findings and a list of at-risk species. These two stellar ITR proposals and the large Quesnel Lake park proposal were submitted to the Parks Canada new parks establishment program and will be submitted to the new BC government cabinet in the New Year. They align well with the federal and provincial mandate to protect 30% of the land base by 2030.

### Conservation International Irrecoverable Carbon Ecosystems Project Expedition

This May, VWS guided Conservation International climate scientist Allie Goldstein from the Centre of Natural Climate Solutions, and renowned photographer Ami Vitale into the Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness to document a forest critical to carbon sequestration and storage in the interior wetbelt. Their photo-documentation and experience in the rainforest will be used to inform and develop an international exhibit highlighting irrecoverable carbon ecosystems across the globe, and the people working to protect them.



A. Peters

Scientist Allie Goldstein and photographer Ami Vitale in the ancient forest of the Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness.

---

## Biologists lead multimedia artists on exploratory Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness expedition

An expedition of multimedia artists took place this year after over a year of planning for their exploration into the Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness.

The project was initiated in 2023 by biologist Iraleigh Anderson, who envisioned a campaign effort involving a presentation of artistic findings to be synonymous with VWS's ecological findings in the rainforest.

This September, following a presentation on the values of the Rainbow-Jordan proposal by biologist Amber Peters, director

Craig Pettitt transported the group of two biologists and six artists across the Revelstoke reservoir and into Frisby and Rainbow valleys for the three-day and two-night expedition. Iraleigh and Amber shared their knowledge of the Inland Rain-

forest and how biologists study ecosystems. The artists had the opportunity to take part in inventory methods including

vegetation plots, use of hand-lenses for species identification, increment bores for the study of tree rings and use of an ultrasonic bat detector for acoustic surveys of the cryptic species. They also visited prominent habitat features including bear rub trees and cedar tree dens.

The group applied what they learned about data collection to their artistic discovery, and collected audio recordings of forest

sounds, stop-motion photography, drawings and creative writing articles. They are currently in the process of planning for an exhibition in support of the park proposal which could be featured in museums in B.C. as early as 2025.



A. Peters

Artists on an expedition into the Rainbow-Jordan stop for lunch amongst the ancient cedar trees of Frisby Valley this September.

# HONOURING OUR B.C. PARKS LEGACY

**B.C. Class A parks are in far better shape than some of Canada's national parks. It is no accident. The people who drafted BC's legislation first studied what had gone wrong with other park laws, including Canada's *National Park Act*. BC's legislation was deliberately written to avoid the over-development for which Canada's national parks are notorious. Scientists say that *full protection* of our remaining wildlands is urgently needed. Preserving them free from exploitative human uses is needed to balance the massive destruction of nature outside of parks. Yet today our provincial and federal governments are fostering new protection initiatives that do not have full protection, nor strong legislation.**

From the beginning, the national park system granted leases in land to private businesses for tourism development. A horde of vested interests built city-like development and artificial entertainment. They maintained pressure for expansion and gained legal rights to get it. They carried on marketing campaigns that brought huge crowds. The loss of wildlife and natural values was tragic. The *National Park Act* was amended several times between 1979 and 2001 to strengthen protection for biodiversity, but the amendments were ineffective.

## What's so good about the B.C. Park Act?

The BC Act was more explicit and enforceable: Class A parks "are dedicated to the *preservation* of their natural environments for the inspiration, use and enjoyment of the public...No natural resource except fish and wildlife ... shall be granted, sold, removed, destroyed, damaged, disturbed or exploited except as authorized by a valid and subsisting park use permit, which shall not be issued unless, in the opinion of the minister, issuance is necessary to the preservation or maintenance of the recreational values of the park involved."

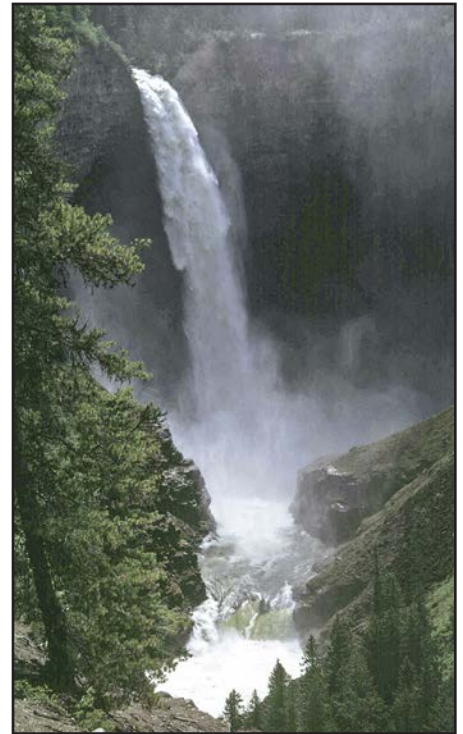
Recreation can be compatible or damaging, depending on the kind and amount. This was considered in a public process called the Park Legacy Project. The review panel declared, by overwhelming public demand, that preservation is the paramount goal. Unfortunately, after this outcome, entrepreneurial driven amendments to the BC Act occurred. For instance, park lodges are now allowed, despite the fact that they lead to displacement or death of grizzly bears.

## New protective designations

The desire and legal imperative for a fair society has led our provincial and federal governments to create new land designations favoured by some First Nations. For this reason VWS has welcomed and celebrated "conservancies" that resulted from our Spirit Bear and Incomappleux campaigns, to be co-managed by First Nations under the authority of the BC *Park Act*. Conservancies do not call for "preservation" but for "conservation", which means to use resources sparingly. They mix four different goals under the *Park Act*: protection of biodiversity, Indigenous cultural uses, resource use, and potential development if it is "sustainable" and "protects biodiversity." They do not allow commercial logging and mining, but they do allow road building, which can be very bad for large wildlife.

Another new designation is Indigenous Protected

and Conserved Areas (IPCA). They have no protective legislation, and can include mining and logging. Some First Nations have logging tenures in IPCAs. The name of these designations is misleading and they should not be considered "protected" areas.



Helmcken Falls in Wells Gray Provincial Park

## Concerns about the Incomappleux Conservancy

Given potential conflicts between the four goals of conservancies, they each need a management plan reviewed by the public. Nearly two years have gone by since announcement of the Incomappleux Conservancy. BC Parks has been negotiating with a group of First Nations all this time, but to date there is no management plan, nor has there been any engagement of the general public. The negotiations are confidential and VWS has no idea what the issues are. BC Parks has stated that an area could be a Conservancy and, at the same time, an IPCA, but there are major disparities in the rules governing these areas.

## BC Parks are for all British Columbians

Respecting First Nations with new conservation areas should not diminish the status and importance of B.C. Class A parks. They are a legacy created by generations of BC citizens, in some cases approved or initiated by a First Nation, such as the Stein Class A Tribal Park. The public is being given the impression that fully protected areas are unfair. But BC parks have their own claim to fairness: the centrality of preservation of nature means that all uses by anyone are judged equally by their effect on the natural values.

Conservancies should not mean the end of BC Class A parks. The idea of interspersing nature protection with economic development can lead to fragmentation of habitat in many ways. If Class A parks were to be abandoned today, the extremity of our destruction of nature would still cry out for fully protected areas. British Columbians can be proud of our legacy of fully protected parks, and it should continue to grow.

# SELKIRK MOUNTAINS ANCIENT FOREST PARK PROPOSAL

When the government protected the Incomappleux part of VWS's Selkirk park proposal, it lopped off the area used by endangered mountain caribou that has 14,148 hectares of old-growth Inland Temperate Rainforest with huge trees, and 35,972 ha. of old-growth spruce-balsam. It omitted the rivers and mountain passes that provide crucial connectivity for the area's grizzly bears, mountain caribou, wolverines and many other species. Last year, the government's Old-growth Panel recommended logging deferrals for 13,207 hectares of at-risk old-growth within the unprotected part of the proposal. This is why the still-unprotected old growth corridors were repackaged this year in a new, 102,000-hectare proposal called the Selkirk Mountains Ancient Forest Park Proposal.



Gary Diers

The protection of the Incomappleux Conservancy was immensely welcome, but VWS laments the fact that many non-forested and clearcut areas were included in the protection, while the adjacent, high value rainforest habitats for mountain caribou and other countless species were omitted. The rich, low-elevation rainforest valleys of the Westfall and Duncan Rivers must be protected to preserve the very few remaining large, intact examples of BC's southernmost inland temperate rainforest.

VWS further investigated the unprotected parts of the proposal with new mapping, research and field work and created a new briefing document for submission to the provincial and federal governments. The brief puts new focus on Kootenay Lake fish stocks, ancient cedar-hemlock forests and rare karst ecosystems, which are known for attracting visitors from around the world.

## Checking proposal boundaries on the ground

by Wayne McCrory, RPBio and Craig Pettitt, forest technician

It is a brisk October 10th day and the last of several 2024 VWS field surveys of the Selkirk Mountains Ancient Forest Park proposal. Field trips began last May when we visited the Duncan River portion and found several sets of mountain caribou tracks in our proposal in the valley bottom above the Duncan Reservoir. Today, we are on Howser Ridge in the Badshot Range of the park proposal to check out mountain caribou habitat, with a hope to see some. Snow dusts the peaks and the scent of subalpine fir lingers in the chill air. The huckleberry bushes are laden with ripe berries and all along we encounter grizzly bear scats.

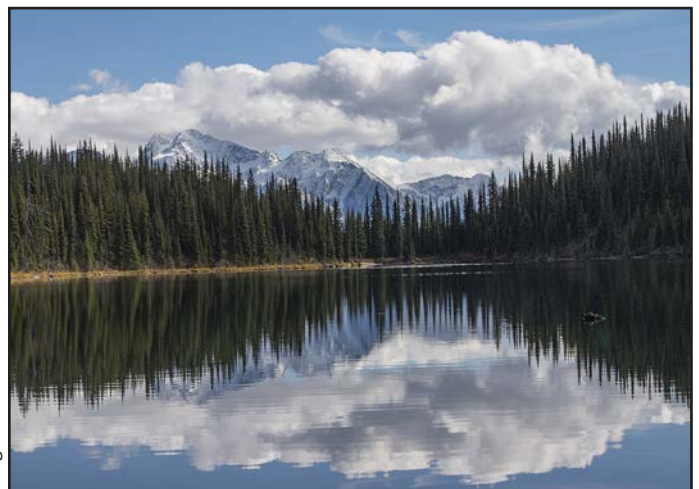
Craig points down to Lake Creek and tells us the government caribou census documented six animals there last winter. The herd has 25 animals, down from the 95 counted in 2005. Our proposal has a large corridor that connects the Badshot Mountains, across the Lardeau River to Goat Range Park. Caribou have been observed crossing there.

To the north and west is the limestone karst mountain range called the Badshots. The massive, unusual mountain formations are too stunning for words. This is also where, some years ago we watched a grizzly bear digging, likely for ground squirrels or the corms of avalanche lilies.

Our proposal boundary takes in surviving large enclaves of ancient forests up the Westfall, Geigrich Creek and East Creek. At the end of the track is clear, blue Morgan Lake, snuggled in a large area of mature subalpine fir and spruce that stretches along the plateau to the Badshots. Plentiful black Bryoria hair lichen, a major winter food for mountain caribou, festoons the trees.

From my previous mountain caribou surveys in Glacier National Park just to the north, this large rolling subalpine ridge with sedges and other caribou summer foods and the lichen-laden forests is ideal habitat for the caribou. This park proposal received significant no-logging Ungulate Winter Range in 2009, and some experts believe the main reason for caribou decline was snowmobiles and heli-skiing. If the caribou disappear, the area could be logged.

To me our park proposal equals any of the many provincial and few national parks I have done wildlife research in, for both ecological and scenic values – world class! Although we saw no sign of mountain caribou, it was good to know there are small nucleus herds still surviving that will have a much greater chance of recovering if the park proposal is protected.



Craig Pettitt

Morgan Lake- The high elevation forest loaded with hair lichens is excellent winter range for mountain caribou.

# FIRE RETURNS TO VALHALLA PROVINCIAL PARK

In 1983 the 55,000-hectare Valhalla Provincial Park was the first achievement of this Society. A large percent of the front face burned this year, although there are patches of green trees. It is painful to residents to lose the beautifully forested mountains that graced our communities and our lives. The park was extremely popular with hikers, and its shoreline was a delight to boaters, all of which generated a thriving tourist trade for our communities that will likely decline dramatically.

After a prolonged drought, a major lightning storm triggered numerous wildfires in the Slokan Valley. Many residents were ordered to evacuate, and several houses were lost. At the same time, a wildfire burned down much of the town in Jasper National Park. *BC's Minister of Forests acknowledged that these recent wildfire emergencies have been worsened by climate change.*

VWS readers know that climate change is caused primarily by the burning of fossil fuels, which emits carbon dioxide into the air. But logging is also a major contributor to climate change. In 2023 a team of scientists estimated that global wood harvests will add 3.5 to 4.2 *billion* metric tons of climate-warming gases to the atmosphere annually over the coming decades.

## A vicious cycle of logging, fires and climate change

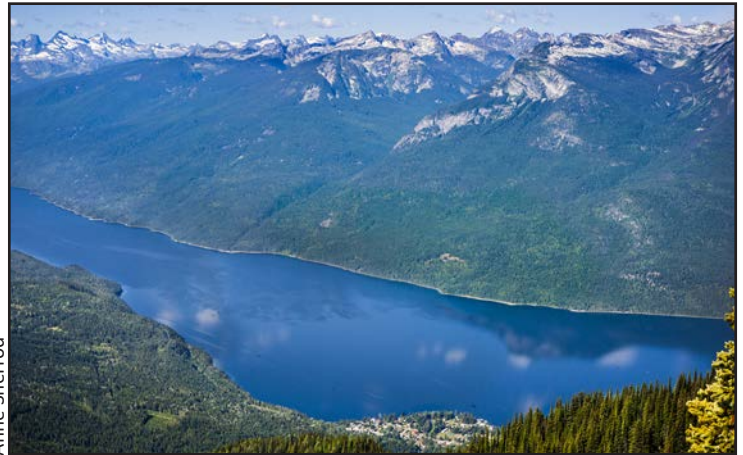
Climate change causes drought, which causes more and larger wildfires. In a vicious cycle, the smoke from the fires emits more carbon and increases climate change. In some cases drought results in fires of monster proportions. These fires can also create dry thunderstorms that generate new lightning-caused fires in a wide area. These fire-generated thunderstorms are occurring in many places where they have never occurred before. Some research suggests that increased fires can cause drought directly. But monster fires are small when they start, and this is an urgent reason why the province should put a higher priority on initial attacking wildland fires when they could potentially explode out of control. This would require much greater investment in fire-fighting resources..

## Old forests remove the most carbon from the air

In 2020 a letter sent to the U.S. Congress by 200 climate and forest scientists stated that "logging in U.S. forests emits 10 times more carbon than fire and native insects combined". According to prominent BC forester Dr. Jim Pojar, "Old-growth forests steadily accumulate carbon for centuries. ...Logging old-growth forests and converting them to managed forests can reduce total carbon storage by 40-50% or more, even when off-site storage of carbon in wood products in buildings is factored in". ("Forestry & Carbon in BC", 2019).

The US Geographical Survey has reported that large, old trees absorb far more carbon than smaller trees. The authors concluded that "The results highlight the disproportionately important role of large trees in determining rates of carbon exchange between forests and the atmosphere."

VWS's current park proposals have Inland Temperate Rain-forest with trees ranging up to 1,800 years old. Their old-growth has among the highest forest carbon storage in



Anne Sherrrod

**Valhalla Provincial Park covers the front face of most of the Valhalla Range. This magnificent view, a key to the valley's tourist trade, was made possible by many years of fire-fighting in the park until the agency adopted a let-burn policy. Had the fires been fought early enough, they might have been stopped before they covered such an extensive area.**

Canada as well as very high biodiversity.

## Logging intensifies wildfires

There is widespread scientific opinion that clearcuts and tree plantations are at high risk of fire and burn more intensely. The canopies of older forests shade and cool the ground, retaining moisture. Claims that more logging will reduce wildfires are untrue. The letter from 200 climate and forest scientists, 13 May 2020, states:

"recent evidence shows intensive forest management characterized by young trees and homogenized fuels burn at higher intensity...Reduced forest protections and increased logging tends to make wildland fires burn more intensely. This can also occur with commercial thinning, where mature trees are removed."

Research by the US Forest Service found that old-growth forests tend to burn less severely than young forests. Low-to moderate-intensity fires leave the organic layer of the soil and the subterranean roots of trees and shrubs intact. Plants regenerate quickly and will have higher vitamin, mineral, carbohydrate and protein content to feed wild animals.

## Avoiding massive forest loss due to wildfires

Up until the mid 1990s, the BC Forest Service fought all fires in Valhalla Park. This began changing in recognition of the ecological benefits of fire, which caused the province to start letting fires in parks burn. This went against the Vegetation Management Plan of BC Parks, which stipulated that all fires should be fought unless a park has a Fire Management Plan. VWS has been interacting with BC Parks about the let-burn policy since 2001. Today it is past due for BC Parks to review its let-burn policy, with a goal of reducing carbon emissions and threats to communities near provincial parks, as well as the health impacts on nearby residents of prolonged, heavy smoke. The weather conditions that blow up fires into massive conflagrations are well known. They should require immediate initial attacks.

# BRITISH COLUMBIA'S FRAUDULENT FOREST

BC's fraudulent forest is the one that's always been logged "sustainably". You know — the one where 500-year-old trees cut down are miraculously replenished by "vigorous new trees". Only ... that forest doesn't exist except in the jargon of BC's forest managers, the lies of the forest industry, and the perfumed rhetoric of politicians. Now, the real BC forest is running out of profitable wood. It is covered with a vast patchwork of clearcuts. Most forest types have less than 10% of their old-growth left; some have only 1%. In many places the young forest on old clearcuts is still too young to log. At least 15 mills in BC have closed. Forest industry jobs have dropped by half over the last 20 years, Last year alone, 3,750 jobs forestry jobs were lost.



The condition of BC's REAL forest is appalling. Vast forests that are now desperately needed to moderate climate change have been massively reduced. The southernmost herds of mountain caribou have been wiped out. In some areas, the clearcutting is so massive that even moose are starving to death. Some of BC's last primary forests, including old growth, are being clearcut, ground into pellets and burned for fuel, contributing massive losses to biodiversity:

---

**"After decades of intense logging, the province's forests are depleted and fragmented and the forest industry is hard-pressed to find enough trees to cut down. In the midst of this, demand for wood from BC has soared from an unusual quarter: thermal energy producers that burn millions of tonnes of wood pellets annually to generate electricity. This demand is fueling the loss of the province's forests...and if allowed to continue will further deplete them."**

— Ben Parfitt, "Log It and Burn It", 2024

---

Drax Power Station in the UK, the largest power plant in the world, controls most of BC's pellet production. BC has 13 pellet plants, and 8 of them belong to Drax. Nearly 6 million tonnes of pellets from imported trees were burned by Drax alone in 2023.

Biofuel is being misrepresented as "green energy", even by the BC government, despite widespread refutation by scientists. In reality, Drax is by far the worst emitter of greenhouse gases out of all power plants and industry giants in the UK, almost four times worse than Esso Refinery. Originally biofuel burning plants used wood waste from logging. Drax is claiming this in BC, but thousands of whole logs have been photographed outside Drax pellet-making facilities and the amount of logging is not disclosed.

## Yearly logging allowance is not logged

Allowable Annual Cuts (AACs) have been declining since 2018, but logging companies had already been leaving part

of their AAC unlogged because it was either too far away from a mill, or on steep slopes that required expensive road building. According to articles by forest analyst Ben Parfitt in *The Tyee*, some companies have been cutting less than 60% of their AAC *for those reasons*.

In the West Kootenays the Chief Forester reduced the 2024 AAC of Interfor's TFL 23 by 7%; but Interfor had been leaving an average of 19% of its AAC unlogged for 12 years. The Chief Forester's *Rationale* scolded Interfor for not logging enough on steep slopes using alternative methods such as helicopter logging. Therefore the new AAC stipulates that only 80% of the cut can be on slopes less than a 50% grade; twenty percent must come from steeper slopes.

Logging on steeper slopes will cause more damage to streams and riparian areas, including erosion, landslides, stream channel instability, and destruction of fish habitat. The Chief Forester's *Rationale* acknowledges that some slopes in the new AAC are rated "Unstable", and that riparian areas are at high risk of damage, but advises Interfor to "mitigate" the damage. The government is setting the AAC too high and forcing companies onto steep, unstable slopes to get the wood.

Logging interests are blaming their job losses and mill closures on unfair AAC reductions while in fact *they haven't logged all they've been given*. They say it's because the government was too slow in signing logging permits. Now, under pressure to keep up the logging, some politicians are conceding that permits to log could be speeded up. **This would hasten the logging of what little profitable forest is left, while the government drags its feet on promises to protect 30% of BC. This, while thousands of BC citizens are run out of their homes every year by wildfires intensified by climate change.**

In 2024 articles by VWS on forests, fire and logging were published in the *Times Colonist*, *Georgia Straight*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Penticton Herald*, *Nelson Daily News* and other news outlets. This included two full-page submitted articles as well as reports by journalist Timothy Schafer.

## NEW MINISTRY TOAD CULVERT AT FISH LAKE SAVES THOUSANDS OF TOADLETS FROM MASS TRAFFIC MORTALITY

The close cooperation over the past ten years between VWS biologists and the Ministry of Transportation of Infrastructure (MOTI) involving the mitigation of Highway 31A Western toad mortality at Fish Lake had a big pay-off this July when a perfect storm of circumstances lined things up for a potential mass highway mortality during this year's toadlet summer migration event. After they metamorphose from tadpoles into toadlets, they normally stage during hot weather at the three beach areas at Fish Lake to await the rain that triggers their migratory journey to the high country on the north side of the highway.

This year, for the first time since we began documenting their population in 2014, the estimated several hundred thousand toadlets that hatched at Fish Lake staged at the middle beach area instead of at the Rest Stop where VWS already had built a 500 m migration fence and bridging that gives them safe passage under the highway. On top of this, wildfires had closed the main Highway 6, which greatly increased the summer Highway 31A traffic levels past Fish Lake. MOTI was also planning to repave the highway at Fish Lake sometime soon. While a

brand new large box culvert had been built by MOTI at this site last year to help reduce toad and other small critter highway mortalities here, VWS still did not have the required permit to build the directional fence and bridging to direct migrating toadlets to cross through the new box culvert.



Toadlets were redirected under Highway 31A with infrastructure built to avoid a close-call high mortality situation amidst Slokan Valley wildfire evacuations.

Fortunately, an emergency meeting between VWS biologists and MOTI environmental staff resulted in VWS being able to build the toadlet fencing and culvert bridging just a day or two before the first summer rain event. Everyone involved was relieved to see thousands of baby toads safely migrating along the fence and hopping out of the culvert bridge on the north side of the highway to start their long journey up the mountain where they will hibernate the long winter out. This is just one example of how VWS biologists and MOTI have cooperated to reduce the high levels of toad traffic kills at Fish Lake. This spring, VWS biologists and volunteers moved over 500 migrating adult toads off the highway and used a temporary fence with MOTI's permission that directed some adult toads to cross under the highway and

through the other new box culvert.

---

## VWS SEEKS WILDLIFE HABITAT AREA PROTECTION FOR INTERNATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT GRIZZLY BEAR CONNECTIVITY CORRIDOR

It is easy to assume that grizzly bears are safe now that trophy hunting for them has been banned for several years; but that is far from true. The bears face serious threats today: the spread of resource roads, and of traffic on roads; the targetting of mountain habitats for resorts; and a renewal of trophy hunting has already started and could possibly grow larger.

Places where the bears are displaced or killed can cause a gap in grizzly bear travel, fragmenting them into small, isolated populations. This blocks the exchange of genes necessary to prevent inbreeding. Weakness and disease due to inbreeding hastens the final demise of isolated populations.

A recent federal government study found that 65% of Grizzly Bear Population Units are ranked high or extreme conservation concern. Eight of

the high concern units are highly or totally isolated. Most of these are in southern BC. Three BC populations have disappeared.

The grizzly bears of Kokanee Glacier Park are dwindling. There are many more grizzlies in Goat Range Provincial Park. Bears in and between these parks also range further south and mix with a number of small, relatively isolated populations. Bear experts say that letting this connection die would mean the loss of the southern grizzly bear populations in BC and across the border into the US.

This year, VWS director Wayne McCrory, R.P.Bio, known for his grizzly bear work across BC, used his extensive field work in this area and collaborated with Baden Cross of Applied Conservation GIS to design a proposal for an 11,254-hectare Grizzly Bear

Habitat Area (WHA) connecting the two provincial parks. It would include Fish Lake and part of the area where the Zincton all-seasons resort has been proposed. The resort proposal poses a major threat of severing the trans-mountain corridor that links the Central Selkirk grizzly bear population in the north to the threatened trans-border South Selkirk grizzly population that is part of an international recovery program.

Wayne's application for the 11,254 hectare White Grizzly (Piqki?lawnna?) WHA is well known for a rare white-phased grizzly bear. Government has already received the application and an extensive scientific analysis of grizzly bear habitat and population dynamics in the area has been complete.

VWS also commissioned an 83-page legal opinion on the Zincton Resort.



## BC WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT: FOR ECOSYSTEM HEALTH OR HUNTERS?

**Behind a facade of biodiversity concern, BC is reducing if not dismantling its professional wildlife management capacity. Why has the Ministry of Water, Land and Resources been starved of funds for fish and wildlife management? Why are citizens committees being set up to make recommendations to government on wildlife management while regional offices are losing their professional scientific staff?**

---

A large hunting organization, the BC Wildlife Federation (BCWF), says that the funds of the Ministry of Water, Land and Resources (MWLR) for fish and wildlife management have been reduced so low that its biologists no longer receive funding for travel in the field, and some of them have been asked to turn in their government cell phones to save on costs. Regional offices are reportedly losing staff.

At the same time, BCWF has been intensely advocating that the government turn BC wildlife management over to an agency “independent of government influence”. It would be run by a multi-stakeholder committee where organizations (such as BCWF), industry (i.e. logging and mining companies) and local government would manage wildlife. It is unclear whether the BCWF wants to help MWLR receive more funding, or take over its job.

### **MOF and BCWF favour mass predator killing**

The Fish and Wildlife Branch has long been made to bear the impacts of unsustainable logging permitted by the Ministry of Forests. When mountain caribou herds were being wiped out by logging, the government expected fish and wildlife staff to prop up failing herds by ultra-expensive predator control and maternity pens for pregnant cows.

Wolf culls cost \$200,000-\$500,000 per herd per year (D. Peel, BC gov’t, 2019). This doesn’t begin to count the cost of chasing down pregnant caribou cows with helicopters and keeping them in pens for several months. No wonder there are no funds to pay the travel expenses of government biologists. Between 2014 and 2023 the province spent \$10 million shooting 1,944 wolves from helicopters, and cougars were additionally shot (CBC, 2023).

Hunting organizations had long demanded that the government shoot predators to make more game for hunters. Wanton killing of predators by the government to increase caribou gave these organizations an excuse for “wolf-whacking” contests and “predator tournaments” where participants shoot any and all predators for fun and prizes. The BCWF excused this, saying that hunters were frustrated because the government would only shoot predators to increase caribou and not for other game animals.

### **Shooting themselves in the foot?**

Now it turns out that Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is in BC and is a deadly threat to the deer, elk and moose that hunters seek for meat. The large predators that are being slaughtered en masse are known to have acute sensitivities to weakness and disease in their prey. Prominent wolf experts, including Canada’s Dr. Paul Paquet, have urged that



wolves are capable of detecting and killing ungulates infected with CWD, well before humans can. Researchers in Colorado have found that “mountain lions in this area actively selected [CWD]-infected individuals”. Hunting by humans instead removes the healthiest individuals from the breeding population.

### **Serious contradictions: BCWF town halls**

The campaign for multi-stakeholder committees had some success in 2020 when MOF set up an initiative called “Together for Wildlife”, that created a system of regional committees to make recommendations to government. Its first target was grizzly bears, as in the Grizzly Bear Framework that had public input last year. The government swore that it had no plans to renew grizzly bear hunting, but the membership of at least one of these committees is stacked with people from hunting groups, some of whom had vigorously opposed BC’s ban on hunting grizzly bears.

Apparently the goal is to remove wildlife management from political influence. Yet leading up to this year’s election, BCWF held up to 24 “election town halls” in communities across BC. Candidates for election attended. At a meeting in Nanaimo, BCWF told the audience that there are enough hunters and fishers in the province to “have the ability to control the outcome of a provincial election.” (Nanaimo News Bulletin) They asked audiences to support a multi-stakeholder board as an independent agency to manage wildlife. Stakeholders in wildlife committees are usually hunting and trapping organizations and interests that destroy caribou habitat or displace them from it, such as snowmobile or heli-skiing interests, far out-weighting any environmental groups who might join.

BC wildlife management is already too fixated on pleasing consumptive users of wildlife and its habitat. The province urgently needs a shift to using ecological science to manage for biodiversity. But the writing is on the wall that the agenda of hunting groups is to get greater control to shoot predators to make more game for themselves, and to do away with what they view as unfair limits on hunting. When wild species are under threat by climate change, fires, overcutting and deadly disease, this is a very strange time to be asking government to divest itself of responsibility for managing the province’s wildlife.

# UPDATE ON BC FOREST PROTECTION

In 2019 the BC Government initiated an “Old Growth Strategic Review”. Their 2020 report concluded that forestry in BC must transist from unsustainable logging to a new management system that has “ecosystem health and biodiversity of BC’s forests as an overarching priority.” In 2023 the government released a draft report claiming that it would do just that. How far along is the transition?

Unfortunately, almost all of the panel’s recommendations concerned changes to social equity, governance and forest practices focused on how to log rather than on protection. One recommendation held significant promise: to impose temporary logging deferrals on areas “at very high and near-term risk of irreversible biodiversity loss” pending negotiations on whether the areas would be permanently protected.

## Betrayal of priority old growth deferrals

This led to the creation of the Old-growth Technical Advisory Panel (TAP). Their report recommended 2.6 million hectares of at risk old-growth for deferrals, emphasizing that they are “rare, at-risk and irreplaceable”.

This year scandalous news broke that the Ministry of Forests (MOF) had stealthily moved over half of the deferral areas from the Panel’s map to poor sites that have trees too small to log. (Ben Parfitt, The Tyee, Mar. 2024)

The government had promised: “This new technical panel will ensure we’re using the best science and data available to identify at-risk old growth ecosystems and prioritize areas for deferral.” In actual truth, the final decisions were made by the Ministry of Forests, the logging companies, and First Nations, some of whom wanted logging. The general public was not informed or consulted.

## Minimal progress on the ground

There was only one significant new forest protection in 2023, in the Incomappleux Valley. VWS is pleased that the 58,000-hectare Conservancy took in the whole tract of virgin rainforest in our proposal. However, it contains only 16,944 hectares of old-growth. 61% of the Conservancy is not forest at all and there are 1,680 hectares of clearcuts.

In 2024 there were two important protections. One was 76,000 hectares in Clayoquot Sound, divided into 10 new conservancies, which is said to contain stands of old-growth Coastal Temperate Rainforest.

## New Klinse-za BC Provincial Park Heavily Disturbed

Klinse-ze park in the South Peace region was expanded to a 200,000-hectare BC Provincial Park. This is a victory for the Klinse-za and Salteau First Nations who have been killing wolves and running a successful maternity pen.

The BC government ignored years of scientific reports that said rampant industrial habitat destruction was driving the caribou towards extinction. A 2019 report by Dr. Dale Seip for the Ministry of Environment recorded 1,147 hectares of oil well sites and facilities, 5 pipelines, and 4,281 hectares



Douglas Noblet

of seismic lines in the range of the Moberly and the adjacent Burnt Pine herds, for a total of 67% disturbance, not counting roads. The Burnt Pine herd was wiped out. Caribou experts warned that 67% disturbance would not support caribou at a self-sustaining level. Their survival depended on immediate cessation of development plus immediate restoration of the habitat.

## BC subsidizes oil & gas to destroy caribou habitat

Then in August 2023, University of BC researchers released a study showing that, between 2018 and 2021, the BC government spent over 27 million dollars on projects to recover Boreal and Southern Mountain Caribou, which includes the Klinse-za herd. At the same time, the government was subsidizing oil and gas companies operating within federal critical caribou habitat for these same herds to the tune of \$26 million. This made current and future exploration and development more profitable, which enabled their expansion. (DiSilvestro et al., 2023) What’s worse, the spread of oil and gas development increases climate change, which causes additional damage to the habitat through fires. It took a scandal of this magnitude to bring about the 200,000-hectare Klinse-za Class A Park.

## Deep Snow Mountain Caribou: No new protection

The rare and endangered Deep Snow Mountain Caribou have received no full permanent protection since 1994 so that their habitat can be destroyed. Years of efforts to save these caribou have only produced evidence of a cold-blooded intent by the government to log until the caribou are gone. They exist nowhere else on Earth but in BC.

**The new protections are important, but they do not begin to address BC’s crises in biodiversity and climate change. The Strategic Review has resulted in four years of talk-and-log with a stock of TAP deferrals that may or may not be protected. The present forestry paradigm is not one of ecological health, but one of biofuel expansion, exporting raw logs, and logging on steep slopes: Profit First regardless of climate change and extinction of a unique and irreplaceable species.**

# THE BATTLE TO SAVE VALHALLA PROVINCIAL PARK AND HOW IT WAS WON

Some VWS members today were around in the early 1980s during the campaign to save Valhalla Park, but many of our readers may have joined since then and know little or nothing about it.

The real struggle was not about whether there was to be a park. The local logging company, mountain climbers and the BC government were agreeable to an alpine park that would give the rock, ice and meadows to hikers and climbers, and allow the forest to be logged. The government routinely created parks by omitting the lower elevations for logging. Whole constellations of species connected to low-elevation forest were being lost.

Founding director Wayne McCrory knew that the area's grizzly bears and mountain caribou needed the forest. Forestry technician Craig Pettitt worked for the Ministry of Forests and he photographed the devastation that was going on in the tributary valleys. Director Richard Caniell was an artist who found peace and inspiration amongst the beauty and wildness of untrammelled nature.

These directors were not going to accept a park without its connected forest. They wanted the whole face of the Valhalla Mountains along Slocan Lake to be a Class A provincial park. Given a heavily pro-industry provincial government—and the mill of Slocan Forest Products (SFP) on the shore of Slocan Lake—a battle royal ensued that would leave the directors exhausted, and in some cases nearly penniless, nine years later when the park was created. SFP threatened to close the mill if such a park was created. The Minister of Forests flew over the proposed park in a helicopter and said when he returned: "It looks like a clearcut decision to me".

As the VWS Chairperson, the late Colleen McCrory became the public face of a campaign that drew the attention of the nation. Behind closed doors the government decided several times to approve the logging, but Colleen received envelopes with no return address leaking the information. More than once she caught Greyhound buses at night to arrive in Vancouver by morning and call a press conference. The logging decision was never announced.

The park was won by intensive work to raise public aware-



DeWitt Jones

ness of the proposal. A huge break-through occurred when Richard Caniell created *The Valhalla Experience*. With slides by National Geographic photographer DeWitt Jones, scenes of logging devastation by Craig, and music by Pachelbel and Gustav Mahler, Richard created a narrative which, forty years later, still speaks for the principles that stand for all parks for all time. Parts of it were shown on national TV twice. It toured the Province with showings at the Vic Theatre in Victoria, the Queen E in Vancouver. The directors even rented a hotel room in Victoria and invited the BC Ministers to a private showing. Amazingly, all but one of them came. As directors and volunteers travelled with the show for years, letters from the public asking for the park filled a whole government filing cabinet — more letters than had ever been written for any park previously.

Surprisingly, this person who had lived most of his life in New York and Los Angeles created a show that plumbed the deepest heart of human beings' need and their love for nature. VWS has wanted for years to make it available to members. Digitizing it with its slides, music and narrative took endless hours in 2023 and 2024 by Richard and director Gene Parker. But today you can use the enclosed member-donor-order form to order a DVD that will play wonderfully on your computer or on a large screen.



Anne Sherrod

"Nature, left undivided, teaches completeness by the experience itself; teaches us our own lack of wholeness, mirrors back to us, from her harmony, our discordance. We have nowhere else to go to be taught such things. Nowhere else to turn, no persons, no city, no government so complete; Nature alone teaches us that the innocence of the world returns with our own. These are the tidings of the great mountains, and people return from such teachings refreshed in body and spirit."

— Richard Caniell, *The Valhalla Experience*

# BC's logging industry is destroying our protection from climate change

"The growing consensus of scientific findings is that, to effectively mitigate the worst impacts of climate change, we must not only move beyond fossil fuel consumption but must also substantially *increase* protection of our native forests in order to absorb more CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere and store more, not less, carbon in our forests."

— 200 forest and climate scientists



by government. Feel-good environmental initiatives that show little results on the ground are functioning as propaganda for the logging industry as it consumes our last remaining old-growth forest.

The public is going to have to push hard to save enough forest to be meaningful protection from climate change and loss of biodiversity. It will require as many people as possible writing letters telling the government no more talk-and-log. Dramatic forest protection must happen now!

The BC government is caught between two opposing forces that are increasingly extreme. One of them is the extreme weather of climate change that is destroying homes, killing people, ruining lives and livelihoods, and costing billions in tax dollars. Scientists recently reported that since 2004 just ten events around the world that were intensified by climate change had killed more than 570,000 people.

The other extreme force is the logging industry running out of wood, and the intention of the corporations and government to keep logging as long as it's profitable, regardless of who or what it harms. This huge force for forest exploitation is pushing hard against the reforms promised

***Please write a letter today and keep writing them.***

Premier David Eby, Fax:250-387-0087 PO BOX 9041 Stn Prov Govt Victoria, BC V8W 9E1 | premier@gov.bc.ca

Hon. Tamara Davidson, Min. of Environment & Parks, Fax: 250-387-1356. PO Box 9047 Stn Prov Govt Rm 112, Parliament Buildings Victoria, BC V8W 9E2 | ENV.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Hon. Randene Neill, Min. Water, Land & Resource stewardship, PO Box 9012 Stn Prov Govt Victoria, BC V8W 9L6 WLRS.Minister@gov.bc.ca

## Please Consider these Key Points for Letter Writing

► **We need 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.

► **Support VWS's three park proposals for old-growth Inland Temperate Rainforest. These forests have some of the highest carbon sequestration and highest biodiversity in Canada.** The Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness and Selkirk Mountains Ancient Forest proposals contain the most southern examples of Inland Temperate Rainforest in BC. The Quesnel Lake Wilderness proposal is one of the most important ways to protect Deep Snow Mountain Caribou.

► **Strictly prohibit the logging of primary and old growth forest for pellets.** Require pellet mills to use only the waste from saw mills and logging sites.

► **The BC government has not provided any permanent, full protection for the Deep Snow Mountain Caribou since 1994.** Slaughtering predators while destroying mountain caribou habitat is a recipe for extinction.

► **B.C.'s wildlife belongs to ALL British Columbians, a great majority of whom value experiencing wild species alive. The government must shift its wildlife management away from prioritizing consumptive uses of wildlife, towards the application of conservation biology**, while respecting the humanitarian and moral values of British Columbians.

► **Increase the funding of the Ministry of Water, Land and Resources.** It must have enough funding to support adequate professional wildlife staff to manage wildlife.

► **The government should not turn wildlife management in part or in whole over to an independent agency.** Giving control of BC wildlife to consortiums of private interests at a time when wild species are declining and facing multiple crises would be irresponsible.

VWS has proven over almost 50 years that persistence can lead to rewards that generations of humans will be grateful for. This was witnessed in 2023 when countless letters written by our supporters finally led to the protection of the Incomappleux as a new conservancy. Though our government appears steadfast against protection of new parks on the scale required to mitigate biodiversity loss, Valhalla Wilderness Society continues pushing forward to protect some of our richest remaining ecosystems, knowing that they are essential to buffer the impacts we face due to climate change and the global exploitation of nature.

### THE VALHALLA EXPERIENCE

The Valhalla Wilderness Society's campaigns have led to the protection of almost half a million hectares of large wilderness BC parks. These have been brought about by as many people as possible writing letters to government, joining protests and making donations.

*Now, for the first time ever, the multi-media presentation that won Valhalla Provincial Park is available on DVD to supporters to view in their homes. You can purchase it for a minimal price using the member/donor form included with this newsletter.*