

# Wildlife and Habitat Engagement

Discussion of wildlife populations

## Challenge 1: Advancing Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples

*What programs and policies are most important to advance meaningful and lasting reconciliation with indigenous peoples and help implement UNDRIP?*

- Reconciliation and engagement with First Nations is critical, however exclusively negotiating while alienating other stakeholders is counterproductive. We have a shared interest in wildlife management in British Columbia and anything other than a round table sets the process up for failure. It creates a climate of mistrust and lacks transparency. Having all with a vested interest in the long-term sustainability of habitat and wildlife at a round table is critical establishing an environment of trust and positive outcomes.

## Challenge 2: Increasing Involvement and Shared Stewardship

- *How should a broad range of stakeholders be involved in wildlife management and habitat conservation decisions?*
- This new model of Wildlife Management has its merits; however, it is imperative that only stakeholders that are willing to contribute to conservation be involved. Groups should be provincial in nature, have a B.C.-based membership/workforce, and conduct on-the-ground stewardship activities. Those that fail to give back to wildlife and its well-being should not earn a say.
- It is imperative that science-based wildlife management be used as the backbone of this process. The North American Wildlife Management Model has a long history of effectiveness and we feel that those organizations that do not support this model should not participate in this process.
- It is important that decision making involvement input from individuals in the regions as to what is working in their community.
- Involve groups at the beginning of the process to offer input and direction and include that consistently throughout the entire decision-making process.
- *What are your suggestions for a new governance model for wildlife management and habitat conservation?*
- We feel that any use group that accesses crown land be responsible for user fees. If individuals are using our natural resources and natural habitat, they should be willing to pay fees associated with this. Examples of this would be wildlife viewing companies such as whale watching companies, bear watching companies, heli-skiing, hunting license fees and resource extraction industries.
- Fish and wildlife management should have legislated objectives in order that Wildlife Managers can be held accountable. Setting meaningful population and habitat objectives such as road densities should be a priority.

## Challenge 3: Declining Wildlife Populations

*What measures need to be taken to proactively manage wildlife and habitat and prevent wildlife from becoming species at risk?*

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- Setting legislated population objectives and following that up with frequent and accurate population monitoring is imperative. Mandatory harvest reporting, and where needed, compulsory inspections, will allow wildlife managers to more accurately track wildlife population trends.
- Science-based management including accurate data is imperative to effective management.
- Decommissioning linear features from industry, and land reclamation/restoration will assist in creating sustainable habitat.
- Fish and wildlife management should have legislated objectives in order that Wildlife Managers can be held accountable. Setting and achieving wildlife population objectives should be a priority.

## Challenge 4: Increasing Human Activity

*What is the most effective way of ensuring that wildlife and habitats are healthy while fostering a healthy economy to ensure life is affordable for British Columbians?*

- Increased encroachment on wildlife habitat is placing incredible stress on a multitude of species. Loss of habitat to industry is common, however increased backcountry access by recreational user groups continues to affect wildlife populations. Mandating environmental impact studies which include wildlife population assessments before approving industrial and backcountry recreational (heli-skiing, mountain biking, wildlife viewing) pursuits is imperative.
- Reduce road density to mandated objectives and require rehabilitation.
- Any industry or backcountry user group that accesses wildlife habitat should be responsible for contributing to the well-being of the resource itself and wildlife. Developing a compensatory program for resource and wildlife management would be effective.

## Challenge 5: Wildfires and Extreme Weather

*What are the most effective ways to proactively adapt to the impacts of climate change to wildlife and habitats?*

- The use of prescribed burns is a well-documented management tool which can restore wildlife populations, make our forests more resilient, and protect communities. Mandating specific wildfire burn plans for each region would be an effective means to ensure wildlife habitat is properly maintained.
- The Wild Sheep Society of BC has been pushing regions to carry out prescribed burns and we are often unsuccessful in these requests. Having a comprehensive prescribed wildfire management plan at the regional level and working proactively with committed organizations such as the Wild Sheep Society of BC would be effective. We are willing to invest funds, resources, time, and man power to carry out wildlife habitat rehabilitation. It is incredibly frustrating throwing our support behind these initiatives only to have the plans held up in the approval process.
- A robust education initiative about wildfire benefits to the general public would help with social licencing.
- A review of relevant policy and legislation which hinders prescribed burns and ecosystem restoration should be initiated.

## Challenge 6: Better Information

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- *How can Traditional Ecological Knowledge, citizen science and other forms of knowledge complement science to support decision-making?*
  - First and foremost, there needs to be a venue for citizen science and then those views must be heard. The hunting community reiterated the necessity to utilize science-based management surrounding the grizzly bear hunt. When the decision was made to terminate the hunt based on emotion and public sentiment over science-based principals, trust is lost by our community. When input is provided and willfully dismissed, seeking further input becomes a challenge.
  - It is important to recognize that Traditional Ecological Knowledge is not limited to First Nations. Other user groups including ranchers, farmers, outfitters, and hunters all frequent the land and have local knowledge that is effective if properly utilized.

*What are the best ways to share information broadly so that there is transparency and trust is gained among all parties?*

Having stakeholders at the table and sharing information with them to disseminate to their membership is critical. A round table creates the best environment for these discussions. Engaging in 'government to government' negotiations whilst ignoring stakeholders creates an environment lacking in transparency and creates an environment of distrust.

- Hosting local and regional round tables are necessary to sharing information, and developing a regional strategy that will benefit wildlife and habitat

## **Challenge 7: Human-Wildlife Conflicts**

*What are the most effective ways to reduce wildlife-human conflicts in British Columbia?*

- Utilizing science-based management and hard data to make wildlife decisions is imperative. Decisions made based on social and special interest groups pressures are rarely in the best interest of wildlife. The cancellation of the grizzly bear hunt was one additional management tool that would effectively reduce wildlife-human conflicts. Despite at times strong opposition to it, decisions on wildlife management must stem from science-based decision making not emotional bias.
- Utilizing hunter harvest as a means for predator control assists with wildlife management and creates long-term positive benefits for conservation from funding.
- Effective planning of communities and infrastructure to reduce the impact on wildlife. Where wildlife habitat and corridors are well known, plan to avoid them or at the very least develop mitigating strategies.
- In dealing with wild sheep specifically, layout all areas in the province where wild sheep exist and develop a 50 km boundary around all of those areas. Within those areas, mandate compulsory testing on domestic sheep for any diseases that place wild sheep at risk. Developing disease mitigating strategies in these zones are an effective means in managing wild domestic disease transmission

## **Challenge 8: Funding**

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*What are the best funding models, funding sources, and creative financing ideas that could increase resources for wildlife management and habitat conservation and provide additional flexibility for how funding is prioritized and allocated?*

- It is imperative that every dollar raised from recreational user fees be paid to a dedicated exclusive account that is utilised only for wildlife and habitat management. It is important that these monies do not get placed in to general revenue and all revenue goes directly to wildlife management.
- All resource user groups whether wildlife watching, snowmobilers, heli-skiing or the like pay user fees that go to wildlife and habitat management
- Dedicated budgets be allocated for wildlife management that is mandated by legislation. Wildlife should not be a political issue. Funding should be legislated and maintained from year to year. In other words, a change in the political party should not mean that wildlife budgets suffer. **These funds should be** allocated to a non-government wildlife society for administration based on clear management objectives and policies.

## Additional Questions

*What challenges are we missing?*

- The recent provincial election resulted in the grizzly bear hunt being terminated as a result of social pressures and special interest groups. Due to urbanization, society is becoming disconnected with wildlife and many individual's perception of wildlife is what they learn through Disney or the Discovery channel. Science based wildlife management is the basis of sound wildlife practices and should continue to be. Government must also utilize their fiscal resources to educate the public on the need to manage wildlife based on scientific principals which includes sustainable, lawful, and ethical harvest of wildlife. It is important that the government dedicate additional financial resources for public outreach. The average British Columbian is losing sight of the realities of wildlife and that harvesting through hunting and trapping is not only sustainable but an effective management tool which provides essential funding for wildlife conservation. This message must be shared with the general public and resources must be used to achieve this means.

*What currently works well in BC for wildlife/habitat management?*

*What changes in wildlife/habitat management are most needed for BC (highest priority)?*

- Funding – Dedicated funding from outdoor consumptive and non-consumptive users.
- Science – Legislated objectives on population levels, road density, critical habitat, regular monitoring
- Social support – Social support can and will be gained through responsible use and stewardship of wildlife and wildlife habitat.

*Are there any challenges or opportunities listed that concern you? Why?*