

**PRESENTATION TO THE BRITISH COLUMBIA LEGISLATIVE STANDING
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
September 26, 2013**

On behalf of its 40,000 plus members, The BC Wildlife Federation welcomes the opportunity to address the Standing Committee of Finance on issues related to natural resource management sustainability in British Columbia.

Investing to create a legacy of fish and wildlife diversity and abundance.

The BC Wildlife Federation (BCWF) is a leader in conservation and wise use of British Columbia's fish, wildlife resources and its habitats.

We supported the surcharge/user-pay funding. As primary contributors we believe users should be directly involved in setting expenditure priorities. It is critical to note that it is the hunter and the angler who pay for most of the current cost of management of the provincial fisheries and wildlife. As government ministries and programs become more complex and interconnected the BCWF can be an effective partner, working with government to deliver activities that have a direct connection to our organization's goals and objectives.

Throughout its history and under various names, British Columbia's fish and wildlife management agency has been among the most understaffed and underfunded in North America. Despite this disparity we recognize the significant potential for the province's fisheries and wildlife resources to contribute to regional economic development and believe that the government is moving towards recognition of this fact. The BCWF encourages government to look at revenues generated by wise use of our fish and wildlife resources beyond that of solely revenue from licence sales. Previous governments have regarded license and tag fees as the only revenue generated by fish and wildlife. There has not been recognition of revenue generated by anglers and hunters who spend on everything from vehicles, fuel, boats and motors to gear and clothing, in addition to hotel and restaurant meals expenditures. In 2011-12 expenditures by resident hunters generated \$230 million dollars.

Numerous studies of the economic impact of hunting and fishing in the province have determined that hunters and anglers (salt and freshwater) contribute more than a billion dollars annually. This is in addition to the hundreds of millions generated by park visitors and ecotourism. Historically, government has not adequately taken this economic activity into account when budgeting for resource management.

Also significant at this time is that the bond is breaking between our young people and the natural world. Hunting and fishing are a fundamental part of Canadian society. A growing body of research links our mental, physical, and spiritual health directly to our association with nature. i.e. “nature deficit disorder” due to an increasing lack of connection to the land. Exercise through hunting and fishing is a proactive approach to managing health care costs.

The following BCWF recommendations to the Standing Committee of Finance come at a critical time. Economic diversification is highly desirable especially during this current period of economic uncertainty. Managed currently, both resident hunting and angling are ‘recession proof’ activities. Socially we need to continue to have our youth connected to nature. Now more than ever we must address the increasing human footprint on our province and work collaboratively to ensure conservation of our fish and wildlife and their habitats for future generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION # 1 – Provide funding for fish and wildlife

Management equal to the licence revenue it collects from licences and permits.

It is critically important for the overall health of fish, wildlife and their habitat to ensure adequate funding is in place for wildlife inventories, harvest monitoring, and other supporting services. Fish and wildlife must be managed as a business, not a cost centre.

The budget for fish and wildlife management within the Ministry of Forest Lands and Regional Operations should be increased by six million dollars to reflect the

difference between revenue collected through licence fees and actual program expenditures.

This would meet the surcharge/user-pay funding formula recommended by the 2002 Recreation Stewardship Panel and the 2013 Liberal Election Platform Commitment to “Direct all revenues from fishing licences be provided to the Freshwater Fisheries Society for conservation activities (\$2.4 million), by 2015/16”. In the longer term we suggest research examining moving both fish and wildlife delivery functions apart from legislation, regulation policy and enforcement outside of government similar to the Freshwater Fisheries Society Model.

Effective resource management will increase BC residents’ recreational opportunities and contribute to the economy through hunting and angling expenditures and increase the revenue for conservation.

The BC Wildlife Federation looks forward to the implementation of E-licensing for purchase of hunting licenses LEH and tags online. E-Licencing has been implemented for fishing licenses and made access to fishing easier.

E-Licencing for hunting is a high priority item for the Federation and its members. We would like to collaborate to ensure there is seamless and cost effective system for Conservation Outdoor Recreation and Education Programs (hunter training course), Hunter numbers and licencing products in order to train and recruitment on new entrants to the sport which will increase revenue, jobs and investment in BC.

RECOMMENDATION # 2 –Water Act.

British Columbia is at a tipping point in terms of:

- Public expectations that watersheds, landscapes and natural capital will be managed sustainably
- Limited government capacity to manage for sustainability on its own
- Social licence for resource developments that may adversely impact watersheds and landscapes.

The new *Water Act* must strive for a high level of collaboration to sustainability management and improve the health of BC watersheds among multiple interests by:

- Regulating groundwater
- Protecting environmental flows
- Changing the allocation system and
- Addressing water supply, drought and watershed planning in priority areas

There is now a cooperative network ready to call on to assist in delivering watershed management objectives including: non-profit watershed groups, educational institutions, agricultural producers, industry, fisheries interests and others, alongside federal, provincial, First Nations and local governments.

The BCWF has encouraged local involvement and input on local watershed management including the Cowichan. These experiences offer models for province to provide authorities to provide watershed councils to manage in economic, environmental and social watershed sustainability by leveraging local experience, expertise and capacity that is not available with the reduced capacity and experience within resource management agencies.

The BCWF understands that the ability to devolve the authority to watershed councils is proposed within the new *Water Act* legislation. However, the ability to fund these activities should be supported through the a 5 million dollars per year funding to the Living Rivers Trust fund while sustainable funding models are developed in collaboration with First Nations, local governments communities and stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATION # 3- Natural Resources Board

Increase the effectiveness of water and land management by through establishment and funding independent Natural Resources Board reporting to the

legislature that expands on the role of the existing Forest Practices Board to cover all legislation administered by the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations.

Independent performance and compliance audits and reporting should be provided the by the Natural Resources Board to the public on key sustainability issues at a landscape and watershed scale to increase the effectiveness and performance of resource management in the province

Government should establish and fund a science secretariat to serve as a resource for research and knowledge to assist the Natural Resources Board in collaboration with universities, technical colleges and private and public sector professionals with the required scientific expertise.

RECOMMENDATION # 4 – Complete and implement the draft Provincial Conservation Offset Policy and related funding mechanisms to address cumulative effects at a watershed and landscape scale.

Approved resource development developments in the province need to have government direction through policy on how to mitigate and compensate for cumulative effects particularly for losses to fish, wildlife and their habitats.

The draft policy discussion paper developed by the Ministry of Environment needs to be endorsed by Cabinet and implemented as well as a funding formula from resource revenues to address cumulative effects of the oil and gas, hydro, mining and transportation sectors.

RECOMMENDATION # 5– Marine and Freshwater Fisheries.

We encourage the BC government to appoint a Parliamentary Secretary to provide leadership on marine and freshwater fisheries policy issues within the province and with the federal government. This is required at the present time with the passage of Bill C38 the federal Budget Implementation Act and the changes to provision of the Fisheries Act, particularly the habitat provisions.

There are also issues with respect to allocation of halibut and other species that are key to the economic viability of recreational fisheries.

Summary;

British Columbia is fortunate to have a rich diversity of fish and wildlife resources. The 40,000 and growing membership of the BC Wildlife Federation firmly believes it is our collective responsibility to conserve these resources. It is critical that we recognize the challenges and opportunities that we face in maintaining BC's diversity of species over the long term, including investing in measures now that will prevent future costly species or habitat recovery such as the mountain caribou recovery project or others. We also strongly believe in the benefits of building on existing fish and wildlife management and education programs as well as investing in new initiatives.

We invite the BC government to join us in maintaining the province's wealth through sound strategy in conserving our diverse wildlife and fish resources and providing education and awareness in conservation and the outdoors. We look forward to working together on the recommendations made on behalf of the 40,000 membership of the BC Wildlife Federation.