



Ministry of
Forests, Lands, Natural
Resource Operations
and Rural Development

TOGETHER FOR WILDLIFE

A Proposed Pathway for Improving
Wildlife Management and Habitat
Conservation in British Columbia



November 2019

Last year, the Province began an unprecedented conversation with First Nations and British Columbians to improve wildlife management and habitat conservation in B.C. The culmination of that engagement resulted in a strategy to guide the Province for the next 10 years.

We held comprehensive discussions with Indigenous communities, 60 stakeholder groups and more than 1400 members of the public. This included rural communities, academic institutions and a wide range of resource industry, conservation, hunter, trapper, guide, recreation and tourism stakeholder organizations, as well as the public. We asked what actions we should take to improve wildlife stewardship.

The *Together for Wildlife* strategy reflects the rich dialogue and diversity of ideas we heard. Wildlife are vital to this province. To support the implementation of this strategy and to improve outcomes for wildlife, we are committing a budget uplift of \$10M starting in 2020. The issues facing wildlife and habitat in this province are complex and can only be resolved through reconciliation with First Nations and ongoing collaboration with industry, stakeholders, and the public. Given declining numbers in wildlife, disappearing wildlife habitat and climate change impacts, British Columbians must work together on shared priorities with the right tools and sufficient funding to achieve better outcomes for wildlife.

This document will represent the foundation of our work from year 2020 and beyond. This is our path forward, together for wildlife.

Sincerely,



Doug Donaldson

Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource
Operations and Rural Development



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1/ Introduction

British Columbia's biodiversity is globally significant – we are home to the broadest diversity of wildlife and ecosystems of any province or territory in Canada, including species not found anywhere else on earth.

This rich natural abundance is a gift and a responsibility. It provides the people of British Columbia with a wealth of environmental, cultural, social and economic benefits that are intrinsically linked to our history, our way of life, and the prosperity of future generations. We have opportunities and values that no other jurisdiction enjoys. Our rich and diverse landscapes, many of which have been sustainably managed by Indigenous peoples long before the arrival of Europeans, are indispensable to the people and communities across the province. They provide food, fresh water, clean air and natural resources while also moderating our climate, regulating disease, cycling nutrients and forming soils. There is a growing body of evidence that wildlife and natural ecosystems make significant contributions to mental and physical well being through

aesthetic, spiritual, educational and recreational values. Wildlife populations are an important source of food and culture to Indigenous peoples. Wildlife contributes to provincial and local economies through hunting, guide outfitting, trapping, wildlife viewing, photography, wilderness tourism and research.

British Columbia's wildlife and habitat faces unprecedented and accelerating challenges due to climate change, increasing human activity and competing pressures on the land base. These pressures are resulting in significant declines in some wildlife populations throughout the province. Along with our responsibility to build true and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, there are evolving societal expectations that require a new and dynamic way of managing our wildlife and habitat. We need to be inclusive, adaptive and agile.

Wildlife stewardship¹ and conservation practices have evolved over the past century and we need to continue to adapt and improve how we approach our work.

British Columbia is geographically, ecologically and culturally diverse and our collaborative approaches to wildlife stewardship must reflect these diverse interests and aspirations. Wildlife does not recognize the boundaries of any government. Also, what works in one part of the province may not work in another and wildlife stewardship practices and policies will reflect this reality.

Given all the issues and opportunities we face today, there is simply too much for any one organization or one government to do. More than ever, we need to work together on shared priorities with the right tools and sufficient funding to achieve our desired outcomes on the ground.

*Male Spruce grouse,
Roy V. Rea photo*



¹ While previous discussion papers referred to 'wildlife management and habitat conservation,' for this strategy, we are using the phrase 'wildlife stewardship.' We define wildlife stewardship' as the responsible care of wildlife and habitat, including protection, conservation, restoration, recovery, regulation of human activities, administration, and enforcement. Wildlife stewardship accounts for the interest of current societies and future generations, as well as ecosystem function.

Along with our responsibility to build true and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, there are evolving societal expectations that require a new and dynamic way of managing our wildlife and habitat. We need to be inclusive, adaptive and agile.



Mountain goat family. Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development photo



*Cow moose grazing in wetland,
Chris Hamilton photo*

2 / Vision and Principles

The Province is committed to making significant new investments and developing new partnerships to collaboratively deliver stewardship together. We recognize we must build on success while continuing to adapt and improve our approaches. We will make these changes in collaboration with Indigenous governments², local governments and partners supported by engagement with all British Columbians.

We built this draft strategy over 18 months through an unprecedented conversation with British Columbians. We held comprehensive discussions with Indigenous communities, rural communities, academic institutions and a wide range of resource industry, conservation, hunter, trapper, guide, recreation and tourism stakeholder organizations, as well as the public³. We asked what actions we should take to improve wildlife⁴ stewardship. We believe this strategy reflects the rich dialogue and diversity of ideas we heard.

We propose the following draft vision and principles to guide the five goals and 23 actions that are the foundation of our pathway forward. We are committed to deliver this strategy together to benefit all British Columbians as we implement our vision.

Our Vision

“Wildlife and their habitats are thriving, adaptive to change, and support and enrich the lives of all British Columbians”

Our Principles

Trust	We will build public trust and confidence in wildlife stewardship through our actions to deliver this strategy.
Collaboration	We will collaborate and form partnerships to deliver this strategy.
Respect	We recognize and respect that people hold deep and sometimes differing intrinsic, ecological, social, cultural and economic values for wildlife stewardship.
Responsiveness	We will be proactive and adapt the strategy as needed to respond to new information and a changing world and will continuously learn by doing.
Recognition	We recognize Aboriginal rights play a critical role in British Columbia’s wildlife stewardship.
Transparency	We will document key decisions that affect wildlife stewardship and will ensure that these records are available and accessible.
Accountability	We will define measures of success for this strategy, report our performance and promote actions that improve implementation and the likelihood of success.
Evidence-Based Decisions	We will use evidence gathered through research and experience to inform decisions to achieve our objectives and monitor outcomes to build understanding when uncertainty exists.
Balance	We will work together to improve a balance to ensure that wildlife stewardship and the economy thrive.
Innovation	We will embrace new technology and approaches to collect, apply and share information, deliver services and implement practices.
Interconnectedness	We recognize that all living and non-living things and communities are integrally dependent on each other.

² In the context of this strategy, the term “Indigenous government” refers to the representative or governing body of a group of First Nations individuals who share collective Aboriginal rights.

³ <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/wildlifeandhabitat/what-we-heard-reports/>
https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/377/2018/08/Wildlife-Stakeholder-report_16JUL18_FINAL-1.pdf
<https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/377/2018/12/Indigenous-What-We-Heard-FINAL.pdf>
<https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/377/2018/12/Public-What-We-Heard-FINAL.pdf>
<https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/377/2019/07/StakeholderPolicyRecommendationsReportPhaseTwo-FINAL.pdf>

⁴ The initiative to Improve Wildlife Management and Habitat Conservation had a mandate to focus on terrestrial, not “at risk” wildlife. However, the actions identified in this strategy will also benefit aquatic species and species at risk, and there are strong linkages with the programs responsible for these species to ensure coordinated delivery.

3 / Goals and Actions

Goal 1 – Understanding and Communicating our Shared Priorities: A Voice for all British Columbians⁵

Wildlife stewardship is a shared responsibility and requires that everyone have a voice. This proposed strategy is the Province’s commitment to develop inclusive and cooperative governance structures and make existing engagement processes more transparent and effective. We will build new relationships to ensure that we work in partnership with all British Columbians to improve outcomes for wildlife stewardship.

Working together to understand and communicate our shared priorities, we will:

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| Action 1 | By 2020, establish a Provincial Minister’s Wildlife Advisory Council with representation from British Columbians with a wide range of perspectives and interests from across the province. The Council will provide advice and support to the Minister on implementation of this strategy, recommendations on sufficient and dedicated funding for wildlife, as well as on wildlife and habitat legislation and other priority wildlife stewardship matters identified by the Minister. |
| Action 2 | By 2021, create Regional Wildlife Advisory Committees to represent a variety of perspectives and to provide opportunities for collaboration to improve wildlife stewardship. ⁶

We will tailor committees to meet the unique needs and priorities of each region and ensure that they can influence and be involved in processes that affect wildlife stewardship (e.g., land use planning, cumulative effect assessments, monitoring, etc.). |

⁵ The numbering systems of goals and actions should not be considered to be in any order or priority – all goals and actions are similarly weighted.

⁶ Existing regional hunting and trapping advisory committees may become sub-committees.

The First Nations – B.C. Wildlife Habitat Conservation Forum

The *First Nations-B.C. Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Forum* (the Forum) was formed in December 2018 in response to the Province’s Improving Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Initiative as an innovative way to obtain perspectives from First Nations across British Columbia on wildlife stewardship issues.

The Forum is comprised of participants from 40-plus B.C. First Nations. Their work is not consultation and members do not represent any other First Nation. In addition to helping draft the *Together for Wildlife Strategy*, Forum participants worked on four short-term recommended amendments to the *Wildlife Act* to support reconciliation and improve wildlife stewardship. These potential amendments include:

- a clause that states that the *Wildlife Act* does not abrogate or derogate any existing Aboriginal or treaty right;
- prioritizes access to wildlife for
 - conservation and public safety
 - First Nations needs for food, social and ceremonial purposes
 - licenced hunting;
- the ability for the Minister to enter into government-to-government agreements for things such as Protocol Hunting and Sheltering; and,
- incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge, laws and customs into decision-making (regulations/policies to be developed over time).

All Indigenous governments in British Columbia will be formally consulted on these potential changes. Engagement will also occur with key stakeholders.



Cougar, Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development

**Action 2
(cont.)**

Regional Wildlife Advisory Committees will provide opportunities for dialogue with industry, stakeholders, local governments and the public that will complement the government-to-government relationships the Province is committed to pursuing in Action 18. Indigenous governments will be encouraged to join any Regional Advisory Committees as the Province's government-to-government partners.

Action 3

By 2021, increase opportunities for the public to engage on wildlife stewardship issues that are important to them. We will redesign the Wildlife and Habitat Branch website pages, conduct province-wide surveys to better understand priority issues and opportunities, and hold public open houses in different areas of the province.

Goal 2 – Informing Stewardship: Management Driven By Data, Information & Knowledge

The right data, information and knowledge are essential for successful wildlife stewardship. This will require modernizing our data and knowledge systems in collaboration with Indigenous governments, local governments, resource industries, stakeholders, non-government organizations and the public.

This strategy will make new investments in biological, social and economic data collection, cumulative effects assessments, monitoring, innovative population modelling, and information management systems. This will improve the availability, accessibility and reliability of wildlife stewardship data for all users. This renewed approach will better inform resource management decisions and will support the relationships and structures to enable investments from other organizations and partners.

Working together to understand and communicate our shared priorities, we will:

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| Action 4 | Starting in 2020, expand biological, social and economic data collection. For example, we will fill critical gaps in wildlife monitoring and inventory and develop wildlife population and habitat supply models. We will ensure consistent standards are followed to collect and analyse this information, based on the latest science, Indigenous Knowledge and local knowledge. |
| Action 5 | From 2020-2025, support priority research for wildlife stewardship at post-secondary institutions. This contribution will leverage other sources of funding and build stronger partnerships between researchers and managers. We will broadly share all research results with British Columbians. |
| Action 6 | By 2022, develop a citizen science framework to provide new opportunities for British Columbians to partner in wildlife stewardship data collection and monitoring. We will build on existing citizen science initiatives in British Columbia and models in other jurisdictions and will use this information to inform decision-making. |
| Action 7 | Ensure wildlife and habitat data are accessible to everyone, reliable and integrated, including wildlife harvest statistics, wildlife monitoring and inventory data and research findings. By 2025, we will complete the ongoing Data and Licensing Transformation. Through initiatives such as the <i>Species and Ecosystems Information System Modernization</i> project, we will make investments to consolidate, replace or enhance out-dated information systems for fish, wildlife and ecosystems. |



Pacific tree frog, Shari Willmott photo



Red fox, Chris Hamilton photo



Townsend's Solitaire in beauty berry bush. Rick Skerry photo



Black bear, Roy V. Rea photo

Goal 3 – Delivering Stewardship: Achieving Tangible Results

To improve wildlife stewardship, we need the right tools to deliver tangible on the ground changes in a timely way. We need to ensure our existing tools, whether they are policies and legislation, financial mechanisms, land designations, or restoration and enhancement activities, are effective in achieving the intended outcomes and, where needed, develop new tools, including legislation, policies and procedures to respond to our changing world.

We will be guided by clear and transparent objectives for wildlife stewardship that are developed collaboratively with Indigenous governments and through engagement with stakeholders. Science, Indigenous Knowledge⁷, local expertise and the needs, values and perspectives of all British Columbians will inform these objectives. Our objectives will be specific, measurable, relevant and time bound, will be set at an appropriate scale to reflect local differences, and will enable the actions needed to achieve our vision.

Working together to deliver stewardship, we will:

Action 8 | Establish clear, measurable objectives for wildlife stewardship. By 2021, in collaboration with the Minister’s Wildlife Advisory Council and First Nations Wildlife Forum, we will develop a renewed approach for objective setting and linking wildlife populations and habitat. We will then put this approach into action by establishing objectives and developing provincial management frameworks for priority species.

Action 9 | Starting in 2020, make investments to leverage other funding opportunities (e.g., Forest Carbon Initiative, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, Fish and Wildlife Compensation programs) for on the ground actions to meet wildlife objectives and increase priority wildlife populations. Examples of actions include enhancing and restoring priority habitats such as wetlands and grasslands, reducing wildlife mortality on highways and railways, establishing best management practices for industry, reducing wildlife conflicts with communities, deactivating and reclaiming resource roads, and managing key threats to wildlife and habitat, including invasive species and disease.



Mule Deer. Roy V. Rea photo

- Action 10** | By 2021, complete a comprehensive review of land designations under the *Land Act*, *Wildlife Act*, *Oil and Gas Activities Act*, and *Forest and Range Practices Act* that contribute to conservation to ensure they effectively target the intended habitat now and in the future. The results of that review will identify gaps and opportunities to improve the effectiveness of those designations for wildlife. Starting in 2022, we will complete more detailed, on the ground assessments for 10 percent of these designations every year. In collaboration with Indigenous governments, local governments and key partners, we will recommend changes to these land designations (e.g., boundaries, management direction) to improve their value for wildlife, and to meet established wildlife and habitat objectives. Proposed changes will follow the required consultation frameworks established by the applicable legislation.
- Action 11** | Starting in 2020, make investments to manage existing Conservation Lands⁸, and acquire new priority lands for wildlife stewardship. We will use these funds to leverage additional investments, and will strengthen ties with Indigenous governments, conservation partners, resource industries and stakeholders to better secure and manage conservation lands to achieve identified wildlife objectives.
- Action 12** | By 2021, review the *Wildlife Act* to make recommendations to modernize and address priority issues such as reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, improved outcomes for wildlife and wildlife stewardship, delivering effective and accessible services, financial mechanisms and ensuring wildlife and ecosystems support strong, innovative and sustainable local economies.

⁷ Indigenous Knowledge generally refers to knowledge systems embedded in the cultural traditions of Indigenous peoples and is based on observations and interactions with the environment. In many cases, Indigenous Knowledge has been passed on from person to person over generations through stories, legends, rituals, songs, laws or other means. The meaning of Indigenous Knowledge differs among societies and cultures. Additional information can be found at: <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/what-does-indigenous-knowledge-mean>

⁸ Administered Conservation Lands include Wildlife Management Areas designated under the *Wildlife Act*, Crown acquisitions, privately owned land leased to the Province, and Crown transfers of administration (between Ministries) all for the purposes of fish, wildlife and habitat conservation.

Goal 4 – Measuring Our Progress: Accountability & Transparency

Our success depends on making sure we are on the right path, which means assessing whether we are delivering the actions identified in this strategy and the impact of these actions to benefit wildlife. This requires a robust and transparent system of reporting on our actions, measures of success, and plans for future investments.

Working together to measure our progress, we will:

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| Action 13 | By 2021, implement a robust performance management framework with goals, objectives and performance measures to monitor and report publicly on the success of this strategy with all British Columbians. |
| Action 14 | Starting in 2021, produce annual financial reports that document all expenditures to deliver this strategy, and share these reports with all British Columbians. |
| Action 15 | Document and share with all British Columbians the rationale for significant decisions related to wildlife stewardship. By 2021, we will develop an approach for publicly reporting out on significant decisions and will implement this over the life of the strategy. |
| Action 16 | In 2025, complete a comprehensive review of this strategy and revise appropriately based on the knowledge gained. |

Goal 5 – Advancing Reconciliation: A Shared Path With Indigenous Governments

Our *Together for Wildlife* strategy will create new opportunities to work collaboratively with Indigenous governments to effectively and efficiently deliver wildlife stewardship. We will know that our work together is successful when Indigenous rights are recognized by society as foundational to how the Province and Indigenous governments steward wildlife, and when Indigenous peoples can meaningfully practise their traditions and customs.

The Province has a special constitutional relationship with Indigenous peoples. The *Constitution Act*, 1982 recognizes and affirms existing Aboriginal and treaty rights. Indigenous governments are not stakeholders. It is the Province's intention to shift our relationship with Indigenous governments to ensure our work is based on recognition and respect for the inherent right of Indigenous peoples to govern themselves and play an integral role in the stewardship of our shared natural resources.

The Province acknowledges that, consistent with existing laws and provincial policy, First Nations have first access to wildlife to meet their food, social and ceremonial needs, now and in the future.

Success also means that wildlife stewardship is delivered in partnership with Indigenous governments and that we continually endeavour to help build their capacity. Together, we must always be improving government-to-government relationships and informing ourselves about Indigenous worldviews, perspectives and approaches, as well as ensuring that all British Columbians understand the rights of Indigenous peoples and their role in wildlife stewardship.

⁹ While shared decision-making and co-management are often understood as meaning the same thing, for the purposes of this Strategy they are not. Shared decision-making involves Indigenous governments and the Province working together to make decisions over wildlife and habitat conservation with both parties sharing decision-making roles under provincial legislation. Shared-decision-making may require changes to legislation with supporting policy and direction. With co-management or "co-stewardship", Indigenous governments and the Province work collaboratively through the entire system of resource management from inventory and supporting methodologies, engagement, analysis, decision-making and effectiveness monitoring. As partners in shared decision-making and co-management, Indigenous governments and the Province will necessarily engage with stakeholders and tenure holders, industry and the public. In both cases what shared decision-making and co-management look like is up to each Indigenous government or groups of Indigenous governments to determine in partnership with the Province.

Working together to advance reconciliation, we will:

- Action 17** Continue to advance policy and legislative analysis to more fully understand and advance co-management and shared decision-making⁹ models and approaches with Indigenous governments in British Columbia. As co-management partners, Indigenous governments and the Province will together define the scope, mandate and function of the arrangements to be used.
- Action 18** With the B.C.–First Nation Wildlife Forum, jointly develop communication and extension materials to educate and inform British Columbians about the nature of Aboriginal rights and title, modern and historic treaties, Indigenous worldviews, use of wildlife and Indigenous wildlife stewardship approaches. By 2021, we will engage with Indigenous governments on draft communication materials.
- Action 19** Incorporate Indigenous Knowledge into statutory and non-statutory wildlife stewardship decision-making through the collaborative development of policies and procedures. These policies and procedures will provide direction and guidance for provincial government staff, to ensure a consistent approach across the province. By 2021, jointly with the B.C.–First Nation Wildlife Forum, we will draft a policy and engage with Indigenous governments.
- Action 20** By 2021 we will develop and complete, in collaboration with participating Indigenous governments, an evaluation of existing guardian and compliance projects. By 2022, building on successes identified in the evaluation, we will develop an approach to a formal compliance program that will be implemented locally with Indigenous governments at their request.
- Action 21** Invest to develop models and approaches for sharing wildlife and habitat data and information with Indigenous governments. This will include the development of agreements and technology that would allow Indigenous governments to share Indigenous Knowledge, and community and food security needs with the Province to support co-management and shared decision-making.
- Action 22** Invest in capacity to ensure Indigenous governments can effectively and efficiently participate in all aspects of wildlife stewardship. Develop pilot initiatives to involve collectives of Indigenous governments to deliver trusted information to support shared stewardship.
- Action 23** By 2020, create and support the operation of a formal British Columbia – First Nations Wildlife Forum to provide Indigenous perspectives on the development of policies and legislation that will help inform discussions with Indigenous governments throughout the province.



Bighorn sheep graze on a hillside. Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development photo

4 / How to Comment

For more information about the *Together for Wildlife – A Proposed Pathway Forward for Wildlife and Habitat in British Columbia* please contact:

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Cover: Elk bull and cow, Roy V. Rea photo

