

# Valhalla Wilderness Society

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## VWS' 2017 ACTIVITIES, THANKS TO YOUR SUPPORT

A hefty contribution from VWS helps the Valhalla Foundation purchase a significant wetland in the Kootenays; a tour with Damien Gillis's film, *Primeval*, generates many letters for protection of the Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal; a team of biologists makes the first ever scientific exploration of an intact valley in the Inland Temperate Rainforest and finds undreamt wealth of biodiversity; environmental and animal welfare organizations, wildlife-based businesses and artists band together in a struggle to end grizzly bear hunting; a well-known BC grizzly bear biologist takes time from his field studies to ensure that hundreds of thousands of tiny toadlets can cross dangerous highways securely to reach their breeding habitat; environmentalists, lawyers, and biologists work feverishly to save the mountain caribou. What all these activities, and many others, have in common is that they were carried out or supported in 2017 by the Valhalla Wilderness Society with the help of your donations.

Every year it is important to pause from our work in the valley bottom of human affairs to seek a mountaintop view. From there, our enclave of environmentally concerned citizens is revealed to be part of a worldwide human effort. We are struggling to fulfil a sacred duty to future generations: to perpetuate the survival and health of life on this planet. Whether we are rangers risking our lives to stop the poaching of elephants, or writing letters to stop the hunting of grizzly bears, we are on a mercy mission to other species that are suffering because of human excesses. How can each of us be part of this effort?

Since donations became easily accessible through our website at <http://www.vws.org>, small contributions have become evermore a mainstay of our work. Your \$10 or \$20 donation, when joined with others, becomes a river of support

for this work. Public-spirited philanthropists and foundations pour grants into this stream. Professionals contribute their services to VWS, either free or by charging for only a small part of their labour. What they give is usually completely beyond our means, but is crucial to our work. We cannot name here everyone on our "honour roll" for 2017, but perhaps a representative few will suffice:



A portion of VWS funds was donated to the Valhalla Foundation towards the purchase of the wetland at the head of Slokan Lake. Photo: S. Sherrod.

Louise Taylor helped VWS's directors carry a big load by sending out Action Alerts and doing research and writing, much of it on a volunteer basis. She has now moved to Australia and we wish her the very best. Karl Gfroerer bequeathed to VWS 30 years of invaluable wildlife film-making in and around our Selkirk park proposal. Jim Lawrence has showered VWS with his superb wildlife photos for years, and this year organized a showing of *Primeval*. Dr. Lee Harding, a former Environment Canada biologist and manager, laboured for weeks

to bring coherence and the best possible accuracy to our lengthy caribou report to the federal Minister of Environment. Thanks to the Environmental Law Centre at the University of Victoria, especially lawyer Calvin Sandborn and student Chelsea Harris, for initiating the project and doing much research. Damien Gillis has arranged and attended numerous screenings of his film, *Primeval*. Lichenologist Trevor Goward has become a fellow caribou campaigner and is working to call attention to VWS's Selkirk and Quesnel park proposals. Dr. Toby Spribille continues at the very core of our Inland Temperate Rainforest campaign.

Whether we win or lose any particular issue, the battle we are fighting together is an collective endeavour that represents our best hope of preserving some ecosystems and their species from the consuming profit imperatives and exploitative greed that is endangering our planet.

# INCOMAPPLEUX FILM *PRIMEVAL* CAPTIVATES BC AUDIENCES

The Valhalla Wilderness Society has members across the province, but many communities in BC have never had a chance to meet the people involved in our projects. Perhaps the most marked change of 2017 was VWS director Craig Pettitt's tour to a dozen BC communities with Damien Gillis's breathtaking film about the Incomappleux, *Primeval*, and sometimes with Gillis himself.

This ancient rainforest, thousands of years old, with trees of awe-inspiring size, was a key part of British Columbia's original legacy to the world. VWS initiated the film because we wanted people everywhere to experience, in some way, this ancient heritage known by our ancestors: its peace, its majesty, its refuge for thousands of forms of life. Perhaps they would feel, as we do, the urgency of protecting such places. Perhaps they would write letters to government urging protection of the Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal and its gem, the Incomappleux old-growth.

Throughout winter and spring 2017, Craig and Damien travelled several thousand kilometers showing the film in the southern interior of BC and on the west coast, including to Salt-Spring Island, Nanaimo, Wells, Cumberland, Qualicum, Brackendale, Prince George, three venues in Vancouver, and three in Victoria. The film was also selected for screening at the prestigious Environmental Film Festival in the Nation's Capitol, in Washington, DC.



L to R: VWS director and public speaker Craig Pettitt, filmmaker Damien Gillis, biologist Toby Spribille and forestry professor Suzanne Simard answer questions after a showing of *Primeval* at the University of BC. Photo: Mari Omori

Craig introduced the film with a short slide show that set the context for the park proposal and the plight of its endangered caribou. That so many attended is testimony to people's deep desire to touch the primeval. For millennia, such forests have been cleaning our air, storing carbon, and nurturing myriad life forms. Underneath the visual beauty of old-growth is a deeper beauty that represents the cooperation of millions of organisms, and one who enters the Incomappleux can feel the intricate orchestration of life all around them.

During summer and fall of 2017, Pettitt continued the tour in BC's Interior, with presentations in Slokan, Kaslo, Argenta, and New Denver. People wrote many letters to our MLAs. The film is being requested by communities and dates are confirmed for showings in Procter and Kelowna. The hospitality of those who host us shows that we are not the only ones passionate to defend our wilderness. Fuelled by this passion, we are determined to reach out to a larger audience. VWS is also hoping to make the film available on DVD sometime in 2018.

The film's launch was accompanied by the start of an online petition on Change.org, aided by Gillis's poetic *Primeval* trailer, which you can see on VWS's website. The petition has received close to 35,000 signatures from BC, which will be printed off at an opportune time and presented to BC's legislature.

## Screening of *Primeval* brings VWS a new team member

Amber Peters saw *Primeval* in Kaslo, and was determined not to be left behind. She introduced herself as a biologist who wanted to work with VWS, and immediately began providing able assistance at further screenings. Within a couple of weeks she was in the field with Craig Pettitt and Toby Spribille, and examining the newly acquired Snk'mip Marsh with Wayne McCrory and was invited to join Dr. Spribille on his discovery adventure to previously unrecorded old-growth Inland Temperate Rainforest. Amber writes of her experience of *Primeval*:

*Even after many screenings, the film never fails to invoke a strong emotion in our own team, and we too leave each evening feeling inspired to push forward in our cause. We thank everyone for taking the time to hear what we have to say, and standing with us in the fight to protect BC's wilderness.*



Photo: Craig Pettitt

# INLAND TEMPERATE RAINFOREST PROJECT GROWS TO NEW HEIGHTS

by Amber Peters

In an extraordinary part of BC's southern interior, a microclimate persists with conditions usually found only in coastal regions. This region is known as the Interior Wet Belt; a place where humid temperate winds breathe life into richly biodiverse forests. Here lies an interesting phenomenon found nowhere else in the world; the Inland Temperate Rainforest. Valhalla Wilderness Society has spent 15 years tirelessly documenting rare forests that exhibit the most distinctive rainforest characteristics. Unidentified as biodiversity hot spots, these remarkable forests are candidates for destruction by clear-cut logging, and many have already been lost. Documenting their exceptional biodiversity is crucial if we are to achieve the protection they deserve.

This fall, Valhalla Wilderness Society had a thrilling success in the goal to identify precious remnants of Inland Temperate Rainforest. A passionate team of biologists embarked on an adventure into an old growth forest previously unexplored by science, finding more than just a remnant of this rare ecosystem type. What we discovered was an ancient world, unaltered by humankind and stretching far beyond the reaches of a day's expedition. There were no records to be found of any other exploration or research taking place in this lost forest and the dense undergrowth suggested we were modern pioneers.

University of Alberta biologist Toby Spribille clued us in to the potential of an intact ancient rainforest similar to the old growth of the Incomappleux. This valley was far from the Incomappleux, promising a unique constellation of ecological jewels. Dr. Spribille's curiosity and ingenuity sparked the adventure, and our supporters helped make it possible. Were it not for our members and supporters, we would not have found this beautiful legacy of British Columbia's true wilderness.

Dr. Spribille led myself and his graduate student Gulnara Tagirdzhanova near the mouth of a creek on a hillside where we climbed to an open ridgetop blanketed in bunches of

ground lichens. As we travelled across the rocky ridge and into the valley bottom, we were amazed by the untouched wonderland of rare lichens and enormous cedars. Giant forests of devils club towered over us and the tallest Douglas maple I'd ever seen stood majestically amongst the cedars.

We were surrounded by undeniable rainforest characteristics such as moss-covered branches and ferns thriving high in the moist crevasses of outreaching cedar boughs. Decaying wood gave new life to tree saplings while fungi and lichens flourished in healthy clusters. This temperate rainforest is a true anomaly of our overdeveloped earth, and we were blown away by the enormous ancient trees. It was like stepping into another world.

We carried on through the valley bottom where a circle of fallen giants leaned on a living cedar as if they were bowing to its magnificence. A wildlife bed of flattened vegetation laid in a ring of trees, and hollow cedars with raised roots were partially excavated by bears preparing for hibernation.

Rushing to document the plethora of biodiversity, we decided we were already late to turn back. What a shame it was to leave this valley mostly unexplored, but we look forward to returning next summer on an expedition to uncover its mystery and build a case to preserve it. Heading back to our starting point, we treaded through a marshy area where we suspected the presence of a bear. We spoke softly and carried on with the sense of ease that comes from a day spent nurtured by a lush cathedral of life.

Leaving the forest we knew we had just experienced something special. Not only was it special, but also precious, as it could disappear before British Columbians have a chance to experience what it truly means to be a part of this landscape. After spending a day immersed in this sanctuary I realized more so than ever the importance of protecting these wild places. I call upon my fellow BC residents to join me in raising our voices for those without a voice, and to ask the BC government to protect these ancient treasures for future generations.



Photo: Toby Spribille

# VWS WESTERN TOAD CONSERVATION EFFORTS CONTINUE

In 2017, VWS continued to be active in the conservation of Western Toads (*Anaxyrus boreas*, aka *Bufo boreas*) in the West Kootenays at three key areas: Fish Lake, Summit Lake, and Beaver Lake.

Toads have very complicated life-cycles. Living mostly on land, they rely on surrounding lakes for reproduction involving three intricate migrations: After winter hibernation, adults migrate on warm spring nights to breed in shallow waters of their natal lakes, each female laying up to 17,000 eggs. After breeding, adults move back to their mountain habitats. In early summer, tadpoles hatch and metamorphose into hundreds of thousands of toadlets that move from water to land in late summer and autumn.

Where breeding lakes are adjacent to active roads, all three migrations force toads and toadlets to cross busy highways. Studies show that roadkills pose a significant conservation threat to the survival of the species. This is why three years ago VWS began a study at Fish Lake in an attempt to mitigate massive road mortalities.

Why are Western toads important? Like salmon, a female Western toad produces many eggs, with only a tiny percent surviving to adulthood. The majority of the baby toad biomass goes into feeding reptiles, birds, and mammals. Substantial nutrient input is carried into the forest as toadlets migrate from lakes to woodlands.



## Fish Lake

The VWS toad project at Fish Lake built a wooden toadlet bridge under the Highway 31A bridge, and 3,000 toadlets were photographed using the bridge this year. A 300m deflection fence patterned with the direction of their migration “inner compass” helped them find the bridge. The photograph shows a small bird known as a “water

ouzel” feasting on toads crossing the bridge. Many volunteers assisted our study, including supervised children shown above decorating the wooden toadlet fence before installation.

Our third year of the four-year VWS study revealed that adult toad mortality on the highway is a serious concern, especially for egg-bearing females. VWS started a “Toad Ambassador” program with volunteers helping biologists count toads migrating across the highway at night. Volunteers also moved over 300 toads to safety, including 80 females carrying eggs. The research will be used to identify the best areas for toad highway underpasses and directional fencing to secure the future of this species at risk.



Top: Experimental fence deflected thousands of migrating toadlets to a safe crossing under a nearby highway bridge  
Bottom: Volunteers do artwork on toadlet migration fence before installation (W. McCrory photos).

Below left: Remote camera captured water ouzel eating a baby toad crossing on the toadlet bridge (VWS photo).

With a three-year permit from the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI), VWS has turned the Fish Lake rest stop into a major toad interpretation site. The public’s response to the project has been overwhelming.

The VWS Fish Lake toad study was funded by Columbia Basin Trust, Kootenay Lake Local Conservation Fund, Yellowstone-to-Yukon Conservation Initiative, and VWS donors. The study has a high level of cooperation with adjacent private landowners, the Kaslo-Sandon Rail-to-Trail Society, and MoTI. This project was carried out in 2017 with the indispensable work of photographer Isaac Carter and dedicated toad researchers Marcy Mahr, Cindy

Walker, Claire de la Salle, and Wayne McCrory.

## Beaver Lake

Another hub of Western toad activity in the Slocan watershed is Beaver Lake in Wilson Creek. VWS has documented upwards of 100,000 toadlets at one time in their summer migration from the lake. Researcher Cindy Walker set up a permanent plot system along the adjacent logging road and monitored a continual toadlet migration until October 13, when temperatures dropped to 4°C. Within the first two weeks of monitoring, some of the tiny toadlets had travelled an incredible distance of 1.3 km from the natal lake. VWS research revealed no evidence of breeding toads in several other nearby lakes (Little Wilson and Wilson), indicating that not all lakes are used for breeding by these amphibians. The information will be used to advocate closure of the campsite in the high density toadlet habitat, with people encouraged to use the campsites at the other two lakes not used by toads.

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## VWS CONTRIBUTES TO PURCHASE OF SLOCAN LAKE MARSH

Numerous Valhalla Society supporters dug into their pockets this summer to help the Valhalla Foundation for Ecology raise funds to buy the 35-acre Snk'mip or Bonanza Marsh at the head of Slocan Lake. For the past 30 years, VWS and others have been trying to save the marsh as the previous owner, a mining promoter, hauled away truckloads of topsoil and gravel from this sensitive wildlife habitat and even tried a small gold placer mining operation in the heart of the marsh. VWS repeatedly reported the damage and illegal activity to authorities. In 1998, a number of VWS directors and others decided to form a registered land trust so they could purchase private lands for conservation.

In August, VWS, many of our supporters, and other conservation organizations made significant contributions to the land trust, raising enough to purchase the marsh. Fed by calcium springs, the Snk'mip Marsh includes many rare and endangered species. It is also a major breeding habitat for the Pacific tree frog and other amphibians and reptiles. The wetlands support a diversity of bird life, including over-wintering Trumpeter swans. Preservation of the marsh anchors a vital habitat link in the wildlife corridor between Valhalla and Goat Range provincial parks, two of VWS's showcase protection areas.

The marsh will now be managed as a Nature Preserve with non-motorized public access. Local Sinixt spokesperson Marilyn James gave permission to use the ancient place name Snk'mip, meaning Head of the Lake, for the new Nature Preserve. In October, more good news arrived with the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Fund donation of \$50,000 to be retroactively applied to the purchase, freeing up funds for restoration and stewardship. Clean up of old mining junk, old buildings, and garbage has nearly been completed and restoration experts will be hired to design a plan to help restore damaged sites.

Protecting vital and fast-disappearing lakeshore and wetland habitats from development is nothing new for the Valhalla Foundation. The success stories include the addition of a 160-acre waterfront parcel to Valhalla Provincial Park, as well as "Colleen's Beach Park" on Slocan Lake, named in honour of the late award-winning VWS conservationist Colleen McCrory. The Foundation's Elkin Creek Nature Preserve in the BC Chilcotin protected a prime 240 acres of wetlands, salmon spawning sites, and native bluegrass meadow habitat. It was a "natural" that the Foundation would also save the vital, beating heart of the Snk'mip wetlands of Slocan Lake. We look forward to celebrating future success stories with our supporters.



Rejoicing in hard-earned success: VWS biologist Wayne McCrory and long-time VWS supporter biologist Ron Jakimchuk at new Snk'mip Nature Preserve. Photo: Xisa Huang

### Summit Lake Toad Park vs Logging Battle Royal:

A case study in why provincial policies involving logging are failing species at risk

For a number of years, conservationists, biologists, and local residents have attempted to expand the Summit Lake Provincial Park and Section 16 Goal 2 park reserve to protect core terrestrial habitat of the Western toad as a class A provincial park. The core habitat should include a 2-km area around the lake. The Summit Lake population is considered a significant breeding population and studies suggest it may be declining. The province, through Columbia Basin Trust and other sources, has funded over \$1 million for toad research and construction of highway toad infrastructures. At the same time, the Ministry of Forests and Natural Resources (MFLNRO) has aggressively sabotaged conservation efforts by approving clearcuts in core toad habitats by the Nakusp and Area Community Forest (NACFOR), even turning a blind eye to NACFOR moving heavy equipment to commence logging during toadlet migrations.

In February 2017, MFLNRO implemented a two-year study moratorium in a 500-m zone around Summit Lake, but the pro-logging biased government agency, including the re-

gional biologist, had already approved the logging prior to the moratorium, resulting in the clearcutting of a block partially within the moratorium area. Five of the seven proposed clearcuts were logged last winter. This winter, a cutblock is up for logging where thousands of toads were videoed migrating outside the moratorium area during spring 2016. Observed toadlet migration numbers were significantly lower in summer 2017 compared to 2016.

The moratorium is part of MFLNRO's Toad Management Strategy, but it outlines logging plans instead of the establishment of an adequate-sized park. The plan was not advertised for public input, and is subject to change only by a Qualified Professional Biologist, revealing a pro-logging bias and ignoring VWS's professional biologist's report recommendations for protection of core habitat around Summit Lake. BC's first toad park would only amount to 649 ha of NACFOR's cutting area, which could easily be made up by the province from elsewhere in the huge Arrow Timber Supply Area. With government resource managers given carte blanche executive powers by the former provincial government, it is no wonder that our list of endangered species keeps growing.

## VWS WEST CHILCOTIN CAMPAIGNS

### ***Nexwagwezan–Dasiqox Tribal Park management plan & threat by Taseko Mines***

VWS continued to provide input into the Xeni Gwet'in-Yunesit'in Nations' management plan for the new Tribal Park and push for a legislated type of protection. In 2014, the Tsilhqot'in Nations declared the whole area, including Fish Lake (Teztan Biny), as the 3,000 sq. km Nexwagwezan–Dasiqox Tribal Park. This park of exceptional beauty and abundant fish and wildlife covers an area larger than Banff National Park. The Tribal Park was created at a ceremony at Teztan Biny after the proposed New Prosperity mine was turned down twice by the federal government. The costly hearings found that the proposed mine would cause unacceptable environmental impacts.

In 2016, VWS and the Xeni Gwet'in carried out further grizzly bear and Western toad surveys at Teztan Biny. In July 2017, BC's outgoing government issued new permits for Taseko Mines Ltd. to do more mine exploration. This utterly contradicted last year's accord signed by BC and the Tsilhqot'in to work more closely on land issues. Shockingly, the permits would allow Taseko Mines to dig 122 drill holes and 367 test pits, and build 20 kms of seismic lines and 76 kms of new or modified trails for the proposed open pit mine sited in areas VWS and other researchers consider highly sensitive grizzly bear and fish habitats. Fortunately, the federal Environment minister recently rejected the provincial permits.

### **Eagle Lake Henry Wild Horse Preserve wolf study**

With support from VWS and others, biologist Sadie Parr is completing a final 4-year research report on wolf feeding ecology in the Eagle Lake Henry Wild Horse Preserve created by the Xeni Gwet'in. This area is now part of Tribal Lands granted by a recent Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) ruling. Sadie braved harsh Chilcotin winters snowshoeing and hiking hundred of kms recording wolf sign and collecting wolf scats and hair to use in her study. Sadie's excellent research shows that wild horses form an important part of the diet of resident wolves and, even though salmon spawn in the general area, wolves were not utilizing them as they do on the coast.

### **Chilcotin-wild horse genetic study delayed by wildfires**

Thanks to funding from the Fitzhenry Family Foundation and Lush Cosmetics, VWS was able to expand our joint wild horse genetic study with the Xeni Gwet'in Nation to the whole Chilcotin, where the last 1,000 wild horses in BC still

survive. Our previous report for Tachelach'ed (Brittany Tri- angle), headed by Dr. Gus Cothran of Texas A & M University, found the main ancestral bloodlines are the Canadian horse and an ancient bloodline from Siberia, the Yakut horse. Yakut ancestry has never been found in wild horses in North America, leading some scientists to speculate that they may represent horses that survived the last Ice Age. A follow-up genome study on this is now being done by the Centre for GeoGenetics, Natural History Museum of Denmark.

The horse evolved in North America over the last 50 million years. VWS biologist Wayne McCrory, Xeni Gwet'in traditional researcher Norman William, and volunteer John Huizinga have been walking dozens of kms of Chilcotin wild



Xeni Gwet'in researcher Norman William and biologist Sadie Parr in camp at Teztan Biny for VWS-Xeni grizzly bear-toad study. (W. McCrory photo)

horse trails to collect wild horse hair caught on tree branches. The basal (follicle) part of the hair contains the genetic information being analyzed by the two labs involved in the study. Unfortunately, field sampling this summer and fall was delayed due to large wildfires. One of our study area wild horse herds was trapped in a pine forest and killed by the Hanceville fire, this year's largest in the province. In December 2016, five horses from the same band were indiscriminately shot along the road, but the RCMP did not do a thor-

ough investigation since wild horses are neither wildlife nor domestic stock under Canadian laws, so they have no statutory protection. In the past, they have been classed as "feral" and subjected to bounty hunts and periodic slaughters. VWS is hoping the genetic results along with other research will help finally bring protection to the last 1,000 wild horses out of the tens of thousands that used to roam BC's interior grasslands.

### **VWS SLOCAN VALLEY BEAR SMART PROGRAM**

Thanks to a better berry crop this year, we did not have the bear-people conflicts of last year when a number of black bears living in New Denver and Silverton were shot by Conservation Officers. Last year, the bears ran out of fruit and ramped up their food-seeking efforts as winter approached.

In 2017, VWS Bear Smart Coordinator Evelyn Kirkaldy fielded numerous calls, gave talks, attended meetings, and continued her excellent public education program on the ongoing need to control attractants. Thanks partly to funding from the Regional District of Central Kootenay, Gillian Sanders installed 14 bear-proof fences for rural residents in the Slocan Valley, with her program covering 50% of the costs. This program was so successful that VWS also funded 50% of the costs for an additional six electric fence units around fruit trees for the villages of New Denver and Silverton.

# Please Write a Letter to Save the SELKIRK MOUNTAIN CARIBOU PARK PROPOSAL

## THE PARK WOULD PROTECT:

- ★ **PRIMEVAL INLAND TEMPERATE RAINFOREST** with trees up to four metres across and 2,000 years old, abounding with rare lichens, mushrooms, plants and many other forms of biodiversity.
- ★ **MOUNTAIN CARIBOU HABITAT** — 28 mountain caribou use the proposed park, which contains a large part of their critical habitat. Half of the proposed park has already been protected from logging as caribou Ungulate Winter Range, but the area needs to be expanded and fully protected as a Class A park.
- ★ **TROUT SPAWNING GROUNDS:** Sections of four rivers are in the park proposal. They provide critical spawning grounds for the blue-listed Bull Trout of Kootenay Lake and Arrow Lakes Reservoir. They host spawning runs of kokanee salmon and Gerrard rainbow.
- ★ **GRIZZLY BEARS** fishing for kokanee salmon.
- ★ **Dense, humid, high-biomass old-growth forests** critical for carbon absorption to reduce climate change. These forests remain standing despite 50 years of clearcutting, mostly because steep slopes have made road building uneconomical, because they are remote from mills.



Inland Temperate Rainforest (ITR) occurs nowhere else in the world but in British Columbia's Interior Wetbelt. ITR is the wettest kind of Interior Cedar-Hemlock (ICH) forest. It makes up only 15% of the forest of the Interior Wetbelt. These are our highest biodiversity forests in the Interior: 283 lichen species have been identified in the Incomappleux Valley alone.

## THIS PARK PROPOSAL IS SUPPORTED BY:

**Pacific Wild**

**Purcell Alliance for Wilderness**

**Raincoast Conservation**

**Save-the-Cedar League**

**West Kootenay Ecosociety**

**Wilderness Committee**

**Wolf Awareness Incorporated**

**Applied Ecological Stewardship Council of BC**

**Conservation Biology Center**

**Craighead Environmental Research Institute**

**Golden Chapter, Council of Canadians**



Craig Pettitt

*Rare antique Inland Temperate Rainforest in the upper Incomappleux Valley, in the park proposal.*

# The proposed Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park is more urgently needed than ever

## Central Selkirk Caribou are crashing rapidly

At right, a mountain caribou bull pauses to look at the photographer very near the boundary of the Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal. Perhaps he is trying to tell us that his family needs help. There are only 28 animals left in the Central Selkirk herd, and every yearly census brings more dismal news. There were 98 when our park campaign began. It is possible that logging had already gone too far when the government's recovery program set aside some forest for them. Besides ongoing logging, the animals' winter habitat is being swarmed by snowmobiles in winter and their calving habitat is crawling with ATVs in summer.

## Logging is eating away at the park proposal

Road building and logging are taking place at two sites within the park proposal that are federally designated mountain caribou habitat. Wherever the forest is cut, it will endanger the lives of the remaining caribou. Yet the BC government's own logging company, BC Timber Sales, is doing the logging.

In addition, one of the new logging roads has opened a stand of large old cedar trees to ATV access. There are numerous sites where fallen trees are being cut up and hauled away for roofing shakes. VWS filed a complaint with the BC Timber Sales' Woodlands Supervisor, who informed us that this ancient old growth was designated as Mule Deer Ungulate Winter Range, which allows logging.

Fallen cedars that take over 100 years to decay provide shelter to many species including bears, and act as a substrate for mushrooms eaten by ungulates in early winter when food is limited. Shake cutting operations left garbage and numerous ATV trails through the old growth forest, opening it to further destruction and ultimately putting pressure on struggling ungulate populations.



Karl Gfroerer

*One of 28 mountain caribou in the park proposal*



*Park proposal old-growth used for shake cutting.*

## MASSIVE LETTER CAMPAIGN IS URGENTLY NEEDED

- The most important thing you can do is write a letter to the BC government urging the creation of the proposed park. (Contact details are listed below).
- Elected officials are more likely to be swayed by personal letters than a petition or emails, so please hand write or type your letter and mail it. Yes, snail mail is most effective! Nevertheless, email is a handy option.
- Ask for a reply to your request for the park.
- Sign your letter and include your full name as well as your address.
- Please also sign the paper petition to the BC Legislature, as well as the separate online petition at [Change.org](http://Change.org).

**Address your letter to:**  
The Honourable John Horgan  
Premier of British Columbia  
East Annex, Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, BC, Canada V8V 1X4  
[premier@gov.bc.ca](mailto:premier@gov.bc.ca)  
Phone: 250-387-1715  
Fax: 250-387-0087

**Send a copy to:**  
The Honourable Catherine McKenna, M.P.  
Minister of Environment and Climate Change  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6  
Tel: 613-996-5322  
Fax: 613-996-5323  
[ec.ministre-minister.ec@canada.ca](mailto:ec.ministre-minister.ec@canada.ca)

**Please also write your local MLA, and send a copy of your letters to Valhalla Wilderness Society.**



# THE DEVASTATION OF THE LAST TEN YEARS OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

by Anne Sherrod

## MOUNTAIN CARIBOU

After BC's Mountain Caribou Recovery Plan was announced in 2007, with the approval of 10 environmental groups, VWS and an equal number of allies called it an "extinction plan". For 10 years we fought an unrelenting uphill battle to expose the fraudulent plan. Now BC is dangerously close to knowingly wiping out all 24 southern (southeastern BC) and central (South Peace) mountain caribou herds — and logging of federally identified critical habitat for them is still going on.

This year the federal government released a trove of information on the central mountain caribou for public comment. The scope of habitat destruction and inadequacy of habitat protection was severe. Louise Taylor and I gave extensive input on several Environment Canada reports on behalf of VWS. Of the southern mountain caribou, six of the 14 herds now number fewer than 30 individuals.

In 2016 the University of Victoria Environmental Law Centre (ELC) offered VWS assistance to file a petition to the federal Minister of Environment. This would be a large compilation of facts that would require her to take steps towards enforcement of the SARA. This year it required a massive amount of documentation carried out by Louise and myself, in addition to the research by the ELC.

## AUDITOR GENERAL'S GRIZZLY BEAR REPORT

The Auditor General's office consulted with VWS's resident bear biologist, Wayne McCrory, while doing research for its 2017 report. The report confirms that grizzly bears are threatened by habitat destruction and human conflicts. It points out that BC's 600,000 km of industrial roads are increased by approximately 10,000 km of new roads each year. Roads are deadly to grizzly bears because they provide easy access to hunters and poachers. The report raised serious questions about the grizzly bear hunt. Large or small in number, hunting deaths are part of the cumulative human-caused mortality of grizzlies, and we don't have an accurate toll of how many we kill each year.

## MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT PLUNDERED

A key part what happened over the last 10 years is explained in the Auditor General's report on grizzly bear management. To put it bluntly, our Ministry of Environment (MOE) has been largely dismantled. Control over wildlife was given to the Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations (FLNRO) — the same Ministry that is killing grizzly bears and mountain caribou by maintaining high rates of clearcut logging. Many employees who lost their jobs at



**Two Species at Risk, One River:** Both of these photographs were taken at about the same place, on a river in Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal. The Auditor General's report pointed out that the province has never implemented the recommendation of the previous audit on biodiversity, to create more connectivity of protected habitat. This connectivity is especially found along rivers. Incorporating 3 rivers, the Selkirk proposal connects 3 parks for these species. There are only 28 Central Selkirk caribou left, and yet the park proposal is starting to be logged.

Photos: L, Craig Pettitt; R, Karl Gfroerer

MOE were senior staff who represented many decades of experience. To revive the Ministry, a lot of staff will have to be retrained. It will be a long road back to recovery — if the new government chooses to do so.

## THE THREAT OF PRIVATIZATION OF WILDLIFE

The destruction of BC's wildlife management capacity included a withdrawal of funds from wildlife protection programs. The slashing of staff and funding of government offices is widely recognized as preparation for privatization. The cuts set the stage for a government announcement this year that wildlife management would be turned over to an independent agency funded by hunting and fishing fees and managed by hunting and fishing interests. A joint letter launched by VWS drew the signatures of 16 environmental groups and wildlife-based business expressed staunch opposition. Fortunately an election and a new government intervened; it has rejected the independent wildlife agency, but unless MOE and its programs receive ample staff and funding, we will be fighting privatization again in the future.

## GRIZZLY BEAR MEAT HUNT

While banning the grizzly bear trophy hunt, the new BC government declared that there would now be a grizzly bear meat hunt! Whether it's for trophies or meat, killing a grizzly bear usually requires several bullets that explode inside their bodies, causing agonizing wounds. VWS initiated a joint letter to government signed by 45 environmental and animal welfare groups, wildlife-based businesses and photographers, and independent activists. We say the meat hunt is just a trophy hunt in disguise. Over the last 10 years the public at large has been increasingly excluded from decision-making process, as the previous government initiated a practice of backroom negotiations with "stakeholders". (cont. on back)

## HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

The wildlife crises of 2017 have been coalescing a network of cooperation between environmental and animal welfare groups, wildlife-based businesses and artists, and independent activists. Over the last two years VWS has been working with these people on a series of joint press releases and letters to government that take strong stands on these issues (you can find some on the Home Page of our website). An increasing number of groups and individuals have been signing on.

One of our chief collective concerns is that BC wildlife management increasingly focuses on pleasing hunters and ranchers rather than applying good science. BC has been in denial that it has 1,500 species at risk and is presiding over

the buildup of a massive extinction spasm.

Members of the public at large who value wildlife alive have been increasingly depowered as, over the last 10 years, government has switched from true public process to consulting “stakeholders” (usually people who have a financial stake in the outcome) who must sign confidentiality agreements. The reality is that wildlife management in BC already has one foot in privatization.

Can the new government turn this around? Not unless those of us who value our wildlife alive band together and increasingly assert that wildlife belongs to the public; we want truly open public process in decision-making, and adequate funding for species protection through our tax dollars.

## DAVIS AWARD

### World Wildlife Fund and CPAWS preserve the memory of Glen Davis with a prize for environmentalists who work behind the scenes

by Wayne McCrory

The late Glen Davis was one of Canada’s foremost supporters of numerous Canada-wide efforts to protect wild places, including some of VWS-led successful campaigns such as the Khutzeymateen Grizzly Bear Sanctuary and Spirit Bear Conservancy Complex. He supported innumerable environmental groups across Canada.

This year World Wildlife Canada and CPAWS announced Anne Sherrod as the recipient of their first Conservation Leadership prize in memory of Glen, with a gift of \$10,000. For more than 35 years, Anne has lived on next to nothing, yet has shown dedication, talent, and passion as a VWS researcher/writer/campaigner and former VWS Director for most of those years.

Working either as a volunteer or on a modest salary (depending on funding vagaries common to environmental organizations), Anne has been part of the backbone of Valhalla’s conservation work. She has researched, written, and produced hundreds of VWS press releases, action alerts, newsletters, briefs, petitions, reports and legal documents related to VWS’s successful park proposals such as Goat Range, Khutzeymateen, and others.

Some years ago she played a key role in rallying public opposition against turning BC Parks into a public-private partnership, and later against a plan to open BC parks to lodge development. Along the way she drafted and networked the “Declaration on the Principles of Parks” signed by nearly 100 BC and US environmental groups. It can be found at [www.vws.org/projects/declaration/](http://www.vws.org/projects/declaration/).

In more recent years, Anne championed the Selkirk



Mountain Caribou Park Proposal, her work helped to stop two run-of-river power-generation projects in the Incomappleux Valley. The Glen Davis Leadership prize was very deserved for a person pivotal to protecting more than 600,000 ha of wilderness in an organization that has won international acclaim for its visionary work.



### Thoughts on Receiving the Glen Davis Prize

To hear the voice of Nature calling for help and be unable to answer would have been true poverty in my life. To have the support of a whole team of people of exactly the same mind and emotion has been a gift beyond imagining. A cooperating team lifts everyone’s work to a higher, more effective level.

I am convinced that a great majority of people in BC feel an urgent imperative to protect nature. What a privilege, to get to serve their yearning and to focus, in a sense, their own actions and giving!

World Wildlife Fund and CPAWS did an important thing in setting up this prize. They not only perpetuated the memory of a great Giver, but they also called attention to the fact that the environmental movement is made of thousands of people who work behind the scenes for little or no payment and no recognition for their work.

Protecting the environment is a collective effort. Neither the poor nor the rich can be spared — there has to be a lot of self-giving on everyone’s part. There will never be another Glen Davis, but it turns out ... there are a few more very much like him in that they are not only very generous, but turn their philanthropy into a human experience and an adventure.

A.S.