



Reference: 31430

December 15, 2023

VIA EMAIL: nancylwilkin@gmail.com, harryn@nisgaanation.ca

Simoogit Hleek (Chief Harry Nyce Sr.), Co-Chair
Nancy Wilkin, Co-Chair
Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council

Dear Simoogit Hleek (Chief Harry Nyce Sr.) and Nancy Wilkin:

Thank you for your letter of August 3rd, regarding the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework and a supporting Office for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health and thoughts regarding resource roads and wild sheep. I also thank you for your letter from September 15th regarding the catastrophic wildfire season and recovery effort. I appreciate your input on the Strategic Plan for Conservation Lands and your letter to the Provincial Hunting and Trapping Advisory Team regarding fisher. The Council is a critical advisor; we are deeply appreciative of the thoughtful effort that goes into the development of your recommendations.

With the recent re-organization the responsibility for the *Wildlife Act*, Together for Wildlife is fully under the responsibility of my Ministry. I will continue to share information and your advice with my cabinet colleagues when relevant, and I remain committed to collaborative and integrated solutions.

I support the specific responses to your new recommendations below, but first I want to address the concern raised about ongoing racism that was witnessed and endured over the last year at association meetings and on social media. Unfortunately hate and racism have a long history in B.C., rooted in power and control and long-standing patterns of discrimination and oppression. This is not acceptable; we must all stand together in commitment to take action against hate and racism.

Our government is advancing programs, overseen by the Parliamentary Secretary on Anti-racism Initiatives and coordinated by the [Resilience BC Anti-Racism Network](#), to ensure we provide direction and resources to staff and communities to assert a zero-tolerance position to racism and ensure all British Columbians feel safe and valued. Through support from the Resilience BC team and others, the Wildlife Habitat and Species Recovery (WHSR) team is developing a specific anti-racism framework to extend learning, develop skills, and provide practical resources and tools to all staff. This framework will be shared with the Council, and we are committed to providing Council members with the same support to help lead the anti-racism expectations all British Columbians should uphold.

Page 1 of 3

Regarding wildfires, this has indeed been a catastrophic year for B.C. that has taken a toll on communities and individuals. We appreciate the Council's kind words and share the interest to prioritize wildfire recovery efforts with consideration for ecosystem recovery and long-term resilience. Currently, there is work underway to assess the damage in wildfire areas including impacts to habitat. We will continue to monitor progress and implementation of wildfire recovery efforts and we are committed to the delivery of these efforts in partnership with First Nations and communities.

Regarding recommendations, "Recommendation 23: Communicate the Importance of the Framework", we recognize the importance of prioritizing biodiversity and ecosystem health as part of our broad efforts to transform and improve the natural resource management system in B.C. The importance is reinforced through our acceptance of all recommendations from the Old Growth Strategic Review and our commitment to reconciliation and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

The detailed considerations the Council has provided to support "Recommendation 24: Establish the Office of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health to oversee the implementation of the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework" is also greatly appreciated. These considerations have been shared with relevant program areas for consideration in engagement materials and policy recommendations and we appreciate your continued support and advice as this policy framework takes shape.

Regarding, "Recommendation #25: Resource Roads Action Plan and Comprehensive Road and Access Management Strategy", the Province acknowledges the significant impact of resource roads on wildlife but is not currently considering the development of a new strategy. Instead, these recommendations will inform work in cumulative effects, the biodiversity and ecosystem health framework, land use and forest landscape planning processes, and assessments underway to identify corridors and connectivity. We appreciate the thoughtfulness of this submission and will consider the suggestion of a strategy in the future. Staff will also continue to track progress on resource roads and provide updates to the Council on progress.

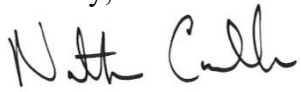
Finally, regarding the health of wild sheep in "Recommendation #26 the Ministry of Agriculture and Food staff are currently working to better understand the overall sectoral impacts of exclusion or management criteria on domestic sheep and goat industries", I am aware of the limitation of legislative authority through the *Wildlife Act* that could better mitigate risk of disease transfer. As your letter advocates, collaboration and cooperation between Agriculture and Food, Forests and Water, Land and Resource Stewardship is ongoing to advance sheep separation. This work will continue. Also, as part of the *Wildlife Act* Review project, mechanisms to improve the protection of wild species from health risks will be considered.

In summary, many of the Council's recommendations form key considerations for critical priority work such as the *Wildlife Act* review, ecosystem health and biodiversity framework and our commitments to protecting and conserving 30% of BC's land and freshwater by the year 2030. Given the importance of these initiatives and deep connections to the vision and many elements of Together for Wildlife, I appreciate the Council's focus on these key areas.

With these additions, staff have compiled updates on all MWAC's current and previous recommendations in the attached appendix.

Again, thank you for your ongoing commitment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nathan Cullen". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Nathan Cullen
Minister
Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship