



Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council

"Wildlife and their habitats thrive, are resilient, and support and enrich the lives of all British Columbians"

April 2, 2024

Minister Nathan Cullen, Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

Dear Minister Cullen,

Re: Funding Priorities

Your Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council (MWAC) is very pleased that new sources of funding have been established to support wildlife and habitat in B.C. Notably, the Tripartite Framework Agreement and Conservation Financing Mechanism are expected to make vital contributions towards fulfilling some of Together for Wildlife's (T4W) goals.

Yet, remarkable though these contributions may be, notable funding gaps persist. The need persists for tangible progress on outcomes under T4W Goal 3, Action 13 (*...review existing and potential new creative funding models and make recommendations to ensure sufficient, dedicated, long-term funding for wildlife and habitat stewardship...*). In keeping with previous recommendations made by Council, we advise that the following initiatives warrant focused attention and a level of funding necessary to fulfill key commitments of Goal 3 of T4W (*Stewardship actions achieve tangible benefits for wildlife and their habitats*).

- 1. Securing key parcels of private land with notable wildlife habitat value by purchasing them to become part of BC's collection of Conservation Lands. This undertaking should be consistent with the Conservation Lands Program Strategic Plan as supported by MWAC (MWAC recommendations #4, #7; T4W Goal 3 Action 11)**

We applaud the creation of the BC Conservation Fund and the opportunity to fund the creation of Indigenous-led area-based conservation on public lands. This initiative will support Goal 5 of T4W (*Collaboration advances reconciliation with Indigenous governments*).

At the same time, there is an urgent need to acquire private lands to support wildlife and habitat stewardship. At \$500,000 annually for Habitat Acquisition Grants, funding from the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation is not enough. Council advises that, in support of T4W Goal 3 Action 11, a minimum annual allocation of \$50 million is required to meet the goals of the Conservation Lands Program Strategic Plan per Goal 3, Action 11 of T4W (*...we will make investments to manage existing Conservation Lands and acquire new priority lands for wildlife stewardship*).

2. Rehabilitating resource roads, and lands subject to severe wildfire, in order to recover and protect productive wildlife habitat (recommendations #14, #17, #25, and advice given in January 2024; T4W Goal 3 Action 9)

Resource roads lead to greater access by the public and predators, resulting in wildlife displacement and mortality, and habitat loss. There is a need to fund the rehabilitation of these roads, together with legislation that requires companies to be responsible for this work on an ongoing basis and a new funding formula that incentivizes restoration of roads as opposed to building new roads.

The increasing severity of wildfires has and will continue to impact wildlife habitat, including that on conservation lands. Support for cultural and prescribed burning is required to reduce the incidence and severity of wildfires. Post-fire, funding is required to restore protective fencing, restore native species, and remove invasive species that will otherwise colonize burned areas. This funding should include science-based designs for monitoring and assessing impacts on wildlife values.

Rehabilitation of resource roads and wildlife habitats damaged by fire will advance T4W Goal 3, Action 9 (*...deactivating and reclaiming resource roads, and; managing key threats to wildlife and habitats, including invasive species...*).

3. Addressing road and rail impacts on wildlife and passenger safety (recommendation #19)

Wildlife mortality on roads and railways is a continuing concern. We encourage you to work with the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to identify high risk road crossings, and fund safe wildlife crossings to avoid accidents with high cost to people and wildlife. At the same time, we encourage you to reach out to federal bodies and railroad companies to address the chronic problem of rail mortality. Progress here will address T4W Goal 3, Action 9 (*...reducing wildlife mortality on highways and railways...*).

In conclusion, Minister Cullen, we celebrate the establishment of new funding sources for wildlife and habitat conservation in British Columbia. However, it is imperative to recognize that there are persistent funding gaps that hinder the fulfillment of Together for Wildlife's crucial goals. The initiatives outlined by the Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council underscore the urgency of addressing key priorities, such as securing critical parcels of private land, rehabilitating resource roads and fire-damaged habitats, and mitigating road and rail impacts on wildlife and passenger safety. Your Council advises that you make a steadfast commitment to allocating the necessary resources and collaborating with Indigenous communities and relevant stakeholders to ensure the realization of these vital conservation efforts. Together, we can safeguard the rich biodiversity of our province for generations to come. Thank you for your attention to these pressing matters.

Sincerely,

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

Co-Chairs, Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council

Cc: Lori Halls, Deputy Minister, Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
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