



February 12, 2019

The Honourable Minister Doug Donaldson
Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development
PO BOX 9049, Stn Prov Govt
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Dear Minister Donaldson,

Re: Protection of the McAbee Fossil Beds

BC Nature (Federation of BC Naturalists) is offering enthusiastic support for protection and careful development of the McAbee fossil beds. We support giving priority to the values of heritage conservation first, then scientific research, then education and finally regional economic development. Our federation represents over 50 naturalist groups across the province, with over 6,000 members. We believe that this extraordinary heritage resource is deserving of international recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and we support promoting this designation.

The McAbee fossil site, 8 kilometers east of Cache Creek, preserves a spectacular record of life in the early Eocene (51 to 53 million years ago) with spectacular plant, insect and fish fossils. Studies of these fossil communities will help understand not only the early Paleogene period, but also possibly mitigate our future. In the early Eocene in BC, the climate was wetter, more humid and warmer than at present and the McAbee ecological community existed at a time of increased atmospheric carbon and globally high temperatures. Its fossil community is helping us understand how biodiversity and species distributions might be affected in such a world, a world with significant parallels to the times that we are entering. The McAbee deposits presents us with an opportunity to discover more clearly how our natural world operates and to help prepare us for what is to come.

We are deeply concerned, however, that there are conflicts in the proposed developments of the McAbee fossil beds, with insufficient input by professional paleontologists and with pressures to put economic development at the forefront. We believe that this irreplaceable heritage must be managed by sound, established best practices for paleontological resources. Appropriate management structures combining protection, scientific research and tourism are already established at several existing developed paleontological resources across North America. Your ministry's report: *Survey of paleontological research/interpretive centre best practices based on site visits August-November 2016* highlights the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument as an appropriate model.

In particular, we believe that the recommendations for management at the McAbee as laid out on pages 42 to 56 of this report should be followed. Among these are recommendations that:

- Appropriate management structure be established, with a chief administrator who has proper training in this resource, a site paleontologist/curator with authority for management of the resource (collections, evaluating permit applications, *etc.*, as laid out in the report), a collections manager with a degree in museology, interpretive/educational staff to act as an interface with the public, a volunteer

coordinator/public liaison director, security staff, and appropriate maintenance personnel.

- There must be full-time, on-site security staff. Fossil theft is a serious issue at all managed fossil sites surveyed in this report, and there is reason to believe that this is also an issue at McAbee.
- Public education/tourism should be developed with appropriate exhibits and educational programs, both on-site and as outreach programs to maximise public education and regional economic development values.
- There should be a group established to promote the McAbee to UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.
- The McAbee should be integrated into the existing and potential network of managed paleontological resources across western North America (The Tumbler Ridge Museum, The Courtenay and District Museum, The Royal Tyrrell Museum, The Burgess Shale Foundation, and the network of US paleontological National Monuments). Such integration provides opportunities for cross-promotion and enhanced regional economic development.
- A clear mandate should be established, such as: *To preserve and protect the fossil heritage of the McAbee site; to create and maintain collections of fossils and related materials from the McAbee Heritage site and comparative BC sites; to conduct and coordinate research on this material and present this to the scientific community; and to interpret the fossil life of the site and related sites of similar age in British Columbia to the public and present this through onsite and outreach programs.*

We recognise that this is a non-renewable resource of international importance. Much of the site has been destroyed by past neglect. The site should be treated with the great care with proper scientific oversight prior to development. We recognise that regional economic development is an appropriate and desirable goal for the McAbee, but believe that this will be maximised when based on a firm scientific management base.

BC Nature looks forward with enthusiasm to the fossils of McAbee contributing to our understanding our province's early Paleogene and fulfilling its potential to interpret that story to the people of the lower Thompson River region, British Columbia, Canada, and the world.

Yours truly,



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