

# Conservation Report – Spring 2021

*Author: Peter Ballin and the Conservation Committee*

A big THANK YOU to the enthusiastic new members of this committee. We are stronger for your commitment and expertise. The invitation remains for other BC Nature members to join the Conservation Committee! Our primary foci now are protected places and climate change; while we remain open to address the issues that concern you most. All we need is you! Remember that BC Nature can support your local club's conservation work. Often your local issues, such as Peregrine Falcon nesting at Quadling Quarry in Abbotsford and rodenticides in Richmond, apply to broader issues of provincial concern, so please let us know so that we can lend an extra 6000 or so voices to what becomes our cause. Join BC Nature's ramp-up of our "voice for nature".

The last few months have witnessed a flurry of conservation activity, spurred on by our president, Harry Crosby. If you wish to be informed of conservation committee activities in the time between magazine publications, let me know so that I can list you on the Conservation Network.

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**Quadling Quarry:** On December 11, BC Nature submitted a letter to Premier Horgan and other politicians and bureaucrats in support of Nature Chilliwack's letter opposing mining Quadling Quarry near Chilliwack. The quarrying activity will likely destroy Peregrine Falcon and Cliff Swallow nests. We received an informative letter in response from Allan Johnsrude, the regional executive director for the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development on January 6. He pointed out that while previously provincially red-listed, a 2017 assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada resulted in a "Not at Risk" determination for peregrines due to evidence of a 13.5% increase in Canada and a 110% increase in B.C. from 1995 to 2015. "Population increases of Peregrine Falcons have also been documented recently in the South Coast Region, including an increase in the number of known occupied sites from 15 to 21 from 2010 to 2015." He points out that under the BC *Wildlife Act*, "nests of Peregrine Falcons and other select species are protected year-round, whereas the nests of most songbirds, including Cliff Swallows, are protected only during the breeding season. Provincial Best Management Practices (BMPs) recommend no-disturbance buffers surrounding

raptor nests (e.g. 50 metres in urban areas), but these are not considered enforceable under the *Wildlife Act*.” Seems conflicting?

Shortly after we received the letter, the provincial government issued a permit to proceed with the mining, which will also destroy endangered Phantom Orchids. We hear that a lawyer for the local homeowners’ association plans to appeal the decision in court based upon some discharge and potential contamination issues. Read more here: <https://bit.ly/3oJcKu7>

**Green Budget Meeting:** On December 5 Harry Crosby and Peter Ballin met Member of Parliament Terry Beech to follow up on the November 10 BC Nature letter we wrote to him in support of Green Budget goals and funding (read it on our website). Terry Beech represents Seymour-North Burnaby, the riding of BC Nature’s office, and serves as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. We found Mr. Beech to be congenial, informed, a totally on-side environmentalist, and eager to meet with us further. He wondered why we hadn’t met before! His area of influence and knowledge is marine protected areas, and he’s been working hard on removing open net pen salmon farms from the Discovery Islands. He acknowledged the “dance” of federal-provincial cooperation, and he talks with his provincial counterparts. He pointed out that money allocation from federal to provincial coffers is tricky, while at the same time BC is the main push for national environmental issues. He heard us that BC Nature wishes to be involved and suggested a one-hour follow-up meeting. To prepare, a small group of BC Nature members met on January 6. We plan to discuss open net pen salmon farming, the herring roe fishery, ecological reserves and marine protected areas, and Roberts Bank Terminal Two.

**IBA to KBA (Important Bird Areas morph to Key Biodiversity Areas:** Read Liam Ragan’s article in this issue to find out what’s happening. (Page....)

**Salmon Farming:** On November 10 BC Nature submitted a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau and Bernadette Jordan (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard), requesting the removal of fish farms from the Discovery Islands. The letter (posted on the BC Nature website) reflects the expertise of committee member Larry Dill, who produced a report on the substantial possible impacts of farms on Sockeye Salmon, which Justice Cohen seemed to primarily rely upon for the Cohen Commission recommendations. Quoting from the letter:

“Our iconic Pacific salmon are in deep trouble. For example, while Fraser River Sockeye returns between 1980 and 2014 averaged - 10 million, the number last year plummeted to less than half a million, setting a record for low returns since record-keeping began in the 1800s. This year current forecasts are about half that again, and we still don’t know the fallout of the Boston Bar slide on future returns.”

There are a number of causal factors for such declines, in sockeye and other salmon species -habitat loss, pollution, over-fishing, the continued depletion of forage fish stocks like herring, and climate change, and (in the opinion of many) open net pen salmon farms. Many of these factors will take time to ameliorate but removing the fish farms can be done immediately.

And it was so decreed on December 17, perhaps more because of First Nations’ involvement than the Cohen Commission recommendations. Eighteen months to get the pens out of the water. This is being judicially contested by the industry, of course.

The battle to remove fish farms from our oceans by 2025, as our Prime Minister promised, continues.

**Caribou Recovery Program Update:** Joan Snyder reports that she did not receive the usual three-month government caribou report due to a snowstorm taking out the electrical power. Here are the relevant agenda items for the most recent meeting (January 12, 2021):

- Acknowledgement of Territory and challenging times
- Predator management
- Monitoring and inventory
- Science update
- Restoration

Herd planning meetings have been temporarily cancelled due to COVID 19. Monitoring and inventory projects are occurring in most cases and the Central Selkirk monitoring/inventory project will be done at the usual time in February and March with the deadline for the latest data listed on March 31<sup>st</sup>. At the last count this winter there were still 26 animals in this herd.

One bright hope comes because the Province halted logging in 270 hectares of old growth forest in the Argonaut Creek area, in a valley north of Revelstoke. The area was to be auctioned off by BC Timber Sales, the Provincial government's own logging agency. A number of environmental groups succeeded in their effort to convince the government to cancel the auction because the area provides critical habitat for a mountain caribou herd.

**Climate Crisis:** On December 11 BC Nature submitted a letter to Jonathan Wilkinson, federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change to applaud the reading of Bill C-12, the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act in the House of Commons. This is what we wrote:

“We wish to underscore the urgency of setting and publishing specific, more proximal targets, accompanied by regulations that allow measurable evaluation of compliance, and penalties for failures to comply. This level of transparency will not only get the job done, but also encourages public support and participation in reducing carbon emissions. We believe that promoting and expanding the conversation is critical to the kind of collective endeavour that the march to zero emissions demands. We draw a parallel to the mobilization of resources that the COVID-19 crisis has engendered and support a similar effort to achieve net-zero carbon emissions.

We wish to be part of the solution, as an organization and as individuals, to combat climate change. Knowing something is inevitable and not taking precautionary measures is totally unacceptable. Please consider how BC Nature (and other ENGOs) can support this government initiative. “

Over the last few months, several BC Nature members have come forth indicating their interest in working on climate action, so our president Harry Crosby connected with Conservation Committee Chairperson Peter Ballin and the Climate Crisis Subcommittee was born. This group met via Zoom on December 12 to brainstorm ideas regarding the subcommittee's goals and objectives. Member Karen Crosby took on the job of compiling the ideas and drafting a mission, goals, and work plan document. The group will be meeting again soon to finalize this plan and get to work on making a difference! If you are interested in becoming a member, would you please contact Karen at [karencr0@telus.net](mailto:karencr0@telus.net)

After just a few days in office, US President Joe Biden issued significant executive orders to address the climate crisis. Find out what they are and write to your Member of Parliament to get our government to follow suit!!

**Roberts Bank Terminal 2:** Roger Emsley, BC Nature Special Representative for Roberts Bank, reports that BC Nature continues to oppose the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority's Roberts Bank Terminal 2 (RBT2) Project. Recent developments are as follows:

The Vancouver Fraser Port Authority (VFPA) has now delayed its response to the Minister Environment and Climate Change Canada's (ECCC) request for further information until summer 2021. This is widely seen as a delay tactic.

The VFPA is stepping up pressure to get RBT2 approved. It recently advised West Coast Reduction, which provides essential services for the agricultural sector, that it will have to vacate its Vancouver inner harbour facilities at some point to make way for further container terminal infrastructure. This is similar to action taken against Global Container Terminals, whereby VFPA amended their lease of their inner harbour Vanterm terminal such that if RBT2 does not get built by 2028 then VFPA will repossess that terminal.

Countering the VFPA efforts is a House of Commons e-petition, with 1861 signatures, presented to the House on December 9 2020 calling on the government to reject the RBT2 development. Two of Metro Vancouver's largest cities, Richmond and Delta, have both formally filed objections to the RBT2 development with the Federal Government. A letter signed by fourteen environmental and other groups was sent to the ECCC Minister on January 11 2021, calling on him to respond to the e-petition by now formally rejecting the RBT2 project. BC Nature submitted a letter to Minister Wilkinson on January 19 in support of this letter. The government responded with nothing new on January 26. Minister Wilkinson wrote, in part:

After considering the Panel's Report and consulting with expert federal departments, the Minister determined that additional information is required from the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority (the Proponent) to inform the Minister's decisions on whether the Project is likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects. The Port Authority must provide additional information related to effects to Indigenous peoples, as well as to biofilm, migratory birds, fish and fish habitat, and Southern Resident Killer Whales. This information request pauses the federal timeline for decision-making. Once the Minister is satisfied that the requested information has been provided, the federal timeline will resume. The Port Authority's responses to the information request will be posted to the Canadian Impact Assessment Registry. The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (the Agency) will then host a public comment period and seek input on the Port Authority's responses. Additionally, the Agency will post the draft potential conditions online—a document outlining conditions that the Proponent must comply with to move forward with the Project. The public will be invited to submit comments on this document as well. The next step will be for the Minister to make decisions on the significance of effects under CEAA 2012. The decisions will be based on science, facts, and evidence, and informed by meaningful Indigenous consultation.

Whilst the e-petition is now closed for signatures there are opportunities to sign an online petition at: <https://bit.ly/2MriKeh>

The BC Nature website has a members-only page dedicated to RBT2 : <https://bit.ly/39MrBzH>

Birds Canada has launched a letter writing campaign to individual MPs. <https://bit.ly/3cODyqu>. They also have a blog on their website. <https://bit.ly/3ts59Ur>. BC Nature has initiated contacts with various MPs, calling on them to support rejection of RBT2.

Global Container Terminals (GCT), operator of the Deltaport and Vanterm terminals, is in a fight with VFPA. GCT wants to build a berth 4 at Deltaport adding container capacity on an incremental as needed basis. VFPA sees this as competition to RBT2 and is opposing it.

Container volumes for 2020 have remained flat when compared to 2018 and 2019, indicating there is still spare container capacity on Canada's West Coast.

There are ongoing container terminal expansions in both Vancouver and Prince Rupert which suggest Canada will have sufficient container terminal capacity for the foreseeable future without ever having to build RBT2.

**Species-at-Risk:** This is not new: The Species and Ecosystems at Risk Local Government Working Group is a collection of municipal, regional, and provincial government workers who are interested in:

- Joining conservation efforts to protect plants and animals and their habitats
- Facilitating discussions across sectors about species and ecosystem protection
- Collaborating on species and ecosystems issues

Since its formation in 2009, the group has been working together to find ways to protect species and ecosystems at risk on private and local government lands. Membership now includes about 90 local governments. Read the terms of reference: <https://bit.ly/3pOvgTv>

BC Nature asks, where is a provincial Endangered Species Act? An Endangered Species Act (ESA) was a mandate of the last coalition government. But the new NDP majority government has indicated that an ESA is not a priority. The province has continued the Ministers Wildlife Advisory Council - <https://bit.ly/3avSFCM>, which is a good thing even though BC Nature is not involved. However, species at risk protection is not included as a specific action item for the Council, and the focus is on game species. There have been recent submissions signed by scientists, hunters, anglers, conservation organizations, Ecojustice, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. Currently a number of highly informed conservation committee members are sharing their knowledge with one another and strategizing about how BC Nature can best approach our government to push for an ESA.

Committee member Greg Ferguson, who has focused on species-at-risk, presents some of his observations and thoughts for action:

- Recovery strategies for many species-at-risk in Canada are not being completed according to legislated timelines under the Species at Risk Act.
- Legislation is not coherent or consistent across different levels of government and as applied to different sectors
- Legal challenges have resulted in much more positive action for species-at-risk than dialogue
- Consider rights of nature (rooted in aboriginal systems, protected for their own intrinsic value)

Actions:

- Challenge higher government staff, Ministers, or the Premier to explain why they aren't willing to enact stronger legislation to protect species-at-risk
- Take a species-specific approach
- Take a habitat protection approach
- Take a threat approach, citing threats to humans as well as ecosystems, such as the campaigns to stop rodenticide and neonics use
- Foster a multi-level (government, industry, private landowners, public, academic, groups, Indigenous) approach

**Protected Places:** Before our news, some background with links provided by committee member Harold Sellers:

A protected area is a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated, and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values. (International Union for Conservation of Nature definition, 2008)

Protected areas – national parks, wilderness areas, community conserved areas, nature reserves and so on – are a mainstay of biodiversity conservation, while also contributing to people’s livelihoods, particularly at the local level. Protected areas are at the core of efforts towards conserving nature and the services it provides us – food, clean water supply, medicines and protection from the impacts of natural disasters. Their role in helping mitigate and adapt to climate change is also increasingly recognized; it has been estimated that the global network of protected areas stores at least 15% of terrestrial carbon.

International Union for Conservation of Nature - <https://bit.ly/3ji6zfc>

The World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) is the most comprehensive global database on terrestrial and marine protected areas. It is a joint project between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the IUCN, managed by UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC). *ProtectedPlanet.net* is the online interface for the WDPA; it lets you discover the protected areas of the world through exploring maps and intuitive searching, feeding you information from the WDPA, photos from Panoramio and text descriptions from Wikipedia.

United Nations target - <https://bit.ly/3aAkNo2>

January brought some good news about land acquisition for provincial parks and protected areas: <https://bit.ly/39MNOho> and <https://bit.ly/3tseo>

BC Nature drafted a letter to provincial ministers with Resolution 2020-001, Ecological Reserves System of British Columbia, passed by the BC Nature Board at its December meeting, following a recommendation from the Victoria Natural History Society and a vote by BC Nature members at our Annual General Meeting on June 23, 2020. From that letter:

“April 2021 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the British Columbia Legislature’s unanimous vote to pass the Ecological Reserve Act, (<https://bit.ly/36GjN0y>) the first such Canadian legislation. With this upcoming anniversary in mind, and encouraged by the Friends of Ecological Reserves (FER), BC Nature

examined the state of the ecological reserves system and how it is functioning. What we see fills us with a great deal of alarm. The Resolution details our concerns and suggests how to improve the system and address current threats to existing ecological reserves.

Briefly, we propose that the BC government establish up to seven new ecological reserves in 2021 to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Ecological Reserve Act* and put in place a clear process for adding new ecological reserves to address gaps in the current system and contribute to reconciliation. BC Parks should complete and implement approved management plans for existing ecological reserves and facilitate inventory, monitoring, and research by universities, research institutes, ENGOs, and First Nations to inform management practices and climate change adaptation strategies. BC Parks should also better support stewardship efforts by the existing volunteer ecological reserve wardens, support groups such as the Friends of Ecological Reserves, and First Nations partners.”

Further to the BC Nature resolution, President Harry Crosby called together a group of highly knowledgeable and experienced individuals to strategize an approach to push for ecological reserves and other protected places in BC. BC Nature member Ian Claque will coordinate this group, which has met twice to date. At the January 24 meeting, we identified these action priorities:

- Get up to date with the government’s recent actions designating, acquiring, and maintaining protected places.
- Research the identification and prioritization of candidate lands for protection, in preparation for input to government.
- Committee member Ben van Drimmelen’s excellent reports on protected places for targeted distribution.
- Inform BC Nature clubs of our Protected Places (here you go!) initiative and enlist them for volunteer work to preserve and/or maintain areas of concern.
- Prepare for Harry’s ministerial meeting about Ecological Reserves, tapping the experts from this meeting.
- Emphasize connection between local conservation/protection projects and provincial goals.
- Rework list of organizations with whom we wish to join in coalition and enlist liaison people.

As we increase the number of meetings with elected officials, BC Nature wishes to not only express our environmental concerns and recommendations, but also to explore how we can contribute to solutions.

And...have you heard that US President Biden has targeted 30% protection for terrestrial and marine areas by 2030?

**Rodenticides:** BC Nature Member Melissa Hafting has worked tirelessly to influence governments to ban the use of second-generation rodenticides, which have taken a toll on owls and other predators as they ingest dead and dying rodents, and BC Nature has taken up her call, including correspondence and affixing our logo to a fact sheet created to help inform cities and the province about the dangers of rodenticides.

Richmond city council passed a motion unanimously to ban these rodenticides on Jan 25, 2021. A news story about this was published by the Vancouver Sun, which you can read <https://bit.ly/2MsUnge>. Unfortunately, municipalities cannot control the use of rodenticides on private residential land; that is up to the province. Melissa and many others are continuing to work to get the provincial government to

ban rodenticides province-wide except for areas where it is absolutely necessary, such as on isolated seabird colonies. Committee member Eva Durance sent a request to Penticton City Council regarding a possible banning of home use of rodenticides except in very serious situations, and then only using a professional applicator. She got a response from the mayor suggesting that she talk with the provincial wildlife branch, again noting that municipalities can exert control only on their own properties. Committee member Elise Roberts is working alongside Environmental Protection in the District of North Vancouver, tracking down dead owls and other victims of poisoning, and reaching out to inform people and institutions about this problem.

These jurisdictions have now banned rodenticides on civic lands:

City of Richmond  
City of Port Moody  
District of North Vancouver  
City of North Vancouver  
District of West Vancouver  
City of New Westminster  
District of Saanich  
Qualicum Beach  
City of Colwood  
District of North Saanich  
Town of View Royal  
District of Oak Bay  
District of Sooke  
City of Victoria  
City of Metchosis  
City of Nelson  
District of Highlands