

Conservation Committee Updates

Authors - Peter Ballin and the Conservation Committee

This introduction is short because the report is so long! We continue to collaborate with more environmental organizations and First Nations. Thanks to the conservation committee members, BC Nature staff, and club members who have contributed so much time and effort for conservation in BC.

Here are some of the subjects of our activities in the last few months:

- Roberts Bank Terminal 2
- Fortis Expansion Project: Tilbury Island
- Climate Change
- Open Net Pen Salmon Farms
- Herring Update
- Concerns about Environmental Regulations Enforcement on Waterways of the Lower Fraser Delta
- Strawberry Island
- The Salish Sea Indigenous Guardians Association Request for a Regional Assessment of the Salish Sea
- Gitdisdzu Lugyek's Marine Protected Area
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- Wildfire Control and Wildlife Values
- Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas

Roberts Bank Terminal 2 (RBT2) - Roger Emsley, BC Nature Special Representative for Roberts Bank

Strong opposition to the proposal by the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority (VFPA) to build a second container terminal on Roberts Bank was expressed in submissions from BC Nature, conservation groups from Canada and elsewhere, scientist experts in wetland ecology, citizen scientists, and the cities of Delta, Richmond, and White Rock, among

16,000 sent to the Impact Assessment Agency. After the close of the most recent and final comment period (March 15, 2022), VFPA submitted rebuttals to the submissions. The last one (June 10) pushed back against the peer-reviewed science articles that demonstrate that the RBT2 project will negatively impact the salinity trigger. This change of salinity in the estuarine waters drives the production of diatoms in the biofilm. Migratory shorebirds rely upon this biofilm, rich in fatty acids, during their northward migration. It is the very foundation of the food web that supports the biological community of Roberts Bank.

The VFPA exercises a significant lobbying presence in Ottawa and continues to promote the myth that West Coast Canada will run out of container terminal capacity as early as 2025, in spite of evidence from terminal operators that sufficient capacity exists to meet trading needs into the 2030s. By that time, already planned container terminal expansions in Vancouver and Prince Rupert will ensure that RBT2 - at a cost of \$3.5 billion plus - will never be needed.

The federal government has maintained its silence since the latest VFPA submissions. Letters to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change Canada and to other members of the federal cabinet remain unanswered. VFPA indicated that it expects a final decision from Ottawa by the fall of 2022. The Governor in Council (federal cabinet) will almost certainly make this decision. They will have to rule whether the project is likely to result in significant adverse environmental effects that cannot be mitigated, and if so, whether or not the project is nevertheless justified.

Fortis Expansion Project: Tilbury Island - Anita den Dikken - The BC provincial environmental assessment

recently concluded. The review group, it appears, did not consider upstream or downstream emissions in reaching its conclusion to recommend approval of the Fortis project.

They did, however, find that there would be significant residual effects:

- Effects on air quality negatively impacting human and wildlife health
- Increase in greenhouse gas emissions
- Loss of vital fish habitat
- Permanent damage to the river-bed
- Harm to endangered species including Southern Resident Killer Whales
- Adverse impacts on humans and wildlife from noise, light, water, and air pollution
- Serious disruption of commercial and recreational use of the lower Fraser River

Approval of their findings needs to be made by both the BC Minister of the Environment and the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

On July 26 BC Nature received a reply from Kyle Ostman of the Environmental Assessment Office (EAO) of British Columbia to our April 12 letter regarding the potential negative impacts of Fortis' planned facility on the Fraser River; BC Nature's concerns are shared with many others regarding project-related risks to fish and fish habitat, greenhouse gas emissions, and climate change, captured in EAO's Summary of Engagement report - <https://bit.ly/3A4745A> July 14, 2022. The main themes that emerged from the comments received during the public comment period and published to Environmental Policy Impact Climate (EPIC), included:

- Climate change and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions;
- Effects of the environment on

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Photo: B. Davison

Yellow-headed Blackbird

the Project including geological hazards;

- Species at risk, terrestrial wildlife, wetlands and their habitat including migratory birds;
- Marine mammals, fish, and fish habitat;
- Natural gas extraction using hydraulic fracturing (fracking) upstream effects; and
- Accidents and malfunctions including seismic and public safety concerns.

The next phase of the environmental assessment (EA) process for the Project is the Application Development and Review phase. FortisBC will develop its application and engage participating First Nations and Technical Advisory Committee members in accordance with the requirements of the Process Planning documents. Once the Application is submitted to the EAO, the EAO, participating First Nations, Technical Advisory Committee, Community Advisory Committee, and the public will have the opportunity to review and comment on the Application through a Public Engagement and Comment Period. There will be an additional final comment period during the Effects Assessment and Recommendations phase for the public to submit comments on EAO's draft assessment report and draft EA certificate including project description and conditions.

BC Nature submitted a letter in August, drafted by Anita, responding to a request for input about the enlarged

marine jetty proposed for the expansion project. This jetty lies across the lower Fraser River from the YVR airport jet fuel storage facility, very close to housing and industrial developments in both Richmond and Delta. The Fortis expansion proposal would increase the number of vessels using the jetty from 137 to 365 per year.

The jetty is in the lower part of the Fraser River, already heavily industrialized. LNG tankers would either need to navigate, a narrow 21 km dredged channel or tugs/barges would be required to transport the LNG to any of 18 locations (off Kitsilano, Point Grey, Stanley Park, or West Vancouver) for bunkering (transferring LNG to tankers). Transporting and bunkering of dangerous cargo such as LNG requires great care. Any puncture to an LNG tank would result in the explosive escape of LNG, thereby asphyxiating and flash-freezing any living being within a 500-metre radius of the puncture. And should the gas ignite, all living beings within an approximate two-kilometre radius would be incinerated.

The Society of International Gas Tanker and Terminal Operators (SIGTTO) is an organization whose members include nearly all of the LNG industry, but apparently not Canadian LNG companies. SIGTTO has established industry-wide safety standards to promote the safe transport of LNG. Among their key recommendations are:

- LNG ports must be located where LNG vapours from a spill or release cannot affect civilians
- LNG ship berths must be far from the ship transit fairway to prevent
 - ◊ collision with other vessels
 - ◊ surging and ranging along the LNG pier and jetty that may cause the berthed ship to break its moorings and/or LNG connection, as all other vessels must be considered ignition sources
- LNG ports must be located where they do not conflict with other

waterway uses - now and into the future

- Long, narrow inland waterways are to be avoided, due to greater navigation risks
- Waterways containing navigation hazards are to be avoided as LNG ports.

The proposed jetty meets none of these conditions. Consider also impacts upon fishes such as salmon and sturgeon, increase in vessel traffic and noise in the Salish Sea with potential impacts on endangered orcas (our Southern Resident Killer Whales), and on migratory birds. BC Nature considers this entire project - the massive increase in the Fortis facility and the location and potential negative impacts of the marine jetty - to be in conflict with current safety and environmental standards.

Climate Change - Cheryl Lewis for the Climate Change Subcommittee

- Thank you to everyone who submitted reflections to mark the one-year anniversary of the heat dome event. Published in the summer magazine, these stories were sobering and worth remembering. They included accounts of:

- Watching parent birds trying to keep their juveniles alive by constantly feeding them to keep them hydrated and shading them with their wings.
- Observing trees endure the extreme heat and then subsequently die.
- Listening to the unfamiliar rattling noise of empty mussel shells washed up on the beach, just a small fraction of the estimated one billion sea creatures that died as a result of the extreme heat.
- Witnessing cockles, clams, sea cucumbers, and many other species succumbing to the hot weather, and the sea birds that seemed to benefit at first, later finding that the sea life that supported them was simply gone.

The climate subcommittee is currently focused upon gathering climate-related educational resources such as links to podcasts, news items, publications, blogs, and webinars, to be hosted on the BC Nature website for our members. The materials will likely include:

- Nature-based climate solutions
- Conversations that matter with authors and individuals with significant expertise
- Resources about how to talk to politicians effectively
- Personal actions for your yard, and your life in general
- Recent news, reports, and upcoming events

Two subcommittee members are developing a webinar to help BC Nature members take climate action and support nature in their own yards. “Reimagining your yard: Landscaping to Support Biodiversity, Sequester Carbon, and be Climate Resilient” is planned for launch in fall 2022.

BC Nature is a member of the West Coast Climate Action Network (WE-CAN) <https://bit.ly/3SWAQBU>. WE-CAN is a powerful network of BC organizations urgently addressing the climate emergency. For weekly updates on climate news and action, subscribe to the **WE-CAN newsletter** <https://bit.ly/3AqvS9z>.

If learning more about science-based climate solutions and developing your own climate action plan interests you, [register](#) for the fall session of Drawdown BC’s “Getting into Action: 5-session Climate Solutions Course”, <https://bit.ly/3QseuqD>, starting on September 12th. Several climate subcommittee members are alumni of Drawdown BC and highly recommend these courses.

The climate sub-committee is delighted to have two new young members join - one in university and one in grade 11. We would love to have additional members to have province-



Photo: E. Van Ee

Chicken of the Woods fungi.

wide representation. Please contact climatecommittee@proton.com

Open Net Pen Salmon Farms: Media Release - Fish Farm Decision <https://bit.ly/3SSr4kl> - **Larry Dill** - The Honourable Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, released an important pair of decisions on June 22, 2022 concerning the future of open net pen salmon farms in BC waters.

BC Nature has had a long-term interest in the health of wild Pacific salmon populations impacted by this industry and is cautiously optimistic that the Minister’s decision is an important step in getting these farms out of the ocean and onto land, where they belong.

Seventy-nine farms had their licenses renewed for a two-year term, instead of the usual six-year term. This will enable one complete grow-out cycle for the fish, but no re-stocking will be allowed until a decision is reached, following consultation with all affected parties concerning the future of BC’s aquaculture industry.

Not included in that number are the 19 net pen operations in the Discovery Islands, on the migration route of the critically endangered Fraser River Sockeye Salmon. These operations were shut down on order of the previous Minister, but the companies challenged this decision in court and won, forcing the Minister to reconsider after adequate consultation. She will now complete this consultation process and make a final decision on

these farms in January 2023.

We appreciate that to make her orders immune to further legal challenges, Minister Murray must conduct adequate consultation. We remain hopeful that following this, her final decisions will be to permanently close the Discovery Islands to salmon farms prior to next spring’s wild salmon outmigration, close all the remaining farms in 2024, and help the industry transition to fully closed containment by 2025, as promised in the Liberal’s election platform. This is absolutely essential to protect wild salmon from parasites and diseases emanating from the farms, and to aid in the recovery of BC’s wild salmon stocks. The science on this is very clear.

BC Nature received an invitation from Fisheries and Oceans Canada to attend upcoming virtual engagement information sessions on the Transition Plan for open net pens in British Columbia. The first engagement sessions were held in August 2022 and were open to all interested Indigenous Nations in BC, industry, local governments, and environmental non-governmental organizations. Larry Dill serves as BC Nature’s Official Representative at these meetings.

Herring Update - On April 19, 2022 BC Nature sent a letter (<https://bit.ly/3pnUpFO>) to Fisheries and Oceans Minister Joyce Murray, expressing our concern for the state of BC’s herring populations. Minister Murray replied on June 10, 2022 (<https://bit.ly/3JVORMp>) stating that Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) is firmly committed to the conservation, protection, and regeneration of our marine environment and the lifeforms it sustains. Minister Murray agreed with our concerns, and added that in a number of areas, herring stocks have experienced significant declines or persistently low levels of abundance within the past 10 to 20 years. “The annual Pacific Herring Integrated Fisheries Management Plan

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(IFMP) describes the scientific assessments and forecasts, harvest levels, areas open for fisheries, management measures, gear allocation, and fishery monitoring requirements. To protect future stock health, DFO has closed most commercial fisheries for Pacific Herring for the 2021-22 fishing season. As outlined in the IFMP, the Strait of Georgia was open with a 10% harvest rate to support fisheries for food and bait, special use, and roe herring. This decision was made with the goal to provide renewable fishing opportunities and increase stock abundance, to benefit the entire ecosystem. This is in line with the cautious approaches taken in recent years, with additional limits on harvest.”

Concerns about Environmental Regulations Enforcement on Waterways of the Lower Fraser Delta - Bob Puls, Conservation Chair, Langley Field Naturalists

On July 22, 2022, representatives from Langley Environmental Partners Society, Langley Field Naturalists, Green Timbers/Surrey Natural Areas Partnership, White Rock Surrey Naturalists, Nicomekl Enhancement Society, Surrey Environmental Partners, Serpentine Enhancement Society, Surrey Natural Areas Partnership, Yorkson Watershed Enhancement Society, and Little Campbell River Enhancement Society met with Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, upon the invitation of John Aldag, MP for Cloverdale.

Langley and Surrey streams provide extensive spawning and rearing areas for salmon year-round. These watersheds are integral for the survivorship of the juvenile salmon, providing habitat to support their growth prior to marine migration. Streams in this riding flow through both residential and farm areas.

Most representatives expressed concerns about the failure of downloading federal environmental regulatory enforcement to the province and



Photo: R. Taylor

Turkey Tail (Trametes versicolor)

municipalities. They suggested that DFO needs to regain its proactive role in enforcing environmental protection regulations as prevention and enhancement is more effective than prosecution post damage. Participants pointed out that municipalities were more interested in circumventing environmental rules than complying with them, and that professional consultant reports assisted development rather than protecting the environment.

Issues include:

- Lack of local habitat enforcement to uphold regulations (as opposed to 15-20 years ago when enforcement officers actively attended to violations)
- Lack of jurisdiction for stream protection in Agricultural Land Reserve lands
- No follow-up to reports of habitat disruption
- Design the new sea dam at the mouth of the Nicomekl to incorporate improved fish passage
- Necessity of stronger rules and enforcement to protect the habitat of anadromous fish
- Absence of fisheries officers at pollution events
- More acknowledgment of citizen scientists
- A reactive, rather than a proactive system
- Bureaucratic log jams
- Restore direct ability for DFO to act
- Concerns about the professional reliance model being flawed

John Aldag urged the participants to

keep him in touch with local issues of concern, and Joyce Murray urged them to keep up the good work.

Strawberry Island - Simon Valdez-Juarez, BC Nature - On August 8, 2022, BC Nature wrote to Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans; Fin Donnelly, Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Aquaculture; Josie Osborne, B.C. Minister of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship; and Ted White, Director and Comptroller of Water Rights, regarding the development of Strawberry Island for cranberry farming.

Strawberry Island lies between Hope and Mission, adjacent to the Bert Brink Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in what is known as the Heart of the Fraser. As the only large island of the Fraser River that remains without dikes, the flooded plains of Strawberry Island serve as prime feeding habitat and refugia for several species of Pacific salmon and red-and blue-listed bird species known to nest and/or feed in the adjacent Bert Brink WMA. The natural waterways in Strawberry Island are being altered and degraded to provide infrastructure for a cranberry farm, including a large dike to drain the floodplain, a road blocking a waterway, and the destruction of riverfront vegetation. One of the leading causes of declines in BC’s salmon runs is degradation and fragmentation of freshwater habitat by structures such as roads, culverts, and dikes. The ongoing diking and fragmentation on Strawberry Island will further contribute to the decline of salmon populations in the Fraser River. Additionally, we expressed concern about the increased vulnerability of communities downriver to cataclysmic flooding exacerbated by the removal of riverfront vegetation. This vegetation reduces flood risk by absorbing water and slowing water flow. In light of the recent catastrophic flooding of the Fraser and expected increases in flooding risk due to climate change, it is reckless to allow the removal of

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riverfront vegetation.

The proposed development is particularly concerning in a flood zone in close proximity to a WMA. Cranberry farms employ agrochemicals known to be highly toxic to fish. If a flood similar to that of 2021 were to occur it could lead to the release of these highly toxic compounds into the adjacent WMA with potentially catastrophic consequences for wildlife populations there and a negative effect on the human population downriver.

We believe that the transformation of the critical natural habitat of Strawberry Island does not comply with legislation: The Water Sustainability, Federal Fisheries, and Federal Migratory Bird Acts. We requested government to do due diligence; we are concerned about lack of oversight and guidance.

The Salish Sea Indigenous Guardians Association Request for a Regional Assessment of the Salish Sea - Roger Emsley - On July 27, 2022, BC Nature wrote to Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change; Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Natural Resources; and Terry Hubbard, President of the Impact Assessment Agency, in support of the Salish Sea Indigenous Guardians Association's (SSIGA) request for a Regional Assessment of the Salish Sea.

To manage the Salish Sea sustainably, BC Nature believes it is essential to better understand the Salish Sea ecosystem and its diverse and important connections, including those to the history, cultures, and livelihoods of the peoples who have lived here for thousands of years. The Salish Sea wetlands and tributaries were and remain essential to the ways of life and health of the Indigenous communities along and well beyond its shorelines.

The proposed assessment must consider the fundamental ecosystem changes of past, present, and future



Photo: C. Ace

Monarch Butterfly

industrial and port developments. A full cumulative effects assessment for the entire area, including relevant or connected terrestrial ecosystems and species of the Fraser River Estuary, many of which are at risk, must follow. Such an endeavour would serve as a model to display to the world how we might live sustainably.

The SSIGA letter refers to several large-scale industrial developments along the Fraser River and its Estuary. While these and other projects have performed stand-alone environmental assessments, none of these developments are known to have ever carried out comprehensive cumulative effect's assessments. Such assessments would include reference baseline understanding of the area with which to compare the present with past projects and the potential impacts of anticipated future projects.

The Fraser River Estuary - recognized by the Salish Sea Institute as the largest and most significant estuary in the Salish Sea - is at a tipping point. For example, Southern Resident Killer Whales continue to decline significantly. Salmon populations and 'forage' fish species such as herring, which form a critical base of the Salish Sea's ecology, have also declined significantly. Climate change and pollution pose serious risks to the stability of the Salish Sea, including the Fraser River Estuary. The requested assessment will, as SSGIA suggests, help to fill in many significant data gaps, allowing for a greater understanding of the Salish Sea's and Fraser River Estuary's status and how this relates to its past

and its future.

BC Nature is particularly concerned about the potential for further environmental damage in the Fraser Estuary, especially Roberts Bank. Yet here the Port of Vancouver wants to build a massive island to construct a second container terminal. That project plus a number of other large and significant industrial developments, including the proposed Delta-port Berth Four expansion, the Airport Fuel Storage terminal, the planned Tilbury Fortis LNG terminal and marine jetty, the potential for a second cruise ship terminal, the Puget Sound LNG project, expansion of port facilities in and around Nanaimo, and others, all threaten the sustainability of the Salish Sea and Fraser River Estuary. BC Nature supports a full and inclusive regional assessment prior to further project-specific environmental assessments and before approval of any of the proposed projects.

Gitdisdzu Lugyek's Marine Protected Area - On August 14, 2022, BC Nature wrote a letter of support to Chief Neasloss and the Kitasoo/Xai'xais Nation Stewards congratulating them on the designation of Gitdisdzu Lugyek's as a Marine Protected Area. IBA/KBA Provincial Coordinator, Liam Ragan, worked briefly with the Kitasoo/Xai'xais Stewardship Authority this past April as part of our work as the BC stewards of the global Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) Program. The area impressed us with its biodiversity and abundance of birdlife, including globally significant numbers of Surf Scoters, and Thayer's, Glaucous-winged, and Short-billed Gulls. BC Nature expressed its hope that the provincial and federal governments step up to support the designation of Gitdisdzu Lugyek's as a Marine Protected Area, and recognized it as an MPA based upon "inherent and Aboriginal rights and title and from [your] connection to this land for thousands of years"

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Coastal and Marine Strategy - On August 8, 2022 Peter Ballin attended a follow-up meeting (see the Summer issue of *BCnature* magazine) now under the new Ministry of Lands, Water, and Resource Stewardship (LWRS), to elaborate upon a 2020 mandate to establish a Coastal and Marine Strategy. The mandate totally meshes with the objectives and values of BC Nature. There's a lot to iron out, since jurisdictional overlaps between municipal, provincial, and federal government abound, not to mention the role of First Nations. An intentions paper should be released in October 2022, and the LWRS staff is open to meetings with BC Nature.

Species at Risk: Wildlife Subcommittee Report - Ben van Drimmelen - The Wildlife Subcommittee attempted to form a coalition of some 45 organizations that made representations to government for species at risk legislation several years ago. Perhaps due to failed past efforts, this coalition would not come to pass. Therefore, the Wildlife Subcommittee looked into supporting several larger organizations that already have initiatives under way related to legislation for biological diversity and species at risk:

The Wilderness Committee has several campaigns under way - for a BC species at risk law <https://bit.ly/3QQKqEz>, for conservation of biodiversity and protected areas <https://bit.ly/3Ao5m0m>, and for conserving old growth (<https://bit.ly/2FAHMDq>). It asked that BC Nature members engage in their online campaign to send pre-written letters followed by prompting to take a series of actions leading to meet with one's MLA and planning an event.

Ecojustice is calling for a law to protect biodiversity (<https://bit.ly/3pm5IDM>). However, it is still developing a broader advocacy strategy for a biodiversity law (planning, research, etc.) and is waiting to see how the new Land,

Water and Resource Stewardship ministry plans to deal with biodiversity.

The BC Wildlife Federation's 24-member Fish, Wildlife and Habitat Coalition advocates for biodiversity and ecosystem health (<https://fwhbc.ca/>). It invited a Wildlife Subcommittee member to attend bimonthly meetings of their Coalition.

The subcommittee developed a potential strategy for BC Nature that would complement these initiatives. It involves helping each BC Nature member club develop an ongoing relationship with their respective MLAs. (The West Coast Climate Action Network has compiled straightforward training in that regard, and we are exploring offering such online training to members.) The result would be that the various federated clubs around the province would be able to meet regularly with their MLAs to explain the need, and desire, for legislation on matters important to their club and to BC Nature, including protection of species at risk and their habitats and protection and conservation of biological diversity. That work does not require meetings of a subcommittee; one or two individuals can do the organizing. Adding that to a couple of resignations, the Wildlife Subcommittee has therefore been dissolved.

Species at Risk Update - Greg Ferguson

The Stewardship Pemberton Society seeks to protect the rare and endangered Sharp-tailed Snake in the Pemberton Valley: <https://bit.ly/3zXOcW5>

McKee Neighbourhood Plan - Abbotsford: McKee Peak of Sumas Mountain in Abbotsford is home to many species at risk, including Pacific Water Shrew, Oregon Forest Snail, Phantom



Photo: J. Forster

One of these is not like the others.

Orchid, Northern Red-legged Frog, and Mountain Beaver. A Neighbourhood Plan has been created that tries to balance extensive housing development with trails and natural spaces. If you think that this balance is not sustainable enough to allow the organisms on the mountain to survive, you have a chance to speak: <https://bit.ly/3c4VYFz>. Information on the area's importance: <https://bit.ly/3dwqaKc>

The South Coast Conservation Program (SCCP) - SCCP will be hosting its Conservation Connects event online on September 27th from 1-3pm. Please check in on the SCCP website <https://bit.ly/3K0nr7X> or Facebook <https://bit.ly/3bWlYm> for more details as they become available.

Status update on the modernization of the Migratory Birds Regulations, 2022. - An important change to this legislation is that bird nests not in use are no longer protected year around except for nests of 18 species (listed in Schedule 1 of the regulations) whose nests are reused by migratory birds, unless there is evidence of abandonment. For more information visit <https://bit.ly/3AqAtZi>

Wildlife Killing Contests - BC Nature signed on to an open letter from ENGOs and other organizations to Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development

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Minister Katrine Conroy, asking the BC government to prohibit wildlife killing contests under the BC Wildlife Act.

The letter states “wildlife killing contests embody and promote a deplorable lack of respect for BC’s wildlife and do nothing to contribute to wildlife management. Notably, scientists have repeatedly warned that killing contests can disrupt stable breeding structures, creating further wildlife conflict and population imbalances”. Such contests are already banned in California and Washington, and soon will be banned in Oregon.

Conservation Committee member Greg Ferguson noted that organized killing seems acceptable in fisheries, trapping, and the livestock industry... something to think about.

Wolves and Bears – Jacqueline

Sherk BC wolves had their own day in court this past summer when Rebeka Breder, a Vancouver animal law lawyer, argued against the legality of the province’s aerial gunning of this much-maligned species. Breder represented the conservation organization Pacific Wild and argued that the province stands in violation of Canadian aviation security regulations, therefore making the killing of wolves from the air unlawful.

Although their case wasn’t successful and the government’s aerial gunning and wolf cull program continues, Breder said that the fact that Pacific Wild’s case was allowed to be heard in the Supreme Court of Canada was in itself a win for environmental advocates everywhere.

The wolf cull has been ongoing for seven years in the provincial government’s Predator Reduction Program, which is part of an effort to protect declining mountain caribou herds. The Mountain Caribou Recovery Plan was implemented in 2007; since then, six sub-populations of endangered



Photo: C. Keen

Chukar

herds have been declared extirpated. The greater issue facing caribou is clearly the loss of their critical habitat in old-growth forests as a result of widespread industrial development.

With reports of so many Black Bears being euthanized in this province, questions arise over whether the BC Conservation Officer Service (COS) is actually fulfilling its mandate to protect wildlife. The COS’s own program, WildSafeBC, is intended to provide the education and community solutions needed in order to reduce and prevent human-wildlife conflicts, but a report issued by the Auditor General in 2017 stated that the BC conservation service had not shown itself to be effective.

Between 2006 and 2015, COS staff destroyed 389 Grizzly Bears in non-hunt conflicts with humans. The COS then reported that it had revised its procedures to evaluate each conflict so as not to automatically assume that a bear should be destroyed. Following that declaration, COS reduced the number of grizzlies killed between 2015 and 2021, under the same circumstances, to 151 .

The number of Black Bear deaths by COS is far greater. In the six years between 2015 and 2021, 3,779 Black Bears were killed. Black Bears are by far the most-killed animal by the COS whose mandate, we are reminded, is to protect them.

The Vancouver-based conservation

and advocacy group, The Fur Bearers, says that annual trends show there is no reduction of black bear deaths by the COS in BC. The Fur Bearers say this reflects a *status quo* where lethal force against black bears is “being deployed at a much higher rate than preventative measures such as compliance and enforcement actions are”. The Fur Bearers has written a letter to the Auditor General of BC calling on the Auditor to conduct a further review of the COS to ensure they are fulfilling their wildlife protection mandate and also to ensure that the taxpayers of BC are receiving value for their dollars to fund the BC Conservation Officer Service.

Caribou - Joan Snyder - This year’s maternity pen experiment was deemed a success. On July 22, 2022, the Arrow Lakes Caribou Society (ALCS) released seven females and six calves from a pen above the hot springs in Nakusp. The animals dispersed up into the alpine, where they will stay until the fall; they will migrate to lower elevations when the snowpack is sufficiently deep for them to reach lichens in the trees.

The Southern Mountain Caribou herd contains about two dozen animals Cows and calves all have GPS/VHF radio collars. GPS data show that all calves but one are with their mothers. True success will be determined in the winter, when the provincial Caribou Recovery Program monitors calf survivorship. Source: John Boivin in *The Valley Voice 11 August 2022: p13*

Wildfire Control and Wildlife Values - Glenda Hanna - BC Nature submitted a letter that grew from the concerns and actions of the Shuswap Naturalist Club in Salmon Arm. Where forested areas such as woodland parks and reserves within/near urban areas or municipalities have been subject to long-term fire suppression efforts, a very high fuel load increases the risk of catastrophic wildfires that may spread to infrastructure includ-

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 ing residences, businesses, roads, railways, etc. Many, if not most, communities in BC that are located in or near forested areas should be considering “fire-smarting” parks and reserves (e.g., by reducing fuel loads, and addressing fuel laddering issues). BC Nature supports wildfire protection projects that help protect nearby residences and other community infrastructure near these forested areas.

However, negative impacts of wildfire mitigation to the vitality and health of the forest ecosystem and to the park users’ experience may be significant. We therefore ask that they be considered and addressed when planning and implementing these projects. A fire-smart forest is not mutually exclusive from one that has a healthy, diverse ecosystem that is aesthetically attractive and experientially pleasing to users.

To accomplish this, BC Nature recommends the following approaches:

1. That all future wildfire mitigation work undertaken in urban/near-urban parks and reserves be planned and implemented in a manner that maintains/enhances forest ecological and park user values while significantly reducing the potential for catastrophic wildfires
2. That the governing authorities secure expert independent scientific and accredited professionals such as Registered Professional Forester (RPF) with input/review of all wildfire protection work proposed for parks/reserves, evaluating strategies to ensure that they maintain/enhance the health and biodiversity of plants, animals, and soils
3. Supporting fire-resistant broad-leaved growth in the treated areas, including:
 - Selectively removing non-deciduous trees of various age/size rather than removing many small/mid-size trees

- Pruning only the lower branches on mid-size trees rather than removing them, to allow more light penetration while simultaneously helping return the forest to a more diverse composition
 - The judicious removal of some mature trees to create light openings
 - Planting some fire-resistant broad-leaved trees and shrubs in treated areas to hasten understory development in lower light penetration areas, including along trail margins
 - Recognizing that a more natural forest with variety in tree species and size, including a deciduous understory, enhances wildlife diversity, ecological processes, aesthetics and park users’ experience
4. Clear, standardized, forest management FireSmart criteria included in relevant statutes, funding application processes, and project supervision, because the government of BC funds, directs, and/or supervises many of these projects
 5. That the governing authorities implement a meaningful public consultation process to educate the public and secure citizens’ input.

BC Nature would be pleased to provide more detailed suggestions about the planning process, technical issues, and public consultation. We look forward to hearing from, and working with you, to manage our forested areas in ways that support healthy ecosystems and communities.

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA) – By Liam Ragan - The primary focus of the IBA program this summer has been to strengthen and build partnerships to ensure we continue to deliver on our mandate to monitor and protect the most important areas for avian biodiversity in BC. This is particularly important as we expand our IBA network to Key Biodiversity Areas and consider



Photo: R. Rudland
 A pair of North American River Otters

a wider swath of biodiversity. While I was in Ottawa meeting with partner NGOs and Environment Canada, our new Executive Director, Stewart Guy, was in B.C. making progress toward new partnerships. Most notably, the Wildlife Conservation Society of Canada has stepped up, providing large amounts of support to the program.

A few wins since the last magazine: This June, students from the University of Victoria Birdwatching Club partnered with the IBA Program with funding from BC Field Ornithologists (BCFO) and radar equipment from Environment Canada to conduct the first survey of Marbled Murrelets in the Hesquiat IBA since that of Alan Burger in 1997. Though our numbers were shy of historic counts, likely due to increased logging in the area, they still met national IBA thresholds, demonstrating an at-risk but still nationally-significant population. Huge thanks to IBA Caretaker and Hesquiat Harbour resident Dianne Ignace, her son Jeff, and the Hesquiaht First Nation for making this possible. See the upcoming *Journal of the BC Field Ornithologist* for details.

IBA Caretaker Matthias Bieber led a group of volunteers to survey Osoyoos Oxbows IBA, also with funding from BCFO. The fifth of five south Okanagan IBAs to be surveyed in the last few years, it had a remarkable 47 Yellow-breasted Chats, making up an estimated 16% of the entire endangered BC population. ♡