

# Conservation Committee Updates

Authors - Peter Ballin and the Conservation Committee

The colour of my hair would classify me as an elder. Is that the case for you? Perhaps your hair is not grey, but you may qualify (I was classified as an elder when I was 32 by a First Nations community!). In October, David Suzuki announced his retirement from The Nature of Things television program. In his exit interviews, he implored elders to speak their voices in defense of nature. Nothing to lose, he said. No risk of being fired. No retributions likely, and if so, so what? BC Nature's mission: to know nature and keep it worth knowing. We are meant to be a voice for nature. Speak your voice! Join the conservation committee and your club members in raising that voice.

And here's what committee member Ben van Drimmelen has to say about that: Want a Minister's ear? BC Nature regularly writes letters to ministers and civil servants in our provincial and federal governments. Ministers generally respond, although frequently with generalities and a dearth of commitments. Nevertheless, it is worth writing such letters, if only to raise an issue and state a position.

Recently, the Commission of the Environment and Sustainable Development, a part of the office of the Auditor General of Canada, gave a webinar presentation on how the federal government was doing regarding biodiversity. The Commission is a watchdog agency that is independent of, but audits, the federal government, providing parliamentarians and Canadians

with objective, independent analysis and recommendations on the federal government's efforts to protect the environment, mitigate the effects of climate change, and foster sustainable development. It reports directly to Parliament and has produced some 30 reports since 2015, on subjects such as protecting aquatic species at risk, promoting biodiversity, managing carbon pricing, encouraging sustainable development, managing aquatic invasive species, protecting marine mammals and regulating salmon farming (go to <https://bit.ly/3UDbhGo>).



*Basking Shark in Pacific waters is designated as endangered.*

The recent webinar summarized three recent Commission investigations and reports:

- 1. Protecting Aquatic Species at Risk**, an audit of whether Fisheries and Oceans Canada, in collaboration with others, protected selected aquatic species assessed as at risk;
- 2. Progress in Implementing Sustainable Development Strategies—Species at Risk**, another audit assessing the contribution of Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada to meeting a target of species at risk under the Healthy Wildlife Populations goal in the 2019

- to 2022 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy; and
- 3. A Backgrounder on Biodiversity in Canada: Commitments and Trends**, <https://bit.ly/3Vv4jDt>, which provided general information on Canada's commitments to protect biodiversity. It also addressed species at risk status and trends.

Generally, the Commission found the federal government actions to be lacklustre. The number of federally-listed at-risk species has steadily increased from 17 in 1978 to 841 today. And there was evidence of "client capture" whereby a federal agency favours commercial users; the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), for example, tends to oppose species-at-risk listing of commercially-significant aquatic species while happily supporting listing of aquatic species with no commercial value. Another indication of that department's skewed priorities was staffing for enforcement, with by far most officers working on the east and west coasts (where many commercially-exploited aquatic species are found), with only 30 (of 530) officers trying to cover freshwater Canada (where many of the aquatic species at risk are located). A third indication is that department's collection of data. Fisheries and Oceans Canada focuses its knowledge-building mostly on the marine species of commercial value that it manages; there is little knowledge-building on data-deficient species.

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But back to getting a minister's ear. The Commission accepts "environmental petitions", online or by email, which are a formal way to contact federal ministers to bring public concerns and questions about environmental and sustainable development issues to the attention of federal ministers. Ministers must respond to the Commissioner in 120 days. There are now approximately 100 federal entities subject to the environmental petitions process. Despite the name, it only takes one signature to make a petition. Therefore, if you or your club wants to contact a federal minister and be assured of a response, you can submit a petition to the Commission of the Environment and Sustainable Development. For instructions, go to <https://bit.ly/3OyN02p> Submit a petition online, go to <https://bit.ly/3TpK1u0> Give it a try!

Here are some areas of activities of the Conservation Committee in the last few months:

- Fish Farms
- Species at Risk
- Roberts Bank Terminal 2
- Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas
- Bears and Wolves and Caribou
- Rodenticides
- Coastal and Marine Strategy
- Anchoring in BC Marine Parks
- Salish Sea Assessment
- Climate Crisis
- Old-growth Forests

**Fish Farms** by Larry Dill - As BC Nature's Special Representative, I attended two online sessions with DFO's transition team led by the Aquaculture Management Division:

- Aug 19: An overview session to

see the Discussion Framework for Transition

- Sept 1: A workshop to discuss and critique the Framework

And critiquing there was! It quickly became apparent that DFO is trying to walk back the commitment to remove open-nets from BC waters by 2025. We heard words like alternative technologies - including semi-closed containment floating farms (not a viable solution at all!) "minimize impact" or "progressively minimizing or eliminating interactions between cultured and wild salmon" - all of this without any inclusion in the Framework of research to study the impacts of farms on wild salmon!

This apparent softening of DFO's commitment enraged the Environmental Non-governmental Organizations (ENGO) community and the majority of Indigenous people that participated in this workshop. It is also most disappointing that we have not heard anything from Minister Murray since that time, and concern is growing that once again her ministry has been captured by the Norwegian companies that run the industry in BC. The cautious optimism I expressed in my last report has faded considerably.

**Species at Risk** by Ben van Drimmelen and Greg Ferguson - Efforts continued to find a way for BC Nature to effectively contribute to encouraging the BC government to pass legislation to protect and conserve biological diversity, including species at risk and their habitats.

Rather than BC Nature going



Photo: J. van der Meulen

Barn Owl

it alone to encourage the BC government to protect and conserve biodiversity generally and species at risk and their habitats in particular, Ben van Drimmelen has been examining parallel initiatives of other large environmental organizations. A series of approaches have now been explored:

- ENGOs that had provided input to the government during consultations of species-at-risk legislation several years ago were contacted and asked if they were interested in forming a coalition to try again. There was little uptake.
- Several large ENGOs that already had strategies and initiatives under way to encourage the government to pass legislation to protect and conserve biological diversity were asked what BC Nature could do to assist in those initiatives. Other than getting naturalists to sign on to an electronic letter-writing campaign (with follow-up), there was little uptake.
- A Fish, Wildlife and Habitat Coalition of some 25 organizations was organized by the BC Wildlife Federation. Most of the Coalition partners are hunting/fishing organizations, whereas a quarter of them are organizations with a broader

conservation mandate. The Coalition lobbies governments to pass legislation and provide funding for wildlife, fish and their habitats and could lobby for the broader issues of biodiversity and species at risk. Accordingly, BC Nature has now joined and become a partner in that Coalition.



Photo: E. Ace

Horned Grebe

Regardless of whether BC Nature is successful in linking to another ENGO to push for species-at-risk and biodiversity protection legislation, there may be great value in having individual naturalist clubs doing their own local nudging of elected officials, be they federal, provincial or even municipal. Ben is now working with the BC Climate Alliance on organizing a webinar that will provide each of our member clubs with “how-to” information through a slightly modified form of their excellent webinar “Becoming your Organization’s Coach on Lobbying Politicians”. The idea is to develop a respectful and long-term relationship with local elected officials so that issues of concern to BC Nature can be explained to provide information (and contacts) for those officials. This could benefit many of BC Nature initiatives, including climate change as well as species at risk. The exploration continues . . .

Greg provides some references to explore management plans for species at risk and commentaries on endangerment. Management plans or recovery strategies in the works or finalized:

- Proud Globelet (*Patera pennsylvanica*) in Canada
- Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*), Western population, in Canada

- Blue Felt Lichen (*Degelia plumbea*) in Canada
- Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*), Western Population, in Canada

These recovery planning documents can be found at: <https://bit.ly/3Tg2BEG>

Recent links regarding species at risk and deforestation include:

- *A rare rainforest under threat* - CBC YouTube video link: <https://bit.ly/3tIS9RD>
- *World’s first recovery effort sees spotted owls released into the wild for the first time* - BC Government news - link <https://bit.ly/3toaRrB>
- *B.C. opens up old-growth spotted owl habitat to logging - again. The Narwhal* - link <https://bit.ly/3A9IkKk>
- Reuters - <https://reut.rs/3Tv5u4I>
- *Business Green* - <https://bit.ly/3ULUZL6> - covers the trillions of dollars of risk financial institutions face if they do not solve the crisis of nature's decline.

**Roberts Bank Terminal 2** by Roger Emsley - Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)’s response to the two submissions by the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority (VFPA) arrived without fanfare on October 26. Were they perhaps hoping nobody would notice? At

least ECCC has gone on record, and the Ottawa bureaucrats gave permission for the report to be released.

The ECCC response (<https://bit.ly/3gokcgi>) is somewhat encouraging in that it continues to voice significant concerns and doubts about the Roberts Bank Terminal 2 project, albeit not as forthrightly as might have been expected since nothing has really changed from the time of the public hearings and panel report (all reported upon in past issues of this magazine) except for the proposal to construct the man-made island in phases.

Many of the significant areas of concern or uncertainty that the Panel expressed have still not been addressed. Is this the final piece that will now lead to a decision from the environment minister or the governor in council? Is it sufficient to result in a denial to approve? By the time that you read this, we may know the results of the review process.

**Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA)** by Liam Ragan. The word of the day for the IBA program this quarter has been *partnership* as we welcome collaborators, returning and new.

As part of BC Nature’s partnership on the evolving Key Biodiversity Areas initiative we have entered into a formal partnership with the Wildlife Conservation Society of Canada, with whom we’ve signed an agreement in order to facilitate expanded First Nations outreach on KBAs throughout the province.

We also welcome back Anne Murray to the IBA Technical



Committee.

Additionally, in large part thanks to our new Executive Director Stewart Guy, we are on the cusp of finalizing some substantial partnerships which should radically increase our capacity, and which I look forward to reporting on in the next magazine. In the meantime, our priorities for the next quarter are

- Expand our partnership with Kitasoo/Xai'xais Stewardship to better understand the *substantial* bird populations at their newly declared Gitdisdzu Lugyek (Kitsu Bay) Marine Protected Area
- Facilitate outreach to between 12 and 18 Indigenous groups on KBAs within their territory in partnership with WCS (including IBA sites being recognized as KBAs)
- Continue to build partnerships with Environment Canada to increase monitoring efforts at remote IBA sites
- Support our network of Naturalist Clubs and IBA Caretakers to survey, protect, and raise awareness of some of the most critical spots for biodiversity in B.C.

As always, questions and comments can be directed to the IBA Provincial Coordinator Liam Ragan at [iba@bcnature.org](mailto:iba@bcnature.org)

### Update on Wolves and Bears by Jacqueline Sherk

**Wolves:** The BC government's wolf cull again moves ahead in its plan to continue killing wolves for a proposed five more years in an effort to support endangered caribou. In a document obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, the Vancouver-based conservation group, The Fur Bearers, learned

of a method authorized for use by government contractors hired to kill wolves, known as the 'Judas Wolf'. This method directs that wolves should be tracked, trapped, collared, and then released and followed using GPS to locate their pack. Once located, the entire pack is destroyed, leaving only the collared animal to survive in order to eventually again track it to another future pack site. Some conservation groups say this practice is unethical, inhumane, and inconsistent with the government's own policies. Government previously denied use of this method, but this document obtained by The Fur Bearers appears to suggest otherwise.

**Bears:** November 2022 celebrated the five-year anniversary of the end of the grizzly bear trophy hunt in BC. It was NDP leader John Horgan's promise to the people of BC that if elected his party would impose a ban on the sport hunting of grizzlies. A ban imposed by one political party may not be maintained by another party taking power, however, and bear advocates implore us not to let our politicians forget that the majority of voters in our province do not support sport hunting. Sport hunting of black bear did not fall under the ban and continues to remain popular with hunters.

Both grizzly and black bear denning sites remain under threat due to excessive old-growth logging across the province. It is in these old trees, both standing and downed, that bears build their hibernation dens and give birth to their young. The University of Victoria Environmental Law Centre said in an April 27, 2022, press release that "Bear dens are nurseries for



Photo: J. Kneesch

Marsh Wren

bears – as essential to cubs as nests are for birds", and that "current and historic land management activities in BC pose an active threat to the long-term survival of these species". Black bear dens are currently protected only on Haida Gwaii and the Great Bear Rainforest. Grizzlies aren't present on Haida Gwaii; however, they are in the Great Bear Rainforest where their dens are protected.

Green Party MLA Adam Olsen has, in response, tabled an amendment to the BC Wildlife Act which would create protections for critical winter denning habitat for bears, and BC Nature has supported the effort in a letter written to Josie Osborne, Minister of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship, and to Katrine Conroy, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, urging government to enact this important legislation. along with the Fur Bearers, <https://bit.ly/3ThPanN> Sierra Club, <https://bit.ly/3DPkTXt>, Pacific Wild Conservation, <https://bit.ly/3TeonIL>.

An April 2022 poll, found here <https://bit.ly/3DFgrKQ>, of Canadians showed that more than 80% of residents are against sport or trophy hunting of Grizzly Bear. While 62% of Canadians support hunting animals for meat, the vast majority of Canadians do not

*Conservation Report continued from page 8*  
support killing for status, prizes, skins, and non-food purposes. The majority of apex predator hunting (grizzlies, black bears, cougars, and wolves) is not for meat, and a ban on sport killing of these species would support the will of an overwhelming percentage of Canadians.

### **Caribou Update** by Joan Snyder - **Maternity Pen updates:**

**Central Selkirks:** Seven female adult cows plus one yearling calf were captured and placed in the Central Selkirk pen. One cow and its stillborn calf died. Three male and three female calves were released from the pen in late July. One male died soon after release, possibly from predation by a wolverine. Finally, one female calf apparently dropped her collar in early October; she is growing and doing well.

**Klinse-Za:** In the First Nations Revelstoke complex, 19 pregnant cows were captured with 17 calves born in the pen. One died shortly after birth, and one cow died leaving an orphan calf. In total, 16 calves, 10 males and six females were released from the pen on August 20, including the orphaned calf. We will have more information in the spring when the new caribou cows and calves have been captured.

Other activities in the caribou program:

- Predator reduction with targeted removal of localized predator populations is used to aid in caribou recovery when predation has been identified as a barrier to effective caribou recovery.
- Supplementary feeding usually using wild food (such as lichens) is being provided to caribou



*Photo: V. George*

*Rock Ptarmigan*

at specific times of the year at designated locations.

- Recreational motor vehicle regulations, including snowmobiles, can be found at <https://bit.ly/3tY92SH>

Next summer, the report will provide recap data from this winter's caribou activities.

Caribou Recovery Actions Website: <https://bit.ly/3ViEzKG>

**Rodenticide Update** - Paraphrased from CBC - The province of B.C. has made a temporary ban on the use of rat poison permanent. The province conducted a review of second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides (SGARS) and their impacts by speaking with technical experts and holding a public consultation that received almost 1,600 responses, including input from BC Nature.

The permanent regulatory changes ban the widespread sale and use of SGARS. Rat poison has been widely criticized for how it moves through the food chain after ingestion by a rat, with trace amounts found in local wildlife and potentially harming predators. A 2009 study on 164 owls in western Canada found that 70% had residues of at least one rodenticide in their livers. Researchers found that nearly half of those owls had multiple rodenticides in their systems. Rat poison has also been found in higher-order predators

and scavengers including weasels, coyotes, birds and squirrels. The permanent ban will come into effect on Jan. 21, 2023 to align with the end of the temporary ban. The ban applies to all sale and use of SGARS by members of the public and most commercial and industrial operations in B.C., except for those services considered "essential" such as hospitals and food production. Essential services using SGARS will have to hire a licensed pest-control company, be licensed, have a site-specific integrated-pest-management plan, and record the use of the poison. According to the government, the ban will reduce pesticide use by requiring individuals and businesses to resort to other methods of pest control, such as traps, less toxic rat poisons, and removing food sources.

**Coastal and Marine Strategy** by Peter Ballin - On September 8, I attended a meeting considering management of BC's northern shelf <https://mpanetwork.ca>. Proceedings are very much in the initial stages, with the collection of mandates and commitments from many sources. Current sites protect 42% of species, with a goal of 74% through adaptive management and monitoring. From the BC government website - <https://bit.ly/3gyl2au>

The Marine Plan Partnership is a co-led initiative between the B.C. government and partner First Nations. Together, the partners developed four sub-regional marine plans and a regional action framework for the North Pacific Coast following an ecosystem-based management approach. The initiative used the best available science and local and

*Continued page 10*

traditional knowledge to make recommendations for marine uses and activities within the plan area.

**Salish Sea Assessment** - On September 8, BC Nature received a reply from Minister of Environment Steven Guilbeault to our letter of support for The Salish Sea Indigenous Guardians Association's request for a Regional Assessment of the Salish Sea. The letter outlined the protocols for initiating such assessments, with no reason to suspect that such an assessment will be carried out.

**Anchoring in BC Marine Parks** - by Ben van Drimmelen - On August 25 BC Nature wrote to Kevin Jardine, Deputy Minister, BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, concerning ongoing damage to the seabed of BC Marine Parks by recreational boaters in eight heavily-used marine parks in the West Coast/Vancouver Island region: D'Arcy Island, Princess Margaret, Pirate's Cove, Wallace Island, Copeland Islands, Desolation Sound, Buccaneer Bay, and Harmony Islands. Anchors and anchor chains



*Great Blue Heron hard at work rip up the subtidal vegetation, including eelgrass beds, which provides vital habitat for a host of creatures.*

This seabed disturbance comes from:

- dragging while setting and raising anchors, and
- scouring from the associated chain and anchor line as vessels drift around their anchors with changing currents and winds.

Although seabed damage is unseen, protection of the seabed in marine parks is as essential as conservation of terrestrial features. Mooring buoys solve the problem, but charging a fee for their use encourages the use of anchors, directly contrary to

sound management; park policies should discourage anchoring and promote the use of mooring buoys. BC Nature wishes to collaborate with BC Parks staff to resolve the problem of anchoring in our marine parks.

Deputy Minister Jardine responded on October 6. BC Parks is currently developing a Marine Recreation Action Plan. This plan, which will be released to the public later this year, will help protect these special places and ensure sustainable recreation for years to come. BC Parks has initiated preliminary research on the coverage of eelgrass within some of our parks, is exploring more efficient means of tracking the usage of anchorages, and is mapping sensitive areas—including Desolation Sound, Montague Harbour, Pirate's Cove and Wakes Cove Marine Provincial Parks. They have already begun to post signage in Desolation Sound closing sensitive areas to anchoring, and the intent is to close other sensitive areas as they identify them.

**Climate Change** by Matthew Syvenky - Our committee's chair, Cheryl Lewis, had to step away from her role. The Climate Committee would like to acknowledge and thank Cheryl for her service. Matthew Syvenky has taken on the role of chair of the Climate Committee. Matthew is a student at Simon Fraser University, studying for a Bachelor of Environment with a major in Resource and Environmental Management.

The Climate Committee is working with BC Nature's fundraiser to secure funds for future

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Conservation Report continued from page 10 projects. The committee is busy brainstorming and setting priorities on prospective projects. We are looking forward to getting started on these new initiatives in the coming months.

The Climate Committee was recently approached by a freelance writer preparing an article for the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC and Explore Magazine about how climate change is affecting outdoor recreation. The committee sent the writer a summary of our answers to their questions, providing a great opportunity for us to reach an audience outside of BC Nature.

BC Nature is a member of the West Coast Climate Action Network (WE-CAN) <https://westcoastclimateaction.ca/>. WE-CAN is a powerful network of BC organizations urgently addressing the climate emergency. For weekly updates on climate news and action, we invite you to subscribe to the WE-CAN newsletter <https://bit.ly/3Vi3m1d>.

The Climate Committee is excited about our opportunities for

the future. We are looking for new, keen members to join our committee! If you would like to be involved, please contact us at [BCN\\_ClimateCommittee@protonmail.com](mailto:BCN_ClimateCommittee@protonmail.com) and we would be delighted to get in touch with you.

**Old-growth Forests** by Peter Ballin - Back to elder action as recommended by David Suzuki: this elder, as a constituent of David Eby, our new premier, participated in a rally at his office on October 27, to support his expressed desire to speed up the deferrals of old-growth to be logged. I spoke at the rally and served as media contact (I was clear but didn't make the cut).

"Two of the three years to implement the B.C. government promises on old-growth have passed. Yet, clearcutting of irreplaceable, endangered old-growth continues, even in the most-at-risk stands," said Jens Wieting, Senior Forest and Climate Campaigner at Sierra Club BC. *Stand.earth* was instrumental in supporting the demonstration. We called for the implementation of at-risk old-growth logging



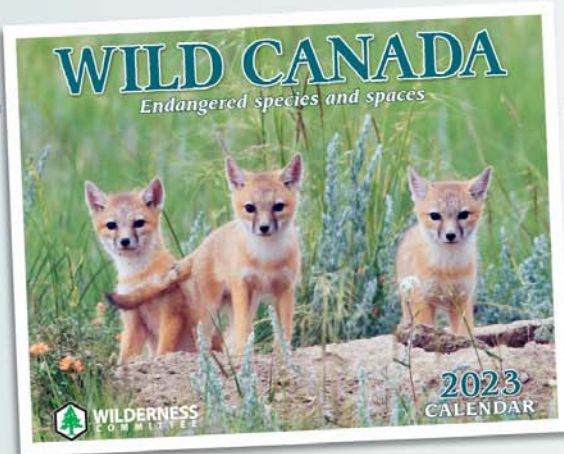
Photo: L. MacDonald

*Coyote hard at work for a meal.*

bans, financial support for First Nations to make deferrals a viable economic option and pursue Indigenous-led solutions, carrying out the Old Growth Strategic Report's 14 recommendations now, and ceasing old-growth logging to clear the path for fracking operations and gas pipelines.

BC Nature signed on to the United We Stand for Old Growth Forests Declaration - <https://bit.ly/3hqrLwU>, joining almost 70 other organizations. You may wish to contact Elders for Ancient Trees email: [oldfolksforoldgrowth@gmail.com](mailto:oldfolksforoldgrowth@gmail.com) and request to be placed on their distribution list. Ω

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