



MEDIA BACKGROUNDER ON THE BC GOVERNMENT'S ANNOUNCEMENT

BC is Rich in Wildlife but Poor in Protection

British Columbia is Canada's richest province, biologically. It is home to 76 per cent of Canada's bird species, 70 per cent of its freshwater fish species, and thousands of other animals and plants. Well over 3,600 species call BC home, and many of these, such as mountain goat and mountain caribou, live mostly – or only – in the province and nowhere else on the planet. However, according to a major report released today by Biodiversity BC (a joint government – NGO initiative) much of the province's wildlife and wilderness is in dire straits. For example:

1. More than 1,600 species are at risk in the province and levels of endangerment are especially high within some wildlife groups, such as amphibians, reptiles and turtles, and freshwater fish.
2. Habitat loss is the major driver of species decline and loss in BC. Nevertheless, global warming is already having a serious impact on the health of BC's ecosystems and is expected to increase the likelihood of species declines already underway.

Government's Proposed Plan for Endangered Wildlife is a Great Disappointment

Government also announced today a "new" policy for how it intends to manage the thousands of species that are at risk in the province. Called the **Conservation Framework**, the policy sets out the government's priorities on: a) how many and what species will receive attention from government; and b) what strategies will be employed to address species at risk. Today's announcement does not include a commitment by government to enact new Endangered Species Legislation, as was recently passed in Ontario. BC is one of only two provinces that has no such law to protect threatened and endangered wildlife. Rather, the Conservation Framework relies wholly on the existing fragmented policy landscape for BC's species at risk, which provides little legal mandate for protection and has proven to be ineffective to actually protect and recover wildlife at risk. In some cases, current policies expressly prioritize industry needs

over at-risk wildlife and their necessary habitat. The sad reality is the vast majority of BC's species and ecosystems at risk as described in Biodiversity BC are in this sorry state because of the very policies and laws that make up the Conservation Framework. As a result, species at risk will remain very poorly protected.

The Solution

There is a tremendous opportunity to demonstrate leadership through the implementation of a robust Endangered Species Act to protect wildlife at risk and their habitat. Studies of provincial and international species protection laws and best practices show that laws based on the following key principles work to protect species and ecosystems at risk.

1. enshrine the principle that healthy ecosystems are essential to healthy human societies and economies;
2. recognize that biodiversity is essential to healthy ecosystems;
3. identify, protect and recover at-risk biodiversity throughout the province;
4. protect and recover biodiversity by protecting habitat;
5. identify, assess and develop recovery strategies for at-risk biodiversity on the basis of sound science;
6. incorporate global warming into policy, planning and management
7. enshrine the precautionary principle, the principle of intergenerational equity; and the polluter-pays principle;
8. require citizen, community and First Nations participation;
9. require accountability and transparency;
10. be funded; and be enforced.

Our organizations have joined forces to campaign for an Endangered Species Law that includes strong habitat protection. The recently announced Conservation Framework relies on a weak and inadequate policy framework and will not recover endangered species in BC.