



February 3, 2012

Premier Christy Clark
PO Box 9041 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC
V8W 9E1

Regarding: **BC withdrawal of support for a National Park in the South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen Valley**

Dear Premier Clark:

BC Nature (Federation of BC Naturalists) is at a loss to understand why Environment Minister, Hon. Terry Lake, has stated that the provincial government is withdrawing support for a national park reserve in the South Okanagan – Lower Similkameen Valley due to lack of local public support. On the contrary;

- The only scientific poll held in the area showed strong local support for a national park.
- Tourism businesses, through the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association, have endorsed the national park concept in this area by putting it in their five-year plan.
- Parks Canada has had positive dialogue with the First Nations in the region on co-management and other issues.
- On the basis of similar dialogue with Parks Canada staff, most ranchers with grazing lands in the proposed park area are now supportive.
- Since the process started, the area under consideration has been reduced in size because of concerns expressed by various groups, most of whom are now satisfied with the process.

The many urgent reasons for creating this national park have been elucidated in our previous letters to government over the past eight years. Some of those reasons are:

- The unique ecology of a very small and easily disturbed area that will soon be irrevocably altered due to significant human pressures.
- More than 50% of Red and Blue-listed species in the province are dependent on the area and its rapidly diminishing habitat for their survival.
- The importance of the South Okanagan Similkameen to endangered birds is recognized internationally through the designation of five sites (White Lake, Vaseux Lake, Kilpoola Lake, Osoyoos Oxbows and Chopaka Customs) as nationally significant Important Bird Areas.
- The Interior Grasslands eco-province, South Okanagan is a unique category in Canada which is unrepresented in the national park system.
- Parks Canada has the resources to expeditiously acquire the necessary interstitial lands that would form the core of the park, the greater part of which are currently in provincial South Okanagan protected areas.
- Parks Canada has the federal laws, policy and staff to manage the new park to a high ecological standard, affording the strong protection necessary to ensure the long-term persistence of the many species in the area that are on the verge of extirpation or extinction due to climate change, population growth, agricultural expansion and resource extraction pressures.
- There are well-documented and well-known economic benefits accruing to communities located near national parks.

Several of our members were involved in the Okanagan Shuswap Land and Resource Management Plan, which was instrumental in the establishment of the South Okanagan Grasslands (Chopaka East and West, Kilpoola, Mount Kobau) and the White Lake Protected Area. Based on this knowledgeable and historic stake in the area, we urge you to reevaluate the stand taken by your government and to resume your support of Parks Canada to create a unique and vibrant national park in the South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen. Please give appropriate weight to the already-proven local support and assess what the majority of British Columbians are saying in support of a South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen National Park in your reconsideration. This would be a park where Canadians and international tourists alike could experience and enjoy the striking scenery as well as the fascinating flora and fauna it has to offer.

We believe that a South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen National Park is the best possible way to protect the region's extremely fragile ecosystem while creating significant economic opportunities for the people and businesses in the region.

Regards,



John Neville

President BC Nature

cc: The Hon Peter Kent, Minister of Environment, Canada
The Hon Terry Lake, Minister of Environment, BC