



October 31, 2013

The Honourable Mary Polak
BC Minister of Environment
PO Box 9047 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC
V8W 9E2
Via email: ENV.minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Polak:

Regarding: **BC re-engagement in the process towards creating a National Park Reserve in the South Okanagan Similkameen**

BC Nature (Federation of BC Naturalists) urges you as Minister of Environment to encourage your government to re-engage immediately in the process towards the creation of a national park reserve in the South Okanagan Similkameen. The documented record of both local and Province-wide support for this initiative in the form of resolutions, petitions, formal polls, and letters from individuals and a variety of business and environmental organizations makes clear that a solid majority of people who will be directly and indirectly affected by the park feel strongly that its presence will bring only positive economic and environmental results. These evidences of support are in the public record and available upon request.

There are many urgent reasons for the creation of this national park about which your government and previous Ministers of Environment have been informed on numerous occasions in the past nine years; the following reiterate the main ones. Given the mandate of BC Nature, “know nature and keep it worth knowing”, the focus is on the ecological reasons.

- The Okanagan Similkameen constitutes a unique ecology that is very small and easily disturbed which has had very significant human pressures on it that have already irrevocably altered much of the land base
- Over 50% of BC’s Provincially listed Red and Blue-listed species are dependent on the area for their survival and suitable habitats for them are shrinking rapidly
- The Interior Grasslands ecoprovince is unique in Canada, yet is not yet represented in the National Parks system. It is Parks Canada's policy to achieve this protection through "Efforts to create new parks are concentrated on those natural regions that do not have a national park."
- Parks Canada has the resources to acquire the necessary lands in a timely manner to form the core of the park, the greater part of which initially will be existing Provincial Protected Areas
- Parks Canada has the resources to staff and manage the new park adequately and give the many species in the proposed park area on the verge of extirpation or extinction the strong protection (and in some cases, habitat and population restoration) needed to ensure their long term

BC Nature 1620 Mt. Seymour Road, North Vancouver, BC V7G 2R9
T: 604.985.3057 F: 604.985.3059 www.bcnature.ca email: manager@bcnature.ca

persistence in the face of climate change, population growth, agricultural expansion and resource extraction pressures. Examples are the Burrowing Owl (important to the 'brand' of local businesses such as Burrowing Owl Winery), and the American Badger.

- The National Park Reserve would allow for creation of a "dark sky reserve" important for local and visiting amateur and professional astronomers; at the same time it would attract night-flying creatures such as bats and nighthawks that are of interest to naturalist tourists, but also very important consumers of insects.
- The area is a biodiversity hotspot for bees, critical to the farming and winery businesses, and a national park will allow for their protection and population enhancement
- Precious surface and groundwater would be protected in the area of the park whereas development would create yet another huge draw on scarce water resources.

The economic benefits accruing to communities near national parks are well-documented and well-known. These include direct benefits to businesses, but also other somewhat more indirect benefits.

- The tourism side of the park will allow for increased support for community museums, natural history exhibits, local festivals, and other events.
- The area has the largest organic farming community in North America for the land base and the national park's tourism draw would provide increased opportunities for these farms to thrive.
- Parks Canada's long experience with fire prevention and management respectful of the natural world would be of great assistance in this fire-dependent, dry area.

Based on this knowledgeable and historic stake in the area, we urge you to once again work with Parks Canada to create a unique and vibrant National Park Reserve in the South Okanagan Similkameen. Please take the time to review the proven and increasing local support and hear what the majority of the residents of the area and British Columbians are saying in support of a national park. We should all remember too that this is a park for all Canadians, not just for the local residents, although the benefits will accrue mostly to the latter.

We believe that a South Okanagan Similkameen National Park Reserve is the best possible way to protect the region's extremely fragile ecosystem while at the same time creating significant economic opportunities for the people and businesses. Please urge your government to begin work once again towards this goal.

Yours sincerely,



John Neville, President
BC Nature (Federation of BC Naturalists)

CC

Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, Federal Minister of the Environment Minister@ec.gc.ca

Alan Latourelle, CEO Parks Canada alan.latourelle@pc.gc.ca

Honourable Christy Clark, Premier, MLA Westside-Kelowna Christy.clark.mla@leg.bc.ca

Honourable Steve Thomson, MFLNRO, MLA Kelowna steve.thomson.mla@leg.bc.ca

Linda Larson, MLA Boundary-Similkameen Linda.larson.mla@leg.bc.ca

Dan Albas, MP Okanagan-Coquihalla Albas.D@parl.gc.ca
Alex Atamanenko, MP Southern Interior Atamanenko.A@parl.gc.ca
Norm Letnick, MLA Kelowna-Lake Country norm.letnick.mla@leg.bc.ca
Dan Ashton, MLA Penticton dan.ashton.mla@leg.bc.ca
Ron Cannan, MP Kelowna-Lake Country ron.cannan@parl.gc.ca
Spencer Chandler Herbert, MLA Vancouver-West End, NDP Environment Critic
s.chandraherbert.mla@leg.bc.ca
Grand Chief Stuart Phillip, President, Union of BC Indian Chiefs president@ubcic.bc.ca
Chief Robert Edward, Lower Similkameen Indian Band chief@lsib.net
Chief Jonathan Kruger, Penticton Indian Band chief@pib.ca
Chief Clarence Louie, Osoyoos Indian Band chief@oib.ca