

## Conservation Committee Report: Summer 2017

By Peter Ballin, Chair, Conservation Committee

This year the Conservation Committee welcomed Jim Bryan and Roger Emsley to its ranks. They bring depth of knowledge and histories of focused environmental action to the committee. Hugh Westheuser resigned, and we thank him for his dedicated work.

**The BC Election:** As of this writing we are yet to vote, but BC Nature submitted a letter to party leaders and many cabinet ministers and critics (17 in total), requesting to know their stances on the following issues:

- Climate change and its effects on habitats and species in BC
- Existing and future fossil fuel project expansions (e.g. liquefied natural gas, Trans Mountain pipeline, and other tar sands oil exports and shipping, coal expansion)
- Site C dam and associated loss of wildlife habitat and farmland
- Species and ecosystems at risk, particularly steps towards their conservation and legislated protection
- Approach to wildlife management, and in particular the proposal to separate wildlife management to an independent agency
- Aquaculture, particularly concerns over the expansion of fish farming and regulations
- Old growth logging and raw log exports
- Harmful pesticides (e.g. neonicotinoids)
- Invasive species management (e.g. banning the import, sale, and use)
- Protected areas management and establishment of new protected areas, both terrestrial and marine (e.g. South Okanagan-Similkameen National Park)
- Farmland protection and its sustainable management (e.g. diversification, stewardship, restoration, etc.)
- Transportation initiatives and consequences (e.g. public transit, proposed bridge replacement of George Massey Tunnel)

As of late April we had received ***NO REPLIES***. Did we overwhelm them? We plan to follow up with those elected.

**Wildlife Management in BC:** Government recently proposed to privatize some wildlife management under the auspices of the BC Wildlife Federation. We have no details of the plan, since the announcement came just prior to the election call in late March. We note the absence of consultation with citizens and groups with non-consumptive interests in wildlife, although a government communication indicates input from “local, regional, and provincial wildlife associations”.

BC Nature issued a press release; here follow some excerpts:

“Nature-lovers across BC are expressing concern over a proposed new method for managing wildlife in the province. Speaking on behalf of BC Nature, president Dr. Alan Burger said “Our members are alarmed by recent statements by government ministers indicating that wildlife management might be handed over to an external agency supported by special interest groups, specifically hunters and guide-outfitters”. This model of wildlife management will undoubtedly work against the interests of the vast majority of British Columbians, added Burger. “This proposal is flawed at several levels” stated Burger. The BC Nature website contains the entire press release: <http://www.bcnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/BCNature-Press-release-wildlife-management.pdf>.

**Solar Power Generation Resolution:** Submitted by the Rocky Mountain Naturalists Club of Cranbrook, and vetted by the conservation committee, the resolution has BC Nature supporting in principle the development of alternate energy sources to mitigate global warming, and urging the development of science-based laws, policies, and guidelines specific to the development of solar power generation in our province. The resolution recommends placing facilities on already highly-impacted lands such as brown lands, and excluding agricultural and crown land. BC Nature would also recommend to the provincial government that it revoke all existing applications for crown land for the purpose of investigating the feasibility of solar power generation, and place a moratorium on all applications and utility-scale solar power production in the province until it develops legislation, policies, and the means to ensure compliance. This resolution will have been presented to the Lillooet AGM.

**Mount Polley:** The January 2017 BC Nature letter to the Prime Minister and Ministers of Justice and Fisheries and Oceans did not gather sufficient traction to reverse the stay of proceedings against the provincial government and the Mount Polley Mining Corporation. Consequently, we, the taxpayers, contributed \$40 million to the cleanup of the 2014 Mount Polley dam breach. Furthermore, Mount Polley Mining Corporation was granted permission to drain treated mining wastewater into Quesnel Lake, a large glacial lake and the source of drinking water to residents of the town of Likely.

**Pipelines:** BC Nature and Nature Canada will not directly challenge the federal government decision to approve the TMX (Kinder-Morgan) pipeline, but may join other groups as interveners in court cases challenging this decision.

**Wells Gray Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site:** Dr. Catherine Hickson and the Wells Gray Wilderness Society propose to make Wells Gray Provincial Park a UNESCO World Heritage Site. BC Nature concurs that Wells Gray is a jewel worthy of such designation, and wrote a letter to support the proposal. As a true wilderness devoid of through roads and encompassing remote mountains and rivers, Wells Gray has an ecologically complex and geologically unique landscape. Its destination-

worthy attributes include inland temperate rainforest, three major rivers, and Helmcken and many other waterfalls. The Trophy Mountain flower meadows, diverse array of lichens, and endangered mountain caribou feature among its biological attractions. History becomes evident through the signs of volcanic/glacial interactions.

**Pink Mountain:** BC Nature registered support with the Minister of Environment for the establishment of an Ecological Reserve on Pink Mountain, in northeastern B.C. Information provided by the Pink Mountain Biodiversity Research Initiative, including a report produced by Ron Long (who wrote about Pink Mountain in a recent BC Nature Magazine) has revealed incredible biodiversity.

The summit plateau contains a 2.2 km<sup>2</sup> centre of diversity that supports almost 200 species of flowering plants: no other site of this size in northern BC contains as many rare and Red- and Blue-listed plant species. Butterfly diversity mirrors the plant diversity, with almost 30% of the species known to BC, as well as an estimated 200 species of moths living in this desirable habitat, making Pink Mountain a butterfly and moth hotspot in Canada.

All BC's large ungulate species except Mountain Goats occur on Pink Mountain, including the Blue-listed Northern Woodland Caribou and Stone Sheep, which lamb in the area. An astonishing concentration of grouse and ptarmigan live here: six of the seven BC species. Isolation from the main Rocky Mountain range has likely led to the unique biodiversity here. Pink Mountain, lying within the Yellowstone-to-Yukon wildlife corridor, offers great biological research potential, not only to conserve its biodiversity, but also to explain it. However, it is threatened by industrial activity and off-road vehicles. BC Nature urges that a wind farm not be built on Pink Mountain, and that wind farms undergo rigorous environmental impact assessment wherever they are placed.

**Fraser River Crossing:** BC Nature submitted a letter to Premier Clark, opposing the bridge construction over the South Arm of the Fraser River, replacing the George Massey Tunnel. BC Nature raised concerns about the lack of a comprehensive environmental review encompassing the river and its biologically valuable adjacent habitats. Some of our concerns:

- Opening the waterway to large ocean-going ship traffic, which are currently unable to clear the 12m deep tunnel. For these ships to pass, the Fraser River would have to be dredged, coupled with dike construction along the shoreline, and rip-rap placed to combat erosion. Dikes would compromise circulation patterns for valuable marshlands. A deeper river would lead to increased stream velocity and allow greater intrusion of seawater upstream.
- Migrating salmon and all that they affect.
- Seawater contamination of irrigation systems of agricultural lands upstream.

- Increased river velocity would increase erosion and siltification of the delta, with possible severe negative consequences for juvenile salmon and a host of other species that utilize the rich estuary as a nursery and a transition habitat in their migrations, including internationally important migratory birds.
- Possible ensuing industrialization of delta lands and encroachment onto farmlands in the Agricultural Land Reserve
- Concerns about climate change. We question a future in coal and LNG ports along the banks of a dredged Fraser River

The Fraser River Estuary and surrounding wetlands are highly-complex ecologically. Extensive estuarine marshes and waters of prime habitat value exist directly downstream of the proposed bridge. These habitats support Canada's largest wintering habitat for waterfowl and birds of prey: a BirdLife International Important Bird and Biodiversity Area. The estuarine ecosystem also links to the apex predators in the Salish Sea: the endangered Southern Resident Orcas. All this in addition to the challenges of predicted rising sea levels.

**Protected Areas across Canada:** BC Nature signed on to a letter from Nature Canada and CPAWS to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Alberta's Minister of Environment and Parks regarding the *Pathway to Canada Target 1* Initiative. Canada has a commitment, under Aichi Target 11, to protect at least 17% of our land and inland waters by 2020. The letter commends the governments for cooperating to achieve their goals and lists several recommendations to help implement them. One of them is to exceed the 17% beyond 2020 – "The scientific evidence is clear that nature needs much more than 17% protection if biodiversity and ecosystem goods and services are to be maintained, particularly in the face of climate change. The 2020 target is thus an interim goal, not a final destination. The signatories therefore recommend that the Pathway process develop a long-term, evidence-based plan to scale up protection concurrent with the effort to protect at least 17% by 2020."

The list of environmental concerns that affect naturalists does not diminish. Remember that BC Nature can support the involvement of your club in those issues that concern you locally.