

TO BE A VOICE AND ADVOCATE FOR WILDLIFE AND THE ECOSYSTEMS THAT SUSTAIN ALL LIFE

WILDLIFE STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL PRESS RELEASE – FEBRUARY 18, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE WILDLIFE STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL RESPONDS TO THE GOVERNMENT PRESS RELEASE OF FEBRUARY 12 2016 ANNOUNCING THE NENGAY DENI ACCORD

The Wildlife Stewardship Council (WSC) is a provincial organization whose membership includes First Nations, guide outfitters and associate members, all of whom share a common concern for the health of British Columbia's wildlife and habitat. The WSC has developed many partnerships with First Nations in BC. Our mission statement is as follows: "To be a voice and advocate for wildlife and the ecosystems that sustain all life."

The WSC wishes to comment on the recent Nengay Deni Accord announcement, specifically the moose population component. In view of the 50% decline in moose populations in the Tsilhqot'in territorial lands, the WSC commends both the Tsilhqot'in First Nations and government decision makers for establishing moose harvest guidelines intended to reduce the overall moose harvest and reverse the trend of declining moose populations in the Tsilhqot'in Territory. The shift from the harvest of cow/calf moose to a harvest of bulls is a wise decision, and is strongly supported by the WSC. The WSC also supports the reduction in opportunity for all licensed hunters as an additional step in recovering moose populations in the Tsilhqot'in Territory. The WSC also notes in the Nengay Deni Accord reference to a plan for an "immediate commitment to moose recovery". The moose recovery plan outlined in the accord is an excellent example of wildlife stewardship in action. The WSC hopes that this plan is part of a larger more comprehensive plan to address the decline of moose and other species province wide. We have outlined below some of the potential causes of declining ungulate populations there and in other parts of the province.

The WSC is extremely concerned about the overall decline in wildlife populations in BC, most notably, but not limited to, certain populations of mountain caribou, moose, deer and elk. The WSC contends that these declines are a direct result of a number of key factors, including the following:

- Failure of successive governments to acknowledge many of the concerns being voiced by First Nations around the province about declining wildlife populations and the impacts of this decline on First Nations sustenance hunting opportunities. Similar concerns have been expressed by rural communities, stakeholder groups, and conservation organizations while many of the key wildlife management issues have been ignored.
- Severe habitat degradation due to industrial activity on the land with very little oversight or accountability for the impacts to wildlife and habitat;
- Lack of credible wildlife population inventories leading to poorly designed and managed hunting regulations that in many cases result in unsustainable harvest rates;



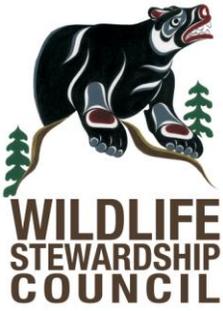
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- Increasing access to, and crowding on, sensitive wildlife habitat;
- Lack of dedicated funding province-wide for crucial wildlife management and enhancement programs;
- Lack of enforcement due to understaffing of the CO service;
- Predator/prey imbalances, and government policies that prevent responsible action when ungulate populations are being dramatically impacted by predation;
- Failure to implement recommendations from the Mike Morris report that would have led to managing BC's wildlife in accordance with best practices.

We are at a critical point in defining the future of BC's wildlife and natural resources. The steady decline in BC's wildlife is readily apparent. Federal and provincial governments are charged with the stewardship of our precious wildlife resources. They have the legal responsibility for managing, enhancing, and conserving it for the present and future benefit of all Canadians.

The situation that has occurred in the Tsilhqot'in Territory is not unique and should be understood as a wake-up call for all. The WSC is aware of other First Nations, guides, and resident hunters who are extremely concerned and frustrated over the lack of meaningful wildlife management which has resulted in diminished wildlife resources in the province. In far too many cases these concerns are being ignored, and the plight of wildlife in BC continues to worsen. As a result, the WSC anticipates that similar agreements to that of the Tsilhqot'in can be expected to allow certain populations of wildlife to recover. We anticipate that other changes will have to occur before the next hunting regulation cycle is implemented. An example of this would be the concerns being heard from rural communities in the northwest portion of the province. Moose and caribou populations are in steady decline due in large part to poorly monitored industrial activity, heavy predation and hunting regulations that are inconsistent with other jurisdictions in the province. In spite of over a decade of these issues being brought forward to government decision makers, those speaking for wildlife have been ignored. Government cannot expect local communities to stand by and be silent while their culture and heritage is being destroyed.

Government would be wise to consider the co-management strategies being employed by the Kwakiutl District Council (KDC), the Wildlife Stewardship Council, Region 1 government staff, and others with respect to Roosevelt elk on Vancouver Island. This program has led to expanded cooperation and involvement with other First Nations, has been supported by many members of the resident hunting community, and has been a tremendous success. In virtually every area where Roosevelt elk exist, their populations are stable or growing. The co-management of these elk over the last fifteen years has led to dramatic increases in harvest opportunities for all. An added benefit has been the many surplus donor animals that can be used for re-introducing elk into historical range and new introductions where suitable habitat exists. The WSC also acknowledges the hard work and dedication of the Region 1 staff for their vision, leadership and support of this initiative.



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For some time now, the WSC has been recommending the formation of a Provincial Wildlife Roundtable that would include representation from First Nations, industry, key stakeholder groups, government, and others. Our goal would be to stabilize wildlife populations and work toward reversing the alarming declines in wildlife by developing a comprehensive strategy for wildlife and habitat conservation. We have outlined the major causes that have resulted in the steep decline of many wildlife populations province wide. For some time now, the WSC has been recommending the formation of a provincial roundtable of all stakeholders committed to the sustainable scientific management and the hallmark of good governance, transparency and accountability. We believe a roundtable approach would replace the politically motivated people management system that currently exists with a more responsible, sustainable wildlife and habitat management process.

Wildlife Stewardship Council
Tahltan Guides Association

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