



NEWS FROM THE B.C. WILDLIFE FEDERATION

President's Message

By David Lewis

BCWF President

The B.C. Wildlife Federation is British Columbia's most influential conservation organization because of the commitment and passion of our members, all 43,000 of them. As the elected President, my hope is to speak for those members, but that process begins with listening.

It is my goal to ensure that all members are heard and represented. Whether you hunt, fish, or shoot, everybody gets equal

representation. In the past year, we have been successful representing the interests of hunters and shooters, convincing the federal government to back away from the most damaging elements of Bill C-21 and Bill 4. I will expand on those efforts at a later date.

Now, angling is our biggest opportunity for positive change.

The BCWF's advocacy work must change to reflect the needs to British Columbians. B.C. is home to 280,000 licensed

saltwater anglers and 320,000 freshwater anglers. If we are to grow our ranks, the BCWF must be more focused than ever on protecting access to fisheries, enhancing fish habitat, and regaining our seat at the table to ensure that fisheries and habitat are properly resourced.

We need to re-engage with all levels of government and stakeholders to get things moving in the right direction for steelhead, sturgeon, salmon, and all fish species that are vital to our members. ▶

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MOVING?

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The BCWF's new Learn to Fish video series is a first step toward recruiting new anglers. Nearly every one of us can remember catching our first fish with a fly or a worm and bobber. The low barrier to entry and the widespread popularity of angling represents a massive recruitment opportunity for us.

The Federation will continue to work with the provincial government on access to wild game and to the backcountry. We have seen hunter access eroded in recent years, as General Open Seasons are converted to Limited Entry Hunts and entire areas are closed to hunters. The moose harvest in Region 7B has dropped from 1,200 to 200. We will work hard to restore hunting opportunities with more news on those efforts to come in the September edition of *BC Outdoors*.



We continue to celebrate our successes in habitat restoration, especially those projects that help us to engage and partner with First Nations. The Bonaparte River coho channel is paying those dividends already, and nearly every Beaver Dam Analogue that we support will lead to a new relationship with a First Nation. If we want to fish and hunt, see more

animals on the land, more birds in the air, and more fish in the water, building those relationships will be absolutely vital. Our way of life depends on successful partnerships, and that is something we will lean into as an organization.

I look forward to hearing your ideas as we navigate these issues and opportunities. 🐦

Executive Director's Message

By Jesse Zeman

BCWF Executive Director

Outreach matters. If we are to succeed and grow as an organization, it is essential that our elected leaders, neighbours, and friends know who we are and what we do.

BCWF members are conservationists, volunteers, and enthusiastic contributors to our communities. We need to talk to people about the hundreds of thousands of hours we contribute each year to organizing and executing dozens of environmental protection projects, habitat restorations, and riparian enhancements, along with funding and participating in scientific research to benefit fish and wildlife. We must passionately and enthusiastically advocate for the environment and for access to the activities we love.

The Federation's goal is to help people take those first steps toward becoming an angler, a hunter, or a sport shooter by inviting more people into our tent. We must show our friends and neighbours what we do and mentor those who show interest in outdoor pastimes. Bring people to the rifle range, to the lake, on the boat. We should invite non-hunters to eat with us when we are successful at harvesting.

Helping people better understand who we are as firearms owners will enable us to grow our ranks, gain more influence with government, and ensure we have social acceptance among non-hunters and non-shooters.

If they know us as friends, rather than strangers to be feared, support for non-sensical, damaging firearms regulations will be diminished.

To achieve these goals, we must engage positively with our elected officials and diversify our membership, especially in urban areas. To that end, the BCWF is focused on building relation-



ships and ensuring that the BCWF is a place where all are welcome. Programs like Becoming an Outdoors Woman and the Women Outdoors Skills and Experience Program are encouraging more women to get their CORE and PAL. Our programs for youth have expanded exponentially to bring our message to thousands of future conservationists each year.

More than 1,500 school children will take part in Gently Down the Seymour this year, a collaboration with the Seymour Salmonid Society. Lower Mainland students visit the hatchery to learn about salmonids, their habitat, and the benefits of hatcheries. They'll also learn about restoring and enhancing habitat along the Seymour River.

On Father's Day, the BCWF partnered with the Freshwater Fisheries Society of B.C. to showcase the incredible bounty

we enjoy throughout the province. Family Fishing Weekend is an annual celebration of angling that brings friends, neighbours, and their children out for a day of fishing, with no license required. More than 800 B.C. lakes are stocked with fish each year and we intend to help more people than ever experience the thrill of catching a fish.

The BCWF is also encouraging partner clubs to take part in National Range Day every June. It is vital that we bring the media, elected officials, and local families out for a day of safe, fun marksmanship. In this way, we can bring more shooters into our ranks and celebrate the 2.3 million Canadians who responsibly, legally, and safely own and use firearms.

If you have friends or relatives who are interested in the outdoors, invite them along on your next outing. It might change their lives. 🐦

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Bonaparte Channel Restoration Is A Win For Coho

By Randy Shore

PR & Communications Specialist

The Bonaparte River channel is a unique and potentially productive coho salmon rearing habitat again, thanks to the efforts of the Bonaparte First Nation and the B.C. Wildlife Federation (BCWF).

The original 500-metre channel has been restored, renewed, and doubled in length, according to Bonaparte CEO Sean Bennett.

"The fencing was basically rotten, the channel was starting to infill, and all the cuttings and trees they planted had grown in so thick it was just kind of clogging the place up," he said. "It was reducing and restricting the groundwater flow coming up into the channel."

That's important because juvenile coho are notoriously fussy about where they rear. The channel is fed by groundwater, which makes it a little cooler in the summer and prevents it from freezing when temperatures drop in the winter.

"When juvenile coho come out of the gravel in the spring they like to hang around for a while, so they seek out these groundwater refuges," explained Bennett, who spent more than 20 years working in the Restoration Group at Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). "Rivers in the Interior are exceptionally cold in the winter, so a groundwater channel is like a trip to Mexico for these coho. The channel is essentially thermoregulated."

Bennett's master's degree research on the Coldwater River found that thermoregulated groundwater channels are fantastically productive, with five or six fry per square metre.

"It's just a huge difference in habitat



The Bonaparte channel is now about one kilometre long after restoration and enhancement

quality," he said. "That's why it was so important to give this channel a renovation."

The channel is now about one kilometre long with more than 4,000 new willow cuttings, woody debris, and boulders designed to recreate the coho-friendly habitat. Three kilometres of fencing have been installed to keep horses and cows out of the riparian area

along both sides of the channel and 1km of the adjacent Bonaparte River.

This summer, a flow gate will be installed that will allow river water into the channel when needed to flush and clean the channel or to simulate a spring freshet.

"A crew from the B.C. Wildlife Federation came out and pulled the existing coho out of channel before the work was done," Bennett said. "The coho looked healthy, but there were only a dozen of them."

DFO assisted with the project surveys and permits and is committed to return for the flow gate installation.

"This is our third project with the BCWF, and that partnership is key to getting where we both want to go with respect to increasing salmon and wildlife populations, and we all benefit down the road," said Bennett.

"This project is going to benefit the people in the community. It's going to increase the number of coho in the channel, which is going to hopefully realize benefits for sport fishermen, commercial fishermen, and First Nations fishermen. There's just no downside to these types of projects."

The Bonaparte First Nation Natural Resource department has expanded from four workers to nearly 20 over the past two years, in part due to the band's restoration partnerships with government agencies such as DFO and the Ministry of Forests, and with nonprofits such as the BCWF.

Bennett appreciates BCWF's commitment to on-the-ground project work.

"At a certain point you've done all the assessments and studies that you can do," he said. "We know what these fish need, where they like to live. I've been

doing this work for decades."

"We know what needs to be done, so let's do it, see how it works, and go from there," he said. "We've made a mess of our rivers and salmon habitats, so let's get on with fixing that."

The BCWF is focused on projects with a high return on investment in terms of environmental outcomes and deliverables and this project is a perfect example, said Neil Fletcher, BCWF director of Conservation Stewardship. "This is a rearing channel with a unique groundwater feed, which is vital to coho salmon."

"The BCWF has worked with the Bonaparte First Nation on wetlands restoration projects before, but we are also very keen to take on fish habitat restoration projects and build on our in-house expertise," he said. "This is a great chance to start training our own staff to do this kind of work and the Bonaparte First Nation has been extremely generous with those opportunities."



Bonaparte First Nation technical staff were also given access to BCWF online training courses, which were developed by the Federation's Wet-

lands Workforce.

"That data covers wetland identification, wetland plants, and restoration technique, and the Bonaparte First Nation was able to put their techs through those training modules through the winter with the idea that the training will support further conservation and collaborations on works in and around water for years to come," said Fletcher.

The BCWF directed \$135,000 to the channel restoration, with part of that money going to a riparian fencing project. Funding for the projects was provided by the provincial government's Watershed Security Fund and the BC Conservation and Biodiversity Award. The Federation was also able to provide staff time and in-kind technical support to the channel project. The DFO AHRF program and Shuswap Fisheries Commission also provided funding for the project. 🐟

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Fishing Forever Provides So Many Magical Moments

By Rachel Teichman

Fish Habitat Restoration and Education Program Assistant



For Mike Stiles, Fishing Forever is a way to feel the same as everyone else on the lake, despite his disability.

"I believe that fishing is one of the cheapest and most inclusive activities out there," he said. "It can also be empowering for someone with a disability, because you can participate alongside everyone else, and does not matter if you're disabled or not, you can all catch the same fish."

After his first Fishing Forever event, he immediately became a champion for the cause, with a determination to bring the same joy he felt to others.

"I have been involved in wheelchair sports and other activities that get people involved for many years," Stiles said.

"I went to my first Fishing Forever event because I have a disability and sometimes need assistance, so I thought it would be a great way to get out and go fishing," he explained. "I was blown away by how well it was planned and how much I enjoyed it and looked forward to it each year."

"Aha" moments like these may be small, but they powerfully illustrate the value of the outdoor equity movement, which aims to ensure that all people have opportunities to explore and enjoy

nature. It is the principal goal of the B.C. Wildlife Federation's Fishing Forever program.

Established in 1989, Fishing Forever has focused on providing people with disabilities the opportunity to learn, or continue, to fish and enjoy the outdoors in a safe and supportive environment. The initiative has inspired communities across British Columbia, serving about 2,000 people with mental and physical challenges each year.

In partnership with more than a dozen BCWF-affiliated clubs, Fishing Forever is hosting at least 18 single- and multi-day events in 13 communities in



2023, including Abbotsford, Campbell River, Courtenay, Nanaimo, Nelson, North Okanagan, Osoyoos, Parksville-Qualicum, Prince George, Smithers, Vernon, and Williams Lake. These events provide a range of resources to help people with disabilities try their hand at catch-and-release and retention fishing.

Events are sponsored by our partners at Cabela's Outdoor Fund, Disability Alliance BC, Habitat Conservation Fund, New Horizons for Seniors Program, and the Province of B.C.

Research shows that spending time in nature has a positive impact on health, reducing stress, anxiety, and depression. For people with disabilities, who may face additional challenges and limitations in their daily lives, the chance to connect with nature can be particularly meaningful.

"I started out as a Fishing Forever participant and became a co-host of my own event," said Stiles. "I co-chair our committee because I have seen so many heartfelt occasions in which people were lifted up and empowered by the event."



"I have seen a severely disabled teenager who could not cast, learn that he could reel in a fish, which he did many times," Stiles recalled. "He was non-verbal, but shook with excitement, and his smile was ear to ear. People from group-living environments say they wait all year for Fishing Forever to happen because they love it so much. I even saw my own daughters catch their first fish at Fishing Forever events."

Fishing Forever events emphasize the importance of responsible fishing practices and encourage participants to consider the impact of their actions on the environment. By promoting

sustainable fishing practices, Fishing Forever helps to ensure that future generations can continue to enjoy the thrill of angling.

Each event is held in a location that offers accessible infrastructure, such as wheelchair accessible washrooms, docks, and shore fishing areas. Volunteers also have experience working with a wide range of disabilities, including physical disabilities, visual impairments, and cognitive impairments. They are committed to providing a safe and supportive environment in which everyone can learn new skills and build confidence.

Experienced anglers are encouraged to volunteer at a local Fishing Forever event. You will have the opportunity to support your neighbours and connect with other anglers who share your passion.

By promoting accessibility and conservation, BCWF hopes to create more inclusive communities where everyone can connect with nature. Whether you are a seasoned angler, just starting out, or have a friend in mind who could benefit from a day at the lake, join in and (re)discover the joy of fishing. 🐟

Soil Is Nature's Zero-Cost Reservoir

By Haiden MacDonald

Fish Habitat Restoration and Education Program Coordinator

Deborah Jones and her husband Ib Neilsen stumbled on to the Cougar Creek Streamkeepers after they noticed that a private landowner had illegally felled trees on the creek bank.

In the process of reporting the incident and engaging with the restoration of the bank, the pair “suddenly and accidentally” joined the Streamkeepers, a mostly informal group that had been looking after the stream and operating a coho incubation box there for many years.

“We both have backgrounds in geography and urban geography, so we also brought with us a watershed-wide view of environmental health,” said Jones. “Working on that first streambank restoration project gave us a front-row seat to stormwater runoff at its filthy, erosive worst.”

Stormwater was pouring off nearby mall roofs and parking lots, through a pipe directly into Cougar Creek.

“Until cities crack the tough nut of how to do development and redevelopment in such a way that we leave space for water to soak into the ground, our urban creeks will continue to struggle with too much polluted runoff when it rains, and not enough water during dry spells,” said Jones, now the group’s Rain Garden Coordinator.

In collaboration with the City of Delta, Jones developed a framework for expanding Delta Green Infrastructure, a nature-based solution to stormwater management. In 2006, their first Rain Garden was completed.

“Cougar Canyon Elementary School Rain Garden was the initial result of that collaboration, way back in 2006. As of 2023, there are 30-plus school and community rain gardens in Delta,” said Jones.



Thanks in part to Deborah Jones (right), Delta now has over 30 rain gardens.

Rain gardens provide rainwater flow regulation, filter contaminants and pollutants from urban stormwater runoff, and contribute to groundwater supplies that hold water on the landscape.

“Delta’s school and community rain gardens divert approximately 22 million litres of water per year away from storm sewers and streams and into vegetation and groundwater,” she said.

The key to climate resilience — reducing the triple hazard of flood, drought and fire — is to give rainwater maximum opportunity to soak into the ground. Whether it’s beaver dams, boulder weirs, swales, wetlands, terraces,

or rain gardens, all these features increase our ability to store precious rain safely in nature’s free reservoir, the ground, said Jones.

You can join the B.C. Wildlife Federation, the Cougar Creek Streamkeepers and the City of Delta on September 23 and 24 for this year’s World Rivers Day Fish Habitat Stewardship workshop. Follow the QR Code below to register and find more information on our website.

“BCWF workshops have been invaluable in attracting young people and bringing additional knowledge and skills to all of us, young and not-so-young,” said Jones. 🐾

Polar Coachman Flyfishers Club Secrets Are Meant To Be Shared

By Randy Shore

PR & Communications Specialist

Anglers have their secrets, from favourite fishing holes to the special twist on the perfect fly. But you would be hard pressed to find a group of people more eager to teach the next generation than the Polar Coachman Flyfishers.

“One of the things that drew me to the Club was that opportunity to learn and share,” said President Jeff Kormos. “We have people who have been fishing around Prince George for 40 or 50 years and they all have places that they go and little secrets that remain well kept.”

That applies when they decide which watershed or stream is going to get hot as the weather changes and the hatches progress, and which flies to use in a particular place at a particular time.

“But they love to teach, share their knowledge and give you a leg up,” he said. “With a little bit of help you can tie a fly that is simple, but excellent to catch fish with, or something really intricate like Atlantic salmon flies that date back to the 1800s.”

The name of the Club is a play on the classic Royal Coachman fly, with a nod to the often-arctic conditions of the region.

The 50-odd members are dedicated to putting more fish in the water through their association with the Spruce City Wildlife Hatchery, which also serves as their clubhouse.

“Some of our members are also members of the Spruce City Wildlife Association, which is the biggest volunteer-run hatchery in B.C.,” said Kormos. “We do a lot of work together, volunteering at the hatchery. We also plan to do learn-to-fish programming with them this year. We haven’t been able to



The Polar Coachman Flyfishers tie one on at the Spruce City Wildlife clubhouse.

do much because of Covid, but this will be a chance to give something back to the community.”

The hatchery cultivates salmon fry on the banks of the Nechako River, using brood stock collected from local river systems by members of both clubs.

“When Spruce City releases the fry, they bring together groups from the community,” he said. “They make sure to get the kids involved, naming the fry, and sending them out on their own to hopefully make it down the Fraser River and then with luck, they come back in a few years.”

The Polar Coachman Flyfishers hold regular BCWF-sponsored Fishing Forever events that help people, young, old and disabled, experience flyfishing. Past events included the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) and groups with spinal and brain injuries.

To help even more people access the outdoors safely, the Club has installed

and rehabilitated fish weirs at Hart Lake and helped purchase and install fishing docks to improve access and protect sensitive shorelines at Shane and Tory Lakes.

“People love being outside and learning about flies and the equipment,” said Kormos. “There’s a bit of learning curve with casting and some techniques to learn, but flyfishing can be really technical or really easy and we’ve found ways to make it simple.”

“People get to fish right away and it’s really fun,” he said. “The Club plans to host a group from the Canuck Place Children’s Hospice and we are really excited about that.”

“When you see somebody hook into their first fish, get that first big jump out of the water, you feel the same joy that we get out of doing this,” he said. “We see that on their faces, and that that really makes it worth it for us.” 🐟

As CWD Creeps Closer, B.C. Hunters Are On Alert

By Randy Shore

PR and Communications Specialist

When Chronic Wasting Disease affecting cervids finally arrives, it will likely be in the high-risk wildlife management areas of southeastern British Columbia adjacent to existing outbreaks in Alberta, Montana and Idaho.

CWD can also leap into other regions unexpectedly, through the transport of carcasses, contaminated hay, or even urine-based scents, according to the provincial government's CWD lead Cait Nelson.

To guard against further transmission, hunters in relatively low-risk parts of the province should send tissue samples in for testing from every deer, moose, elk, or caribou they harvest.

"Cases in Alberta and Montana are close enough that they are within the range of natural deer movement into B.C. raising the possibility of animal-to-animal infection," said Nelson. "We need to keep our guard up everywhere."

Hunters are often surprised by a positive CWD test result from an animal that appears healthy in every way.

"Just because the animal looks healthy and it's got a good layer of fat, it can still be an infected animal," she said. "I've spoken to B.C. hunters who have harvested animals in Alberta and they're really surprised to hear that the animal tested positive."

CWD is a disease of the central nervous system, caused by infectious agents called prions. As the prions accumulate, they cause cell death in the brain and neurological disease, which is 100 per cent fatal. Prions also accumulate in other tissues and may be shed by the infected animal into water or on plants and



British Columbia's common ungulates are at risk of contracting Chronic Wasting Disease.

bedding through saliva, urine, and feces.

"We've been watching this disease track across southern Alberta for 20 years and we saw CWD jump the Rocky Mountains in 2019 when it was detected in the area around Libby, Montana," said Nelson. "So, we've been talking about this in B.C. for a long time without a detection and we are starting to see some CWD fatigue among hunters."

"It's important to understand that the likelihood of a positive result goes up with every passing year," she said. "Hunters can help us by providing more samples, even in areas where it is strictly voluntary. Hunter vigilance is the best guard against transmission in B.C."

Hunters are encouraged to provide samples for CWD testing after harvesting a deer anywhere in B.C., hunters can submit the head of the animal for testing, or the hunter can remove the sample tissue and retain the head for mounting.

"All you need is a sharp knife and an understanding of where to locate these tissues," she explained. "Any hunter can go in and remove the tonsils or lymph nodes from a deer, or a section of the brain stem from an elk, moose or caribou."

The tissue samples can be sealed in a plastic freezer bag, frozen and then dropped at any of 30 freezer locations throughout B.C.

"We are adding more freezer locations, especially in the north, in an effort to make submission more convenient, but you can also contact any B.C. Wildlife Office or Conservation Officer to arrange drop off," she added.

To learn more about how to prepare a sample and how to submit tissue or a head for testing, go to the BC CWD website at www.gov.bc.ca/chronicwasting-disease or contact Cait Nelson at 250-751-3219 or cait.nelson@gov.bc.ca. Contact the Wildlife Health Lab at 250-751-7246. 🐾

Learn To Hunt Wild Turkeys Are Elusive, Quick To Escape

By Randy Shore

PR and Communications Specialist

It's not that turkeys are the smartest animals in British Columbia, it's just that they're scared of everything and take off with the slightest provocation.

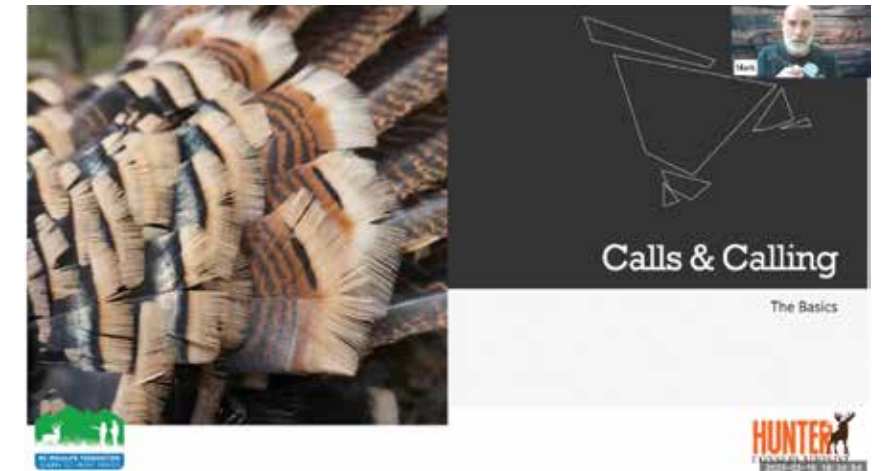
"I've seen turkeys in a field when some deer show up 300 yards away and the turkeys go 'Omigawd, we are all going to die,'" said Mark Hall, host of the Hunter Conservationist podcast. "They all left and went into the forest."

Hall hosted a recent episode of the B.C. Wildlife Federation's Learn to Hunt series, which covered everything a novice or experienced hunter could want to know about turkey hunting in B.C.

According to Hall, one of the nice things about hunting turkeys is that when you succeed, getting the birds back to the truck requires practically no effort compared to field-dressing a deer or a moose and hauling the animal out.

"It's all about the hunt rather than a freezer full of meat, it's just a unique B.C. experience," said Hall.

The wild turkeys common in B.C.'s southern Interior and the Kootenays migrated up from the United States after birds were transported to Idaho and Montana from the southwestern U.S. Turkeys are also found on Vancouver Island, possibly the descendants of a previous relocation project.



"There is huge hunter demand for this game bird," said Hall. "When we see hunter effort and the harvest climbing steadily, it says to me that the turkey population is climbing."

Since turkey hunting started to take off in B.C. about 20 years ago, the number of hunters on the landscape has increased to around 1,000-1,500 and they harvest roughly 750 birds in total each year.

About 40 per cent of hunters will successfully harvest a bird each year, which compares favorably with other species.

"As a hunter, I want to encounter birds, even if I don't get one every year," he said. "If I get a tom to gobble back at me during the hunt that is a great experience. That call and answer, luring a gobbler into my

decoy set, all of that is really exciting. Harvesting a bird is just a bonus."

Hall explains how to identify toms and hens at different ages, which varies significantly over their life cycle. Turkeys feed on seeds through the winter and shoots in early spring, he notes. They also feed heavily on insects, particularly spiders. Finding their feeding grounds is essential to locating turkeys.

To learn more about tracking, attracting, and harvesting wild turkeys, check out the BCWF Learn to Hunt Series at bcwf.bc.ca/2023-spring-learn-to-fish-hunt-series.

BCWF members can watch this episode and past episodes of the series at no cost. 🐾



Scientific Insights

Research Shines A Light On The Secret Lives Of Cougars

By Randy Shore

PR and Communications Specialist



The cougar project has recorded 56 cougar kittens.

Cougars are elusive in nature and difficult to monitor for population trends, so making informed wildlife management decisions is a challenge.

In British Columbia, cougars are generalist predators who primarily consume ungulates such as mule deer, white-tailed deer, caribou, and moose, but also smaller mammals such as raccoons, beavers, snowshoe hares, and even voles.

They are part of a complex food web made even more complicated by humans, who manage and hunt wild game and alter the landscape itself through logging, road building, and fire suppression.

UBC doctoral researcher Siobhan Darlington is disentangling the role that cougars play in British Columbia's diverse ecosystem.

"Deforestation from wildfires and logging removes large tracts of canopy cover, so the landscape is getting more

structurally complex over time," said Darlington.

Cougars are very widely distributed large carnivores that are found from the southern Yukon all the way down to Patagonia. Cougars occur throughout the southern Interior B.C.

Earlier studies suggest that cougars played a role in the extirpation of the Selkirk caribou herd and that they have an impact on mule deer and whitetail populations as well. So, their impact can be significant.

Today, the Southern B.C. Cougar Project is led by Darlington with supervisors Dr. Adam Ford and Dr. Karen Hodges and wildlife biologists from the Ministry of Forests, in partnership with the Okanagan Nation Alliance.

The project seeks to better understand the habitat needs and territoriality of B.C.'s largest wild cats. The project is supported by the federal innovation funding agency Mitacs, the B.C. Wildlife Federation (BCWF), and the Abbotsford Fish and Game Club, among others.

The objectives of the study are to understand the population dynamics and distribution of cougars in B.C., what habitat they use and when, what they eat, how they select their prey, and how they compete with other predators.

"We don't have a cougar management plan in British Columbia and there isn't a lot of data on cougars themselves," said Darlington. "That means management decisions for cougars are based on distribution maps for deer and hunter harvest records for cougar, which is quite limited. We need to improve data collection so that cougar management decisions are being made with cougar data."

"This round of funding will allow me to look at some questions around the habitat where cougars are killing mule deer specifically, because there's so much conservation concern around mule deer," she said.

"Mule deer are important for First Nations and hunters as well," Darlington added. "Trying to address the reasons for their decline is part of this project, because we know that cougars are one of their main predators."

Another BCWF-funded study, the Southern Interior Mule Deer project led by PhD students Chloe Wright and Sam Foster, is intertwined with Darlington's cougar research. In the Boundary region, where mule deer survival rates are slightly lower than neighbouring areas, cougars are killing more mule deer.

Estimates of B.C.'s cougar population are vague at best. A recent estimate of the population in the Thompson



Lead researcher Siobhan Darlington with a cougar kitten.



Siobhan Darlington collars a young cougar.

Okanagan put the number between 300 and 1,200.

"We don't know a lot about their survival rates, apart from the hunter harvest records, nor the causes of mortality that they endure, their reproduction rates, and population density," said Darlington. "So, there are a lot of knowledge gaps to address."

The project has GPS collared and tracked 50 cougars since December 2019 to collect baseline data about the southern Interior population between Kelowna and Cranbrook. The data will allow Darlington to learn about their prey choices, habitat choices, and how they are affected by disturbances to the landscape.

The collaring process allows researchers to assess the cougars and record their sex, age, and weight, and to take tissue, blood, and hair samples.

Tracking the cougars with GPS shows the winter and summer ranges of males and females and highlights where those ranges overlap with the range of migrating mule deer.

Eleven cougars collared in this study have died so far from causes ranging from hunter harvest and conflicts with livestock to fatal attacks by other cougars and even injuries from prey. (Collared animals may be legally harvested, but the animal's details and tags must be reported.)

"We are monitoring reproduction as well for adult females," she said. "We track when kittens are born and go to visit den sites when kittens are about a month old. We have monitored 30 litters so far, so we know they tend to give birth between July and September."

Using remote cameras at the dens, researchers can monitor the progress of the kittens. Site visits are used to tag, measure, and sex the kittens.

"We've documented 56 kittens from the ages of zero to 18 months, and that's around the average time the cougars disperse and leave their mothers," she explained. "They can stay with their mothers until they're about two years old, but in some cases, they leave at just one year old."

To learn more about the secret lives of cougars in Southern B.C., watch Darlington's BCWF Conservation Series webinar "Spatial and seasonal variation in cougar prey choice across the southern interior of B.C." at <https://bcwf.bc.ca/conservation-webinar-series/>. Or check out the project website www.bccougar-project.weebly.com. 🐾

2022 BCWF Awards Winners

BCWF Recognizes Outstanding Conservationists & Hunters



TED BARSBY CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR: GEORGE C. REIFEL

The BCWF Ted Barsby Conservationist of the Year recognizes and honours an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to conservation in B.C.

Our winner, George C. Reifel, is a third-generation conservationist and sportsman who has volunteered for over four decades at a wide range of conservation organizations to secure and enhance the natural environments of North America, particularly in British Columbia, for the benefit of wildlife, fish, plants, and people.

He served for 45 years as an active Director of the British Columbia Waterfowl Society, the group that was formed to assist with the creation of the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary and continues to manage the Sanctuary to this day. The Sanctuary is approximately 850 acres of managed wetlands and tidal marshes in the Fraser River Estuary and is home to 300 avian species.

As a Director of The Nature Trust of British Columbia, he was responsible for the negotiations to secure several high profile conservation projects in British Columbia, including the five privately owned islands that became the catalyst for the creation of the South Arm Marshes Wildlife Management Area in the Fraser River Delta, the Hoodoos Ranch in the Kootenays, and the riparian areas of the Englishman River on Vancouver Island.

Reifel is a Past President and the longest serving provincial and national Director in the history of Ducks Unlimited Canada, a Director Emeritus of the Pacific Salmon Foundation, and a Life Member and Past Director of the historic Tyee Club of British Columbia.

Reifel is a Life Member of the BCWF.



BERT PALMER MEMORIAL BIG GAME AWARD WINNER: CRAIG SUMMERS

The Bert Palmer Award is an annual competition that recognizes an individual who has ethically, and with outstanding success, hunted with fair chase rules and scored with the Boone and Crockett point system.

Winner Craig Summers, 62, harvested his prize-winning black bear on northern Vancouver Island after four days of scouting. He has been hunting since he was 14 years old. He loves the freedom of being in the backcountry and the variety of wilderness that B.C. has to offer. Summers is a proud BCWF member because of the work the Federation does to ensure that hunting opportunities are available to future generations.



LEE STRAIGHT FISHING AWARD WINNER: ERICKA DIXON

The B.C. Wildlife Federation's Lee Straight Fishing Award is sponsored by the Pfeleiderer Family and is given in memory of avid fisherman and BCWF member, Lee Straight.

Award-winner Ericka Dixon caught her winning 6-lb rainbow trout in Phillips Lake, in Monck Provincial Park. Wearing a headlamp for light, she dragged her gear on a sled across snow-covered ice to drop a line. A resident of Vernon, Dixon is a manager for the Kindale Developmental Association for adults with disabilities. She caught her first rainbow trout at the age of 14 and fell in love with angling right away. Ericka fishes year-round, especially on long weekends. She recently learned to tie flies and will try her hand at flyfishing this year with her own hand-tied lures.

YOUTH FISHING AWARD WINNER: BROGAN VIPOND

The B.C. Wildlife Federation Youth Fishing Award is awarded to a Federation member 18 years of age or younger who has caught an outstanding fish in British Columbia.

Award-winner Brogan Vipond of Pouce Coupe has been fishing for more than four years and asks his mom to skip school to go fishing "every chance I can." Brogan caught his big trout at an undisclosed B.C. lake, after quadding 30 km and hiking for



five hours with mom and dad. "I was having my best fishing day on the open water and this big fish was my first, but not the only one I caught," he said.

Brogan has another big fishing trip planned for June and will take part in his first sheep hunt this summer and a caribou hunt in the fall. He hopes to become active in the B.C. Wildlife Federation as he grows older.

RODERICK HAIG-BROWN PROJECT AWARD WINNER: SPARWOOD AND DISTRICT FISH & WILDLIFE ASSOCIATION

This prestigious award recognizes the accomplishments of a BCWF club whose recently completed conservation project — benefiting fish, wildlife, or habitat — is deemed most worthy.

The Sparwood and District Fish & Wildlife Association conceived and managed the Sparwood Elk Study, which was sparked by the mysterious decline of elk populations in the area. This extensive elk collaring and migration study focused on cow elk movements, mortality and survival, vulnerability of cow elk to then-current hunting regulations, and areas of high importance such as highway and railway-crossings. The project captured 78 cow elk between 2016 and 2018 with capture effort spread across winter ranges.

Large expenditures of time and effort by club members and support from Teck Coal and the B.C. Ministry of Forests contributed to the success of this study.



BCWF YOUTH BIG GAME AWARD WINNER: ELISSA PHILLIPS AND AVERY PHILLIPS

The B.C. Wildlife Federation Youth Big Game Award is awarded to a federation member 18 years of age or younger who has taken a big game animal in B.C. This year's winners are siblings Elissa Phillips and Avery Phillips from Jaffray, B.C.

Elissa Phillips, 16, won an LEH tag for a bighorn sheep and harvested her first ram while hunting with her father, grandfather, and uncle. Elissa is due to graduate from high school this year and plans to pursue a career as an ultrasound technician. Avery Phillips, 11, harvested his winning mule deer buck on his birthday, while hunting with his mother and father. He also joined an LEH hunting group with his parents and family friends, and harvested his first bull moose.

FRANK SHANNON JUNIOR CONSERVATIONIST: MARCUS KILB

The Frank Shannon Junior Conservation Award was developed by the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks in cooperation with the B.C. Wildlife Federation to permanently enshrine the outstanding lifetime contribution of Frank Shannon in the protection and management of fish and wildlife and their habitats. This award is presented to a youth or youth organization for exemplary conservation work.

Grade 12 student Marcus Kilb was nominated by the Bulkley Valley Rod and Gun Club for his passionate work on his

YouTube video channel kilb Outdoors as an ambassador for his community's anglers. Kilb used multiple cameras, drone footage, voice-overs and musical composition to convey his excitement and enthusiasm for angling. He also assisted the Club by providing video services in aid of recruitment and marketing, aimed at expanding their membership.



BILL OTWAY AWARD FOR BEST REGIONAL PRESIDENT WINNER: MIKE FOWLER

The Regional President's Award recognizes a regional president who has made an outstanding contribution to the BCWF's work on the conservation of wildlife and habitats. This year's winner is Mike Fowler.

Fowler is the BCWF's Region 5 President for Cariboo-Chilcotin. Mike has served on Federation boards, committees, and executives for the past 23 years, including multiple terms as Region 5 President and Vice President. He has also served as the Firearms Committee Chair, as a member of the Cariboo Regional Wildlife Committee, and as BCWF Vice President. In 2018, he represented the North Coast Sport Fishing Advisory Committee on the International Pacific Halibut Commission and served on the Pacific Salmon Commission in 2021.



PRESIDENTS VOLUNTEER AWARD: DAVE WHITE

The President's Volunteer Award is selected by the BCWF president for exemplary volunteer service in the field of conservation.

This year's winner, David White, is a retired sawmill manager from Canal Flats. He began hunting, fishing, and trapping at an early age. He took over leadership of the Canal Flats Rod and Gun Club in 1972 and continued in that role when the club joined the BCWF in 1982. He served as president in most years right up to April, 2023. During his off-years, he served as Regional President for East Kootenay. He is a past recipient of the Roderick Haig Brown Award and also helped the East Kootenay Wildlife Association win the Roderick Haig Brown Award for a Bighorn Sheep project.

Dave was one of the founding directors of the Kootenay Wildlife Heritage Fund and a director and chair of the Kootenay Conservation Program. He served as a director of the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program helping to direct funding from BC Hydro to worthy conservation projects.

WILD SHEEP AWARD: BRIAN HANSLIT

The Wild Sheep Foundation Youth Award recognizes an individual under the age of 18 who has ethically, and with outstanding success, hunted big game in British Columbia.

The 2022 Award goes to Brian Hanslit, a hunter and trapper living in Atlin, B.C. Brian has history with the prize-winning moose, going back to 2021. He first spotted the bull with two cows, but opted not to shoot the moose because of its broken palm. He noted at the time that the moose appeared to be blind in one eye. The following year he tracked the moose for four days before spotting him. The following morning Brian spotted his moose standing just yards from the spot where he was first seen the year before and took the shot. Brian then confirmed the animal was blind in his right eye.



B.C. CONSERVATION OFFICER OF THE YEAR WINNER: DREW MILNE

The Conservation Officer of the Year is awarded annually to a Conservation Officer who goes above and beyond the call of duty and exemplifies the values of the Conservation Officer Service: integrity, public service and protection of the environment.

The recipient of the 2022 Conservation Officer of the Year is Drew Milne, currently COS Inspector of the South Coast Region. Milne grew up on Vancouver Island, exploring the outdoors whenever he got the chance. He followed his family tradition into military service, completing six years with the Canadian Armed Forces.

Following his passion for the outdoors, Milne completed a natural resource management degree at Vancouver Island University and joined the BC COS seasonal program in 2008. Milne spent three years as a compliance and enforcement officer — Indigenous liaison at the BC Government Environmental Assessment Office. He returned to the COS as a sergeant in the Kootenays, later transitioning to the role of training sergeant.



ART DOWNS AWARD WINNER: VICTORIA KACER

The Art Downs Award recognizes excellence in writing and commitment to conservation and the environment. The

Award recipient Victoria Kacer is a student and law clinic worker at the Environmental Law Centre. She helped author an extensively researched 66-page request for an audit and examination of

BC Hydro funding of the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program on behalf of the B.C. Wildlife Federation.

The document highlights the failure of BC Hydro to properly allocate funds towards habitat restoration and elevated the BCWF and its work in habitat restoration as a result. The paper supported the BCWF's recommendation that a third party, the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, given that it has a highly successful track record in the field of conservation and a close working relationship with BC Hydro and the provincial government, should lead funding allocation.



OUTGOING PRESIDENT: CHUCK ZUCKERMAN

B.C. Wildlife Federation President Chuck Zuckerman passed away suddenly in March at the age of 73.

A BCWF member since 1977, Chuck was just weeks away from closing out a two-year term as President and had previously served as the Federation's Vice President, President of the Lower Mainland Region, and the Chair of the Recreational Shooting Sports Committee. Chuck served as the President of the Port Coquitlam Hunting and Fishing Club for 13 years and spent more than 40 years actively supporting conservation.

He was an avid hunter and firearms safety specialist. Chuck was an instructor at Simon Fraser University and developed safety training programs in his forty years as a longshore worker. He also taught prerequisite courses for the firearms Possession and Acquisition License (PAL) and the Conservation Outdoor Recreation Education (CORE) program for new hunters.

Chuck was most proud of having passed down this way of life to his children, grandchildren, and generations of British Columbians. 