

The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, or FLNRO for short, is responsible for stewardship of provincial Crown land and natural resources, and the protection of B.C.'s archaeological and heritage resources. It's a big job, and they can't come close to doing it.

The fish and wildlife part of the institution's mandate alone is such a monumental task it is impossible to achieve, but still it could be done much better than it is now.

The area the folks at FLNRO call Skeena Region, essentially the land mass drained by the Skeena and Nass and Stikine rivers, is about the size of Switzerland. Stop for a moment and consider the staggering amount of wildlife contained in the vast area within those boundaries. How many conservation officers would it would take to provide adequate protection for all the bears, ungulates, steelhead, trout, whitefish, pike, and char found within that area?

If you thought it might take a lot of manpower to adequately police an area that extends from Vanderhoof to the headwaters of the Skeena, from there to Kitimat and Prince Rupert, and to Dease Lake and Telegraph Creek and all the way north to Atlin, and all the places in between, you would be correct. There are 11 conservation officers in all of Skeena Region.

It takes half that number of people to run the reaction ferry at Usk. And more another comparison I recently spoke to a nice gentleman involved with the reopening of the White Spot Restaurant in Terrace. He

told me that they hired 70 staff.

That there are only 11 conservation officers is a deplorable state of affairs, a vivid and shameful indicator of the level of concern successive provincial governments – most of which have been dominated by the Social Credit Party and their latter-day descendants, the BC Liberals, under Premiers Campbell and Christy Clark – have for the fish and wildlife of this province.

The Socreds were a zany right wing party. The BC Liberals are too. Like the Socreds before them, the BC Libs embrace the open-for-business, pro-development ethos. They love government only in so far as forming one enables them to increase their wealth and power and that of their cronies.

A central feature of their philosophy is a desire to transfer as much public money into private hands as possible, something they achieve through the sale of crown assets. This is why the parks service and highways maintenance were privatized. It's the reason for independent power projects, which is the privatization of our rivers. This is the motive that led to the sale of



**SKEENA ANGLER
ROB BROWN**

Poachers 4

BC Rail.

The BC Liberals and their predecessors know as well as you and I that tourism is now the engine of the provincial economy, and they are doubtless aware that it is the largest player in the country's economy too. For this reason they are willing to spend big bucks on advertising campaigns of the Super Natural BC ilk, while they disingenuously spend as little as is politically feasible on environmental protection while promoting environmentally reprehensible initiatives like LNG development, pipelines, and of all things, hydro dams. Under these regimes, fish and wildlife have received short shrift, and our earnest enforcement officers have been put in the demoralizing position of trying to make the best of a bad situation.

To rectify this we need to make sure that the scandal-ridden and generally incompetent BC Liberals never again form a government. Once they are gone, a sea change needs to take place within FLNRO. Senior managers must be made to understand that their role is not to placate politicians, and that no part of the organization will be given over to helping industry slither their

way to environmental approval.

Stewardship, real stewardship – where, for example, foresters put the long term sustainability of the forest ecosystems ahead of the needs of private forest companies, where wildlife managers put the welfare of animals above the needs of those who want to slaughter them for profit, and where fisheries managers put the ecological needs of the fish under their jurisdiction above the needs of the so-called user groups that seek to exploit them – must become the over arching principle under which the ministry operates.

To ensure that this level of actual stewardship is maintained, the freedom of information laws currently in place will need to be sacrosanct. To this end, it will have to be recognized that every scrap of paper, e-mail, or other government communication is, by extension, the property of the people and, as such, never subject to deletion. To guarantee that no dedicated public servant is compromised or prevented from executing his mandate by political pressure, effective whistle blower laws will need to be written and enacted.

Managing animals requires rigorous data collection and ongoing science. To that end, more biologists will need to be hired, the field time they need will have to be increased, and the equipment they require will have to be provided.

The ranks of enforcement officers will need to be increased by ten fold for a start. And that is not all.

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