

NR38 New Legislation to Protect and Restore Biological Diversity and Ecosystem Health

Islands Trust

Whereas a healthy environment is essential for the wellbeing of residents, local communities and local economies;

And whereas the cumulative impacts of inadequate provincial environmental regulations impose costs and risks on local communities, including risks associated with climate change, drinking water supply, wildfire hazard, flooding, and security of municipal infrastructure, and may undermine local government planning:

Therefore be it resolved that UBCM call upon the Province of British Columbia to, in partnership with Indigenous leadership, develop and communicate in a timely way the process and timelines through which they will develop new legislation to protect and restore biological diversity and ecosystem health, in a manner consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and with the involvement of local governments, civil society groups, Indigenous Knowledge Holders, scientists, and members of the public.

RESPONSE: Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

Government acknowledges the urgency to protect biodiversity, species at risk and their habitats. It's one of the reasons the Ministry of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship was established. Protecting and promoting the recovery of threatened and endangered species continues to be a priority for our government. Supporting healthy ecosystems is imperative so our environment can support healthy communities and sustainable livelihoods.

This Ministry is building on our progress to date to protect threatened species, enhance B.C.'s biodiversity, and establish consistent and effective management actions that will support ecosystem health.

We are advancing implementation of the [Together for Wildlife Strategy](#), including Goal 12, which commits to reviewing and improving the *Wildlife Act*. The first round of improvements to the *Wildlife Act* came into force on Sept 1, 2022. These were short-term reconciliation focused amendments addressing Indigenous Knowledge and the ability to enter into sheltering agreements. We also continue to work with First Nations and other partners on a variety of species and habitat management initiatives and policy projects that benefit biodiversity and species at risk management including investing \$37 million for watershed, wetland, species and ecosystem restoration last year.

Our government has also committed to implementing all 14 recommendations of the independent panel's old growth strategic review report, [A New Future for Old Forests](#). Many of the recommendations, including forestry deferrals, ecosystem health prioritization, and the development of a new framework for biodiversity targets, will benefit species and ecosystems at risk. Recommendation #2 is to "declare the conservation and management of ecosystem health and biodiversity of British Columbia's forests as an overarching priority and enact legislation that legally establishes this priority for all sectors." The report recognizes that conserving and managing ecosystem health will be a cornerstone of the Province's biodiversity conservation strategy.

The 14 recommendations identified follow-up actions. The next priority is to build a strategic action plan to guide implementation of the recommendations. From now through 2023, Government will partner with First Nations and will engage with industry, environmental organizations, labour groups and local governments in identifying the required key actions.

Alongside the development of the strategic action plan, there will be two phases that were initiated in fall 2022 to implement Recommendation #2. Phase one comprises the development of a declaration for conservation and management of ecosystem health and biodiversity in British Columbia. Phase 2 in 2023, will explore both the legislative and policy tools required to support the implementation for the declaration.