

# SPEAKING NOTES

## **The Honourable Steve Thomson**

*Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations*

### **B.C. WILDLIFE FEDERATION AGM AND CONVENTION**

*Best Western Plus – The Westerly Hotel  
and Convention Centre  
1590 Cliffe Avenue  
Courtenay BC*

**Friday, April 27, 2012**

**1 :00 P.M. – 1 :45 P.M.**

Site Contact:

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*(Check Against Delivery)*

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Overview:**

On April 25-28 the British Columbia Wildlife Federation (BCWF) will be holding its 56<sup>th</sup> Annual AGM and Convention. Minister Thomson will be attending the lunch on Friday, April 27 and is the keynote speaker later that afternoon. He is speaking for approximately 20 minutes and then taking a few questions from the audience.

### **Audience:**

- Approximately 100-150 people, primarily BC Wildlife Federation members.
- A number of FLNRO staff from the Fish, Wildlife and Habitat Management Branch will attend Thursday and Friday including
  - Andrew Wilson, Director
  - Ian Hatter
  - Sunjit Mark
  - Jeff Morgan
  - Vicki Marshall
  - Penny Lloyd
  - Chris Ritchie
  - Gerry Kuzyk
  - Chris Addison
  - Garth Mowat
  - Sue Pollard
  - Bruce McLellan (Bruce will be there Friday and Saturday)

### **Selected Agenda – Friday, April 27, 2012**

- 12:00-1:00 pm Lunch in the Ballroom Foyer
- 1:00-1:45 pm Minister Thomson speaks (20 min) then does a Q&A (20-25 min)
- The Minister will be introduced by BCWF President Rodney Wiebe.

## **INTRODUCTION**

- Good afternoon everyone.
- It is my pleasure to bring greetings from Premier Clark and my colleagues in government, and from staff in the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations.
- A number of those staff are here today and I'd like to thank them for all their great work in managing fish and wildlife on behalf of the province.
- For many years the BC Wildlife Federation has been a strong and steady voice in support of wildlife conservation, and a passionate advocate for your 38,000 members.

## **CONTRIBUTION OF B.C. WILDLIFE FEDERATION**

- Today the B.C. Wildlife Federation remains at the forefront of promoting the wilderness experience.
- Your members have a deep and personal connection to the land.
- And you have never taken this connection for granted, but instead have worked alongside government in the cause of conservation.

- In many ways you are not so much an audience as a partner in conservation.
- Your Wilderness Watch program encourages volunteers in every corner of the province to identify and report infractions of environmental regulations.
- And your partnership with the Government in delivering Conservation Outdoor Recreation Education – or CORE – teaches both hunters and target shooters how to stay safe.
- Whether you are interested in hunting, fishing or simply hiking, the CORE program is a great first step in recruiting more people into enjoying our natural landscape.

### **HUNTER RECRUITMENT AND YOUTH/INITIATION LICENSES**

- However, we can do more.
- When I spoke with you last year, I noted our government's goal to increase the number of hunting licences sold annually.
- Last November we took another step forward on this goal, when we passed legislation expanding the Youth Hunting Licence and creating the Initiation Hunting Licence.

- These licences provide a chance for novices to experience the full hunting experience under the care and supervision of an experienced mentor.
- The Youth Licence expands eligibility from the previous 10-13 years, to 10-17 years.
- The Initiation Licence allows a one-time purchase of a trial hunting licence for adults who have never hunted before, but who would like to see if it is right for them.
- For the people in this room, describing B.C.'s amazing hunting experience would be preaching to the choir.
- The Youth and Initiation Licence program will allow you to take that experience outside this room, and grow your passion with your friends and family.
- Since our goal for these programs is to increase hunter recruitment it is in our interests to keep costs low.
- Youth licences will remain only \$7.00.
- Initiation licence costs are under review, but will cost no more than a regular hunting licence.

- Consultation on this program is actively underway, and I welcome the Federation's feedback.
- The legislative amendments creating these new licences will be brought into effect in the coming months.

### **HARVEST ALLOCATION POLICY**

- That is not to say we will always agree on every file, and I know your members have concerns with the implementation of the Harvest Allocation Policy.
- Last month I spoke about this very issue at the Guide Outfitters AGM, and they also expressed concerns.
- Last December we issued harvest allocation shares for residents and guided hunters for 2012 through 2016.
- The shares were based on the Ministry's responses to the recommendations in the "Harvest Allocation Policy Review.
- The economic implications of the shares to the GOABC members were more severe than expected so we limited the impact to individual guides to 30% for 2012.
- The truth is there is no harvest allocation that is going to suit every user group perfectly.

- Recognizing the need for guide outfitters to be able to have a predictive business model, we did implement a suite of tools to allow more flexibility in the quota system.
- We also recognized that regional managers need to be able to exercise some discretion.
- They need to implement the policy in a way that mitigates conflicts between resident and non-resident hunters, respecting resident priority.
- That said, government has been very clear that regional managers need to maintain consistency across the province in how they make their decisions.
- We are developing a decision making process that will provide transparency and accountability.
- We will be monitoring the program carefully to ensure that decisions follow a consistent process including stakeholder consultation.
- I know many of you are also wondering how the policy will be implemented in 2013 and beyond.

- Ministry staff are working hard on this and I hope to have a decision for you soon.
- We are committed to reviewing the Harvest Allocation Policy in 2014 to make sure it is working as intended.
- I welcome your active voice in that review process.

### **INVENTORY FUNDING**

- Before an annual allowable harvest can be determined, we need to have confidence in our wildlife inventory.
- Ministry staff biologists do amazing work.
- One of the advantages of being part of a large Ministry responsible for all land use decisions such as FLNRO, is that opportunities to fund inventory work are much greater.
- In 2011/12 we invested almost \$2 million to inventory major ungulates, including deer, elk, goat, sheep, moose and caribou.
- Was some of this inventory funding directed toward inventory to help resolve approvals for mining and forestry applications?
- Yes, and that data helps to ensure that development doesn't come at the expense of critical habitat.



- It also increases available data overall - helping to improve our understanding of many big game populations, and the annual allowable harvest that can be sustained.
- In 2012/13 we have committed another \$400,000 to big game inventory work
- and I can confirm that an additional \$400,000 is being provided through our Land Based Investment Strategy.
- Those funds will be used to help ensure the most important inventories for harvest management are completed.
- By comparison, from 2008-2010 inventory work only averaged \$120,000 per year.

## **FISHERIES**

- Our government has also maintained a strong commitment to B.C.'s recreational fisheries.
- I am very pleased to note a significant increase in not only recreational fishing, but in economic investment that comes from fishing.

- The 2010 Survey of Recreational Fishing in Canada shows that B.C. freshwater fishing was one of the few jurisdictions across Canada that saw a significant rise in active anglers.
- The total value of our recreational fishery has been previously estimated at around \$480 million per year
- We expect that number to rise given the increased interest noted in the survey.
- Our government is dedicated to ensuring our fishery resources are available for current and future generations to enjoy.

### **FIRST NATIONS CERTAINTY**

- Whether reviewing hunting or angling, we have a duty to consult with First Nations in their traditional territories.
- Our government is proud of the positive relationship we have established with First Nations.
- We take seriously our duty to consult with First Nations on fish and wildlife management.
- Decisions on allocation will always incorporate the best available science, and conservation principles.

- For example, many of your members will know of the cap on resident hunting of four black bears in the Haida Gwaii.
- This was a negotiated settlement after the Council of the Haida Nation acquired the guide territory rights for the area.
- While conservative, the resident hunter allocation is based on the actual use by resident hunters over a five year period.
- I can assure you that this case should not be viewed as precedent setting.
- Decisions involving First Nations' use of wildlife will continue to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

## **TREATY 8**

- I know that some of your members in the north east have similar concerns about how ongoing Treaty 8 First Nations consultations will affect big game quotas.
- Staff are working hard on this file to prevent any disruption to local hunters.
- We have already issued grizzly bear quotas and the season opened as scheduled on April 15.

- Staff will continue to work with First Nations to have consultations complete prior to the fall hunting season.

### **MID-TERM TIMBER SUPPLY**

- As an organization with an interest in forest health, many of you will have been following the news regarding the fall-down in the mid-term timber supply.
- There is no denying the economic impact of the mountain pine beetle to B.C.'s forest industry has been severe, and has left the government with difficult choices not only in the immediate future, but for years to come.
- People in affected communities – likely some of the people in this room – face the very real risk of job loss.
- As a government we want to do everything we can to avoid that.
- We are looking at all options to address the fall-down in the mid-term timber supply.

- As conservationists I want you to know that wildlife habitat values and conservation-based principles will be an important part of the discussion.
- I also want to be clear that no decisions have been made on this issue.
- We are actively consulting with various stakeholders, and Ministry staff have already been in contact with the BC Wildlife Fed to receive your input on how best to proceed.

### **RESOURCE ROAD ACT**

- Whether you are hunting, angling or just out for a hike, the first step is getting to the perfect spot to find big game, big fish or just a big view.
- Where that spot is can be a closely guarded secret, just to be sure no one else goes in there and 'spooks it up.'
- More often than not, the first part of that accessing that spot is a resource road.
- I want to take this opportunity to thank the BC Wildlife Federation for being an important part of the extensive consultations on the proposed Natural Resources Road Act.

- We're not finished this process, and I do not anticipate having legislation until fall 2012 at the earliest.
- However, earlier this spring we moved targeted measures forward that will help keep resource roads open now.
- Previously, when a road was no longer being used commercially, it was often closed in order to avoid legal exposure, blocking it off to recreational use as well.
- Changes to the Occupiers Liability Act, if passed, will allow users like yourselves to continue to access abandoned resource roads, as long as you assume the risks that go with them.
- Roads would still be deactivated to protect environmental values such as water quality, wildlife and fish habitat.
- We hope the end result will be greater access to B.C.'s backcountry for the enjoyment of everyone.

## **CONCLUSION**

- Hunting and fishing will always be an integral part of the social fabric of British Columbia.
- Outdoor enthusiasts like you will always place a deep value on wild spaces, and the creatures that dwell in them.

- You will teach these values to your children, and they will teach their children.
- Thank you for not only keeping these traditions alive, but keeping them vibrant.
- I look forward to many more years of working with you
- Thank you for inviting me to speak to you this year.
- Enjoy the rest of your convention, and best wishes for the coming season.

**-END-**