

SPEAKING NOTES

The Honourable Steve Thomson

Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations

BC WILDLIFE FEDERATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND CONVENTION

*Sheraton Vancouver Guildford Hotel
15269 104th Avenue
Surrey*

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(Check Against Delivery)

INTRODUCTION

- Good afternoon everyone.
- I'd like to acknowledge the traditional territory of the Coast Salish peoples.
- I bring greetings from Premier Clark and my colleagues in government, and from staff in the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations.
- It's a pleasure to be here with you for your 55th Annual General Meeting.

CONTRIBUTION OF BC WILDLIFE FEDERATION

- On any given day BCWF members are out and around our beautiful province promoting the responsible use of the environment for the benefit of present and future generations.
- You are quite literally on B.C.'s frontlines and the knowledge you have from using our land and rivers is a valuable resource we rely on to develop effective public policy in this area.

- This government values the partnership we have with the BCWF.
- And we ask for your continued support, your knowledge and your commitment to sustainable fish and wildlife management and habitat conservation.

RIVERS

- Your 2011 convention theme “Our Rivers: From Peaks to Oceans” is one that all British Columbians can identify with.
- From the Columbia to the rivers of the Peace, the Skeena, and the Fraser, the waterways of B.C. are the lifeblood of this province.
- They bring water to our fields, dams and aquifers, provide habitat and nourishment to thousands of species and ensure hours of adventure and enjoyment to outdoor enthusiasts across British Columbia.
- They also support a mix of commercial, First Nation, and recreational fisheries that are very important to our province.

- We are committed to providing an angling experience on these rivers.
- That's why in 2007 the Province and its partners, the Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC and the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, established a goal to get more people out fishing in B.C.
- Since then we've launched a number of programs to make it easier to get an angling licence and to learn about fishing.
- Supporting our partners on learn-to-fish and fishing-in-the-city programs and simplifying regulations – are just a few examples of the work we're doing to get more people interested and out angling.
- These steps appear to be working because angling licence sales are up which is great news for us all!

Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations

- We've all seen quite a few changes in government recently from a new premier to changes in Cabinet that reflect new ministries and their operations.
- With the new Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations you will see positive changes in the reorganization of the natural resource sector.
- Our structure is now an area-based model with ADM's, Regional Executive Directors and Director's of Resource Management based in the regions.
- This model supports local decision-making made by people living in your communities.
- The business of fish and wildlife management has not changed.
- This new ministry is focused on one land manager and one process - a single review framework that is timely, diligent and science-based.
- This new integrated approach will enhance our ability to provide more effective and efficient client service.

HUNTER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

- In 2006, the Ministry released “A Strategy for Resident Hunter Recruitment and Retention in British Columbia.”
- It was recognized that the number of annually active resident hunters in British Columbia has been declining for the past 25 years.
- Recognizing that hunters are a positive force in the stewardship of our wildlife resources, the Hunter Recruitment and Retention strategy provided recommendations to reverse this decline.
- The strategy set a performance measure of increasing the number of basic resident hunting licences sold annually to 100,000 by 2014-15.
- The intent was to achieve this performance measure through a series of strategy recommendations.
- I am glad to report that we have made significant progress on some of these recommendations, including expanded hunting opportunities for junior hunters.

- I'm particularly proud of the success in selling resident hunting licences – we've almost reached our 2014/15 goal - currently we are at 95,000 basic resident hunting licences, which is up from 84,000 licences sold in 2004.

ALLOCATION POLICY

- Government started the Harvest Allocation Policy so we could have a consistent and transparent policy for the entire province that is above all else, **fair** to all wildlife user groups.
- The policy is set to come into full force for the 2012-13 hunting season.
- But many factors have changed since we began this process in 2003 and since the policy was signed off in 2007 including a world-wide recession and a rapidly strengthening Canadian dollar.
- In February 2011, the Ministry hired Chris Trumpy, a former Deputy Minister, to examine the potential impacts of the policy's implementation on the guide outfitting industry in B.C.
- This was after receiving reports from the guiding community that the policy will have significant negative effects on their industry when it is fully implemented.

- As the report makes clear, and we wholly agree with, is that no changes to the current allocation policy will be undertaken without discussions with all user groups.
- The final report was submitted on March 31st after substantial discussions with provincial guides, ministry staff, and at a high level, the BC Wildlife Federation.
- The report recognizes that the Harvest Allocation policy is both transparent and consistent.
- However, the report notes that the policy fails to meet the core principle of fairness.
- Specifically, the report indicates that the policy is too inflexible to deal with the variety of unique guide outfitter circumstances that exist throughout the province.
- These include factors such as the temporary circumstances of individual guides, access differences between guiding territories, and the behaviour of individual guides which can impact harvest allocations to other guides.
- The report offers 11 recommendations to address these issues.

- The Ministry released the report to the BCWF and the GOABC this week.
- And we will be asking for a formal response to the report from you and the GOABC by mid-May.
- The Ministry will open a dialogue with both organizations after receiving your respective responses to help inform decisions on which, if any, of the report's recommendations will be implemented and how, before any final decisions are made.
- It is my hope that we can conclude this work in as timely a manner as possible so that the hunting community can return to more positive and collaborative discussions.

CONCLUSION

- Hunting and fishing are an important part of the tradition, heritage and spirit of British Columbia.
- We want to ensure future generations will enjoy the same privileges and opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation.
- Conservation is at the core of our approach to managing our precious wildlife resources and protecting habitat.

- And I know the BC Wildlife Federation shares that commitment.
- Thank you for inviting me to speak to you this year.
- And I hope you enjoy the rest of your conference.

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