

The Hunter Conservationist

By Bill Otway

Vancouver Sun OpEd Piece
July 28, 2007

Recently the news media carried the story of the efforts of our provincial government to recruit more participants to the ranks of hunters. These stories have generated a number of responses from the public who seem to view the hunter as the major threat to the future of our cherished wildlife resource. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, throughout history no other segment of society has contributed more to the conservation of wildlife than hunters have.

In British Columbia the annual operating budget of the Fish and Wildlife Branch of the Ministry of Environment, is approximately \$12 million. Licenses and fees paid to the government by hunters generate almost \$9 million covering almost 75% of the total budget for protecting and managing all Fish and Wildlife in this province.

Over and above that hunters contribute an additional \$3 million annually to wildlife conservation through the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund in B.C. and Wildlife Habitat Canada nationally. It is worthy of note that both these funds were established as a result of lobbying by hunter and fisher organizations such as the B.C Wildlife Federation and Ducks Unlimited Canada..

Ducks Unlimited Canada, began operation in B.C. in the 1970's when their first budget was \$1.2 million. For the past four years their contribution to British Columbia wetland protection and enhancement has been \$ 8 million a year. They have also secured 320,000 acres of critical wildlife habitat in British Columbia. It is worthy of note that since it's inception in Canada in 1938 Ducks Unlimited Canada and it's hunter supporters have contributed \$1.2 Billion to wetlands conservation and now has an annual operating budget of \$80 million.

In addition to the cold hard cash hunters put into conservation, hunters have contributed a minimum of 3958 person years of volunteer effort into wildlife conservation projects in the 23 years since 1985 alone. At a minimum value of \$15 per hour this effort works out to a contribution of \$86.5 million plus it is estimated they contributed a further \$21 million in out of pocket expenses to participate in these volunteer projects.

The conservation work of hunters is not limited to huntable species as many claim. The plight of the Vancouver Island marmot was first brought to the public's attention through the efforts of the hunters in the Nanaimo Fish and Game Protective Association and the B.C. Wildlife Federation in the early 1970's. They called for the protection of this animal. Their efforts resulted in the marmot being recognized provincially as an endangered species and being given full protection. Today this animal is a *cause celeb* for a number of groups who are receiving much in the way of government funding for their

efforts. When the hunters first brought this issue forward no one else had heard of the Vancouver Island marmot and the hunters received nothing for their efforts beyond the knowledge that an animal that needed it was being protected.

Funds from the Habitat Conservation Trust fund have gone to create nest boxes for cavity nesting birds, and dollars from that same fund support the Burrowing Owl recovery project and many similar projects. Hunters also give of their time and effort working on these projects.

Funds from Wildlife Habitat Canada were used in the purchase of 38 hectares of critical killer whale habitat in the estuary of the Tsitika River at Robson Bight.

In BC, the list of wildlife enhancement efforts by the member clubs of the BC Wildlife Federation is endless and stretches back to before the turn of the last century. It ranges all through the scope of enhancement projects, from nest box creation and erections, to controlled burns to enhance food habitat for various species, winter feeding programmes and wildlife population inventories.

The fact is that the work that hunters do to ensure the health of the species they hunt provides uncounted benefits to all of the non-game species. It needs to be remembered that, when you protect habitat for deer, grouse, elk, moose or other game species, that same habitat is protected for songbirds, predators, shore birds and all the other non-game species.

Most of North Americas leading conservationists over the years were hunters. In the US, we had President Teddy Roosevelt working with Canadian Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier to create the National Parks programme and the North American Wildlife Management plan. A plan that Dr. Valerius Geist reports is the only successful one in the world and thanks to the work of hunters we have been able to maintain a broad biodiversity in our wildlife.