

Watershed *Sentinel*

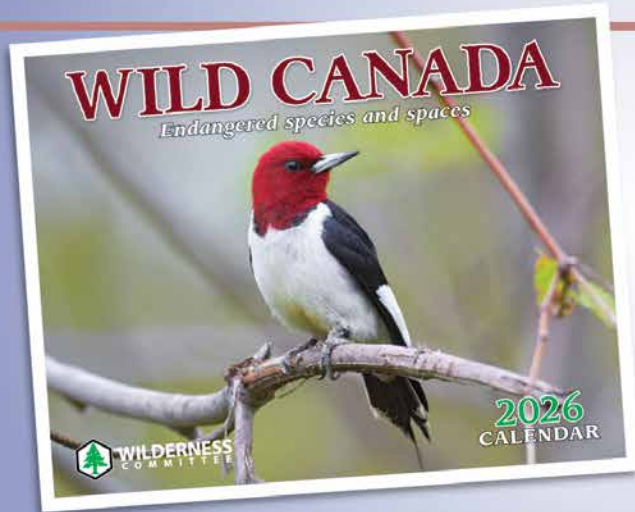
The
Grass
Roots
Issue

October
November
2025



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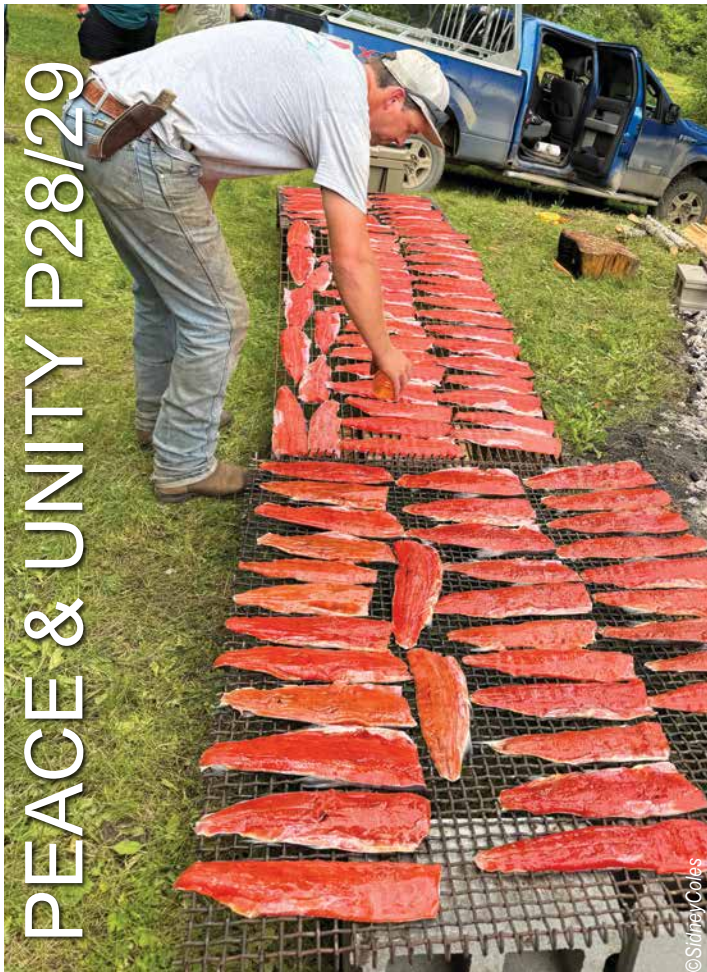
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Features



Subsidized Clearcuts

BC's logging companies are out of touch with reality. What's needed is a new social contract, not another bailout.

Power of the Grassroots

Community-based activism is not easily dislodged once it takes root. Like marsh grass, it spreads under the surface, knits together broken earth, and can even overwhelm much larger rivals. Like the people in these stories, it thrives in adverse conditions.

Content

3,5	News Shorts Sockeye, secret police, tiny "gut sponges," and more	12	Prairie Owl Preserving Saskatchewan grasslands for burrowing owls	32	Melting Arctic As waters warm and ice melts, development pressure ramps up
4	Letters From raw log exports to "enough," our readers weigh in	14	Poisoned Land Nevada lithium mine is a new act of colonial violence	34	Bison Are Back Elk Island: a wildlife haven in the heart of Treaty 6 territory
7	Happy Returns This year's historic BC salmon run follows fish farm removals	16	Toxic Skies How much dioxin is coming from Burnaby's incinerator?	36	Wild Times Joe Foy on why he calls BC mineral claims "storylands"
8	Blockades Defending ancient forests near Fairy Creek	31	Rain Bombs What's causing the global increase in flash flooding?		Cover Credit ©UN Women/Ryan Brown



Editorial

Zoe Blunt

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The Light Bringers

We are committed to bearing witness – watching, listening, recording, and reporting. We use this platform to stand with those who confront injustice. We speak up for the whistle-blowers who risk everything to bring government and corporate wrongdoing to light.

The purpose of corporate propaganda is to keep us complacent and compliant. It works by obscuring reality and by manipulating people's fears of poverty and hardship. It distracts and divides us while billions are spent on corporate welfare in the form of tax breaks, bailouts, and sweetheart deals.

We're told that these deals help those in need through some kind of trickle-down magic. But they don't. Governments and corporations could actually eradicate poverty for millions if they chose to. They could preserve watersheds and ecosystems if that was their priority. Their actions put the lie to their words.

The propagandists would like to keep us helpless and hopeless. Resisting and reclaiming our strength means learning to use our eyes and ears, trusting our guts, and checking reality against the stories we're told by people who believe they have the power to determine what's real.

– Zoe Blunt, Sayward, BC, September 2025

What's New At the 'Shed

Don't miss your holiday gift package! With Canada Post negotiations at a standstill, there's a credible threat of another postal strike this year. We're not trying to scare you, but winter will be here before you know it. Get the wilderness calendar and magazine subscription package early, and enjoy peace of mind no matter what happens.

Our podcast keeps getting better. In the most recent episodes, we discuss the health risks of dioxin emissions from the Burnaby incinerator, and witness the launch of a powerful movement to reclaim Indigenous land on northern Vancouver Island. Listen anytime on our website – there are no ads, no log-ins, and no membership required. www.watershedsentinel.ca/radio.

Thank you for the cards and emails! We're always delighted to hear your thoughts and ideas. Whether it's a comment, a response, a call to action, or a letter to the editor, go ahead and drop us a line. You can even use the contact form on the website!

Speaking of gifts, we've got bundles! Get a bundle subscription for an amazing price – they're handy for handing out for others to enjoy in break rooms, waiting rooms, lunch rooms, living rooms, welcome wagons, and everywhere else. Plus, we have a great new catalogue of shirts, hoodies, and more! www.watershedsentinel.ca/store

Surprise! Burning forests emit CO₂ Burning Carbon

Biomass energy company Drax, which imports wood pellets from North America to burn for energy in the UK, is being questioned by investors and the financial regulator because its carbon accounting may not justify the billions in public subsidies it receives for “renewable” energy. Drax is the largest emitter of CO₂ in the UK. The Environmental Paper Network (environmentalpaper.org/biomass) explains: “Burning woody biomass for energy emits no less than burning coal... New trees, let alone replacement forests, can’t regrow and re-absorb that CO₂ again for decades to centuries.”

—*Financial Times*, September 3, 2025

—*The Guardian*, August 28, 2025

Countries divided over production

No Plastic Treaty

The sixth round in three years of UN-led talks for a global treaty to end plastic pollution have ended in deadlock. Despite last-minute negotiations, there remained a split between a group of about 100 nations calling for curbs on production and oil states pushing for a focus on recycling. The chair announced that the talks will resume at a later date.

—www.bbc.com
August 15, 2025

14-million-acre nature reserve

Mayan Jungle

The leaders of Mexico, Guatemala and Belize have announced plans to create a tri-national nature reserve that would stretch across jungle areas of southern

Mexico and northern parts of the two Central American nations, encompassing more than 14 million acres (5.7 million hectares). The leaders also discussed a proposal to expand the controversial “Maya Train” from southern Mexico to Guatemala and Belize. Guatemalan President Bernardo Arévalo said, “I’ve made it very clear at all times that the Maya Train will not pass through any protected area.”

—www.business-humanrights.org
August 15, 2025

Ohio grassroots effort saves solar

People Power

In Ohio, a persistent grassroots effort has defended a large solar installation and defeated the fossil fuel industries’ concerted attacks on alternative energy. The industry flooded the zone with funding and misinformation, even buying the local newspaper, but the citizens fought back with everything from publicity to the state power board. Their eventual victory can be attributed to “Maximizing the use of free media in the form of letters to the editor, commentaries, and videos on YouTube. Not hesitating to call upon allies with which to work in coalition.”

—www.ohiocapitaljournal.com
July 16, 2025

Bacteria absorb “forever chemicals”

“Gut Sponge”

University of Cambridge scientists have identified a family of bacterial species, found naturally in the human gut, that absorb various PFAS (Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances) molecules from their surroundings. When nine of these species were introduced into the guts of mice to “humanize” the mouse

microbiome, they rapidly accumulated PFAS eaten by the mice – which were then excreted in faeces. The researchers also found when mice were exposed to increasing levels of PFAS, the microbes worked harder, consistently removing the same percentage of the toxic chemicals.

—www.sciencedaily.com
July 2, 2025

Military drills spark UK wildfires

Unfriendly Fire

Live-fire military training has sparked hundreds of wildfires across the UK countryside since 2023, with unexploded shells often making it too dangerous to tackle them. Figures obtained by the BBC under the *Freedom of Information Act* show that of 439 wildfires on Ministry of Defence land between January 2023 and August 2025, 385 were caused by army manoeuvres. Locals near the recent fires say they want the MoD to completely ban live fire training in the driest months.

—www.bbc.com
August 29, 2025

New data centres cause price surge

AI Inflation

Grid pressure from massive data centers built to support AI has caused electricity bills to surge across the eastern US, with an extra \$9.3B in future costs estimated to start hitting consumer bills immediately. Last year, grid operator PJM’s nine-fold capacity price increase triggered lawsuits and political backlash. PJM’s independent market monitor says roughly 3/4 of the hike was tied to demand from current and planned data centers.

—www.newsweek.com
August 7, 2025

Letters

Raw Log Exports *Even Dumber Now*

In Canada, we allow big business lobbyists way too much influential access to governmental decision-makers – all without a truly independent news media willing to investigate and expose corporate lobbyists' corrupting overreach. This also applies to decisions made about our natural-resource exports.

After almost four decades of consuming mainstream news media, I cannot recall a serious discussion on why our national and provincial governments will not insist upon processing all of our own oil (and lumber) here at home in Canada, instead of exporting it bulk raw abroad and purchasing it back processed at a notably higher price (as we do with the US, for example).

The salt on this open wound is that the US has used these raw-log bulk exports to justify its anti-dumping duties (recently increased to 35%) on Canadian softwood lumber, since the American lumber industry processes their logs for value added. Processing our own lumber would dampen this justification/excuse, while also adding lumber-processing jobs and other economic gains up here. Is this not a no-brainer?

—Frank Sterle, Jr.
White Rock, British Columbia

The Watershed Sentinel welcomes letters but reserves the right to edit for brevity, clarity, legality, and taste. Anonymous letters will not be published. Send your musings and your missives to:
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Profound Thanks

Thank you for a fantastic issue of *Watershed Sentinel* (Vol. 35 No. 3); devastating and enlightening facts, profound analyses, heartbreaking as well as encouraging stories/reports. Warm regards,

—Erika Daleus
Nanaimo, British Columbia

Welcome to America

Where the only free speech that survives is whatever doesn't offend the guy signing merger approvals.

Shareholders over satire, bribes over broadcast integrity, and if you dare make fun of the mob boss-in-chief, don't be surprised when the lights go out and the studio gets repurposed as a reality show soundstage.

Welcome to America, where the jokes aren't funny and the punchlines get black-listed.

—Mary Geddry
Coos County, Oregon
(from her *Substack*, July 19, 2025)

Enough

cannot see it
ya cannot see it
and just can't feel it
and will not touch it
ya will not touch it
and just won't hear it
blindsided blindsided
blindsided by hindsight
that all it will take
ya all it'll take
is just one drop
just one last drop
so imagine it like Lennon
and own it like Ono
count ten
then pick one at the least
someone once said
enough
enough enough enough
enough is as good
as a feast

—Gerry Bowes
Gabriola Island, British Columbia
(from his poetry chapbook *Funny Kind of Species*)



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Oyster, sea star deaths explained

Mysteries Solved

UBC researchers have discovered a virus associated with mass Pacific oyster die-offs, while a separate team has identified the bacteria that wiped out over six billion sea stars across the West Coast. The findings may help prevent mass mortality of Pacific oysters and sea stars.

—www.timescolonist.com
August 4, 2025

Peace River Coal faces sanctions

\$800,000 Penalty

Peace River Coal tried to challenge the largest environmental fine ever laid by BC's Ministry of the Environment, but the BC Environmental Appeal Board has upheld the full penalty. The Province fined the coal company for repeatedly violating selenium discharge rules at a coal mine near Tumbler Ridge. MoE is seeking millions more in penalties for other selenium discharges.

—www.biv.com
August 29, 2025

BC plans clearcuts in prime habitat

Logging Caribou

Despite BC's conservation promises, plans are proceeding to log old growth forests that are home to endangered southern mountain caribou. Wildsight, Stand.earth, and Wilderness Committee used satellite data to show 57 square km of old-growth forest are approved or pending approval for logging in the Kootenay-Boundary region.

—www.vancouversun.com
July 5, 2025

Chiefs call for aerial glyphosate ban

Spray Canceled

Lake Huron, ON forests will not be sprayed with toxic glyphosate this year, thanks to high-profile protests led by local First Nations, Stop the Spray Ontario, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge Elders. The groups set up a round dance blockade on Highway 17 at the Serpent River First Nation to demand the Province stop the aerial spraying of glyphosate on their territories.

—www.chiefs-of-ontario.org
August 28, 2025

First Okanagan returns in 100 years

Sockeye in Syilx

A new fish passageway that bypasses the Okanagan Lake dam has opened the way to the first sockeye salmon returns in over a century. Sockeye can once again migrate from the Pacific Ocean to Okanagan Lake via the Columbia River. The Okanagan Dam Fish Passage, built by the Syilx Nation with government partners, will allow steelhead, rainbow trout, sockeye, chinook, and kokanee salmon to migrate back into the lake and its tributaries.

—www.cbc.ca
August 21, 2025

AB cancels hearing on coal mine

Public Shut Out

Alberta's Energy Regulator has canceled a planned public hearing on a huge coal mine project. The "scandal-plagued" AER apparently caved in to pressure from Australia-based Valory Resources.

—www.thetyee.ca
August 27, 2025

Deadly pulp mill discharges

Toxic Domtar



©Kyle Lane

A BC pulp and paper mill faces new penalties for repeatedly discharging acutely toxic waste into the Kootenay River. Domtar's mill near Cranbrook racked up three new fines totalling \$56,000 just weeks after the Ministry of the Environment and Parks levied penalties for nearly two dozen previous releases of chemicals that are toxic to fish. Two other mills owned by Domtar elsewhere have been hit with over a million dollars in fines in the last six years.

—www.biv.com
July 21, 2025

Rebranded unit targets enviros

Secret Policing

An RCMP unit notorious for complaints about unnecessary violence and misconduct is set to crack down on opposition to new laws fast-tracking large-scale resource and infrastructure projects. Documents obtained by *The Breach* show the Critical Response Unit-BC, formerly Community-Industry Resource Group (C-IRG), is working with secretive provincial committees that monitor and target resistance to major projects.

—www.breachmedia.ca
August 21, 2025

Landslide Warning

Faultlines, dams, and slide risks in the Columbia Valley

by Donald Pharand

Brace yourself if you have family or friends living anywhere in the Columbia River valley. In the interest of public safety, we must raise grave concerns about landslide risks in the valley.

In July, an 8.8 earthquake on the Eastern Russia Peninsula reminded us of the tectonic forces under our feet. The earthquake was followed by a tsunami and, a few days later, by a volcanic eruption in the same region. Ten days later, a 100 million cubic metre landslide came down in Alaska. Just the Earth doing its thing.

One of BC's best-known landslides is the Hope Slide along Highway 3 in southern BC. The highway was rebuilt over the rubble, which came down on January 9, 1965. That same morning, two earthquakes were recorded nearby. The piece of mountain that slipped away that day is estimated at 45 million metric tons.

BC mountains and valleys are criss-crossed by innumerable faultlines. The biggest is the Cascadia Fault off the coast of Vancouver Island. Another important faultline is the Columbia River Fault, where the Monashee Mountain Range pushes up against the Selkirk Mountain Range just west of the Rockies. At its top sits the Mica Dam, which holds back Lake Kinbasket.

The Revelstoke Dam, 70 kilometres south, holds back Lake Revelstoke near the city of Revelstoke. Both dams straddle the Columbia River fault. Halfway

between the two dams is the Downie slide, with 70 metres of its toe under the waters of Lake Revelstoke. Its upper 3,000 metres are part of the Mount Katz massif on the Monashee side of the reservoir. Downie weighs in at 1.5 billion metric tons.

These unstable slide zones will continue to collapse over time. Concerned about public safety, BC Hydro engineers launched what may be the largest mountainside stabilization project on Earth. Using water drainage engineering, they increased the Downie slide's stability by 10%, although what that ultimately means is unclear.

Adding to the risk, another active landslide was discovered a few kilometres upstream from the Mica dam, The Little Chief Slide in the Mount Hallam Massif weighs in at 900 million metric tons. The danger of a new collapse tripled when a third active landslide was found on the Selkirks side of Lake Revelstoke in 2021. The St. Cyr slide, only five kilometres from the Revelstoke Dam, is the same massive size as the Downie Slide.

A survey of downriver residents indicates few are aware of the dangers posed by these huge, active landslides. The biggest danger is that a new collapse in any of these slide zones could cause a tsunami



violent enough to knock out the Revelstoke and/or Mica dams and scour the lower Columbia Valley, destroying the cities of Revelstoke, Castlegar, Trail, and every small town and dwelling along the way. Dismantling the Revelstoke and Mica dams might be the only way to prevent a wall of water racing downvalley after the collapse of one of these slides.

The safety issues raised here need to be brought to the public, not just discussed behind closed doors in government and corporate board rooms. All downstream residents should know the dangers lurking above the dams, and how their safety and wellbeing could be affected by another landslide collapse.

Donald Pharand is a researcher and eco-activist in the southeast of BC since the 1980s. don.pharand@gmail.com

Many Happy Returns

Salmon run in historic numbers after fish farm removals

by *Watershed Sentinel* staff, with files from 'Namgis First Nation and Pacific Salmon Federation

Coastal and upriver communities across British Columbia are celebrating the biggest sockeye salmon returns in decades. At press time, this year's Fraser River sockeye runs were estimated at over 9 million salmon, almost 20 times last year's run of 474,000 fish, according to Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

"The 2025 Early Stuart sockeye run is the largest since 1997," the Pacific Salmon Foundation stated, "and represents productivity levels similar to the 1970s." The news is incredibly hopeful considering that the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada recently recommended listing the run as endangered.

The 'Namgis, Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis, and Mamalilikulla were among the First Nations to remove all salmon

farms from their territories after gaining access to farm sites and seeing firsthand the threats they pose to wild salmon.

"The fish that are returning now are the first ones that made it past Discovery Islands without having to run the gauntlet of disease pathogens and sea lice," said Bob Chamberlin, chair of the First Nation Wild Salmon Alliance.

Open-net salmon farms have operated on the BC coast since the 1980s and have been widely documented spreading viruses, bacteria, and sea lice to wild salmon. In recent years, dozens of farms along the Fraser River sockeye migration route have been closed. The federal government has committed to banning open-net pen salmon farms by 2029. But the fish farm industry is not going easily, pressuring agencies and taking legal action in an effort to reverse the decision.

"We want to thank and congratulate the federal government for doing the right thing for wild salmon," said hereditary chief Homiskanis (Don Svanvik) of the 'Namgis. "There is so much excitement right now in our community. We are seeing fish numbers that are off the charts for this time of year."

Bob Chamberlin agrees that the removal of open-net pen fish farms in the Discovery Islands is a big factor for Fraser River sockeye.

"This is an opportunity to build, to realize the importance of wild salmon to British Columbians and First Nations and the environment, and begin to chart a course of nation-building with this resource because the benefits are so far-reaching," Chamberlin told CBC.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada also credits the huge returns to the 2021 clearing of the Big Bar landslide that blocked the Upper Fraser River in 2019. This is the first brood to head up the river since the channel re-opened.

While Fraser River returns are cause for celebration, Svanvik noted that returns to local rivers like the Gwa'ni (Nimpkish) are still far below where they should be. "Our Nimpkish sockeye have had some relief from the removal of farms in the Broughton Archipelago," he said, "but they're still exposed to lice and pathogens from salmon farms around Port Hardy."

Svanvik added, "The federal government needs to keep its promise and let wild salmon recover across BC. Commercial and recreational fishers also have reason to cheer. These are great days for wild salmon."



©Randy Bell

Blockades are Back

Volunteers brace to defend ancient forests near Fairy Creek

by *Watershed Sentinel* staff, with files from *Elders for Ancient Trees* and *Ricochet Media*

This fall, five years after the largest civil-disobedience campaign in Canadian history, forest activists are once again preparing to risk arrest to stop the logging of old growth forests on southern Vancouver Island.

In late August, volunteers blocked a forest road with a five-metre tall sculpture of a wooden cougar to protect thousand-year-old trees 50 kilometres from Fairy Creek. The anonymous group is demanding permanent protection for all of BC's remaining ancient forests, including eight cutblocks in the Upper Walbran Valley that are now approved for logging.

"Old growth logging is still happening in this province. This ancient ecosystem is being clearcut. We are obligated to take immediate action to stop its destruction," said one forest defender.

The Walbran Valley, in Pacheedaht First Nation territory, contains one of Vancouver Island's last intact old-growth watersheds. Years of protests in the 1980s and '90s pressured the BC government into buying back a Tree Farm License and creating Carmanah Walbran Provincial Park. But the park protects only 5,500 of the valley's 13,000 hectares.

In 2021, the BC government temporarily deferred logging in the central part of the valley, but forests in the Upper Walbran Valley were left out. The Upper Walbran supports extraordinary biodiversity, including wild salmon runs, Roosevelt elk,

marbled murrelets, red-legged frogs, and northern goshawks.

Organizers stress that this isn't just a local issue. Protecting old-growth forests safeguards the ecosystems and watersheds that sustain us all.

"Now is the time for all of us to activate our souls for our Great Mother in ways that are assertive while doing no harm," says Bill Jones, a member of the Pacheedaht First Nation, whose band council has approved the logging. "I told the industry people who were making presentations to quit logging the last of the old growth because there is very little left. We must save it for our children and all the children to come."

Ecologist and author Andy McKinnon called the news "disheartening." He told *Ricochet Media*, "Some of the largest individual trees, groves, and forest stands remaining on earth are in the Walbran and along the Nitinat."

The logging will be carried out by Huu-ay-aht First Nation in partnership with Western Forest Products. Huu-ay-aht and WFP are the joint owners of Tree Farm License 44 and partners in Humiis Ventures logging company and Alberni Pacific Division sawmill. In 2024, the



Province granted Huu-ay-aht a license to log in the Walbran next to Carmanah Walbran Provincial Park.

The Huu-ay-aht Economic Development Plan indicates that the old growth forests of the Upper Walbran Valley could be used for "bioforestry," defined as converting "biomass" (ancient trees) into energy. This is commonly achieved by reducing trees to wood pellets and burning them. The document also includes references to processing trees into chemicals and specialty materials, while developing "sustainable bioforestry practices."

Elders for Ancient Trees shared a call to join the forest defenders and protect old growth forests from logging. For details, visit www.tinyurl.com/defend-walbran.

For more on this story, see Sidney Coles' August 25 article at www.ricochet.media.

Fast Track to Disaster

Bypassing environmental laws a “dangerous precedent”

by Watershed Sentinel staff

Across the country, a flurry of new laws seeks to roll back environmental protections in the name of “streamlining” large-scale development projects.

The federal government promises that its new law will fast-track renewable energy projects and help create economic certainty. But Ecojustice calls Canada’s Bill C-5, the *Building Canada Act*, a “dangerous precedent,” denouncing its disregard for democratic principles, Indigenous rights, public consultation, and the environment. New laws in Ontario and BC are treading the same treacherous path.

If you haven’t heard about Bill C-5, that’s no accident. It was rushed through Parliament with minimal public notice. According to Ecojustice, Bill C-5 gives the federal Cabinet “sweeping and potentially unconstitutional” authority to circumvent any law or government regulation, including the North Coast oil tanker ban and even acts of Parliament. It allows Cabinet to designate any project as “in the national interest” and fast-track it to completion while bypassing public consultation, environmental assessments, and consent from Indigenous people.

C-5 is already drawing fire from Indigenous communities, environmental advocates, and civil society organizations. Rather than speeding up the development process, Ecojustice suggests future “national interest” projects risk getting bogged down with legal challenges, protests, and public opposition.

The public pays the price

Two new laws in BC follow the same template. Bill 14, the *Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act* was introduced in the spring, passed by the Legislature with little discussion, and came into force July 1st. Along with Bill 15, the *Infrastructure Projects Act*, the Province insists the legislation will offset the effects of tariffs and economic instability by fast-tracking project approvals.

Much of the cost will be borne by the public in the form of taxpayer-funded grants and BC Hydro rate hikes

But BC’s new laws will mainly benefit mega-projects like mines and LNG export terminals, while gutting environmental protections and raising costs for residents. Massive electrical transmission lines designed to power new North Coast LNG export plants will be exempt from environmental assessments, and much of the cost will be borne by the public in the form of taxpayer-funded grants and BC Hydro rate hikes. A Freedom of Information request by *The Narwhal* reveals that the Province plans to deliver over a billion dollars in grants to projects owned by some of the richest oil and gas companies

in the world. The environmental impact from unleashing these climate-changing fossil fuels is incalculable.

In Ontario this summer, the Legislature passed Bill 5, the *Protecting Ontario by Unleashing Our Economy Act*, which would create “special economic zones” and allow projects and corporations to bypass provincial laws, provincial regulations, and municipal bylaws. Premier Doug Ford says one such zone will include the mineral-rich Ring of Fire region of northwestern Ontario, which straddles the Attawpiskat River in Treaty 9 territory.

The great reversal

Tim Gray, executive director of Environmental Defence, says the impact of these new laws could be “catastrophic.”

“Bill C-5, like its cousin, Ontario’s Bill 5, takes us backward to a time when major developments went ahead without proper review, polluters filled our drinking water and air with toxins, and the public were told to sit down and shut up about the impacts,” Gray said.

“Parliament passed laws to address threats to our health and the environment, and they should never be bypassed without discussion and debate,” Gray warned.

Subsidized Clearcuts

What's needed is a new social contract, not another bailout

Analysis by Zoe Blunt

“We just want to go to work,” said Cody Herman. We spoke with Herman and his fellow United Steelworkers at a union picket line near Campbell River, BC in late August.

In June, USW Local 1-1937 went on strike in Tree Farm License 64 because the company insists on hiring non-union contractors to do union work. The new TFL is held by Western Forest Products and La-Kwa sa muqw, a partnership of four First Nations: Tlowitsis, We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum, and K'omoks.

Striking worker Mark Bernard said, “No one’s talking” about ending the strike, which could drag on for months. Nor are the men hopeful that they’ll benefit from the federal government’s funding package for the lumber industry.

When the US imposed new import taxes on Canadian logs and lumber this summer, logging companies demanded a bailout from the federal government. And that’s what they got. As Canadian exports to the US crashed in August, Prime Minister Mark Carney pledged up to \$1.2 billion in loan guarantees, grants, and other funds for Canadian companies to restructure their operations and diversify their products. But it’s not clear if the money and guarantees will actually help workers.



lumber tariffs, he will be forced to make substantial sacrifices in other areas.

Losing the forests

Forest industry losses will continue because the Canadian lumber industry is barely profitable. Almost all the old growth forests are gone. The easy-to-reach, low-elevation, high-value trees were taken years ago. What’s left is the “guts and feathers,” as Wilderness Committee campaign director Joe Foy says.

Ninety per cent of Canada’s timber is exported to the US, mostly in the form of lumber and raw logs. But Canadian wood makes up only 20% of the US market, giving our southern neighbour the upper hand in trade negotiations.

As Forest Products Association of Canada vice-president Eric Johnson admits, “We’re never going to diversify our way out of the US.”

In any case, the bailout strategy backfired. The US Department of Commerce declared it would double its duties on Canadian lumber to counter what it calls unfair public subsidies of Canadian lumber.

The new duties could be Trump’s biggest economic bargaining chip. If Carney is committed to getting the US to remove

Even BC Forests Minister Ravi Parmar acknowledges that our forests have reached the point of diminishing returns. He blames forest fires and pine beetles, but ignores the effects of decades of clearcutting, overlogging, and mismanagement. Instead, Parmar boasts that his government is issuing logging permits faster than ever before – 80% of them in under 25 days.

Companies like Western Forest Products are making deals with First Nations, as with the La-Kwa sa muqw partnership, to do their “dirty work” in old-growth forests, but there’s no guarantee that band members will ever benefit from these partnerships. First Nations can end up deeply in debt after buying into money-losing timber businesses, even as they destroy irreplaceable natural heritage.

Welfare for workers

BC Premier David Eby said, “I know that during hard times it is often the workers who pay the price.” It was meant as an expression of empathy, but it sounds like a warning.

Carney says \$700 million of his funding package will go toward guaranteeing loans so private companies can restructure their operations. Restructuring, of course, means downsizing, streamlining, and cutting jobs to be more competitive. The global economy compels Canada to compete with lumber suppliers in Mexico, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

It costs politicians nothing to claim that this bailout will benefit workers. But the only thing they can guarantee is a new round of austerity: cutting wages and benefits and replacing union workers with non-union contractors – the same gambit that has led to the Steelworkers’ strike.

It turns out forest workers will get some backhanded support from Carney. His package includes \$50 million to retrain those who will inevitably lose their jobs.

Bea Bruske, Canadian Labour Congress president, states the obvious: corporate loan guarantees are not what the labour force needs. “Workers want to know that our social safety net, which has some gaping holes in it, is being stitched up,” she told *The Tyee*. Specifically, she says, they need investment in social programs. “The right approach to take is to shore up those services that workers and their families depend on,” she said.

At least Bruske is looking out for workers and families – even if it’s only to direct them to the welfare office.



Carney’s package includes \$50 million to retrain those who will inevitably lose their jobs

Any industry that pays workers so little that they need social assistance to survive is not sustainable, and no amount of public money will keep it afloat for long.

Subsidizing failure

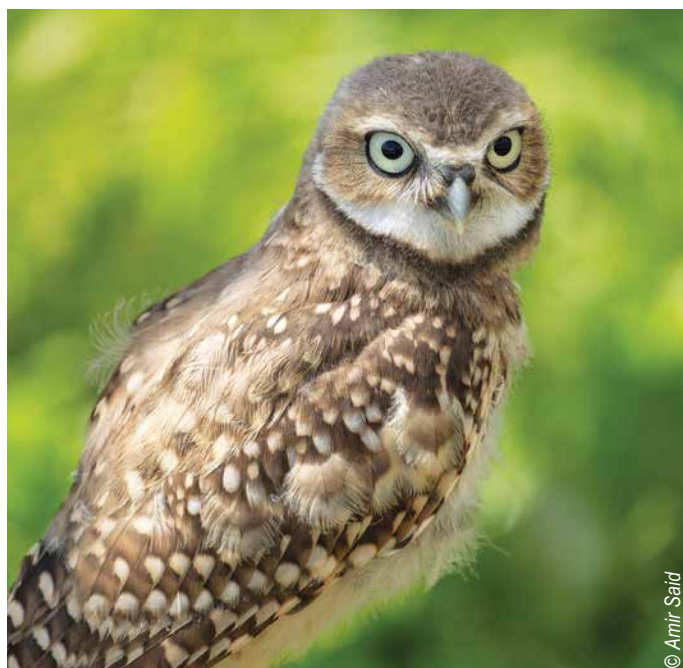
The missing piece of this debate is the social contract. Decades ago, local sawmills and value-added jobs were part of every Tree Farm License. The government had strict limits on raw log exports. That contract was scrapped by successive governments that caved to pressure from forest companies seeking quick profits. The industry lost 150,000 jobs in twenty years.

The federal government’s funding announcement seems to suggest its loan guarantees could bring back local sawmills and stop the flood of raw log exports. If so, the government could be positioned to fulfill its pledge of building millions of new homes with Canadian lumber. It might even lay the foundation for a new social contract.

As things stand, the bottom is falling out of the forest industry. Profit margins are tighter every year, and companies like Teal Cedar – loggers of Fairy Creek – will do whatever they can to stay solvent.

Owl of the Prairies

Preserving native grasslands for burrowing owl habitat



by Amir Said

Looking at the grasslands of the Canadian Prairies, it's hard to picture all of that open space as one of the country's most endangered ecosystems. After all, the fields seem to go on forever.

The rapid decline of Western Canada's grasslands ecosystem and the wildlife that has called it home is well-documented. From plains bison herds thousands strong to the once-common swift fox, the biodiversity of the Prairies looked unrecognizably different only a couple of centuries ago.

When it comes to Canada's threatened grasslands, one animal in particular has become something of a symbol: the burrowing owl, a small, brown bird blending in with the landscape. Its small stature and long legs are adaptations it's evolved to survive on the tough grasslands of the Prairies. While those traits

help it evade predators and squeeze into small burrows, they don't do much to protect the bird from the grave threats it faces.

Once abundant in southern BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, the burrowing owl is now an extremely rare sight in Canada. They're common in some other parts of the world, with healthy populations throughout South America, but here, their numbers have been devastated by habitat destruction.

Hatching a recovery program

In the heart of the Prairies, people are working to change that. Nature Saskatchewan's Grace Pidborchynski is the head of Operation Burrowing Owl, a program hatched in 1987 to support burrowing owl recovery in Saskatchewan by enlisting the help of local landowners.

"There was an urgent need for a program that was directed at private landowners to have burrowing owl habitat on their land, and also to ... conserve its remaining habitat," Pidborchynski says.

Since its inception, OBO has brought in over 300 participating landowners conserving 200,000 acres of land to welcome burrowing owls and encourage them to nest. Most of that land isn't being used by the owls, but making it available is considered an essential step in their recovery.

Conservationists have had some success with the species; a small number have been recently reintroduced to the wild in BC, where they were considered extirpated in 1979. And Saskatchewan's OBO participants reported 60 pairs of owls in 2024, up from 31 pairs the year prior.

Big challenges for little owls

Reintroducing burrowing owls is an uphill battle. According to OBO's data, Saskatchewan's wild population dropped 97% from 1988 to 2023. The federal government deemed the burrowing owl an endangered species in 1995, and Saskatchewan followed suit in 1999.

Burrowing owl populations face numerous challenges, including collisions with vehicles and the risk of consuming pesticides in the rodents and insects they feed on, but their greatest enemy is the impact of agricultural development and urbanization on the grasslands. Years of development have decimated the habitat that these owls and many other now-threatened animals have long called home.

“Modification of native land, breaking up that land to turn it to crop, that results in a loss of habitat for burrowing owls,” Pidborchynski says.

She also points to control programs targeting other burrowing animals like ground squirrels and badgers. Burrowing owls don’t dig their own burrows; rather, they rely on those dug by other animals. “Without these burrows ... they’re more vulnerable to inclement weather and predators such as coyotes and other large mammals.”

Pidborchynski says OBO’s data suggests that burrowing owl populations in Saskatchewan appear relatively steady, but their population is still minuscule compared to what it once was.

Owl ambassadors

Raising awareness about the threats facing burrowing owls is one of the most important elements of grasslands conservation



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Their **greatest enemy** is the impact of agricultural development and urbanization.

in Saskatchewan, and what better way to do that than let the public see these rare birds up close?

That’s the strategy of the Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre in the city of Moose Jaw. When it first opened in 1997, the centre wasn’t far from a wild population of burrowing owls, with guests free to observe the birds from a respectful distance. Today, those wild owls are gone.

The sanctuary’s large outdoor enclosures are currently home to 29 captive burrowing owls – a fraction of the population that once lived in the area, but still a place where the owls thrive, free from the dangers facing the province’s wild populations.

Lori Johnson, the centre’s owl coordinator, says raising awareness is a critical step to saving Saskatchewan’s wild burrowing owls.

“You often hear about endangered species, but it tends to be the big, exciting, flamboyant species that we don’t necessarily have here in Canada or in Saskatchewan,” she says. “The elephants, the orangutans and tigers, but we have just as many endangered and threatened species that call our backyards home.”

To spread the word, the centre brings owls on tour, visiting schools and libraries to give students and community members a close look at one of the most iconic animals of Prairies.

Johnson says saving the owls requires the public’s help. “Without them, we can’t save these little guys,” she says.

Wild burrowing owls can still be found throughout the southern Prairies, where they reside in the warmer months before heading south for the winter. Sightings in Saskatchewan can be reported to OBO’s HOOT Line at 1-800-667-HOOT (4668), or by emailing obo@naturesask.ca.

Amir Said is a journalist and photographer based in Calgary, Alberta. He’s lived in multiple countries and provinces but is proud to call the Prairies home.

Poisoning the Garden

Thacker Pass lithium mine is a new act of colonial violence

by Odette Auger

The caldera of an extinct volcano has been a garden of medicines and foods for the Numu/Nuwu (Northern Paiute) and Newe (Western Shoshone) peoples and their non-human kin since time immemorial.

They call the caldera Peehee Mu'Huh (rotten moon), in remembrance of a massacre in 1865, when the 1st Nevada Cavalry slaughtered entire families in their sleep. The mining industry and government call this place "Thacker Pass," after the general who led the massacre.

The US government's 2021 decision to permit Lithium Americas to mine at Thacker Pass violated Indigenous people's rights, Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union said in a 138-page February 2025 report, *"The Land of Our People, Forever."* The 18,000-acre project is now under construction and will extract lithium from one of the world's largest known deposits.

Under Trump, the push is coming from a lens of "national security," rather than the Biden-era tactic of labelling it a "solution to climate change." Even though California's Imperial Valley has been declared to meet 100% of US lithium needs and 40% of global needs, the premise is still that a domestic source of lithium is required to prevent reliance on foreign sources.

"The Land of Our People, Forever" found that the Bureau of Land Management permitted the Thacker Pass mine without obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous people. This is in violation of their rights to religion, culture, and their ancestral lands under international human rights law.



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People of Red Mountain state, "Lithium Nevada [a Lithium Americas subsidiary] feigned consultation with our Tribes," timing its official letters when the tribes were coping with the first wave of losses from COVID-19. "Lithium Nevada considered our lack of response to be consent. This gave them an advantage in the permitting process." People of Red Mountain maintain this does not constitute proper consultation as required by Article 19 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Legal appeals have so far failed to stop the construction of the mine.

Locked out of our home

Gary McKinney, a member of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of Duck Valley, is the head scout for the American Indian Movement in Nevada, and the descendant of one of the three survivors of Thacker's massacre. He explains the area is significant for cultural practices, hunting, trading, and plant harvesting. "There are natural gardens and springs that give life to those

different medicines. Our people were known as root diggers, or earth diggers.” From buffalo to golden eagles, many came to this place for the abundance, he says. “Life was born there.”

To this day, tribal members still get out there as much as they can, McKinney says, to hunt and harvest their food. There are thousands of documented artifacts and cultural sites in the area, including petroglyphs marking coming-of-age ceremonies and culturally significant places, but “these were not brought up in any litigation,” he says. “We tried to intervene so that we could present those things, but they locked us out of the argument.”

McKinney shares how his grandmother continued to pray and bring tobacco there until the company started construction. Even though entry is not formally forbidden, “some of the non-native security hired by Lithium Americas kind of put restraints, vocally, by noticing my grandma driving up. They’ll drive down in their white trucks and get out and tell my grandma ‘road’s closed, can’t go up there.’ So that put fear in her – ‘I’m not supposed to be going up there anymore. I don’t feel good over there anymore.’ And that’s how she’s been. You have a house and then somebody goes and locks it up and you can’t go into that room any more.”

Violence against land and people

Rose Curtis, a member of the Fort McDermitt Shoshone Tribe, worries about the mine and its potential impact on her community. She works at Fort McDermitt Wellness Center and organizes an annual walk to grow awareness about sexual assault against children, and is outspoken about the risks “man camps” pose to the safety and wellbeing of women and children in the area. “A lot of our women, even the Elders, some of them are scared. They live alone – and the highway is just right there.” The mine and “workers’ hub” are directly between the McDermitt Tribe community and Winnemucca, where tribe members must commute for medical appointments and groceries.

Curtis describes the lack of adequate law enforcement and support services on the reservation, which makes it difficult to address issues of sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking. Much of the area is without cell service, with emergency dispatch “six hours away,” says Curtis. “The ambulance is seventy miles from us to get help.”

Curtis explains there’s a toll on the mental health of her community, “when these people come in and do what they want, basically.” She says there is an active FBI case involving sexual

From buffalo to golden eagles, many came to this place for the abundance.

assault from five years ago, “but they haven’t even picked up the guy yet. They know who it is.”

The increase of violence against women and children goes hand in hand with violence against the land. The ACLU reports these concerns “are backed by documented instances of other extractive industry operations on or near Indigenous land that have been associated with increased violence against women [and] girls.” *Watershed Sentinel* asked Lithium Americas what they are doing to prevent this; they declined an on-record interview.

Curtis says she doesn’t “see the tribal council getting involved in these kind of things. You don’t see them sticking up for their people ... and that’s the sad part.” She explains, “They got billions of dollars and they’re going to just go with it. And some believe, well, you might as well take their money and get what you need now – because they’re going to do it anyways.”

McKinney says there are at least five other tribes with deep ties to the Caldera, and “the blood that spilled out there belongs to family members” of all five tribes. He explains that while “community benefit agreements” have been reached with two tribes, “what the corporation does is divide the community there. The tribal leadership seems afraid to speak about it to the public.”

The massacre at Peehee Mu’huh turned the land into a burial ground, and it remains a place for mourning and communing with ancestors. McKinney warns against the current fast-tracking of permits. “If we’re not there to sink our teeth in, then it’s erasure, another form of genocide.”

Odette Auger (Sagamok Anishnawbek) is an award-winning independent journalist and storyteller living on Klahoose territory in the Salish Sea. Follow her work at authory.com/OdetteAuger.

This story is third in a series on critical minerals mining on Indigenous lands in the US. It was published with support from the Institute for Journalism & Natural Resources.

Landfill in the Sky

How much dioxin is coming from Burnaby's incinerator?

by Zoe Blunt

Independent tests have found alarming levels of dioxins in ash collected near Metro Vancouver Regional District's waste incinerator in Burnaby, raising fears of widespread contamination and long-term health consequences.

More than 23,000 people live within three kilometers of the incinerator, not counting workers who are also exposed to its emissions. For years, nearby landowners have watched ash-like particles piling up on their buildings and vehicles. The new test results have spurred environmental and public health groups to confront Metro Vancouver's lackadaisical approach to the facility's hazardous emissions.

Built in 1988 near the Queensborough Bridge and the Fraser River, the incinerator is owned by Metro Vancouver, licensed by the Province, and operated by global mega-corporation Veolia North America at a cost to taxpayers of \$245 million for the next five years, plus millions more to replace aging components.

According to Dr. Tim Takaro, physician-scientist with the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, Metro Vancouver claims the facility is "designed to prevent dioxins and furans from entering the environment, and that incinerators 'do not create a health risk to the public or people working in the vicinity.' However," he adds, "*this* incinerator is clearly a source of hazardous pollutants in an already polluted airshed."

Design flaws

Dioxins and furans are unavoidable by-products of incineration; there is no way to prevent these toxic compounds from forming in burn chambers and smokestacks. The airborne particles and gases released by the Burnaby facility also include mercury, lead, arsenic, hydrochloric acid, and sulphuric dioxide. But Metro Vancouver does not conduct continuous monitoring for any of these poisonous compounds. That worries nearby property owners, who took it upon themselves to test the particulates on their rooftops.

Sue Maxwell, chair of Zero Waste BC, recalls: "We were approached by landowners that have a warehouse nearby in Metro Vancouver because they were concerned that they need to clean off their roof on a regular basis of some kind of buildup of dust or particulate matter. They had already done some testing for metals... We recommended they test for dioxins and furans because metals can come from multiple sources. Dioxins are much more of an indicator of incomplete combustion."

"It should not take citizens testing rooftop debris themselves to confirm what frontline communities have been saying for decades," comments Denaya Shorter of the US/Canada region at the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives. A coalition of local and global groups is calling for a comprehensive, independent

study of the incinerator's toxic emissions as a first step to protecting public health and the environment.

The price of pollution

Dioxins are the most toxic substances on earth because they do not break down over time. They are not shed or excreted by the body; instead, these compounds accumulate in microorganisms, reptiles, birds, mammals, and humans. Levels become more concentrated higher up the food chain. Whales and other sea mammals in the Arctic, thousands of kilometres from the nearest industrial dioxin source, have extremely high levels of dioxins in their tissues. The Inuit who rely on them for food carry some of the highest concentrations of dioxins in the world.

Dr. Douglas Courtemanche of Doctors for Planetary Health – West Coast warns: "Dioxins are potent carcinogens and endocrine disruptors that have an adverse effect on neurological and reproductive development in the early stages of life and have dangerous hormonal and reproductive effects in adults."

Similarly, heavy metals like lead and mercury cause permanent damage to brains, nerves, and endocrine systems, especially in children. They accumulate in rivers, creeks, and soils. Like dioxins, the body can't get rid of them efficiently, and they build up in our blood and muscles.

Sulphur dioxide and hydrochloric acid come with their own costs to human health and the environment. Years ago, the Province set a goal of reducing those emissions from the Metro Vancouver incinerator, but in this case, it's hardly a priority: the Province is allowing the incinerator operator to take all the time it wants to reduce emissions. The current deadline is 2028, a full seven years after the first permit requirement – and Metro Vancouver is appealing to extend the deadline yet again.

Burning questions

Who benefits from the incinerator? Its cheerleaders include the Regional District, the facility's operators, and producers of non-recyclable waste, especially plastic and fossil fuel lobby groups like the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada and the Canadian Plastics Industry Association. The Regional District touts the facility as a "waste-to-energy" plant that burns garbage to create electricity, although it's neither clean nor efficient. It will cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade its output and connect it to the district grid.

“It should not take citizens testing rooftop debris themselves to confirm what frontline communities have been saying.”

Poor air quality from exhaust, heavy industry, and wildfire smoke should compel the Regional District to track and eliminate airborne contaminants. But when it comes to the most toxic pollutants on the planet, the incinerator seems to get a free pass. The operator tests for dioxin emissions only once per year, on just one of the facility's three boilers. And the operator chooses when that test happens, ensuring the cleanest possible result.

Tests are not conducted during the times when dioxins and furans are most likely to be released due to incomplete combustion: at startup, shutdown, and times of abnormal function. In other jurisdictions, testing is continuous, giving regulators precise data about how much dioxin is being released into the environment.

At the end of the day, about four-fifths of the incinerator waste goes up in smoke – a "landfill in the sky." The remaining ash is either dumped in the municipal landfill or sent to a hazardous waste disposal site.

Burning garbage is, of course, prohibited in Metro Vancouver and most other places to protect air quality and public health. Growing evidence of the incinerator's risks may serve to galvanize Greater Vancouver's population and government to take on the waste problem at its source.

Watershed Radio interviewed Sue Maxwell about pollution from the Burnaby incinerator affecting people and the environment. Listen to the podcast at www.watershedsentinel.ca/radio

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Power of the Grassroots

Anyone who's tried to pull perennial grass out of a garden bed understands the deep-rooted tenacity of these plants. In favourable conditions, they can grow four feet tall with roots six feet deep. But they thrive in unfavourable conditions. Even when wrenched from the ground, if one root fragment is left behind, the plant will sprout again and spread with a vengeance.

It's the same with community-based activism. It's not easily dislodged once it takes root. It spreads under the surface, thrives on adversity, and adapts quickly to new circumstances. Like marsh grass, it's relentless and often overwhelms much larger rivals. When the earth is broken and scarred, tough little shoots spring up, holding fast to each other, knitting the soil together, and bringing life back to barren places.

Let the stories in this issue be a timely reminder of the real power of grassroots organizing, and the extraordinary things that can be accomplished when we turn away from isolation and complacency, toward courage, connection, and action.



In the Public Interest

Shipbreaking lease cancelled after years of fierce opposition

by Zoe Blunt

Environmental groups and First Nations are celebrating a “decisive” turning point in the battle to protect the ecology of Baynes Sound, 100 km north of Nanaimo on Vancouver Island.

It took years of documenting environmental damage from a commercial ship-breaking operation before the Province finally canceled the company’s ocean access in July 2025.

The Ministry of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship revoked Deep Water Recovery’s Union Bay water lease “to protect the public interest” after the ship-breaking company failed to comply with more than twenty government orders and warnings over four years.

Comox Valley Regional Director Daniel Arbour, speaking with CHEK News, called the decision “a very decisive action. It’s not very often that they cancel Crown leases.” The Concerned Citizens of Baynes Sound credits the win to the “collective effort” of a grassroots coalition with the K’ómoks First Nation, Tla’amin First Nation, Qualicum First Nation, West Coast Environmental Law, MLA Josie Osborne, and MP Gord Johns.

CCOBS says the waters around Union Bay and Denman Island are “ecologically and biologically significant” for nesting and migrating shorebirds. The area is “vital to the regional shellfish industry, supports robust herring populations, and provides critical habitat for numerous marine

species,” according to the group’s website. For more than four years, CCOBS and its lawyers have been raising the alarm about marine demolition spreading hazardous materials like asbestos, mercury, lead, and oil into Baynes Sound.

Ian Munro, president of CCOBS, told CHEK News that group members feel vindicated now that the Province has taken action. “It’s a big step, you know, that we have the government saying this can no longer continue,” he said.

The Concerned Citizens of Baynes Sound credits the win to the “collective effort” of a grassroots coalition.

Along with losing its lease, DWR must pay \$72,500 in fines for discharging toxic effluent into Baynes Sound and failing to comply with a Pollution Abatement Order issued by the Province in March 2024. DWR is also required to post a \$3.2 million financial security deposit to ensure the cleanup of its waste.

Without a water lease, DWR is not allowed to moor derelict ships offshore or move them onto its waterfront property for dismantling. But it’s not clear whether the company will comply with the order; At press time, photos released by CCOBS showed ships still anchored at the site.

The company faces more repercussions from local government in the coming months. The Comox Valley Regional District is pursuing an injunction to permanently prohibit shipbreaking in Union Bay. The Province classes the facility as a commercial waste operation, which is not permitted under the district’s bylaws.

Over the years, relations between the American-owned company and its neighbours were marked by protests and lawsuits. In 2024, company owner Mark Jurisich sued Union Bay resident Mary Reynolds, 73, for punitive damages after she flew a drone over the marine demolition site and shared video evidence of contamination online. Her lawyer, Jason Gratl, contended that Reynolds’ actions were safeguarded by the *Protection of Public Participation Act*. The court agreed and dismissed that part of DWR’s claim.

Local residents vow to keep pushing for laws to protect marine ecosystems from ship demolition. A statement in The Island Grapevine reads, “The work of environmental protection is far from over. We cannot allow this issue to be relocated to another coastal community. Canada/BC must adopt international shipbreaking regulations.”

DIY Housing Co-op

Facing renoviction, tenants organized to buy the building

by Andrew Oliphant

Emily Power had been living in her apartment at 272 Caroline Street in Hamilton for less than a year when the owner put the 21-unit building up for sale.

The sale took many residents by surprise. Even the superintendent didn't receive a notice from the owner.

Power braced for the worst. She was wary that an investment company would purchase the building and raise rents, either through “cash for keys” offers, where landlords offer cash for tenants to vacate the rental unit, or another type of pressure or harassment, since many residents were longstanding, rent-controlled tenants.

Power, a born-and-raised Hamiltonian, was friendly with a number of tenants in her building, so she began organizing and eventually started a tenant association. There are no legal limitations in Ontario to starting a tenant association and no limit to the number of participants required. After a big turnout at the first meeting, the association quickly mobilized to fight the sale.

They researched prospective buyers and wrote letters to companies touring the building, letting them know that 272 Caroline had an active tenant association. They learned their rights as tenants and prepared for tactics a new landlord might use to push them out of their homes.

“Many of us – friends and family, co-workers – have gone through renoviction situa-



tions,” Power says. “People were motivated to support each other and fight back.”

Buying the building

After two months of meeting regularly, they began floating the idea of buying the building themselves and starting a housing cooperative. A housing co-op is a type of non-profit housing that removes the landlord from the equation. Any revenues made from rents are used for operating expenses, like mortgage payments, property taxes, and repairs. Any leftover profit goes into building investments and capital reserves.

Power reached out to their local Cooperative Housing Federation (CHF) branch to see if there was any precedent of another

tenant association fundraising for a down payment and getting their own mortgage. Power learned that there weren't many examples, and also that there were no dedicated funding programs to support new cooperatives. But the federation was supportive of the idea.

Power informed the tenants of what might be needed to start their own co-op. The association took a vote and decided to move ahead with trying to purchase the building. But buying a 21-unit building is more challenging than buying a condo or even a single-family home. The owner told them that there were a number of big real estate companies looking to buy the building, so the tenant association had to fight against other buyers as well.

“These real estate investment trusts – private equity companies – have so much money, they can act quickly,” Power says. “They can offer cash to buy a building without conditions. [As] non-profit organizations, we’re really at a disadvantage.”

Reaching out for support

As there was no real roadmap on how to start their own co-op, Power and the other tenants looked to multiple sources of support. The local CHF connected them with city staff and advocated for support to subsidize their down payment. The Federation crafted a management plan to help tenants pay for the mortgage and required building upgrades, and even donated some money to cover the final closing sale costs. They also connected the Caroline Co-op with other co-ops in Hamilton.

“We had a lot of questions about, how does a co-op actually work?” Power says. “How do you share responsibilities for maintenance, governance, and finance?”

The board worked closely with Hamilton-based First Ontario Credit Union, which helped the board apply for a Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation (CMHC) special loan.

“First Ontario reps worked really hard to advocate for us with CMHC, to help them understand ‘What is a co-op?’ Yes, this is affordable rental housing. Yes, the overall financial model is viable,” Power says.

CMHC special loans offer \$100,000 support for the down payment to provide incentives for non-market housing investment. Depending how high a building scores on three main criteria of accessibility, affordability, and sustainability, CMHC will offer longer amortization periods and favourable interest rates. Since the Caro-

line Co-op was offering below-market rent for all of the tenants in the building, it had the option to choose a 50-year mortgage with low interest. Having this flexibility was the reason why First Ontario Credit Union was willing to invest.

“From what I gather, it’s actually very rare that people apply [for the CMHC special loan] under the affordability stream,” Power says. “It seems like a lot of larger landlords are benefiting from this federal program for energy efficiency and accessibility without actually guaranteeing that critical affordability piece.”

The newly-formed tenant association cobbled together low-interest loans and donations from various community foundations and private individuals, which took about a year of effort and networking. According to Power, there were a number of investment companies “waiting in the wings” for the tenant association’s agreement to fall through. But after a public demonstration on the front lawn of the building scared other investors away, they were finally able to close on a \$4,800,000 sale price with the owner.

The Caroline Co-op proved that for credit unions, investing in non-market housing can be a good financial investment. First Ontario Credit Union said that they would be interested in working on other co-op conversions.

“People should know that they can do this too,” Power says.

“People should know that they can do this too.”

Untapped potential

Housing cooperatives represent huge potential for housing stock across Canada. Co-ops are a popular form of housing all over the world. In some countries cooperative housing makes up over 40% of all housing stock. In Canada, it’s less than one per cent.

Canada has an aging population, and for many on fixed incomes, stable rent and a sense of community are really important. Cooperative housing has shown that rents can be reduced, repairs can be made quickly, and tenants can have freedom from landlords.

“Some co-ops that were built in the ‘60s and ‘70s are coming to the end of their mortgage,” Power says. “So they’re in a wonderful position where they can actually lower housing charges for their members.... It’s really about maintaining affordability for the members of the co-op.”

More could be done through all levels of government to fund non-market housing. The city of Hamilton’s new Housing Accelerator Fund will provide incentives to non-profits and co-ops, which could pave the way for other groups to replicate the Caroline Co-op success. And last year, the federal government made a \$1.5 billion commitment to support non-market housing – the largest federal investment to build co-op housing in 30 years. The program will run until 2028 and consist of around \$500 million in contributions

Continued on Page 22 ⇨

and \$1 billion in loans – however, there are specific parameters for this funding. For a new co-op to receive funding in a city with a population over 100,000 people, it must include a minimum of 75 units. So smaller co-ops like Caroline Co-op would be ineligible to receive any support from this federal program.

Organization is key

No resident at the Caroline Co-op owns their unit. Rather, every tenant is a member of the co-op, which gives them the right to live in a unit and participate in the governance of the building. Every member has equal say in the operations of the co-op (one member, one vote).

While some co-ops require participation – where a lack of participation can lead to termination of membership and eviction – Caroline Co-op has taken a different approach. Members are asked to attend quarterly General Membership meetings and contribute at least two hours per month to the operations of the co-op, but Power understands that there may be barriers to participation.

“This has been the fun part – coming up with our repair plan and fixing things tenants had been asking for for years under the previous landlord.”

There is a volunteer board of directors and various committees, which members are encouraged to participate in. When a resident moves out, they simply leave and the co-op re-allocates the unit to the next household on the waiting list.

Power says apart from a water main breaking on their first day of possession, owning the building has been pretty smooth sailing.

“This has been the fun part – coming up with our repair plan and fixing things in people’s units that they had been asking for for years under the previous landlord,” Power says. “It’s empowering for people who live in the building to actually see the results, and see how quickly

we can get things done when we actually have control ourselves and have the budget to do so.”

As older rental stock starts coming on the market, tenants can be ready to act. Organizing can help not only prepare for any building sale, but in the event of nefarious landlord practices, organized resident groups can also equip tenants to advocate for better landlord practices.

It’s important for tenants to use the tools at their disposal. Residents are better off when they’re organized and meet regularly.

Power and the entire co-op plan to release a short documentary to share their learning with others.

“As working-class people, we should be organized,” Power says. “If you’re a tenant, you should be reaching out to your neighbours. If you live in an apartment building, try to set up a tenant association in your building.... If we’re organized, we’re better prepared for whatever may come.”

Andrew Oliphant is a social worker and freelance journalist currently based in Toronto. This story was originally published by The Media Coop (<https://mediacoop.ca/node/119297>).



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Awakening a Village

An “erased” nation reclaims its land and history

by Desiree Mannila

On July 24, 2025, in collaboration with the Awi’nakola Foundation, Ma’āmtagila hereditary leaders and descendants welcomed *Forestorium* – an on-site opera by University of Victoria artist Paul Walde that invited the audience to bear witness to art and ceremony braided together on Ma’āmtagila ancestral territory, on Vancouver Island’s Adam River south of Sayward.

Ten kilometres down a dusty forest road with panoramic views of the devastating impact of forestry, guests were welcomed by the silence of one of the few remaining old-growth groves in the once-abundant forests of the Ma’āmtagila. Viewers sprawled across the forest floor, tucked between fallen trees and undergrowth, to listen to a libretto encapsulating five years of interviews with activists, scientists, and Indigenous knowledge keepers.

The performance portrayed the many sides of the forest industry, from the perspectives of loggers to the pleas of protesters and the Indigenous community denied access to their homelands. Following the opera, Ma’āmtagila Hereditary Chief Makwala (Rande Cook) addressed the spectators. “Ceremonies come in all forms, and this is a ceremony right now.” Cook reminded the listeners of their responsibilities as witnesses, as the Ma’āmtagila people were officially declaring the site as protected, “to reclaim not only our space, but our identity.”



Continued on Page 24 ➡

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“We’re forest people. Our whole culture comes from the forest,” Cook says. “We cared about our land so much that if you were disruptive and harmed it ... the penalty was death.” He explains how forests were the setting for historic rituals that led to the songs, dances, masks, and other prerogatives held by chieftain families in the present day. “Our role as chiefs is to protect our land,” he says. When he stepped into his grandfather’s chieftainship, he started walking his traditional territory and witnessing firsthand the clearcut logging destruction of Ma’āmtagila territory.

Cook notes the ancient practice of the Kwakwaka’wakw to “bury” their deceased in treetops. “When the remains would fall later, our DNA would be absorbed into the tree.”

Stolen land, erased peoples

Cook walks us through the colonized history of the Ma’āmtagila. In June of 1948, the head families of the Tlowitsis and Matilpi (Ma’āmtagila) Bands agreed that the head hereditary chiefs of the Matilpi and Tlowitsis would hold equal power and responsibility for the amalgamated Nation, and members of both tribes would hold equal rights to all amalgamated lands. “The whole reason for the amalgamation ... our elders were worried about losing our land because all the kids were being taken to residential school.”

The children were placed in the St. Michael’s Residential School in Alert Bay, and many Ma’āmtagila members moved there to be closer to them. They were required to transfer into the Nimpkish Band (‘Namgis) to live on the reserve.

In 1998, with no Ma’āmtagila people present, two Tlowitsis brothers, John and Alec Smith, took the opportunity to fabricate a band council resolution declaring

On paper, the Ma’āmtagila were **erased**.

that no members of the Ma’āmtagila remained, and therefore their lands were forfeited to Tlowitsis. “They just saw the opportunity to benefit financially, without thinking about culture or family connections,” says Cook. The Tlowitsis First Nation has not held an election since. John Smith remains Tlowitsis Chief Councillor, along with his son, Nanwaḱolas Council president Dallas Smith.

On paper, the Ma’āmtagila were erased; in practice, descendants continued to hold ceremonies, returning to the land and carrying the culture forward.

Government feeds greed

Tlowitsis is currently in the late stages of treaty negotiations. Cook explains, “They want to sell 100% of Ma’āmtagila territory,” to help fund their new 635-acre reserve located near Campbell River. “If [they] do that, we’ll never have access to our land again.... It’s complete erasure.”

The impending sale of Ma’āmtagila’s territories pushed Cook to seek legal counsel. In 2024, Nanwaḱolas and Western Forest Products unveiled La-kwa sa muqw Forestry Limited Partnership (LKSM), a “historic partnership” giving four member Nations (Tlowitsis, We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum, K’ómoks) a 34% share. “Logging is amped up by 30% in Ma’āmtagila territory,” Cook says. “They’re trying to get as much as they possibly can out of it before it’s gone.”

In March 2024, a new Tree Farm License was created by subdividing another TFL.

TFL 64 spans much of Ma’āmtagila territory, but the licence holders are Western Forest Products and LKSM. “I’m not saying logging is bad, but it’s fixing the type of logging. We need to be more selective ... we need to leave the old growth. We need that diversity,” says Cook.

The new cutblocks were quiet this summer, though – workers went on strike in June when United Steelworkers Local 1-1937 rejected LKSM’s demands for non-union contractors in union jobs.

Cook says the Awi’nakola Foundation is working to identify and tag as many culturally modified trees as possible, and noting evidence of harvested CMTs. “We’re losing so much ... especially our yellow cedar at high elevations – it takes thousands and thousands of years to grow that.”

Awakening Hiladi

On July 24 and 25, the Awi’nakola Foundation held its annual Tree of Life gathering in the historic Ma’āmtagila village of Hiladi, “the place to make things right,” at the Adam River estuary on northern Vancouver Island. The village is the permanent residence of Ma’āmtagila matriarch Tsasilqualus (Dawna Ambers) and volunteers are slowly rebuilding it.

On July 25, hereditary chiefs unveiled a beautifully carved eagle pole to mark this place as Ma’āmtagila land forever. Ma’āmtagila descendants and allies, ranging in age from five weeks to 85 years, came together to feast, dance, celebrate, and bear witness.

Speaker Matthew Ambers addressed the gathering. “This land was never given away. It was never sold, never bought, never taken through warfare.” Ambers explains that it is the wish of the Ma’ąmtagila hereditary Chiefs for their people to return to take care of their territory.

Wielding an eagle-topped talking stick, Ambers read Ma’ąmtagila’s Declaration of Sovereignty: “The Ma’ąmtagila Nation has exclusively occupied and used these territories since the beginning of time.... The Ma’ąmtagila Nation is the



proper rights holder for Aboriginal rights over Ma’ąmtagila lands, submerged lands, waters, air, and resources. The Ma’ąmtagila Nation has never been consulted by the Crown for resource extraction in its territories, nor has it ever consented to such activities.... The Ma’ąmtagila Nation commits to protecting the integrity of the most diverse and vulnerable ecosystems that exist in its territories.”

The Ma’ąmtagila Declaration aims to have the Crown officially recognize the Ma’ąmtagila, the first step in asserting their rights with industry. The full declaration can be read at www.maamttagila.ca.

Paxąla, Desiree Manila, is a proud member of the Da’naxda’xw/Awaetlala Nation, and WS’ staff reporter.

Listen to songs, drumming, interviews, and the reading of the Ma’ąmtagila Declaration at www.watershedsentinel.ca/radio

Tampering With Life

Is there a future for genetically engineered animals?



by Lucy Sharratt

Production of the world's first genetically engineered food animal, a GE salmon, ended in 2024 after twenty years of protest in Canada. In 2012, the introduction of the GE "Enviropig" was stopped because of consumer and farmer opposition, but a new GE pig is on the horizon.

Thus far, the use of genetically engineered (GE or genetically modified) animals in Canada has been stopped by public protest and consumer rejection. However, the question of who determines the fu-

ture of genetic engineering, and based on what considerations, is still wide open, as Health Canada is considering a gene-edited pig for human consumption.

GE salmon goes belly-up

After seven years, the production of genetically engineered Atlantic salmon by US-based biotechnology company AquaBounty ended in 2024. This was the first GE food animal on the market anywhere in the world, and people in Canada were the first to eat it. Despite the lack of

labelling to help consumers choose, the market rejected GE salmon.

The Atlantic salmon was genetically engineered with genetic material from chinook salmon and ocean pout, with a claim to grow faster. It was first sold in Canada in 2017, produced in Panama. Starting in 2021, it was produced by AquaBounty at on-land "tank farms" in Prince Edward Island and Indiana in the United States.

All these fish farms are now sold and there is no GE salmon being produced

anywhere. In March 2024, Cooke Aquaculture bought AquaBounty's PEI facilities but said, "Cooke does not farm or sell any GE seafood products and has no plans to do so with this acquisition."

Speaking about AquaBounty's demise, Sharon Labchuk of the coalition GMO Free PEI said, "We're glad to see the back of this company after over twenty years of our protests against genetically modified food." Labchuk first protested the GE salmon in 2001 and continued to work with community groups who opposed the GE fish and the ongoing government funding for the company.

The GE salmon was produced on land but a major concern was the potential, however slim, of escape into the wild, especially as AquaBounty expanded production to new sites. Escape would have put endangered Atlantic salmon at risk of genetic contamination or competition from GE salmon.

"The development of GE salmon violates wild salmon and all the human and more-than-human communities that wild salmon support," said Carl Wassilie, a Yup'ik biologist, co-founder of Salmonberry Tribal Associates and organizer with the Block Corporate Salmon campaign. "Wild salmon underpin our cultural, spiritual, emotional, and physical wellbeing as Indigenous Salmon Peoples. We need to build on this victory to ensure that no other company takes up the colonial project of genetically engineering salmon."

The GE salmon was stopped, but this does not mean an end to GE animals.

This little piggy didn't go to market

Back in 2011, the GE "Enviropig" was poised to be the first GE food animal in the world. It was developed at the Uni-

versity of Guelph in Ontario but, in 2012, as a result of farmer and consumer protest, the hog producers' association Ontario Pork stopped funding the research and the university shut down their commercial pursuit.

The pig was genetically engineered with genetic material from a mouse to reduce the amount of phosphorus in the pig's feces. Excess phosphorus is a pollution problem created by large factory farms, a problem that already has many solutions.

"No GM Pork on My Fork."

In February 2010, Environment Canada approved production of Enviropig™, but in March 2010, the National Farmers Union (NFU) Ontario passed a resolution opposing its use and asking that "these financial resources be redirected to research that fits the real needs of hog producers."

Unlabelled GE meat threatened to trigger a consumer backlash. Sean McGivern of NFU Ontario and a hog and cattle producer, said, "This GE pig could ruin the trust Canadians have in our pork...It's down to the University of Guelph to cancel their request for approval. This is the only way to protect our markets."

Public opposition culminated in February 2011 at a "Pig Rally" at the university. Protesters wore pig snouts and held signs saying, for example, "No GM Pork on My Fork." A large banner read "UofGE: Changing Pigs, Selling Life" which was a spoof of the UofG's slogan "Changing Lives, Improving Life."

The "co-inventor" of Enviropig™, professor Cecil Forsberg, told the *New York Times* that, "I had the feeling in seven or eight or nine years that transgenic animals probably would be acceptable. But I was wrong. It's time to stop the program until the rest of the world catches up." In 2025, has the world "caught up?"

This next little GE piggy?

Because people in Canada have never been consulted about genetic engineering in our food system, important questions remain unasked and many voices unheard. At a 2024 event at the University of Alberta, Robin Wall Kimmerer, author of *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, was asked about genetic engineering and said, "These tools that fundamentally change the identity of the genetic sovereignty of our plant and animal relatives are ethically challenging."

Despite the ongoing controversy and unresolved issues, Canadian regulators are now assessing the safety of another genetically engineered pig, engineered with the gene editing technique of CRISPR to be resistant to most strains of a costly pig virus. At the same time, the public demand for mandatory GE food labelling in Canada is heating up again. See www.cban.ca/labelling for updates and action.

Lucy Sharratt is Coordinator of the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN), a project of the MakeWay Charitable Society.

Peace and Unity 2025

A summit to strengthen hearts and resolve

by Delores Broten and Alice de Wolff

Participating in the fourth Peace and Unity Summit, held on the rodeo grounds at Anspayaxw (the Hiding Place) in Kispiox, BC in August, was entering another world.

This year's summit was dedicated to "supporting Indigenous land defenders who continue to uphold Indigenous law in the face of police violence and relentless pressure from the extraction industry."

The four-day event was led by Wet'suwet'en and Gitksan people, with support from many groups, notably the Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition, David Suzuki Foundation, and Dogwood.

These four days were a combination of serious discussions, land retreat, networking, youth mentoring, cultural sharing, meals, and celebration, all of which were informed by the laws and generosity of Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en cultures.

Panel discussions from Indigenous leaders were held on topics like "Land Back and Sovereignty: Decolonizing in Action," "Free, Prior, and Informed Consent and Resource Extraction," and "Allied Support and Digital Storytelling."

Learning by doing

Panel days were interspersed with land-based days of learning through rafting and other activities on beautiful Gitksan territory. Activities on the site included

a kids' camp, youth media mentorships, a sweat lodge, arts demonstrations, and even horse-drawn wagon rides. We were treated to generous and delicious food (fresh sockeye salmon and crab!) and evenings filled with spirited Gitksan, Nisga'a and Sekani drumming and dancing, and the Big River Cree Singers from Saskatchewan, who got everyone up and moving.

Running through the entire four days was a powerful spoken and unspoken message on alternative economics: There is another way, and it must come from caring for and respecting the land and each other. This caring adheres to sacred laws. It includes well-defined decision-making processes, within houses and clans and among chiefs, which would be the proper way to affirm "free, prior and informed consent." This is something clearly missing in almost all of Canada's actions at this time. The responsibility of the houses is to look after the land, all of which implies an entirely different way of being.

Cleo Reece from Keepers of the Water pointed out that the promise in Treaty 8 to "share the land" went only to the depth of a plough. She also said that "revenue-sharing" means doing the same things as the oil companies, and that current revenue-sharing and "economic reconciliation" by fossil fuel corporations is about extraction and depletion, not about sharing. She warned that the environmental degradation experienced by Alberta's First Nation communities

impacted by fossil fuels will happen in Gitksan territory as well, if people don't come together to fight.

Rights and relationships

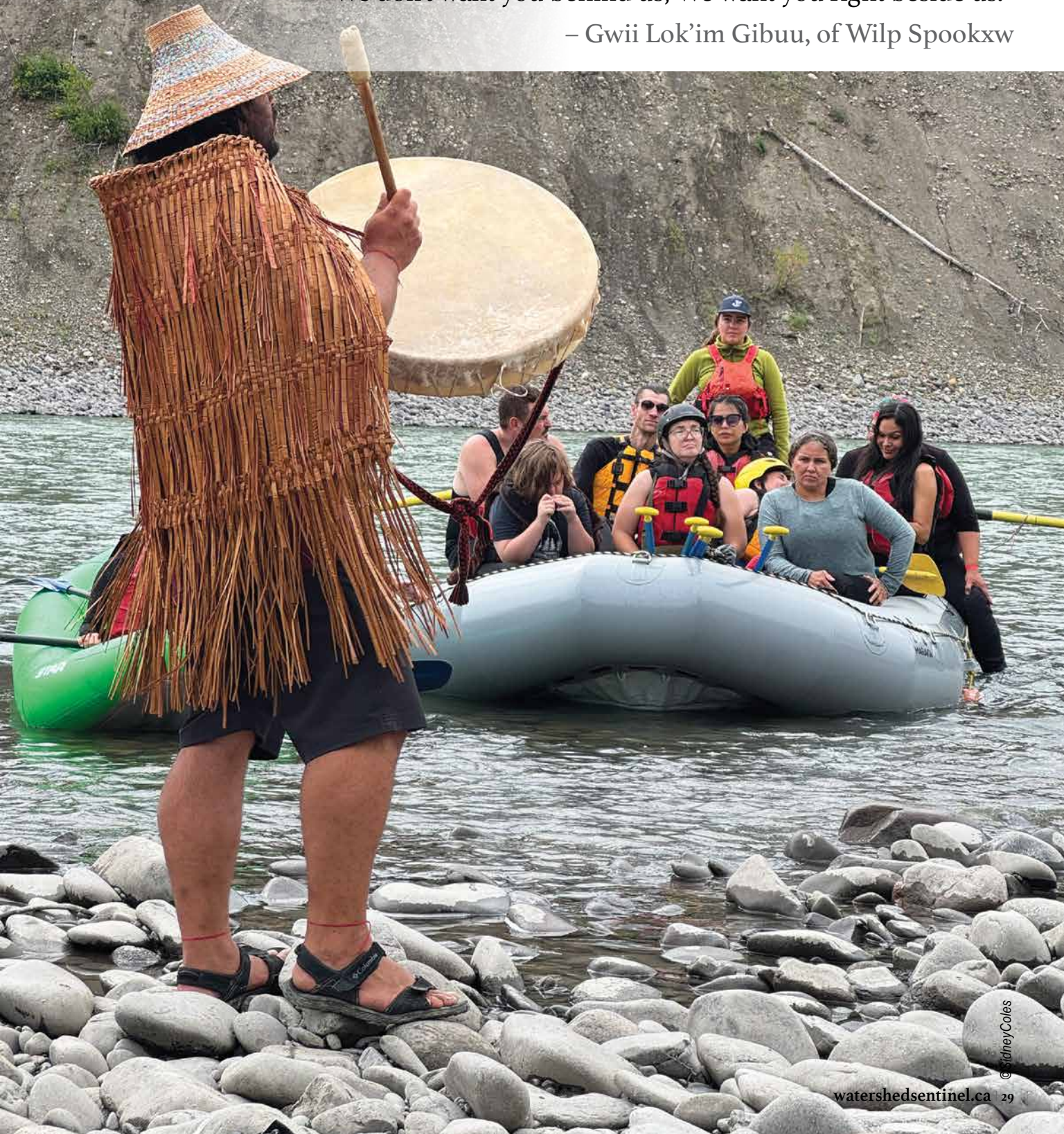
On the final day, participants were invited to witness the raising of the Honouring Our Ancestors monument at the nearby Wet'suwet'en village of Tse-kya ("Base of Rock"), also known in Gitksan as Hagwilget ("Place Of the Quiet People"). The monument, which took ten years to complete, names Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en ancestors who did not have headstones and those who passed away far from their respective territories. The feast that followed included tables piled high with food and gifts, drumming and dancing, games and laughter, speeches, and a few tears in memory of those who were gone.

Several of the speeches during the feast and the panels during the summit referred to the Supreme Court of Canada's Delgamuukw decision in 1997, which acknowledged that Aboriginal title constitutes an ancestral right protected by section 35(1) of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. In that case, the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en were plaintiffs.

The summit made clear that First Nations' strongest currency, their riches, resides in their relationship to the land. Love, care, and respect for the land and each other are not transactional.

Continued on Page 30 ⇨

“Peace and Unity is meant for you.
It doesn't matter who you are.
You don't have to be Indigenous to share these values.
We don't want you behind us, We want you right beside us.”
– Gwii Lok'im Gibuu, of Wilp Spookxw



⇐ *Peace and Unity continued*

Friendships were made and strengthened and alliances were formed and re-affirmed. All this in preparation for the great struggles Indigenous and environmental peoples are expecting as fossil fuel expansions are promoted and supported by the Canadian and Provincial governments. We left with full stomachs, overflowing hearts, and renewed determination.

With editorial help from Sidney Coles.



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“We gather to celebrate the solutions, alliances, and collective hope that fuel these fights. We have already witnessed victories: communities have resisted extractive industries that threaten ecosystems and lives. We have stood together to stop the Enbridge pipeline and to protect the Sacred Headwaters from fracked methane. We have seen the Lax Kw’alaams Nation halt the proposed LNG export facility at Lelu Island.”
—<http://peaceandunitysummit.com>



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Rain Bomb Onslaught

Global heating creates the perfect conditions for flash floods

by Stephen Leahy

A series of severe storms hit the central and southeastern US this past April, and brought more than three Aprils' worth of rain over a few hours.

This was said to be a 1-in-1,000-year event. In our hotter climate, that metric is no longer accurate. Exceptional rainfall events have become a regular occurrence. For example, extreme rainfall events have increased by 60% in the US Northeast in the last few years.

Flash flooding is increasing worldwide, including in areas that have typically been safe from flooding. The reason for this increase is that more rain is falling over shorter time spans.

When rain falls faster than the ground or drainage systems can handle it, tiny streams become unstoppable torrents of water. River levels around the world are regularly topping high-water marks that have stood for a hundred years or more.

Homes and businesses far from rivers or streams can experience overland flooding, which has become more frequent and widespread in recent decades. Floods claimed the lives of 5,250 people and displaced 43 million people in 2024, according to the Emergency Events Database (www.emdat.be). Damages and economic losses topped \$500 billion.

Recall 2024's devastating flash floods in Valencia, Spain? Over 30 inches of rain fell in just a few hours. It was Spain's

worst weather disaster, claiming 232 lives and totaling €18 billion in damages, with 11,242 homes destroyed and 120,000 vehicles written off.

Why these deluges?

The well-documented increase in extreme rainfall events globally is primarily the result of hotter temperatures.

Rising temperatures have significantly increased evaporation rates. The atmosphere acts like a sponge, soaking up water from the enhanced evaporation. This atmospheric sponge can hold more water in warmer temperatures – 7% more water per 1.0°C of warming.

Since temperatures are currently 2.0°C higher over the continental US, the air can now hold 14% more moisture. In Western Europe, temperatures are 2.8°C higher this summer, so there is potential for more Valencia-like flooding.

It also turns out that hotter ground temperatures lead to stronger updrafts of water-laden air masses. These then cool down faster, resulting in heavier rainfall, according to a study in the journal *Nature* this year. “The temperature increase caused by climate change leads to more



intense precipitation locally,” the study concluded.

This has led to a 15% increase in torrential rainfall events lasting only a few hours, as well as an increase in flash flooding. Record-high 24-hour rainfall extremes occurred 52% more often in 2024 than during 1995–2005, according to the 2024 Global Water Monitor Report.

Stephen Leahy is an award-winning environmental journalist. This article is adapted from his weekly newsletter, *Need to Know: Science and Insight* (leahy.substack.com).

Sanctuary Under Siege

What happens in the Arctic doesn't stay in the Arctic

by Gordon Feller

The Central Arctic Ocean (CAO), a vast, high-seas expanse spanning 1.1 million square miles historically protected by year-round sea ice, has remained largely untouched by human industry.

But this sanctuary is now under siege from climate change and intensifying economic development pressure. As summer sea ice shrinks at unprecedented rates, new shipping routes and resource and geopolitical claims are converging in a fragile and largely unregulated ocean.

Today, the Arctic is warming four times faster than the global average. The alarming consequences include a 65% reduction in average September sea ice since 1980. “The Arctic is in the midst of rapid change, and we’re seeing that reflected in profound environmental and ecological shifts,” says Dr. Julianne Stroeve, senior scientist at the US National Snow and Ice Data Center. “What was once permanent ice is now open water in summer.”

This transformation has opened the door to ambitious industrial schemes, most notably the proposed Transpolar Sea Route – a direct shipping corridor across the Arctic. Proponents argue this route could reduce shipping time and costs between Asia and Europe. However, as the Arctic Council’s Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment working group notes, “Trans-Arctic shipping introduces risks of oil spills, black carbon emissions, underwater noise, and disruption to wildlife migration patterns.”

The threat is magnified by the CAO’s extreme remoteness. The region suffers from a severe lack of search and rescue capabilities, and any pollution incidents would be compounded by the lack of cleanup capability in such remote waters – meaning accidents in the CAO could have transboundary consequences, with ocean currents spreading contamination far beyond the Arctic.

“What was once permanent ice is now open water in summer.”

Equally concerning is the looming possibility of deep-sea mining in the CAO. As Arctic coastal states submit overlapping claims for Extended Continental Shelf rights, competition for seabed resources intensifies every day. The International Seabed Authority wrapped up their 30th Session this July without either green-lighting deep-sea mining or stopping it with a moratorium (which 38 governments, including Canada’s, are calling for). Meanwhile, the US intends to offer its own permitting process for both its territorial waters and the high seas.

Deep-sea mining targets hydrothermal vents and other unique seafloor ecosystems – environments that are largely un-

explored and potentially irreplaceable. “We’re talking about ecosystems that have evolved over millions of years in total darkness, under immense pressure, and are highly vulnerable to disturbance,” explains Dr. Diva Amon of the Deep Ocean Stewardship Initiative. “Once disturbed, they may never recover.”

The ecological wealth of the CAO cannot be overstated. The CAO is “the world’s quietest sea,” offering migratory whales, seals, and seabirds a refuge from anthropogenic noise pollution that is increasingly rare elsewhere in the world’s oceans.

Beyond biodiversity, the Central Arctic Ocean plays a pivotal role in climate regulation. Arctic ice cools the planet by reflecting sunlight, and Arctic currents and atmospheric systems regulate global weather. Climate scientist Dr. Mark Serreze notes, “What happens in the Arctic doesn’t stay in the Arctic. The loss of sea ice is linked to more erratic jet streams and extreme weather events further south.”

Importantly, the Arctic is inhabited. Indigenous peoples have lived in the region for millennia, forging deep cultural and subsistence relationships with the marine environment. “The Central Arctic Ocean is integral to the food security, cultural identity, and governance practices of Arctic Indigenous communities,” emphasizes Dalee Sambo Dorrough, former Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council. “Ignoring Indigenous knowledge in deci-

sion-making is both unjust and counter-productive.”

Some progress has been made. In 2018, the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement – a landmark accord involving Arctic and non-Arctic nations – placed a moratorium on commercial fishing in the CAO and established a joint scientific research program. This agreement, built on the precautionary principle, is the first international accord to preemptively ban fishing in a high seas area before it starts.

Yet, more is needed. The US-based non-profit Ocean Conservancy is calling for a new international agreement tailored to the CAO’s current threats, one that not only bans deep-sea mining

and transpolar shipping but also ensures inclusive governance and Indigenous representation. “The Arctic is becoming a new geopolitical frontier,” warns Dr. Klaus Dodds, Professor of Geopolitics at Royal Holloway, University of London. “We must resist the temptation to treat it as a commodity race, and instead treat it as a shared responsibility.”

Key pillars of this proposed agreement include:

- A moratorium on new extractive industries in the CAO.
- Codification of Indigenous knowledge and participation in governance.
- Funding for Arctic science and monitoring.

These efforts must be guided by a spirit of cooperation, not conflict. Safeguarding the Central Arctic Ocean is not only a matter of conservation but of global equity and justice. As United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres warned during the 2023 Climate Ambition Summit, “The melting Arctic is not just a local tragedy – it is a planetary crisis.”

Gordon Feller is a journalist, consultant, speaker, and Smithsonian Institution Global Fellow based in California.



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Bringing Bison Back

Elk Island: Alberta's wildlife haven

by Leif Gregersen

Just 35 minutes east of Edmonton on the Yellowhead Highway lies Elk Island National Park, a UNESCO designated biosphere reserve that's home to two species of bison, the Plains bison and the wood bison, which for a time were almost completely wiped out.

Although the exact number changes from year to year, around 400 Plains bison and 300 wood bison currently live in the park. The Plains bison are slightly smaller than their cousins, but still almost two meters tall at the shoulder and lighter in colour with a shaggy cape, a long beard, a bushy head of hair, and a rounded hump. Wood bison are darker in colour and adapted to the colder climate of the north. They have pointy beards, less hair on their forelegs than Plains bison, and a large, rectangular hump. These bulls are the largest land an-

imal in North America, with some weighing over 900 kg (2000 lbs).

The park, which is in Treaty 6 Territory, has been continuously used by Indigenous people for sustenance, ceremony, trade, and travel since long before the park was founded. Elk Island National Park is a traditional gathering place for many First Nations. With cooperation from Parks Canada, it's a spiritual (though not permanent) home to Plains Cree, Woodland Cree, Saulteaux, Assiniboine, Dakota, Lakota, Dene/Chipewyan, and Métis people.

It is estimated that at their peak, there were as many as 30 million bison in North America. They roamed the continent in herds numbering up to 100,000. Information plaques in the park state

that in their heyday, hundreds of years ago, a single bison herd could cover the area of an entire US state. They thrived in pre-European settlement days because Indigenous people didn't hunt the bison to near-extinction as settlers did. Instead, they used methods to help them thrive, like burning forests to increase grasslands and grazing grounds.

In the welcome centre, I learned about the huge significance bison hold within First Nations cultures. The park administration, along with providing bison for conservation projects, provides bison to Indigenous groups. To honour the animal's spirit, they use every possible part: hides, bones, and even ligaments. Traditionally, the bounty was divided up among the hardest-working, bravest individuals and groups. Items made from bison, ranging



from hides for shelter and clothing to string made from sinew, were often traded with other First Nations people outside the Great Plains.

In contrast, European settlers and their descendants found the bison meat too costly to transport. They were paid \$3.50 each for bison hides, which they stripped from the carcasses, leaving the rest of the animal to rot where it fell. Mass over-hunting with horses and firearms, rather than on foot with traditional tools like spears and arrows, quickly drove the population from millions to just over 1,000 animals in 1906 when the Elk Island conservation program began.

Currently, an estimated 500,000 bison live in North America, including 20,000 plains bison and 11,000 wood bison in protective management in parks. Commercial bison farming has become so successful that bison meat is available for private sale, in some grocery stores, and can be found on the menus of some restaurants. Bison meat has been described as having a richer, sweeter, and more robust taste than beef.

Erin Elliot, the public relations and communications officer for Elk Island National Park, explained that within its boundaries, bison are allowed to roam freely throughout the park. Within Elk Island's 194 square kilometres of protected areas, there are few predators and few diseases. This allows an incredible experience for park visitors who will often come across bison, elk, bears and other wildlife by the side of the road or in clearings. Visitors can also experience the beauty of the woods, lakes, and islands as they navigate 80 km of trails on foot or by bicycle.

The staff at Elk Island cautions visitors that the park is teeming with wildlife of

all shapes and sizes, from the 2-cm long pygmy shrew to the massive, majestic elk that gave the park its name. They estimate that the park holds as many as 600 elk, 300 moose, and 500 deer, as well as bears, cougars, and timber wolves.

Administrative assistant Kay Liew answered a question I've wondered about for some time. As a child, I visited Elk Island often, and we always called the animals "buffalo," while now they are almost always referred to as bison. Apparently, "buffalo" is a term imported to North America from Asia where water buffalo live, and from Africa where African buffalo are found. While both terms are accurate, "bison" is the unique name for the North American animal.

Elliot also noted that the park is the only completely fenced-in national park in Canada. This fence keeps invaders out and park wildlife within a safe zone away from the dangers that loom outside park

boundaries. This unique aspect of Elk Island Park has resulted in park animals thriving to the point where they may eventually outgrow the park's ecological carrying capacity. Parks Canada is preparing a reintroduction program to populate areas all over Canada and the US with bison, elk, and other animals. The park administration has already partnered with Indigenous groups to reintroduce bison to their traditional territories, successfully relocating over 300 bison in partnership with Indigenous groups so far.

We can all take comfort in knowing that these beautiful animals have a future in a place that's committed to preserving their species and helping to bring them back from the brink of extinction.

Leif Gregersen is an Edmonton-based writer, teacher, and public speaker who has written 12 books. edmontonwriter.wordpress.com



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Wild Times

Storylands

by Joe Foy

There are few things as enjoyable as a good story. That's probably why stories these days are often monetized: books, magazines, social media, songs, and Netflix series, for example.

BC has its own monetized story: mineral claims. Lands staked for mineral exploration.

Most people understand that old-growth forests and wildlife habitat need to be protected to prevent species loss. But if those lands have been staked, it makes protection much more difficult. Often the mineral claim holders want to be compensated by the provincial government, even when there's little chance of the claim becoming a profitable mine.

That's because in BC, the value of a mineral claim is not based on the likelihood of a profitable mine. Instead, its value is sometimes based on how good a story its owner can tell.

That's why I call BC mineral claims "storylands."

Silverdaisy Mountain, surrounded by Manning and Skagit Provincial Parks, is a twisted tale of a great story on top of some lousy claims. Since the early 2000s, there have been a number of battles against clearcut logging of spotted owl habitat and other special forests in the mineral claim area at Silverdaisy.

BC Timber Sales, the provincial government's logging agency, was the main culprit. Mineral claims kept the area from being protected, and BC's logging agency walked in and took advantage.



For over a century, Silverdaisy's various owners dug tunnels and drilled core samples, but never made one red cent of profit. It hardly mattered. They told great stories that attracted a lot of investment money. Some of the owners made money, workers made money, the government taxed the payrolls, savvy investors bought low and sold high, and those in the dark or just plain unlucky got a bit of hope and joy from the stories they got in return for the money they lost.

How much are crappy mineral claims with great stories worth? In the case of Silverdaisy Mountain, north of \$20 million was paid to the owners in 2022 to relinquish their claims so the area could finally be protected.

There are many such storylands lurking in the dark corners of the province. Fire Lake is located near Garibaldi Park and century-old mineral claims that never produced a profitable mine. But with

claim names like "Money Spinner" and political leaders talking about "critical minerals" and eliminating environmental reviews – well, you get the story.

At stake are old-growth forests and spotted owl habitat surrounding Fire Lake that should have been protected long ago. They are now pending approval for logging by – you guessed it – BC Timber Sales. Once again, looks like the door was held open by a mine that's never going to happen, and the BC government's own timber agency is waltzing right in.

I'm thinking that critical habitat is far more rare, precious, and deserving of protection than any storyland hole in the ground or government-run logging show ever could be.

That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Joe Foy is the protected areas campaigner for the Wilderness Committee.

Thank You!

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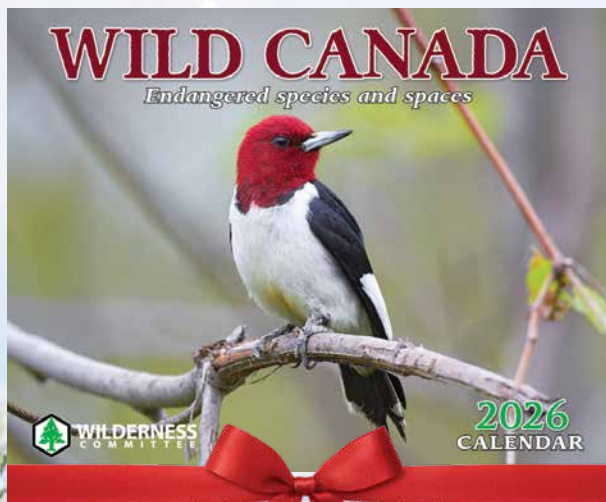
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