



## Comments on Draft Key Recommendations in the Southern Lakes Area Regional Wildlife Assessment (February 2012)

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Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Canada thanks the Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee (SLWCC) for the opportunity to comment on the draft Key Recommendations. Here we provide responses to each of the eight recommendations (re-written in bold), and a general comment.

### **General Comment**

These eight Recommendations are generally valuable and worth supporting. We have made some specific suggestions as to changes to make them more effective. They tend to lack detail as to how they could be implemented, and therefore where they fit in governmental and regulatory processes, and what they might mean in terms of government infrastructure. Without more details on means of implementation, it is difficult to have full confidence in them. We expect that the full Regional Wildlife Assessment coming from the SLWCC in the future will fill some of these gaps, and we look forward to that Assessment.

### **1. The parties should continue to develop and advance cooperative and coordinated management of wildlife and their habitats among responsible governments.**

*WCS Response:* We support this recommendation. We suggest that this Recommendation needs to be expanded to specify an institutional mechanism for continued cooperation and coordination of management. The Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee (SLWCC) has been such an institution, and seems to be the best means of continued cooperation and collaboration. We recommend that the SLWCC continue to operate. The Southern Lakes region is unique in Yukon in the extent to which numerous different governments overlap geographically in their interests, and also in the intensity of threats to wildlife habitats, so a continuing institutional focus on this region is warranted.

### **2. The parties should develop and implement complimentary (*complementary*) legislation, policies, guidelines, and standards to manage wildlife and their habitats.**

*WCS Response:* We support this recommendation. We feel strongly that the legislative, regulatory and policy regime should be relatively uniform across the land base, and that this regime should be established on the basis of the best available science and high management standards. There are substantial gaps or inconsistencies in the existing array of regulations and standards (e.g., different standards in different government Departments), and in the management regime (e.g., voluntary vs. mandatory application of best management practices), and we hope that the more detailed

recommendations of the SLWCC will address some of those gaps. Further, in the absence of good knowledge of some regional wildlife, their habitats, and their response to development and management activities, the precautionary principle should be employed by all Parties.

3. **The parties should develop and implement a managed harvest framework that integrates rigorous and verifiable information on licensed and subsistence harvest to ensure long term sustainability of all harvested species, with an immediate focus on caribou and moose.**

*WCS Response:* We are in agreement with this recommendation. Full harvest reporting for all species and by all parties is critical for management and conservation of wildlife populations.

4. **The parties should identify, map, and carefully manage key wildlife habitats. The focus should be on sensitive ecological areas (e.g., wetlands, riparian, sand dunes, salt flats, older forests), and habitat for traditionally used species and species at risk that require a higher duty of care with respect to human development and disturbance.**

*WCS Response:* We support this recommendation because we agree that wetlands, riparian areas, sand dunes, salt flats, and old forests require special consideration in conservation and land use planning. Overall we find that Recommendations 4 and 5 are partly overlapping and deal collectively, though incompletely, with the broader question of how to achieve conservation in a region with increasing human activity. We suggest that these Recommendations would be more useful if SLWCC could put forward a conceptual framework within which conservation should advance, linking conservation goals and elements to land use and management processes and practices.

We recommend the overall conceptual framework be the coarse- and fine-filter approach with differentiation of goals at different spatial scales linked to process and practice. At the regional or sub-regional scale (coarse filter), conservation seeks to maintain ecosystem representation and functioning and requires consideration of hydrologic and terrestrial connectivity, cumulative effects of human activity, and climate change. This scale is addressed during land use or conservation area planning, and requires ecosystem mapping, connectivity mapping, and assessments of thresholds of human activity within which key ecosystem processes are sustainable. Land use and management tools can include protected areas, special management areas, and landscape-scale thresholds on human activity. Recommendation 5 appears to refer to tools that could be employed in such land use planning processes and scales. The fine-filter approach, by comparison, refers to the more localised conservation elements that require site-specific management and attention. Most of the examples in Recommendation 4 fit this category. This Recommendation however lacks any direction as to the management tools and processes whereby it could be realised. These could include specific land use designations (e.g. Habitat Protection Areas), regulatory standards, published guidelines, and best management practices. Many of these details may be forthcoming in species-specific SLWCC Recommendations, but the value of the Key Recommendations would be in outlining a conceptual framework with general links to management process and practice.

5. **The parties should work towards developing tools to use in land use planning that take into account wildlife and their habitats in the Southern Lakes area.**

*WCS Response:* The intent of this recommendation is not clear. This Recommendation implies that land use planning will occur, however the need for it is very pressing and requires re-stating from a wildlife conservation point-of-view. The Committee should explicitly identify the need for regional land use planning within the Southern Lakes region, including conservation planning with goals of conserving key wildlife habitats and corridors, representative ecosystems, and ecological benchmark areas (as suggested in our comments to Recommendation 4). We recommend an explicit statement of the value of conservation planning for wildlife conservation in the Southern Lakes region. There already exist a number of software tools for conservation planning and wildlife habitat assessments in the context of land use planning (e.g., BEACONS Benchmark Builder and Ranker; Marxan; Zonation), and we do not believe the SLWCC Parties should be developing any new tool(s) for this purpose.

6. **The parties should develop and implement effective monitoring protocols for traditionally used species and species at risk to ensure their long term conservation, using scientific, local and traditional knowledge.**

*WCS Response:* Long-term monitoring of wildlife species is critical for effective management and conservation. Thus we support this recommendation to develop and implement effective monitoring protocols. We suggest this recommendation be extended to monitoring other species, such as keystone species (e.g. beaver, snowshoe hare), indicator species (e.g. wood frog), and other focal species that support fine-filter management and conservation objectives and/or that are not adequately captured by coarse-filter approaches.

7. **The parties should continue to develop and implement outreach and education materials and programs to reduce human-wildlife conflicts (e.g. road collisions, disturbance to calving ungulates, and carnivores in communities).**

*WCS Response:* We agree in general with this Recommendation. However, most of these issues are more widespread than just the Southern Lakes region, and already get some form of government attention in Yukon. We believe that there is no need for the SLWCC Parties to establish new administrative infrastructure and means to achieve this Recommendation, but that existing staff and procedures should be used with specific input from whatever institution perpetuates the SLWCC. We also feel that the term “develop” needs to be expanded to include “engagement” in new science to support decision-making regarding best practices for minimizing human-wildlife conflicts.

8. **The parties should continue to develop and implement education and outreach programs and materials aimed at increasing knowledge and appreciation of wildlife and their habitats, with a focus on furthering management and conservation objectives. An emphasis should be placed on youth and schools, where appropriate.**

*WCS Response:* We agree in general with this Recommendation. As with Recommendation 7, we do not feel that there is a need for more government infrastructure because education and outreach programs are fairly well established in government and more widely applicable than just the

Southern Lakes. There is a need for ongoing identification of which programs and materials are needed (by some agency following the SLWCC), and a need for continued or expanded funding for the work. We recommend the Parties expand the scope of this Recommendation to include programs and materials aimed at increasing public knowledge of the cumulative effects of both development and climate change on wildlife and their habitats.