



We stand for wildlife



Welcome to Wildlife Conservation Canada's e-newsletter. You are receiving this because you have previously supported the conservation work of the global WCS organization. WCS Canada has been working to protect wildlife and wild places across Canada since 2004 and we hope you will find these stories about our work inspiring.

Ontario Government turns back the clock on watershed protection

Major changes proposed for Conservation Authority powers

Back in 1946, the idea that we should try to manage entire watersheds as single interconnected systems was pretty cutting-edge conservation thinking. As soils blew away and rivers clogged up thanks to indiscriminate forest clearing, Ontario decided it had to act and created watershed-based Conservation Authorities. That step looked even more farsighted in 1954 when Hurricane Hazel hit the southern part of the province, destroying homes and taking 81 lives, leading to a new focus on keeping development away from flood-prone and sensitive areas.

Conservation Authorities (CAs) have come to play a critical role in preserving what remains of natural areas in one of the most heavily developed parts of Canada, [as we explain in this WCS Canada Muddy Boots blog](#). They play an important role in steering development away from sensitive and flood prone areas while working constructively with municipalities and housing developers to mitigate the impacts of new development on natural areas.

However, buried in the recent provincial budget omnibus bill were [drastic changes to the role of Conservation Authorities](#), including a new ability for developers unhappy with CA decisions to ask the province to override them. A great example of what this could mean in future is unfolding in a provincially significant wetland just to east of

Toronto in Durham. [A proposal to build a warehouse in a provincially significant wetland here](#) would normally have to be approved by the local CA. But the province has instead stepped in to downgrade the wetland's status, thereby forcing the CA to approve the development.



The Duffins Creek wetland is one of the largest coastal wetlands remaining in the Greater Toronto Area. Photo: Toronto Region Conservation Authority

Instead of neutering the watershed-wide protection mandate of these authorities, the province should be embracing them as a model for landscape management throughout the province. What the CA model does is make the link between the health of natural systems and our health a top priority. Justina Ray joins Craig Stephens, a population health epidemiologist and professor at the University of British Columbia, to talk about why we need to stop squandering the tremendous health assets nature has gifted us and ensure we do not leave future generations with an impoverished foundation for health [in a piece for the Hill Times](#) (subscription required). Justina also addresses the important role of CAs in protecting public health in [an interview with CTV news](#).

Fast fact: Burned trees are full of life

Many insects quickly take advantage of trees burned after fires and these insects, in turn, attract birds such as woodpeckers. In fact, some trees rely on fire to prepare a seedbed and open cones. Below, new vegetation quickly takes root in a burned forest in Yukon. Photo: Hilary Cooke/WCS Canada.



Yukon climate plan may rely on smoke and mirrors

Is burning wood a good solution to climate change? That's a question being asked in Yukon, where a new government strategy sees increasing use of biomass as a way to meet energy needs while addressing climate change. WCS scientist Dr. Don Reid raises some important questions about this potential strategy [in a story published in The Narwhal](#). For starters, where will the wood come from? The Yukon government says it will come from "waste" like logging residue and fire abatement projects (clearcutting around communities to stop the spread of fires). But Dr. Reid questions whether these sources can really supply the kind of quantities needed to keep up to 20 new biomass plants burning for decades. He worries that [most of the dead trees in recent burns will be salvaged](#) and that attention will inevitably turn to logging new areas, thereby harming wildlife habitat and biodiversity. And then there is the question of whether biomass is really a good solution given the urgency of our current climate crisis. It will take many decades, especially in an environment like Yukon where trees grow slowly, to "absorb" the carbon released by burning more wood, making the "climate neutral" characterization of biomass questionable. These factors combined make it worth considering other options, including pumped hydro storage, wind, and solar power, before embarking on a major expansion of biomass power in Dr. Reid's view.



Bats have an amazing ability to "see" with sound. Photo: Michael Proctor

A bat blast

In the Batman movies, the caped crusader uses a spotlight to cast his signal into the sky. But WCS scientist Dr. Cori Lausen doesn't need this kind of notice to know when bats are around. Dr. Lausen is much more attuned to the sounds of bats on the wing and [she shares her insights into bats amazing sound abilities in a new audio interview](#). Did you know bats' echolocation signals are so loud they have to protect their own ears from these deafening sound bursts? Or that when remastered to bring them into the range of human hearing, some bat calls sound like bird songs? Bats' ability to "see" prey using sound waves is one of those amazing natural adaptations that we spend too little time thinking about. But even more importantly bats' sounds also give us the ability to learn more about their behaviour, what species are where, and how populations are faring. [Listen in as Dr. Lausen describes bats' rich sound environment and hear some examples for yourself](#).

Getting mountain goats to smile

How do we know that female mountain goats with young are the last to shed their winter coats? By analyzing hundreds of photos of these mountainside scramblers and assessing the state of their outerwear. This innovative use of citizen photography, collected from sources like [CitSci.org](#) and [iNaturalist](#) as well as from park, museum and newspaper archives, led to a new understanding of how and when mountain goats shed the heavy winter coats they grow to survive harsh alpine winters. Biologist Dr. Katarzyna Nowak and WCS scientist Dr. Don Reid explain how they developed and implemented this innovative citizen science discovery approach and [the](#)

Photo: Adult nanny with kid on a forest trail below Mount White on Carcross/Tagish First Nation Traditional Territory.

Many hands help overcome major obstacles

With communities in Canada's North locked down to prevent COVID transmission, how to get another season of sound recording in the Arctic Ocean underway became a big problem last spring. Fortunately, WCS Canada received some vital help in solving this conundrum from two Western Arctic communities -- Sachs Harbour and Ulukhaktok, Northwest Territories – as well as from Fisheries and Oceans Canada in cooperation with the Canadian Coast Guard.

WCS marine scientist Dr. Bill Halliday shipped one set of sound recorders from his base in Victoria, BC to the two remote communities via our Yukon field office. Community members then carried the recorders in their boats on the last leg of their journey to listening posts offshore. Meanwhile, Bill prepared a second batch of recorders that he handed over to Fisheries and Oceans Canada technicians onboard the Coast Guard's icebreaker, the Sir Wilfrid Laurier, in Victoria. These technicians spent a month onboard the vessel, on its late summer trip to the Beaufort Sea, helping to deploy and retrieve scientific equipment for numerous researchers. (Some of this work would normally have been handled by WCS contractors who would get on board the ship once it had arrived in the Arctic.)

Thanks to this great partnership effort, we managed to deploy seven new recorders and retrieve five recorders that had accumulated valuable data about marine life in the dark icy waters of the Arctic Ocean. All without Bill ever getting his feet wet.



Sound recorders packed for shipping

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