



A Perfect Life

by Joe Foy

Sitting on the shores of Fish Lake, breathing in the pine scented air, surrounded by the sounds of the breeze in the trees and a distant loon calling, life felt just about perfect.

I was there to join a weekend celebration in honour of the first anniversary of the Tsilhqot'in Nation's announcement to create a 300,000 hectare tribal park in the surrounding wilderness of the Chilcotin Plateau. Several of the Chiefs attended the event, and explained their efforts as they consulted with their neighbours and discussed what the rules would be to govern the new protected area they call *Dasiqox*.

Expanding a protected area system in a way that bridges and buffers existing protected areas as well as new ones, that is proposed and managed by Aboriginal people, is a hot topic these days – both here in BC and around the world.

Most parks are just too small to contain and sustain the wild plants and animals that live within the park boundaries. The signs and symptoms of wildlife under siege are everywhere. Consider the high profile story of Cecil the Lion who was lured out of his African park refuge, across the boundary lines into the sights of a bow hunter who killed and beheaded him. Or the recent story of a BC guide outfitter convicted of allowing a “cli-

ent” to shoot a grizzly bear that had been attracted by bait. Parks here and abroad need wide buffer areas and connecting corridors between parks to keep wildlife populations safe and healthy.

Even plants are at risk – especially the really big ones known as old-growth trees. For a number of years

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now the BC government has quietly been allowing logging companies to survey provincial park boundaries. Why would logging companies want to pay for expensive on-the-ground surveys of provincial park boundaries you might wonder? The answer is that logging companies are increasingly “shaving” the last old-growth trees right up to the very edge of the park boundary line. The result is something that biologists call the “edge effect” – a risk of increased blowdown and soil erosion in the park, and loss of habitat that sustains wildlife.

There has got to be a better way. And there is. The Tsilhqot'in Nation and other aboriginal groups around the planet are pointing the way to new forms of protected areas that can allow wild nature to survive and thrive

while providing livelihoods for surrounding rural communities.

To use the example of the Dasiqox Tribal Park, it provides bridging habitat between a number of existing provincial parks including Ts'il'os, Nunsti, Big Creek, Eleven Sisters, and South Chilcotin Mountains. The effect is to create a much larger region where wild plants and animals can survive and thrive. And the point of the Tsilhqot'in Nation's ongoing discussions is to make sure the local economy survives and thrives too.

We need more of this kind of thinking – here in BC and in other countries. Conservation biologists tell us that if the world is to retain grizzlies, salmon, rhinos, lion, and all of the other wondrous creatures big and small, then nations are going to need to set aside half of their total area for nature. Clearly we need additional types of protected area designations – and all nations need to speed up the pace of new protected area creation in the global race against the extinction clock.

Looking out from the shores of Fish Lake, the view was clear. A perfect life isn't without wildlife.



Joe Foy is the national campaign director for the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, Canada's largest citizen-funded membership based wilderness preservation organization.