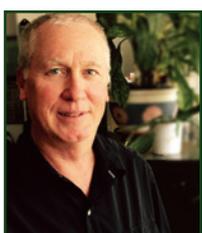




SAVE THE Skagit



END LOGGING AND MINING THREAT



Joe Foy,
Co-Executive Director

[@JoeFoyWild](#)

The Skagit River rises in the Cascade Mountains from wetlands, rivulets and tarns located on both sides of the 49th parallel, eventually entering the Salish Sea near Mount Vernon, Washington. The area's lush forests and clean clear waters support an impressive diversity of fish and wildlife, including an important run of chinook salmon.¹

This area's importance can't be

overstated. Wilderness habitats within the Skagit headwaters are required to recover B.C.'s North Cascade population of grizzly bears — the priority grizzly population for recovery in the province.² Over 200 species of birds have been documented here and the area contains important forest habitat for the endangered northern spotted owl.^{3,4}

Climate change's increased stress on our environment through forest fires and smaller salmon runs makes protecting the Skagit even more important.

The good news is about two-thirds of B.C.'s Skagit headwaters are

protected in Skagit and Manning provincial parks.⁵ However, the rest of its lands aren't protected. They are covered by a 1984 treaty — the High Ross Treaty — between B.C. and Seattle calling for conservation to protect the health of the watershed.⁶

The recent clearcut logging in the Donut Hole is a wake-up call for all those who love the Skagit

Which is why environmental groups on both sides of the border were surprised when last year the B.C. government — through its own BC Timber Sales (BCTS) — allowed clearcutting in the headwaters of the Skagit River in an area surrounded by those parks. Nicknamed the Donut Hole, the forest here hasn't been granted provincial park status because of a pre-existing mineral claim tenure currently owned by the mining company, Imperial Metals.⁷

While we scrambled to get it stopped, BCTS was allowed to grind on over the long days of summer and into the fall of 2018.⁸ Both the mayor of Seattle and governor of Washington State called on B.C.'s

premier to stop the chainsaws, to no avail. By winter four new clearcuts scarred the mountainsides.

What successive B.C. governments have been too slow to grasp is just how vital the headwaters of the Skagit River are to the health and wellbeing of the region's people and wildlife. This river and its tributary streams are located near the town of Hope. The headwaters are within a half day drive of over six million people including those from Metro Seattle, Bellingham, Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley.⁹ And it's a major outdoor recreation destination featured in local hiking guidebooks.¹⁰

These headwaters are unceded Indigenous lands. Upper Skagit, Stó:lō, Syilx and Nlaka'pamux people have accessed the Skagit headwaters forests, meadows and streams since time immemorial for essentials such as clean water, wild foods, old-growth wood and other cultural materials needed for medicines and spirituality.¹¹

Recent clearcut logging in the Donut Hole is a wake-up call for all those who love the Skagit. It's time to protect it for good.



Photo top: 18 Mile Creek (Paul Morgan).
Photos above: grizzly bear (Don Johnston), clearcut in Smitheram Valley, Donut Hole (WC files).



WHAT'S AT RISK IN SKAGIT COUNTRY

DONUT HOLE

The Donut Hole is a 5,800-hectare hole in Manning and Skagit provincial parks. It contains three large valleys that drain into the Skagit — Smitheram, 26 Mile and Silverdaisy.

Although it was left out of park protection because of a pre-existing mineral claim, the immediate threat is logging. In the early 2000s BC Timber Sales began clearcut logging in Smitheram Valley — habitat supposedly set aside for the endangered northern spotted owl.^{12,13} Protests by environmental groups helped stop the logging — until 2018 when it started up again. Now, BCTS is asking for government approval to log in Silverdaisy and 26 Mile valleys as well.¹⁴

Although Silverdaisy Valley saw industrial development decades ago, the valley essentially remains unlogged and is home to a popular hiking trail to Silverdaisy Peak.¹⁵ 26 Mile Valley



Photo: view from Silverdaisy Peak, Donut Hole (WC files).

remains pristine to this day and much of the valley bottom is designated as protected northern spotted owl habitat.

BCTS has proposed building a network of logging roads through the area to enable large-scale clearcutting. The Donut Hole must be protected now.¹⁶

SUMALLO RIVER

Sumallo River is a tributary of the Skagit and drains the mountains to the west of Manning Provincial Park. The Sumallo drainage has several unprotected and unlogged valleys including 20 Mile, 18 Mile and Laforgue. It also drains Mount Outram. Both 18 Mile Valley and Mount Outram have popular hiking trails.^{17,18} All three valleys have been designated as northern spotted owl wildlife habitat areas (WHA).¹⁹

While there are currently no logging plans for the Sumallo, nothing is holding logging operations back so it's only a matter of time. The Sumallo drainages need to be fully protected now.

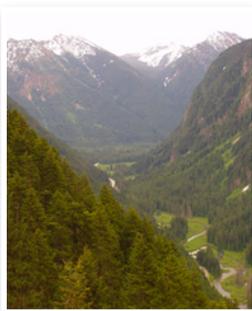


Photo: Sumallo Valley (WC files).

KLESILKWA RIVER

Klesilkwa River and its tributary Maselpanik Creek drain the mountains to the west of Skagit Valley Provincial Park. Klesilkwa and Maselpanik have already been heavily logged. However, there are still many reasons these valleys should be protected from further damage.

The valleys are important fish and wildlife habitat and will become key grizzly bear refuge areas once they increase back to healthy numbers. They are the location of a historic trail route scouted out in the late 1850s to access the Fraser River gold rush.²⁰ These valleys must be protected now to go through a process of natural regeneration.

UPPER SILVERHOPE CREEK

Silverhope Creek lies just west of the Skagit River watershed and flows to the Fraser River. The Silverhope Creek Valley is the route the Skagit River access road follows as it makes its way south from near Hope to Skagit Valley Provincial Park.

A tiny area is currently protected by Silver Lake Provincial Park, but the upper watershed of Silverhope Creek warrants protection to ensure future logging operations don't harm the unlogged Eaton Creek Valley and its popular hiking trail to Eaton Lake.²¹

Swanee Lake and its old-growth forests would be protected as well. These two spots are designated as habitat areas for the endangered northern spotted owl.²²

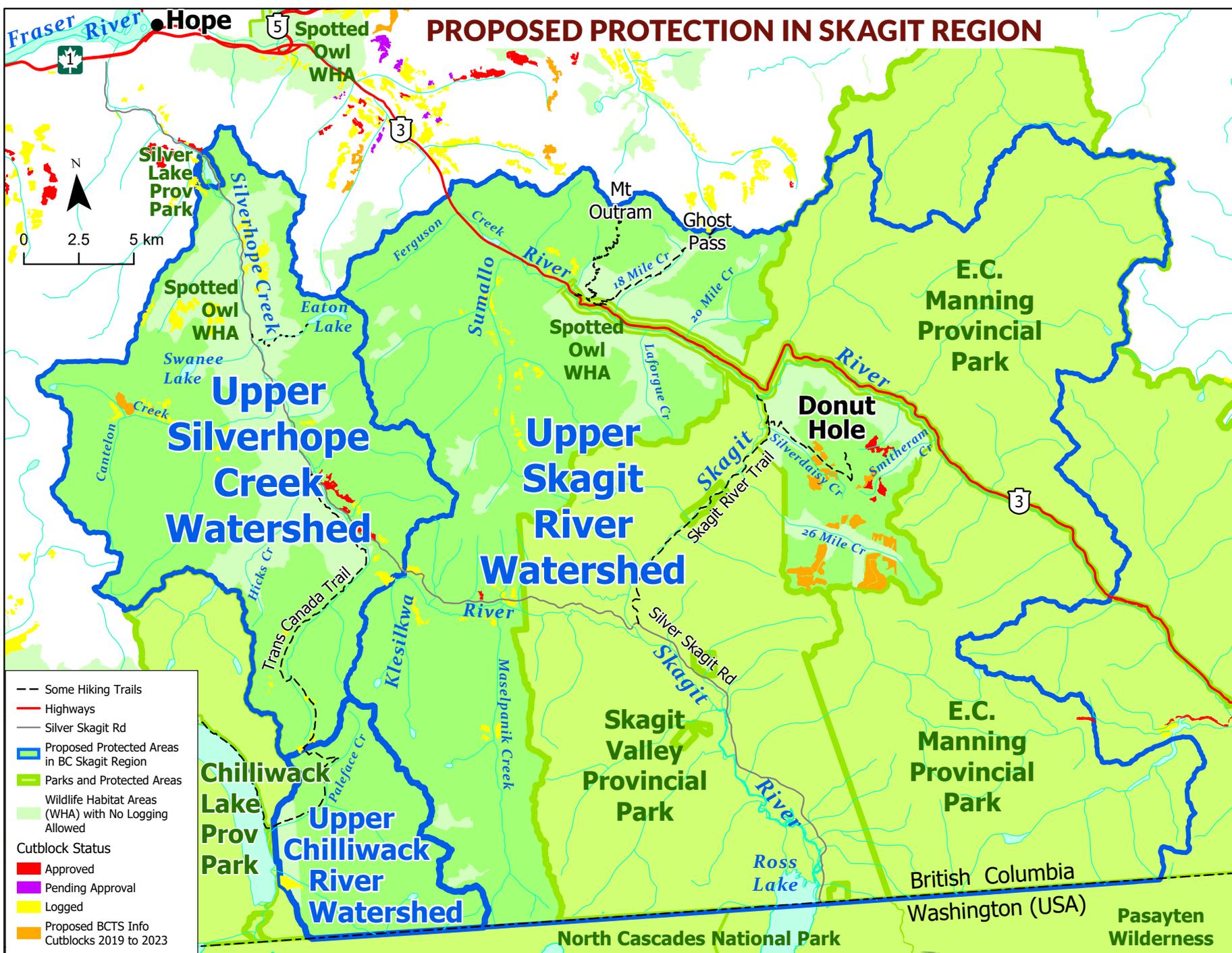
Logging continues to pick away and endanger forest habitat in the upper Silverhope Creek watershed and protection should be granted immediately.

UPPER CHILLIWACK RIVER

Paleface Creek and Depot Creek both drain into Chilliwack Lake. Though the lake is in a protected park, the two creeks aren't. By protecting Paleface and Depot creeks, the Trans Canada Trail section going over the Paleface-Silverhope Pass would be protected and would be a great recreation feature.²³



Photo: wild lupines (John E. Marriott).



SEEING THE BIG PICTURE

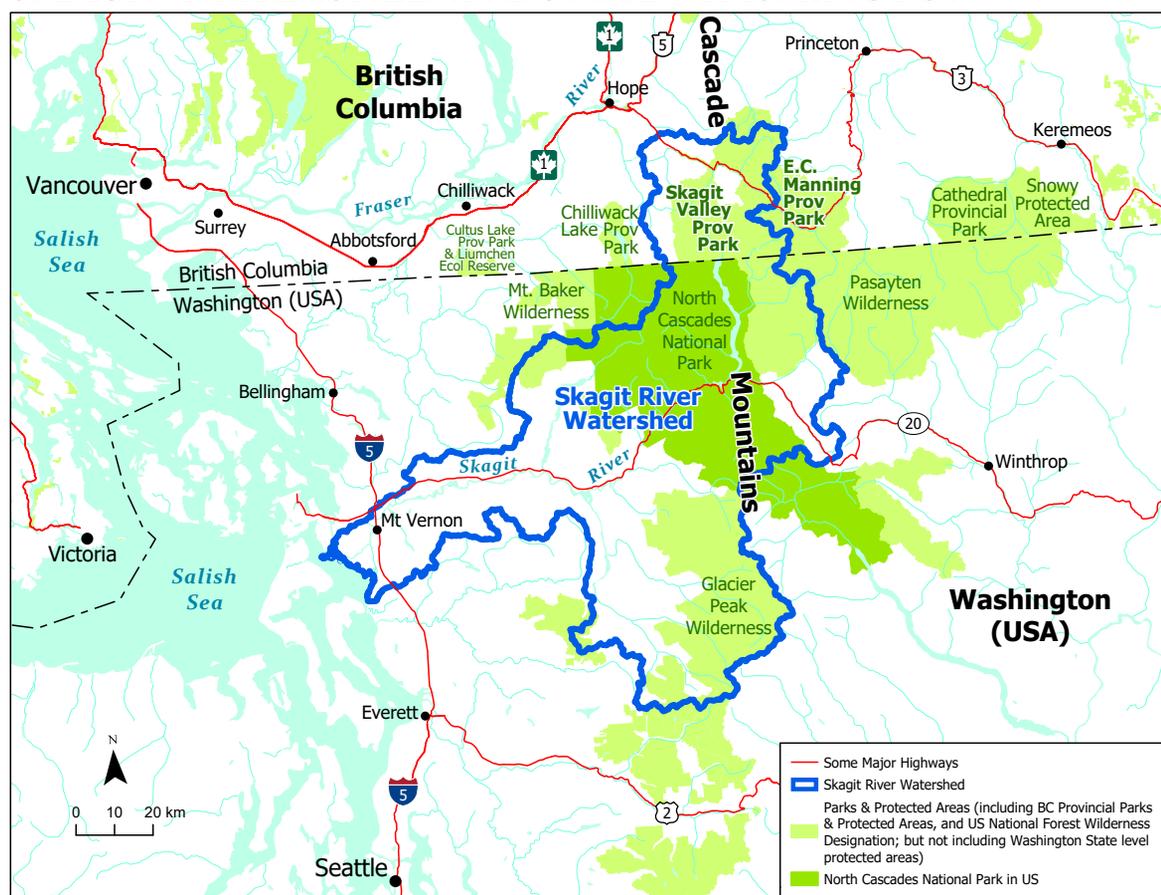
When it comes to parks and protected areas, many of us in Canada and the U.S. can't see past the border. We're knowledgeable about parks in our own countries, but fail to see the connection between what's protected just over the border.²⁴ B.C.'s Skagit Valley is a good example of this, as it's part of one of the largest and most diverse regions of contiguous cross-border protected lands in North America.

South of the border, the North Cascades National Park, Mount Baker National Wilderness and Recreation Areas, the Pasayten Wilderness and Loomis Forest are linked with Canada's Liumchen and Chilliwack River Ecological Reserves, as well as Cultus Lake, Chilliwack Lake, Skagit Valley, Manning, Cathedral and Snowy Mountain provincial parks. This combined network of cross-border wildlands total over one million hectares in size and serves as a critical wildlife corridor. **This is the region's best hope of holding on to and recovering much-loved fish and wildlife populations.**²⁵



Photos left to right: hiker on Silverdaisy Peak (WC files), red crossbill (Grambo Photography), west entrance to Manning Provincial Park (WC files), bobcat (Jakob Dulisse), ancient Douglas-fir, 18 Mile Valley (WC files).

SKAGIT WATERSHED IN BC AND WASHINGTON



SKAGIT HEADWATERS NO PLACE FOR A GIANT COPPER MINE

The Donut Hole hasn't been granted park protection because of a pre-existing mineral tenure held by Imperial Metals.²⁶ Their "Giant Copper" ore body is said to contain more than 45 million tons of ore composed of gold, silver, copper, molybdenum, uranium and more.²⁷

Although this ore body could be extracted by open-pit mining, it would likely be too expensive because so much material would need to be dug up in



Photo: alpine lake at source of Silverdaisy Creek, Donut Hole (WC files).

a location hemmed in by provincial parks.²⁸ It's also situated in the headwaters of the Skagit watershed which is an extremely essential and sensitive international fisheries habitat.

Imperial Metals also owns the Mount Polley Mine located in B.C.'s Cariboo region. **A massive tailings breach there in 2014 spilled 24 million cubic metres of mine waste into rivers, streams and lakes, including Quesnel Lake.** Several studies are ongoing at Quesnel Lake to determine what the actual long-term impacts will be to salmon. The

company was never fined for the disaster — believed to be the biggest mine tailings spill ever in Canada.²⁹

A large copper mine in the Donut Hole would be devastating to the region. Acid mine drainage resulting from mining ore can leach toxic heavy metals such as copper, zinc, cadmium and others, which can be extremely harmful to fish and other aquatic life. Even a slight increase in trace amounts of copper above natural stream levels, for example, suppresses the

ability of trout and salmon to smell, making it harder to avoid predators, find mates and return to spawning grounds.³⁰

The Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission (SEEC) is actively looking at ways to buy the mineral tenure from Imperial Metals so the entire area can be protected. In this way, the nightmare of mine pollution leaching into the Skagit can be avoided. The B.C. government needs to work with SEEC to ensure the Donut Hole is protected as fast as possible.³¹

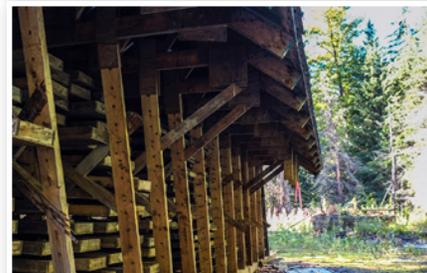
THE 1984 HIGH ROSS TREATY

In 1942 Seattle City Light, the public company in charge of providing electricity to Seattle, began to negotiate an agreement with B.C. to raise the Ross Dam — just south of the border in Washington State — by 37 metres which would have flooded over 2,024-hectares of the Skagit Valley within B.C.

In 1967 the agreement was finally completed and made public. Though supported by the B.C. government, the agreement faced intense public opposition in the province when people learned the company was paying only \$5.50 per acre per year for the destruction of this region. By the 1970s it had blown up into a full-on environmental campaign to save the Skagit.

B.C. and Seattle negotiated to resolve the issue and the result was the 1984 High Ross Treaty. In the treaty, Seattle City Light agreed not to raise Ross Dam for 80 years in exchange for power purchased from B.C. at rates equivalent to what would have resulted from building the dam. **It also created the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission to manage an endowment fund to preserve the pristine wilderness and fish and wildlife habitat in the Upper Skagit Watershed.**

The purposes of SEEC, as stated in the treaty, include protecting Skagit wilderness areas, improving hiking trails and buying out mining and logging rights. It is currently pursuing the purchase of the mineral tenure in the Donut Hole and the B.C. government has a responsibility to actively help with securing the mineral tenure. SEEC is calling for BCTS logging in the Donut Hole to cease and for the area to be put off-limits to further logging. After the Donut Hole is fully protected, it is expected SEEC will turn its attention to getting the remaining portion of the Skagit and surrounding lands fully protected too.³²



Photos: chinook salmon (Barrie Kovish), mineral core sample shack, Donut Hole (WC files).

DELAYS AND HALF-MEASURES

If there's one thing the latest BC Timber Sales clearcutting in the Donut Hole area has taught us, it's that we can't be complacent in getting B.C.'s Skagit River headwaters protected.

The provincial government, in cooperation with First Nations, must pass legislation putting the Donut Hole, Sumallo, Klesilkwa, upper Silverhope and upper Chilliwack watersheds off-limits to logging and other industrial activities — immediately.

Every day of government inaction means the Skagit and surrounding lands risk losing even more wildlife habitat to logging. Hope is fading for at-risk species like northern spotted owls and the North Cascade population of grizzlies.

Every day of delay in protecting the Skagit puts much-loved hiking trails like Silverdaisy, Ghost Pass and Eaton Lake at greater risk of being carved up

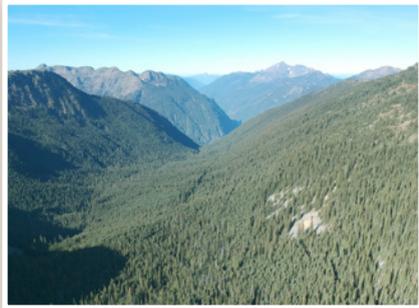
by logging roads or clearcuts. Every dithering moment of inaction by the province risks the clear waters of the Skagit being drowned by mud and silt pouring off logging operations or mine waste, busting loose and spewing down the mountainside.



Photo: long-toed salamander (Jacob Dulisse).

Now is not the time for half measures. Now is the time to get the job done once and for all, which means the Skagit's unprotected areas must be protected now.

Please write today urging the B.C. government to legislate a ban on logging within the Skagit and surrounding areas immediately. Call on them to obtain the mineral tenure within the Donut Hole from Imperial Metals so B.C.'s entire Skagit watershed and surrounding lands can be granted the protected area status we all want.



Photos: stacked logs in upper Smitheram Valley, Donut Hole, upper Silverdaisy Valley, Donut Hole (WC files).

OUR PROMISE TO PROTECT

In 2010 the world's wealthy countries including Canada signed the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, committing to protect 17 per cent of their territory within a decade.³³ Since then, member nations have been investing in new parks and protected areas.

However, Canada lags far behind. Since the declaration, the country has gone from 9.6 per cent to just 10.6 per cent protected area. That's laughably far from the 17 per cent goal.³⁴

And that goal is just the tip of the iceberg. **Many scientists believe humanity's long-term survival depends on protecting at least 50 per cent of the planet as wild nature to halt human-caused species loss and slow climate change.**³⁵ Bhutan and Venezuela are examples of two countries that have already protected around half of their territories.³⁶

Within Canada, Indigenous Peoples often lead the way. On the west coast, the Haida Nation have protected more than half of their territory on land.³⁷

B.C. should follow their lead. Protecting the Skagit would help move Canada closer to fulfilling its commitment to protect 17 per cent by 2020.



Photo: northern spotted owl (Francios-Xavier DeRuydts).



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TAKE ACTION

Protect BC's Skagit Headwaters!

Please contact BC's premier and ministers of environment and forests and ask them for immediate action to:

- ▶ **Halt all logging in BC's Skagit Watershed**
- ▶ **Secure the mineral tenure in the Donut Hole in BC's Skagit Watershed**
- ▶ **In cooperation with First Nations, designate the Skagit Watershed and the upper Silverhope and upper Chilliwack watersheds as Protected Area**

Premier of BC – Email: premier@gov.bc.ca or Phone: 250-387-1715
BC Environment Minister – Email: ENV.Minister@gov.bc.ca or Phone: 250-387-1187
BC Forests Minister – Email: FLNR.Minister@gov.bc.ca or Phone: 250-387-6240

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