

January 12, 2021

Honorable Katrine Conroy,
Minister of Forests, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development

CC: Honorable Nathan Cullen
Minister of State for Forests and Natural Resources

Dear Minister Conroy,

Re: Opportunity to protect the Skagit/Manning Donut Hole

Congratulations on your appointment to the important FLNRORD Ministry. The newly named Skagit Conservation and Recreation Alliance (the Alliance) have been working to see the lasting protection of the Skagit/Manning Donut Hole for decades, and are excited to work with you in your new role. We are requesting a meeting with you to discuss how to bring a resolution to this long-standing issue and make a lasting impact for wildlife and recreation in BC.

In September, the BC government released the Old Growth Strategic Review and made a commitment to defer logging in nine areas. Skagit-Silverdaisy was among these with an area of 5,745 ha. This is terrific and encouraging news, and we are eager to see the protection of these areas be completed.

The undersigned groups are writing to request a meeting to discuss a path forward for the Skagit/Manning Donut Hole which will **provide permanent protection and help you deliver on your mandate set out by Premier Horgan**. We put forward the following recommendations to bring this issue to a swift resolution:

1. Immediately remove the lands within the Donut Hole from the Fraser Timber Supply;
2. Work with the Minister of Environment to designate all Crown lands within the Skagit-Manning Donut Hole as a Recreation Area as an interim protection measure no later than Spring 2021;
3. Work with the Minister of Mines to retire Imperial Metals' claims within the Donut Hole;
4. Work with the Minister of Environment to create a protected area designation in full collaboration and consultation with First Nations who have a right and responsibility to the area.

Our group stands ready to assist you and your team to bring lasting protection to the remarkable Skagit/Manning Donut Hole, including Silverdaisy and 26 Mile Valley. We have included a backgrounder on the issue at the end of this letter.

We would like to meet with and would be more than happy to discuss this further in a meeting.

Yours sincerely,

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Louise Pederson, Outdoor Recreation Council of BC

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John Thornton, BC Wildlife Federation

Mark Worthing, Sierra Club BC

Background:

The designation of the Skagit drainage has been in process since 1968 when Seattle City Light proposed to flood the Skagit Valley. The province negotiated protection of the Skagit Valley by way of the Skagit River Treaty in 1983, which designated most of the lands along the Skagit River as a Recreation Area to be managed by BC Parks. This decision was supplemented by the creation of the adjacent Cascade Recreation Area in 1986.

BC Parks proceeded with their planning process, and in 1995 created the Class A Skagit Valley Park and adjusted the western boundary of Manning Park to exclude those mining claims within the park. The decision was then made that those lands formerly within the Recreation Area or Manning Park, but not included in the Skagit Valley park, would revert to Crown land status and thus within the Fraser Timber Supply Area. As this area was now entirely surrounded by protected areas it became known colloquially as the “Donut Hole”.



This change resulted in BC Timber Sales auctioning cutting blocks in the Donut Hole, logging began in 2018. However the Skagit Treaty had established the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission (SEEC), jointly funded by BC and the City of Seattle, which had been given a very green mandate. The logging was considered by SEEC and the signatory groups to be in conflict with that mandate, and hence a breach of the Treaty.

At a meeting with representatives of the Alliance in 2019, the Minister of Forests at the time, Hon. Doug Donaldson, advised that there would be no more timber sales in the Donut Hole. Following this, the Forest and Environment Ministers [publicly announced](#) an ending to the logging in the Silverdaisy (the Donut Hole) which was widely celebrated.

The Alliance is appreciative of the 2019 decision and we welcome the recommendations made in the Old Growth Strategic Review which identified Skagit-Silver Daisy (Donut Hole) as a priority area for protection.

END OF EMAIL

For follow up:

We ask therefore that representatives of the Alliance be given the opportunity to meet with you and Minister Heyman to clarify the intent of your government with regard to future land use status of the Donut Hole lands. We have the following specific questions for consideration:

- Given Minister Donaldson's assurance that logging in the Donut Hole will stop, will you honour that assurance and exclude the Donut Hole lands from the Fraser Timber Supply Area?
- Your government identified the Skagit-Silverdaisy (Donut Hole lands) as "deferred from logging" when it released the Old Growth Strategic Review. We note that it is in your mandate to implement the recommendations of the Review. Does "deferred" mean exclusion of mining exploration, or other activity, in the area pending a final decision on forest and land status? What degree of protection will be granted by the deferred status?
- The long term future of such deferred old growth forests has not yet been made clear. Is it your government's intent to fold them into the park system or keep them under management by FLNRO? It is the opinion of the Alliance that they should be incorporated in the park system as the main purpose is to retain biodiversity which is a prime mandate for BC Parks.
- A lead item in your mandate is moving to reconciliation with First Nations, and this is emphasised further with regard to the item on Implementation of the Old Growth Strategic Review. How will you approach this task with regard to the Donut Hole lands? The Alliance is strongly in support of moving to a form of protected status for the Donut Hole lands that has the approval of the regional First Nations. Will you be considering this together with Minister Heyman?

- Given that Imperial Metal's Giant Copper claims lie within the old growth deferred area, will your government be initiating any further action to achieve a settlement with Imperial on return of their claims to the Crown? The Alliance believes such action would go far in bringing an end to disputes over the Donut Hole lands.