



Recommendations for BC's 2027 Budget Consultation

Presentation Date and Time: Monday, June 15, 2026, 10:20 - 10:30 am

Location: Kelowna, BC, Coast Capri Hotel

Good afternoon, Chair and Committee members

My name is Sam Foster, and I am the Education and Communications Director at Exposed Wildlife Conservancy.

We'd like to start by recognizing the Province's continued commitment to safer communities, responsible resource development, and environmental stewardship. Our recommendations today are intended to support these priorities while delivering practical benefits for British Columbians, particularly those living and working in rural, remote communities.

At their core, our recommendations focus on a simple principle:

The most cost-effective public safety and conservation investments are the ones that prevent problems before they arise.

Our first recommendation is to increase funding for BC's Conservation Officer Service

Increased investment in the COS represents a practical extension of the province's commitment to safer communities.

Conservation Officers are the frontline responders for human-wildlife conflict and public safety threats. Their work protects both people and wildlife, often preventing situations from escalating and reducing unnecessary wildlife mortality. However, growing demands and large, often remote service areas are placing increasing pressure on already limited resources.

Increased funding for staffing, operational support, and essential equipment is needed to ensure officers can respond effectively.

This investment becomes even more important as major projects advance under the Province's Look West strategy. New worker camps, industrial sites, and expanding infrastructure will create additional areas of human-wildlife interaction across rural BC. Ensuring the COS has the capacity to respond proactively will help support both public safety and responsible development.

We'd like to acknowledge the Province's recent investment in a Wildlife Safety Response Officer position in Ucluelet, a community that ranked highest in BC for bears destroyed as a result of human-wildlife conflicts last year. This is exactly the kind of targeted, effective investment that makes a difference: We encourage the Province to build on this success by expanding similar positions to other high-conflict regions across BC.

Our second recommendation is to increase funding for WildSafeBC and Bear Smart programs.

If there is one message we consistently hear from communities, it is that people want practical solutions that help them coexist with wildlife safely.

WildSafeBC and Bear Smart provide exactly that.

Investments in education and prevention often deliver returns far beyond their initial cost.

By equipping residents with practical tools to secure attractants and reduce risk, these programs address the root causes of human-wildlife conflict and help redirect public resources from reactive responses toward proactive community safety and stewardship; a better outcome for both people and wildlife.

Just as importantly, these programs help build public trust by giving communities the tools they need to participate in solutions.

As BC continues to attract investment, prevention-based coexistence programs also help demonstrate that economic growth and environmental responsibility are being advanced together.

One of the most important lessons we have learned through our work is that protecting communities and protecting wildlife are not opposing goals.

Strong stewardship is increasingly viewed as a competitive advantage. Programs such as these allow the province to showcase that commitment in practical, measurable ways.

Our third recommendation is to invest in Natural Resource Officers.

As development, recreation, and resource activity continue to expand across BC, stewardship and oversight must keep pace.

NROs play an important role in monitoring compliance to ensure environmental commitments are met and regulations are followed. Their work also supports the Province's biodiversity objectives while helping protect the healthy landscapes that support tourism, recreation, wildlife viewing, and local economies.

Strong oversight creates credibility, providing confidence that development is occurring responsibly. Importantly, it reduces the risk of deferring costs onto future budgets in the form of litigation, restoration, and reputational damage.

Together, these investments help create a future where communities are safer, development is more sustainable, and wildlife conservation remains a source of pride for our province.

A stronger Conservation Officer Service improves public safety and community resilience.

Expanded support for WildSafeBC and Bear Smart programs reduces costs through prevention.

And increased Natural Resource Officer capacity helps ensure responsible fast-tracked development while protecting the natural assets that British Columbians depend on.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of these recommendations. I look forward to any questions you may have.