

Nature Wise, August 2016

For the life of me I can't understand why Christie Clark's government is dragging its feet on the proposed South Okanagan Similkameen National Park. Oh, don't get me wrong, I think I know why she's doing it, I just don't understand it. We, the citizens of BC, are missing a once in a lifetime opportunity to preserve an important piece of essential and endangered habitat for future generations. I have heard from sources well placed in the government that the intention is to eventually okay a small national park in two separate pieces separated by a large land tract centred on Mt Kobau which would be designated a Provincial conservancy. Conservancy status is lower than Class A park status in the Provincial hierarchy and allows some industrial development as well as various commercial operations. The blame for this downgrading of the Mt Kobau area and its exclusion from any National Park can be laid squarely on the shoulders of MLA Linda Larson. MLA's who support the larger National Park concept seem to be afraid to do or say anything because it's "Linda's area". And we all know (because she said so) that Linda prefers cows to tourists.

Some people, including Linda Larson and Premier Clark, might say well what is wrong with the land remaining under the jurisdiction of the Province if it is just as well protected? Well, the problem is that even if the land were designated a Class A Park it would not be as well protected as it would as a National Park. The BC parks system is one of the most poorly funded systems in our region of North America. In 1991/92 the Parks budget was \$40 million; since then the amount of land in the parks system has more than doubled and the number of visitors using our parks has increased substantially but the annual budget is now just \$31 million – a decrease of over 20%. The number of full time Park Rangers looking after this vast territory and millions of visitors has gone from 27 in 2001 to only 7 in 2016. Imagine – seven rangers to look after an area larger than Denmark, Costa Rica and Switzerland combined! Compare this to WA State who employs 152 full time year round rangers. Now consider this: BC Parks spends \$2.21 per hectare of parkland; Alberta Parks spends \$26.27 per hectare and Parks Canada spends \$33.72 per hectare. WA State spends \$1515.00 per hectare on their park system. When I calculated that number from the WA State Park website I couldn't believe it so I called their budget office and the budget manager confirmed that their budget confirmed the numbers. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to see that BC is woefully underfunded. To be fair, Christy Clark might argue that BC has a much larger land base than those other jurisdictions and we have many hectares of wilderness park which require little expenditure. That is probably a reasonable comment but if we even eliminate two-thirds of our park system as wilderness requiring little (not none, but little) expenditure we still are so far behind the other jurisdictions that the situation borders on insanity.

Recently Premier Clark was interviewed on Global News and a few of the questions were about the proposed National Park. She was not at all forthcoming in answering the questions and in a few cases might be accused of lying (except of course politicians don't lie, they are misquoted or they bend the truth). Two of her mistruths involve support for the park. She said locals don't support the park which is not at all shown by the two scientific professional surveys that have been carried out in the South Okanagan – Similkameen and she said that there are conflicting polls regarding support. Unless the Government has carried out a secret poll which they haven't released, there have only been two professional scientific polls carried out and both of those show overwhelming local support for the park. The third mistruth that we know about is that Premier Clark said that MLA Linda Larson and the BC Environment Minister are currently holding talks with the Federal Government. If that is so, there is no one who knows about it.

Perhaps as Rick Weber suggested on Global News in the interview, one of Premier Clark's legacies will be that she will go down as the one who "kaiboshed the National Park for southern BC".