

District of Oak Bay
AVICC Backgrounder and Resolution

RE: Resolution Requesting the Province of British Columbia to Implement a Moratorium on Recreational Wolf Hunting on Vancouver Island, Pending Scientific Study

In March 2020, Stqéyəʔ, the famous lone wolf who made his home on Discovery and Chatham Islands for approximately eight years, was legally shot and killed by a recreational hunter near Shawnigan Lake on Vancouver Island. The lone wolf had suddenly left Discovery and Chatham Islands and found his way into an urban neighbourhood in Victoria. He was eventually captured by provincial conservation officers and released to Vancouver Island's west coast, to an undisclosed location.¹

In life and in death, he captured the interest, imagination and hearts of thousands of people locally, nationally and around the world. Among those most deeply touched by his presence were Chief Ron Sam and members of the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees) Nation, given the wolf's spiritual and cultural significance to them and to the memory of a deceased Chief.

His story also inspired renowned conservationist Jane Goodall, PhD, DBE (founder of the Jane Goodall Institute and UN Messenger of Peace), who learned about the wolf through the work of local filmmaker and author Cheryl Alexander. As a Saanich resident who spent years documenting the wolf's life on the two small islands situated not far from her home, Ms. Alexander wrote a book and produced a film, both of which have received national and international recognition and acclaim.

Ms. Alexander's book and film also inspired a local family who have since commissioned Vancouver Island sculptor Kent Laforme to create an art piece that would honour and memorialize Stqéyəʔ.

After extensive community consultation, facilitated in part by the Municipality of Oak Bay through its Arts Alive public art program, a permanent location for the sculpture was identified. Situated on the traditional territory of the Coast and Strait Salish Peoples, specifically the Ləkʷəŋən-speaking peoples, known today as the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations, the setting at Cattle Point was considered ideal and overlooks the southern waters of the Salish Sea, within sight of the two small islands where Stqéyəʔ made his home,

The death of Stqéyə? from recreational hunting prompted local and international media attention and created a public outcry, including from individuals and organizations dedicated to responsible wildlife stewardship and conservation. Reactions of sadness and outrage were swift, citing what many believed was a senseless killing.

The nature of this wolf's death shines a light on the public's concerns about current recreational wolf hunting practices in British Columbia, where wolf populations are subject to unrestricted recreational hunting, despite the fact that there appears to be limited available scientific analysis and evidence-based tracking data. Relying heavily on anecdotal and hunter survey information about wolf population size and sustainability of current harvesting levels, especially at the regional level, the Province has not undertaken a re-examination of the scientific and ecological impacts of recreational hunting.

Wolves, identified as “apex predators,” reportedly control populations of other species such as deer, preventing the overgrazing and destruction of plants that provide habitat for other smaller wildlife such as birds, beavers, marmots and mice.² Without a robust and methodical scientific study of the eco-system impacts of removing or decreasing the wolf population, we cannot know with certainty what adverse ecological effects could be occurring.

While government reports state that the wolf population in B.C. is “stable to increasing,” they also note that existing population estimates are not precise and are unreliable, particularly at the regional level.³ For example, Southern Vancouver Island is considered to be a “low-density wolf area,” but this assessment is based on data from Banff and Jasper National Parks in Alberta, also considered to be low-density wolf areas.⁴ In a 2018 statement, the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development estimated that there are around 250 wolves on Vancouver Island, although the statement also noted that no scientific inventories have been conducted to monitor this population.⁵

According to the 2014 B.C. Grey Wolf Management Plan, “There is considerable uncertainty in the current take (harvest) of wolves by recreational hunters and trappers, as B.C. does not have a mandatory reporting system... [and] without more reliable estimates of harvesting, it is difficult to assess the sustainability of B.C.'s wolf harvest.”

The Municipality of Oak Bay is honoured to have been chosen as the host community to a moving, commemorative art piece that memorializes Stqéyə?'s life but also reminds us of his death, the result of recreational hunting. As host community, we are also aware that the controversy about the death of this wolf has galvanized public opinion, which may

result in one of Stq'éya?ʔ's greatest legacies, the development of more rigorous wolf management practices and species stewardship and conservation.

The Municipality, therefore, requests of the Provincial Government, namely the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, to establish a moratorium on recreational wolf hunting, pending the completion of a more complex and complete scientific, data-driven study, including consultation with Indigenous communities, to re-examine the interdependent relationship between our coastal wolf population and eco-systems, natural habitats and wildlife ecology.

Citations:

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