

“A BUSINESS PROPOSITION”:

Naturalists, Guides, and Sportsmen in the Formation of the Bowron Lakes Game Reserve

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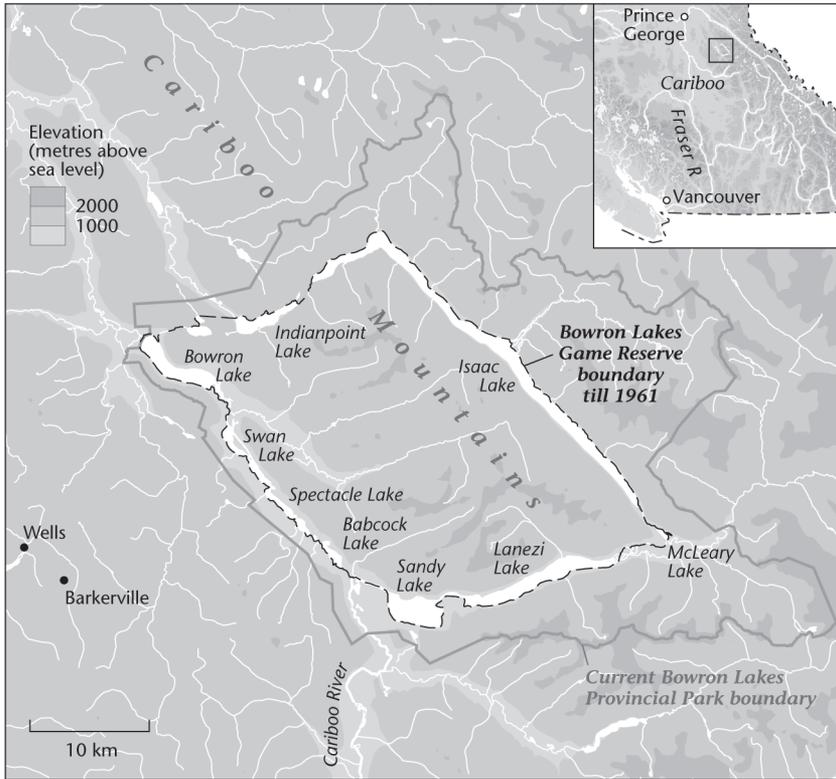
IN 1900, FRANK KIBBEE SETTLED at Bowron Lake (then called “Bear Lake”), the first in a chain of lakes that loops through the sparsely populated Cariboo Mountain region of central British Columbia.¹ Described as a “veteran frontiersman” by family friend and newspaperman Louis LeBourdais, Kibbee epitomized a backwoods lifestyle. Over the next few years he worked a series of traplines before becoming a guide for tourists and sport hunters on the lakes, bringing attention to the Bowron as a wilderness destination. He gained widespread notoriety for fending off the repeated attacks of a wounded grizzly bear in 1912 while guiding a hunting expedition. The event, which left Kibbee’s head and face permanently marked by the grizzly’s teeth, was, and continues to be, widely celebrated as an example of Kibbee’s wilderness acumen. In 1926, known as an accomplished woodsman, he became game warden for the newly created Bowron Lakes Game Reserve on the land he had been traversing for years.²

Prior to Kibbee’s arrival and the arrival of others like him, game legislation had little relevance to the Bowron, which was a hinterland to the nearby gold-rush boom town of Barkerville. Along with Kibbee, interested government officials, local naturalists, other wilderness guides, and visiting sportsmen all contributed to transforming the Bowron into a wilderness destination. Their efforts culminated in the creation of the Bowron Lakes Game Reserve in 1925. Uniting those interested in the

* This article originated from graduate work completed at the University of Northern British Columbia under the supervision of Theodore Binnema. It stems from research conducted for the author’s recently completed master’s thesis entitled “‘It Happened to Me in Barkerville’: Aboriginal Identity, Economy, and Law in the Cariboo Gold Rush, 1862-1900” (Prince George: University of Northern British Columbia, 2012).

¹ Louis LeBourdais, “Kibbee Comes to Cariboo,” British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), LeBourdais Papers, box 7, file 13, 1933.

² Louis LeBourdais to the *Daily Province*, Quesnel, 3 September 1940.



Bowron Lakes Game Reserve in the Cariboo region of British Columbia. Cartography by Eric Leinberger.

Bowron region was a belief in the necessity of government intervention in the propagation of game as a resource for human benefit. The dialogue surrounding the Bowron Lakes Game Reserve serves as a case study to demonstrate that the conservation of game as a resource, rather than the preservation of the wilderness for its own sake, motivated British Columbia's environmental policy in the early twentieth century.

THE CONTEXT OF THE BOWRON LAKES GAME RESERVE: ENVIRONMENTAL IDEOLOGY IN EARLY TWENTIETH- CENTURY BRITISH COLUMBIA

In 1931, provincial game warden Arthur Bryan Williams expressed astonishment that: "In these enlightened times there are still people who do not realize that our wild life is a business proposition and not

just a sportsman's hobby." Furthermore, industrial prosperity in British Columbia depended in part on the existence of game, and therefore "conservation ... [was] a vital necessity."³ The economic argument was one that Williams used frequently throughout his tenure as provincial game warden in order to acquire government support and resources.⁴ Such statements reflect the wider context of environmental ideology as it existed in British Columbia in this era.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conservation was the dominant ethos in North American environmental policy.⁵ In the conservationist way of viewing the environment, game and natural scenery were resources that should be used to benefit citizens. As Williams's American contemporary, government forester, and leading conservationist Gifford Pinchot put it, conservation was "the greatest good to the greatest number of people for the longest time."⁶

Some influential British Columbians visited American parks and reserves and drew openly on their ideas.⁷ Bryan Williams occasionally drew on American examples to reinforce his ideas about game conservation in British Columbia. For example, in his first report in 1905 he directly compared British Columbia's revenue from fish and game to that garnered in several American states, and he used their financial success to argue that game was a valuable asset to the province.⁸ Similarly, in his 1931 report Williams pointed out that "the people of the United States are very much alive to the value of their wild life" as a way of suggesting that British Columbia should place a similar value on game.⁹ The first superintendent of Strathcona Provincial Park, American engineer Reginald

³ British Columbia, *Province of British Columbia Department of Attorney General Report of Provincial Game Commissioner for the Year Ended December 31st, 1931* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1932), 6.

⁴ Williams was not alone. Paula Young notes that Strathcona's superintendent Reginald Thomson used the same strategy during postwar cutbacks. See Paula Young, "Creating a 'Natural Asset': British Columbia's First Park, Strathcona, 1905-16," *BC Studies* 170 (2011): 39.

⁵ See Leslie Bella, *Parks for Profit* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1987); Samuel Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959); Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006).

⁶ Carolyn Merchant, "Conservation and Preservation, 1785-1950," in *The Columbia Guide to American Environmental History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 136.

⁷ For example, members of British Columbia's Royal Commission on Timber and Forestry attended the United States National Congress on Conservation and Natural Resources held in Seattle in August 1909 and travelled to eastern Canada as well. See Peter Gillis and Thomas Roach, "A Touch of Pinchotism: Forestry in British Columbia, 1912-1939," in *A History of British Columbia: Selected Readings*, ed. Patricia E. Roy (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1989), 85.

⁸ British Columbia, *First Report of the Provincial Game and Forest Warden of the Province of British Columbia, 1905* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1906), 7.

⁹ British Columbia, *Report of Provincial Game Commissioner, 1931*, 7.

Thompson, naturally was strongly influenced by American parks and had visited Yellowstone in 1913 as part of his duties.¹⁰ Likewise, those who advocated the creation of the Bowron Reserve in the early 1920s used Yellowstone as an example of how game could be managed inside the protected areas for sport hunting outside of them.¹¹

Although conservation tended to dominate government policy towards the environment, not everyone subscribed wholeheartedly to this ethos. For example, preservation, the belief in “the maintenance of wilderness as wilderness,” was popular in the United States and Canada.¹² John Muir, the American who spearheaded preservationism and is often juxtaposed with conservationist Gifford Pinchot, had been busy promoting the preservation of the American wilderness through the establishment of national parks at Yellowstone (1872) and Yosemite (1890). In Canada, the preservationist impulse led to the creation of national parks at Banff (1885), Yoho (1886), and Glacier (1886) as well as to the formation, in 1911, of the world’s first national parks service.¹³ In an effort to maintain wilderness as wilderness, preservationists were concerned about the influence of human encroachment and development on wild areas and saw parks as a way of preserving animals and habitat undisturbed.¹⁴ This was subtly different from the efforts of conservationists who were also interested in protecting game numbers but saw the maintenance of wilderness as part of development rather than as separate from it and as a route to profit through the promotion of tourism and sport hunting.¹⁵

It is easy, in retrospect, to place conservation and preservation in opposition to each other and to extend this dichotomy over environmental thinkers and policy-makers in British Columbia. In reality, conservation and preservation frequently coexisted or were combined with other

¹⁰ William Wilson, “Reginald H. Thomson and Planning for Strathcona Park, 1912–15,” *Planning Perspectives* 17 (2002): 380.

¹¹ Richard Wright, *Bowron Lake Provincial Park: The Only All Season’s Guide to North America’s Unique Canoe Route* (Surrey: Heritage House, 1994), 23.

¹² Char Millar, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism* (Washington: Island Press, 2001), 4.

¹³ See Claire Campbell, *A Century of Parks Canada, 1911–2011* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2011).

¹⁴ Miller, *Gifford Pinchot*, 4.

¹⁵ Conservationists saw parks and reserves as a way to protect resources for future use and, therefore, were not averse to later resource extraction or use for the benefit of citizens. For an understanding of how these different environmental ideologies played out in the United States in the early twentieth century, see, for example, the literature on the Hetch Hetchy Dam. See Robert Righter, *The Battle over Hetch Hetchy: America’s Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Kendrick A. Clements, “Politics and the Park: San Francisco’s Fight for Hetch Hetchy, 1908–1913,” *Pacific Historical Quarterly* 48, 2 (1979): 185–215.

notions of environmental management imported from Britain and elsewhere.¹⁶ Bryan Williams provides a poignant example. Little has been written on Williams, who was originally from Ireland but who immigrated to British Columbia in 1888 to pursue a life outdoors. He was managing a hydraulic mining company in 1905 when he was appointed game and forest warden, a position he held (with a few interruptions) until 1934.¹⁷ During these years Williams was also an avid big game hunter and guide. He deeply loved British Columbia's wilderness and wrote glowingly of it both in his official game reports and in his later books. Summing up his feelings in his 1926 *Game Trails in British Columbia*, he wrote: "Here you will find the finest country on the earth's surface, a splendid climate, a land of promise, of freedom and beauty, where you can wander at will, where you can forget all your sorrows, escape from the trials, tribulations and conventions of civilized life and revel to your heart's content in the exquisite wonders that the Almighty has created for our pleasure."¹⁸

Although Williams had sentimental and aesthetic reasons for wanting to preserve the province's game, he used these in conjunction with practical and economical ones when arguing for reserve creation, increased game protection, or changes to legislation.¹⁹ He knew that an economic argument had more traction both with the provincial government and the general population. Yet sentimental and economic values were not, for Williams, in opposition to each other when it came to game conservation. For example, in 1931, he cited the financial benefits of game conservation while also asserting: "Everybody should realize that wild life is a heritage, not for this generation alone, but for those who come after us, and we have a great responsibility to keep that heritage unimpaired."²⁰ His background suggests that he was probably familiar with Irish and British game laws, including notions of game-keeping

¹⁶ Paula Young touches on this unique brand of environmental ethos as it applied to the Ellison expedition, which explored Strathcona Park in 1910. See Young, "Creating a 'Natural Asset,'" 26-28.

¹⁷ G.W. Lister, "The History of the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service: 100 Years of Integrity, Service and Protection," *International Game Warden Magazine*, summer 2005, available at <http://www.moosecop.net/History/>.

¹⁸ A. Bryan Williams, *Game Trails in British Columbia: Big Game and Other Sport in the Wilds of British Columbia* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), 355. Williams's reference to the "Almighty" is an example of natural theology. See Carl Berger, *Science, God and Nature in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

¹⁹ British Columbia, *Report of the Provincial Game and Forest Warden*, 1905, 7.

²⁰ British Columbia, *Report of Provincial Game Commissioner*, 1931, 6.



Figure 1. Henry Bell-Irving (left) and Arthur Bryan Williams (right) about to start on a moose hunt in the Cassiar District, British Columbia, circa 1930. Image AM551 1977-213.5 courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives.

and the conservationist principles that informed them.²¹ Likewise, his careers in the mining and guiding industries suggest receptivity to the idea of what he termed “business propositions” existing in conjunction with wildlife conservation. His outlook as an Anglo-Irish sportsman and businessman in British Columbia seems to have dovetailed with the mainstream North American environmental principles held by many of his contemporaries. For Williams, an aesthetic appreciation for the wilderness was compatible with the utilitarian and interventionist policies that were part of his role as game warden.²²

Journalist Louis LeBourdais provides a more local example. LeBourdais worried in 1935 that game was depleted and threatened at Bowron Lake due to the encroachment of civilization. He articulated this as the need for a reserve:

In the last twenty-five years, hundreds of moose, scores of Caribou and bear, both grizzly and black, have been killed; scarcely a dozen marten

²¹ For example, see Robert Longfield Esq., *The Game Laws of Ireland* (Dublin: E. Ponsonby, 1864).

²² His interventionist measures included breeding pheasants, importing game species, and relocating beaver from places like Bowron to beaver-poor areas. See Williams, *Game Trails in British Columbia*, 343; British Columbia, *Province of British Columbia Department of Attorney General Report of Provincial Game Commission for the Year Ended December 31st, 1939* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1940), 24.

are left in the same area where there were literally thousands ... while the beaver and other fur-bearing animals were also disappearing fast. The hunters travelled by canoe, in comfort, and the stalking of game was easy. The frozen surface of the lakes and streams in winter, made light work for the trapper and his dog team.²³

He went on to say: "Five years more would have been too late, in the opinion of many; no wild game or fur-bearing animals would have been left once the highway to the coast was open and the place well advertised outside."²⁴ Yet LeBourdais concluded that the dangers of development were not perhaps critical, and he predicted that game would soon "increase beyond the saturation point." For LeBourdais, the purpose of the reserve was to provide hunters and trappers with game. Once the reserve filled up with game: "The surplus will move out into the trappable or open country, and the trapper and the big game hunter may then have reason to be grateful for what he now perhaps considers an imposition."²⁵ LeBourdais's initial concerns about the impact of hunting and trapping on the Bowron wilderness were assuaged by the knowledge that the game department was acting to ensure that hunters and trappers would be able to continue to hunt and trap well into the future.

Environmental thought in British Columbia encompassed a wide combination of ideas, including preservation and conservation; however, conservationist or utilitarian principles tended to motivate actual management, legislation, and reserve and park creation.²⁶ Although provincial parks had a different intellectual origin than game reserves, scholarly research on the province's earliest parks is useful for understanding early twentieth-century attitudes towards the environment. Comparatively, provincial parks tend to be better researched than game reserves.²⁷ Tellingly, like game reserves, early provincial parks were usually seen as resources to be exploited rather than as locations

²³ Louis LeBourdais, "Bear Lake," Bowron Lakes, BCA, LeBourdais Papers, box 3, file 2, p. 1.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ For example, in Osoyoos a debate raged between the preservationist H.J. Parham and museum collectors led by Hamilton Laing. See H.J. Parham, *A Nature Lover in British Columbia* (London: H.F. and G. Witherby Ltd., 1937); and Richard Mackie, *Hamilton Mack Laing: Hunter-Naturalist* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1985), 85-86. A similar debate occurred in Comox, where Hamilton Laing and Allan Brooks successfully opposed ornithologist Theed Pearse's proposal to turn Comox Bay into a bird sanctuary. See Mackie, *Hamilton Laing*, 148.

²⁷ Notably, *BC Studies* 170 (2011) was devoted to this topic.

for wilderness preservation.²⁸ British Columbia's first provincial park, Strathcona, formed in 1911, is a case in point. Historian Paula Young notes that the province's "natural resource reservoir" was widely seen as "a potentially profitable arena for the investment of outside capital" and that "tourism promoters in British Columbia commodified scenery and used the language of economics to argue for the creation of a provincial park."²⁹ Such language reflects an ideology similar to that of game reserves, where the environment was seen as a resource for development and profit rather than as an entity to be preserved for its own sake. Strathcona's first superintendent, Reginald Thomson, also struggled to impose a preservationist ethos in a setting more inclined to conservationist practices. "British Columbia was not hospitable to wildlife preservation during the teens of the twentieth century," notes historian William Wilson.³⁰ Strongly influenced by preservationist American park policy, Thomson expressed considerable anxiety over unregulated trapping and subsistence hunting, despite the fact that others felt that there was no evidence of these activities "being serious obstructions to the growth of park wildlife."³¹

This utilitarian attitude towards British Columbia's wilderness can be traced back to the beginning of game legislation in the province. Measures for protecting game were established in British Columbia in 1859, when the Colonial Legislature of Vancouver Island passed a "Bill for the Preservation of Game at certain seasons of the year."³² Although Vancouver Island's laws were extended to the joint Colony of British Columbia in 1866, early legislation did not have an immediate or widespread effect. Many British Columbians, including lawmakers, had little enthusiasm for game protection because they perceived British Columbia's wilderness as unlimited and preferred it relatively unregulated.³³

In 1905, when newly appointed Arthur Bryan Williams wrote his first report as provincial game and forest warden, he expressed frustration

²⁸ Historians of Canada's National Parks have reached a similar conclusion. For example, see Robert Craig-Brown, "The Doctrine of Usefulness: Natural Resource and National Park Policy in Canada 1887-1914," in *Canadian Parks in Perspective*, ed. J.G. Nelson (Montreal: Harvest House, 1970), 54-55; Bella, *Parks for Profit*; and Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*.

²⁹ Young, "Creating a 'Natural Asset,'" 17-18.

³⁰ Wilson, "Reginald H. Thomson," 383.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 381-82.

³² James E. Hendrickson, ed., *Journals of the Colonial Legislatures of the Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia 1851-1871*, vol. 1, *Journals of the Council, Executive Council, and Legislative Council of Vancouver Island, 1851-1866* (Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1980), 26.

³³ Williams, *Game Trails in British Columbia*, 342.

at the fact that “there ha[d] been a great tendency on the part of the Magistrates throughout the Province to show excessive leniency towards those brought before them for infringements of the Game Laws.”³⁴ In *Game Trails in British Columbia* Williams stated that many in positions of power believed “that the government did not have money to throw away on such foolishness.”³⁵ With few legislative tools, a relatively uninterested public, and little funding for game protection, his job was initially very difficult. “My earliest attempts at game protection were dis-heartening,” he later reflected.³⁶ With no money for salaried employees, Williams travelled the province to prosecute Game Protection Act violators on his own “whenever [he] could lay hands on them.”³⁷ This interference was bitterly resented, and, according to Williams: “The consequence was that I was frequently subjected to considerable abuse, threats of violence, occasional actual attempts at violence, and sometimes to practical jokes.”³⁸

Williams therefore tended to make his arguments for increased game legislation in economic terms. For example, in 1905 he argued that increasing game numbers would mean “enough [game] to spare to induce numerous tourists to come into the country and put large sums of money in circulation.”³⁹ His efforts eventually paid off, and the power to create game reserves appeared in a 1908 amendment to the Game Protection Act, which gave the game department an added mechanism for managing and supervising the province’s game and those who pursued it.⁴⁰ For Williams, the introduction of firearms licences in 1913 was another important turning point for it gave the department increased control of hunters and demonstrated to him a change in popular and government opinion towards the province’s wild resources.⁴¹ He wrote in *Game Trails* that, just before the First World War, “pheasant breeding was begun, a number of wapiti were purchased and kept in parks, so that the surplus

³⁴ British Columbia, *First Report of the Provincial Game and Forest Warden of the Province of British Columbia, 1905* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1906), 5.

³⁵ Williams, *Game Trails in British Columbia*, 342.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 341.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 345.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ British Columbia, *Report of the Provincial Game and Forest Warden 1905*, 6.

⁴⁰ “An Act to Amend the Game Protection Act, 1898,” *British Columbia Statutes*, 1908, c. 18, s. 4, p. 114. Williams did manage to create the “Yalakom Reserve” in 1907, prior to legislation allowing for the creation of game reserves, through an Order in Council, which declared a closed season for all animals and birds for a period of ten years in the Yalakom Mountains. See British Columbia, *Third Report of the Provincial Game and Forest Warden of the Province of British Columbia, 1907* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1908), 15.

⁴¹ Williams, *Game Trails in British Columbia*, 345.

stock could be turned out in areas where this species of game had formerly flourished.” Furthermore, “even a few red deer were imported from New Zealand to form the nucleus of a herd that was to be used to stock one or two of the larger islands on the coast.”⁴² Such actions are indicative of an outlook distinctly uninterested in preservation of wilderness in an untouched state. Unfortunately for Williams, shortly after these initial triumphs the financial pressures of the outbreak of war took priority over the needs of the game department.⁴³

In 1918, under new Liberal premier John Oliver, the Game Protection Act was amended to abolish the old game department, to create the Game Conservation Board, and to make the British Columbia Provincial Police responsible for the act’s enforcement.⁴⁴ The Game Conservation Board consisted of five members (later increased to seven) and was responsible for looking after British Columbia’s game laws through recommendations made to the attorney general until the board was abolished in 1929.⁴⁵ The board’s 1920 report expressed a commitment to “the control of the Game Reserves, already established,” and to the maintenance of measures for protecting game and destroying predators on said reserves.⁴⁶ The preservationist ethos was not part of its stated mandate, and animal depletion was not a concern. In fact, the board remarked frequently on the large number of game abounding in the province. In 1920, according to A.R. Baker, the board’s chairman: “A glance at the list of guides ... will remove any impression that big game in this Province is on the decrease, or that hunters have any difficulty in obtaining such trophies as the bag limits allow.”⁴⁷

The Game Conservation Board was responsible for the management of game as a resource through the administration of the Game Protection Act. Part of its mandate was “the encouragement of the propagation of game, the establishment of fur farms, and the taking of animals and birds for scientific purposes where damage [was] being done to agricultural or other interests.” This meant “the power to grant permission for their

⁴² Ibid., 343.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Lynne Stonier-Newman, *Policing a Pioneer Province: The BC Provincial Police, 1858-1950* (Madeira Park: Harbour, 1991), 123.

⁴⁵ British Columbia, *Annual Report of the Game Conservation Board of the Province of British Columbia, 1920* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1921), 5; British Columbia, *Province of British Columbia Department of Attorney General Report of the Provincial Game Commissioner for the Year Ended December 31st, 1929* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1930), 5.

⁴⁶ Nineteen twenty was the only year for which the Game Conservation Board published its own report. Afterwards its report was included in the reports of the provincial game warden. See British Columbia, *Report of the Game Conservation Board, 1920*, 7.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 16.

destruction where the occasion [arose].⁴⁸ In 1920, as it had been for many years, the government was still paying hunters to shoot cougars on Vancouver Island and actively encouraging hunters to lose no opportunity to kill “eagles, big-horned owls, crows, magpies, chicken-hawks, and all vermin detrimental to wildlife.”⁴⁹ In 1928, during a particularly harsh winter, the Cariboo regional commissioner put out hay to feed game animals.⁵⁰

New legislation for the registration of traplines in 1925, followed by several modifications to this system throughout the late 1920s, was the next major step for game law in British Columbia.⁵¹ There is evidence that British Columbia was an international leader in trapping regulations. In 1946, American zoologist Carl Eklund praised the BC system: “The registered trap-line system employed in British Columbia . . . for the past 19 years is one of the most effective trapping management practices used in North America.”⁵² He suggested that some of these practices could be applied to American regulations. The game department was aware of its success in this area and others. In 1931, Williams wrote of the department generally: “Unquestionably, in the years to come, if we continue to improve our present system, which is now generally acknowledged to be the finest on the continent, our game will multiply and eventually be our greatest source of wealth.”⁵³ Here Williams explicitly linked the well-being of game resources to the province’s overall financial well-being.

Another indication of the prevalence of the idea that wilderness should be managed for the benefit of the citizens is in the constant mention of economic considerations in the game reports. The state of the department’s finances indicated its effectiveness. In 1922, provincial game warden William McMynn indicated that he was “pleased to be

⁴⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 15. See also Richard Mackie, “Cougars, Colonists, and the Rural Settlement of Vancouver Island,” in *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia*, ed. R.W. Sandwell (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 120-41.

⁵⁰ British Columbia, *Province of British Columbia Department of Attorney General Report of the Provincial Game Warden for the Year Ended December 31st, 1928* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1929), 22.

⁵¹ Carl Eklund, “Fur Resource Management in British Columbia,” *Journal of Wildlife Management* 10, 1 (1946): 29. Eklund asserts that the legislation was not modified after 1926, but, in fact, major modifications occurred in 1926, 1929, and 1935. See “An Act to Amend the ‘Game Protection Act,’” *British Columbia Statutes 1926-27*, ch. 24, pp. 75-78; “An Act to Amend the ‘Game Protection Act,’” *British Columbia Statutes 1929*, ch. 27, pp. 215-19; “An Act to Amend and Consolidate the Enactments for the Protection of certain Animals and Birds,” *British Columbia Statutes, 1935*, ch. 28, pp. 83-117.

⁵² Eklund, “Fur Resource Management,” 29.

⁵³ British Columbia, *Report of Provincial Game Commissioner, 1931*, 7.

able to state that [the] year ha[d] been a very successful one both in respect to revenue and enforcement.” According to his report: “The total amount derived from the sale of game licences and from fees thereunder [amounted] to the sum of \$178,205.39.”⁵⁴ Indeed, the government’s agenda was to “enforce the ‘*Game Act*’ at a minimum cost.”⁵⁵ In 1928, the Liberal government was replaced by the Conservatives under Simon Fraser Tolmie, who reinstated the pre-1918 game department, hired new game wardens, and placed the responsibility for game legislation back under Bryan Williams as provincial game commissioner.⁵⁶ Despite these administrative shifts, the government continued to articulate wilderness and wildlife in terms of their economic value. In 1939, the Game Commission enthusiastically reported that, despite the outbreak of war, the department had brought in \$242,357.53, a new record.⁵⁷

The beginning of the depression era in Canada put increased financial pressure on all branches of the government, including the game department. There was some controversy in 1931 over the suggestion that the game department could cut costs by laying off game wardens or at least only employing them seasonally. Williams had fought hard for salaried game wardens since his appointment in 1905, and he knew that their presence was essential for the success of game law.⁵⁸ Despite a weakened economy, Williams argued: “Any person who gives the matter a moment’s thought should realize their [i.e., game, fish, and scenery] vast commercial importance, [and] that any economy which affects it will prove a very fatal, false economy and that its conservation, cost what it may, is a vital necessity.”⁵⁹ Despite financial pressures and cost-cutting, the department continued to engage in conservation measures. For example, game commissioner Williams was responsible for the relocation of mountain sheep

⁵⁴ British Columbia, *Province of British Columbia Annual Report of the Provincial Game Warden for the year ending December 31st, 1922* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1923), 7.

⁵⁵ British Columbia, *Province of British Columbia Department of Attorney General Report of the Provincial Game Warden for the Year Ended December 31st, 1924* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1925), 5.

⁵⁶ These changes were possibly a cost-saving measure, but they also may have been motivated by pressure from Police Superintendent McMullin, who had been recommending the change for five years. McMullin cited the need for efficiency as police officers were responsible during this time for everything from licensing vehicles to workmen’s compensation to “counting deer.” See Stonier-Newman, *Policing a Pioneer Province*, 162.

⁵⁷ British Columbia, *Report of Provincial Game Commission, 1939*, 9. In 1934, Game Commissioner Bryan Williams retired and was replaced by a commission of three permanent members from the game department: Jas. G. Cunningham, F.R. Butler, and A.G. Bolten. See British Columbia, *Province of British Columbia Department of Attorney General Report of Provincial Game Commission for the Year Ended December 31st, 1934* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1935), 5.

⁵⁸ British Columbia, *Report of the Provincial Game and Forest Warden, 1905*, 5.

⁵⁹ British Columbia, *Report of Provincial Game Commissioner, 1931*, 6.

to the Cariboo game district in 1929.⁶⁰ Furthermore, throughout the 1930s, the Game Commission actively trapped and relocated beaver from the Bowron Lakes Reserve to other parts of the province with great success. Commanding officer of the Cariboo Division, R.M. Robertson, wrote that the “Bowron Lake sanctuary ha[d] been responsible for the supply of beaver to restore and hold the too-rapid dissipation of water supply” in beaver-poor areas.⁶¹ Such actions indicate that the government was not interested in preserving wilderness for wilderness’s sake but, rather, was actively engaged in what it saw as proper management of game as a resource for the benefit of the province.

It is tempting to see the Bowron Lakes Game Reserve as simply a step towards the eventual creation of the Bowron Lakes Provincial Park.⁶² However, the reserve and the park were created in very different intellectual contexts. Bowron Lake Provincial Park was created in 1961 as part of a general postwar expansion of parks, when wilderness was preserved for aesthetic purposes and recreational activity.⁶³ The Bowron Lakes Game Reserve was created in 1925, when conservation dominated as an ethos for environmental management in British Columbia and throughout much of North America. The Bowron Lakes Game Reserve was a product of prevalent cultural ideas about wildlife. The articulation of these ideals among certain groups in British Columbia influenced the way that the reserve took shape. Among other interested individuals, several of the area’s prominent guides, naturalists, and sportsmen articulated their vision of the Bowron Lakes Game Reserve in conservationist terms – as a resource to be managed for provincial profit and development.

CONSERVATION AS A METHOD OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT: NATURALISTS, GUIDES, AND SPORTSMEN ON THE 1925 BOWRON LAKES GAME RESERVE

When the possibility of creating a reserve at Bowron arose in the early 1920s, its advocates argued that “protecting the inner lakes and allowing hunting on the outside of the lakes would provide a sanctuary where

⁶⁰ British Columbia, *Report of the Provincial Game Commissioner, 1929*, 15.

⁶¹ British Columbia, *Report of the Provincial Game Commission, 1939*, 24.

⁶² As does Richard Wright. See Wright, *Bowron Lake Provincial Park*, 25.

⁶³ BC Parks Cariboo District, *Bowron Lake, Cariboo Mountains and Cariboo River Provincial Parks*, Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection (June 2001), 15; Ben Bradley, “One Hundred Years of Struggle: The Ongoing Effort to Establish Provincial Parks and Protected Areas in British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 170 (2011): 7.

animals could breed.⁶⁴ They could then be hunted by sportsmen as they wandered out. Game officials felt similarly, and, in 1923, provincial game warden J.H. McMullin wrote: “There are ... areas ... which I would suggest be laid aside as game reserves, namely: the Bowron Lake quadrangle, particularly suited for moose.” He indicated that the local hunters fully supported the idea and that the government “would have sympathetic cooperation from them if it was thought advisable to close [the reserve] for a certain number of years” to give the game a chance to multiply.⁶⁵ This would be done, however, with the full expectation of opening it again in a few years.

The *Cariboo Observer* reported that most Barkerville residents were initially opposed to the idea on the grounds that a reserve was entirely unnecessary.⁶⁶ For example, prominent miner and entrepreneur Fred Tregillus wrote in 1922 that “the Moose [were] more than holding their own” at Bowron. In fact, “if they thinned out a little more it would benefit the remaining ones.” Moreover, he stated, the interior of the Bowron rectangle was hardly suitable for moose habitat “and [that] it [would] be hard to educate them to the point where they [would go] short of their natural food.” Tregillus asserted that the moose were a recent arrival in the Bowron region and that: “Reserve or no reserve, they will pass on again, and, with time, return.” According to Tregillus, the money spent on maintaining a reserve would be much better spent obtaining a doctor for Barkerville and Wells: “The government is being urged to spend a great many thousands yearly in an attempt to save the lives of moose &c, but next to nothing to save the lives of the people who are holding down this revenue-producing outpost.”⁶⁷

Despite initial opposition by locals like Tregillus, practical and economic concerns favoured the creation of a reserve. The game department’s 1923 report asserted that the land was “not suitable in any way for agricultural purposes.”⁶⁸ Furthermore, the land could be acquired at “very little expense” and should be appropriated “before any influx of

⁶⁴ Wright, *Bowron Lake Provincial Park*, 22–23.

⁶⁵ British Columbia, *Province of British Columbia Department of Attorney General Report of the Provincial Game Warden for the Year Ended December 31st, 1923* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1924), 13.

⁶⁶ Wright, *Bowron Lake Provincial Park*, 23.

⁶⁷ Fred Tregillus to Mr. J.P. Babcock, Quesnel, BC, “Re. Proposed Bowron L. Reserve,” 17 October 1922, Barkerville Museum and Archives, unfiled documents, Tregillus Fonds, *Outdoors Activities*.

⁶⁸ British Columbia, *Province of British Columbia Department of Attorney General Report of the Provincial Game Warden for the Year Ended December 31st, 1923* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1924), 14–15. The idea that areas set aside for wildlife should be otherwise economically “worthless” was not unique to British Columbia. According to Alfred Runte, “[American] national parks ... encompassed only those features considered valueless for lumbering, mining, grazing, or

settlers” who would “embarrass the Government by squatting or trying to pre-empt.” A game reserve, on the other hand, would “attract a certain class” to the area – a class deemed more desirable for development.⁶⁹

In early 1924, Game Inspector W.L. Fernie repeated his request for a reserve at the Bowron Lakes, stating: “All opposition, as far as can be learned, has been withdrawn and the inhabitants are anxious for it being proclaimed.”⁷⁰ In 1925 their wish was granted. Fernie’s report reads: “I think the laying aside of the Bowron Lake[s] Game Reserve has been the cause of general satisfaction.”⁷¹ Indeed, a number of interested and influential voices spoke in favour of the reserve in the years leading up to its creation and continued to espouse its virtues in the years following. Those who supported the reserve based their arguments on practical, utilitarian principles that saw game as a resource to be managed for profit and development.

Naturalists such as Thomas and Elinor McCabe and Allan Brooks articulated these values in their support of the reserve, which they praised for its role in increasing local moose populations. In 1922, the McCabes arrived in the Bowron region and built a large home on Indianpoint Lake, within the future reserve.⁷² The McCabes were American, though Thomas had served in the Canadian Army in the First World War.⁷³ The McCabes are typically described by historians as “enthusiastic naturalists” and were instrumental in advocating for the Bowron Lakes Game Reserve.⁷⁴ They spent their summers at Indianpoint Lake and their winters at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California at Berkeley, where they had an office. They made significant contributions to scientific understandings of British Columbia’s animal life, including the donation of forty-seven hundred specimens to the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University and a number of scholarly publications.⁷⁵ For example, in 1933 they contributed information to an article by Seth Benson entitled “A New Race of Beaver from

agriculture.” See Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 48.

⁶⁹ British Columbia, *Report of the Provincial Game Warden*, 1923, 14-15.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1924, 16.

⁷¹ British Columbia, *Province of British Columbia Department of Attorney General Report of the Provincial Game Warden for the Year Ended December 31st, 1925* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1926), 16.

⁷² Chris and Jenny Harris, *The Bowron Lakes: British Columbia’s Wilderness Canoe Circuit* (Vancouver: Gordon Soules, 1991), 86.

⁷³ R.W. Campbell, Neil Dawe, Ian McTaggart-Cowan, John M. Cooper, Gary Kaiser, and Michael C.E. McNall, *The Birds of British Columbia*, vol. 1, *Introduction and Loons through Waterfowl* (Victoria: Royal British Columbia Museum, 1990), 26-27.

⁷⁴ Wright, *Bowron Lake Provincial Park*, 22.

⁷⁵ Campbell et al., *Birds of British Columbia*, 26-27.

British Columbia,” a topic that had considerable importance for the game department, which had been live-trapping and relocating beaver from the Bowron Reserve since 1931.⁷⁶ The McCabes measured the animals, weighed and described them, and included charts and diagrams about beaver populations in the province.

In 1928, the McCabes published “The Bowron Lake Moose” in *The Murrelet*. In this article they praised “enlightened game legislation” for its ability to “remove the artificial checks” on moose populations in British Columbia, allowing them to populate the Cariboo.⁷⁷ These “artificial checks” included human (and specifically Aboriginal) predation that, according to the McCabes, accounted for low population numbers before 1900. They argued: “It is probably a fact that [moose population increases] did begin with certain natural checks upon the human element, and so may well be taken as an example of what legislation can accomplish, and indeed is accomplishing.” Although the McCabes wrote in praise of the new reserve and “the new regulations for the licensing of guides,” the fear of population decline or wilderness destruction was never a concern. The “abuse of the hunting privilege is now largely a thing of the past,” they wrote: “In short it is highly improbable that game which maintained its abundance during the past decade will now suffer extermination through human agencies.”⁷⁸

Although Allan Brooks disagreed with the McCabes’ proposed date for the arrival of moose in the Cariboo, he articulated a similar lack of concern for the preservation of depleted game numbers.⁷⁹ Brooks had spent time trapping and exploring in the Barkerville region in 1900 and 1901, and he took notes on the birds and mammals he encountered during his trips.⁸⁰ Although primarily an ornithologist and artist, Brooks was also knowledgeable about British Columbia’s big game and

⁷⁶ Seth B. Benson, “A New Race of Beaver from British Columbia,” *Journal of Mammalogy* 14, 4 (1933), 320–25; British Columbia, *Report of Provincial Game Commissioner*, 1931, 16.

⁷⁷ Thomas T. McCabe and Elinor Bolles McCabe, “The Bowron Lake Moose: Their History and Status,” *The Murrelet* 9, 1 (1928): 3–4. For a modern discussion of historic moose populations, see D.J. Spalding, “The Early History of Moose (*Alces alces*): Distribution and Relative Abundance in British Columbia,” *Contributions to Natural Science* 11 (1989), Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria.

⁷⁸ McCabe and McCabe, “Bowron Lake Moose,” 4–9.

⁷⁹ Allan Brooks, “The Invasion of Moose in British Columbia,” *The Murrelet* 9, 2 (1928): 43–44.

⁸⁰ Hamilton Laing, *Allan Brooks: Artist-Naturalist* (Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1979), 63–65. Despite Laing’s observation that Brooks encountered very little big game, Brooks’s own article states that, during his tenure in the Bowron region, he encountered “a good many Caribou and a few mule deer.” Although he saw no moose personally, he saw plenty of moose sign and heard stories about their movements in the area from trappers and Aboriginal people. See Brooks, “Invasion of Moose in British Columbia,” 44.

described himself as “a practical conservationist.”⁸¹ In 1926, he published an article in which he argued that big game conditions in the 1920s were better than they had been pre-contact. He cited numerous explorers and pioneers who described scanty game conditions in British Columbia. He then asked the reader to “compare these conditions about one hundred years apart with the game conditions in the same region in the present day.” He claimed that moose, caribou, elk, white-tailed deer, mule deer, sheep, and goats were not only maintaining their populations but flourishing and growing. Like the McCabes, he attributed this growth to “the decrease of the aboriginal tribes and the destruction of bears and wolves.” In conclusion, he argued: “Ruminant big game is probably five times as abundant at the present day as it was when Alexander Mackenzie first traversed the region towards the close of the eighteenth century, and ... it will continue to hold its own, and in the case of some species increase, providing sane methods of protection continue to be enforced.” Furthermore: “Any pessimist who talks of the extinction of our big game must be either ignorant of or wilfully blind to the present day conditions.”⁸²

The fact that such ideas were being propagated by local naturalists demonstrates that a conservationist ethos dominated the early years of the Bowron Reserve. Moreover, some naturalists, such as Allan Brooks, were also sport hunters. Brooks’s biographer notes that Brooks often joked that he was “most concerned over earning a dollar a day so he could get all the hunting he wanted (both birds and big game) including one big game hunt a year in some new region.”⁸³ Sportsmen had considerable influence over legislation in British Columbia, so Brooks’s double qualification as both sportsman and naturalist may have afforded him additional influence.

In 1923, Williams had hoped, for economic reasons, that the game reserve would attract “a certain class” to the Bowron Lakes area. The McCabes, with their large home, academic connections, and keen interest in wildlife, certainly fit the mould. However, the people that Williams primarily imagined coming to the new reserve were upper- and middle-class sportsmen. As historian Tina Loo argues, sportsmen often came to places like Bowron as a way to assert their masculinity “as skilled, self-reliant, self-controlled, chivalrous risk-takers in relation to

⁸¹ Allan Brooks, “Past and Present Big-Game Conditions in British Columbia and the Predatory Mammal Question,” *Journal of Mammalogy* 7, 1 (1926): 38. See Mackie, *Hamilton Mack Laing*, 150–51.

⁸² Brooks, “Past and Present Big-Game Conditions,” 38–40.

⁸³ Laing, “Allan Brooks,” 431.

the animals they stalked, the environment through which they pursued them, and the other men who helped make [the hunt] possible.”⁸⁴ These “other men” were their guides. Guides, like Frank Kibbee, facilitated sportsmen’s access to the reserves by providing advertising, guiding services, supplies, and local knowledge. Guides were therefore of particular interest to the game department because the economic potential of British Columbia’s game could not be achieved without them.

Frank Kibbee was the longest-operating and most renowned guide in the Bowron region, both before and after the reserve was created.⁸⁵ Kibbee was the guru of the Bowron Lakes wilderness and the epitome of frontier manliness. LeBourdais described him as “a rugged frontier-man of the old school” and even went so far as to attribute a lapse in good wilderness judgment to a lapse in his manliness due to the fact that he had recently married.⁸⁶ Kibbee was a tourist attraction in himself and helped to popularize the region. Indeed, the newspaper articles that described the endless bounty of moose, bear, caribou, and goat usually devoted some space to an anecdote about their quirky hunting guide. LeBourdais’s favourite story was “Frank Kibbee and the Ba’r,” which he published many times in different forms. In his version of the story Kibbee was mauled by a grizzly after an inept American client used all his bullets shooting at grouse and neglected to reload. LeBourdais delighted in replicating Frank Kibbee’s own style, which he described as “original, and [which] has a snap and wit to it which is unsurpassed.”⁸⁷ According to LeBourdais, Kibbee’s response to his mauling was to declare: “If a Grizzly Ba’r ever stops to see the second card with me, I’m a-skinning’ his hide.”⁸⁸ Kibbee was also known for running his sawmill with a broken-down car and for (successfully) advertising for his second

⁸⁴ Tina Loo, “Of Moose and Men: Hunting for Masculinities in British Columbia, 1880-1939,” *Canadian Historical Review* 82 (2001): 298.

⁸⁵ Kibbee serves as a particularly poignant example, but he was only one of many guides in the Bowron area through these years, several of whom had equally important roles in the creation and management of the reserve. For example, Joe and Betty Wendle worked with the McCabes to lay the base for the reserve and deserve credit for its creation. The couple operated a lodge and guiding business at Bowron from 1926 until 1935 and advocated for the protection of other wilderness areas besides Bowron, including Wendle Lake Provincial Park, which bears their name. See Richard Wright, *Barkerville, Williams Creek, Cariboo: A Gold Rush Experience* (Williams Lake: Winter Quarters Press, 1998), 79. See also “Bowron Lake Park 1961-2011,” Bowron Lake Park Registration Centre, available at <http://www.bowronlakeinfo.com/history.html>.

⁸⁶ LeBourdais, “Frank Kibbee and the Ba’r,” 1933, BCA, LeBourdais Papers, box 7, file 13.

⁸⁷ Louis LeBourdais to Hazel Kibbee, 7 December 1933, BCA, LeBourdais Papers, box 7, file 13.

⁸⁸ LeBourdais, “Frank Kibbee and The Ba’r.”

wife.⁸⁹ Such frontier stories, published in local newspapers and journals, were part of the draw of the Bowron region.

Because sportsmen were often unfamiliar with the territory through which they traversed, the success or failure of their hunting experiences depended on the skill of their guides. Indeed, at Bowron many of the best experiences, stories, and trophies described by the hunters resulted from the direct intervention of the guide. Pearl Fleming, for example, recalled that Kibbee called a moose right into camp:

Frank Kibbee was a wonder at calling moose. He could imitate the call of a cow so well that he could bring the bulls down to within a short distance of him. I remember one night we were camped on the shore of a lake and Frank called with his horn, at the same time splashing in the lake. Before long we had a bull right in camp with us. We were in the tent and the big brute passed the tent door and stuck around for a long time.⁹⁰

Fleming's language suggests respect and admiration for his guide, and Kibbee's actions certainly added to the quality of Fleming's trip.

The game department recognized the importance of guides, noting that "the popularity of the various Big Game districts may to a certain extent be measured by the number of guides operating in the various territories."⁹¹ In 1920, four registered guides operated out of Barkerville: J.D. Cochran, F. de W. Reed, J. Wendle, and F.D. Kibbee. By 1925, the number of guides had doubled to eight. Considering that Barkerville was far from being a population centre in 1925, and considering the difficulty of getting to the reserve itself, this is a considerable number and an indication of success in the eyes of the provincial government.

Guides were also helpful for ensuring that the regulations imposed by the provincial government were properly observed. The consolidated Game Protection Act, 1935, included a provision stating: "No person who is not a resident shall at any time hunt big game, unless he is accompanied by a guide or a resident."⁹² This ensured clientele for local guides. In return for this modicum of occupational security, guides were legally responsible for ensuring that their clients adhered to game regulations. The act stated: "[The guide] shall prevent any person for whom

⁸⁹ Newton Pullen, "Moose, Bear and Cariboo Delight Southern Party," BCA, LeBourdais Papers, box 3, file 21, p. 20.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ British Columbia, *Report of the Game Conservation Board*, 1920, 16.

⁹² "An Act to Amend and Consolidate the Enactments for the Protection of Certain Animals and Birds," 1935, c. 28, s. 33, p. 96.

he is acting as guide from hunting or killing any big game of a different sex or species from or in excess of the number of big game which that person is entitled to hunt and kill.”⁹³

By 1940, R.M. Robertson, officer commanding in “C” Division, was not as concerned about declining game numbers as he was about the declining population of sport hunters. He gave two possible reasons for the latter: “(1) the area is not advertised as it should be and (2) a lack of qualified guides.”⁹⁴ Such statements indicate the awareness of game officials of the importance of guides to their vision of conservation in British Columbia.

Perhaps the most significant indication of the importance of guides to conservation at the Bowron Reserve was the decision to make Frank Kibbee its first game warden. The 1926 game inspector, W.L. Fernie, wrote: “Kibbee, who used to make a living trapping on this territory, is more than satisfied now that he has the duty of patrolling the area with which he is so familiar.”⁹⁵ In addition to recognizing their importance for attracting hunters, the game department valued the guides’ specialized local knowledge and influence over their clients’ hunting activities. Kibbee’s tenure as Bowron’s game warden demonstrates the direct relationship between the business of guiding and the implementation of conservation policies on the Bowron Reserve.

Although naturalists and guides had important roles in conservation at the Bowron Lakes Reserve, sportsmen were at the centre of these ideas and the legislation that resulted from them. The importance of sportsmen in conservation has been explored outside of British Columbia by several authors. In an American context, John Reiger argues that sportsmen were the architects of conservation efforts from the 1870s onwards. He demonstrates that sportsmen and their codes and values gave rise to conservation legislation for wildlife, timberlands, and national parks in the United States.⁹⁶ Tina Loo makes a similar argument about Canada: “Canada’s game laws were ... the embodiment of the principles that comprised the ‘sportman’s creed.’”⁹⁷ The role of the sportsman’s creed was

⁹³ Ibid., s. 43, p. 103.

⁹⁴ British Columbia, *Province of British Columbia Department of Attorney General Report of Provincial Game Commission for the Year Ended December 31st, 1940* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1941), 29.

⁹⁵ British Columbia, *Province of British Columbia Department of Attorney General Report of the Provincial Game Warden for the Year Ended December 31st, 1926* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1927), 20.

⁹⁶ John F. Reiger, *American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation*, 3rd ed. (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2001), 67.

⁹⁷ Loo, *States of Nature*, 26.



Figure 2. Bowron Lakes guide Frank Kibbee with a bull moose at Bear Lake, circa 1914. Image E-02202 courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives.

important because it created an “ethical relationship between people and the natural world.”⁹⁸ Certain activities, such as killing game for sale or consumption, waste of life, or using artificial tools such as dogs, lights, or boats were considered unethical. When certain individuals or groups refused to abide by these codes, legislation was created to enforce them. Unsurprisingly, the sportsmen’s code is visible in game legislation in early twentieth-century British Columbia. For example, the Game Protection Act made it illegal to export animals, to trap or snare game birds, to buy the heads of mountain sheep, to hunt with dogs, and to hunt deer for their pelts alone. There were exceptions to some of these regulations for Aboriginal people (but only for “resident Indians”), free miners, and farmers, who could “kill deer depasturing their fields.”⁹⁹ As in the rest of North America, the values of sport hunting were prominent in such aspects of British Columbia’s legislation.

Big game hunting was a long-standing tradition in the Bowron Lakes region. Despite its proximity to the booming late nineteenth-century gold rush town of Barkerville and, later, the 1930s gold rush town of Wells, the Bowron region did not have the same mineral resources and,

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹⁹ “An Act to Amend and Consolidate the Acts for the Protection of Certain Animals, Birds, and Fishes,” 1898, c. 24, s. 4, p. 123; s. 6, p. 124; s. 9, p. 125; s. 27–28, p. 129; s. 12, p. 125.

therefore, never experienced the same level of industrial development as did these nearby sites. However, before 1900, some people fished, hunted, and trapped for the purpose of selling their catches to miners.¹⁰⁰ Food, especially fresh meat, was hard to come by in Barkerville in the late nineteenth century. As early as 1862, one miner reported that his “little stock of provisions ... (of beans, bacon and flour)” was eagerly bid for by the storekeepers, but he refused to sell since “gold is not to be preferred at the risk of starvation.”¹⁰¹ According to George Colpitts, western Canada experienced a shortage of domestic meat animals, which resulted in the prolonged dependence of settlers on wild game and the persistence of “market hunting” as an occupation.¹⁰² Barkerville fits within this larger context. According to Frank Kibbee’s daughter Hazel: “[Hunters] could get good prices and ready sale for all the fish they could bring into Barkerville ... [T]he salmon run helped them in getting their fish easily.”¹⁰³ Ex-Hudson’s Bay Company employee Kenneth McLeod and his partner Neil Wilson were especially well known Bowron hunters and fishers who sold game in Barkerville.¹⁰⁴

However, Barkerville was in decline by 1900, and, as the market waned, the market hunters left. The 1920 report from the Game Conservation Board declared: “The sale of game having been done away with and the market-hunter’s occupation gone, the principal objections to allowing game to be kept [in cold storage] have been removed.”¹⁰⁵ By the 1930s, when Wells emerged as an urban centre and potential market, selling game for profit was not only frowned upon by sportsmen but was also being more tightly controlled by the law.¹⁰⁶ Efforts to end commercial hunting seem to have been relatively successful.

As the gold in Barkerville dwindled and the old-time hunters aged or moved away from Bowron, the sportsmen moved in. First in a slow trickle, then in a headlong rush, sportsmen arrived at the headwaters

¹⁰⁰ F.W. Lindsay, *The Cariboo Story* (Vernon: Vernon Interior Printers, 1958), 9.

¹⁰¹ W. Champness, “To Cariboo and Back in 1862,” in Mark Forsythe and Greg Dickson, *The Trail of 1858* (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 2007), 96.

¹⁰² George Colpitts, *Game in the Garden: A Human History of Wildlife in Western Canada to 1940* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 78.

¹⁰³ Hazel Kibbee to Louis LeBourdais, 5 February 1934, BCA, Bowron Lake, Louis LeBourdais Papers, box 3, file 21.

¹⁰⁴ Harris, *Bowron Lakes*, 81.

¹⁰⁵ British Columbia, *Report of the Game Conservation Board*, 1920, 7.

¹⁰⁶ According to Colpitts, the sale of wild game for food was eradicated in western Canada because of pressure from sport hunters and the idea that civilized people did not eat wild meat. He argues that British Columbia was slower than other provinces in adopting legislative restrictions on the sale of wild game for food. See Colpitts, *Game in the Garden*, 63–102. On market hunting generally, see Mackie, *Hamilton Mack Laing*, 141–42.

of the lakes armed with guns, cash, and high expectations. Countless 1920s and 1930s newspaper articles, posters, and personal stories from big game hunters concern hunting in the Bowron region. Without exception, the region was described as a hunter's paradise. One article, subtitled "Mr. Pearl Fleming, of Victoria, Accompanies Californians on Trip into Country East of Barkerville Where Chain of Dozen Lakes Forms Lovely Water Road Through Sportsman's Paradise," describes the lakes as follows:

"On the heights the mountain goats could be seen in large numbers. Bears were observed fishing at the lake side or eating berries, which grew in profusion. Moose, caribou, and mule deer were frequently seen and grouse were all about in large numbers. Through this wild haven of wild things [the hunters] made their way, gliding over the placid surface of the lake and stream contentedly."¹⁰⁷ Another headline read "Bowron Lake: Where Grizzly, Moose, Caribou, and Goat Roam the Unspoiled Wilderness," and it featured pictures of campers "getting back to nature."¹⁰⁸

The increased interest in Bowron as a wilderness destination resulted from the considerable efforts of the game department. According to the 1920 report of the Game Conservation Board: "Moving pictures, featuring the wild life and big game of the Province, including many of an educational nature, have been exhibited before a number of the Game Associations."¹⁰⁹ One of these moving pictures was produced by Mr. Will D. Sweet and included clips from the Bowron area as part of "a motion picture from of a three weeks' vacation spent in Central British Columbia, in the famous Cariboo Country – a fisherman's and hunter's paradise."¹¹⁰ Sweet boasted of large audiences and good reviews to the Quesnel game warden J.P.C. Atwood, who had taken him in to Bowron to obtain much of his footage. Sweet predicted that the result of his film would be "many outing parties on Isaac Lake."¹¹¹ These accounts betray the deep interest and involvement that sport hunters had in the Bowron area both before and after the creation of the reserve.

Despite the influx of hunters in the 1920s, in 1929 the game department reported: "There has been some talk that the people in the Barkerville area

¹⁰⁷ Pullen, "Moose, Bear, and Cariboo," 20.

¹⁰⁸ "Bowron Lake: Where Grizzly, Moose, Caribou, and Goat Roam the Unspoiled Wilderness," *Vancouver Sunday Province*, 12 September 1926.

¹⁰⁹ British Columbia, *Report of the Game Conservation Board, 1920*, II.

¹¹⁰ Will Sweet to J.P.C. Atwood, Quesnel, BC, "Attention Armistice Day Meeting," 3 September 1940, BCA, LeBourdais Papers, box 7, file 13.

¹¹¹ Will D. Sweet to J.P.C. Atwood, Quesnel, BC, 3 September 1940, BCA, LeBourdais Papers, box 7, file 13.

would like to see the Bowron Lake[s] Game Reserve thrown open.”¹¹² Not only did hunters and the legislators imagine the reserves as tools for game management in their region, but they also requested changes based on the perceived needs of game. And they expected their requests to be answered with government action. In their reports, game officials explicitly stated that the input of sport hunters was a major factor in legislative change. British Columbia boasted thirty-three sportsmen’s associations in 1920, and, according to the Game Conservation Board:

This indicated the interest taken by sportsmen in this movement, and their approval of the Board’s policy, in enlisting their co-operation in the discus [*sic*] – for which opportunity is afforded at open meetings, whilst numerous recommendations submitted through the executive of these organizations receive the attentions and consideration of the Board at all times. These new associations were widely distributed, representing a diversity of interests.¹¹³

The input of sportsmen was not just influential but sought after and highly valued. From the earliest years, the game department attributed a specific value to sportsmen. In 1905, Williams wrote: “It is very seldom that a man comes into this country to shoot big game without leaving \$1,500 behind him, and more often it is double that amount.” Furthermore, while a man came to shoot, he might also see “the commercial advantage of the country, and not only invest[] money himself, but advise[] his friends to do likewise, and generally advertise[] the country.”¹¹⁴

The language of game department reports suggests that one of its key goals was the success of hunters. For example, the 1929 report states that the year had been successful because “a number of big-game hunters came into the Division during the hunting season and in most cases good success was obtained.” Of Bowron specifically, the report states: “A large number of moose heads was taken out of the Cariboo and exceptionally good sport was obtained in ... Barkerville.”¹¹⁵ In 1931, Game Commissioner Bryan Williams reported that game numbers were on the rise and that: “The sportsmen of the province feel that they are at last getting results from the strenuous efforts they have made to have game conservation placed on its present basis.”¹¹⁶ Even more convincing

¹¹² British Columbia, *Report of the Provincial Game Commissioner, 1929*, 17.

¹¹³ British Columbia, *Report of the Game Conservation Board, 1920*, 9.

¹¹⁴ British Columbia, *Report of the Provincial Game and Forest Warden, 1905*, 7.

¹¹⁵ British Columbia, *Report of the Provincial Game Commissioner, 1929*, 19.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1931, 5.



Figure 3. Hunters and dead moose at the Bowron Lake Reserve, circa 1930. Image G-02829 courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives.

is the fact that sportsmen were one of the key sources of funding for the game department, and Williams suggested that they should rightfully expect to get something in return for their investment.¹¹⁷ Even more than naturalists and guides, sportsmen were at the centre of conservation as an ethos of environmental management at the Bowron Lakes Game Reserve.

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 meant a new era in game conservation both at the Bowron Lakes Game Reserve and throughout North America. The expansion of protected places slowed considerably.¹¹⁸ However, it was also a period in which preservation gained popularity as people and governments began “recognizing the ecological, philosophical, and political damage” caused by interventionist policies in the parks, a process that culminated in the mushrooming of the provincial parks system in the 1950s and 1960s.¹¹⁹ In 1961, the Bowron Lakes Game Reserve was turned into Bowron Lake Provincial Park, with, according to local historian Richard Wright, “the idea of protecting unspoiled wilderness and magnificent Cariboo mountain scenery,” not managing game as a resource. Indeed, to improve the scenery and to enhance the idea of Bowron as a wilderness, signs of human habitation and development were destroyed shortly after the provincial park was declared. Wright notes that rail portages, trappers’ cabins, and even the McCabes’ home on Indianpoint Lake were burned down “in a moment

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹⁸ Alan MacEachern, “Changing Ecologies: Preservation in Four National Parks 1935-1965,” in *Canadian Environmental History*, ed., David Duke (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2006), 361.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

of pyromaniac enthusiasm to return the land to wilderness.”¹²⁰ Ideas about the purpose and management of protected wilderness had shifted. The history of the Bowron Lakes Game Reserve in its formative years reflects a broader context of environmental theory in North America. British Columbians expressed an environmental ethos that included elements of conservation and preservation; however, an examination of game legislation and its application at the Bowron Lakes Game Reserve shows that, in practice, game management was motivated by the utilitarian idea that wildlife was a resource. As a result, the dialogue around Bowron displayed very little concern about preserving an untouched wilderness, and the government often intervened directly in order to shape the reserve into a desirable form. The naturalists, guides, and sport hunters of the Bowron region were essential to this way of perceiving the environment. All three groups influenced the legislation that shaped the Bowron Lakes Game Reserve as a location of conservation in the first half of the twentieth century.

¹²⁰ Wright, *Bowron Lake Provincial Park*, 25, 41.