

100

Years of Integrity, Service and Protection

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British Columbia Conservation
Officer Gerry W. Lister.

Background photo
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Left: Game Warden
badge introduced
in 1928 and used
until 1961

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S EARLY DAYS

Unlike most other provinces and U.S. states in the west, British Columbia has always been a bit unique in a number of ways. The first thing that comes to mind is the vast diversity of its wildlife species but the way that the province and many of its government agencies evolved is also very unique.

British Columbia wasn't settled by a westward migration of settlers from the east, but was established when two separate British colonies were united. Vancouver Island was originally settled by fur traders and a Hudson's Bay Company post was constructed at Victoria. It became an official British colony in 1849. With the discovery of gold in the Cariboo region of the mainland (formerly referred to as New Caledonia) in 1857 and the influx of miners that it brought, Britain declared it the Colony of British Columbia in 1858. The Governor of Vancouver Island was also appointed the Governor of British Columbia. A police force, at the time called the "British Columbia Constabulary" was formed in order to keep law and order amongst the miners. The provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, and the Yukon and Northwest Territories did not even exist yet. The Klondike Gold Rush was still 40 years away. The North West Mounted Police, who later became the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, would not come into being for another 15 years.

The two colonies were united in 1866, a year before the United States purchased Alaska and sandwiched the British Colony. It appeared to only be a matter of time before the U.S. would acquire British Columbia as well. Britain really had no use for the colony as it was so remote, but a naval base established near Victoria during the Crimean War probably kept it from being bargained away. In 1869 Britain ceded the area between Ontario and B.C. to the Dominion of Canada and in 1870 Manitoba became a province. British Columbia's governor made bold demands of the Dominion in exchange for joining confederation. Canada accepted B.C.'s terms, as it wanted to assert its dominion from coast to coast and in 1871 British Columbia joined confederation.



The History of the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service

THE EARLY YEARS OF GAME PROTECTION

The British Columbia Constabulary was responsible for enforcing all ordinances of the Colony, most of which were variations on British law. An 1859 ordinance dealt with buying and selling game and the protection of some species of birds. The maximum penalty for violations under this enactment was a one pound fine or one month in gaol (jail).

In 1870 a new "Game Ordinance" was enacted which made it unlawful to possess game, which were only specific bird species, within the cities of Victoria and New Westminster (or within a one mile of the city limits) and the towns of Nanaimo and Esquimalt, or on board any steamboat, between the first of March and the tenth of August. It was also unlawful to have venison, which meant deer and elk, in possession in these places from February first to August first. The ordinance also prohibited the collection or destruction of the eggs of certain bird species. There was a \$50 maximum fine for contravention of this ordinance.

Other ordinances were enacted from time to time to prevent the "wanton destruction of Game". An 1873 ordinance dealt with the payment of bounties for destruction of noxious animals and birds.

In August of 1888, Thomas Graham was appointed in the Victoria area as a local constable for the "purpose of preventing the destruction of Game".

A unique "BCism" was introduced in 1892. "Gamekeeper" William Healy of Sooke (near Victoria), wrote to Superintendent Hussey of the Provincial Police to provide him with the details of his game protection efforts. He wrote of a situation where he had encountered hunters using a miner's head lamp to search for deer after it had become dark. He wrote that when the hunter came within 40 or 50 feet of a deer, even though its body was in darkness, the "eyes would shine like two balls of fire making a splendid target". This is the first known reference to an activity that quickly became known as "pitlamping" in British Columbia, a term still used to this day to describe all types of spotlighting, jack lighting or shining of wildlife for the purpose of hunting. The term "pit-lamping" even existed as a legal term in the Game Act for many years.

In 1898 the various ordinances and Acts that protect certain animals, birds and fish were consolidated into the "Game Protection Act". Compared to contemporary wildlife protection legislation the act is quite lenient, but one can clearly see that it was quite strict at the time. Use of poison, explosives, nets and other devices, other than a hook and line for the taking of trout, was made illegal. A \$50 game licence was required to be taken out by non-residents of the province so that game could legally be exported. The bag limit on big game was quite generous: ten deer, five caribou, three mountain sheep, five mountain goats, two bull moose and two bull elk. The act made it illegal to kill deer, but not other species, for their hides alone. The act also provided for "apprehension without warrant" by a constable or peace officer of anyone found committing an offence in the presence of the constable or peace officer, a provision that basically still exists in the Wildlife Act today.



Game Wardens Neil Cameron and Len Washburn in Fernie, BC in 1932



Above: Game Officers of B.C. Police Game Laws Enforcement Branch in Vancouver, 1928. Cst. J.F. Ritchie, Cst. W. Clark, Sgt. J.G. Cunningham, Cst. A.P. Cummins



Above: Second patrol vessel S.S. Watla launched 1913

Left: Game Warden B. Wilson and Predatory Animal Hunter Bud Frost on Provincial Game Department vessel No. 2 (PGD 2) after successful cougar hunt



A. Bryan Williams – Provincial Game Warden – 1905 – 1918; Game Commissioner 1929 – 1934

In 1904 three men were appointed as Provincial Police Constables for the sole purpose of enforcement of the Game Protection Act in the Fernie District. This action was undertaken in an effort to deter the Stoney Indians, of what is now southern Alberta from entering British Columbia to harvest their game.

THE FORMATION OF THE FIRST GAME DEPARTMENT

In 1905, the Game Act was again amended, this time creating the position of provincial game and forest warden and allowing for appointment of deputy game and forest wardens. The act directed the provincial game and forest warden to "give his entire time and attention to the game, forestry and fishing interests of the province, conduct prosecutions, and see that all laws having reference to game, forestry and fish are enforced." Three deputy game wardens were appointed in May of 1905. Albert E. Watts Sr. holds the distinction of being the first game warden ever appointed in British Columbia. Interestingly, the Order-in-Council appointing him and all other subsequent deputies does not identify them as deputy game and forest wardens as set out in the act.

In July of 1905, Arthur Bryan Williams, the manager of a hydraulic mining company in the far northern gold mining town of Atlin, was requested to return to Vancouver, where he was appointed as Provincial Game and Forest Warden, heading up the "Department for the Protection of Game and Forests". He was given no budget with which to conduct his activities, but the new act did provide for the issuance of \$50 game licences for non-residents, so some revenue was realized. Mr. Williams reported directly to the provincial secretary at this time, but

within a short while the "Game and Forest Department" became a sub-agency of the Department of Lands and Works.

Although A. Bryan Williams was the provincial game and forest warden, his responsibilities extended only to enforcement of the laws and at that time there was not much legislation protecting forests. Forest fire protection was primarily a Dominion Forest Branch responsibility, but four provincial fire wardens were appointed and placed under the Department of Lands and Works, but they did not report to Williams.

Williams set out to appoint deputy game wardens around the province. These men would be recommended to him by members of the legislature, local fish and game protective associations and from time to time by the premier himself. For the most part these men were strictly volunteers. They were generally just given a copy of the game laws and a badge and told to advise Mr. Williams before commencing prosecutions. There was no strict direction or policy to be adhered to and most of these men did not conduct regular patrols and many never apprehended any violators or made any effort to do so.

A "Game Warden Fund" was set up and administered by a committee of three men representing various fish and game protective associations. Members of the associations and the public could donate to this fund. Two salaried deputies were appointed in the Vancouver and Victoria areas to provide assistance to Mr. Williams and other deputies were appointed to deal with specific trouble spots and their wages and expenses were paid out of this fund. A total of \$323 in wages and travel expenses was paid out of this fund in 1905.

In 1907, the Minister of Lands and Works, as well as A. B. Williams, thought it would be efficient to have fire wardens cross-appointed as deputy game wardens, so 18 men were so appointed.

In 1908 Williams wrote to the Minister of Finance, R.G. Tatlow, requesting \$10,000 for operating expenses, which included the purchase of a launch for \$1,500. He felt that many tourist hunters would not be going to the Cassiar or Chilcotin that year because the "Indians" had been slaughtering the game. He didn't think that licence revenue would be more than \$4,500 and suggested increasing the fee for the non-resident licence to \$100 and instituting a \$2.00 "gun licence" for



1905 non-resident game licence

residents. He estimated this would generate revenue of nearly \$17,000 a year. He got his wish in part when the fee for the general game licence was increased to \$100 and he was granted a budget of \$10,000. Williams was now able to pay many seasonal deputies for their services.

In 1909, forests were removed from Williams' portfolio and his position was consequently renamed "Provincial Game Warden". In actuality, any forestry work that had occurred had been under the direction of the Chief Commissioner of Lands, not Mr. Williams, and had not involved any of William's staff, with the exception of the cross-appointed fire wardens.

The department's first patrol boat was purchased in 1909 and was sent to Campbell River to be operated by the deputy game warden stationed there.

The Attorney General was responsible for overseeing all law enforcement efforts within the province, so in 1910 the Department for the Protection of Game was placed under his control. This action elevated the game department to equal status with the other branch of the Attorney General's ministry, the B.C. Provincial Police.

In 1910 a non-resident anglers licence was instituted for a cost of \$5.00. Unless a non-resident person was



Cartoon from back cover of inaugural issue of Wildlife Review



travelling on a public conveyance, they were required to take out the appropriate licence even if they were only carrying the implements that could be used for taking game or fish.

With a guaranteed annual budget and revenue from non-resident licence sales the situation of the game department improved and by 1911 there were several full-time salaried deputies on staff, along with numerous honorary deputies scattered around the province.

To further improve matters, resident hunting licences, known as "Firearm Licences" were introduced in 1913. Not only were they required for hunting, but also for carrying firearms and traps. There were several different categories of licence available. The game department estimated that with a population of 400,000 people in British Columbia, 12,000 licences would be sold. Twenty thousand were initially printed and the same number of corresponding numbered licence badges were produced. As the hunting season approached, there was a rush on licences. Temporary receipts had to be issued and badges and licences mailed out later. Almost 32,000 licences were sold generating \$99,015 in revenue. Over 7,500 free farmers, prospector's and Indian licences were also issued at no charge.

Provincial Game Warden Williams was becoming frustrated with the appointment of honorary deputies. One such deputy whom he had appointed in 1908 was not heard from at all until a conviction was made by him in 1913. Williams commented that he frequently found these honorary appointments "worse than useless."

The second patrol vessel "Watla" was built for the game department at Vancouver Shipyards and was delivered in September of 1913. She was 45 feet long and powered by a three cylinder gasoline engine. She was taken to

Campbell River and the other patrol boat, "Weksia" was moved to Prince Rupert.

By 1914 suggestions were again being made that fire wardens should be made game wardens. Game Warden Williams, recalling when this had been tried in the past, stated that it had been an absolute failure. He stated that a man who might be a most capable fire warden was generally "utterly incapable" of doing the work of a game warden and vice versa. He also said that if a man was busy dealing with fires he would be unable to attend to game work, and often the busiest times for both will overlap.

Pitlamping was becoming a very serious issue, with several people narrowly escaping being shot. Game Warden Williams recommended that a minimum penalty of a month in gaol (jail) be legislated in the next amendment of the act. He said that men who pit-lamped, even after much had been written and said against it, should be treated as criminals and shown no mercy. In 1918, a mandatory jail sentence for "pitlamping", without the option of a fine, was instituted.

THE B.C. POLICE YEARS

The "Game Act" was amended in 1918, abolishing the "Game Department" and giving the Provincial Police sole responsibility for enforcement of the act, while an appointed Game Conservation Board made decisions on seasons and regulations. The services of A.B. Williams and all but two of the 33 salaried Deputies were dispensed with. The

Deputy Game Warden badge from first series, issued 1906. Issued to A.P. Cummins of Chilliwack, who was one of only two Deputies hired by B.C. Police when they took over the Game Department in 1918. Cummins and R. Gidley of Victoria also served as game wardens in the new Game Department in 1929.



Superintendent of the Provincial Police force was designated ex-officio (by virtue of his office) the Provincial Game Warden and all police constables were ex-officio game wardens, and as such included game protection work in their regular duties.

In 1924, following a reorganization of the Provincial Police, uniforms were introduced for the first time.

In the 1920's game associations grew in number and influence and for the most part because of their united disapproval of the present state of game management, a Game Laws Enforcement Branch was established within the B.C. Police in 1926.

The situation remained less than ideal because regular police work always took precedence, even for the members of the Game Laws Branch. By 1929, the Game Conservation Board had grown from its original five members to 13 and was becoming disorganized and ineffective. It was only an advisory board and many of its recommendations were never passed into law. To address the concerns of the game associations and to provide for better application of the game laws, the Game Act was again amended in 1929, creating the office of the Game Commissioner who could appoint wardens as he saw fit.





Clockwise from left:

A motley crew of Conservation Officers and other Fish & Wildlife staff at a training session in the early 1970's

The Cache Creek checking station interior c. 1972 – can be a very busy place

Successful roadcheck made c. 1960

Game warden George Ferguson mans Fish & Game Branch booth at outdoor show c. 1960



THE "NEW" GAME DEPARTMENT

On June 1, 1929 thirty five game constables and special constables, regular constables, and some former deputy game wardens, formed a new 60 member B.C. Game Department, headed once again by A. Bryan Williams, who was appointed as the Game Commissioner.

The Game Department was organized along the lines of the B.C. Police with five divisions, each supervised by a district game warden (later called Inspectors). The uniform worn was nearly identical to that of the B.C. Police, including Sam Browne belt with cross-strap, holster and revolver. Brass "Game Department" insignia and buttons replaced B.C. Police brass, and blue epaulets and tie replaced the green worn by the police. The few predatory animal hunters employed by the branch did not wear a uniform.

In this first year of operation, the Game Department and B.C. Police, in combination, swore out 602 Informations (charges), 163 more than in the final year of complete B.C. Police control (1928). The Game Department

accounted for the vast majority of them, so clearly there were violations occurring, but the police just didn't have the resources to detect them.

The British Columbia Police and the Game Department both fell under the auspices of the Attorney General and as such they worked in very close cooperation. Game wardens were cross-appointed as police constables and vice-versa. Game wardens occasionally transferred directly to the police force and police constables were occasionally transferred to the Game Department without any say in the matter, while others with an interest in hunting or fishing transferred over voluntarily. In 1931, the Game Department purchased a 38 foot patrol boat for its Powell River Detachment, but it was considered a joint Game and Police vessel. The Game Department covered all operating costs and provided the skipper, while the B.C. Police provided the crew as required.

On July 5, 1930 the fledgling

Game Department suffered its first tragedy when Game Warden Dennis Greenwood of Canal Flats was shot and killed off-duty by a man whom he had charged for several violations of the Game Act. Greenwood was in the presence of his family at the time. Warden Greenwood's murderer, William Floyd, was arrested and charged, but was found not guilty by reason of insanity. Game Warden Greenwood was highly respected in the small community and his funeral was attended by most of the residents of Canal Flats.

Game Commissioner Williams was proud of the new force, which was comprised of many veteran law enforcement officers, as well as several new recruits. In the Annual Report for 1930 he wrote:

"The work done by the Game Wardens this year has been highly commendable. While every force of men is bound to have one or two who are not as energetic or as efficient as they might be, nevertheless the Game Department really has a remarkably fine lot of men whose physique and devotion to duty regardless of danger, exposure to rain, frost, and snow, and often long hours of night work, has been a great credit to the department.

The general idea seems to be that any man who is fond of sport can make



Cover of first issue of Wildlife Review, October 1954.



a good game warden. It is not realized what number of qualifications a man must have, nor is it realized what a strenuous life most of them lead and how many risks they must take if they do their work as they should.

The following year Commissioner Williams wrote:

"The ordinary man cannot know what amount of work a police officer or game warden has to do or what his responsibilities are. A game warden has his whole time occupied, every day of every month of the year, and to do his work properly he has to work long hours, frequently finding it almost impossible to take his annual leave of absence".

The Game Department suffered its second tragedy on October 3, 1932. Game Warden Albert Edward Farey had charged and convicted Frank Gott, a decorated war hero, in 1930, and Gott had borne a grudge against the warden ever since. The requirement to tag deer was introduced in 1932 and Game Warden Farey found Gott in possession of a deer that he had failed to affix a tag to. At some point Farey turned his back on Gott and he was shot, dying instantly. Following a two day manhunt Divisional Game Supervisor Robertson of Kamloops and Game Warden Quesnel of Clinton found Gott, who refused to surrender. He ignored several warning shots and tried to flee, resulting in him being shot in the leg. He later died of a combination of tuberculosis and exposure. Criticism was leveled at the police for the methods used to apprehend Gott. The critics chose to ignore the fact that Gott was a desperate and dangerous man, who had shot a dedicated game warden in the back without any chance to defend himself. Newspaper articles of the day chronicled Gott's guiding expertise, outdoor skills and wartime achievements, while little was written about the life of the murdered warden, himself a decorated W.W.I veteran who had been wounded in action. Game Warden "Bert" Farey was buried in the Lillooet cemetery and his funeral never even made the newspapers of the day.

Although few in number, British Columbia had made its own regulations regarding non-tidal fishing, but the Dominion government began to exert its authority over these matters and apart from issuing angler's licences to non-residents, the provincial government gradually ceased any involvement in regulating non-tidal fisheries. By 1928 the province was officially out of sports fishing management and enforcement.

In 1932, the first resident angler's licences were issued, for a \$1 fee. As was the case with a non-resident, the licence was required not only to angle, but also to carry fishing rods and any other device that could be used for catching fish by angling. A Fish Culture Branch was established and three small trout hatcheries were built with the proceeds of the licence sales.

A. Bryan Williams retired in 1934 at the age of 68, and a three man Game Commission made up of A.G. Bolton, Head of the Fish Culture Branch, James Cunningham, Inspector of E Division and Frank Butler, Headquarters Inspector, replaced him. Mr. Bolton retired two years later due to ill health.

In 1938, the Governments of Canada and British Columbia signed an agreement that permitted the province to manage non-tidal fisheries, with the exception of the salmon species. The Game Department began enforcing the federally enacted non-tidal fishing regulations and took over the federal trout hatcheries.

Another example of the close working relationship between the Game Department and the B.C. Police is the assistance provided by Game Warden Don Ellis and his Doberman Pinscher Reo. Don was hired as a warden in 1939, and until Reo's death in 1945, the two assisted the B.C. Police in over 50 successful manhunts.

As the Second World War raged in Europe, Canadians, who were pulled into the fracas because they were still considered to be British subjects, enlisted and were sent overseas. Commissioner Butler advised that no employee of the Game Department was to enlist in the non-permanent or overseas forces unless they first received special permission from headquarters. The Commissioner and the Attorney General felt that game wardens were so thoroughly acquainted with their assigned districts, because of constant patrolling, that their services to the country would be far more valuable at home should trouble arise in those districts.

While some wardens felt the necessity to take part in the overseas action and resigned in order to do so, only Inspector Frank Kearns and Game Warden Clint Atwood, both of whom had served in the First World War, took a leave of absence to enlist. Wardens Kearns and Atwood both returned to the Game Department at the end of the war.

In 1945, the Game Commission began to recognize the need for its staff



to take some time off the job, and Commissioner Butler wrote:

"As the duties of a game warden are of an arduous nature, calling for him to be on duty at any and all times, it is the desire of this Commission that whenever possible, a game warden should be allowed one day a week off duty if he so desires...it should be a recognized fact that each game warden or fishery officer is entitled to a reasonable time off to spend with his family or in connection with his own personal interests."

In 1946, due to the immense increase in resident and non-resident hunters, especially in the Kamloops, Cariboo and Lillooet Districts, the Cache Creek Game Checking Station,



Left from top: Conservation Officer Don Thatcher poses beside a fully equipped mid patrol vehicle – Prince George c. 1974

Late 1990's patrol vehicle with Ministry of Environment "skunk-stripe" graphics

2005 Conservation Officer Service patrol vehicle

Above: Game Warden Jim Osman on his off-road tricycle, nicknamed the "Osmobile", 1955

under the command of W. (Slim) Cameron commenced operation. Its function was to collect data on fish and game harvested in those regions and to enforce the game regulations. In this first year of operation, 64 convictions for game violations were obtained from checks at the station. It was noted that there was an astonishing lack of knowledge or partial disregard of the regulations. This first year, the station

consisted only of a tent on the side of the highway. The station was made permanent in 1955 when a building was constructed and the area around it was improved and paved. The station continued as a joint management and enforcement facility until 1976 when its operation was transferred to the Biometrics Section in Victoria. Many game wardens and conservation officers received their initial exposure to wildlife enforcement at the Cache Creek station.

Although the Provincial Police and the Game Department had employed a few different predatory animal hunters since 1926, it wasn't until 1947 that departmental predator control became serious business. It had become evident that the bounty system was ineffective in reducing the numbers of predators, so it was decided to employ alternate methods. James Dewar, based out of Extension near Nanaimo, became Chief Predatory Animal Hunter, and was assigned the task of training new predatory-animal hunters. The department built kennels at Extension and purchased trained cougar hounds. The plans were to breed, train and then distribute cougar hounds to districts that required them.

In 1949 the Predator Control Division of the Game Department was established and a Supervisor was appointed to oversee operations. Although stationed in the various Game Divisions, the Predatory Animal Hunters were under central control of the Supervisor.

One of the first "undercover" operations took place in 1949 when Corporal Les Lane and Game Warden Frank Urquhart spent a week at the Canadian Rainbows Lodge. The lodge was prosecuted under Dominion and Provincial statutes and \$1,300 in fines were collected. Corporal Lane, a former B.C. Policeman conducted several more undercover operations over the years.

On August 15th, 1950 the British Columbia Provincial Police force was disbanded with little warning. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) took on many of the constables, but many resigned and several transferred to the Game Department. Several more joined the Game Department over the next few years as they resigned from the RCMP or decided that civilian life was not for them.

By 1952, at the request of the Fisheries Management Branch, game wardens had begun conducting investigations into water licence applications and incidences of pollution which threatened fisheries interests.

Since 1946, Game Warden Bill Ward



of Kamloops had been directing much of his efforts toward public relations. The Game Commissioners recognized the value of Bill's work, and recognized the need for a larger scale effort. In 1953 they transferred him to Vancouver in order to have him devote more of his time to a provincial public relations effort. In October of 1954 the first issue of the "Wildlife Review" was published, with 2,000 free copies distributed. The magazine had a friendly, down-to-earth and non-pretentious feel about it and it was an immediate success. By May of 1964, circulation was 60,000 and it was still distributed free of charge. A one dollar charge for a two year subscription was imposed and circulation fell to 20,000, but stabilized around 37,000 copies in 1968. Bill Ward retired in 1967 and the look and feel of the magazine changed almost instantly and within a year it no longer resembled its former self. Although the production of the magazine was contracted out in 1979 it remained advertisement free until after it was turned over to private hands in 1983.

In 1954, Game Commissioner James Cunningham passed away suddenly leaving F.R. Butler as the sole Commissioner.

THE FISH & GAME BRANCH

On April 1, 1957 the Department of Recreation and Conservation was established and the Game Department was removed from the Department of Attorney General and became the Fish and Game Branch within the new department. Game Commissioner Frank Butler continued as Director of the "Game Branch".

By the early 1960's there were many biologists within various divisions of the Fish & Game Branch. The first biologist hired by the old Game Department in 1947 was now the Deputy Director and his influence and that of the other biologists was beginning to affect the game wardens. Branch management wanted to see a higher level of participation by conservation officers in all functions of the branch. The objective was to have field staff identified with the branch as a whole, rather than with the particular division to which they

belonged. It was felt that through integration of activities, "work satisfaction would be stimulated and greater efficiency achieved." Many of the people now in control did not appreciate law enforcement as part of a wildlife management scheme and wanted to soften the image of the enforcement staff. In 1961, the game warden title was discontinued and replaced by conservation officer. It was felt that this title reflected a greater scope of responsibility, was a better fit with the now popular conservation movement, and was a departure from the nasty old "bush cop" image many people had of the game warden.

Charles Estlin, Game Inspector in Nelson, was promoted to the new position of Chief Conservation Officer in Victoria in 1962. The new position was created to provide an administrative head for the conservation officers who, unlike the game and fisheries divisions, had never had a headquarters supervisor. Chief Estlin was the direct supervisor of the officers commanding the five divisions.

Shortly after Estlin's appointment, Director Frank Butler, who had started his career with the department in 1914, retired. Assistant Director Dr. James Hatter, a biologist, with no enforcement background, became the new director of the "Game Branch".

Shortly after his appointment, the new director created the first Divisional Supervisor position in Vancouver. The new structure bypassed the Chief Conservation Officer altogether, with the Inspectors reporting to the Supervisor, who in turn reported to the Director. The Game Divisions became regions and were made smaller, and the number increased. Eventually, each Regional Protection Officer (formerly Inspector), reported to a Regional Supervisor who in turn reported to the Director. Management felt that the regional supervisors would be better able to coordinate the activities of the various divisions of the Branch. The Chief Protection Officer was now a staff position at headquarters developing policy with no direct authority over the field conservation officers. Chief Estlin was not even included in management discussions or decisions that ultimately affected the fate of the field officers.

The Game Act was repealed in 1966 and replaced by the Wildlife Act. In conjunction with this, the branch was renamed the Fish & Wildlife Branch. It was felt that these name changes better reflected the concept of wildlife conservation and diversity and not just the concept of propagating game species for sport.

Conservation officers were conducting game and fish management activities but they were still referred to as enforcement



Above: Game Warden Ben Rauch (foreground) and Biologist Glen Smith checking ducks in the Creston area c. 1957

staff, although they spent no more time carrying out enforcement duties than they did carrying out fisheries, or wildlife, or general public relations duties. In some regions officers spent as little as 20% of their time, on average, on enforcement.

In an effort to increase the enforcement presence, 65 auxiliary officers were hired in 1972 to provide seasonal assistance to the 70 permanent officers. Nine new offices were opened and 31 permanent positions were created over the next two years. The number of auxiliaries was increased to 114, but the average amount of time spent provincially on enforcement of the branch's legislation was still only 40%.

A study of the Fish and Wildlife Branch completed in 1977 by W. Winston Mair, who had been B.C.'s first Supervisor of Predator Control and subsequently the Chief of the Canadian Wildlife Service, recognized the need for conservation officers to be distinct from biological staff. It recognized that conservation officers had lost their status and their specialized role within the branch and changes were required in order to improve their position. Mair stated that had the conservation officers not been a well disciplined group with an extremely high sense of duty, their situation might well have been more desperate than it was. His recommendation was that because staff who carry out enforcement require entirely different skills and aptitudes, from staff in fish & wildlife management, a separation of the two functions was necessary. Among his other recommendations was that conservation officers be issued with a distinctive uniform complete with rank insignia, service stripes and shoulder flashes (patches) identifying them as such. He also recommended that a trained police officer be hired to head the enforcement program at headquarters.

Changes began to occur in 1978 when the Ministry of Recreation and Conservation was dismantled and the Ministry of Environment was created. The Fish and Wildlife Branch was moved over to the new ministry.

In 1979 a new Chief Conservation Officer, who was a retired member of the RCMP, was appointed. The recommendations of the 1977 study were being implemented for the most part and the reorganization plan was to eventually separate the conservation officer group from fish and wildlife.

In January of 1980 the Wildlife Control Officers, who had been reporting directly to the Regional Wildlife Biologists, became part of the new enforcement group and reported to the Senior



Conservation Officer immobilizing a snared grizzly bear near Quesnel, BC in 2001

Conservation Officers in their respective sub-regions. They were advised that even though they were now conservation officers, they were not to become involved in enforcement matters at the expense of their own specialized duties.

THE CONSERVATION OFFICER SERVICE

By the end of June 1980 the Conservation Officer Service (CO Service or COS), with a contingent of 109 officers, was operating as a separate entity from Fish and Wildlife. Conservation officers were now responsible for enforcement of all legislation within the mandate of the ministry, as well as for problem wildlife control (public safety). While many officers welcomed the change, many of the officers who had begun their careers in the early 1960's, and had enjoyed their roles as generalists within the old "Branch", found it difficult to adapt to being "environmental policemen".

A new uniform that more closely resembled other professional law enforcement agencies, rather than fish or wildlife management agencies, was introduced to distinguish the members of the Conservation Officer Service from other staff within the ministry. The familiar green and khaki of the "Game Branch" was gone, replaced by a sky blue shirt, grey trousers and navy blue outerwear.

Regional Conservation Officers continued to report to the Regional Directors, and not to the new Chief Conservation Officer. The Regional Director controlled the budget for all programs within his region and if a Regional Director was not fond of enforcement, he could cause the conser-

vation officers to operate on a shoestring. Of course the reverse was also true and could have negative repercussions when other programs suffered financially and the conservation officers were seen to be "prima donnas." Over time it was clear that, when it came to the CO Service, some regions were "haves" and many were "have-nots."

A necessary change, to confirm that conservation officers were no longer just wildlife officers, was to change the way they were appointed. A new piece of legislation, the Environment Management Act was introduced in 1981, and conservation officers received their appointments from this act, rather than under the Wildlife or Game Acts as had been the case since 1905.

Although the game wardens of the 1930's and 1940's had always been closely associated with the B.C. Police and had openly worn side-arms, the changing attitudes of management had resulted in a gradual elimination of this practice. Conservation officers, by virtue of being "members of the Provincial Police" still had the legal authority to carry side-arms and in the 1970's many did. There was no formal policy or training in their use, and steps were taken, albeit very slowly, to remedy this. In 1982, a formalized sidearm carrying policy and training program were instituted, and by 1983 all officers were issued with .357 calibre revolvers and a black Sam Browne duty belt with flap holster. An open holster was introduced in 1993 and all officers were converted to a .40 calibre Glock pistol in 1997. In 1999, the previous policy which had made the wearing of side-arms optional, and restricted them to fish and wildlife enforcement and problem wildlife duties, was rescinded, and all officers were instructed to wear their side-arms while on duty, with a few exceptions that are at the discretion of the officer.

As environmental protection legislation was improved in the 1980's the Conservation Officer Service took on an increased role in its enforcement. The primary pieces of environmental legislation that were enforced were the Waste Management Act and its multitude of regulations, the Water Act and the Pesticide Control Act.

Unlike many U.S. jurisdictions, Canadian "Fish & Wildlife" agencies tend to provide public access office space for their officers, away from their residences. In many cases they also provide clerical support staff. Of course there is an added cost to providing these facilities and support and when costs need to be cut district offices may be closed. A major downsizing of the

Conservation Officer Service occurred during the recession of 1984 when "Zone Offices" were introduced; twelve district offices were closed and amalgamated into multi-person offices.

When a new Wildlife Act was proclaimed in 1982, the provisions found in the previous Wildlife Act and in the old Game Act that made all conservation officers members of the Provincial Police were not included. As the Criminal Code of Canada did not specifically recognize conservation officers as peace officers, certain preventative and protective elements that the code provides to peace officers no longer applied. From an enforcement standpoint, the ability to take immediate action against people found in possession of illegal firearms and the ability to execute arrest warrants and serve subpoenas and summonses was also lost. This was remedied in 1985 when all conservation officers were appointed as Special Provincial Constables. Presently conservation officers are still appointed as Special Constables, and while they receive the protection of the Criminal Code, and have the authority to serve court documents, they cannot exercise any enforcement authorities as a Peace Officer under the Code.

In 1988, after the introduction of the Commercial River Rafting Safety Act, the Headquarters operation was renamed the Enforcement and Outdoor Recreational Safety Branch. Over the next fourteen years it had three other names, and only the field component of the enforcement program was technically the Conservation Officer Service.

In response to the increasing complexity of environmental investigations, specialized units, known as Environmental Enforcement Units, were set up in regional and sub-regional offices beginning in 1989. The officers within these units were to act as expert investigators in Waste, Water and Pesticide Act cases. These units were renamed Industrial Investigations Units in 1993, but their function and purpose remained unchanged.

A Special Investigations Unit was established in 1993 to conduct covert and undercover operations. The unit presently has three permanent staff, and relies on specially trained officers within the CO Service's ranks, as well as contractors from other police forces, as operators.

Because of the creation of the Environmental Enforcement Unit, and the introduction of new legislation that the CO Service was expected to enforce, a large number of officers were hired between 1989 and 1994. By 1996 the CO Service had reached its peak staffing level with 154 officers. This number began to drop as vacant positions were not filled and by 2001 had appeared to stabilize around 140 officers.

Conservation officers were ordered by the Superintendent of Motor Vehicles to remove the blue lights from their patrol vehicles in March 2000, as they were not considered to be a police agency. Vehicles were then converted to a red-white combination. Many problems soon became evident as members of the public who only recognized the red-blue combination as enforcement, failed or refused to stop for

officers conducting road checks or back road vehicle stops. Further attempts to convince the B.C. Association of Police Chiefs to support the Conservation Officer Service failed, and members of the Service now operate exclusively red lights on their vehicles, and many problems continue to exist.

Following a change in government in 2001, the Ministry of Environment was split into two separate ministries and the CO group fell under the new Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection.

In January of 2002, large staffing reductions were made across government, and the Conservation Officer Service was not immune. Within a few days it was clear that 22 enforcement positions had been eliminated, nine district offices were to be closed and all district support staff would be laid off. The Service was to be restructured with the seven existing regions reduced to three, and a General Investigations Unit would replace the Industrial Investigations unit. One bright spot was Regional Directors were eliminated and the three remaining Regional Enforcement Managers now reported directly to the Chief Conservation Officer, who in turn controlled the overall provincial enforcement budget.

The Conservation Officer Service, whose staff was considered highly specialized, was granted special permission to re-assign its staff without having to follow the normal general union procedures or be bound by general government seniority rules. At the end of the day no one was laid off, although some officers chose to resign, and the affected officers were transferred to vacant positions within the Service. Early retirement packages were offered to those managers who met the criteria, and those who didn't were kept on, working on special projects until they met the criteria.

All field offices were closed to public access because the loss of clerical staff meant that officers would be required to spend more time dealing with non-enforcement issues, thereby reducing their field presence. The responsibility for issuing licences and permits, and for inspecting wildlife was removed. Main office telephone lines were rerouted to a "call tree" where the caller could choose from a number of options. One option was to be connected to a provincial Call Centre to report violations or wildlife



Refueling for an aerial patrol in the early 1960's - the branch has never owned their own plane. They did lease a float plane for a few seasons in the early 1970's for northern patrol

conflicts. Two officers who had received lay-off notices were assigned to the Call Centre and during its start-up period in the summer of 2002, officers from around B.C. were brought in to help field calls and train staff. The decision to lock up the offices was always unpopular and has been relaxed somewhat since its inception and is now, by and large, optional.

The Conservation Officer Service and the position of Chief Conservation Officer were formally established in legislation in May 2002 when the Environment Management Act was amended. The Chief CO now has the authority to designate conservation officers, auxiliary conservation officers (within the ministry) and special conservation officers (from outside agencies). The category of Deputy Conservation Officer, which had existed in the Wildlife Act and had only applied to that Act, was done away with.

The amendments also provided additional provincial authorities to officers in order to better operate within the Ministry's mandate without the need to rely on their Special Constable appointments. For example, officers could now take appropriate action when hunters were found in a motor vehicle with open liquor, or when vehicles were being operated without insurance or a driver's licence. Officers now had the ability to enforce the provincial Parks Act and regulations, and to regulate activity within a park or recreation area.

In October of 2002 the familiar and highly visible sky blue uniform shirts that had been introduced when the conservation officer was established in 1980 were replaced by an "LAPD" navy blue uniform shirt, the same as is worn by municipal police forces in British Columbia.

New decal packages were provided for each patrol truck within the COS fleet in 2002 in order to provide a visual identity for the Service. Previously there was little difference between a conservation officer's rig and the vehicles driven by technicians in all the other non-enforcement programs, aside from a small conservation officer graphic on the door and emergency lighting, the latter of which was usually low profile.

An official badge, coat of arms and flag (armorial bearings) was granted to the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service by the Office of the Chief Herald of Canada in 2004. The badge contains the official motto of the Conservation Officer Service "Integrity Service Protection". New shoulder flashes and hat badges were produced depicting the new official badge, in

contrast to all previous insignia which always used the Provincial Coat of Arms as a centerpiece. The Conservation Officer Service is the only provincial agency with its own armorial bearings, although most municipal police forces have had them for many years.

All new vehicles, beginning with those delivered in 2005, are highly visible and fully equipped. Each extended cab Chevrolet pick-up sports a low profile LED light bar, rear directional arrow stick, strobes in the front and rear marker lights, LED lights in the mirrors, front and rear box mounted winches, and a hidden loading ramp system, as well as Conservation Officer Service decals, including the new official badge.

The Conservation Officer Service today consists of a Field Operations Unit with 85 permanent officers, including Sub-Regional supervisors (called Senior Conservation Officers) and a General Investigations Unit consisting of 13 officers and Seniors. There are presently seven vacancies that remain un-staffed for cost saving reasons. There are technically two ranks below the Senior level: Conservation Officer in-charge (Field Operations or Investigations) and Conservation Officer. An officer who is responsible for a district (field office) is considered to be in-charge regardless of whether he or she supervises subordinate staff. In 2003, complicated union and human resources issues resulted in all ranks below Senior being classified at the same pay scale. A strange anomaly now exists where supervisors who are responsible for officers with four or more year's experience, who should require less supervision, make more than officers who are supervising new recruits. Simply put, a supervisor is required to be paid more than subordinate staff, so when subordinate staff reach the top of their pay scale, the supervisor is bumped up to a slightly higher scale. There is a very wide discrepancy between the pay of the Conservation Officers and that of the Senior Conservation Officers, who are primarily office staff, serving as lower level managers for the most part.

There are three Regional Offices, with a Manager stationed at each. They are located at Nanaimo (South Coast), Kamloops (Interior) and Prince George (Northern). An additional three managers are stationed at headquarters a combination Special Investigations/Headquarters

Operations Manager, a Manager of Program Resources and Planning, and Wildlife/Human Conflicts Manager. There are three other administrative positions at headquarters, as well as two Special Investigations Supervisors.

Conservation officers are stationed in 44 locations throughout the province. Half of the field staff is stationed in the southern quarter of the province, south of 100 Mile House. Conversely, there are only four officers currently stationed

in the northern quarter of the province, an area roughly the size of the state of Colorado, but inhabited by only a few thousand permanent residents. The summer and fall of 2005 will see 12 seasonal officers employed in Field Operations, with two seasonal Bear Response Officers deployed to North Vancouver and one to Whistler.

British Columbia was settled and developed in a unique way. B.C. had a territorial police force before the RCMP even came into existence - law and order has long been important to British Columbians. British Columbia's Game Department had its beginnings as an enforcement agency and spent many years in that role, working closely with the Provincial Police. After an identity crisis that lasted a decade or two, a professional law enforcement agency, responsible for environmental policing in B.C., was born. The Conservation Officer Service is unique to western North American resource agencies, and in fact seems to be most similar to one or two agencies in the Eastern U.S. But the officers, and their predecessors, who comprise this force are not all that unique because they still share the same dedication to protecting their natural resources as their colleagues throughout North America. ☐



New official "badge" of the Conservation Officer Service granted by the Chief Herald in 2004.



PATCH Exchange

By Ranger Mike Lathroum

B.C. Shoulder Patches



For this issue of Patch Exchange I am going to take a break and let guest writer Gerry Lister from the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service take the reins. This is not Gerry's first appearance in the patch exchange; he made his debut way back in the Winter 1995-96 issue of IGW.



In 1929, when the British Columbia Game Department was re-established by separating it from the British Columbia Provincial Police, the uniform worn by the game wardens remained nearly identical to that of the B.C. Police although B.C. Police brass insignia was replaced by brass Game Department insignia. Predatory Animal Hunters, who were in a separate division, did not wear a uniform.



In 1951, new style jackets were issued to Predator Control personnel to foster greater public awareness of their work and to assist personnel in receiving public cooperation. A shoulder flash (patch) was designed and placed on the left arm of the jacket. The author has been unable to find any documentation related to this patch or a sample of this flash. A black & white 1951 photograph of B Division Game Department staff shows a Predatory Animal Hunter wearing this shoulder flash. The flash appears to be a slightly convex sided triangular patch with "B.C. GAME" written up the left side, "DEPARTMENT" written down the right side, what appears to be "PREDATOR BRANCH" written across the bottom and what appears to be a wolf head in profile looking left in the center. The script is most likely yellow, while the wolf head is probably white.



sioner patches are extremely rare.

Al West, Supervisor of Predator Control, requested that the Predator Control Division be given permission to requisition new uniforms. Predatory Animal Hunters were being used at checking stations and generally assisting the game wardens and because the wardens were changing their uniform he wanted to see the PAH make a change to the same uniform. As a result, in 1956, all Divisions were issued the same uniform with a curved felt patch that said "British Columbia Game Commission" on it. Below the patch was a small tab denoting the Division game wardens wore a Wildlife Protection Division tab, while the Predator Control staff wore one that said Predator Control Division. There were also Game Management and Fisheries Management Division tabs. The Game Inspectors were issued a small rectangular tab, which simply said "Inspector" and was placed below the divisional tab.



In 1957 the Game Department was absorbed into the new Department of Recreation and Conservation and the Game Commission flash was phased out. It was replaced by an identically sized flash that said "British Columbia Fish and Game Branch". The use of the divisional tab continued. There was also a darker cloth version of the Fish and Game flash that was worn only on the left sleeve of the uniform shirt without a divisional tab.



Around 1963 a more rectangular shaped flash was introduced with the same wording, but in much larger type. A felt patch was worn on the outer garments and a cloth version, in a much lighter green, on the shirt. The Divisional tabs were discontinued, as were distinctive tabs for Inspectors. All employees of the branch now wore identical insignia. There is more speculation on the reasoning for this in the article on the history of the Conservation





Officer Service elsewhere in this publication.

The above noted patch did not last long, because in 1966 the Branch was renamed the Fish and Wildlife Branch and a new patch was in order. It may have taken a while to convert to this new patch which was basically identical to the former, with "Wildlife" replacing "Game". There are photographs taken in the late 1960's and early 1970's of conservation officers still wearing the Fish and Game flash. There are at least five very different variations of the cloth shirt patch. The standard version was a medium green with yellow lettering and green merrowing. One variation has lettering that is almost orange on a bright green background, another has yellow merrowing, and another has an aquamarine background. I have never been able to determine why such variation exists, beyond manufacturer's variations.



In 1979, there was seen to be a need to again distinguish conservation officers from technical and biological staff so a rocker was issued for placement under the shoulder flash. A felt rocker, in a much lighter green, was to be placed under the felt flash on outer wear, while a cloth version with yellow merrowing was to be placed on the shirt. While the shirt rocker didn't look bad, the felt version looked oddly out of place on the uniform jacket and for the most part was not worn by most officers.

Another reason that these rockers did not get affixed to the uniform was that within a year of their introduction, the uniform for conservation officers changed dramatically from the standard green and khaki, to a sky blue shirt and grey pants with a navy blue jacket. In conjunction with this change came a new shoulder flash of the new standard government design. Shaped somewhat like a slice of bread, the new flash bore white thread on a navy blue background and said "British Columbia" & "Ministry of Environment" surmounting the "TV screen" provincial coat of arms. A separate "Conservation Officer" rocker was placed above the flash. This flash was eventually replaced by a one-piece version with the rocker forming part of the patch.

Over the next 10 years or so, the Ministry of Environment (MOE) went through several name changes, sometimes too quickly for the patches to keep up. The MOE patch was replaced by a Ministry of Environment and Parks patch, which in turn was replaced by a second-generation MOE patch, similar to the first version. The government of the day saw this as a money wasting proposition and decided to develop a new patch that would not require constant fiddling as the Ministry name changed. The division under which the conservation officers fell was known as B.C. Environment, so a patch was designed that utilized that name. It was issued to some officers and even placed on a few uniform components but it was not a very attractive design and was actually smaller than the previous version. This meant that the old stitch marks would be obvious when placing new patches onto an old uniform item. Ultimately a new hourglass shaped flash was introduced in 1993. It simply said "Conservation Officer" & "British Columbia" around a full color provincial coat of arms. A smaller version was introduced in 2001 for wear on the new dress tunic. A version with a black background was introduced in 2002 when a switch was made from the sky blue to a new LAPD blue shirt.

In 2004 an official badge design was granted to the Conservation Officer Service and a motto of "Integrity Service Protection" was adopted. As a result, a new shoulder patch was issued that has the new badge and motto on it. This flash says "Conservation Officer Service", rather than "Conservation Officer" or the name of the Ministry. A small centennial tab was introduced in 2005 for placement below the flash in honour of the 100th anniversary of the "COS".

Just a reminder that the Patch Exchange is still active. I have a good selection of most of the more common patches available at this time. I am hoping to get a little more variety once some of you return from this year's conference in British Columbia. For those of you headed to Penticton, enjoy yourselves and work safe. ♡



The Patch Exchange
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