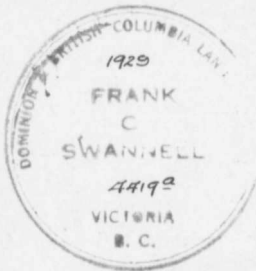




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SHALL WE SAVE THE BEAVER?



A PLEA FOR LEGISLATION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THIS VALUABLE ANIMAL, WHICH WILL OTHERWISE SOON BECOME EXTINCT.

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SHALL WE SAVE THE BEAVER?



Dear Sir,—

I request you to read the following letter relating to the saving of the beaver from extinction, which appeared in the "Colonist" last February, when an effort was made to induce the Government to bring a bill before the House then in session, which bill included the protection of the beaver for a term of years upon the lines proposed in this letter.

The Government at that time were not prepared to bring in any more possibly contentious legislation, so the matter was laid over, although the members of the Government, and many members of the House were quite in sympathy with the proposal.

In this matter every year is of vast importance, and had the close period been created last session many beaver would be living to-day and a start made towards replenishing the stock.

This fact was brought forcibly before me last summer, when I happened to be working upon the Upper Chilcote River, at a place where vast thickets of willow exist for miles. I was delighted to come upon quite extensive beaver workings, apparently used, new dams had been built, old ones repaired and large stones placed upon them to keep them in place, aspen trees had been cut down over large spaces, and everything showed the recent presence of a thriving little colony of beavers such as I had not seen for years; but upon

closer investigation I was disappointed to find that no fresh cuttings existed, and that no beaver were there at all. I afterwards heard that beaver had been caught in the locality that summer, so that was the end of one colony, which might have been saved by the timely enactment of the before-mentioned bill. Doubtless other colonies have met with a similar fate.

Upon the publication of the following letter I received a number of letters from persons interested in this subject, all in sympathy with my proposal. I append one from Mr. I. H. Brownlee, of Victoria, which appeared in the "Colonist."

I also publish a statement by a very intelligent and influential Indian from the Kluskus Lake country.

In addressing this pamphlet to you, I do so with the request that you will kindly fill in and sign the blank form and send to me by return mail, so that another effort, backed up by the opinions of well-informed persons, may be made at this coming session to pass a law which will save and permanently conserve this valuable animal.

I may add that ample time must, of course, be given to trappers now out to dispose of their fur before such a law comes into operation.

I remain,

Yours faithfully,

SIDNEY WILLIAMS.

Quesnel, B. C., December 30th, 1904.

Plea for the Beaver.

Sir,—

As the organizer of the first Game Protection Society in this Province, and as one who has always taken an intense interest in wild animals and birds, may I occupy some of your space to make a plea for one of the most interesting and valuable of our Provincial fauna, the beaver?

Twenty-five years ago beaver existed in this district in countless numbers, and even so late as nine years since, when I first came to reside in Cariboo, they were fairly plentiful, while now, with the exception of a few wandering individuals upon the larger rivers, and a few in certain remote places, they are very scarce.

The Indians hunt them relentlessly, in season and out. No sooner does one find the tell-tale cuttings than he haunts the spot until the beaver is taken. He hunts them with dogs, nets, traps and guns, and it is really a wonder to me that the animal has survived so long.

Last spring my calling took me through the Kluskus Lake country, which has probably been one of the best beaver grounds in the world; during a journey of some 500 miles past innumerable lakes and streams, I saw old traces of beaver almost everywhere; in many places acres of small trees had been felled, old beaver houses existed upon every pond, and streams passed through successions of old dams; yet in all this distance, as well as during a great deal of travelling in various directions from the beaten trails on foot, I did not see the sign of one single existing beaver!

I had many conversations upon the subject with the Indians I met during this journey, and many of the more intelligent of them greatly deplore the wholesale extermination of these animals, and would gladly welcome any law that would tend to replace them. One very intelligent Indian, who had done a great deal of trapping, stated that many Indians would assist in carrying out such a law, and that watchmen could be appointed amongst them. "But," he said, "at present what can we do? When we find a beaver family we know that if we do not catch them, Indians from elsewhere will come in and get them."

Another Indian travelling with me pointed out a stream we passed, and told me that the previous year he had killed a number of

beaver on it, but he had purposely left some to breed. "That summer following," he said, "a Chilcotin Indian came there and killed every beaver, young and old, when the fur was almost worthless."

Upon my return from Kluskus I attended as a delegate a convention at Soda Creek, at which were met gentlemen from all parts of Cariboo District. At this convention I made a statement of these facts concerning the beaver, and my remarks as to existing conditions were corroborated by several gentlemen from various localities. It was unanimously decided by the convention to embody the following in the local platform: "That the beaver be protected by law for a period of six years, during which time a penalty of \$250 per skin be inflicted upon any person having the raw skins of this animal in his possession."

Regarding the fine mentioned, this is absolutely the only means of coping with the situation; so long as their skins may be bought and sold, beaver will be killed; so long as store-keepers can make a dollar out of a beaver skin they will assuredly do so, and so long as Indians and others can make a few dollars by killing a beaver they will do it.

Has the law prohibiting the killing of beaver during the breeding season stopped that killing? I think I am correct in saying that more beaver are killed between April 1st and November 1st than during the open season; and I cannot believe that the creation of a close season has saved one single beaver from destruction in this district.

The fault with our game laws does not lie in their deficiency, but in the difficulty of their enforcement. Up here the Game Act is a dead letter; nobody knows it, nobody fears it; much could be done by creating a wholesale fear of the law by making heavy penalties for its infraction.

In the case of such an animal as the beaver, which is exclusively killed for its commercial value, it is really a very simple matter to preserve it. It would be impossible to follow trappers into the wilds and obtain convictions, but by depriving them of a market for their spoils you immediately put a stop to their depredations.

I am of the opinion that the only means of saving the beaver from extinction in this Province is to immediately give the remaining stock an absolute rest for at least six years, and this can only be done on the lines as mentioned above.

Beavers are animals that rapidly increase in numbers, and I believe that were such a law put into force at once, these animals

would in time again become numerous in many localities, I would further suggest that at the termination of the close period, if upon the report of the game wardens the stock will warrant so doing, trapping beaver be allowed for short periods, say one season in every four.

There may be some persons whose greed, overcoming their better feelings, will oppose such a measure because it would affect their pockets. There would doubtless have been many such who would have opposed suppressing the slaughter of the buffalo, whose extinction is now universally regretted; yet the buffalo before the steady march of civilization was bound to succumb, whereas the beaver, living, as it does, in vast wastes of the Province, might, if properly conserved, be a source of revenue for all time, and thus save from utter worthlessness and unproductiveness a great portion of our territory.

Again, there are those who will immediately raise the cry of what will become of the poor Indian if he may not kill beaver? Never fear, the poor Indian will look after himself. If he were dependent upon the beaver for a livelihood he would have starved to death some time since. In some localities he may have to somewhat curtail his expenditure in whiskey and silk handkerchiefs, but that he will be actually inconvenienced by such a law, there is no need to fear.

I understand that a Game Bill will shortly be brought up before the Local House, in which bill is included a close time for beaver, such as I have suggested. If this be so our legislators may rest assured that by giving this section of the bill their support they will be the means of saving this valuable animal to be a source of wealth to the Province for many generations to come, and by so doing they will earn the approval of every prudent and sensible citizen.

SIDNEY WILLIAMS.

Quesnel, B. C., January 9th, 1904.

Another Plea for the Beaver.

Sir,—

I wish to endorse Mr. Sidney Williams' timely plea for the preservation of the noble beaver, and I hope that every surveyor will back him up. The history of the beaver is a sad one. They were common in Wales over 600 years ago. They have since been exterminated from France, Germany, Austria, Russia, Poland, Sweden and Norway. I believe a few still remain in two districts of Norway, and some are known to have frequented the Elbe as late as 1878. Canada is the natural home of the beaver, and this animal is the crest of the Canadian Dominion.

The conquest of Canada was fought, in a measure, on the value of the fur of this the largest rodent we have. The early wealth of the Hudson's Bay Company was built on the value of this fur. The engineering feats of the beaver are too well known to require repetition. Every well informed hydraulic engineer will doff his hat to the beaver. Why then should this noble animal be wantonly destroyed? The nature and extent of British Columbia affords better protection to the beaver than any other province in Canada, with the possible exception of parts of Northern Quebec and Ontario. It would not be asking too much from our Provincial Government to set aside a large beaver preserve. We have exterminated the buffalo from our prairies. If we don't adopt the stringent remedial measures proposed by Mr. Williams we shall also wipe out the beaver, our national animal. I hope the papers of the Province will take this matter up editorially.

J. H. BROWNLEE.

Victoria, B. C., February 5th, 1904.

Statement of Michell a well-known and respected
Indian from the Nasco River.

I was born near Ilcatcho, and lived many years at Kluskus Lake, and about ten years ago moved to the Nasco River, where I am still living. My country was once full of beaver, and twenty years ago they were plentiful, even ten years ago there were a fair number on the creeks away from the trails, now there are scarcely any left; perhaps after hunting for four or five weeks a man will get four or five skins.

They are hunted mostly in the fall and spring. In the spring, until the end of June, they then have young ones, and ought not to be killed. I tell the boys not to kill them in the spring, as all the young ones die too.

I think that the Government should put a stop to killing beaver altogether for several years, and there are now enough left for more to come if they were left alone.

Other Indians are of the same opinion.

If the Government will authorise me I will watch and see that beaver are not killed in my part of the country.

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MICHELL. X
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Quesnel, B. C., December 26th, 1904.

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