

Additional Information and Questions Posed

Context for the open letter to Todd Loewen, Minister of Forestry and Parks, submitted by Alberta Wilderness Association and the Exposed Wildlife Conservancy on May 5, 2025.

Unsustainable hunting and trapping changes contradicting science and expert opinion.

Since taking office, Minister Loewen has made several changes that allow or increase hunting in the province. These changes include increasing cougar quotas, allowing the public to hunt “problem” grizzly bears, removing trapping limits for furbearing animals, expanding cougar hunting ranges, and opening provincial parks to the use of off-leash dogs for cougar hunting. It also includes expanding the Minister’s Special License to include white-tailed deer, mountain goat, cougar and bison, as well as expanding the hunting season for license holders.

These decisions contradict sustainable management principles, Alberta’s species-specific management plans and status reports, peer-reviewed science, and the advice of biologists (see associated Appendices for further details and biologists’ statements). For instance, grizzlies are considered Threatened in Alberta, and while populations have slowly increased, they are still vulnerable and at-risk, and further mortalities could reverse the progress made towards recovery. Similarly, cougar populations are estimated to be stable, but close to a minimum viable population number in the latest update to the provincial Cougar Management Plan. This would indicate a population unable to withstand additional hunting pressure. The same logic applies to Alberta’s at-risk mountain goats and at-risk wolverines. These populations do not appear able to withstand increasing hunting or trapping pressures according to current science.

We have previously and formally requested the Minister provide evidence to support these changes, or to back up the numbers he quoted for these populations. To date, we have not received such evidence or data. In fact, all scientific evidence we have found in peer-reviewed research papers, status reports and species-specific management plans contradicts the decisions to allow or increase harvest of these species.

Protests from Albertans affected by decisions.

Consultation for these decisions has been heavily biased, and has primarily excluded biologists, conservationists, naturalists and other recreational users, Indigenous groups, and the agricultural community. There has been no public consultation, and for many of these decisions, there has been a distinct lack of transparency.

Several of these decisions were not formally announced, and Minister Loewen only made statements after the change had been leaked to the press. Some changes, such as his lifting of furbearer trapping quotas and the increase in cougar quotas, were only released at the start of the hunting or trapping season, allowing no time for the public to react.

On learning of these changes, public sentiment was extensively negative. Alberta Wilderness Association has been copied on over 1,700 letters to Minister Loewen protesting these changes, with nearly 70 personalized letters. Exposed Wildlife Conservancy received over 200 personalized letters to the Minister on cougar hunting alone. We have also received calls and emails from many concerned citizens disgusted by the irreparable damage these changes could cause to our wildlife. These letters and the concerns expressed by Albertans have been largely ignored.

Conflicts of Interest and favouritism towards hunters, trappers, and outfitters.

When consultation occurred, it was overwhelmingly with hunter, trapper or outfitter associations. For instance, only the Alberta Trappers Association was consulted on lifting furbearer limits. In the recently tabled Bill 41 (Wildlife Amendment Act), the organizations listed as part of the news release were Alberta Wildlife Federation, Safari Club International, Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Professional Outfitters Society, and Alberta Hunter Education Instructors Association, all organizations heavily affiliated with hunting.

Although Minister Loewen claims that he has no Conflict of Interest and was cleared by the Ethics Commissioner to take over the Ministry after initially being denied three times (see appendices), his wife and son are listed as the primary shareholders for Red Willow Outfitters, a company he owned until his appointment as Minister of Forestry and Parks. The minister and his family formerly owned and currently own traplines. He has appeared as a guest at the Alberta Trappers Association gala dinner while Minister, hinting that he would be changing trapping limits on wolverine, otter and fisher. He also recently appeared as a guest at the Wild Sheep Foundation's summit, the organization which offered a bounty on cougars this past winter (2024-2025).

Finally, he has made six international trips to foreign destinations to promote Alberta hunting opportunities to "showcase Alberta as a world-class international hunting destination – boosting the province's outfitting industry" and to "promote Alberta hunting opportunities" in Europe and the United States.

Clearly, the minister maintains strong ties to the hunting and trapping community, which has benefited from his decisions. The favouritism he has shown to hunters, trappers and

outfitters to the detriment of Alberta's public resources, especially wildlife, is at odds with his role as Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Questions posed to the Alberta Minister of Forestry and Parks

We request answers to the following questions from Minister Loewen:

1. Scientific Basis:

- a. What scientific data and population models were used to justify recent wildlife management decisions (as outlined in the associated letter)?

2. Consultation and Transparency:

- a. Which groups were consulted in the decision-making process? Will the Ministry publish a list of stakeholders consulted?
- b. Why were conservation biologists, Indigenous representatives, and public recreation users were not included?
- c. Why were several of these policy changes (e.g., furbearer quota removal, cougar quota increase, off-leash dog cougar hunting in provincial parks) not announced (they became public knowledge only after implementation and/or media coverage)?
- d. Will your office commit to establishing a standard 60-day public consultation window before enacting future regulatory hunting or trapping changes?

3. Potential Conflicts of Interest:

- a. What mechanisms are in place to manage potential conflicts of interest within the wildlife regulatory process outside of the government-appointed Ethics Commissioner? Have you been assessed by these methods?
- b. In light of documented familial ties to hunting and outfitting interests (as outlined in the attached appendices), will you agree to a formal review by the Ethics Commissioner and the Auditor General to ensure decisions were made in accordance with public duty and your mandate?