

## Background and Update: Mount Elphinstone Wildlife Habitat Area Proposal

### **Conservation Concern:**

The SCCA is concerned about the conservation of a significant Coastal Tailed Frog population in the Elphinstone area. In 2004 the SCCA retained biologist Linda Dupuis to conduct an assessment of Tailed and Red-legged frog habitat and distribution in the Elphinstone area above Roberts Creek. [Click here \(link\)](#) to view Elphinstone Amphibian Values. The study also offers an excellent outline of the biology of these two species.

### **Population Distribution:**

The study showed that Tailed Frogs are distributed through-out the length of Clack, Gough and several other adjacent creeks and that Gough and Clack Creeks have the ideal qualities to support this population. The center of this breeding population is around the confluence of the two creeks. Based on Dupuis's assessment, the SCCA proposed a linear Wildlife Habitat Area (WHA) for the Tailed Frog. You can view the original proposal map [here \(link\)](#). Note that the Crown land portions are outlined in green and the private land portion is in yellow.

### **WHA Design:**

The design of the WHA is intended to protect the breeding center of the population and maintain the riparian cover and hydrological stability of the upper reaches of the two creeks. Senior wildlife biologists at the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) confirmed that the proposal was ecologically sound and appropriate for the needs of the species. However, the breeding center of the population is on Island Timberlands Private Managed Forest Land (PMFL) - a land use designation that provides a tax break and protection against regulation by local governments. The MOE advised us that the PMFL owner would need to agree to protection on some of their land before the MOE would pursue the proposal any further.

### **WHA and FRPA:**

In 2006, Sunshine Coast licencees focused on getting new Forest Stewardship Plans (FSP) approved by the Ministry of Forests in order to operate under the relaxed regulatory regime enabled by the new Forest and Range Practices Act (FRPA). In two approved FSPs (one from the Sechelt Community Forest and the other from Western Forest Products) we noticed statements that because licencees had agreed to a WHA for Tailed Frogs on Mount Elphinstone, the goals and objectives of government had been satisfied and that no other actions on behalf of them were required. The SCCA asked the Forest Practices Board to challenge the approval of these FSPs on the grounds that supporting a nomination for WHA status is not the same as achieving an actual result - a designated WHA. The board considered our request and decided it couldn't challenge the approvals because the FSPs did satisfy the minimum requirements of the Forest and Range Practices Act, thus making the approvals mandatory.

### **No Response:**

Over the past seven years, the SCCA (and many others) repeatedly raised the Tailed Frog issue with Island Timberlands (and the property's former owner, Weyerhaeuser). Neither owner has responded or shown any interest in protecting this important population of an at-risk species, and so the proposal is currently in limbo. It should be noted that, in addition to other Sunshine Coast licencees, BC Timber Sales (BCTS) also supported the WHA proposal and has never logged or proposed to log inside its boundaries.

### **Current Activities:**

In mid-July the SCCA received word that Island Timberlands applied for permission to build a road over Crown land and through the Crown land portion of the Tailed Frog WHA proposal in order to access some of its private land for logging. Island Timberlands has also obtained a permit to capture and move Tailed Frogs. They have retained the services of a Registered Professional Biologist (RPBio) to carry out this work and may also put together a "Tailed Frog recovery plan". Island Timberlands contends that "this is progress" in that so much more effort is being brought to bear on protecting the frogs than was ever previously the case.

### **In Summary:**

The only extensive population of Tailed Frogs ever to be documented in the Sunshine Coast Forest District is within the 2004 Mount Elphinstone Wildlife Habitat Area proposal and it cannot be designated without the cooperation of Island Timberland. As well, at least two licencees (Sechelt Community Forest and Western Forest Products) have used the fact of this proposal as a rationale for not undertaking any measures of their own to protect land for the Tailed Frog within their operating areas.

The SCCA intends to keep urging Island Timberlands to engage on the issue of real protection for Mount Elphinstone's Tailed Frogs. We also intend to keep challenging local licence holders on their scientifically unsupportable assumption that one Tailed Frog WHA eliminates the need for conservation forestry practices elsewhere in the Forest District.

-Daniel Bouman, July 2011