



Letter to the Editor – September 28, 2009
BC Wildlife Federation Thanks Public Safety Minister

Dear Editor,

On behalf of the membership of BC Wildlife Federation, I would like to express thanks to Public Safety Minister Peter Van Loan for his quick actions on Thursday to put a stop to the RCMP initiative to hire EKOS Research to poll firearms owners.

Firearm owners have been forced to register their firearms with the Canadian Firearms Center and therefore to share their private information. As the administrator of the program since May 2006, the RCMP has had access to all this information. Previously, such information was only shared when an inquiry was made of the database.

Admittedly, because of the way the software was designed, any police contact at all was enough to qualify for an automated check of the Registry. A citizen might not even own a firearm but may still be checked through the registry for a myriad of other reasons. When someone reports a car accident, or a vicious dog attack, or even if a police officer had entered their car's license plate into their computer - these would all initiate a check. However, the information was supposed to stay confidential within law enforcement circles.

In fact the Canadian Firearms Center's privacy section of their website clearly states;

"Relevant Firearms Program information is disclosed only to federal and provincial public safety business partners that have legal authority to collect this information consistent with their public safety responsibilities. Program business partners include local and provincial police, the Canada Border Services Agency and International Trade Canada.

The Privacy Act requires that those agencies must have a use consistent with the purpose for which the information was collected. In turn, those non-federal agencies to which firearms information is disclosed are bound by similar requirements under their jurisdictional privacy laws. Furthermore, firearms information is not shared with any private sector agencies. Some private companies, however, can have access to personal information while under a contracted arrangement for software administration or records management procedures. Under the terms of those contracts, these companies cannot use or disclose information. Also, employees of private companies are thoroughly screened for security clearance to ensure that personal information is protected at the same level as federal requirements."

It is unconscionable that the RCMP decided to spend \$80,000.00 and violate "client" privacy by sharing confidential information with a private firm to poll owners as to their satisfaction with the Firearms Registry.

Firearms owners were first ordered, under penalty of imprisonment, to acquire a license to possess their legally acquired property, and then to register it with the government. However, they now have decided to poll us to see if we are happy with the terms of our yoke.

Those who obey the law should not be subject to this sort of mistreatment by those who have been hired to protect us. Not only have the RCMP failed to protect law abiding firearm owners, but they have actually exposed them to greater risk. There is a certain security in anonymity. Firearms have

a considerable value, especially on the 'black market'. Criminals will pay handsomely for a list of where they are located.

For putting an end to this travesty and calling for an inquiry by the Office of the Federal Privacy Commissioner into how it happened and who is responsible for such a poor decision, the membership of the BC Wildlife Federation thanks you, Minister Van Loan.

Michael Fowler,
Chair, Firearms Committee
BC Wildlife Federation

For further information contact Patti MacAhonic, Executive Director of the BCWF at 604-291-9990 extension 230 or email: patti@bcwf.bc.ca

The BCWF is a province-wide voluntary conservation organization representing over 30,000 British Columbian members whose aims are to protect, enhance and promote the wise use of the environment for the benefit of present and future generations.

The B.C. Wildlife Federation was incorporated under the B.C. Societies Act in 1951 and it became a registered charity in 1969. The Federation is British Columbia's largest and oldest conservation organization.