

Habitat Conservation Trust Fund Projects Announced

Record funding of over \$6.6 million to be spent on fish and wildlife

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KAMLOOPS - More than \$6.6 million will be spent this year on 128 projects aimed at protecting, restoring and enhancing fish and wildlife populations and habitats in British Columbia.

Environment, Land and Parks Minister Cathy McGregor announced approvals for the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund projects while attending the British Columbia Wildlife Federation annual general meeting in Kamloops today.

"These projects cover the entire range of fish and wildlife issues," said McGregor, who is also the sole trustee for the HCTF. "They include everything from conservation of Fraser River sturgeon, to a wetland management program, to studying and removing invasive plants from Garry Oak meadows, and many others.

"Each project has been carefully reviewed and evaluated for its scientific merit and adherence to the objectives of the trust fund," she said. "All of these projects, many of which are several years in duration, have clearly demonstrated the benefits they will provide to the restoration, preservation and protection of fish and wildlife species and their habitats."

Some of the projects of interest include:

- the Okanagan Lake Action Plan - studies, experiments and activities designed to rebuild and maintain the stocks of kokanee in Okanagan Lake - \$268,400.
- the Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy - ongoing planning, co-ordination and implementation of a strategy aimed at protecting grizzly bears and their habitat - \$160,000.
- Thompson River Steelhead - research into genetics, productivity, migration challenges and selective harvesting techniques of wild steelhead stocks - \$291,200
- Telkwa Mountain Caribou Recovery - planning for the introduction of caribou to strengthen a remnant herd, and research to examine habitat use, productivity, mortality, etc - \$30,000

The minister also noted the significance of two projects that are being undertaken by the Environment Ministry in partnership with Ducks Unlimited. The first is at Tower Lake near Fort St. John where an earth dam will be constructed to protect and enhance wetlands, and waterfowl nesting will be encouraged with ditches

and nesting boxes. The second is at Ward Lake near Grand Forks where a water delivery system will be installed to supply the lake with water from a nearby creek, and nesting structures will be built.

To qualify for funding through the HCTF, projects must demonstrate at least one of the following objectives:

- Conserve or enhance biological diversity, fish, fish habitat, wildlife or wildlife habitat.
- Acquire and manage lands for the conservation or enhancement of a population of a species
- Increase understanding, knowledge and awareness of fish or wildlife and their habitat, or of the trust fund, through promotions, education or other programs.

The Habitat Conservation Trust Fund is supported primarily by surcharges on angling, hunting, trapping and guide-outfitting licence fees. Since 1981, almost \$37 million have been provided to more than 1,500 projects through the BCTF and its predecessor, the Habitat Conservation Fund.

Backgrounder

Approved Projects for 1997/98 - Highlights

Province-Wide

Fisheries

- Provide provincial coordinator to assist local stewardship groups in protecting lake fish populations & habitat.
- Study threatened white sturgeon throughout the Fraser watershed.
- Production of educational fish species brochures and fact sheets.
- Protecting B.C.'s native fish stocks from illegal movement of native or exotic fish species.

Wildlife

- Hold Community Greenways workshops to introduce Greenways concept to local communities.
- Ongoing promotion of the Naturescape program, production of educational materials.
- Identify and pursue province-wide land securement opportunities,

including potential Wildlife Management Areas designations.

- Re-publish volumes 1 & 2 of the Birds of British Columbia.
- Enhancement, rehabilitation and stewardship of land securement activities under the Pacific Estuary Conservation Program.
- Support Project WILD which provides educational materials to teachers, scout/guide leaders, park interpreters and youth.
- Prepare public information materials on selected wildlife species at risk.

Vancouver Island

Fisheries

- First stage of restoration plan for the Stoltz slide area on the Cowichan River - studies to identify stabilization techniques for this large clay slide.
- Restoration of intertidal estuary habitat in the Campbell River.
- Large woody debris structures will be installed in pools in the Big Qualicum River to improve rearing habitat for steelhead and coho salmon.
- Research potential ecological and genetic impacts of escaped Atlantic salmon on wild steelhead stocks.

Wildlife

- Develop and implement management, protection and enhancement plans for 20+ critical wetlands along coastal Vancouver Island.
- Develop techniques and procedures to safely and effectively relocate Vancouver Island marmots to new areas.
- Monitor bird use within recently-enhanced habitats at Cowichan Bay.
- Assess 300+ eagle nesting sites on private land on eastern Vancouver Island and produce conservation and management plans.
- Removal of invasive plants in a zone of Garry oak meadow in Victoria.
- Study the breeding ecology and habitat of an urban population of Cooper's hawk in Victoria.

Lower Mainland

Fisheries

- Install fencing to exclude livestock from lower Whittal Creek to protect salmonid habitat.
- Enhance fish populations by augmenting water flows in Musqueam and Cutthroat Creeks.

- Review data and develop plans for wild steelhead conservation in key Lower Mainland watershed.
- Develop effective bull trout conservation, protection and enhancement strategies in the Squamish River, Chehalis Lake and Silver Lake.

Wildlife

- Coordinate and expand the BC Wildlife Watch program.
- Study the population persistence of the Pacific giant salamander in the streams in the Chilliwack River drainage.
- Transplant Roosevelt elk to historic ranges near Powell River, Indian River Valley and Upper Pitt River.
- Evaluate habitat and promote private land stewardship for the vulnerable great blue heron on the east coast of Vancouver Island, Gulf Islands, Sunshine Coast and lower Fraser Valley.

Thompson-Nicola

Fisheries

- Research into genetics, productivity, migration challenges and selective harvesting techniques of wild steelhead stocks on the Thompson River.
- Develop alternative water use strategies at 6 lakes in the Kamloops area to prevent fish kill and loss of habitat.
- Monitor and enumerate steelhead escapement through the Bonaparte fishway.
- Replace irrigation systems on the Quilchena Creek to restore water flows.
- Assess and repair ministry-owned fisheries enhancement structures.
- Compile inventory information on the Adams Lake bull trout for conservation purposes.

Wildlife

- Do an impact assessment on bear habitat and use prior to BC Parks potentially developing campground facilities at Duffey Lake.

Kootenay

Fisheries

- Conduct studies on imperiled populations of the Columbia Basin white sturgeon.

- Radio telemetry to identify spawning and winter habitats of the Slocan River rainbow trout.
- Conduct stock monitoring on the harvest of kokanee in the west arm of Kootenay Lake.
- Undertake studies to determine status of the Wigwam River bull trout, and develop conservation and management strategies.
- Studies to determine the life history of the Kootenay Lake burbot.

Wildlife

- Assess and increase populations and determine seasonal habitat preferences of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep in the East Kootenay Trench.
- Inventory breeding populations and habitats of the Lewis woodpecker in the East Kootenay.
- Study of population and habitat use of the wolverine and provide conservation recommendations.
- Use prescribed burning to enhance the winter habitats of West Kootenay ungulates.
- Habitat selection and suitability assessment of East Kootenay lynx and its relationship to the snowshoe hare.
- Protect and enhance wetland and upland habitat near Wilmer with fencing, and restore the natural site and uses.

Cariboo

Fisheries

- Operation and maintenance of existing projects.

Wildlife

- Aerial moose inventory of 5 areas to aid in the recovery and conservation of populations.
- Monitoring of lichen enhancement trials on caribou winter range northwest of Alexis Creek.
- Monitor radio collared bighorn sheep on Churn Creek to identify key wintering habitats and sensitive areas for future enhancement.
- Replace 13 km of fencing around Junction Sheep Range Park to protect California bighorn sheep and significant grasslands.

Skeena

Fisheries

- Investigating the feasibility of constructing a low flow storage dam on Borel Lake to prevent the Nithi River from de-watering and protect juvenile fish stocks.

Wildlife

- Conduct raccoon control in areas of the Queen Charlotte Islands and other areas where it is required to protect nesting seabird colonies.
- Introduce caribou to supplement the Telkwa Mountain herd and monitor habitat use, productivity, mortality, etc.
- Mapping, ground truthing and documenting red-listed plant species, and reporting on status and recommendations.

Onineca/Peace

Fisheries

- Rehabilitate and enhance wetland habitat at the outlet of Charlie Lake.
- Establish a fish passage around a water control weir at the Swan Lake outlet.
- Restore 3 sites on McMillan Creek where banks are eroding.

Wildlife

- Identify plains bison movements in the Sikanni and Halfway watersheds by monitoring radio collars.
- Establish landscape unit objectives for 6 priority landscape units in the Robson Valley Forest District.
- Conduct inventory of butterflies and moths in the Peace River Valley.
- Place bait stations near moose calving grounds north of Prince George to reduce predation of calves.

Okanagan

Fisheries

- Design and place rearing habitat complexes into the Lang Tulley artificial rearing and spawning channel in the Shuswap River near Lumby.

- Ongoing operations and maintenance of fisheries projects.
- Undertake studies and activities to rebuild and maintain stocks of kokanee in Okanagan Lake.

Wildlife

- Install a water delivery system to supply Ward Lake with water from Hardy Creek, and erect nesting structures.
- Develop a site-specific strategy to reduce grizzly bear - human conflicts in the Mabel Lake area.
- Continue the integrated ecosystem approach of the South Okanagan Conservation Strategy for the purpose of conservation of biodiversity in the South Okanagan.
- Remove and clean up artificial objects such as portable enclosures fences and miscellaneous materials in the range of the Ashnola bighorn sheep.