

Trust Fund for Habitat Conservation to be Created
Sihota announces record funding of \$4.9 million
for fish and wildlife projects

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VICTORIA - The B.C. government will convert the Habitat Conservation Fund to a trust fund, to allow more money to be spent on fish and wildlife conservation projects throughout B.C., Environment, Lands and Parks Minister Moe Sihota said today at the B.C. Wildlife Federation convention.

The trust fund will be established under new legislation, expected to be introduced with the provincial budget.

"All Habitat Conservation Fund revenues will go directly into the trust fund, and the full balance in the fund will be available to support HCF projects," said Sihota. "The trust fund enables the HCF to spend all the funds it expects to earn in the coming year. This year, the HCF will provide record funding of \$4.9 million to support 154 habitat conservation projects. That's a remarkable increase over last year's record funding of \$3.7 million for 123 projects."

Under the existing system, HCF revenues are placed in a special account under the control of Treasury Board, and the HCF public advisory board has been unable to access the full amount in the account. Over the years, an accumulated balance has built up in the special account. These funds will be used to support habitat conservation projects over the next few years.

"The creation of this trust fund has been a major goal for many of B.C.'s anglers and hunters, who are the primary contributors to the HCF," said Sihota. "There are many valuable conservation projects which will now be able to go ahead this year, and in coming years."

This year's HCF projects include developing an action plan for Okanagan Lake kokanee, supporting the Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy, improving stream habitat to benefit salmon and other fish, and funding studies to help protect threatened white sturgeon on the Fraser and Columbia Rivers. Under the trust fund, HCF projects will continue to be based on the HCF public advisory board's recommendations to the environment minister.

Since it was established in 1981, the Habitat Conservation Fund has provided approximately \$30 million to fund more than 1,400 conservation projects throughout the province. The HCF is supported primarily through surcharges on angling and hunting licences.