

B.C. PLANS \$6.5 MILLION INCREASE TO CONSERVATION FUND

*Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection 2005WLAP0008-000123
February 12, 2005*

VANCOUVER – The Province intends to seek legislative approval to provide almost \$6.5 million to the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund (HCTF) to strengthen support for habitat and wildlife protection and restoration projects across B.C., Premier Gordon Campbell announced today.

"B.C. is known around the world for its leadership in habitat and wildlife protection, thanks in large part to the work done by organizations like the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund and its partners in communities across the province," said Campbell. "Our improved fiscal and economic outlook means we can take steps, like this proposed funding, to support the work of the HCTF and ensure critical habitats and species are preserved for generations to come."

"I am delighted to hear about this extra funding," Heather Lemieux, chair of the HCTF, said. "More money means more community groups will be able to turn their ideas into reality, generating incredible environmental, community and social benefits across the province."

The proposed funding would be managed by the HCTF to support its ongoing conservation efforts and boost the fund community groups rely upon for local conservation projects. Lemieux said the HCTF expects to invest the funding in three priority areas:

- \$3.7 million for the HCTF's endowment fund which pays for the operation and maintenance of conservation lands.
- \$1 million to increase the Public Conservation Assistance Fund that provides grants to community stewardship groups.
- \$1.8 million to complete a multi-partnered purchase of over 4,000 hectares of critical habitats in the Kootenays known as the Hofert/Hoodoos area.

The Hofert/Hoodoos comprises forests, rangelands, wetlands and striking rock formations known as hoodoos that support a wide variety of species, some of them threatened. The HCTF previously invested \$500,000 towards the purchase of the 4,037 hectare Hofert property between Invermere and Fairmont Hot Springs.

"The Hofert/Hoodoos is one of the largest and most critical wildlife habitats in the province," said Don Krogseth, chair of The Nature Trust of B.C., which led the group purchase. "This investment means we can now turn our attention away from the mortgage and put our efforts into development of a long-term management plan."

Campbell and Lemieux accepted a "Platinum Legacy Sponsor" award from Ducks Unlimited Canada in recognition of the HCTF's important contributions to DUC's wetland conservation programs since 1987. Wetlands are a critical component of B.C.'s vital water resources and contribute significantly to the economic and environmental health of the Province.

"Ducks Unlimited Canada enjoys a strong working relationship with the Province of British Columbia," said George Reifel, past president and director of Ducks Unlimited Canada. "Since coming to B.C. at their invitation in 1968, DUC and the Province have partnered on over 400 conservation projects, encompassing more than 130,000 hectares of high priority wildlife habitat."

"Ducks Unlimited was an original funding partner on the securement of the Hofert/Hoodoos property and is extremely pleased with today's announcement to complete this phase of the project. The newly announced HCTF endowment fund will greatly assist conservation efforts in British Columbia."

The planned HCTF funding by the Province complements other substantial environmental contributions government has made. They include the \$7 million Living Rivers Trust Fund and an \$8 million B.C. Trust for Public Lands. As a result of its strong economic position, the Province has committed over \$20 million to long-term conservation and habitat restoration projects and measures since September.

Full details of the HCTF 2005-06 projects can be found at <http://www.hctf.ca>.

-30-

BACKGROUND

HABITAT CONSERVATION TRUST FUND

- Since 1981, the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund and its predecessor, the Habitat Conservation Trust, have contributed over \$75 million to conservation, enhancement and protection projects across British Columbia
- The HCTF's mission is to provide funds to proponents to assist in maintaining the health of natural ecosystems and the productivity of species within them
- It has four main objectives: fish and fish habitat; wildlife and wildlife habitat; stewardship; and land acquisition
- It supports projects that are not eligible for support from existing research funds or don't fall within routine government responsibilities

- In a typical year, the HCTF invests approximately \$5 million in community projects. Successful applicants often provide an equal contribution of cash or in-kind
- In 2004-05, the HCTF invested \$5.5 million in 142 projects
- Proposals are evaluated by a Public Advisory Board that then makes recommendations to the Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection, the trustee of the HCTF, for approval
- The majority of HCTF's funding come from a surcharge on hunting, fishing, trapping and guide-outfitting licenses. Courts frequently direct fines for environmental offences to the HCTF
- The HCTF has twice before contributed to the Hofert acquisition project. In 2003 it provided \$300,000; in 2004 it contributed \$200,000