



HABITAT CONSERVATION
TRUST FOUNDATION

Quality Waters Fund

Project Number 0-545

Year 3 Project Report

West Coast Region

Project Summary

There were two components to the Region 1 QWS program in 2023-24. The River Guardian program (component 1) was successfully delivered in partnership with the BC Conservation Foundation and the Haida Fisheries Program. This was the sixth year of the project and it ran relatively smoothly again in 2023-24. Analysis and reports have now been completed for the River Guardian activities in year 5 and data entry, analysis and reporting for 2023-24 is underway. Year five of this monitoring found the lowest levels of overall angler participation recorded but with the highest proportion of Haida Gwaii resident anglers. There were two observations of anglers fishing in closed-waters in 2022-23. Surveys have suggested similarities in spatial distribution of angler effort between years and response to environmental conditions (discharge). The results of the River Guardian surveys are producing meaningful insights into the spatial-temporal distribution and behaviour of steelhead anglers on the Yakoun River, and are continuing to provide an opportunity for collaboration with the Haida Fisheries Program and their direct engagement with anglers on the waters of Haida Gwaii. In 2021, the HCTF Board requested that mainland coast steelhead surveys be completed (component 2). Capacity limitations in 2021 meant we were unable to complete these surveys, however surveys were completed in 2022-23 and 2023-24 using a combination of internal and external staff. In 2023-24, a single survey day was completed on five of the historically surveyed river sections (Glendale, Ahnuhati, Kakweiken, Atwaykellesse, and Wahpeeto Rivers). Observed steelhead abundance was the third lowest on record with 28 steelhead observed in all 5 indices combined, and an average steelhead density across all streams of 2.8 steelhead/km.

Summary Funding Table

	2023-24 Budget	2023-24 Spending	Variance
Haida Gwaii (various)	\$18,000	\$15,500	-\$2,500
Yakoun River	\$0	\$0	\$0
Tlell River	\$0	\$0	\$0
Mainland Coast (Various)	\$12,000	\$8,746	-\$3,254
TOTAL	\$30,000	\$24,246	-\$5,754

Progress and Challenges in Achieving 2021-24 Project Outcomes

The 2021-24 River Guardian program ran very smoothly. In each year, weather and river flow conditions was variable, as expected, but the number of survey days and duration of fishery season allowed for flexibility in managing this. The Haida Gwaii River Guardian program has helped to further develop a successful working relationship with the Haida Fisheries Program and provided insights into angler spatial-temporal distribution, behaviour, and catch. The Mainland Coast steelhead swims in 2023-24 were successfully completed at a time with good survey conditions and within the appropriate biological timing window. However, variable and unusual weather and flow conditions in 2022-23 were less than ideal, despite a high degree of staff flexibility and diligence around monitoring conditions.

Capital Asset Purchase Information

N/A

Additional Supporting Information

Two reports are provided with this submission: 1) Yakoun River Guardian Program: Year 5 Summary (2022-2023); and 2) Mainland Coast Winter Steelhead Snorkel Surveys May 8, 2023.

Photos

Three photos are included with this report - all were taken by Mike McCulloch. Two photos are of swimmers during the Mainland Coast snorkel surveys. The third is an aerial view photo taken in May 2023 of the Ahnuhatti River landslide that occurred in the previous year.



