



HABITAT CONSERVATION  
TRUST FOUNDATION

# Quality Waters Fund

Project Number 6-268

Year 3 Project Report

Skeena Region

## Project Summary

A highly successful suite of Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation-funded projects were delivered during the 2023-24 funding cycle, providing fishery information to decision-makers, to better inform stakeholders and provide angling opportunity in the Skeena Region. Projects included an estimate of the aggregate abundance of the Skeena Interior Summer Steelhead ecotype via the Tyee Test Fishery, a mid-Skeena indication stream, the Kitwanga River, via a dual-beam identification sonar, upper Skeena indicator stream, Sustut River, as well as the Witset Mark-Recapture population estimate of Bulkley and Morice River steelhead abundance, the premier steelhead fishery in British Columbia. Unpredicted reductions in adult summer steelhead abundance in the Skeena watershed in 2021, has resulted in the lowest adult returns since the inception of the Tyee Test Fishery. These reductions in fish abundance have resulted in budget savings associated with a review of angler use management on select Skeena rivers. With biologist efforts being focused on determining the reason for and response to the continued decline of Skeena interior summer steelhead.

## Summary Funding Table

	2023- 2024 Approved Budget	2023- 2024 Spending	Variance
<b>Skeena River</b>	\$57,000	\$56,490	-\$510
<b>Kitwanga River</b>	\$13,500	\$13,500	\$0
<b>Bulkley River</b>	\$38,500	\$36,500	-\$2,000
<b>Kispiox</b>	\$2,000	\$0	-\$2,000
<b>Morice</b>	\$2,000	\$0	-\$2,000
<b>Sustut</b>	\$60,000	\$59,545	-\$455
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$173,000</b>	<b>\$166,035</b>	<b>-\$6,965</b>

## Progress and Challenges in Achieving 2021-24 Project Outcomes

Progress – All stock assessment projects were completed on time and within the allocated budgets. However, recent decline in Skeena interior summer steelhead abundance have resulted in management efforts being focused more on biological assessments versus management of angler use (lottery, Leh, etc.). Population information collected throughout the project, did support the closure of the fall summer steelhead fishery in 2021. Also, summer steelhead population estimates collected at all assessment sites are being used in the development of a Skeena run timing model and Skeena steelhead stock assessment review.

Challenges - The last funding cycle has been extremely challenging. The delivery of this project has been fraught with many hurdles, including budget reductions due to Covid (2021), the lowest recorded return of summer steelhead to Skeena (2021), and historic drought (2023).

## Capital Asset Purchase Information

N/A

## Additional Supporting Information

N/A

## Photos



