

Together for Wildlife

Together for Wildlife HCTF Conservation Fellowship Recipient 2024



Alexia Constantinou

Alexia is a PhD student in the Applied Conservation MacroEcology Lab led by Dr. Jason Fisher at the University of Victoria. She is working on a collaborative project with Alkali Resource Management and Esk'etemc Nation, sponsored by Francis Johnson. Their work focuses on monitoring fishers (*Pekania pennanti*), mesocarnivores in general and wildlife of interest for the community, mainly through a lens of how wildlife respond to prescribed and cultural fire.

Fisher populations in British Columbia are facing a sharp decline and are projected to be extirpated from central BC within the next decade. Alexia is working to confirm the presence of fishers, their prey, and other mustelids through the use of camera traps, monitoring them across portions of their known range in interior BC. This research will reveal which areas fishers still occupy, where their prey is located, and which regions they have vacated. By assessing fisher population size and distribution in the southern interior, habitat stewardship efforts, led by First Nations leaders, can be optimized to protect and enhance fisher habitats. Fishers, along with other members of the weasel family, remain understudied in terms of how landscape-scale fires, human activity, and forest harvesting affect them.

This project will provide crucial insights into the drivers behind fisher population decline and support wildlife management decision-making. It forms part of the broader Mesocarnivore Monitoring Program operated by the Ministry of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship. Alexia's work contributes to a deeper understanding of species that are vital for food security, cultural practices like trapping, as well as at-risk species and their habitat use within traditional territories in the Cariboo Region. This research will aid First Nations land stewardship and the province by validating existing habitat models and guiding conservation and recovery efforts for fishers and other mesocarnivores.

The Mesocarnivore Team at the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, led by Dr Joanna Burgar are providing additional support to expand the monitoring power of the project. Data sovereignty and management, alongside ARM and the Guardians program is integral to this project. This project and the budding relationships are the joyful highlight of Alexia's professional career thus far. When she's not in PhD mode, you might find Alexia teaching in the Department of Renewable Resources at BCIT, kayaking, playing Wingspan or biking.

