



HABITAT CONSERVATION
TRUST FOUNDATION

2023-2024

Impact Report



Investing for the future
of British Columbia's fish and
wildlife, and their habitats.



Contents

1	Welcome
2	Highlights
3	Project Locations
4	Fish and Wildlife Grants
6	Habitat Grants
8	Stewardship Grants
10	Education Grants
12	Education Programs
14	Strategic Plan Update
16	Financial Overview

Message from our CEO and Board Chair

Welcome

On behalf of HCTF, we are proud to present our first Impact Report outlining our work, measures of success, and project examples.

This past year our staff, grant review committees, and Board of Directors/trustees evaluated over 800 grant applications. Behind the nearly 600 approved grants and education programs is a community of over 40 education facilitators, 190 conservation project leaders, 360 teachers, and many project partners and volunteers. They collectively build a more resilient future for our fish, wildlife and their habitats in B.C. Our conservation work simply could not happen without their contributions.

Special recognition goes to our many funders, particularly the anglers, hunters, guide outfitters, and trappers who pay an annual surcharge when they purchase a license. Complementing the surcharge funding are contributors, including the Province of B.C., Government of Canada, BC Parks Foundation, Forest Enhancement Society of BC, and Conservation Officer Service.

This year we began the understated but important organizational work to improve our governance and granting. In the previous year, the Indigenous perspectives added to our board and staff created a stronger foundation for this work. Now we can confidently focus on improving our decision-making processes, increasing accountability (such as publishing this Impact Report!), and beginning a multi-year process to streamline our granting programs for our applicants. Ultimately, these efforts will strengthen our work of approving over \$10 million in grants and programs.

Yet, despite our progress, much more work is needed to halt and reverse the loss of species and ecosystems in the province. Through the guidance of our Strategic Plan and HCTF community, we will continue enabling our project leaders to conserve B.C.'s freshwater fish, wildlife, and their habitat for generations to come.

We look forward to working with you, our HCTF community!



Dan Buffett
CEO



Greg Anderson
Chair of the Board

Our Mission

To improve sustainability and societal awareness of British Columbia's fish, wildlife, and their habitats through leadership, education, and funding for conservation.

Highlights

21k

Students
Learning About
BC Biodiversity

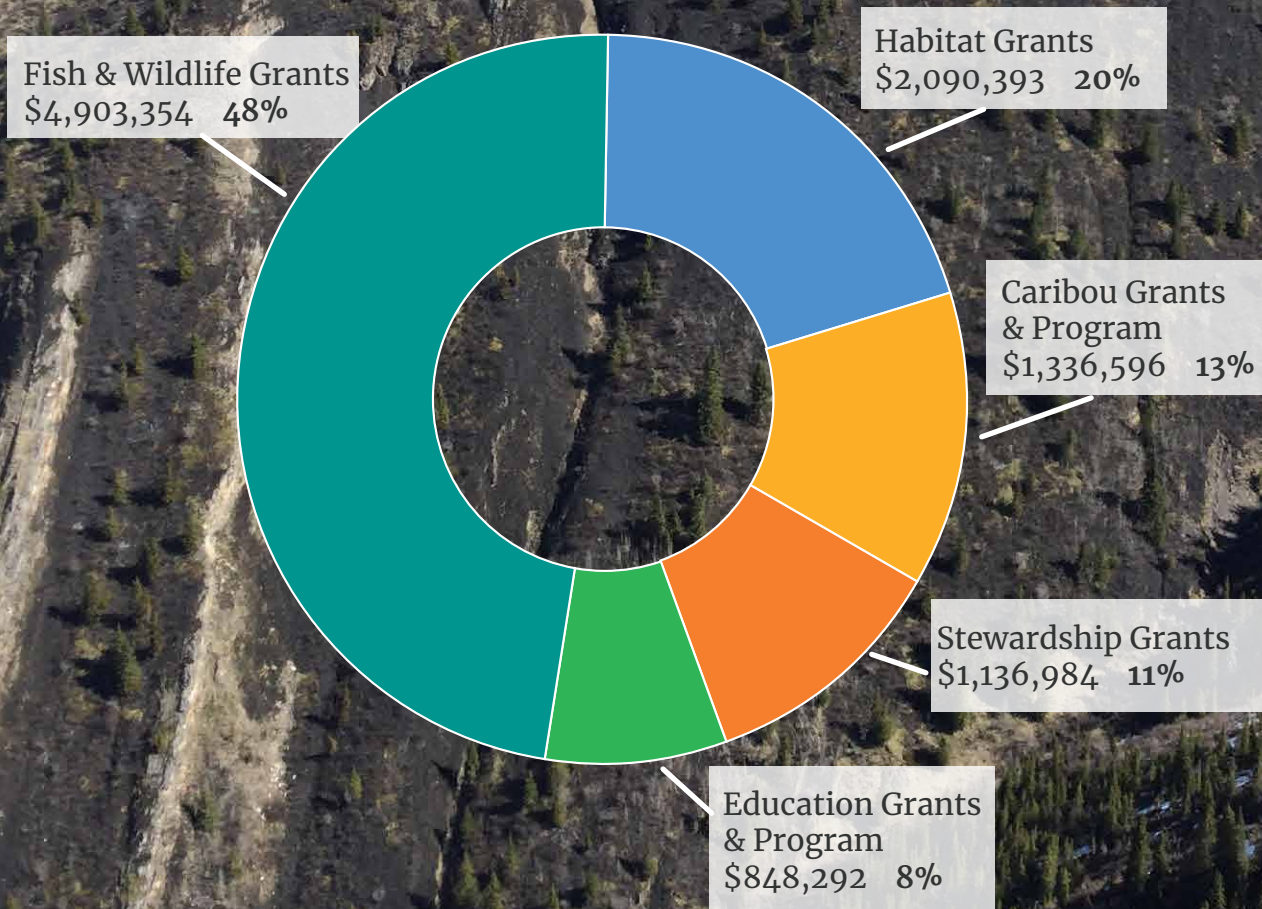
225

Conservation and
Stewardship
Projects Funded

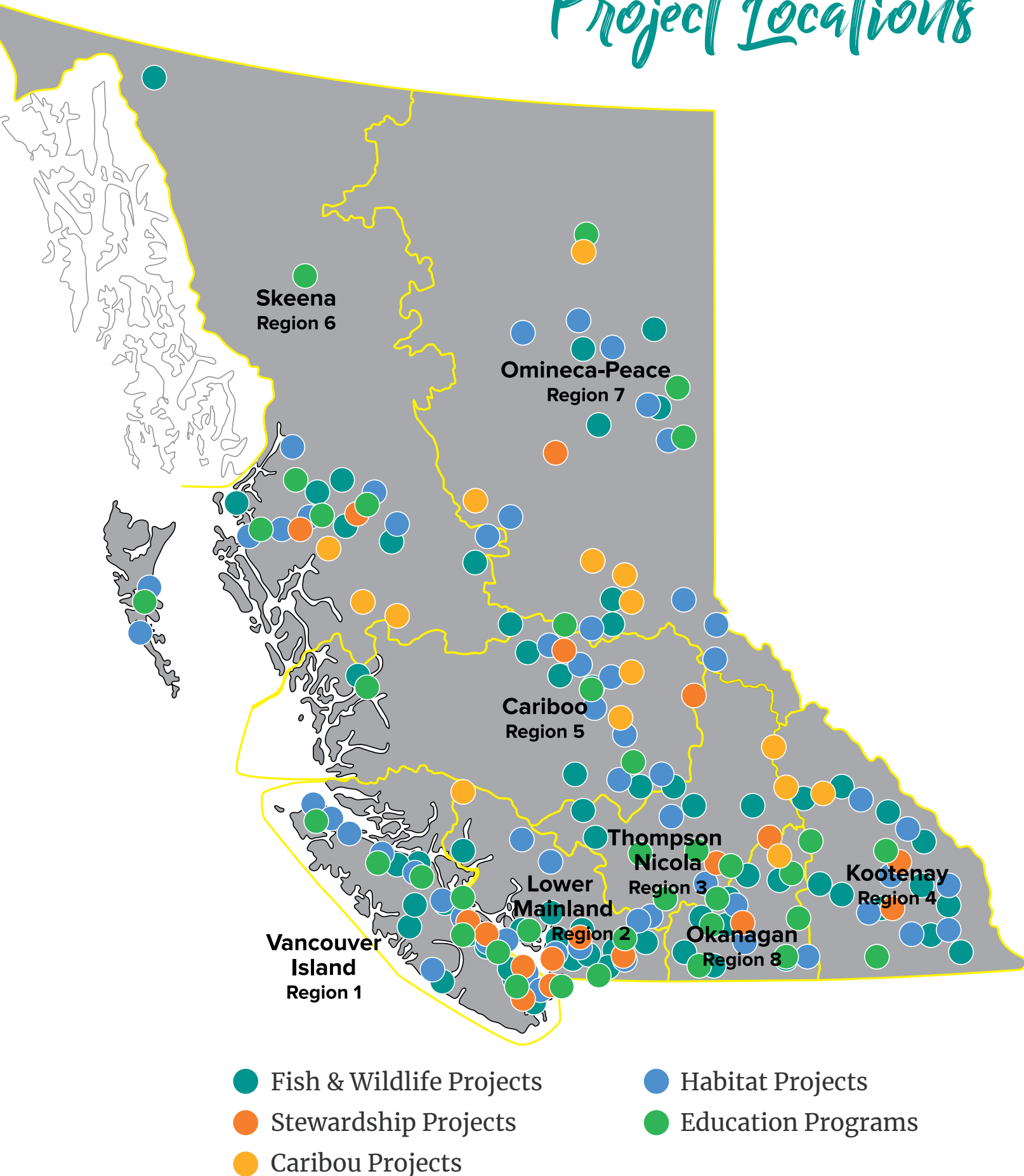
177

Hectares of Land
Acquired

Funding by Grant Program 2023-2024



Project Locations





Fish and Wildlife Grants

Year in Review

Our largest program, Fish & Wildlife Grants, funds applied research, population monitoring and assessment, and on-the-ground habitat restoration and enhancement for wildlife and fish including restricted funds for wild sheep, caribou, and white sturgeon conservation.

In 2023-24 there was an increase in new applicants to HCTF including several First Nations and Indigenous-led organizations. We also noted a rise in larger, landscape-level habitat restoration projects including wetland and watershed restoration initiatives, stream and riparian restoration, and forest enhancement including restoration of roads or linear features.

New funding was secured from the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans for invasive mussel monitoring, building on the existing program with the Province of B.C. As the threat of invasive mussels gets closer to B.C.'s borders, HCTF is grateful for provincial and federal support of this important preventative work.

Fish & Wildlife Grants have funded a wide range of species and habitats in all regions of the province. These projects include protecting vulnerable or endangered species of bats, a Provincial risk-assessment for coastal cutthroat trout, and population changes in moose directly informing management as well as moose habitat enhancement in the north. In 2023-24, approximately \$6M was dispersed to 145 Fish & Wildlife projects.

95 km
of Roads Restored

145
Fish & Wildlife
Projects Funded

Project Stories



Callazon–Clearwater Valley Níkanêse Wah tzee Stewardship Society

This multi-year project is taking place in the Klinse-Za herd range of the Central Group of Southern Mountain Caribou. The Klinse-Za herd numbered only 36 individuals in 2013, but with recovery efforts, the population has grown to 159. While this is a great success, the long-term viability of the herd remains in question; habitat restoration is a critical component in supporting a self-sustaining population.

One key habitat restoration method is functional restoration, which rehabilitates a road after the tenure holder fulfills their statutory requirement to deactivate the roads. These roads disrupt migration routes and fragment habitat, as well as increase predator access to caribou, hindering recovery efforts. In this project, Níkanêse Wah tzee Stewardship Society is dismantling the roads in Callazon–Clearwater and reforesting the corridors.

This year, 9.3 kilometers of road were physically treated with ecological restoration techniques such as loosening the soil of compacted surfaces and planting native seedlings. This decreases mobility for predators and access by humans to the area, influencing approximately 320 hectares of critical habitat for the Klinse-Za caribou herd. In its three years so far, it is estimated that this project has influenced over 2,000 hectares of contiguous caribou habitat.



Juvenile White Sturgeon Critical Habitat

InStream Fisheries Research

The only population of white sturgeon in Canada is found in B.C. Within the Lower Fraser River, the Pitt River watershed is an important area for this population's survival. InStream Fisheries Research Inc. are tagging and monitoring the juveniles, which is a critical stage for this species that can live over 100 years. The project is identifying critical rearing and overwintering habitats for juvenile sturgeons in the Pitt River watershed and determining the migration pathways and timing as juveniles move into and out of these critical habitat areas.

With the third year of a 5-year project completed, over 350 juvenile sturgeon were tagged and detected through fixed stations and mobile tracking surveys. In collaboration with Katzie Development Limited Partnership and the Fraser Valley Angling Guides Association, the project shares information with several other organizations on the river to track the juveniles beyond the Pitt River watershed. While many juveniles remain within the watershed, many other individuals migrate downstream to the mouth of the Fraser River and upstream near Mission – covering 135 km of water. The project will guide the future conservation of the species and the current catch-and-release sport fishery of this population in the Lower Fraser River.



Habitat Grants

Year in Review

HCTF operates several grants focused on securing new habitats and managing existing high-value habitats for fish and wildlife. Some of these grants are restricted to non-government organizations or the B.C. government as the Province provides funding to HCTF specifically for these programs.

The Conservation Lands Operations & Management (O&M) program, delivered with the Nature Trust of BC and Ducks Unlimited Canada (in the south coast region) provides funding to 113 provincially-administered conservation areas. The Fisheries O&M program provides funding to the Province for the operations and maintenance of infrastructure such as spawning channels, aerators or small dams initially funded by HCTF. In the current funding cycle, 42 sites are managed to improve fish and other aquatic values in rivers, creeks, and lakes; the Aerator Replacement Fund was launched in 2023-24 to ensure ongoing benefits to regional fishing values. The restricted provincial government grant, Quality Waters (QW), continues to develop or revise Angling Management Plans, support River Guardian Programs, and stock assessments on Classified Waters in B.C.

The Land Stewardship Grant provides three years of funding for operations and maintenance activities on lands owned and managed by NGOs. 2023-24 marked the start of a new cycle, with 7 NGOs receiving support to manage high-value properties for fish and wildlife.

Several Habitat Acquisitions were underway throughout the year with one property finalizing the purchase process, ensuring the protection of 182 hectares for future generations.

162

Sites Managed

22

Rivers Managed
Under QW

Project Stories



Wycliffe Wildlife Corridor

The Nature Trust of BC

Wycliffe Prairie spans 182 hectares in the East Kootenay region, within the unceded, traditional territory of the Ktunaxa Nation. Through the Habitat Acquisition Grant, HCTF helped the Nature Trust of BC fund the purchase of this property in early 2024.

An ecologically diverse area, it features riparian forests, wetlands, grasslands, and dry, open forests that are vital habitat to several endangered and at-risk species such as grizzly bears, Lewis's woodpeckers, American badgers, and Western painted turtles. It's also an Ungulate Winter Range for mule deer, whitetail deer, and elk, and is potential critical habitat for the Southern Mountain population of caribou.

The largely natural state of open grassland in a dry, hot Douglas-fir biogeoclimatic subzone is of provincial conservation concern, and its protection will aid carbon sequestration, helping to mitigate the effects of climate change impacts. The property also connects to several adjacent conservation lands, increasing connectivity and wildlife corridors; with the addition of this prairie, the total area of conservation land in the Wycliffe Wildlife Corridor complex is now over 1,450 hectares.



Conservation Lands O&M

West Coast Region

The West Coast region of HCTF's Conservation Lands Operations & Management program encompasses some of the rarest and most diverse ecosystems in the province. Comprised of estuaries, wetlands, and riparian zones, the areas not only provide crucial habitat for a wide range of fish and wildlife but also provide flood protection and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Outcomes from the 2023-24 project include:

- Planting of over 2,300 native trees, plants, and shrubs in estuarine and riparian habitats of 5 key properties
- 7 volunteer events, engaging community members in invasive plant removal and native planting
- Replacement of large infrastructure such as kiosks, a bridge, a boardwalk, and an observation platform
- Invasive species control on 34 properties with over 34 hectares surveyed
- Ongoing relationship building with First Nations, local governments, stewardship groups, and fish & game clubs



Stewardship Grants

Year in Review

The 2023-24 year saw big changes in HCTF's stewardship grants. HCTF began restructuring what was formerly two grant programs, into three better-defined grants: Capacity, Community, and Action.

Built on feedback from project leaders, Capacity Grants are for organizations that have identified a need for conservation work but do not yet have the capacity to design and deliver a conservation or restoration project. This was the pilot year of the grant program, which received 46 applications and over \$1 million in funding requested; 13 projects were approved for a total of \$197,315 in funding committed for a two-year period. Many of the successful project leaders were new HCTF recipients including Indigenous-led and small organizations.

The new Action Grants were redesigned during the 2023-24 year and will launch in the spring of 2024. We're excited to see what our project leaders accomplish in these new programs!

Rounding out the stewardship umbrella is Community Grants, which has started to rebound after reduced applications during the pandemic. With over \$200k requested, HCTF funded nearly \$150k in community-based and volunteer-led projects. Many of these projects enable volunteers to conserve and enhance a multitude of aquatic and terrestrial habitats that often are overlooked in local communities.

53k +

People Engaged
in Projects

1,359

Volunteers in
Community Grants

Project Stories



Capacity Grant

Cherryville Community Forest

Within the first cohort of HCTF's new Capacity Grants, the Cherry Ridge Management Committee (CRMC) was the first to finish a project. They completed a feasibility study and project plan to identify and prescribe treatments to enhance habitat within the Cherry Ridge Community Forest Block in North Okanagan.

One result of the project was identifying the most effective treatments to enhance habitat and build a plan with actionable steps for implementation; 9.5 hectares of mule deer habitat range will be treated and 6 km of access roads rehabilitated through this detailed plan. Another outcome was for two CRMC Directors to be involved in field work and receive training on completing the prescribed ecosystem restoration plans.

Additionally, the full Board was involved in the project, and a public meeting was held to encourage community involvement. The funding for this project enabled the CRMC to build organizational capacity to plan and implement habitat restoration in their community; while Capacity Grants can be standalone projects, the successful completion of the Cherryville Community Forest Habitat Enhancement Project did enable the CRMC to submit a Fish & Wildlife Grant proposal for 2024-25, which was approved.



Community Grant

Metchosin Parks Holly Eradication

For several years, a dedicated group of volunteers has been tackling invasive species in Metchosin parks. Holly, daphne, Himalayan blackberry, and broom are significant problems in many parks, spreading easily and crowding out native plant species, disrupting ecosystems.

Community Grant funding enabled the Metchosin Invasive Species Council (MISC) to purchase materials and equipment such as pruners and spades, pullerbearers for removing larger stems, flagging tape, and safety equipment. The vast majority of work, hundreds of hours' worth each year, was conducted by volunteers.

MISC has so far succeeded in removing all known holly – thousands of stems – from six District of Metchosin parks, representing over 90 hectares of park land. While in itself an incredible feat, the group has also been expanding its outreach, gaining attention and support from the community and partners. In fall 2023, a local school reached out to get students and staff involved; a classroom and 2 staff joined the group in removing invasive plants from Witty's Lagoon, stewarding riparian habitat for a wide range of wildlife.



Education Grants

11^k

Students Engaged in
Outdoor Learning

54^k +

Hours of Outdoor
Education

Year in Review

HCTF strongly believes education is a critical component of conservation and invests in education across B.C. with HCTF Education. This includes grants that support students in kindergarten through grade 12 by funding field trips and outdoor education.

In 2023-24, our Get Outdoors (GO) Grants supported 11,000 students to get outdoors and discover more about B.C.'s fish, wildlife, and their habitats through place-based learning and experiential and hands-on activities. The grant covers transportation, project materials, and program fees to a maximum of \$800 per class for an average cost of \$12 to \$13 per student. Common destinations include local and provincial parks, local wetlands, lakes, fish spawning channels and forests, non-government conservation lands, nature interpretation centres, and community gardens.

LEAP, or Leadership Environmental Action Project Grants, are for middle and high school classes to undertake mini conservation projects. These projects provide opportunities for students in grades 8-12 to gain experience and skills with biodiversity and conservation stewardship projects and showcase careers in this field. The grant covers transportation, teacher-on-call, project materials and/or program fees to a maximum of \$5,000. This year there were three LEAP Grants awarded for supporting students in invasive species, stream-to-sea, and forest health projects.

Project Stories



GO Grant

A Comox Valley Field Trip

One GO Grant this year supported a trip for kindergarten and grade 1 students to Tsolum River, where they joined biologists to assess the stream's health through various activities. They explored the river's history, learning about its recovery from past pollution due to a copper mine.

By examining macro-invertebrates like caddisflies and mayflies, students assessed stream health and found it to be very healthy, supporting abundant salmon. The experience included discussions on the importance of salmon to the community, factors affecting stream health, and the impacts of pollution and climate change. The students also participated in a read-aloud, nature journaling, and a forest walk to identify trees and plants.

"I thought the learning was exceptionally impactful. They discussed the field trip for months afterward and remembered details about how to collect specimens and how monitoring streams helps us make better choices as a community."

- Teacher observation



LEAP Grant

A High School Field Study

A LEAP Grant for a Campbell River high school provided learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom as part of their Stream to Sea Biology Program.

The program used a series of field study projects to immerse grade 11 students in the world of environmental science through experimental design, data analysis, laboratory and field techniques, and hands-on learning in their local forests, streams, wetlands, and ocean ecosystems.

Students learned various scientific techniques used to manage these ecosystems, developed their critical-thinking skills, and were exposed to potential career paths in ecosystem management.

They also learned about the environment and about themselves, their fellow students, and the biodiversity around them. One student reflected:

"We learned about the immense human impact that we have on our planet in both the big picture and locally, decreasing biodiversity through habitat destruction, pollution, invasive species, fragmentation and over-harvesting."



Education Programs

Year in Review

HCTF Education also runs province-wide programs for classrooms and schools, offers workshops and resources to on average 1,000 educators each year, and administers several scholarship programs.

Wild Schools is a program for kindergarten through grade 8 public and independent schools, providing environmental education professional development and connections to conservation for B.C.'s educators. The program works with over thirty schools, hundreds of educators, and thousands of students each year to support teaching and learning of B.C.'s fish, wildlife, and their habitats. The Environmental Exchange Box program pairs kindergarten to grade 9 classes from around the province with another class. The pen pal-style program encourages each class to learn about biodiversity in their area and share it with their partner class. This year the program had over 1,800 students and 82 classes participating.

HCTF continues to build the bridge between education and careers with scholarships. This includes two memorial scholarships, in honour of Al Martin and Don McCubbing, which this year invested \$50,000 for 7 students to pursue careers in fish and wildlife management. This year also saw the launch of Together for Wildlife (T4W) Scholarships, offered in partnership with the First Nations-B.C. Wildlife & Habitat Conservation Forum and the Province of BC. It awarded ten \$20,000 scholarships to master's and PhD candidates conducting applied research to improve the stewardship and management of wildlife and wildlife habitats.

900

Hours of Professional Development

10^k +

Students in HCTF Education Programs

Project Stories



Exchange Box Victoria and Prince George

This year a Victoria-area school eagerly filled their exchange box with all sorts of goodies! The class adopted trees on the playground and then worked in teams to photograph their newly adopted trees. With pictures in hand, they returned to their classroom to create artwork of their trees, carefully drawing and painting the different roots, branches, and trunks. When the paintings were complete the class split into groups to create collages of the artworks to include in their exchange box with a school in Prince George.

In addition to the collages included in their exchange box, the kindergarten class from Victoria included some fantastic self-portraits made from local natural objects found nearby. They also included some extras from their collections so that their Prince George buddies could either join in and create some self-portraits of themselves or use the materials for another purpose.

The class also produced a short video; using their self-portraits as the visuals, the class took turns speaking in French about how spending time in nature makes them feel.

This hands-on learning and sharing builds an incredible appreciation for biodiversity and a connection to their local places.



Al Martin Conservation Fellowship M. Sc. Recipient

Alessandro Freeman is an M.Sc. student of Ecological Restoration at Simon Fraser University and the British Columbia Institute of Technology under the supervision of Dr. Douglas Ransome. A 2023 recipient of the Al Martin HCTF Conservation Fellowship, he was awarded \$10,000 for his studies.

Alessandro's research project titled, "Determining the Accuracy of the BRAT Model for Identifying North American Beaver (*Castor Canadensis*) Habitat in Central Interior British Columbia" is assessing the Beaver Restoration Assessment Tool (BRAT) – a spatial computer model that determines watercourses of high and low quality that beavers potentially may dam to create wetlands.

Through fieldwork and modeling, and in partnership with Ducks Unlimited Canada, the project is studying the viability of using beavers to conduct wetland restoration and conservation projects. The goal is to develop a more reliable method of identifying beaver habitat to help maintain perennial flow in watercourses, and the conservation of habitat for aquatic and riparian species.

In the spring of 2024, Alessandro successfully defended his thesis!



Progress on the Strategic Plan: 2022-2027

In 2022, HCTF identified five overarching strategies that were imperative to implement within five years to support our Mission, Goals, and Core Values. The strategies built on our accomplishments to provide a roadmap for HCTF's continued success in funding projects that conserve B.C.'s freshwater fish, wildlife and their habitats for generations to come. Below are just a few representative actions HCTF undertook in this reporting period from the five strategies.

1. Support projects and programs that propose to **ADDRESS THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE and cumulative effects on fish, wildlife, and their habitats.**

- HCTF financially supported initiation of a limnology monitoring project to measure water quality changes in over 20 small lakes in the Thompson-Okanagan Region to better understand how climate change will affect small lakes and fisheries values.

2. **SECURE FUNDING sources to provide continuity and strengthen conservation of fish, wildlife, and their habitats.**

- As a new funding partner, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) contributed \$140,000 to the Invasive Mussels Monitoring Grant program, while the BC Parks Foundation (also a new funding partner) provided \$35,000 to HCTF's Education GO Grant program for school groups.
- In partnership with the First Nations-B.C. Wildlife & Habitat Conservation Forum and the Province of British Columbia, HCTF launched the Together for Wildlife Scholarship program. The associated new funding extended HCTF's existing scholarship program with funding for 10 new academic post-secondary scholarships to further support leading-edge fish, wildlife, and habitat research in B.C.



3. Ensure the conservation **BENEFITS OF OUR PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS ENDURE OVER TIME.**

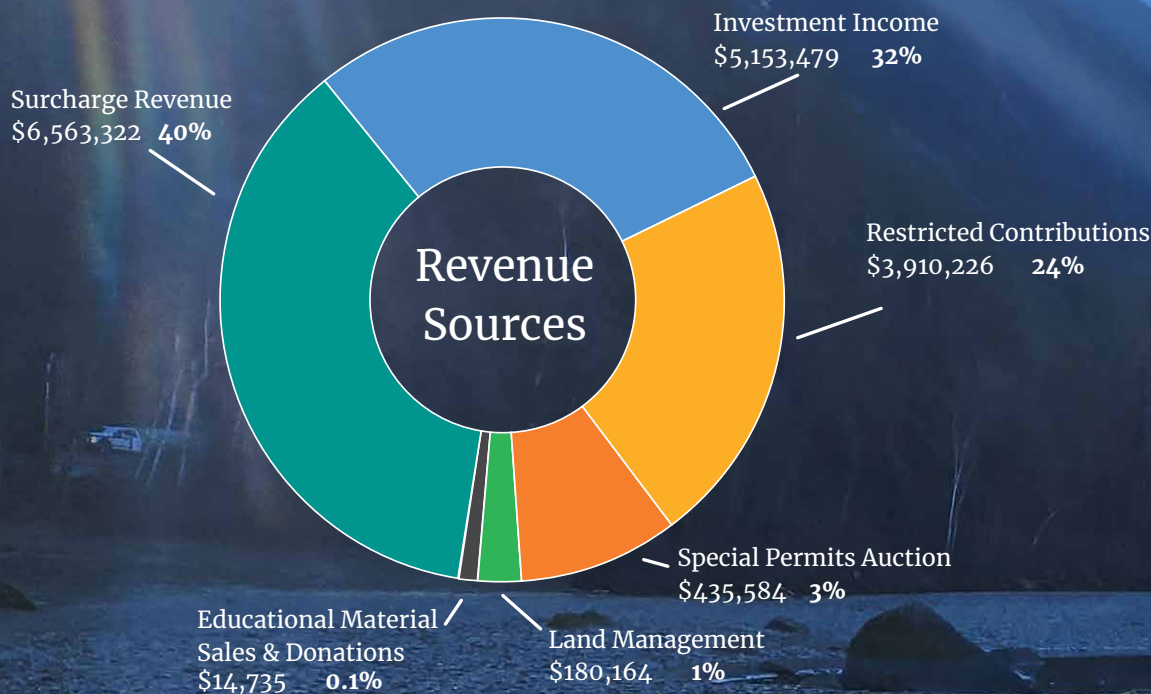
- HCTF completed an integration of granting programs to better meet conservation needs and reduce the administration of grants from the applicant's perspective. As a result, HCTF staff created a new grant program (Capacity Grant) while also revising existing granting programs including the Invasive Freshwater Mussels Monitoring and Wild Schools program.

4. **EXPAND COLLABORATIONS with organizations, agencies, and Indigenous Peoples to build conservation connections and responsible use between people and nature.**

- HCTF and Simpcw First Nation (Simpw Resource Group) collaborated on a 3-day workshop in Revelstoke to increase the attendees' capacity focused on the restoration of linear features for caribou.
- HCTF engaged directly with several B.C. First Nations communities to determine how HCTF could reduce barriers to granting and better understand Indigenous values and priorities for conservation and restoration.

5. Continually **IMPROVE HCTF'S ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS and reputation to strengthen conservation outcomes.**

- With more Indigenous perspectives in the organization (Board, staff), the HCTF Board has developed and posted online its first Land Acknowledgment statement, and an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion statement.
- HCTF initiated a virtual webinar for funded post-secondary scholarship students to share their research plans and preliminary findings about their fish and wildlife projects.
- HCTF began streamlining granting processes to reduce barriers and improve the granting experience for applicants so they could focus more of their time on the important work of conserving fish, wildlife and habitats.



Financial Overview

Responsible Investing Performance

In 2018, HCTF began a process to transition all the funds we had invested in financial markets into Responsible Investing portfolios.

While funds are invested, they achieve several goals set out by HCTF; these include reducing carbon emissions and assisting in the transition to a low-carbon economy. Upon the initial transition to Responsible Investing, HCTF set a goal to achieve carbon intensity that was consistently lower than the benchmark, with target of 70% below benchmark by the end of year 3.

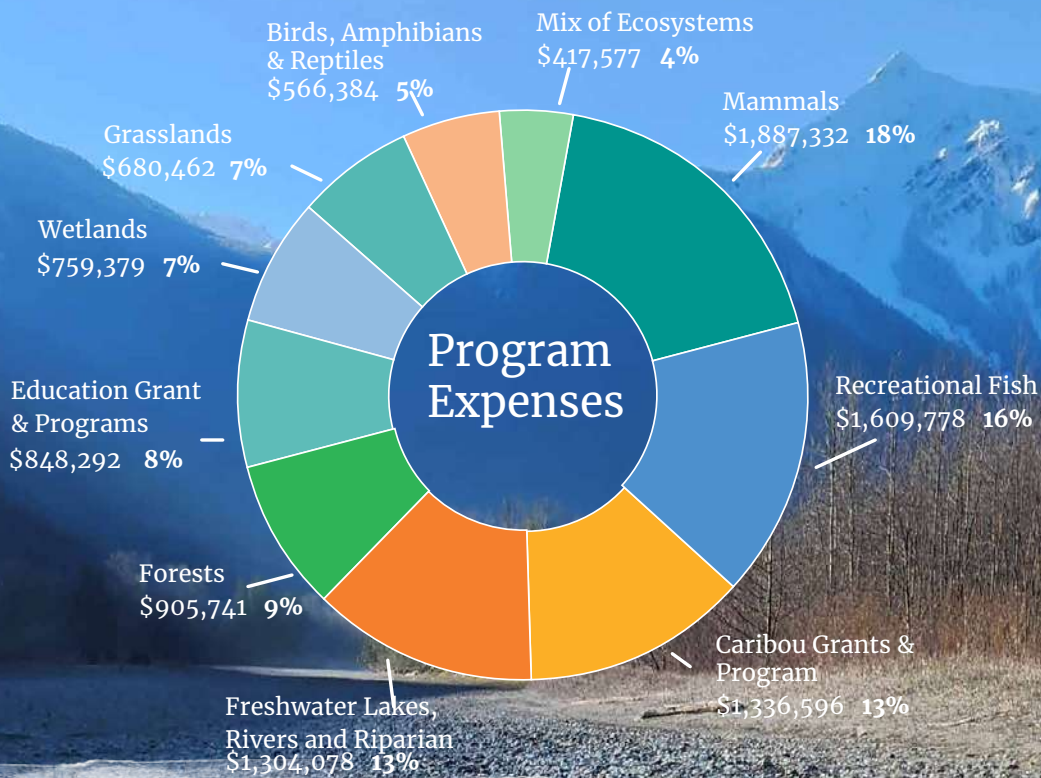
We are proud to report that we have achieved this goal and will continue to maintain or exceed this target.

HCTF recognizes that climate change is one of the leading threats to fish, wildlife, and their habitats in B.C. Designing our financial portfolios to address

this threat aligns with our efforts to mitigate climate change through the enhancement and restoration projects we approve each year.

As part of Responsible Investing, we identify and remove (screen out) companies that negatively impact the environment or biodiversity. Beginning in 2023, another screen was added which factors in companies' relationships with Indigenous communities; those companies that have known conflicts with Indigenous communities are screened out. HCTF is taking steps to advance reconciliation, including integrating this value across our business decisions.

In total, HCTF generated over \$5 million in responsible investment income in 2023-24.



Court Awards and the Conservation Officer Service

Court awards are a unique restricted revenue source that emerges from environmental infractions processed through the court system.

HCTF is a potential recipient of creative sentencing awards, where judges use alternatives beyond traditional fines, penalties, and imprisonment for environmental infractions. Under this approach, courts can order offenders to make payments to HCTF, which then invests those funds into conservation projects.

In 2023-24, HCTF allocated \$174,850 from court awards to 18 different fish and wildlife projects.

One of the larger payments related to a 2017 infraction of a company sentenced under the Environmental Management Act to pay HCTF \$195k. The funding was allocated over several years, with the final \$43,600 awarded in 2023-24 to a project in the

Elk Valley led by the Sparwood and District Fish & Wildlife Association. The wild sheep population in the area is decreasing but the cause is unknown; this project worked to better quantify the survival rates and causes of mortality and evaluate conditions to improve information to help recover this herd.

In 2021, an individual was charged with an infraction under the *Wildlife Act* in the lower mainland. They were found guilty and fined \$9,500 which was received in 2023 and allocated to a project taking place in the area of the infraction. The project, led by Still Moon Arts Society, creates stewards by connecting community members of East Vancouver to local greenspaces through hands-on restoration work and accessible educational offerings within the Still Creek watershed.

For more details regarding our Responsible Investment practices and HCTF's 2023-24 Audited Financial Statements, [visit our website](#).

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Cover: Marmot Recovery Foundation

Index: Amanda Irvine

p.2: Ridgeline Wildlife Enhancement Inc.

p.4: Ridgeline Wildlife Enhancement Inc.

p.6: Mike McCulloch

p.8 Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species
Society

p.10 NatureKids BC

p.13 (Exchange Box) R.L. Clemitson
Elementary

p.12 George Jay Elementary

p.14-15 iStock photo

p.16-17 Ministry of Forests

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Project story photos are courtesy of the
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