

# Together for Wildlife

## Together for Wildlife HCTF Conservation Scholarship Recipient 2025



Danny McNeil-Willmott

Danny McNeil-Willmott is a two-spirit PhD student at the University of Northern British Columbia. Danny is Red River Métis with their ancestors coming from the centre of the Red River nation in St. Vital, St. Norbert, and St. Boniface. Their Métis family names are Nault, Perreault, Carrière, Beauchemin, Ducharme and Lagimodiere.

They received their undergraduate degree in biology and psychology from Cape Breton University. Upon completing their degree, they relocated to British Columbia in 2016 to pursue their master's in Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University.

Growing up Danny was raised with the values of land and wildlife as kin, and finding ways to support and heal landscapes through Indigenous stewardship is foundational to informing how they move through this world. These values and worldview were deepened through working for a First Nations owned environmental consulting company as a field biologist and project manager. It was during their tenure in this position that they determined they wanted to participate more fully in Indigenous lead conservation and land stewardship research. This desire was rooted in a mission of finding ways to encourage natural resource projects to utilize Indigenous stewardship methodologies in applied settings. Their dream is to see a large-scale culture shift towards the implementation of a more holistic approach to natural resource projects, rooted in an ethos of reciprocity and relationship building.

Their project is a tri-partnership between the T'exelc community (Williams Lake First Nation), Environment and Climate Change Canada and the University of Northern British Columbia. The project is focused on examining the impacts and influences of Indigenous fire stewardship on ecological communities within the Cariboo-Chilcotin. It is through this research that the project team hopes to provide a restorative framework for restoration initiatives targeting the grasslands and open Douglas fir forests of the T'exelc community's territory.

Wildlife data collection began in the summer of 2024 through the utilization of camera traps and autonomous recording units (ARUs). Additionally, vegetation surveys will be conducted to gain a holistic understanding of the ecological communities within the study area and the changes they undergo post fire treatment. Data collection and analysis relating to culturally significant species for the T'exelc community will be prioritized throughout the project.

It is important to note that this work fundamentally does not belong to Danny personally, it belongs to the T'exelc community. At the heart of this project lies Danny's profoundly deep and personal drive to incorporate Indigenous ways of relational knowing and kinship-centric ecological thought into Western scientific spaces. This research is a love letter to all their relations, humans and non-humans alike.

