Together for Wildlife HCTF Conservation Scholarship
Recipient 2025

Sima Khanal

Sima Khanal is a PhD student in the Faculty of Land and Food Systems at the University of British Columbia. Born in Gorkha, Nepal, she grew up surrounded by forests she deeply admired, an early connection to nature that inspired her lifelong commitment to conservation. Her work spans two continents, integrating rigorous field research with policy analysis to advance human–wildlife coexistence.

In British Columbia, Sima leads a multi-park randomized controlled trial (RCT) to improve compliance with bear safety practices among campers. Her research examines how targeted interventions influence both perceptions and observed behaviors in keeping campsites bear-safe, while also estimating the impact of human presence on bear presence using causal models.

In India, Sima studies the push and pull factors underlying human–elephant conflict in rural landscapes. She analyzes how changes within ancient elephant forests, compared to shifts in surrounding buffer areas, have shaped patterns of conflict over time. Her work also includes a causal impact evaluation of large-scale infrastructure projects in Himachal Pradesh, assessing how such developments affect human–wildlife interactions. By combining spatial analysis with historical datasets, she identifies the ecological, infrastructural, and socio-economic determinants of conflict risk.

Before beginning her PhD, Sima worked extensively in biodiversity conservation in Nepal, collaborating with NGOs, government agencies, and community forest user groups to protect species such as hornbills, tigers, and Asian elephants. At UBC, she works with provincial agencies and academic research groups to design and evaluate conservation interventions that balance the needs of both people and wildlife. Her research contributes directly to global conservation priorities, applying causal models commonly used in economics to deliver evidence-based policy solutions. Through her work, Sima aims to close the gap between research and practice, ensuring that conservation policies are both effective and grounded in the ground realities of the landscapes and communities they affect.

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