



Quality Waters Fund

Project 6-268

2025-26 Report

Skeena Region

Project Summary

A highly successful suite of Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation funded projects was delivered during the 2025–26 funding cycle. These projects provided critical fisheries information to decision-makers, improved stakeholder awareness, and supported angling opportunities for Interior Summer Steelhead in the Skeena Region.

Projects included estimation of aggregate abundance and run strength of the Skeena Interior Summer Steelhead ecotype through the Tyee Test Fishery; fence counts on the upper Skeena indicator stream, the Sustut River; and a Witset mark–recapture population estimate of steelhead abundance in the Bulkley and Morice rivers, which together represent British Columbia’s premier steelhead fishery.

Unpredicted reductions in adult Summer Steelhead abundance beginning in 2021 have resulted in the lowest adult returns observed since the inception of the Tyee Test Fishery. Aggregate abundance estimates from two of the assessment sites have fallen below the Routine Management Zone (RMZ) threshold in six of the last seven brood years. These sustained reductions in abundance are of significant concern to fisheries managers and reaffirm the institutional importance of these assessment programs for supporting responsive and adaptive resource management.

Summary Funding Table

	2025-26 Budget	2025-26 Spending	Variance
Skeena River	\$57,000.00	\$48,897.08	-\$8,102.92
Kitwanga River	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Bulkley River	\$31,000.00	\$30,850.20	-\$149.80
Sustut River	\$67,500.00	\$70,684.59	\$3,184.59
Total			

Progress and Challenges in Achieving 2025-26 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. Regional biologists continue to work closely with project stakeholders to modernize project infrastructure, expand biological data collection, and update assessment programs to reflect changes in river system morphology.

Challenges – 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). The latest hurdle is inflation. Every facet of these projects depends heavily on labor to deliver the invaluable information needed to make defensible fisheries management decisions, playing a major role in our contractor's ability to continue to offer the same level of services they have in the past.

Capital Asset Purchase Information

N/A

Additional Supporting Information

Project reports are not available at this time. Scale and tissue analysis take upwards of six months to complete, delaying the completion of project reports into mid-2026.

Photos



Summer steelhead tagged at Tyee Test fishery



Upper Sustut Fence



Witset Beach seine crew sampling fish prior to release