

## ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

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*our*  
**trust**

Stories of people and places in the Columbia Basin



**YEARS  
WORKING  
TOGETHER**

FALL 2025

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*Our Trust* is published and produced annually by Columbia Basin Trust. If you'd like to reproduce anything you read, contact us at [communications@ourtrust.org](mailto:communications@ourtrust.org).

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Columbia  
Basin **trust**

## OUR PRODUCTION-PROCESS DECISIONS RESULTED IN SAVING:



# OF 10 MIN  
SHOWERS SAVED  
**1,671 SHOWERS**



KMS DRIVEN BY  
A CAR SAVES  
**386,000 KM**



60W LIGHTBULBS ON  
FOR 1 HOUR SAVED  
**896,600 BULBS**



NM VOC SAVED - # OF  
KM DRIVEN BY A CAR  
**8355.714 KM**



This year's issue of *Our Trust* magazine was printed by Hemlock Printers, one of North America's leading environmentally progressive print companies. Hemlock's operations are 100% carbon neutral, and their process respects ancient forest protections while using FSC®-certified papers. The publication is printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper using UV print technology, which reduces volatile organic compound (VOC) emissions to virtually zero.

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR AND CEO

**WELCOME** to the 30th anniversary edition of Our Trust Magazine—a publication unlike any other we’ve shared. This special issue is both a tribute and a reflection. It honours the people, communities and partnerships that have shaped this region since Columbia Basin Trust was founded in 1995.

Together with Basin residents, we’ve worked to strengthen the social, economic and environmental well-being of this region. This magazine is a celebration of all that we have accomplished, and a reflection of the many voices, stories and relationships that have brought that work to life.

Throughout these pages, you’ll see how shared vision and collaboration have led to meaningful results. From the visual journey mapped in our timeline (pages 6–9) to the overview of our collective impact (page 47), and through every story in between, we look back with deep appreciation for what’s been achieved, together.

Our legacy is rooted in the Basin’s hydropower history. While the construction of treaty dams brought lasting negative impacts to people and ecosystems, they also sparked the creation of something transformative. Columbia Basin Trust was born from a desire to return benefits to the region, and today, our hydropower assets continue to fuel our work. It’s a story of restoration, renewal and enduring commitment. Learn more about the history of our hydropower assets on pages 10–11.

Looking ahead, we are focused on the next chapter. Guided by our Columbia Basin Management Plan, we’re developing programs that reflect local priorities and lead to meaningful outcomes. Our direction is centered on strengthening the health and resilience of our organization, relationships, communities and the natural environment.

At the heart of it all is the Basin’s local and regional economy. Whether it’s supporting small businesses, investing in housing and child care spaces, or strengthening local food systems, every initiative we support helps communities become more self-reliant, support local livelihoods and keep prosperity rooted in the Basin.

To everyone who has been part of this journey—thank you. To the visionaries who imagined the impossible, to the founding Board that charted a new course, to every director and staff member who helped bring that vision to life. And to all of you—residents, organizations, partners—who continue to shape the future of this place we call home.

Together, we’ve built a legacy we can all be proud of. And we’re just getting started.

**Jocelyn Carver**

Chair, Board of Directors

**Johnny Strilaeff**

President and Chief Executive Officer



Photo: Photography by Larissa

# A River Transformed, A Region United

How loss, leadership and local voices gave rise to Columbia Basin Trust



Photos: Columbia Basin Trust Archives



## A River Transformed

**IT'S 1965.** At Duncan, beyond the north end of Kootenay Lake, diesel scrapers begin carving a path for the first of several massive dams to be built under the Columbia River Treaty. Over the next decade, four dams rise on the Duncan, Columbia and Kootenay rivers.

As the dams are completed, residents brace for what's to come: inundated valleys, destroyed homes and displaced communities. "You hear lots of stories of people that were just devastated by it even though they knew it was coming," remembers Brian Gadbois of Revelstoke. "Some of them stood there and watched as their house was lit on fire."

Entire communities—such as Waldo, Renata and Arrow Park—disappear beneath newly formed reservoirs. Alongside these communities, the cultural sites and sacred places of Indigenous peoples are lost.

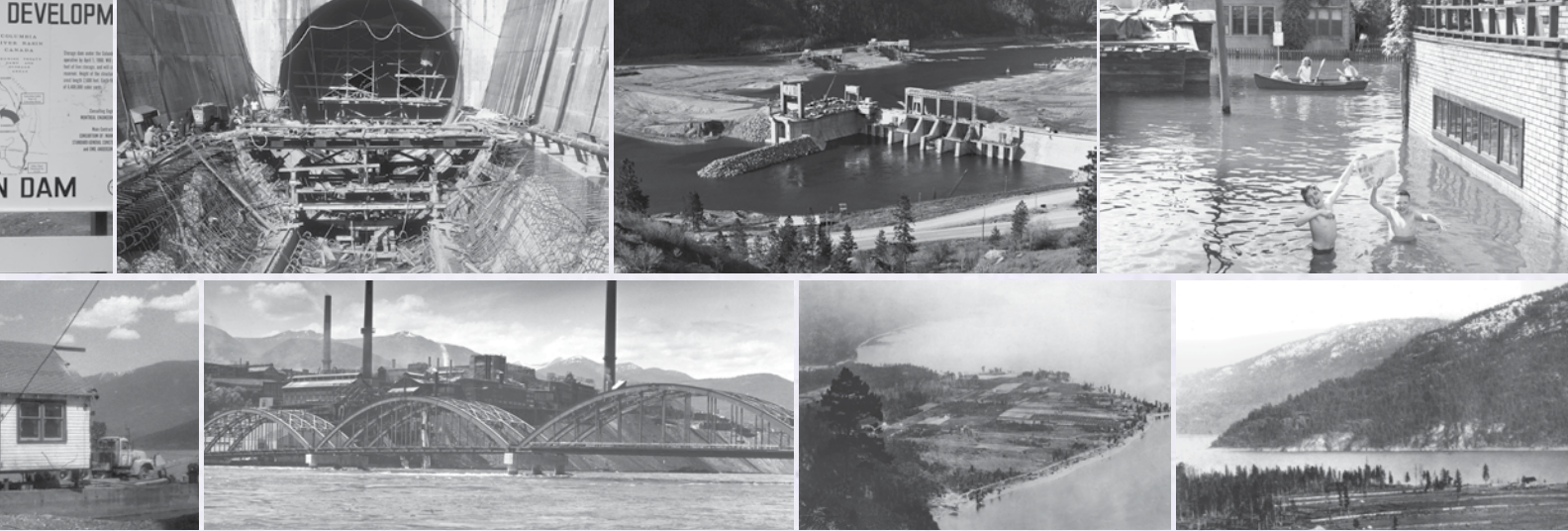
"Our history forever changed," said Kathryn Teneese, then Chair of the Ktunaxa-Kinbasket Tribal Council. "Access to ancient villages, ancient places—they don't exist anymore because they're underwater because of a dam."

## A Region Left Behind

By the early 1990s, the pain of the past still lingers. Residents continue to live with the legacies of flooded valleys, lost livelihoods and broken promises. Prosperity had been promised, but opportunities never materialized.

"When the dams were built, there were promises made to this region," said Josh Smienk, then Director with the Regional District of Central Kootenay and founding Chair of Columbia Basin Trust. "But those promises never came to fruition."

While the Columbia River Treaty obligated the U.S. to pay "downstream benefits" to British Columbia in exchange for enhanced flood control and power generation, the first 30 years of payments were made as a lump-sum prepayment to the Province shortly after the Treaty was signed. None of these funds were made available to Basin communities, which continued to live with the negative impacts of dam construction and operation.



## Voices Rise

In the face of ongoing impacts—and with new revenue on the horizon—Basin residents began organizing. In 1992, a small gathering in a Castlegar ballpark brought community leaders together to ask: what could be done to help the Basin?

With annual downstream benefits payments from the U.S. to the Province set to begin, Basin residents—local leaders, First Nations, farmers and community advocates—began to speak up.

They wanted action on environmental damage, social disruption and economic imbalance. They wanted revenues returned to the region. They wanted to restore fisheries. They wanted a say.

The challenge? To unite this vast and diverse region in one voice.

“Still, there was a growing sense that unity was the only path forward,” said Garry Merkel, a founding Trust Board Chair and Columbia River Treaty Committee member. “This was us as residents trying to have a conversation and build something that we wanted.”

## A Movement Takes Shape

In 1993, regional leaders formed the Columbia River Treaty Committee (CRTC). Their task: gather input, build consensus and ensure the voices of Basin residents were heard.

In June of that year, the first Columbia Basin Symposium was held in Castlegar. Community members from all walks of life shared stories and called for a different future, one rooted in respect for people and responsibility for the land.

“We can’t abandon the future generations,” said Corky Evans, then MLA for

Nelson-Creston and CRTC member. “And we can’t abandon the ducks and geese that used to land in the wetlands...and the elk and caribou and the grizzly bears. And we can’t abandon the future of this land base.”

The gathering was a turning point. It helped shape a mandate for the region and positioned the CRTC as a serious negotiating partner.

“We’re not just people in the way,” said Audrey Moore, then Mayor of Castlegar. “We’re people to be reckoned with.”

## A Bold Idea

In 1994, the Province of BC announced it would allocate a portion of downstream benefits to the region. But there was a problem: without a legal entity, there was no way to manage or invest these resources.

That’s when the idea of a “trust” emerged—a unique combination of a Crown corporation and a regionally controlled organization. The name Columbia Basin Trust was chosen, and a new chapter began.

Later that year, the second Symposium set the stage for long-term investment. The Province proposed a bold offer: seed money to develop new hydropower projects within the Basin.

The irony was not lost on residents. “We just all looked at one another and thought the idea was nuts,” recalls Karen Hamling, a Nakusp Councillor at the time.

## The Trust is Born

In 1994, the Columbia Basin Accord was signed, providing a total of \$500 million—shared equally between the Columbia Basin Trust and Columbia Power Corporation—for new hydropower projects, along with \$45 million in seed capital to launch the Trust’s programming.

On July 6, 1995, the Columbia Basin Trust Act was signed into law. In just over three years, what began as a grassroots movement became a formal, transformative institution designed to serve the people of the Columbia Basin.

“It’s kind of miraculous that it all did come together,” said CRTC member Kim Deane. “I’m not sure any one person pictured the whole thing; collectively all the factors fell into place in an interesting way and darned if we didn’t get this amazing result.”

Like the mountains of earth once moved to build the Duncan, Mica, Keenleyside and Libby dams, the people of the Basin moved mountains of their own.

They built a future rooted in resilience and regional pride.

“In my lifetime, I’ve found that those things that make sense are what you need to pursue,” said Sophie Pierre. “That’s the Trust.”

Read the full story in Columbia Basin Trust: A Story of Power, People and a Region United at [book.ourtrust.org](http://book.ourtrust.org). ■

**“We got it done. Against all the people who said, ‘Don’t create another level of government,’ and all the naysayers... we now have done something that no other region of British Columbia has ever tried.”**

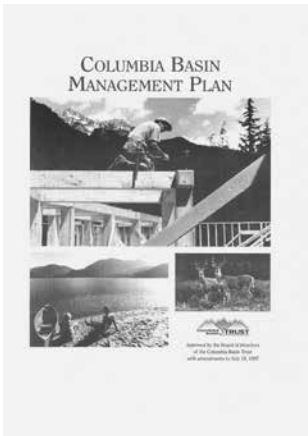
—Corky Evans, then MLA for Nelson-Creston and Founding Director of Columbia Basin Trust, 1995



# The Journey:

## 30 Years of Progress

Since 1995, Columbia Basin Trust has grown with the communities it serves. From opening offices and funding local projects to building hydropower facilities, this timeline highlights the moments that have shaped both the Trust and the region over 30 years.



\$5M investment in Kicking Horse Mountain Resort (1999)

Arrow Lakes Generating Station construction begins (1999)

Community Initiatives & Affected Areas Program launched with \$12.9M over 10 years (1998)

First grants committed: just over \$1 million to projects in education and environment (1997)

Columbia Basin Management Plan adopted following symposium in Revelstoke (1997)

Brilliant Dam purchased from Teck Cominco in partnership with Columbia Power (1996)

First Trust office opens in Nakusp (1996)

Province creates Columbia Basin Trust (1995) and Columbia Power Corporation (1994)

Community meetings held around the region (1993, 1994)

Columbia River Treaty Committee formed (1992)



## Establishing the Trust

# 1990s



Water Smart Program launched with local governments (2009)

Veneto Place opens: first major investment in a 45-unit affordable housing complex in Fernie (2009)

Commissioned first Basin climate trends report laying groundwork for Communities Adapting to Climate Change Initiative (2006)

Did not proceed with the sale of \$260M in hydropower assets to BC Hydro, reinforcing community ownership and long-term stewardship (2004)

Community Development Program launched (2004)

Brilliant Expansion Generating Station construction begins (2003)

First seniors' care investment: Castle Wood Village, Castlegar (2002)

Training Fee Support Program begins (2001)

\$6.7M invested in St. Eugene Resort development (2001)

First Youth Forum & Youth Advisory Committee formed (2001)

Opened Trust offices in Castlegar and Golden (2001)

First land conservation project supported: Wycliffe Corridor (2000)

Basin Business Advisors Program launched (2000)

Partnerships established with Columbia Kootenay Cultural Alliance and Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy (2000)



# Growing Roots 2000s



The Trust and Columbia Power purchase Fortis' remaining interest in the Waneta Expansion Generating Station (2019)

Purchased Creston's grain elevators to preserve regional history (2018)

Ecosystem Enhancement Program launched to support longer-term, landscape-level projects (2017)

Child Care Support Program launched (2017)

First Nations Housing Sustainability Initiative launched (2017)

Supported launch of regional EV charging network (2017)

Neil Muth Memorial Scholarship established (2016)

Supported BC Invasive Mussel Defence Program to protect lakes and rivers (2015)

Non-profit Advisors program launched (2015)

Lot 48 conservation project on Columbia Lake supported (\$1M, 2012)

Columbia Basin Broadband Corporation created to expand high-speed connectivity (2011)

State of the Basin Initiative expanded through a 10-year partnership with Selkirk College to provide ongoing regional research and data (2010)

Grasslands Rangelands Enhancement Program introduced (2011)

First Basin-wide affordable housing partnership with BC Housing (2010)

Wage subsidy programs create 100+ student jobs (2010)



# Expanding Impact

# 2010s



## Bringing People Together

Columbia Basin Symposia connect residents from across the region to discuss shared interests, exchange perspectives and strengthen a sense of Basin identity.

Golden 1995  
 Revelstoke 1997  
 Cranbrook 2005  
 Castlegar 2007  
 Revelstoke 2010  
 Creston 2013  
 Kimberley 2017  
 Cranbrook, Trail, Golden 2023

Began construction on new Trust office in Nakusp (2025)

Columbia Power history book published for its 30th anniversary (2024)

Released 10-year Columbia Basin Management Plan (2024)

\$82M broadband network expansion through Connect the Basin (2023)

The Headwaters: Stories from the Source Podcast launched (2022)

Began construction of Nelson Health Campus with 75 long-term care beds (2022)

Partnered with Province on regional wildfire resiliency program to reduce wildfire risk (2021)

\$11.7M in direct COVID-19 support for communities (2020)

Trail Enhancements grants launched (2021)

Celebrated 25 years with history book: A Story of People, Power and a Region United (2020)

# Responding & Renewing 2020s

## BENEFITS OF THE TRUST 2024/25

**\$76.1M**  
total benefits

**\$101M**  
in revenue

**\$58.1M** in grants  
and initiatives

**2,670** projects  
supported

**\$4.4M** in capital  
projects

**\$6.5M** in  
business loans

**56** active programs  
and initiatives

**\$7.1M** in new real  
estate investments

**\$2.1B** total book  
value of assets

# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Basin communities and residents benefit from the Trust's steadfast investments.

## RETURN ON INVESTMENTS

**9.28%**  
power projects

**4.44%**  
private placements

**10.5%**  
market securities

Created in 1995 with a \$321 million endowment from the Province of British Columbia, the Trust now manages \$2.1 billion in assets. Revenues are generated through hydropower facilities, private investments and market securities—and reinvested to benefit Basin communities.

In 2024/25, the Trust provided \$76.1 million for over 2,670 projects through 56 active programs. This included:

- \$58.1 million in grants and initiatives
- \$7.1 million in commercial real estate and investments
- \$6.5 million in new business loans
- \$4.4 million in capital investments.

Total revenues reached \$101 million, exceeding targets:

- Hydropower facilities returned 9.28%, slightly below the 10% target due to a planned outage at Arrow Lakes Generating Station. Strong results from other facilities helped offset the impact.
- Private placements returned 4.44%, below the 6% target due to increased maintenance and improvement costs.
- Market securities performed well, returning 10.5% thanks to favourable conditions across fixed income and public equities.

This financial performance supports the Trust's long-term sustainability and its continued investment in a vibrant, resilient Columbia Basin.

[ourtrust.org/annualreport2025](https://ourtrust.org/annualreport2025)

# More Than Books

Supporting libraries to meet changing community needs

**AT THE CRESTON VALLEY PUBLIC LIBRARY,** Director Saara Itkonen sees the library's expanding role every day. Programs for families, access to computers and local history, and spaces for community connection have always been part of the mix—but residents' needs continue to evolve.

Supporting libraries across the Basin is the role of the Kootenay Library Federation (KLF). For nearly 20 years, KLF has helped 20 libraries through

**“The Trust’s online hub is my go-to for non-profit management resources. It’s practical, easy to use, and available when you need it.”**

collaboration, shared resources and professional development. Since 2017, it has partnered with Columbia Basin Trust’s Non-profit Advisors Program (NPA) to strengthen its own capacity—and help local libraries better serve their communities.

“People come in with a wide range of needs—whether that’s finding information, accessing services or connecting with others,” says Itkonen. “Knowing I can rely on KLF and their support network helps me feel less alone in figuring out how to meet those needs.”

## Strategic Support with Regional Reach

In 2024, KLF worked with an NPA advisor to develop a four-year strategic plan. The process brought together library leaders from across the region to co-create a shared vision, mission and values.

“The program gave us tools to strengthen our organization as a whole,” says KLF Executive Director Melanie Reaveley. “That means we can focus on supporting local libraries in a consistent, thoughtful way—whether that’s training, resources or expertise that individual libraries couldn’t easily access on their own.”

Reaveley also points to the online hub as an essential resource.

“The Trust’s online hub is my go-to for non-profit management resources. It’s practical, easy to use and available when you need it.”

KLF has also received targeted support in governance, strategic planning and community outreach, all of which strengthen their ability to support local libraries.

## Local Benefits, Broader Impact

With clearer internal direction, KLF is better equipped to support local libraries—and the benefits are being

felt on the ground. At Creston, Itkonen says that backing helps her navigate the challenges of serving her community.

“With KLF behind me, I feel more able to lead intentionally, knowing that I’m part of a network working toward shared goals,” she says. “The library can’t be everything to everyone, but that support makes a real difference.”

Through the Non-profit Advisors Program, the Trust helps organizations like KLF build capacity—so local libraries can adapt and thrive, providing residents with the programs, resources and connections they need. ■

## Non-profit Advisors Program

Since 2015, the program has helped more than 450 non-profits build capacity and strengthen their impact. Here’s how:

- Free webinars and in-person workshops
- On-demand Non-profit Essentials Webinar Series
- Organizational assessments and subsidized consulting
- Access to experienced advisors and practical tools

[ourtrust.org/nonprofit](https://ourtrust.org/nonprofit)



Photos: Andrew Bibby Photography

# BRILLIANT DAM: POWERING PROGRESS FOR 80 YEARS



Photos: Ursula Heller

## HOW A WWII-ERA DAM BECAME A CLEAN ENERGY ENGINE FOR THE COLUMBIA BASIN

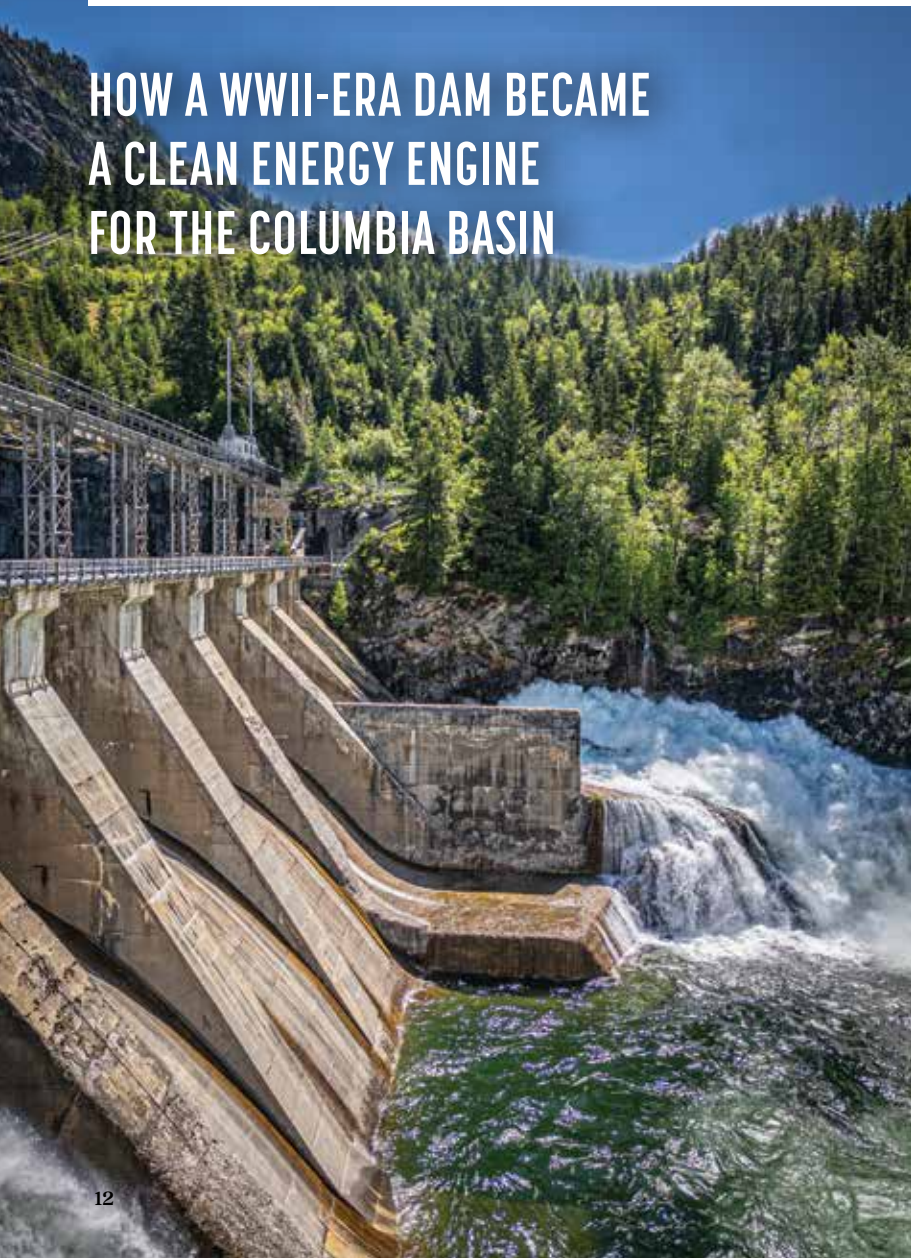


Photo: Adrian Wagner Studio

**ON THE BANKS** of the Kootenay River near Castlegar towers a piece of wartime infrastructure still humming with life. Brilliant Dam, built in 1944 to fuel Canada's World War II industrial effort, has evolved into one of the country's most reliable sources of clean energy. Eight decades later, its story is one of transformation, resilience and lasting regional impact.

### LOOKING BACK: POWER FORGED IN WARTIME

As Allied forces battled the Axis powers in the 1940s, Canada's industries were under pressure to deliver strategic materials. The Trail smelter, operated by Cominco (now Teck), played a key role by producing essential materials like lead, zinc and magnesium, all critical for munitions and aircraft production. The smelter even contributed heavy water, or deuterium oxide, to the U.S. Manhattan Project, becoming one of the only large-scale producers in North America during the war.

To meet growing energy demands, Cominco constructed the Brilliant Dam. The dam's electricity bolstered smelter output and, by the 1950s, began powering Kimberley's Sullivan Mine via an 86-kilometre transmission line—the longest of its kind in the world at the time.

### STRATEGIC INVESTMENT, LOCAL CONTROL

In 1996, a pivotal year in the dam's legacy, the Trust and Columbia Power Corporation (Columbia Power) purchased the facility. The acquisition marked the start of a long-term, locally controlled investment in regional power assets. Today, Brilliant is one of four hydropower facilities jointly owned by the Trust and Columbia Power, forming the backbone of the region's investment portfolio.

The joint ownership structure—shared equally between the Trust and Columbia



Photo: Shawn Talbot

Power—ensures that income generated by the facility flows directly back to the region. For the Trust, that means funding for social, environmental and economic programs across the Basin. For Columbia Power, it includes paying dividends to the Province of BC and supporting environmental stewardship programs, community sponsorships and scholarships.

#### EXPANSION AND MODERNIZATION

Following the acquisition, the new owners launched a \$100 million upgrade program. Each of the dam's four turbines underwent refurbishment between 2000 and 2002, boosting the facility's capacity from 125 to 145 megawatts.

According to Brandon Haney, the Trust's Vice-President of Power Operations, the upgrades represented a 20-megawatt increase to capacity: "enough to power an additional 12,500 homes annually." Today, the dam produces 980 gigawatt hours annually, enough electricity to power nearly 100,000 homes.

The enhancements also included concrete rehabilitation, seismic stabilization, spillway gate refurbishment and switchyard replacement. These improvements increased reliability and delivered environmental benefits. By directing more water through the turbines rather than over the spillway, the upgrades reduced Total Gas Pressure, a condition that can be harmful to fish and is similar to decompression sickness, or 'the bends,' in humans.

In 2007, the \$205 million Brilliant Expansion Project added a second powerhouse downstream of the original dam. This project generated clean

energy from water that would otherwise be spilled and contributed nearly \$95 million to the local economy through wages and goods procurement. Of the 400 workers on the project, more than 85 per cent were locals.

#### SUSTAINING A LEGACY, POWERING THE FUTURE

Today, Brilliant Dam is recognized as one of Canada's most reliable hydroelectric facilities, a status affirmed by Navigant Consulting in 2014 and 2021. It remains jointly owned by Columbia Power and the Trust, with the Trust now responsible for asset management. Together with three other jointly owned hydropower facilities,

Brilliant Dam is part of a diversified energy portfolio that generates revenue to support Trust programming and benefits across the Basin.

Looking ahead, future improvements will help make the dam adapt in an era of climate uncertainty. Ongoing reinvestment in infrastructure will be critical to preserving the dam's value and reliability for a stable, sustainable future in the Basin.

From a wartime workhorse to a cornerstone of regional self-reliance, Brilliant Dam is an enduring symbol of how past investments continue to power our future. More than a legacy asset, it reflects a shared commitment to clean energy and local prosperity. ■

### Powering the Basin

Brilliant Dam is one of four hydropower facilities jointly owned by the Trust and Columbia Power. Together, these investments generate sustainable revenue that supports programs and services across the Basin.

#### Brilliant Dam & Generating Station

Located near Castlegar  
Acquired: 1996  
Capacity: 145 MW  
Powers: ~100,000 homes

#### Brilliant Expansion Generating Station

Adjacent to Brilliant Dam  
Completed: 2007  
Capacity: 120 MW  
Powers: ~55,000 homes

#### Arrow Lakes Generating Station

Located near Castlegar  
Completed: 2002  
Capacity: 185 MW  
Powers: ~80,000 homes

#### Waneta Expansion Generating Station

Located near Trail  
Completed: 2015  
Capacity: 335 MW  
Powers: ~65,000 homes

# Future-Proofing Basin Arts Venues

*Upgrades fuel thriving arts scene in Trail and Cranbrook*

**AT THE BAILEY THEATRE IN TRAIL**, a technician fine-tunes the lighting while performers warm up in the wings. In Cranbrook's Key City Theatre, the house lights dim as a hush falls over a sold-out crowd. But the magic of live performance begins long before the curtain rises — made possible by years of planning, partnership and investment behind the scenes.

Since 2017, both theatres have undergone major transformations. From structural repairs to pandemic-era pivots, their evolution reflects a sustained effort to keep the arts vibrant and accessible.

## Modernizing with Purpose

These venues are more than performance spaces; they're cultural anchors that bring people together, support local jobs and attract visitors. They host everything from touring musicians and film screenings to school plays and community festivals. To remain viable, both the Bailey and Key City theatres have had to confront aging infrastructure and rising operational costs.

At Key City Theatre, critical roof reinforcement and electrical, HVAC, backstage and dressing room upgrades were undertaken, while modern sound and lighting systems enhanced both artistic versatility and venue rentals. A lobby renovation added a small performance stage, enabling intimate events like cabarets and acoustic sets, boosting programming by 25 per cent. As of fall 2025, a new passenger elevator will also be complete, improving accessibility.

"The \$4.5 million in capital projects completed since 2017 means the building now has a projected lifespan of another 30 plus years," says Galen Olstead, Executive Director, Key City Theatre. "In the 2024-2025 season, we presented over 35 events, hosted over 150, and sold more than 32,000 tickets, with strong momentum in youth engagement, Indigenous programming, and inclusive community outreach."

In Trail, a 2018 renovation at the Bailey Theatre improved comfort, energy efficiency and audience experience through upgraded ventilation, a new concession and lounge, and a striking marquee. A larger-scale overhaul in 2022 tackled rigging, roofing, electrical and fire safety upgrades. Now hosting over 120 events and selling 23,000 tickets annually,

the venue continues to play a central role in the region's cultural life.

"Thanks to investments from the Trust and Regional District, our transformation has benefited the community and arts ecosystem in every way," says the Bailey's Artistic Director, Nadine Tremblay. "We're employing more artists, offering more diverse programming, and better serving the community with our expanded team of knowledgeable staff. We're even able to offer free events like our season opener and Halloween Spooktacular."

## Meeting Challenges with Innovative Solutions

When the pandemic disrupted live events, both theatres adapted quickly to keep staff working and audiences engaged. Trust support helped implement safety measures, retain staff and invest in new technology.

In Trail, the Bailey team created Covid Jingles, a video series featuring original improvised songs that promoted local businesses and organizations. In Cranbrook, Key City Theatre adopted live-streaming technology to continue performances for at-home audiences.

"The pandemic showed us how important our venues are to everyone's health and well-being," says Tremblay. "Before our first show back, I heard a band tuning up their instruments and I cried at the sound of the tuning A notes. I had forgotten how essential art is and how much joy it gives me. Investing in it helps build a well-rounded, healthy community."

Today, audiences have come roaring back. "In 2023, we saw our highest-ever attendance at Key City Theatre, and that number rose by 30 per cent in 2024," adds Olstead.



Photo: Photography by Larissa



Photo: Brian Clarkson

“We’re proud to host a sold-out annual January production involving over 100 local youth and volunteers, as well as two community-driven festivals — Ed Fest and the Kootenay Children’s Festival — which bring thousands together for accessible arts experiences.”

### Strengthening the Arts

The Trust has helped both theatres respond to immediate needs and invest in long-term capital upgrades. It also supports the region’s broader arts community through its partnership with Columbia Kootenay Cultural Alliance (CKCA), which delivers funding and development opportunities for artists and cultural organizations across the Basin.

CKCA strengthens the creative sector that thrives in these venues, ensuring artists of all ages and disciplines have support to grow and succeed.

### A Bright Future for Artists of All Ages

These investments are preserving more than bricks and mortar; they’re helping build lifelong connections to the arts.

Rossland local Lola Rossi first performed at the Bailey at age five in a Kootenay DanceWorks show. By 10, she had found a new passion, adding singing and acting to dancing while starring in *The Little Mermaid*. Now 13, Lola has taken the stage a dozen times and counts many of her closest friends from musical theatre.

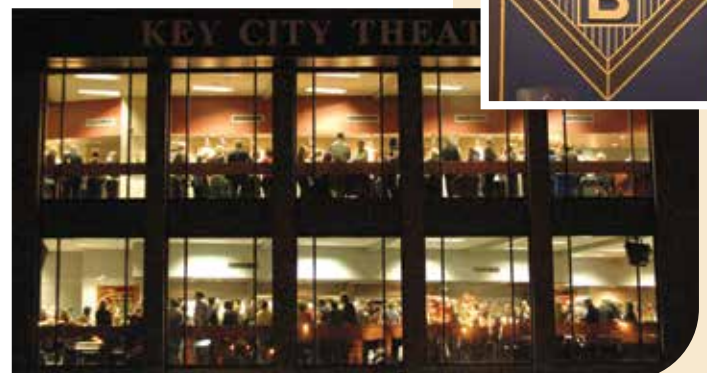
“My favourite part is practicing and being in the dressing room,” she says. “Someone will put on their song to rehearse

and everyone else starts singing really loudly. We have all these inside jokes and we’re always humming because the songs get stuck in our heads. It’s really fun!”

Triple Threat Experience, the youth program Rossi is enrolled in, continues to engage young people in the arts alongside groups like the Rossland Light Opera Players (RLOP), the oldest volunteer-run theatre organization in Western Canada.

“The Charles Bailey Theatre is a central hub that connects the region’s arts community, and I’m so thankful to be part of that,” says Alana Davis, RLOP Secretary. “It’s getting busier, but we’ll always make performing there a priority.”

In Trail and Cranbrook, the show goes on thanks to resilient facilities, passionate people and a shared belief that the arts are essential. Every performance reflects not just talent onstage, but the strength of the communities that support it. ■



Photography by Larissa

# Wycliffe: Where the Land Came Back Together

How shared vision and long-term partnership restored one of the Basin's rarest ecosystems

AT DAWN, GOLDEN LIGHT spills across the balsamroot-covered grasslands of Wycliffe. The air is alive with birdsong, the rush of the St. Mary River, and the quiet movement of elk through the open forest. Beneath pine and fir covered ridges and beside clear, winding creeks, rare and threatened species find a safe place to live.

Spanning more than 1,400 hectares between Kimberley and Cranbrook, the Wycliffe Conservation Complex is one of the largest open-forest grassland ecosystems in the Columbia Basin. It shelters a wide range of at-risk plants, reptiles, birds and mammals across a rich mosaic of grasslands, wetlands and forested slopes. For grizzly bears, elk, white-tailed deer and countless others, this isn't a stopover—it's a vital habitat.

But Wycliffe wasn't always a haven.

Just a few decades ago, the area was fragmented by multiple owners, shaped by past land use, and at risk of permanent loss. In British Columbia, grasslands cover less than one per cent of the land base, yet nearly one-third of the province's at-risk species depend on them. That made Wycliffe, and its future, urgent.

"It was a matter of timing and shared purpose," says Chris Bosman, Conservation Land Manager for The Nature Trust of BC. "This was a landscape worth saving, and a lot of people recognized that early on."

## **BUILDING A CONSERVATION CORRIDOR**

Efforts to conserve the Wycliffe landscape began in the late 1990s, when a small group of conservation partners, including Columbia Basin Trust, worked to acquire key parcels of former land use from Cominco (now Teck). The Trust

provided early funding to help secure the first properties and has continued to support land acquisition and stewardship in the years since.

What began as a few isolated acquisitions evolved into a coordinated conservation effort. While the importance of the Wycliffe grasslands was mutually understood, The Nature Trust of BC, Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Province of BC each undertook projects independently to bring more of the area into conservation.

Initially each land-holding partner focused on restoring and stewarding their own parcels, addressing forest in-growth, encroachment, and the spread of invasive weeds that threatened Wycliffe's sensitive grassland ecosystems. In 2017, the Trust launched its Ecosystem Enhancement Program to further support large-scale restoration across the Basin. Through this program, partners have worked together to collaboratively steward the Wycliffe Complex Corridor, restoring ecological connectivity for wildlife and supporting healthier, more resilient habitats.

What was once managed as separate holdings is now stewarded as a single ecological unit. Shared priorities, such as wetland and riparian restoration, invasive species removal, and forest thinning, are now tackled across the landscape in a coordinated approach.

## **A SHARED COMMITMENT TO STEWARDSHIP**

The Trust's approach has always been rooted in partnership: listening to community priorities, supporting local knowledge, and helping organizations access the resources they need.

"This landscape reflects what's possible when local and

**"It's a great example of how conservation partners can each contribute pieces that together create a stronger, more functional landscape."**

—Chris Bosman, Nature Trust of BC



Photo: Ross Blake Photography

regional groups work together over the long term,” says Krista Watts, Environment Lead at the Trust. “We’re proud to have played a supporting role in helping partners protect and care for this special place.”

That care isn’t just institutional, it’s deeply personal. In a region where most people live close to the land, a strong sense of responsibility unites residents, conservationists, governments and Indigenous groups alike.

“It’s a powerful example of how beauty, conservation efforts, and increasing wildlife populations can coexist,” says Hugh McLuckie, Wycliffe resident and owner of Pine Butte Ranch. “All while ensuring that the public feels welcome to enjoy and appreciate it.”

#### LOOKING AHEAD

Climate pressures are already reshaping ecosystems across the Basin—altering growing seasons, intensifying wildfire risk and stressing wildlife populations. In this context, Wycliffe offers hope.

“It’s a landscape that’s still functioning, still connected,” says Bosman. “And because of that, it can better adapt to change.”

“In 50 to 100 years from now, people will really value the foresight it took to protect large areas between communities, places where people can still get outside and experience nature,” says Richard Klafki, Program Director for the Canadian Rockies at The Nature Conservancy of Canada.

As the work continues, Wycliffe remains a testament to what’s possible when purpose and partnership align: a once-vulnerable landscape now home to wildflowers, wildlife and the enduring spirit of community care. ■

Photo: Columbia Basin Trust Archive

## Ecosystem Enhancement at a Glance

Through its Ecosystem Enhancement Program, the Trust supports large-scale, landscape-level projects that improve ecological health and strengthen climate resilience across the Basin.

Since 2017:

**36**

PROJECTS SUPPORTED

**1,800**

HECTARES OF AQUATIC HABITAT IMPROVED

**7,367**

HECTARES TERRESTRIAL HABITAT ENHANCED

**12**

INDIGENOUS-LED ECOSYSTEM PROJECTS SUPPORTED

[ourtrust.org/eep](https://ourtrust.org/eep)



# HELPING YOUNG VOICES TO BE HEARD

Empowering youth to lead, connect and take action—then and now

**I**N THE 1990S, the Trust's early symposia brought together elected officials, Indigenous leaders, longtime residents—and youth. Young people in the Basin were eager to be heard. Sitting alongside their parents and grandparents, many of whom had lived through the construction of the Columbia River Treaty dams, young people were navigating their own challenges and ready to speak up.

At those early meetings, they raised concerns that remain relevant today: limited educational and employment opportunities, lack of transportation between communities, bullying, racism and too few resources to support their wellbeing.

For the past three decades, the Trust has created spaces for youth to connect, lead and take action on the issues that matter to them. From summer programs and advisory committees to youth-led projects and regional networks, the Trust's approach has been consistent: support youth with meaningful opportunities and let their voices shape the direction.



Photo: Columbia Basin Trust Archive

## The Early Years: Youth Links and Leadership

In 1999, the Trust launched Youth Links, a six-week summer program designed for youth aged 17 to 19 to leave a legacy in their home communities. The first cohort of 12 participants travelled throughout the Basin, hiking, visiting heritage sites, volunteering, and learning about the region's history, ecosystems and Indigenous cultures.

"We toured the entire Basin in a van with two counsellors," says Ryan Schopman, a participant in that first group. "We painted an old railway snowplow at the Revelstoke museum, restored a building yard in Fort Steele, built nature trails and removed invasive weeds. Youth Links opened my eyes to the many opportunities for community connectedness across the Basin."

Photos: Columbia Basin Trust's archives



## Turning Voices into Action

In 2001, the Trust hosted the first Basin Youth Action Forum at Blue Lake Camp near Canal Flats. Ninety youth from across the region gathered to connect and share ideas. Their

message was clear: youth wanted more ways to

participate and make a difference.

That same year, the Trust created the Youth Advisory Committee for members aged 15 to 29. The committee offered guidance on programming and funding, while giving youth practical experience in evaluating grants, organizing training and leading workshops.

"I joined at 29 because I was new to the area and looking to contribute locally," says Tessa Bendig, now the Trust's Manager, Delivery of Benefits. "The experience gave me exactly what I was looking for: hands-on community development and a deeper understanding of regional needs."

Photo: Columbia Basin Trust Archive



Photo: Columbia Basin Trust Archive



Photo: Ruby Hogg



Photo: Meadowsweet Photography

## Building a Network, Shaping a Legacy

In 2016, youth engagement had evolved into a more coordinated, Basin-wide approach. To support this, the Trust launched the Basin Youth Network, providing local organizations and individuals working with youth with resources and a collaborative framework for community-driven programming.

The Network now supports 27 Community Youth Networks across the region. Many of the people leading these networks are young adults themselves, bringing lived experience and local insight to the role.

“What I love most about the Basin Youth Network is how it fosters leadership and connection,” says Alana Minifie-Rybar, Coordinator for the Fernie Youth Action Network. “It has shown me, time and again, the impact of meaningful support in the lives of young people.” The Network doesn’t just support youth—it cultivates the next generation of community builders and civic-minded leaders. It’s a ripple effect: when youth feel seen, supported and empowered, they carry that forward into their schools, their towns and their futures.

Mike Kent, who served as the Regional Coordinator from 2016 to 2025, played a key role in strengthening these local connections.

“I’ve always appreciated the Trust’s investment in Basin youth. Its openness to diversity has been very important for all youth programming,” says Kent. “The honesty and enthusiasm youth brought, especially at our Youth Summits, were real highlights. I’ve made many lasting friendships in communities across the Basin.”

From building regional connections to amplifying local voices, the network helped ensure that youth priorities were not only heard, but supported through flexible, community-based action.

## Supporting the Next Generation

While much has changed, many challenges remain—and youth in 2025 are not so different from those in 1995. They still want to be heard, supported and empowered. Today, the Trust continues this legacy with programs that reflect youth priorities: job readiness workshops, leadership journeys, summits and mindfulness toolkits.

The impact of youth programming continues to resonate, not only for today’s participants, but for those whose early involvement shaped their paths.

“Through Youth Links, I learned to collaborate with diverse teams and solve problems on the fly,” says Crystal Lawrence, now a fisheries biologist. “That program gave me a deep appreciation for the Columbia River watershed and helped shape my career. I’m proud to be part of the legacy of the Trust’s youth programming.”

Young people across the region remain inspired and ready to lead. As Lydia Kalawsky of the Rossland Youth Action Network puts it: “One word that I would use to describe the future of the Columbia Basin would be ‘hopeful,’ because it seems like there are going to be so many new and exciting opportunities, especially for youth in this area.”

With a continued focus on collaboration and youth leadership, the Trust is helping ensure the next generation of Basin youth will thrive—and continue to shape the region’s future. ■

[ourtrust.org/byn](http://ourtrust.org/byn)

Launched in 2002, the youth-driven publication **SCRATCH Magazine** became another platform for young people to share stories, ideas and resources—produced entirely by Basin youth.

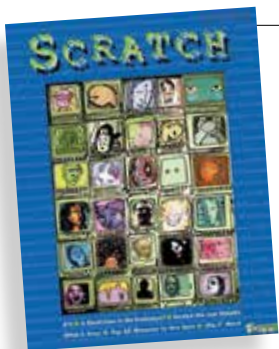


Photo: Columbia Basin Trust Archive

## YOUTH ENGAGEMENT MILESTONES

- 1999 | **Youth Links** program begins
- 2001 | First **Basin Youth Action Forum**
- 2001 | **Youth Advisory Committee** launched
- 2002 | **SCRATCH Magazine** debuts
- 2016 | **Basin Youth Network** launched

# From Start to Future

College partnerships enhance student life, expand and innovate learning, and boost the region's potential

**COLLEGES ARE VITAL** to their communities.

They deliver local training, create opportunities for students to learn close to home, and adapt to the evolving needs of their regions.

Selkirk College, College of the Rockies and Okanagan College's Revelstoke Centre have long developed creative solutions—from new facilities and programs to innovative ways of reaching students. The Trust has supported many of these efforts, helping advance college-led ideas that improve access, enrich student life and strengthen local capacity.

In 2019, the Trust partnered with Selkirk College and College of the Rockies on a \$14-million initiative to enhance student experience. Running through 2027, this investment is upgrading learning spaces, improving programming and enhancing campus life—creating stronger learning environments and expanded options for Basin students.

This builds on years of collaboration. Among the most significant has been student housing: new residences in

Castlegar, Nelson and Cranbrook are helping reduce one of the biggest barriers students face—finding safe, affordable places to live. With secure housing, more learners can stay in the Basin, focus on their studies and succeed in their programs, while also easing pressures in local rental markets.

Other Trust-supported initiatives have expanded trades training spaces in Castlegar, Nelson and Cranbrook; created mobile classrooms that bring education to smaller communities; and added child care spaces, new programs, and upgraded technology—ensuring colleges can better serve both students and industry.

Colleges also deliver Trust programming and research, extending the reach of investments. Through Selkirk Innovates, Selkirk College produces tools like the State of the Basin reports and the Columbia Basin Climate Source website, giving communities reliable, region-specific information. College of the Rockies helps deliver wage subsidy programs, connecting residents with meaningful work and training.



**“The Trust has been an extraordinary partner in advancing education in the Columbia Basin. From supporting the construction of new instructional and housing spaces to enhancing and modernizing student-centred areas, to investing in cutting-edge teaching tools, their contributions reflect a deep commitment to the educational success and well-being of all Basin residents. As the Trust marks its 30th anniversary, we celebrate not only their impact but also their continued dedication to building a brighter future for our region.”**

- Michael Crowe, President and CEO, College of the Rockies



Photo: Selkirk College

**“For over 30 years, Selkirk College’s partnership with Columbia Basin Trust has been fundamental to our ability to serve learners and communities across the region. Together, we’ve created so many transformative opportunities, from expanding student housing and child care to initiatives that enhance campus life. It’s been wonderful to have a partner that shares so many of our own values: equity, access, sustainability and an enhanced sense of community. We’re so grateful for the Trust’s support in helping us build a stronger, more resilient Basin.”**

- Dr. Maggie Matear, President and CEO, Selkirk College



Photo: College of the Rockies

While declining international enrolment has created challenges, interest in local programs—especially trades and industry training—remains strong. As colleges shape the next chapter, their insight and agility will continue to benefit the region.

The outcomes speak for themselves: more students learning close to home, more communities with access to training, and more tools to guide the Basin into the future. ■



Photo: Andrew Bibby Photography

## OPENING DOORS – STUDENT BURSARIES MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Basin students receive financial support each year through bursaries offered in partnership with local colleges. Available through Selkirk College, College of the Rockies and Okanagan College’s Revelstoke Centre, these bursaries reduce financial barriers and encourage students to study in their home region.

The program has supported thousands of learners since 2006, contributing to a stronger local workforce and allowing students to focus on their studies and future plans. For many, the support represents more than just funding—it’s an investment in their potential, and in the strength of the region.

**\$1.35M**  
invested in bursaries

**1,783**  
bursaries awarded to  
Basin students

[ourtrust.org/bursaries](https://ourtrust.org/bursaries)

# Where Community Begins

*Local vision lays foundation for lasting homes in Salmo and Slocan Valley*

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING CHALLENGES** are being met with shared vision and community determination. In Salmo and the Slocan Valley, stories like Arlie Bengert's—who says the best part of living in Salmo Valley Estates is “the friendliness and the freedom with a sense of security”—show how local efforts are doing more than building homes: they're helping people stay connected and communities thrive.

## Supporting seniors at Passmore Lodge

In the heart of the Slocan Valley, a modest timber-framed building tucked among the trees stands as a symbol of community resilience. Built in 1999, Passmore Lodge was the first affordable housing project supported by the Trust, marking the beginning of a long-term commitment to housing across the Basin.

“Passmore Lodge has allowed aging residents to remain in the Slocan Valley instead of having to move to Alberta or Saskatchewan where housing is cheaper,” says Joyce Johnson, Administrator at Slocan Valley Housing Society (SVHS). “Staying close to family, friends and community support systems is vital to our senior population.”

Over time, the Trust's support has evolved to meet changing needs. In addition to contributing to new housing developments, the Trust also helps communities preserve and upgrade existing housing and generate renewable energy. Passmore Lodge was among the first to benefit from these improvements, receiving upgraded attic insulation, ventilation, energy-efficient heat pumps and solar panels.

“After the 2021 heat dome, some tenants couldn't afford air conditioning, so I looked for alternatives,” says Johnson. “One tenant who initially resisted the change told me later how grateful they were, and that's been the collective response. It's really made a difference.”



Since 1998:

**1,600+**

new affordable rental housing units created

**2,000+**

existing rental housing units upgraded or made more energy efficient

**33**

communities with Trust-supported housing initiatives

[ourtrust.org/housing](https://ourtrust.org/housing)



# Community builds homes and hope in **Salmo**

About 80 kilometres to the south, the Salmo and Area Supportive Housing Society marked a major milestone in 2014 with the opening of Salmo Valley Estates—a 28-unit affordable housing development for seniors and families. The project was the result of more than a decade of community fundraising, volunteerism and planning, supported by the Trust, BC Housing and multiple levels of government.

“The site had to be within walking distance of clinics, banks and other essential services,” says Heather Street of the Society. “Merle Hanson owned a property that fit the bill and he allowed us to purchase it with a no-interest mortgage, which we paid off quickly. But without the Trust’s guidance, this beautiful building would not be here today.”

Formed in 2002, the Society mobilized the community through bake sales, barbecues and sales of the popular Salmo Seniors cookbook. The result: a development that includes 20 senior suites and eight family townhomes, supporting a wide range of residents and helping to revitalize the community.

“It’s made the community more vibrant,” says Street. “As seniors moved into the Estates, their former homes were bought by young families. We even gained a beautiful new daycare. We still have a large senior population, but now it’s balanced by a younger generation.”



## More homes, stronger communities

Slocan Valley Housing Society now manages three properties and is working on a fourth—a new affordable housing development in the Village of Slocan for residents of all ages.

“This project will support everything from families to schools and businesses,” says Johnson. “Without a place to live, people can’t work or spend money locally, which means businesses suffer. People want to raise their kids in the valley, a place that’s less consumer-oriented and more nature-focused. But they can’t do that if they can’t find a place to live.”

Street sees similar pressures in Salmo. “Salmo is still affordable with a lower tax base and offers great amenities,” she says. “Our clinic and ambulance services are excellent, and we have a great education system, which is appealing for young families. But just like every other small community, we need more affordable housing.”

While no two communities are the same, these stories reflect a broader trend: locally led housing solutions, backed by the Trust, are helping communities across the Basin meet today’s housing challenges and plan for the future. In recent years, the Trust’s role has expanded to include not just construction and energy improvements, but also livability enhancements that encourage gathering and physical activity, and supports that improve emergency readiness. Together, these efforts make housing more comfortable, safe and resilient.

A slower lifestyle rooted in community and nature is why so many choose to live in the Basin. Thanks to local leadership and the Trust’s ongoing commitment, more people can continue to call it home, today and for generations to come. ■



Photos: Spencer Legebokoff



# It Takes a Village

## How a strategic investment and partnership created a network of seniors communities

**IN THE 1990S**, Cranbrook resident Endre Lillejord was struggling to find a home for his mother, Ivy. He was disappointed to discover that housing options were limited for seniors who, like Ivy, needed some support but were still largely independent. He quickly realized that his family was not alone: across the Basin, seniors and their families were looking for alternatives to institutional care. So, he decided to take matters into his own hands.

Lillejord founded Golden Life Management to design, build and operate seniors' housing. The company envisioned a supportive, affordable housing model grounded in the idea that "it takes a village to care." Its facilities, called "villages", were designed to reflect that philosophy. The first, Joseph Creek Village, opened in Cranbrook in 1998, with Ivy Lillejord as one of the first residents.

"When you walk through the halls of the village, you're surrounded by friends and families, and everyone has a goal of ensuring that you have the supports and services in place to live your best quality of life," said Celeste Mullin, Lillejord's daughter and Golden Life's Vice-President of Corporate Business. To maintain and strengthen these supports, Golden Life sought "a strategic partner that we could align with; someone who brought credibility to our seniors' development, enhanced our brand, was financially strong, and well-integrated within the communities."

That partner was Columbia Basin Trust. Recognizing their shared commitment to improving quality of life in the region, Lillejord approached the Trust to discuss a potential collaboration. The Trust agreed. In 2001, it committed \$1.3 million to support Castle Wood Village, Golden Life's second seniors housing project. Located in Castlegar, Castle Wood was the first facility of its kind in the West Kootenay, offering 77 suites and a range of amenities including a games room, exercise room, library, beauty salon/barbershop, and craft and hobby areas.

"Castle Wood was a pioneering project in the region, and it made sense from both a community and investment perspective," said Johnny Strilaeff, President and CEO at Columbia Basin Trust. "It demonstrated that we could invest in projects that deliver strong financial returns while also meeting real community needs."

Residents themselves have felt the difference. "After moving in, I knew this was my home—a place with independence, support and community," says Kay Abbott, resident and head of the Castle Wood residents' council.

Mullin credits the success of the partnership to mutual respect, open communication and a willingness to learn and evolve. In 2006, for example, Golden Life approached the Trust about enhancing affordability for low-income seniors. Together, they developed an innovative grant program, enabling eligible residents to pay 70 per cent of their income for rent, meals and housekeeping.

Mullin calls the program "a great example of how we've met our collective goal of ensuring that people in the Basin have great quality of life, regardless of their financial resources."

Golden Life and the Trust have continued to collaborate over the years. Eight of Golden Life's 17 villages were developed with support from the Trust, in the communities of Cranbrook, Castlegar, Creston, Fernie, Fruitvale, Invermere, Kimberley and Nelson. The facilities continue to provide seniors with more independent, community-based living options—an enduring legacy of a strategic partnership rooted in shared values.

As the partnership evolves, the Trust's role may shift, but its legacy remains clear. The investment in Golden Life's villages not only strengthened the Trust's portfolio but also helped create lasting infrastructure that supports seniors to age with dignity, independence and connection. For the Trust, this is the kind of impact that defines success: enabling community well-being today, while reinvesting in the Basin's future. ■

[ourtrust.org/investments](http://ourtrust.org/investments)



## A HOME AND A COMMUNITY: KAY ABBOTT'S CASTLE WOOD STORY

A resident since 2014 and president of the residents' council, Kay Abbott has found much more than a place to live at Castle Wood Village—she's found a supportive community.

"When my husband became ill, we had to decide on our next steps," Kay says. "Then someone told us about Castle Wood. We came down to look and we liked it right away. We had a two-bedroom suite and could come and go as we pleased. After my husband passed, there was no question I would stay—this was my home."

Kay values the safety Castle Wood offers her family and the friendships she's built. She leads the busy residents' council, which organizes events, fundraises and plan improvements like enhancing garden accessibility. As a former teacher, she also helps run a writing group, contributing to the lively, active community. "This is a busy place with activities every day and plenty of peers to connect with. I like my independence but know support is here when I need it—and that's great!"

# The Heart of Nelson

**A museum inspired by the convergence of art and history**

**THE NELSON MUSEUM**, Archives and Gallery (NMAG) is more than a place to view artifacts and photographs. With historical exhibitions, contemporary art shows, book launches and community events, it's a vibrant centre for arts, history and community life—truly a cultural touchstone for the region.

Photos: Barbarich Photography



Photo: Barbarich Photography



Photo: Adrian Wagner Studio



The Nelson Museum, Archives and Gallery (NMAG) traces its roots to 1955, when the Kootenay Museum Association was incorporated. After a few years at its current 502 Vernon Street location—a former post office that became Nelson's City Hall in the early 1960s—it moved to a series of locations, including the former Kansas City House brothel on Lake Street. In 1974, it relocated again to a purpose-built 5,000-square-foot facility, constructed as part of BC's centennial celebrations.

By the early 2000s, that space could no longer meet the needs of the growing collection or expanding programming. In 2003, a local referendum approved renovating the Vernon Street building after City Hall relocated. The new facility, originally known as Touchstones Nelson, opened in 2006, following a \$3.2 million renovation. The project was supported by a \$220,000 grant from Columbia Basin Trust.

"The old building could not keep up with growth and development," says Jennifer Dunkerson, Executive Director, NMAG. "The new one is visible and central, with space for storage and archives."

Since then, the Trust has continued to provide significant support for equipment upgrades, conservation work, programming and energy efficiency. These contributions have helped sustain a facility that is both rooted in the community's past and responsive to its present.

NMAG's impact extends beyond its walls. In addition to hosting exhibits downtown, the Nelson Museum curates sports displays at

the Nelson and District Community Complex and Civic Centre arenas. Its archival collections are anchored by the Shawn Lamb Archives, named for the late director and long-time archivist who retired in 2009 after 25 years of service.

"She was the founder of most of what we do, and her vision was for the museum to be the centre of Nelson's history," says Dunkerson. "We continue to uphold that in everything we do. She had the passion and dedication that set an example for all of us."

That legacy continues in award-winning projects like Roll On Columbia: Exploring the Landscape and Culture of the Columbia River Treaty, a 2015 exhibition that wove history and art together to tell the story of the Columbia River. Supported in part by the Trust, the exhibit earned the Canadian Museums Association's award for Outstanding Achievement in Exhibitions for institutions with budgets under \$1 million.

Today, NMAG continues to grow. In 2024, 12,500 visitors came through the doors, up from 11,800 the year before. The museum employs nine staff and hosts 50 active volunteers, with student staff joining each summer. Visitors experience rotating exhibitions, community programming and permanent features like Nelson's Cold War-era bunker, located adjacent to the main building.

"Our goal is to be welcoming and inclusive to anybody who walks through the doors," says Dunkerson. "People can be confident they will see and take away a new perspective."

That commitment is reflected in the museum's evolving approach to representation and reconciliation. NMAG is working to build and formalize relationships with local Indigenous communities. A staircase exhibit explores local LGBTQ2+ history, and work is underway to redesign the museum's main historical exhibition, originally created in 2005, to better reflect the full range of voices in the community. A public survey will help guide that redesign.

As the museum continues to evolve, the Trust remains a valued supporter, especially at key moments of growth and transition.

"The Trust has been a foundation that we can use to reach out to other supporters," says Dunkerson. "Their presence has made a real difference; we wouldn't be where we are today without them."

Nearly two decades after its transformation, The Nelson Museum, Archives and Gallery continues to demonstrate the value of community-driven vision and long-term support—a hallmark of the Trust's work throughout the Basin over the past 30 years. ■



# Before it was mainstream

CLIMATE  
SOURCE:  
TAKE  
ACTION  
LOCALLY

## Laying the groundwork for local climate and water action

**IN THE LATE 1990S**, climate change and water scarcity were rarely topics of conversation around kitchen tables or in rural council chambers. Yet Basin residents were noticing changes in their environment and raising questions about the future of their communities. Listening to this early foresight, Columbia Basin Trust began exploring ways to help residents prepare for the challenges ahead.

The solution started with something that didn't yet exist: Basin-specific knowledge. At the same time, the Trust worked to give communities practical tools to act on that knowledge. This approach became the blueprint for decades of environmental work, shaping both climate and water initiatives across the region.

### The Water Connection

One of the Trust's earliest environmental priorities was water. In 2003, it formed a Water Advisory Panel to bring together experts who could provide strategic direction on water issues unique to the Columbia Basin.

That early vision led to programs like Water Smart and the Water Ambassador network, developed in partnership with local governments. These programs gave communities practical ways to track water use, educate residents, and implement conservation measures tailored to local needs.

The results were tangible. Communities such as Elkford have reduced treated water use by millions of litres each year through Trust-supported initiatives—proof that early investments can have lasting benefits. (See “From Sprinklers to Stewardship” on the next page for Elkford's full story.)

Today, the Trust has convened a new Water Taskforce to explore emerging challenges, but the foundation laid over 20 years ago remains central: collaboration and local action.

### Taking on Climate—Before It Was Headline News

Around the same time, the Trust began addressing another emerging concern: climate change. In 2003, it hosted a two-day workshop to help residents understand what climate change could

mean for the region—a conversation that was rare at the time.

This early momentum led to major research collaborations, including technical reports with the University of Victoria and partnerships with the Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute. These studies provided the first Basin-wide data on shifting weather patterns, snowpack trends and glacier change.

But research was only the first step. The Trust also worked directly with local governments, helping them sign onto the Columbia Basin Climate Charter and supporting them to integrate climate considerations into community planning.

One of the most visible outcomes is Climate Source, launched in 2018—a public, interactive portal that translates complex climate science into clear, localized information. Updated this spring, it continues to guide municipalities, First Nations, and organizations in developing climate adaptation and mitigation strategies.

The Climate Source website helps residents and communities take climate action and build resilience. Explore practical tips, inspiring local solutions and submit your own climate project to showcase the collective impact across the Basin.

[basinclimatesource.ca](https://basinclimatesource.ca)

## A Lasting Approach

The Trust's work in water and climate share the same DNA:

- Anticipate challenges long before they become urgent
- Invest in regionally relevant research
- Convene and collaborate with local governments, First Nations and organizations
- Support implementation of solutions designed for the Basin's unique geography and communities.

While many Trust programs today—like energy retrofits, wildfire resilience and land conservation—carry climate and environmental benefits, the long-term impact of these early investments is clear.

As Johnny Strilaeff, Trust President and CEO, puts it: “This kind of work isn’t always visible, but it’s foundational. The data, the partnerships, the local know-how—they all give our communities the ability to respond to challenges in ways that make sense here in the Basin.”

Thirty years on, the Trust's environmental work is still defined by the same principle that guided it in 1997: look ahead, build capacity and act together. ■

# From Sprinklers to Stewardship

## How Elkford saved millions of litres of water and built a culture of conservation

On summer evenings years ago, sprinklers in Elkford often ran long after residents had gone to bed. “My predecessor used to stay up at night watching our reservoir drop,” recalls Director of Engineering and Public Works Jesse Huisman. “He could see in real-time when water use was so heavy that we would lose our capacity to fight a major fire.”

Today, that's no longer a concern. With support from Columbia Basin Trust, a range of water conservation initiatives now save millions of litres of treated water each year. Advanced monitoring technology helps detect leaks before they become costly repairs. Plus, the District of Elkford's efforts to adopt new bylaws promote more sustainable development.

The Trust has worked on water-related priorities for decades—sometimes with greater focus, sometimes less—depending on community needs. From 2011 to 2015, the Trust aimed to “support Basin residents to increase their awareness and understanding of water issues, and to take steps to address issues.” During this time, Elkford joined the Trust's Communities Adapting to Climate Change Initiative and launched its WaterSmart project—efforts that continue to influence how the community manages water.

Mayor Steve Fairbairn calls this shift part of Elkford's “management DNA.” Both he and Huisman credit the Trust with

instilling stewardship values and a proactive approach to communicating with residents and implementing best practices. “The habits and behaviours the programs encouraged still exist and exist quite successfully,” says Fairbairn.

Instead of worrying about reservoir levels, Huisman now focuses on deepening civic knowledge and refining practices. For example, Elkford is updating the awareness built during its WaterSmart project to align with newer protocols promoted through the FireSmart program.

Across the Basin, the Trust's water initiatives have explored everything from aquatic wildlife health to water availability for agriculture, supported by peer networks, training programs and community stewardship projects.

With the release of the 2024–2034 Columbia Basin Management Plan—shaped by resident input—water has returned to the forefront of the Trust's strategic direction. Elkford's success shows what's possible when communities and the Trust work together to protect this vital resource.

“Those of us responsible for managing community water systems work diligently to ensure reliable access to safe, potable water,” says Fairbairn. “So many people are now experiencing water shortages firsthand. Perhaps this is why most of the population seems to understand that we simply cannot take water access for granted. We are fortunate that the Trust can bring the region together to address this pressing issue for the sake of current and future generations.” ■



# Bringing Back the Salmon

Indigenous-led movement reconnects the Columbia River with its sacred past—and future

**THE COLUMBIA RIVER** was once one of the greatest salmon-producing rivers in the world. For Indigenous Peoples along its length, salmon have been central to life—spiritually, culturally, nutritionally and economically—since time immemorial.

That began to change in the late 1930s with the construction of the Grand Coulee and Chief Joseph dams in the U.S., followed by the Columbia River Treaty dams on both sides of the border. Together, these structures blocked salmon from reaching the upper Columbia River system, severing a vital connection between the fish and the Salmon Peoples of this region.

## Led by the Nations

Over many decades, the Syilx Okanagan, Secwépemc and Ktunaxa Nations have worked to bring salmon home. Their longstanding efforts, including through the Canadian Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fisheries Commission, laid the foundation for what is now Bringing the Salmon Home: The Columbia River Salmon Reintroduction Initiative.

“This Initiative is located in unceded Indigenous territories. Salmon have been prevented from returning to our waters for more than 86 years now,” says Jason Andrew, Ktunaxa Nation representative with the Bringing the Salmon Home Executive Working Group.

Mark Thomas, Executive Working Group Chair and Salmon Chief for the Shuswap Band, adds: “It is our cultural, spiritual, emotional and unconditional responsibility as Indigenous People to do all we can for our brethren, the Salmon. We will not waver or cease this responsibility; it is in our blood.”

In 2017, as discussions about renewing the Columbia River Treaty approached, Columbia Basin Trust

Photos: Bringing the Salmon Home Initiative





supported renewed dialogue on salmon reintroduction—helping bring the three Nations together with senior levels of government, dam operators and others.

“The vision and leadership came from First Nations,” says Johnny Strilaeff, President and CEO of the Trust. “Our role was to support that momentum by helping convene discussions. I want to recognize the work of now-retired Trust staff member Kindy Gosal, who was instrumental in bringing people together around the table and laying the groundwork for collaboration.”

This collaboration led to a historic milestone in 2019: the signing of a Letter of Agreement between the Syilx Okanagan, Secwépemc and Ktunaxa Nations, British Columbia and Canada to formally establish Bringing the Salmon Home. Its long-term vision is to restore salmon for Indigenous food, social and ceremonial needs, and to benefit ecosystems and communities across the Basin.

### A Generational Movement

With funding from the Trust and other governments, the Initiative has made significant progress, including:

- Technical studies and salmon monitoring
- Tri-Nation youth and cultural gatherings
- Community and transboundary engagement.

Annual salmon fry releases in places like Columbia Lake, Revelstoke and Castlegar bring hundreds of people together. Elders speak, children sing, and communities send young salmon into ancestral waters—followed by ceremonies to call them home.

This is a generational movement. Youth are learning directly from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, ensuring that traditional wisdom continues to guide the way forward.

“This initiative is about both providing salmon and giving hope for generations to come,” says kal?lupaq’n Chief Keith Crow, Syilx Okanagan Nation representative. “We have the track record, and the technology is available to deliver fish passage in both directions. Through our combined efforts, salmon are swimming today in the upper Columbia system in Canada.”

### A Shared Future

The initiative is widely seen as a model for Indigenous-led ecosystem restoration and reconciliation. But lasting success requires sustained commitment.

The Trust remains committed to walking alongside the First Nations as they lead this work—honouring past commitments and the possibilities ahead.

“The Trust is proud to be part of this Indigenous-led process,” says Strilaeff. The dedicated work of the Bringing the Salmon Home Initiative helps the entire Basin remember what once was, and imagine what could be again.” ■

[ColumbiaRiverSalmon.ca](http://ColumbiaRiverSalmon.ca)

**“This initiative is about both providing salmon and giving hope for generations to come.”**

— kal?lupaq’n Chief Keith Crow, Syilx Okanagan Nation representative

# The Last Piece: Conserving the East Shore of Columbia Lake

Collaborative restoration grounded in Indigenous and ecological stewardship

**NEAR THE HEADWATERS** of the Columbia River, the east shore of Columbia Lake holds both rich ecological diversity and deep cultural meaning. Locally stewarded by the ʔakisq̓nuk First Nation and the Shuswap Band, the area is part of a landscape where both the Ktunaxa and Shuswap Band have longstanding cultural, spiritual and historical connections. For generations, it has supported seasonal use, salmon harvesting and ceremonial gatherings.

Once targeted for development—including a marina, paved roads and a golf course—the Columbia Lake - Lot 48 Conservation Area, part of a 7,600-hectare network of conservation lands, has instead become a model for collaborative restoration.

The 127-hectare parcel was the final privately held piece on the lake's eastern shore. The area lies along a historic travel and trading route known locally as the Spirit Trail. Its protection was the result of nearly two decades of advocacy, land-use planning and negotiation. Conservation was made possible by a broad partnership involving Columbia Basin Trust, First Nations, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), the Province of BC, the Regional District of East Kootenay and others.

Funding included \$2 million from Teck (now Elk Valley Resources), \$1 million from the Trust and more than \$700,000 from the Columbia Valley Local Conservation Fund—a unique, locally supported fund drawn from a parcel tax across the region. In total, the land purchase cost \$7.2 million, with additional contributions from provincial, federal and non-profit partners.

“The conservation of Columbia Lake - Lot 48 was supported by the local community, the Ktunaxa Nation, the Shuswap Band and the regional district,” says Richard Klafki, NCC’s Program Director for the Canadian Rockies region. “It was the last undeveloped piece on the eastern shore, and everyone involved knew how important it was to protect it.”

Restoration work began shortly after the land was secured in 2012. Dense forests were targeted for ecological recovery, invasive species removal began, and motorized access was limited in collaboration with BC Parks and the Ktunaxa Nation.

These treatments are restoring the open grassland ecosystem and improving the wildlife corridor for species such as Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, elk and migratory birds.

“Since we have been stewarding this land, we have seen the natural resilience of the land start to rebound. One great sign of this change has been the return of the American badger, one of the rare endangered species in southeast BC, thanks to a resurgence of ground squirrels, the badgers’ favourite food,” says Klafki.

The area also supports at-risk bats and Lewis’s woodpeckers, aided by the installation of roost trees wrapped in artificial bark.

Community and cultural values guide priorities for kinquq̓nki, which is the Ktunaxa name for the stewardship project that focuses on ecological protection and restoration on the east side of





Photo: Cole Lord May

Columbia Lake. The land contains archaeological sites, and public access remains open for walking and biking, but with increased efforts to prevent unauthorized trail-building and protect sensitive habitat.

"In the last five years, I've noticed people have especially recognized the importance of respecting nature," says Klafki.

A key element of the project is the return of fire to the landscape. Members of ʔakisq̓nuk First Nation and partners have undertaken forest thinning to reduce wildfire risk and prepare the area for prescribed burns scheduled for 2026. Led by the Ktunaxa Nation, these will help restore ecological balance and cultural function after a century of fire suppression.

For Alfred Joseph, an Elder of ʔakisq̓nuk First Nation, the east side of Columbia Lake is part of the community's identity. "I remember when you could gallop a horse through these lands. It's time to restore that balance, for the sake of the grasslands and future generations."

What began as a response to development pressure has evolved into a long-term vision for Indigenous-led conservation. Guided by the Ktunaxa Nation and supported by a broad network of regional and conservation partners, the restoration on the east side of Columbia Lake reflects how cultural renewal and ecological resilience can move forward together. ■

Photo: Kimberley Rae Sanderson



Photo: Bailey Repp



Photo: Claude Rioux



Photo: Tracy Connery



# Kaslo's Outdoor Revival

## HOW A LAKESIDE VILLAGE REIMAGINED ITS PUBLIC SPACES AND COMMUNITY LIFE

Nestled along Kootenay Lake's west shore, Kaslo has become a beacon for outdoor recreation and cultural activities. With support from Columbia Basin Trust and the leadership of local groups and volunteers, the village has transformed its public spaces, revitalizing the economy and bringing fresh energy to community life.

*"Kaslo relies on well-maintained public spaces to welcome visitors and showcase our lakeside charm," says Suzan Hewat, Mayor of Kaslo. "Our outdoor spaces bring people together."*

### Trails That Connect and Inspire

The Kaslo Outdoor Recreation and Trails Society (KORTS), which has led a decade-long enhancement of the trail network, is central to this transformation. What began as grassroots trail development has become a well-connected system with upgraded signage, culverts, parking and trailhead amenities. In 2025, the group is adding two new 1.5-kilometre connector trails and improving trail access points, making it easier for everyone to explore the region's natural beauty.

"The Kootenay Lake Road Trip app includes a three-kilometre Kaslo River Trail Tour that features local landmarks like the old generator from the 1890s and native plant life—kind of like an outdoor museum," says Dan Miles, President of KORTS. "It's a fun way to actively engage people."

KORTS trails now see steady use by skiers, hikers and mountain bikers, with up to 100 weekly adventurers during peak season. Popular additions like the Hide and Seek sculpture trail—a playful installation by the Koots Artist Collective—encourage families and new hikers to connect with the outdoors.

"I'm proud to say that of Kaslo's 1,049 residents, 390 are KORTS members," says Miles. "That shows real community buy-in, and the Trust's funding helps us dream big and carry out wonderful, creative projects."





Photos: Louis Bockner

## Space to Move, Gather and Grow

The Kaslo Skate and Bike Park, with stunning views of the lake and surrounding mountains, is another symbol of the community's grassroots strength. Completed in 2007 after years of advocacy and volunteer effort, the scenic park attracts riders of all ages.

"Built with the help of volunteers, the skate park has become very popular," says Hewat, who has served on Kaslo's council since 2005.

Today, it's also a training ground for mountain bikers and a welcoming gathering space for youth. After an adrenaline-filled ride, many cool off with a refreshing swim just steps away in Kootenay Lake.

Once a modest green space, downtown Kaslo's Front Street Park has been reimagined with new infrastructure, including a performance pavilion, permanent washrooms and landscaped grounds. It now anchors community life and strengthens the social fabric of the village.

"It's been a real community effort," says Hewat. "We formed a committee with local seniors, market vendors, arts groups and a heritage consultant to shape the park's vision."

Café patios fill on market days, and events like Kaslo May Days and the car show turn Front Street into what Hewat calls "the village's living room."

Lifelong Kaslo resident Dana Carlson, owner of Cornucopia, a health food store featuring products from local artisans and farmers, is grateful for a more vibrant and welcoming downtown.

"From families picnicking in the beautiful park to performances and the farmers' market drawing crowds, we've seen a real boost in support for small businesses thanks to these upgrades," says Carlson.

## A Village with Rhythm and Reach

Kaslo's outdoor transformation also supports large-scale events like the beloved Kaslo Jazz Etc. Festival, where musicians perform on a floating stage for thousands of visitors gathered along the shoreline.

"I volunteered as front gate manager for 17 years. It's a world of dancing on the beach, glow sticks and jazz under the stars," says Miles. "The joy and celebration of our events attract people who are looking for the quality of life our happening little town offers."

Kaslo stands out as a community that has brought its vision to life—shaping public spaces that foster connection, creativity and economic vitality. With long-term collaboration between local leaders, volunteers and the Trust, the village has become more than a postcard-perfect setting—it's a place where people come together and community thrives.

"Kaslo gets its hooks into you," says Hewat. "Between the natural beauty, the people and these amazing public spaces, it leaves a lasting impression." ■

# More Than a Return: St. Eugene

## How a bold investment helped reclaim a site of pain and build a pillar of Indigenous tourism

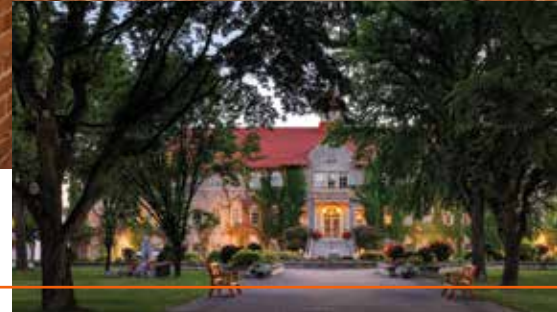
**NEAR CRANBROOK IN ʔAQʼAM**, St. Eugene Golf Resort and Casino is set against an impressive mountain backdrop. Once a residential school run by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate from 1912 to 1970, the resort now stands transformed under Ktunaxa Nation ownership, surrounded by manicured lawns and colourful gardens—a striking contrast to its somber past.

The final bend along the road to St. Eugene, once called Crying Corner, revealed not a holiday destination but an imposing, 55-foot-tall concrete structure where over 5,000 children from the Ktunaxa, Okanagan, Shuswap and Blackfoot Nations were forcibly removed from their families and denied their language and culture.

One of these children, Sophie Pierre—who spent nine years at St. Eugene from age six—later became Nasuʔkin (Chief) of ʔaqʼam. She recalls the idea of transforming the school into a resort was initially met with reluctance.

After the school closed in 1970, the building and 327 surrounding acres were turned over to five bands: four Ktunaxa Nation communities including ʔaqʼam, ʔakisq̓nuk, Yaq̓it ʔa-knuq̓li 'it and Yaqan nuʔkiy, and the Shuswap Band. It sat vacant for over 20 years, falling into disrepair while the Ktunaxa struggled to reconcile differing opinions about what to do with the site. Some wanted it torn down, while others, like Pierre, saw an opportunity to create a space for healing and community benefit.





casino addition, St. Eugene filed for bankruptcy protection in December 2003 in an attempt to restructure its finances and operations.

In 2004, a groundbreaking partnership between the Ktunaxa, the Samson Cree Nation in Alberta and the Rama First Nation in Ontario rescued the project from financial collapse, marking the first national First Nations collaboration of its kind. Eventually, the resort began to turn a profit. An RV park was added in 2017 and, in 2018, St. Eugene was the host hotel for the BC Seniors Games.

The resort's Director of Sales and Marketing, Michael Sprake, says they recently celebrated the golf course's 25th anniversary and are planning for future growth.

"We've recently added new glamping cabins and are expanding amenities—including updates to our casino lounge—to attract a wider range of visitors," he adds. "These investments help us remain competitive in the tourism market and support stable, year-round employment for our community."

Between hosting writers' conferences and partnering with nearby wineries for tastings and festivals, St. Eugene employs 200 to 250 people year-round, offering stable employment and helping steward local economic development. Sprake is optimistic as the organization begins strategic planning around a new vision for the coming five to 15 years.

The Trust's early support helped enable Indigenous leadership to reclaim and repurpose a site of historical pain into a space for healing and opportunity. Pierre believes the resort helped foster relationships between the Ktunaxa Nation and non-Indigenous organizations across the Basin, cementing the fact that "the Indigenous community is going to be involved now." ■

"Since it was within the St. Eugene Mission School that the culture of the Kootenay Indian was taken away, it should be within that building that it is returned," said Ktunaxa Elder Mary Paul. Her words became a cornerstone of the project and are now displayed on the walls of the resort.

Pierre recalls that it took time for the community to embrace what their Elder meant: that reclaiming and transforming St. Eugene could help restore cultural, social and economic order. In the halls where children once suffered, the Ktunaxa envisioned renewal.

"Somehow, without two nickels to rub together," said Pierre, the Ktunaxa and their partners "managed to put together a \$40-million resort."

In 1999, Columbia Basin Trust joined the project, ultimately investing nearly \$7 million in construction and operations. While the investment was structured as a loan, it was never fully repaid. On paper, it was a financial loss—but in hindsight, the Trust viewed it differently. The investment helped catalyze a community-led effort to transform a site of trauma into one of pride, purpose and opportunity. It created meaningful employment, supported Indigenous tourism, and contributed to long-term economic renewal in the region.

The St. Eugene golf course opened in 2000 and was quickly recognized by Golf Digest as one of the top three Best New Canadian Courses in 2001. Yet despite the early accolades, external challenges such as wildfires, global events, and a regional tourism downturn left the resort deeply in debt. Struggling to build the planned hotel and

Photos: St. Eugene Resort





# Dream Big, Decide Local

## How ReDi Grants are shaping Basin Communities

Photo: Ruby Hogg

**IN THE NORTHERN** mountain town of Valemout, what started as a social snowmobile club has grown into a world-class outdoor recreation hub. Mountain bikers now travel from around the globe to ride its trails—momentum sparked, in part, by the Trust's Resident Directed Grant Program (ReDi).

"The impact has been massive," says Curtis Pawliuk, Executive Director of the Valemout and Area Recreation and Development Association (VARDA). "ReDi-funded developments are enhancing life for locals and putting Valemout on the map."

Further south in Nakusp, ReDi has helped another community dream take shape. At the volunteer-run Summit Lake Ski & Snowboard Area, a series of small grants have funded equipment upgrades, day lodge improvements and the purchase of a groomer.

"The population around here isn't huge; not big enough to support a commercial hill," says Butch Warantz, a long-time outdoor recreation champion who has been volunteering at the hill for 40 years. "What we have is a small community hill and a really good, diverse group of people who make it a fun place to be."

For local students, it's also a chance to ski free three times a season. "When there's fresh powder, people are pretty cheery!" Warantz laughs. ReDi grants, he says, have been instrumental in keeping the hill safe and enjoyable for everyone.

These stories are just two of hundreds across the Basin where ReDi grants have sparked real, lasting change. From support for diverse recreation and cultural programming for youth to upgrading farmers' markets and more.

### A Unique Model of Local Empowerment

What sets ReDi apart is its core principle: communities know best. Each year, the Trust allocates funding to First Nations and local governments, who design community processes for deciding how grants are awarded and distribute the funding on the Trust's behalf. Some hold public meetings and vote. Others work through

volunteer selection committees, carefully weighing applications. The result: a legacy as diverse as the communities themselves.

"What I love is that the program gives communities a chance to guide progress toward their own vision," says Pawliuk. "It means that when projects become reality, people can feel ownership over the success—they know they contributed."

Formerly known as the Community Initiatives and Affected Areas Programs, ReDi has been one of the Trust's most enduring funding streams. Since 1998, it has invested over \$60.6 million into 6,000

local projects, helping communities take ownership of their development and future.

**ReDi has been one of the Trust's most enduring funding streams. Since 1998, it has invested over \$60.6 million into 6,000 local projects, helping communities take ownership of their development and future.**

### Deep Roots, Lasting Change

ReDi is built on relationships. The Trust delivers funding to First Nations and local governments, who engage citizens in presenting ideas and making decisions about which projects to support.

In Valemout, ReDi helped VARDA purchase equipment, connect key trail links and create momentum for larger investments. "We used to be a place people just drove past," Pawliuk says. "Now we're a destination."

In Nakusp, grants have met the humble but vital needs of a community ski hill that serves as a winter lifeline.

"These grants keep us going," says Warantz. "They help us tackle important maintenance and slowly chip away at improvements."

### More Than Money

"These grants are not a handout," says Pawliuk. "You need a dream, a plan and community support. But if you do the work and get people invested, you can do amazing things." Ultimately, ReDi offers more than funding—it's a framework for bringing people together, nurturing local leadership and building confidence in what a community can achieve.

See how ReDi is making a difference in your community and how you can get involved at [ourtrust.org/redi](https://ourtrust.org/redi). ■

# FROM PIT STOP TO DESTINATION

The investment that redefined Golden's future



Photo: Tracy Connery

Photo: Jeff Bartlett

**UP TO THE LATE 1990S**, Golden was a picturesque stopover for travellers, rooted in rail and natural resource industries. The town's charm came from its rugged mountain backdrop and its hard-working people, but its economy rose and fell with the tides of industry.

Everything changed in 1999 when international investor Ballast Nedam committed to the development of a major resort, but only if a local partner came on board. Columbia Basin Trust stepped in with a crucial anchor investment of \$5 million to help transform the modest, community-run Whitetooth Ski Area into Kicking Horse Resort. That investment became the catalyst for a major reinvention of Golden's identity and economy.

"We were a logging and railroad town, a highway pit stop," says Mayor of Golden, Ron Oszust. "With Kicking Horse, we became a destination."

The resort's development triggered a wave of growth. High-density construction brought new homes, lodges and jobs, from lift operators and engineers to tourism entrepreneurs.

"That multiplier effect rippled through our whole economy," says Oszust. "It attracted people who were just visitors at first, before they realized Golden was a good place to build a life."

What followed went beyond economic growth and turned into a cultural revival. Golden has become a magnet for what Oszust calls lifestyle enthusiasts—people drawn by the incredible skiing, mountain biking and backcountry access who chose to stay and put down roots with families and businesses.

"Golden has grown since I moved here in 2009. Businesses like restaurants and retail shops have sprung up around the world-class resort, but it's still a tight-knit community," says Andy

Brown, Communications Manager, Tourism Golden.

The influx of new residents and visitors helped fuel vibrancy year-round. From adaptive trails and summer festivals to a thriving arts scene supported by Kicking Horse Culture, the town pulses with creative energy and civic pride.

"I consider myself beyond lucky to live where other people vacation," says Brown. "Beyond the access to the great outdoors, I'm surrounded by people who genuinely care about this place and each other."

Attractions like the Golden Skybridge—Canada's highest suspension bridge—have added new momentum, bringing a broader mix of visitors. Yet Golden has held onto its identity as an authentic mountain town.

"There's always been a roll-up-your-sleeves and get things done spirit here," says Oszust, pointing to decades of volunteer-built projects like the Rotary Trail and the Golden Curling Club, which

hosts the longest-running curling group west of Winnipeg.

The legacy of community action continues, even as residents navigate new challenges like affordable housing and sustainable infrastructure. With major developments underway, including two climate-resilient bridges over the Kicking Horse River and expanded residential projects, Golden continues

to evolve, but its foundation remains unchanged.

"Golden has always been community first," adds Oszust. "The resort gave us the chance to thrive, but it's our people who made it count."

The Trust's early investment wasn't simply financial—it was a bet on the future of a town ready for its next chapter. And Golden proved them right. ■



Photo: Tracy Connery

# Revelstoke's Child Care Journey: A Model of Vision and Collaboration

Decades of service and impact for families and community

When the Revelstoke Child Care Society (RCCS) opened Stepping Stones Childcare Centre in 1995, it marked the beginning of a long-term commitment to families in the region. More than thirty years later, the community is recognizing a legacy of growth, innovation and collaboration, an effort supported by Columbia Basin Trust.



## Meeting child care needs, then and now

"We started with 16 child care spaces," says Tracy Spannier, Co-Executive Director of RCCS, which was founded in 1989. "Today, we operate 89 licensed spaces across two centres. It's always a race to try to keep up with the increasing needs."

Revelstoke's child care journey took a strategic leap forward in 2011, when RCCS conducted a community-wide needs assessment. The result was clear: the town needed more safe, inclusive child care, particularly for infants and toddlers, to support parents in the workforce. This led to the opening of Cornerstones Child Care Centre in 2012.

"We have a team of about 20 now," Spannier says. "We're currently hiring more educators and working with School District 19 to add twelve more infant/toddler spaces. The Trust is supporting us with investment in equipment."

## Strategically investing in people

The Trust's contributions have been crucial to RCCS's growth. Investments in Early Childhood Education (ECE) training and wage subsidies have strengthened workforce stability in a high cost-of-living region.

"The two-dollar per hour wage subsidy signals respect for the profession and lets educators build sustainable careers," says Spannier.

Carys Gregg, Manager of Care at Stepping Stones, is a clear example. She began as an Early Childhood Assistant in 2017, and completing her ECE and Infant Toddler and Inclusion/Special Needs certifications by became fully qualified in 2024, thanks in part to the Trust's training wage subsidy.

"The Trust's support allowed me to continue my education without leaving Revelstoke, which was very important to me," says Gregg. RCCS has helped many educators gain post-secondary qualifications while remaining in the workforce, ensuring families continue to receive high-quality care.





## Planning for the future

The focus on sustainability extends beyond staffing. Capital grants have helped RCCS upgrade its 1956 facility, including improvements to the HVAC system, building envelope and playgrounds. The creation of an infant/toddler room, a preschool-to-school-age room, and new flooring have all contributed to a better environment for children.

Retired school superintendent Anne Cooper, who serves on the RCCS board as treasurer, emphasizes that Revelstoke's progress stems from innovative leadership and dedication.

"This community has always been at the forefront of child care," says Cooper. "We've had strong strategic plans, stayed current with research and policy, and been open to collaboration with the school district,



the Ministry and the Trust. The Trust's support for staff recruitment, training and facility improvements has been critical. You can't run centres without trained staff. The Trust didn't just support facilities; they helped us train and retain the people who make these programs possible."

## Community effort that inspires

Former mayor David Raven, who served during key years of RCCS's growth from 2008 to 2014, also credits a collective effort.

"Revelstoke's success is the result of a community effort for change," says Raven. "We've gone from a blue-collar town to one with a strong, advanced educational system."

He highlights local champions like Cooper and Linda Chell, RCSS Co-Executive Director, for fostering a culture that values early childhood learning.

"Revelstoke is well known within regional educational communities. On a personal level, my granddaughter's early learning experience was phenomenal compared to the prior generation—she was much better prepared for kindergarten," he says. "The Trust has supported both infrastructure development and ECE training, which has now spread throughout the Basin. Other communities have adopted similar programs inspired by what we started here."

Revelstoke has served as an innovative mentor community, sharing its needs assessment model and strategic plans across the Basin. "We opened the first StrongStart centre and the first early learning hub in the province," says Cooper. "We always share. If others can learn from that, we all benefit."



## A sustainable legacy serving families and the economy

For families, accessible, high-quality child care allows parents to work and thrive. For children, it offers rich, supportive learning environments that set the stage for lifelong success.

"We have always taken a proactive approach," says Spanner. "The Trust is supporting us in building something that lasts." As the Trust marks its 30th anniversary and RCCS celebrates more than 35 years of service, this milestone shows what's possible when a community leads with strategy, heart and committed partners. ■

## Child Care Support Program

Since 2017:

Creating **1,443** new  
licensed child care spaces

Investing **\$6.8 million** into  
450 projects to improve  
3,600 child care spaces

Training and certifying  
more than **300** Early  
Childhood Educators

Enhancing wages of **340+**  
ECEs annually since 2022

[ourtrust.org/childcare](https://ourtrust.org/childcare)

# GIV'ER SHIRT WORKS IN FERNIE LEVELS UP

*Business owners gain  
new tools to grow and succeed*



**INSIDE A HUMMING** 3,000-square-foot production space, Kieran Summers checks a row of freshly printed hoodies while Erin reviews the month's numbers on her laptop. It's a far cry from the small retail shop they ran when they first opened Giv'er Shirt Works in 2003—and a big leap from where they were just a few years ago.

"When the pandemic hit, everything shifted online," says Kieran. "We realized we had to rethink how we worked if we wanted to keep growing."

In 2021, the couple made a bold move: they purchased their current building, transitioned fully to production, and invested in new software to better manage orders. But even with these upgrades, they knew they needed expert advice to make the changes stick. That's when they connected with business coaches through Columbia Basin Trust's Basin Business Advisors program.

From October 2021 to June 2022, Kieran and Erin took a deep dive into their finances,

business strategy and leadership approach. One of the biggest lessons? Their pricing model was out of date.

"With suppliers raising prices and retail sales gone, we were at risk of falling behind," says Kieran. "The coaches had me go through our profit and loss statements and margins line by line. It was humbling, but it opened my eyes; without changes, we could have out of business in a year or two."

With guidance, they retooled their pricing model, adopted shop management software, and developed a spreadsheet that automatically sets pricing to meet their margins. The results were immediate: their first full year in the new production space showed stronger margins and improved efficiency, validating the move to a production-focused model.

The program also helped them look

beyond the numbers to long-term growth. They identified the roles they needed on their team, promoted a staff member to production manager, and freed Kieran from the production floor to focus on business development. Erin expanded her role into HR, creating clear job descriptions, refining the hiring process, and introducing cross-training so "production all-rounders" can adapt to changing needs.

"Dialing in our org chart was a massive win," says Kieran. "Now we have a stronger, more versatile team and the capacity to keep moving forward."

Looking ahead, Kieran and Erin see a clear path for growth—one that balances creativity with solid business planning. "The support we received gave us tools we'll use for years," says Erin. "It's made all the difference." ■

## BASIN BUSINESS ADVISORS

The BBA program helps entrepreneurs succeed by providing resources, mentorship and skilled advice to foster economic capacity and growth in the region. Since 2000, BBA has supported over 3,200 businesses through:

- One-to-one business advisement tailored to individual needs
- Education workshops on practical topics to achieve success
- Program referrals to connect to available resources
- Learning networks to facilitate growth.

[bbaprogram.ca](http://bbaprogram.ca)

Photos: Giv'er Shirt Works



# Broadband for All

*Bringing high-speed internet to one of Canada's most rugged regions*

**WHETHER FROM A CHAIRLIFT** on RED Mountain Resort, the banks of the Elk River or a home office in the Blaeberry, high-speed internet is now part of daily life in the Basin. Reliable connectivity powers how people work, learn and connect—but it wasn't always this way.

In the early 2000s, many Basin communities struggled with poor internet infrastructure. Students faced slow download speeds, small businesses lost ground, and professionals were often forced to relocate. With high costs and complex logistics, telecom providers were slow to invest in rural networks.

That's when Columbia Basin Trust stepped in. In 2001, it helped establish the Columbia Mountain Open Network (CMON), a non-profit aiming to create a Basin-wide, open-access broadband network. When financial challenges stalled the initiative, the Trust acquired CMON's assets in 2011 and launched a new subsidiary: Columbia Basin Broadband Corporation (CBBC). Its mission? To build a robust fibre optic network that brings affordable, reliable, high-speed internet to underserved Basin communities.

Since 2013, CBBC has activated 1,285 kilometres of fibre optic cable across the region, reaching some of the most remote communities in the Basin. The network provides key connection points for internet service providers, enhancing service to more than 20,000 rural households, improving public and institutional services, and boosting the region's economic resilience.

For institutions like Selkirk College, the impact has been transformational.

"We used to struggle with data access between campuses," says Rena Vandenbos,

Chair of the School of Environment and Geomatics and a researcher with Selkirk Innovates. "Now, with a fast and stable connection, our students can collaborate seamlessly—whether they're in the lab, on campus or logging in from home."

Student Kai Symington-Kruus agrees. "For one of my favourite projects—creating topographic maps with Digital Fabrication and Design students—having dependable access made a huge difference, especially when sharing large datasets," she says. "As someone who commutes, the freedom to work from anywhere has been invaluable. And as a co-op student entering the workforce, I truly see the value in this kind of accessibility."

One major milestone was the 125-kilometre fibre expansion through the Slocan Valley, completed in 2022. In 2023, Columbia Wireless connected to the network, extending service to even more rural households. Additional wireless upgrades are filling remaining coverage gaps.



Photo: Amy Allcock

Photo: Tom Weager



Photo: Spencer Legebokoff

Now, the largest initiative yet is underway. Connect the Basin is an \$82-million project co-funded by federal, provincial and regional governments alongside the Trust. With targeted completion in spring 2027, the project will deliver direct high-speed internet connections to more than 5,400 homes in 59 communities.

None of this progress would have been possible without strong collaboration, particularly the vision and leadership of the Basin's local governments and the Ktunaxa Nation through the Southeastern BC Regional Connectivity Committee.

"Connecting rural communities to affordable high-speed internet has been a long-standing goal of the Regional Connectivity Committee," says Rob Gay, Chair of the Committee. "This major investment reflects years of collaborative work, and we're deeply grateful to see it coming to fruition. We know it will have a lasting and meaningful impact across the region."

Moving forward, the region is well positioned to benefit from ongoing service delivery through local providers and partners, ensuring residents continue to access economic, educational, health and emergency services enabled by connectivity. The Trust stepped in when few others could—and thanks to years of collaboration, communities across the Basin are more connected and future-ready. ■

[ourtrust.org/broadband](https://ourtrust.org/broadband)

# From Farm to Table

## How FABx is helping connect Basin producers and buyers

**"IT'S NOT ALWAYS EASY** to get a shelf spot," says Kip Cantrell, garlic grower and co-owner of Thistle Farm in the Creston Valley. "But FABx helped us walk in with a plan and walk away with new partners."

That's exactly the kind of connection the Basin Food and Buyers Expo (FABx) was designed to spark. Columbia Basin Trust founded this annual event in 2018. Each year, it has brought together farmers, food processors, buyers, chefs, funders, and community leaders.

For Cantrell and his partner Michele, who also crafts seasonings and salts, FABx has opened doors that traditional sales efforts didn't. "We've gone to FABx with specific goals to make deals with specific stores," he says. "In the process, all kinds of other connections have been made."

One of those connections is with HomeGrown Market in Nakusp, an independent grocery store co-owned by Mickey Wojnarowski and Brendalee Morgan. The couple is proud to stock their shelves with Basin products like Thistle Farm's.

When Nakusp hosted FABx in 2023, Mickey and Brendalee helped to make the event a success. "Having FABx here pushed our momentum forward a few years, at least," says Wojnarowski. "It brought a lot of attention to local producers and made it easier for us to expand what we offer."

Beyond business deals, Wojnarowski points to deeper benefits to host communities. "The school, the food bank, our Grow Arrow Lakes initiative, the Kootenay Food Council and others are collaborating now," he says. "These kinds of connections can't happen if people aren't talking with each other. When everyone gets together in person, magic seems to happen."

The Trust launched FABx as part of its broader efforts to support local food production and access across the region. From the start, the event has helped to foster industry relationships, share practical knowledge and inspire business development. Over the years, other partners and supporters have stepped forward. In 2023, the Trust transitioned from being a full funder to a partial funder. It continues to support the event's evolution.

"We believe local food should be accessible and enjoyed by everyone," says Shauna Fidler, FABx co-organizer. "So, this year, we're throwing our doors wide open."

The 2025 Basin Food Summit and FABx will take place in Nelson from November 6-8. Highlights include a food film festival, a collaboration with Nelson's Burger Month campaign and meals prepared by student chefs from Selkirk College.

"Our food system is a reflection of who we are as Basin residents," says Fidler. "FABx is creating a legacy of vibrant, inclusive and resilient food culture—one connection at a time." ■



Photo: Adrian Wagner



Photo: Kyla Jane Photography

**TO LEARN MORE OR GET INVOLVED  
IN FABX25, VISIT [BASINFOOD.CA](https://basinfood.ca)**



**“These kind of connections can’t happen if people aren’t talking with each other. When everyone gets together in person, magic seems to happen.”**

**—Mickey Wojnarowski, Owner of HomeGrown Market in Nakusp**



**For more than 30 years,** Columbia Basin Trust has worked alongside people and communities to strengthen the social, economic and environmental well-being of the Columbia Basin.

We were created to support residents' priorities—and we continue to do that today by funding local projects, forming partnerships and investing in Basin-grown solutions. Whether it's advancing climate resilience, supporting local economies, or enhancing community spaces and services, our work reflects the goals and values of the region.

Since 1995, the Trust has delivered more than \$957 million in benefits through 47,000 projects across the Basin.

With staff based throughout the region and a Board of Directors who all live in the Basin, we stay connected to the people we serve. Community Liaisons also play a key role, helping ensure that even the smallest or most remote communities can access support and bring their ideas to life.

Together with Basin residents, we're working to leave a legacy for future generations.

# A Legacy for the Columbia Basin



[ourtrust.org](https://ourtrust.org)



Photo: Tracy Connery

*Above:* Columbia Basin Trust Staff, Radium 2025

*Left:* 2025 Columbia Basin Trust Board of Directors. (L-R) Betty Anne Marino, Jocelyn Carver (Chair), Krista Turcasso, Susan Clovechok, Angus Graeme, Suzan Hewat, Bill van Yzerloo, Karen Hamling, Ron Oszust and Christine Hoechsmann. Missing: Owen Torgerson (Vice-Chair).



  
**1,600+**  
affordable  
housing units  
created

  
**\$71M**  
invested  
in housing  
initiatives

  
**\$10.9M**  
invested in the  
**First Nations  
Housing  
Sustainability  
Initiative**

  
**3,600+**  
existing  
child care  
spaces  
improved

  
**300+**  
training  
opportunities  
for Early  
Childhood  
Educators

  
**1,443**  
child care  
spaces added

  
**1,986**  
student jobs  
created

  
**1,783**  
students received  
bursaries/awards

  
**3,846**  
individuals received  
training funding

  
**492**  
projects led by  
**Indigenous peoples**

  
**57**  
projects supported in  
**Metis communities**

  
**13,940**  
hectares of  
**terrestrial habitat**  
improved

  
**2,827**  
hectares of  
**aquatic habitat**  
improved

  
**20.5M**  
Lifetime Equivalent  
**Kilowatt-hour (kWh) saved**

  
**19,800**  
rural households with  
access to high-speed  
internet

  
**1,285kms**  
of regional internet  
**network extended**

  
**56**  
communities  
connected

  
**735**  
projects supported  
that address  
**climate resilience**

  
**84**  
electric charging  
stations added

  
**4,253 ha**  
(hectares) of land  
treated for wildfire

  
**4,243 ha**  
(hectares) of land  
treated to reduce  
**wildfire risk**

  
**\$18M**  
spent on **wildfire risk  
management** and  
public education

  
**972**  
**wildfire  
related jobs**  
created

**47,000+**  
projects  
supported

  
**632**  
community events,  
festivals and  
celebrations  
sponsored

  
**803 kms**  
of trails developed,  
maintained or  
enhanced

  
**151**  
indoor and outdoor facilities  
built or upgraded

  
**3,832**  
arts & culture  
projects  
supported

  
**346**  
recreation  
projects  
supported

**2,205**  
families access healthy food  
through the nutrition coupon program



  
**2273t** (tonnes)  
**food waste recovered**

**407**  
non-profits  
supported through  
technology grants

  
**3,232**  
businesses supported  
with advisory services  
through Basin Business  
Advisors (BBA)

  
**162**  
BBA for  
Agriculture

# Columbia Basin Trust Region

The Trust serves the region consisting of all the watersheds that flow into the Columbia River in Canada. We are grateful to operate in the traditional territories of the Ktunaxa, Lheidli T'enneh, Secwépemc, Sinixt and Syilx Nations.



## Map Legend

- Incorporated Communities
- First Nations Communities
- ▼ Columbia River Treaty Dams

- Rivers
- ← Direction of Water Flow
- - - - - Canada-USA Border

## Hydropower Facilities\*

- 1 Arrow Lakes Generating Station
- 2 Brilliant Dam and Generating Station
- 3 Brilliant Expansion Generating Station
- 4 Waneta Expansion Generating Station

\* Owned 50/50 by the Trust and Columbia Power Corporation

