



Kootenay Lake Local Conservation Fund

Dedicated to Conservation Projects in the RDCK

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By Dan Elliott, RDCK Communications Coordinator

The threat to the grizzly bear and other wildlife populations across Canada is significant. Loss of habitat, human interaction, climate change, and access to foraging/roaming areas top the list of reasons why. In the Kootenay Lake region, Meadow Creek is an important corridor to help maintain the connection of grizzly bear populations. However, to ensure the safe passage of grizzly bears, work must be done to deter the bears from foraging on local food (agricultural crops, chickens/sheep and beehives). That is where the Kootenay Lake Local Conservation Fund (KLLCF) helps out. This year electric fences (50% of the cost is covered by the KLLCF), will be installed by landowners, with the assistance of Grizzly Bear Co-Existence Solutions, on 15-20 properties to protect livestock and crops.

Within the [Regional District of Central Kootenay](#) (RDCK), the ecological values of Kootenay Lake and surrounding areas have been impacted, just like much of BC. To address the impacts, the KLLCF was created in partnership between the RDCK and the [Kootenay Conservation Program](#) (KCP) to provide grants to support Kootenay Lake area conservation efforts focused on the conservation of water and aquatic systems, as well as wildlife and habitat.

“This local government service focuses on protecting our quality of life. Fish and wildlife habitats and water are important for local residents and why many people live here,” said Juliet Craig, Program Manager, Kootenay Conservation Program. “People appreciate conserving these values and this fund supports projects that contribute to these values.”

“The areas around Kootenay Lake have been impacted by such activities as development and dams,” said Sangita Sudan, General Manager, Development and Community Sustainability Services, RDCK. “As a result, our ecosystem has been impacted so it is important to work towards restoring it as much as we can.”

Established by a referendum in 2014, the KLLCF is a RDCK service for Electoral Areas A, D and E. Residents in these electoral areas pay a parcel tax of \$15/per year towards this dedicated fund for conservation projects within the service area. On average, the fund contributes approximately \$65,000 to \$75,000 per year to project grants. The KCP works in partnership with the RDCK to administer the fund within the terms of reference.

“This is a dedicated fund strictly for conservation,” said Craig. “It is only used for projects that are within the fund’s themes including aquatic systems, water conservation, and wildlife and habitat conservation.”

“For our communities, these are very important projects that make a direct impact on the natural environment we value,” said Ramona Faust, RDCK Electoral Area E Director. “The contribution through taxation has leveraged two-to-five times the funds coming to the region and has been integral to continue conservation efforts in our own backyard.”



Electric fencing installed to prevent bears from getting chickens (Photo courtesy – Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions)

This model of funding was first established in Canada in 2008 in the East Kootenay with the Columbia Valley Local Conservation Fund before being adopted by the RDCK in 2014.

To be eligible for grant funding, projects must be delivered by a registered non-profit organization, local government or First Nations Band or one that is partnered with a qualified eligible organization to apply. As well, the project must meet one of the International Union for Conservation of Nature threats to biodiversity. These threats include climate change, habitat loss and degradation, pollution, and invasive species.

This year, \$71,000 was distributed among eight different projects as part of the KLLCF. Projects included:

- Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions – funding for the purchase of electrical fences in semi-rural/urban areas to prevent bears for foraging on residential gardens and livestock
- Land securement for conservation purposes of Cottonwood Lake
- Harrop wetland restoration monitoring and assessment project at Sunshine Bay Regional Park
- Bat conservation and the battle against White Nose Syndrome (an invasive fungal disease that has reduced many bat colonies)
- Western Toad Mortality Mitigation – building of culverts to allow toads to cross Highway 31
- Habitat Restoration for Beavers along the Duncan Lardeau River Floodplains

- Wildflowers for Pollinators – supporting the conservation of native pollinators (bees and butterflies) and plants (wildflowers)
- North Kootenay Lake Water Monitoring Project (which recently rebranded as Kootenay Watershed Science)



North Kootenay Lake Water Monitoring Project (Photo courtesy - Kootenay Watershed Science)

Each year proposals are reviewed by a team of volunteers, known as the Technical Review Committee (TRC), who are local experts in their field, including biologists, environmental scientists, and forestry professionals. This group provides recommendations to the RDCK Directors in the KLLCF service areas (Area A, D and E) based on technically sound projects with scientific merit, which can make an impact and address important issues or problems in the area. From there the three Directors make the final decision on which projects will move forward to the Board for final approval.

As co-administrator for the program, KCP hosts the TRC meeting and prepare the recommendations, meet with the area directors, and track the project reporting. Once funding is approved by the Board, the development team prepares service agreements and each project will receive 80% of the grant up front. The remaining 20% is held back until an interim and final report is submitted.

“It is about creating balance in the ecosystem,” said Sudan. “It is hard to measure, but that is why it is important to allow local scientists to work in this area. Habitat conservation and restoration of local areas help manage the ecosystem balance, supporting biodiversity and ecosystem management. A healthy ecosystem cleans our water, purifies our air, maintains our soil, regulates the climate, recycles nutrients and provides us with food.”

The simple act of creating a culvert for toads to cross a highway can help ensure a balance in the ecosystem.

“If you remove animals from an ecosystem there is a trickledown effect in the food chain,” said Sudan.

“There are many ecological factors we do not see but are important to conservation - such as the survival of toads, bats, pollinators and other species” said Craig. “These projects help support the survival and recovery of these animals.”



Underpass created for toads to cross Highway 31 (Photo courtesy – Wayne McCrory)

The fund has been instrumental in leveraging additional funding and in-kind support. The money in the pot from local resident’s results in more funding, which in return equals more conservation work being done. One example is the recent acquisition of land around Cottonwood Lake.

“This is an important legacy,” said Sudan. “We are happy the KLLCF contributed to the purchase of this land by the Cottonwood Lake Preservation Society as it is a critical watershed in the region and an important habitat for at risk species, including bears.

[Click here](#) for more information on the KLLCF.

For further information, please contact:

Dan Elliott

Communications Coordinator

Regional District of Central Kootenay

Tel: 250.354.3476

Email: delliott@rdck.bc.ca