Creston Valley Conservation Action Forum Check-In Summary Report

Prepared by:

Kootenay Conservation Program[1]

March 2026

[1] For more information: Juliet Craig, KCP Program Director, juliet@kootenayconservation.ca
https://kootenayconservation.ca/conservation-action-forums/

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In February 2026, Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area and Kootenay Conservation Program (KCP) co-hosted a check-in meeting to review the progress on the priority actions identified during the 2020 Creston Valley Conservation Action Forum. The Conservation Action Forum (CAF) was a collaborative event that involved participants with diverse backgrounds and perspectives, including scientists, resource managers, conservationists, First Nations, and other governments. In 2020, CAF participants worked together to identify five priority actions that would contribute to maintaining healthy fish and wildlife populations and ecological functions in the Creston Purcells Conservation Neighbourhood (Figure 1) over the subsequent five years and were encouraged to pursue these actions as they were able[2]. Six years after the 2020 event, it was timely to check-in on these actions and their progress.

The five key actions identified in 2020 (not ranked) were:

1. Develop a Landscape Scale Ecosystem-based Inventory of Biodiversity
2. Enhance Landscape Connectivity and Corridors Through a Climate Change Lens
3. Expand Stewardship Opportunities to Protect High Quality Habitats
4. Restore Floodplain Connectivity of the Kootenay/Kootenai River System
5. Perform Fire Maintained Ecosystem Restoration

The February 2026 Conservation Action Forum Check-in meeting was structured in two parts. The morning provided an opportunity to review progress on the priority actions identified at the 2020 Forum and explore recommendations for next steps. A series of 18 concise presentations were delivered to address priority actions. In the afternoon, participants formed four breakout groups to assess the ongoing relevancy of the priority actions and adjust as needed to better reflect current situations and issues. The breakout groups also identified next steps for moving forward on the key priority actions and discussed potential collaborative efforts to support this work. The meeting concluded with a summary of the day's discussions and closing remarks.

[2] Kootenay Conservation Program. (2020). Creston Valley Conservation Action Forum Summary Report. https://kootenayconservation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Creston-Valley-CAF-Summary-Report_FINAL-27Feb2020.pdf

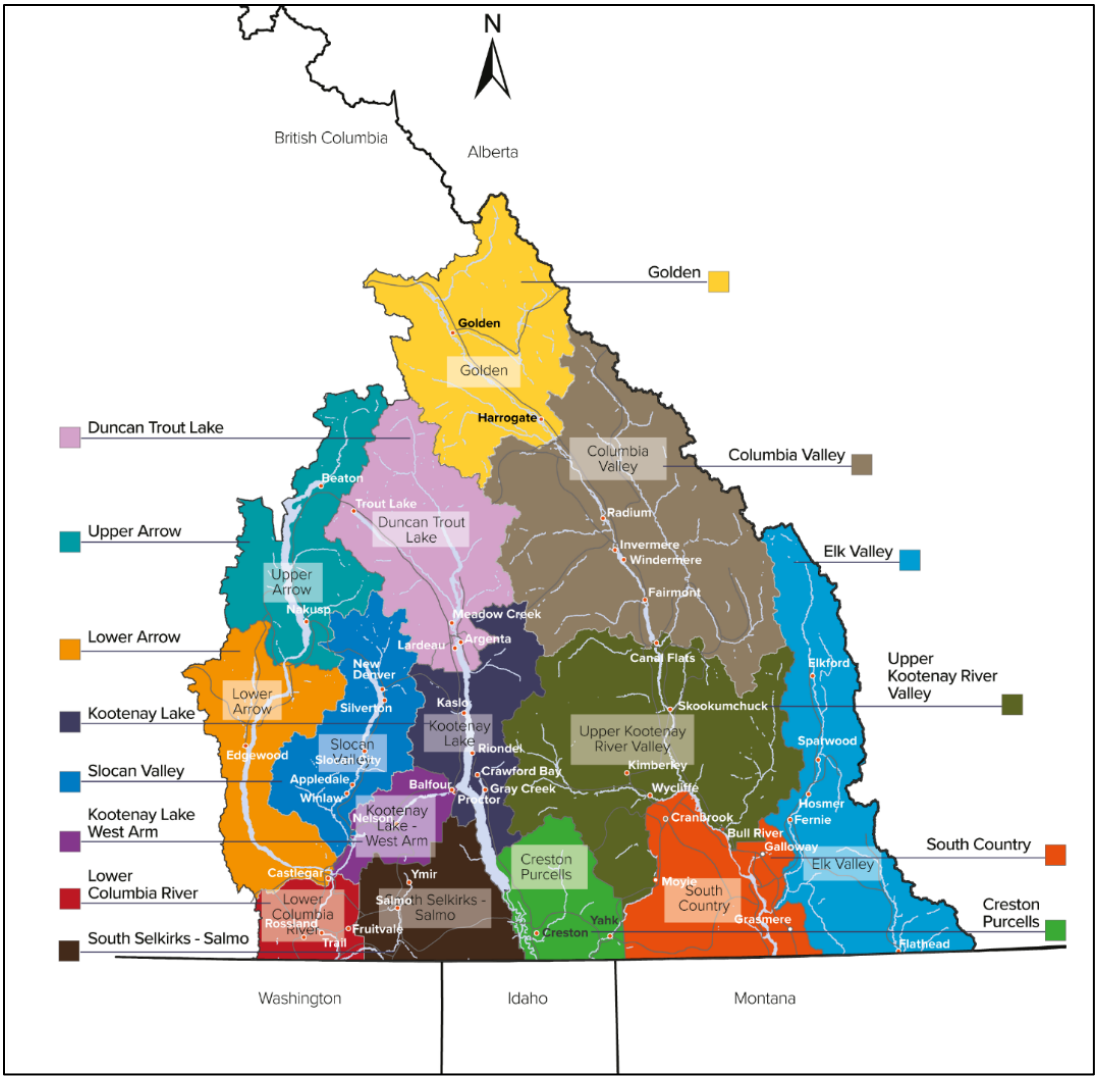


Figure 1: The Creston Purcells Conservation Neighbourhood (shown in light green) is one of 14 Conservation Neighbourhoods identified by Kootenay Conservation Program to frame subregions of the Kootenays based on social, ecological, and conservation-driven communities.

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS ON CRESTON VALLEY CONSERVATION ACTION FORUM PRIORITY ACTIONS

The Creston Purcells Conservation Neighbourhood extends from the south end of Kootenay Lake to the US border, along the western margin of the valley bordering Darkwoods Conservation Property in Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) Electoral Area C, and east to the watershed divide in the Purcell Mountains which includes a small portion of RDCK Electoral Area A encompassing Wynndel/Eastshore of Kootenay Lake and a large portion of RDCK Electoral Area B extending to its boundary with the Regional District of East Kootenay. KCP respectfully acknowledges that these lands are the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Yaqan Nuʔkiy, one of six Ktunaxa Nation communities, who have stewarded this

land, water and all living things since time immemorial, and whose values and culture continue to inspire and guide stewardship of this region.

The Creston Valley is well-known for its ecological treasures such as diverse wetland and riparian habitats, active floodplains along the Kootenay River, old cottonwood galleries rich with biological diversity and uncommon and at-risk species. Since the 1940s, this region has been recognized as being exceptionally important for wildlife and led to the provincial designation of the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area (CVWMA) in 1968, which protects over 300 species of birds, close to 60 species of mammals, and 29 species of fish, reptiles, and amphibians[3]. Further international recognition came in 1994, when the CVWMA was designated a Ramsar site wetland of international importance; and again, in 2002, with its designation as a nationally Important Bird Area by BirdLife International because it regularly supports over 100,000 water birds during migration periods[4].

This Conservation Action Forum Check-in meeting created an opportunity for local stewardship groups, First Nations, scientists, governments, agricultural producers, and others to identify concrete actions to conserve and protect the incredibly biodiverse and ecologically rich landscape of this region. The following is a summary of the status of each of the five original priority actions based on a combination of formal presentations given by project leads as well as participant updates.

The day began by setting the stage with 18 presentations delivered by representatives from 14 different organizations. Presentations were themed to report the results of conservation and stewardship projects of each of the five priority actions identified during the 2020 Creston Valley Conservation Action Forum. Presenters shared information on local research and stewardship projects.

PRIORITY ACTION 1: DEVELOP A LANDSCAPE SCALE ECOSYSTEM-BASED INVENTORY OF BIODIVERSITY

Presenters shared updates on this priority action, illustrating how long-term monitoring, geospatial mapping, habitat restoration, species recovery, and invasive species management intersect to protect biodiversity. Presentations emphasized collaboration, data-driven planning, and proactive responses to conservation challenges within the ***Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area*** *and surrounding key habitats.*

Marc-Andre Beaucher's presentation outlined the importance of the **Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area**, a 7,000-hectare Ramsar wetland and key waterfowl staging site in BC's interior that supports numerous species at risk. Monitoring activities implemented since 2020 highlight its value for diverse wetland-dependent birds, reptiles, and other wildlife, and the ecosystem services it provides to the Creston Valley alongside research and education

[3] https://crestonwildlife.ca/wetlands-wildlife/biodiversity/
[4] https://www.crestonwildlife.ca/

opportunities. Looking ahead, staff are updating guiding frameworks for the next 5–10 years to set restoration priorities, refine monitoring efforts to available capacity, identify new funding sources, and strengthen partnerships to support ongoing conservation and monitoring efforts.

Wildsight Creston Valley worked with the Selkirk College GIS department to create the "Green Map" by combining 28 digital layers that identified many features on the landscape, including habitat quality and local knowledge, to identify potential migration corridors. Living Lakes Canada also used LiDAR to map trees in the valley bottom by height and species which allowed an inventory of Cottonwoods along watercourses. Future work will include mapping of elk exclusion fences through drone photography and AI-guided geospatial analysis, with an ultimate goal of mapping the whole valley bottom and establishing wildlife migration corridors.

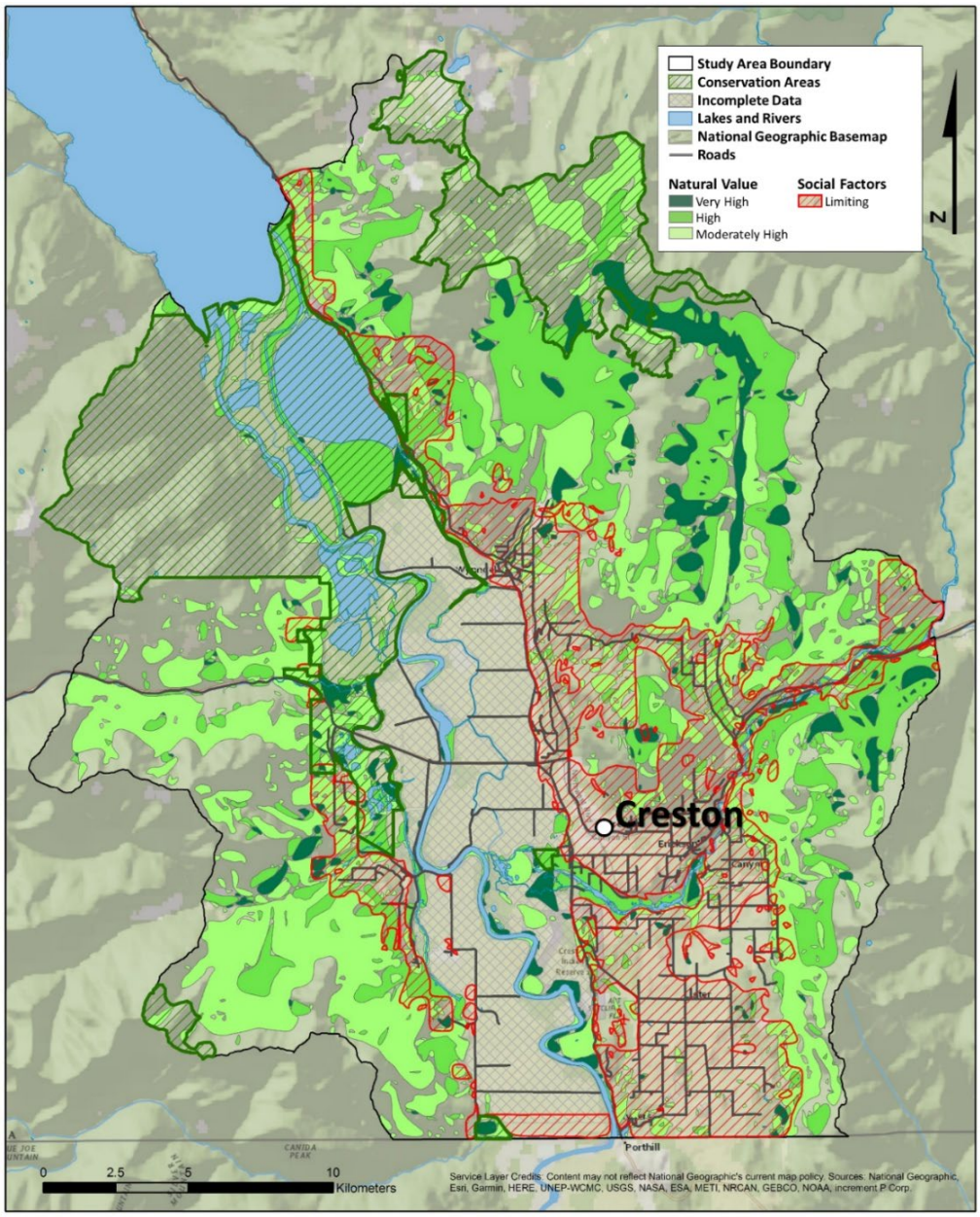


Figure 2: Green Map of Creston Valley identifying natural values. Source: Wildsight Creston Valley.

Heather Gates of **Wildlife Conservation Society Canada** summarized a decade of acoustic bat monitoring in the Creston Valley through the North American Bat Monitoring Program, which has generated baseline data to track trends and prepare for White-Nose Syndrome. Year-round detectors revealed migratory timing and habitat use. To address roost shortages, researchers created artificial tree roosts and pole structures, building 18 installations across key sites including the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area. Monitoring using guano, acoustics, and microclimate data has detected seven species, including the endangered little brown myotis. Future work will test new locally made BatBark and MiniBark roosts and continue monitoring occupancy and effectiveness.

Devon Moore with the **Ministry of Water, Lands and Resource Stewardship** presented on recovery efforts to maintain and increase the Rocky Mountain northern leopard frog's population at its last known breeding site in the Creston Valley, including reintroductions to their historical range and annual monitoring of egg mass distribution over the years. Also discussed were challenges facing the northern leopard frog, such as habitat loss and the increasing American bullfrog population in the Creston Valley, and a description of the efforts to address these challenges, including prescribed burns, habitat restoration, and the bullfrog control program.

Molly Tilden of the **Central Kootenay Invasive Species Society** (CKISS) highlighted invasive species as a major biodiversity threat in the Creston Valley. CKISS has expanded stewardship initiatives, including the 2025 Poison Hemlock Patrol, which incentivizes landowners to eradicate this toxic plant and will continue in 2026. The confirmation of whirling disease in Kootenay Lake has increased focus on prevention through public education and community monitoring via iNaturalist is being utilized to support the early detection of new threats. CKISS stressed the need for sustained funding, stronger prevention, and rapid response to manage invasive species effectively.

Priority Action 2: Enhance Landscape Connectivity and Corridors Through a Climate Change Lens

Presenters shared updates on the progress being made towards enhancing landscape connectivity through a climate change lens. Presentations focused on the identification of landscape-level wildlife corridors to reconnect fragmented grizzly bear populations, and restoration and other land-based activities to protect wildlife movement and enhance habitats.

Michael Proctor with the **Trans-border Grizzly Bear Project** (TBGBP) described efforts to reconnect grizzly bear populations between the South Selkirk and Purcell mountains. The South Selkirk population to the west of Kootenay Lake was completely isolated – no exchanges of grizzly bears with the Purcells or the Central Selkirks north of the West Arm. Using GPS telemetry, TBGBP identified corridor habitat across the Kootenays including the Creston Valley in the Duck Lake area. This stimulated the implementation of management to increase connectivity of grizzlies across the Creston Valley, and after 15 years of these activities, monitoring revealed that the South Selkirk grizzly population had reconnected with the south Purcells. In recent years, a local community group was then started to organize conflict

reduction efforts, and a wildlife coexistence manager was hired. These conservation successes inspired the TBGBP to initiate an Ecological Corridors project with other Kootenay biologists. This initiative, Kootenay Connect, secured Environment and Climate Change Canada funding for species at risk habitat restoration work in 7 corridors across the Kootenays as the Kootenay Connect Priority Places project. They are also working to get one pilot corridor (around Columbia Lake) officially recognized by the Province of BC.

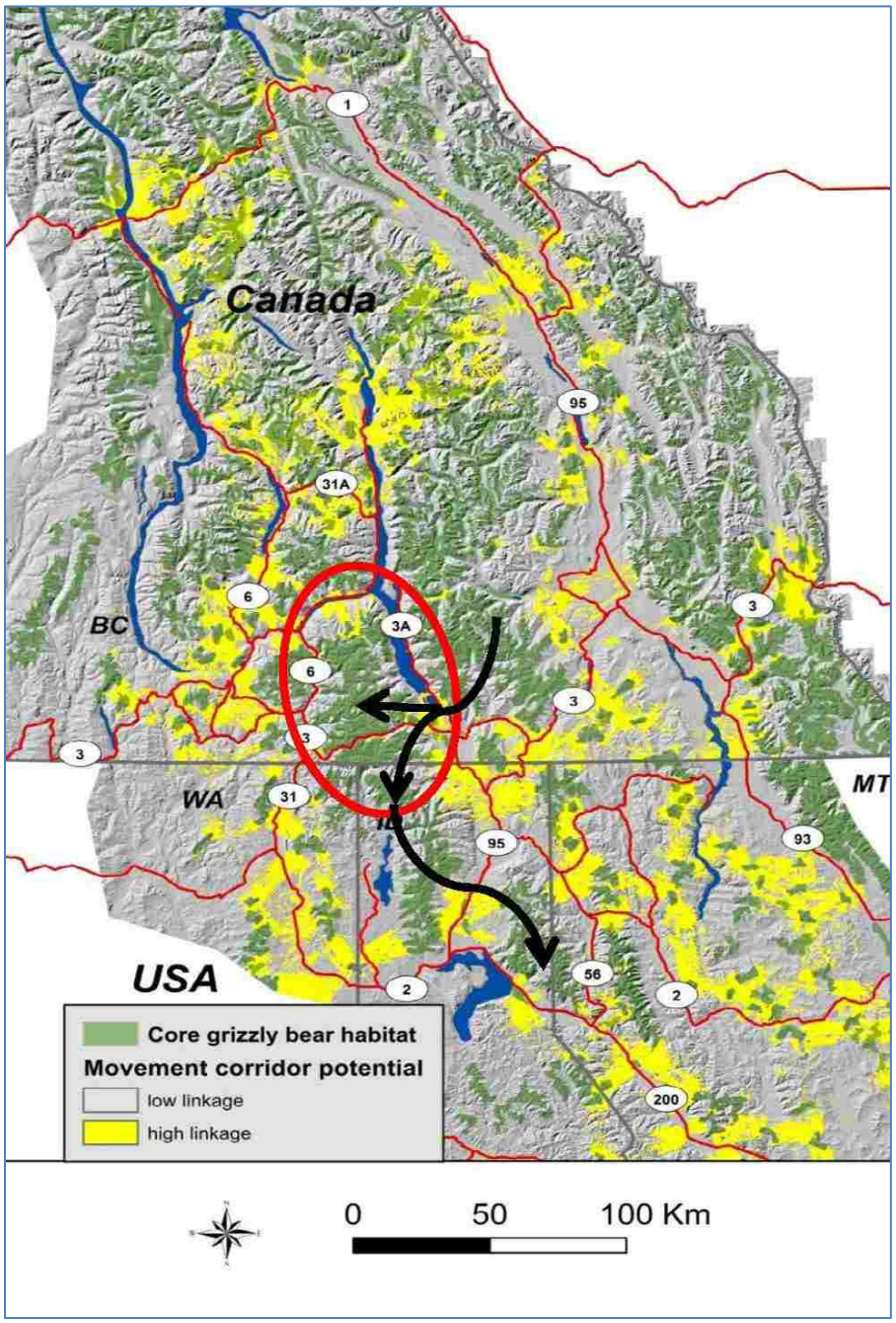


Figure 3: Grizzly movement and connectivity in the Creston Valley. Source: Michael Proctor, Trans-border Grizzly Bear Project.

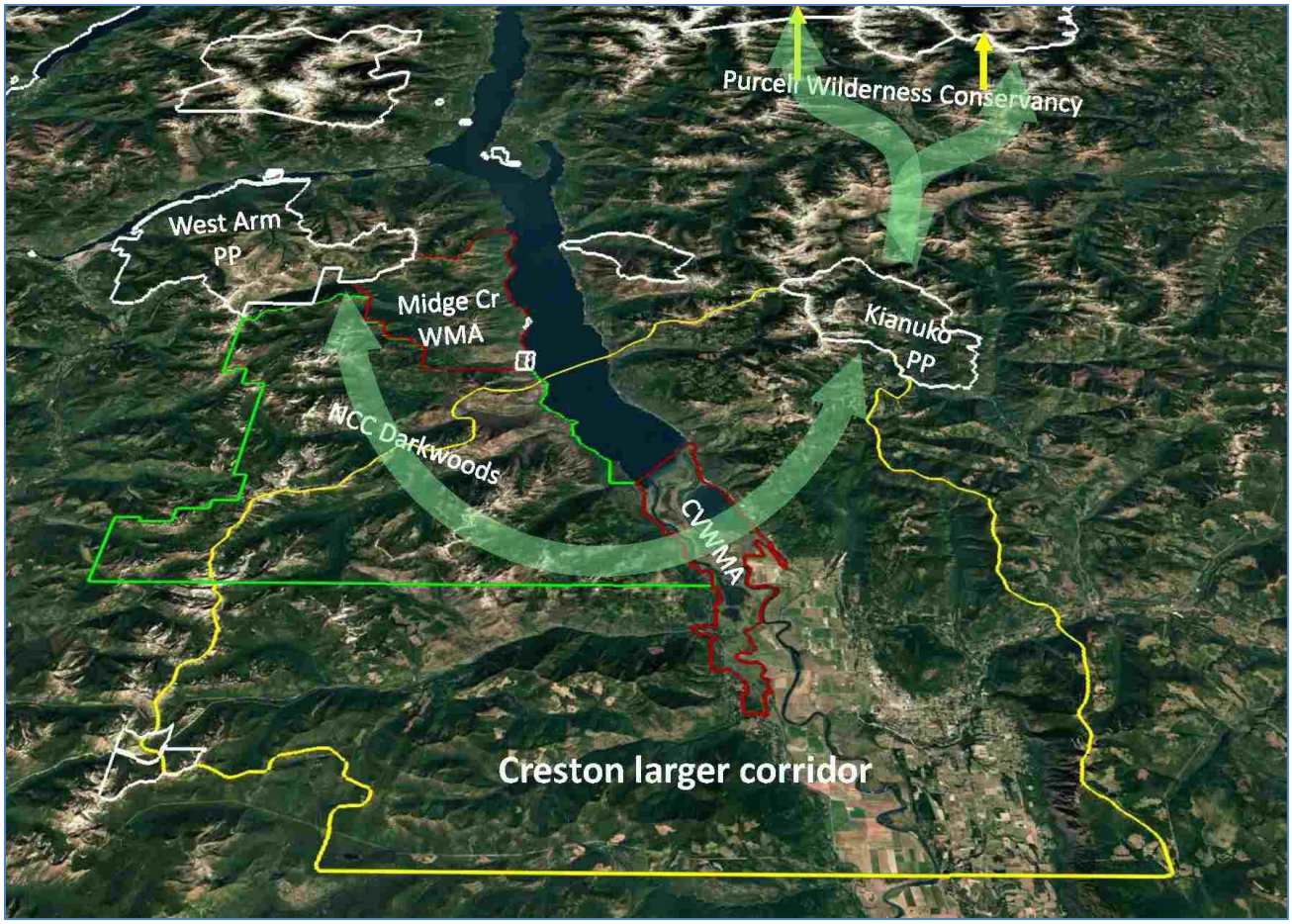


Figure 4: Kootenay Connect corridor in Creston Valley (yellow). Source: Kootenay Connect.

Marc-Andre Beaucher presented on habitat enhancement work that took place from 2019–2025 in the Frog Bear corridor, a key movement pinch-point for east-west grizzly bear movements between the Selkirk and Purcell Mountains. Supported by Kootenay Connect Priority Places, guided by a connectivity master plan, and delivered with partners including the **Nature Conservancy of Canada**, projects created over two hectares of new wetlands, restored 15 hectares of habitat, fenced roughly 23 hectares of sensitive riparian areas, and established 16 hectares of habitat for species-at-risk. Cattle exclusion led to rapid vegetation recovery and improved wildlife habitat, and a new sinuous wetland channel increased breeding and movement opportunities for amphibians and turtles. Future work will focus on monitoring, additional fencing, targeted restoration, and ongoing partnership building.

Figure 5: Frog-Bear Corridor enables safe passage of grizzly bears in the Creston Valley between the Selkirk and Purcell Mountains. Source: Nature Conservancy of Canada.

Rebecca Gidney of **Wildsight Creston Valley** created a video on their Wire Fence Removal to Restore Habitat Connectivity (Wildflow) project, conducted in partnership with the Creston Valley Rod & Gun Club, which aimed to improve habitat connectivity and reduce risks to wildlife by removing old, unsafe fencing along known wildlife movement corridors. Over the course of the project, Wildsight contractors and community volunteers removed approximately 1,830 metres of derelict barbed wire fencing across seven properties in RDCK Electoral Area A, from Wynndel to Riondel. These locations were selected because they overlapped with observed wildlife migration paths and key habitat areas. The project also engaged community members in conservation, increasing awareness of local wildlife needs and encouraging broader adoption of wildlife-friendly practices.

PRIORITY ACTION 3: EXPAND STEWARDSHIP OPPORTUNITIES TO PROTECT HIGH QUALITY HABITATS

Presentations detailed the progress being made towards expanding stewardship opportunities to protect high quality habitat in the Creston Valley. Information shared highlighted agricultural initiatives that support biodiversity and wildlife connectivity, human wildlife coexistence programming that supports electric fencing and proactive management, and promotion of payment for ecosystem services to restore riparian habitat on private land.

Rachael Roussin of the **Kootenay Boundary Farm Advisors** outlined agriculture programs that support biodiversity. The Environmental Farm Plan and Beneficial Management Practices Program provide funding for "planning" and "projects." A plan will look at a specific area of a farm, such as riparian health, biodiversity, grazing, vegetative buffers and water management and provide recommendations that align with farm goals. Farmers can then access funding to implement projects identified in plans.

Dave Zehnder, founder of the **Farmland Advantage** program, provided information on the payment for ecosystems services concept (by email). Two major themes identified at the 2020 Creston CAF as critical to the future health of the Creston Valley's ecology were connectivity of riparian habitats in the Creston flats, and bear and elk movement corridors through the wider Creston Valley. There was also consensus amongst participants that farmland is critical to achieving this connectivity. Corridors that link public lands, First Nations Reserve Lands, conservation properties, and farmland were identified. Since that meeting, they have worked with partners to target farms in the zones deemed critical, and established contracts with them to take the necessary contracts to restore and maintain riparian corridors. What is required now is a scaling up of the concept through a three-step process to achieve the scale required: 1) establish a working group to guide collaboration; 2) secure the necessary funding to continue the process, and 3) implement the model at scale.

Creston Valley Grizzly Coexistence Solutions promotes coexistence between grizzly bears and people through education, collaboration, and the use of practical tools. **Dee Howard** presented on how correctly installed electric fencing can prevent bear conflicts and associated grizzly bear mortalities in low elevation wildlife linkage habitats that overlap with private agricultural land, emphasizing that effective coexistence depends on prevention rather than reaction. Providing safe wildlife passage, while carefully managing agricultural attractants, is a key strategy for reducing conflict and ensuring that both human communities and grizzly bear populations can thrive.

PRIORITY ACTION 4: RESTORE FLOODPLAIN CONNECTIVITY OF THE KOOTENAY/KOOTENAI RIVER SYSTEM

Restoration of floodplain connectivity in the Kootenay/Kootenai River system has focused on the Frog-Bear wetlands. Wetland and riparian restoration efforts have enhanced habitat for wildlife and improved connectivity in the area.

Adrian Leslie from **Nature Conservancy of Canada** (NCC) outlined habitat restoration efforts on NCC properties in the Creston Valley. To help support grizzly bears and northern leopard frogs, NCC restored three wetlands along with almost 2km of riparian habitat in their Frog Bear Conservation Corridor. Wetlands were initially restored in 2021, and revegetation efforts have been ongoing ever since. Despite challenges from excessive herbivory from elk, along with invasive plants and drought conditions over the past several years, the wetlands are being used

by northern leopard frogs, bears, many birds, turtles and pollinators while native vegetation is becoming established throughout.

Figure 6: Wetland enhancement in Frog-Bear Corridor. Source: Nature Conservancy of Canada.

We enhanced this session by playing Norm Allard's **YouTube video** on **Yaqan Nuʔkiy wetland restoration** that he had prepared for World Wetlands Day 2026.

PRIORITY ACTION 5: PERFORM FIRE MAINTAINED ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

There has been significant progress in collaborating to perform fire-maintained ecosystem restoration with the establishment of the Yaqan Nuʔkiy ¢uku kqa¢in Working Group.

John Cathro and **Carter Kuiper** provided an update on the **Yaqan Nuʔkiy ɋuku kqaɋin Working Group.** The goals of this working group in 2026 are to: establish the ɋuku kqaɋin Prescribed Fire Crew including training, equipment, and contracts; collaboratively plan 2-3 large burns; and conduct spring and fall burns with the ɋuku kqaɋin Prescribed Fire Crew and Working Group members. This group consists of representatives from Yaqan Nuʔkiy, Creston Valley Community Forest, Huscroft Lumber, Canfor, Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area, Nature Conservancy of Canada (Darkwoods), Town of Creston, BC Wildfire Service, RDCK, and First Nations Emergency Services Society.

PRIORITY ACTION 6 (NEW): ADDRESS ELK AND AGRICULTURE CONFLICT

Presenters invited to address growing conflicts between elk and the agricultural community in the Creston Valley introduced topics such as elk conflict management, producer compensation programming, disease prevention, and improved population monitoring. Presentations highlighted integrated tools, such as behavioural deterrents, targeted harvest, new survey technologies, and policy programs, paired with surveillance for chronic wasting disease led by the province, illustrating that a coordinated approach to balance conservation, agriculture, and hunting opportunities is needed.

Colleen Cassady St. Clair from the **University of Alberta** summarized her work with graduate students to address human-elk conflict in contexts of human safety and agriculture over the past 25 years. They used behaviour-based methods of hazing, aversive conditioning, and deterrents. Core conclusions were that (a) human safety can be increased by repeatedly chasing elk with humans and dogs, (b) intensity of grassland use can be reduced by repeated herding on horseback, and (c) stationary deterrents with lights and sound cause elk to flee initially, but with rapid habituation. Variation in boldness among individuals contributes to the capacity of elk to inhabit human-dominated areas. A jurisdictional scan showed greater prevalence of four management tools across elk ranges: harvest of cows and young animals, coordinated and high-intensity hazing, selective fencing, and compensation for damage to crops and equipment.

The **Agriculture Wildlife Program** compensates producers for up to a maximum of 80% of damage caused by designated wildlife (including elk) to standing forage, grain, and silage corn crops. **Taylor Griffin** with the **Ministry of Agriculture and Food** presented on the provincial program, including eligibility requirements, timing, how the compensation component works, while noting budgetary constraints may result in compensation levels or methodology being adjusted.

Cait Nelson of the **Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship** outlined chronic wasting disease (CWD), a fatal prion disease affecting deer, elk, moose, and caribou that can persist in the environment and spread through bodily fluids and carcasses. Infected animals often appear healthy, making testing essential. After more than 20 years of surveillance, B.C.'s first cases were confirmed in the Kootenay region in 2024, including detections near the U.S. border, with the biggest threat to Creston being recent cases identified in Bonners Ferry only 20 kms from the border. Prevention focuses on carcass handling restrictions, testing harvested and roadkill animals, reporting sick wildlife, public education, and coordinated partnerships to limit spread before the disease becomes established.

Emily Chow with the **Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship** presented on three key initiatives underway by the provincial government to improve coexistence between elk and agriculture and inform better management decisions: a proposed hunt targeting antlerless elk that remain year-round in agricultural areas (while increasing surveillance for CWD); a drone survey trial to provide safer, more efficient, and more frequent population estimates than traditional helicopter surveys; and a collaring project that will deploy 12 GPS collars to gather

data on elk movements, mortality, habitat use, and disease pathways. These projects aim to address outdated population data, account for local differences in Creston elk, and build the knowledge needed to balance conservation, hunting opportunities, and agricultural sustainability.

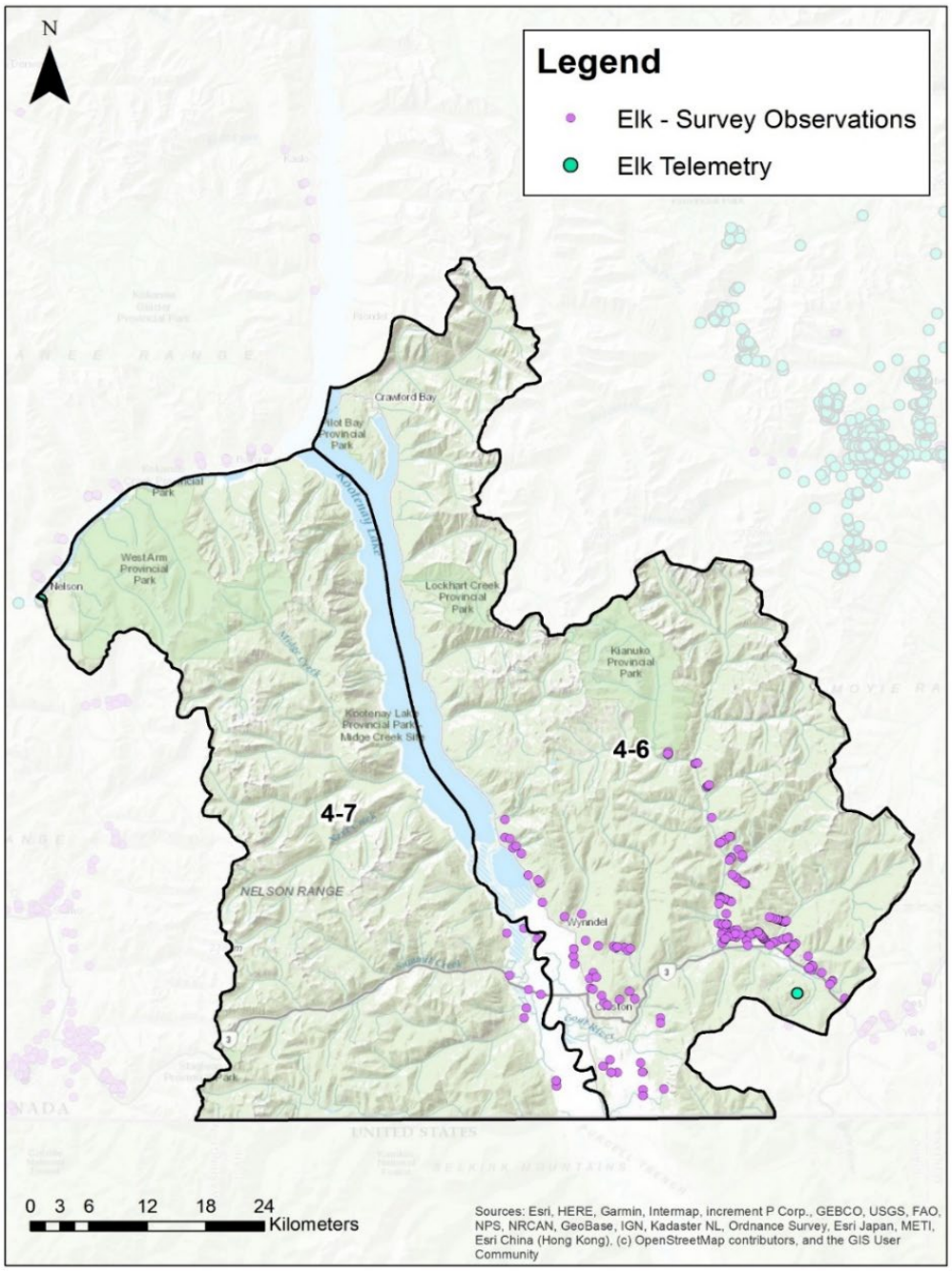


Figure 7: Elk survey observations (purple) and telemetry locations (green). The provincial government has purchased 12 collars for elk in the Creston Valley to increase telemetry data. Source: Provincial government.

Discussion of Next Steps for Priority Conservation Actions and Potential Collaborations

Following presentations, participants moved into four breakout groups to discuss the next steps for key priority conservation actions and to identify potential collaborations.

The four priority actions focused on in breakout groups were:

1. Enhance Landscape Connectivity and Corridors Through a Climate Change Lens
2. Expand Stewardship Opportunities to Protect Habitats and Biodiversity
3. Restore Floodplain Connectivity of the Kootenay/Kootenai River System
4. Address Elk and Agricultural conflict [NEW]

The first step for each group was to determine whether to update the original priority conservation action based on work that has taken place over the last five years, and new available information (Table 1).

Table 1: Priority Actions discussed at the 2026 KCP Creston Valley Conservation Action Forum Check-in.

2020 Priority Action	2026 Priority Action
Develop a Landscape Scale Ecosystem-based Inventory of Biodiversity	*Combined with Action #3*
Enhance Landscape Connectivity and Corridors Through a Climate Change Lens	**Enhance Landscape Connectivity and Corridors Through a Climate Change Lens**
Expand Stewardship Opportunities to Protect High Quality Habitats	**Expand Stewardship Opportunities to Protect Habitats and Biodiversity**
Restore Floodplain Connectivity of the Kootenay/Kootenai River System	**Restore Floodplain Connectivity of the Kootenay/Kootenai River System**
Perform Fire Maintained Ecosystem Restoration	**Perform Fire Maintained Ecosystem Restoration** [***not discussed*** *because being led and coordinated by Yaqan Nuʔkiy ɛuku kqaɛin Working Group*]
	Address Elk and Agricultural conflict [*NEW*]

The following provides a summary of discussion points made during smaller group discussions on priority actions.

Priority Action 1: Combined with Action #3

This action was combined with Action #3 and not specifically discussed at the 2026 Forum.

Priority Action 2: Enhance Landscape Connectivity and Corridors through a Climate Change Lens

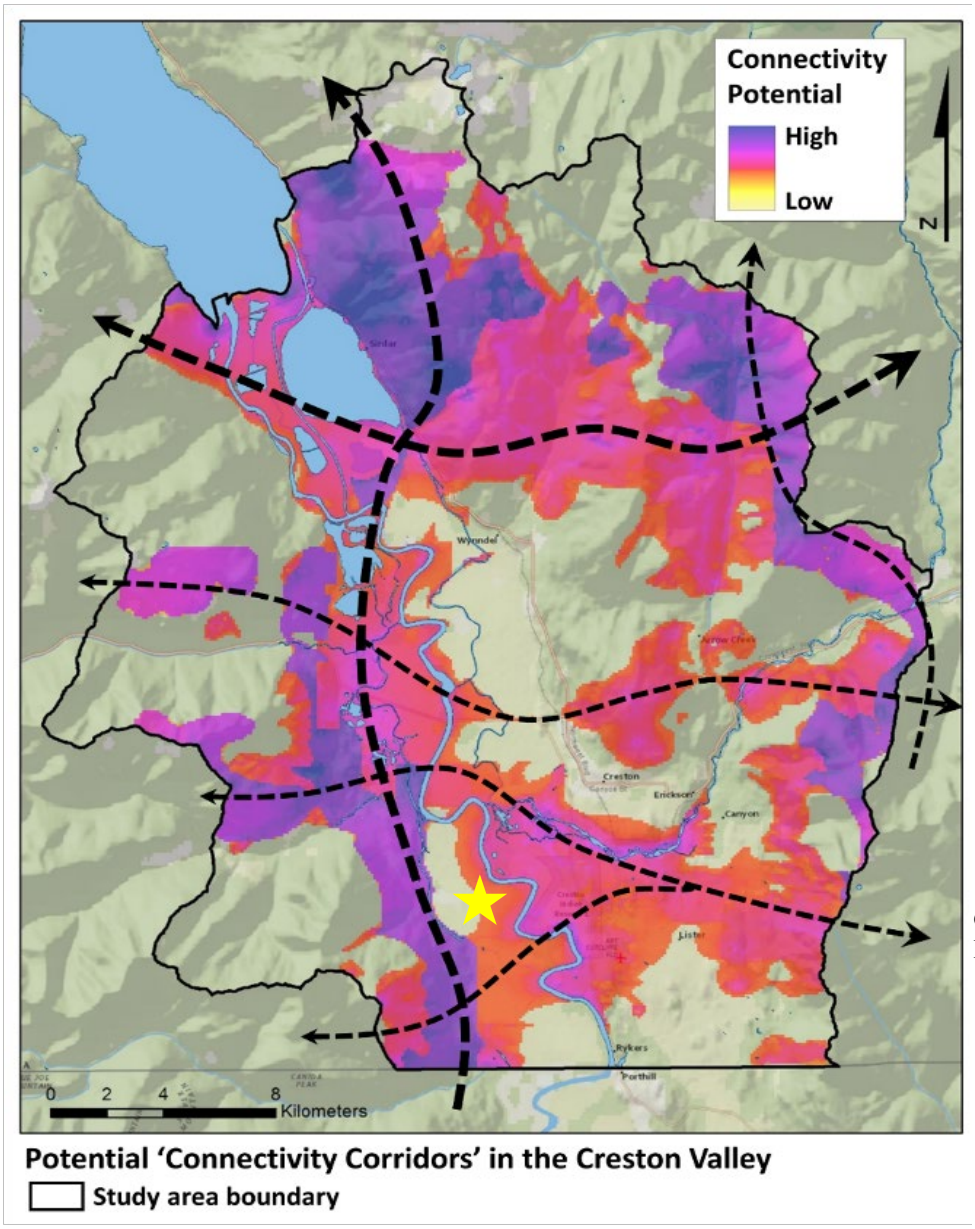
Group members: Morag Turnbull (The Nature Trust of BC), Irene Manley (WLRS/FWCP), Lee-Anne Fournier-Beck (BC Wildfire Service), Rebecca Gidney (Wildsight Creston Valley), Vanessa Lozecznik (College of the Rockies), Caroline Collier (Wildsight Creston Valley), Marcy Mahr (Kootenay Conservation Program), Julie Couse (Nature Conservancy of Canada), Brian Churchill (Wildsight Creston Valley). Lead**:** Wildsight Creston Valley

This group focused on corridors and connectivity south of Hwy 3 using those identified by Wildsight Creston Valley's Green Mapping project as a starting place.

1. **What is being planned already?**

- Creston Valley Green Map (Wildsight Creston Valley):
    - Compiled many data layers to map out the Creston Valley
    - Found that the valley bottom, which is mostly agricultural land, had no government data – this was a large constraint for the Green Mapping project to identify the bigger picture
    - Also had a project using LiDAR to map trees by species and height in the valley bottom; mostly cottonwoods and not a lot of coverage – not sure where to go next with this; included a pilot area with aerial photography east of Creston to assist with mapping
    - What is missing in Green Map:
        - Want to identify the best natural (undeveloped) areas in the valley – currently these are found on most First Nations Reserve lands
        - If anyone has project data on species, biodiversity, etc., anywhere in the valley bottom, it is important to include
- Connectivity Model developed by Wildsight Creston Valley and depicted on map (presented by Gitte Grover at meeting) was based on:
    - "Nodes" and local data
    - Yaqan Nuʔkiy observations of elk migration
    - Michael Proctor data on grizzly movement
- Southern cross-valley corridor connecting Goat Creek to Yaqan Nuʔkiy Reserve Lands to Corn Creek on west side of valley
- WLRS-FWCP has telemetry data for western screech-owl (WESO) along the Goat River which is an important secure riparian corridor in the bottom of the canyon – WESO polygons could be brought into corridor assessment

- South of Hwy 3, Yaqan Nuʔkiy has been restoring wetlands and creating more connectivity between the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area in north - south / east-west directions (work ongoing)
- Nature Conservancy of Canada and Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area have also been working in Frog Bear Corridor and adjacent properties to enhance habitat and connectivity (via Kootenay Connect Priority Places and other projects)
- There are some additional prescribed fires planned with Yaqan Nuʔkiy and the Nature Conservancy of Canada (further north in the Creston Valley)



Goat Creek – YN Reserve Lands – Corn Creek

Figure 8: Potential 'Connectivity Corridors' in the Creston Valley based on Wildsight Creston Valley's Green Mapping Project. Source: Wildsight Creston Valley.

2. **What are the next steps to advance this action?**

Building connectivity North - South

- The CVWMA and First Nations Reserve Lands create a north - south corridor along the Kootenay River – identify the gaps, create strategies to address
- Are there conservation opportunities to build from Yaqan Nuʔkiy restoration work?
- Discussion is taking place about some public land parcels because the Regional District of Central Kootenay is looking at them to create a regional parks program in Electoral Areas B and C (ongoing discussion)

Building connectivity East - West with Green Mapping and other inputs

- Discussed the area where the Goat River meets the Kootenay River, the CVWMA and where it intersects with Hwy 3, and the mainstem of the Kootenay River, as well as some private ag parcels surrounding this zone (e.g., Ferry landing Rd.)
- Begin to target the southernmost suggested connectivity corridors identified in Wildsight Creston map Goat Creek - Corn Creek
- Cross-valley connectivity is very important to connect wet and dry habitats
- Obtain FWCP's WESO data and fill in habitat mapping gaps in the Goat River canyon this area does not have high agricultural use so maybe there could be some opportunities for conservation that could contribute to connectivity
- Need to do an assessment of key private lands to determine whether they could be priorities for acquisition to create a protected corridor (note: KCP is doing this)
- There are well-known biodiversity hotspots like Fox Tree Hill that should be included in corridor planning – what other high biodiversity areas exist? Where are there sensitive ecosystems? Ryan Durand has done sensitive ecosystem mapping and wetland classification for the Columbia Wetlands and Slocan Valley, he's a good plant ecologist/GIA analyst -- his methods include TEM, LiDAR, drones, field ground-truthing, and applying BC wetlands classification.
- What about opportunities for bat work here too? Encourage another NABat grid cell for south of Hwy 3 along Kootenay River
- Yaqan Nuʔkiy is working on aquatic connectivity (e.g., burbot) – coordinate with them to bring together aquatic and terrestrial connectivity since that interface is so important for species and habitat along the Kootenay River valley bottom
- Further south, down by Dale Marsh and USA / Canada border there could be a corridor that feeds out of Boundary Creek and east to the Kootenay River
    - Have found northern leopard frogs down by Rykerts Lake
    - At the base of Skimmerhorn, there are lots of natural springs and different wetlands that pop up in different places (private land and then further east public, including a wildlife habitat area)
- In addition to looking at opportunities, also identify / map the barriers to movement and pinch points for wildlife

Next steps:

- Identify a few keystone / target species for multi-species corridors

        - E.g., grizzly bear, western screech owl (note: western painted turtles and north leopard frogs have smaller movements of scale yet would be included in the "umbrellas" of more wide-ranging species)
    - Look at sensitive habitats, (Gb) brushland ecosystems (Fox Tree Hill east of Kootenay River), cottonwoods, dryer forests and promoting connectivity between those habitats
    - Coordinate with Yaqan Nuʔkiy to identify gaps and next steps with their wetland / riparian restoration work
    - Consider having Ryan Durand use similar techniques to what was done in the Columbia Wetlands and Slocan River Valley to provide detailed landscape mapping and classification of wetlands communities based on the BC Wetland Classification System
        - Ryan's mapping can help identify areas for enhancing sensitive wetland and Gb ecosystems, rare plants, and habitats for fire treatment to reduce wildfires
    - Assess private land through the lens of conservation opportunities along the Goat River and the main Kootenay River (KCP is doing this)

Key Actions:

- Brian (Wildsight Creston Valley): Share "Goat-Corn" east - west suggested corridor boundary (see map above)
    - Revisit CDC available mapping data and integrate new data into Green Map
    - Add wildfire risk reduction plans to Green Map (fire-maintained ecosystem restoration) - would be great to know where ecosystems exist that require fire maintenance because this ties into mitigating climate change and should be considered across the landscape from Duck Lake to the US Border
    - Brian will make a list based on this group's input and move it forward to continue building out the Green Map
- Irene (MLWRS/FWCP):
    - WESO private lands - share territory maps based on telemetry points look at those habitats to pull them into the Green Map's larger context
    - Map out WESO habitat as identified by Irene's team

3. **What geographic area of the Creston Valley is a high priority for this action? (either describe or draw on map)**

    - South of Hwy 3: North - South corridor of the Kootenay River floodplain
    - East - West corridors according to Wildsight Creston Valley's Geen Map, in particular the lower corridor linking the Goat River Canyon to Yaqan Nuʔkiy Reserve Lands to Kootenay River to Corn Creek

4. **Resources/Collaborators:** Wildsight Creston Valley; Yaqan Nuʔkiy; WLRS-FWCP; CVWMA; Creston Wildlife Co-existence; Farmland Advantage; Kootenay Boundary Farm Advisors; BCWS; NCC; Ryan Durand; Michael Proctor; Thomas Hill (Fox Tree Hill / dry brushland ecosystems); KCP.

5. **Timeframe:** In the next 6-12 months

PRIORITY ACTION 3: EXPAND STEWARDSHIP OPPORTUNITIES TO PROTECT HABITATS AND BIODIVERSITY

Group members: Raine Freeman (Friends of Kootenay Lake Stewardship Society), Molly Tilden (Central Kootenay Invasive Species Society [CKISS]), Laurie Carr (CKISS), Devon Moore (FWCP), Julia Shewan (CVWMA), Asha DeLisle (Town of Creston), Vanessa Lozecznik (College of the Rockies), Jess Holden (Wildsight Creston Valley), Rebecca Gidney (WildsightCreston Valley), Caroline Collier (Wildsight Creston Valley).

Many of the same discussions that arose from the 2020 CAF are similar to actions/activities arising now around stewardship with agriculture.

1. **What is being planned already? (and increased collaboration because of this networking opportunity)**

- Caroline Collier (Wildsight Creston Valley) working on pollinator pathway through town to promote growth of native plants. Town has a newsletter - potential opportunity for Pollinator Pathway to get the word out.

2. **What are the next steps to advance this action?**

- Opportunities that could take place, or already in motion but could use more support, include:
    - Turtle observations to identify crossing areas and mortalities, submit to Ministry of Transportation and Transit (MOTT) to build road crossing structures (Jess, Wildsight Creston Valley)
    - Treating poison hemlock (CKISS); opportunities for more collaboration between CKISS and the town to treat poison hemlock (CKISS and town will have later breakout conversation)
    - Wildlife reports (Julia, CVWMA)
    - Bullfrog hunt (Devon, FWCP)
    - Northern leopard frog observations (Devon, FWCP)
    - Marsh monitoring program, getting volunteers to listen for species (possibly Friends of Kootenay Lake Stewardship Society)
    - Collecting wildflower seeds (Caroline, Wildsight)
    - Planting and growing native plants (Caroline, Wildsight)
    - Bioblitz (Julia, CVWMA)
    - Checking bluebird boxes
    - Bat counts (Jess, in contact with bat program, needs more volunteers)
    - Installing turtle fencing (Wildsight initiative already underway but could use more volunteer effort to walk fences for maintenance)

    - Hold event to teach seniors in the valley how to use iNaturalist
    - Ongoing Creston Valley Bioblitz project
- Establish more working groups that allow for more intentional connection among individuals in the valley (Julia, CVWMA)
- More connection of various group's volunteer lists to enhance folks coming out to multiple events/initiatives
    - Establish a sort of "Creston Conservation Corps group of volunteers"
    - Could include this in the Creston Valley welcome basket to be supplied to newcomers
    - The Harvest Share program has a good volunteer pool that could be utilized
- Attend farmers market to advertise cross-organization volunteer opportunities
    - Better connection between organizations so if one group is tabling at an event, can speak to and advertise for multiple organizations. Would increase representation for all groups
    - Limits to insurance for covering volunteers; folks tend to move away from using volunteer engagement because sometimes the coordination is more costly than finding a summer student to be paid for the work
    - Wildsight recently reviewing insurance policy to better understand what coverage they have – if we did a "co-volunteer group" could Wildsight's insurance cover all applicable activities?
- KCP could help with a tool that can be taken to landowners, like the Stewardship Solutions Toolkit, to aid with identification of stewardship opportunities (except KCP doesn't interface with the public)
- Could we have a shared "conservation themed volunteer calendar"?
    - KCP has an events Google calendar, but it's more partner organizations that utilize it rather than the general public
    - Laurie with CKISS was mentioning they have an excel file that you can enter information into and then it automatically adds it to their website; she will ask their website designer about how this works
    - Chamber of Commerce already has a calendar that adds in any Creston events (they have someone paid to manage that)
        - Reach out to see if we could do volunteer events (Vanessa from College of the Rockies could do this, Rebecca from Wildsight also said she could have this conversation)
        - Still do an intake event and direct them to the Chamber of Commerce calendar
- Could we hold a Volunteer Fair event to promote potential volunteer opportunities?
    - We could hold it at College of the Rockies

- Host regular events (e.g., annual volunteer appreciation event?) to volunteers to create a sense of community (get better engagement when groups of people attend events to socialize); have booths from all organizations to highlight opportunities
    - Something to give back to volunteers (e.g., hats, seeds, plants, etc.)
    - Monthly prize draws?
    - Currently FWCP as well as KCP and other partners host Critter Day in Trail every two years. Perhaps that could be brought to Creston (Juliet will ask Angus at FWCP)

Activity	Resources Needed	Timeframe	Collaborators	Lead
Talk to chamber of commerce about posting volunteer events on their calendar. Side note: Rebecca is wondering if we could tack on volunteer appreciation to the business awards?	None - conversation.	Not discussed.	Rebecca (Wildsight) and Vanessa (College of the Rockies) interested in leading this conversation.	Wildsight Creston and College of the Rockies
If Chamber of Commerce doesn't work, establish a shared volunteer events calendar.	Organization to host the calendar, discussion regarding fee for service to post to it?	Not discussed.	All participants were interested.	Potentially Wildsight Creston Valley
Host Volunteer Fair for conservation in Creston.		Not discussed.		
Discuss bringing Critter Day to Creston.	Could be hosted at community park, volunteers, support from FWCP.	Not discussed.		Juliet (KCP) will discuss with Angus (FWCP).

PRIORITY ACTION 4: RESTORE FLOODPLAIN CONNECTIVITY OF THE KOOTENAY/KOOTENAI RIVER SYSTEM

Group Members: Marc-Andre Beaucher (CVWMA), Alyson Brda (CVWMA), Krista Watts (Columbia Basin Trust), Robyn Usher (Crest Valley Rod & Gun Club), Asa MacLaurin (BC Wildfire Service), Alana Higginson (BC Wildlife Federation), Jim Schaefer (Creston Valley Rod & Gun Club), Adrian Leslie (Nature Conservancy of Canada)

Background regarding considerations on water in the Creston Valley:

- How well is the hydrology mapped in the area?

    - Kootenay Lake is really well understood as it's tracked by the water branch of Canada, power companies, etc.
    - Would be important to map all the tributaries to understand water in the valley, the connections, flows, amounts, etc.
        - RDCK & Yaqan Nu?kiy are currently doing community engagement on this
- Columbia River Treaty between Canada & US is under review (but currently put on hold)
    - This Treaty focuses on flood control and power generation; unsure how outcomes of this could affect waters in the Valley
    - Nothing our groups can do about this treaty, but helpful to understand that it is under review and could impact work regarding water in the Valley

Two potential projects were discussed under this priority action.

PROJECT #1: Pumping water into units surrounding/including the wetlands in the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area (CVWMA)

1. **What is being planned already?**

- CVWMA just updated some water control structures in Six Mile Slough – getting water into the Wildlife Management Area areas is dependent on the levels of the lake and whether it can be moved into there. The infrastructure is there (gravity system), so it's dependent on the river and lake levels coming up higher than the wetlands
    - In the past 25 years, Six Mile Slough has experienced cycles of flood and drought – all four compartments were "over-full" for a number of years and in the past 5-7 years, drought likely resulting from the changing climate has been dried out the compartments by the end of the summer.

2. **What are the next steps to advance this action?**

- One way to solve would have been to breach natural levees in Six Mile Slough - but challenges were encountered due to the presence of federal species at risk.
- The project could be revisited with Department of Fisheries and Oceans - talk to CVWMA if passionate about this
- Note on water levels in BC: BC Hydro has looked at what an average year looks like - they've only had 1 in the last 15 years. Hard to plan for the future when you don't understand what's happening. Build wetlands 5 years ago and now they have no water, how to build for an ever-changing climate?

PROJECT #2: Return of the Kokanee Salmon Project (Summit Creek Enhancement)

1. **What is being planned already?**

- Creston Valley Rod & Gun Club (CVRGC) was funded to increase kokanee salmon stock in the lake. Going into year 4. Lots of the eggs went into Meadow Creek, but lots of the eggs were also put into Summit Creek and the Goat River in year one.

- Reason for action was a huge drop in kokanee populations in the lake - but what caused this? Was it rearing habitat and that's why we're discussing restoring that?
- Whether the restoration in the floodplain and streams benefits kokanee in the end, it also benefits other species and adds nutrients from the wetlands into the river - so although focused on one species, it's actually a multi-species - ecosystems approach that could provide benefits
- Creston Valley Rod & Gun Club have collected quantitative data on the creek and did habitat assessments following government protocols
    - Started investigating old creek channels and seeing what channels still exist, what ones were carrying nutrients
    - Shade cover, nutrients, gravel materials, etc.
    - Want to improve rearing and spawning habitats
    - Found kokanee spawning much higher up stream than recorded previously - due to not being surveyed that far up before, or if there were barriers that are no longer there? Unsure.
    - Have been in conversations with the provincial fisheries department in Nelson, Yaqan Nuʔkiy, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI), CVWMA, and BC Wildlife Federation regarding proposed restoration ideas
- Identified 7 options on what types of restoration could occur on Summit Creek, proposed these to Yaqan Nuʔkiy
    - Options are all on CVWMA lands, still water in *some* of the channels, but lots of them don't have water at any time of year anymore. Summit creek has lowered itself and has started eroding and headcuts have formed creeping upstream - the bottom is now 2-3m below the original channels
    - Stewardship and community education is a strong feature of this project (start with small enhancement projects to include community and increase awareness?)
- Project concerns:
    - Freshet is a lot more violent than it used to be
        - CVWMA has lost part of their dykes in some areas - built temporary one
        - To combat this concern – could dissipate stream channels through wetlands first to slow energy and spread flow, that way any restoration work downstream wouldn’t be at risk of blowing out and being lost
    - Channel is very sterile now, no cover on it and very channelized and straightened. Potential to do some planting and large woody debris (at least at the entrance where the fish are waiting for the right temps for the fish to swim up river)
    - Don’t want to repeat work others are doing or work siloed – need to make sure there’s good communication throughout groups in the Valley and projects are working to benefit each other rather than repeating work
    - Not a full understanding of the geomorphology and hydrology of the area – potential that Kootenai Tribe of Idaho may be interested in helping gain a better understanding of this?

2. **What are the next steps to advance this action?**

- Long-term objective for 2026 - Have a plan ready for the end of December 2026 to start seeking funding
- Seek input on the restoration plan from the Yaqan Nuʔkiy (by end of February) to create a solid plan for going forward and finalize document of restoration options (CVRGC)
- Host a workshop with technical support and come up with a prioritized plan - bring interested parties meaningfully together (targeted audience)
    - Workshop planning
    - Identify any other key partners and the hydrologic work they're doing (RDCK, Yaqan Nuʔkiy, others?)
    - Broaden outcomes to more than just Kokanee - identify and list co-benefits
        - Burbot, wetlands, riparian area, etc.
- Finalize solid plan with interested parties and start searching for funding
    - Lots to flush out first - but potential for ecosystem enhancement project funding (Columbia Basin Trust)

3. **Resources** necessary to implement activities
    - Landowner buy-in - CVWMA
    - Local First Nations - Yaqan Nuʔkiy, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
    - Other interested parties - CVRGC, BCWF, NCC (for letter of support)
    - Funding for feasibility study
        - Kootenai Tribe of Idaho may be interested in hydrological studies and feasibility
    - Funding for project development
        - Project partners search for funding opportunities
    - Funding for project implementation - this amount will be dependent on what plans are chosen to go forward - could be large amounts of funding depending on the undertaken, or small to start

4. **Timeframe**:
    - Input on plan to build workshop around - end of February
    - Workshop planning & implementation - done by the end of May
        - Kootenai Tribe of Idaho having meeting 5-6 of May – Marc-Andre would like to engage with them prior to this since it's a decision makers meeting
    - Finalize plan to start applying for funding – Dec 2026

5. **Collaborations**:
    - Project lead: Creston Valley Rod and Gun Club
    - Landowner: Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area
    - Local First Nations - Yaqan Nuʔkiy, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
        - Other interested parties - CVRGC, BCWF
            - BCWS burn reed canary if there's an area to treat?

- Community members wanting to learn more and get engaged in conservation projects
- **Lead:** who will be the lead for the next steps/activities that support the overall priority action: Creston Valley Rod and Gun Club - Robyn Usher (Kokanee Project Manager)

Geographic area of interest:

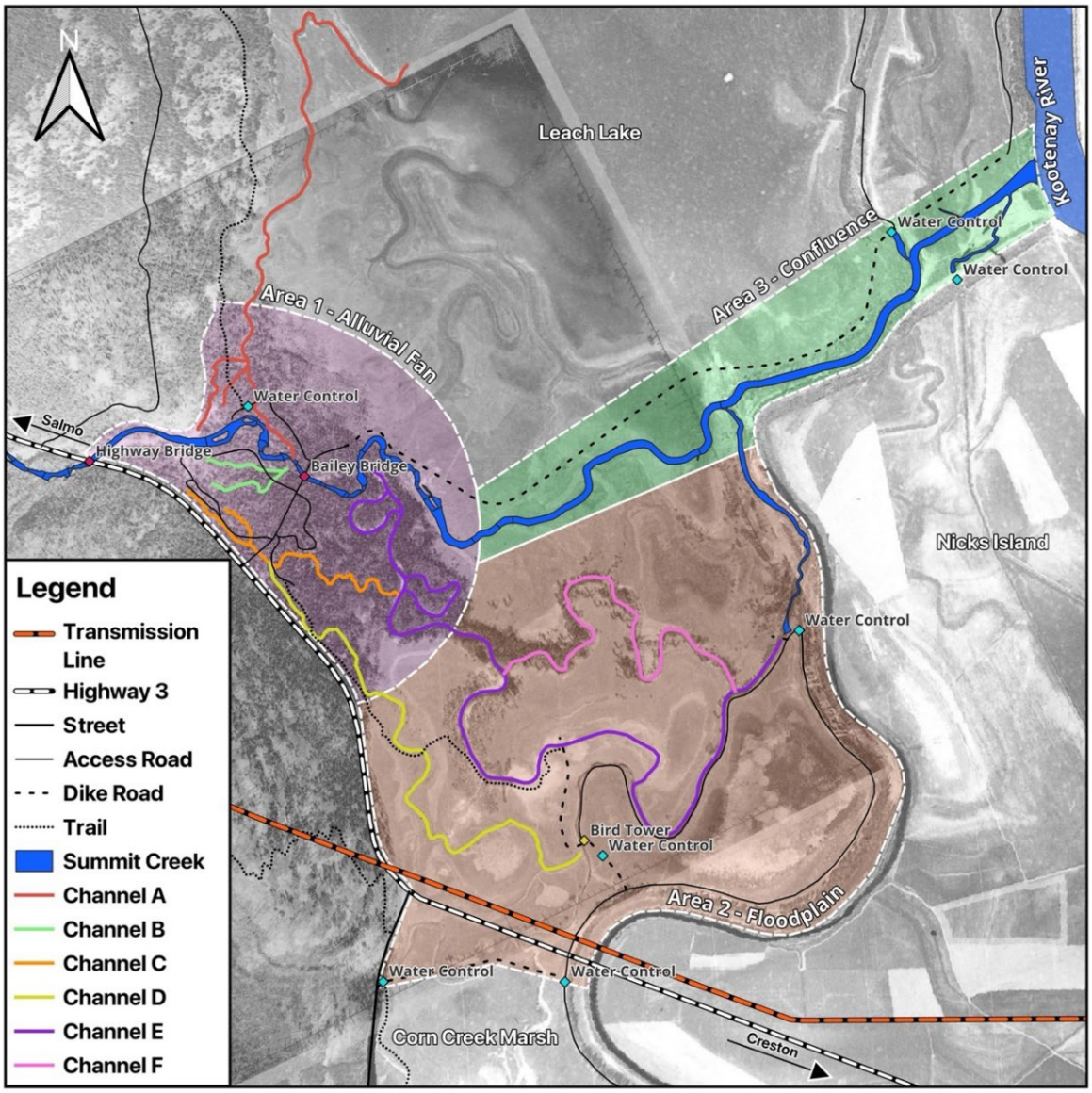


Figure 9. Potential riparian restoration units in the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area, west side. Source: Creston Valley Rod & Gun Club.

PRIORITY ACTION 5: PERFORM FIRE MAINTAINED ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

This action was not discussed at the Creston Valley Conservation Action Forum Check-In because it is already being actively pursued and coordinated by the Yaqan Nuʔkiy ɣuku kqaɣin

Working Group. Contact the Yaqan Nuʔkiy ɣuku kqaɣin Working Group for more information and future plans.

PRIORITY ACTION 6: ADDRESS ELK AND AGRICULTURE CONFLICT

Group members: Emily Chow (Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship), Don Low (Farmer), Robin Louie (Yaqan Nuʔkiy; Friends of Kootenay Lake), Dale Mcnamar (Farmer), Gitte Grover (Wildsight Creston Valley)

Locals suspect the elk population in the area has increased steadily and are now at unsustainable levels for agriculture producers. The increase in conflict seemed to coincide with the end of the winter Limited Entry Hunting (LEH) in the area. First Nations have been helping by harvesting elk, but the community doesn't need as many elk as the farmers would like to see removed. Everyone likes the elk and can tolerate a certain amount, but the current population is too much.

1. **What is being planned already?**

- Projects in progress:
    - Elk inventory in 2026/27
    - Trial drone survey
    - Hunt coordinator and special instructions

2. **What are the next steps to advance this action?**

High level suggestions:

- Improving high elevation habitat will be important
- Important context with predator management and the connection to non-migratory elk
- Conservations with Nature Conservancy of Canada/ Darkwoods to explore hunting
- Hunting towers like in Michigan
- Wildlife act changes: hazing, landowner tags

Actions:

- Government & others: Advocate for a landowner tag
    - This would allow landowners to have tags to give out, allowing some control over who they have on their property. This is common in several other jurisdictions. Currently not an option under the *Wildlife Act*
- Government & others: Review hunting regulations - hunt over the winter
    - This would be reviewed for the next hunting regulation cycle, would allow pressure to be on the elk over winter, when they are causing conflict. This was considered for this cycle but didn't go forward due to concerns with hunting migratory elk

- Government & others: Advocate for a grizzly bear hunt
    - We discussed how increasing predator population may be encouraging elk to stay low year round
- Payment for ecosystem services - is there a different funding source for compensation? Payment for ecosystem service?
    - Compensation through Ministry of Agriculture was reduced from 80% to 51% in 2025. Compensation doesn't solve the problem but is an important part of the picture, would be good to find a different funding source to help with compensation
- Increased communication with the agriculture community – Creston Valley Rod & Gun Club, Creston Valley Beef Growers, Dairy farmers, Orchard (see below)

3. What geographic area of the Creston Valley is a high priority for this action?

- Lower valley agriculture lands

Activity	Resources Needed	Timeframe	Collaborators	Lead
Improve communication - Gov, Beef Growers, Dairies, Orchards, Rod & Gun	None	Start spring/ summer 2026	Reps from: Gov, Beef Growers, Dairies, Orchards, Rod & Gun Club	All

MOVING FORWARD

All Creston Valley Conservation Action Forum Check-in participants, as well as those who were invited but could not attend, will be provided with this summary report and encouraged to connect with one another to continue working on the actions discussed during this meeting, and identify opportunities to collaborate and share information within the conservation community and beyond. Lead organizations will pursue these actions and continue to move them forward, while also seeking additional partners, funding opportunities, and community input where appropriate. Kootenay Conservation Program will provide another check-in opportunity in the coming years to provide an opportunity for the Creston Valley conservation community to reconnect, assess further progress on priority actions, and refine them as needed. In the interim, participants are encouraged to maintain open lines of communication, share updates on emerging initiatives, and support collective efforts that advance conservation goals throughout the Creston Valley.

In a feedback survey completed at the end of the day, participants indicated that attending the meeting was helpful in terms of checking-in on the progress of priority conservation actions identified at the original Creston Valley Conservation Action Forum in 2020 and identifying next steps. They also indicated they would be interested in checking in more regularly (e.g., every two years) to connect and share their work in a more informal setting. Moving forward, KCP will remain engaged at a strategic level in supporting partners and First Nations in their conservation work in the Creston Valley area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Creston Valley Conservation Action Forum Check-in was held in Creston, BC, and relied upon the collaborative efforts of many people. We are extremely grateful to Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area for co-hosting this event, and to the organizing committee: Marc-Andre Beaucher (Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area), Jessica Holden (Wildsight Creston Valley), Adrian Leslie (Nature Conservancy of Canada), Julia Shewan (Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area), and Dave Zehnder (Windermere District Farmers Institute). We appreciate everyone who provided expert input and background information: Marc-Andre Beaucher, Laurie Carr, John Cathro, Emily Chow, Heather Gates, Rebecca Gidney, Taylor Griffin, Dee Howard, Carter Kuiper, Devon Moore, Cait Nelson, Dr. Michael Proctor, Rachael Roussin, Colleen Cassady St. Clair, and Dave Zehnder, as well as the many other meeting participants. We also sincerely appreciate the support of funding agencies that supported this workshop including the Columbia Basin Trust, Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, and The Nature Trust of BC.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANTS

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation
Adrian	Leslie*	Nature Conservancy of Canada
Alana	Higginson	BC Wildlife Federation
Alyson	Brda	Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area
Asa	MacLaurin	BC Wildfire Service
Asha	DeLisle	Town of Creston
Brian	Churchill*	Wildsight Creston Valley
Caroline	Collier	Wildsight Creston Valley
Carter	Kuiper	Yaqan Nuʔkiy
Dale	Mcnamar*	Farmer
Dean	Skoreyko	Piper Farms
Dee	Howard	Creston Valley Rod & Gun Club, Creston Coexistence
Devon	Moore	Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
Don	Low	Farmer
Emily	Chow	Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
Gitte	Grover	Wildsight Creston Valley
Heather	Gates	Wildlife Conservation Society Canada
Irene	Manley*	Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
Jessica	Holden	Wildsight Creston Valley
Jim	Schaefer	Creston Valley Rod & Gun Club
John	Cathro	Yaqan Nuʔkiy ɛ̓uku kqaɛ̓in Working Group
Julia	Shewan*	Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area
Julie	Couse	Nature Conservancy of Canada
Juliet	Craig*	Kootenay Conservation Program
Kendal	Benesh	Kootenay Conservation Program
Krista	Watts	Columbia Basin Trust
Laurie	Carr	Central Kootenay Invasive Species Society
Lee-Anne	Fournier-Beck	BC Wildfire Service
Marc-Andre	Beaucher*	Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area
Marcy	Mahr*	Kootenay Conservation Program
Molly	Tilden	Central Kootenay Invasive Species Society
Morag	Turnbull	The Nature Trust of BC
Raine	Freeman	Friends of Kootenay Lake Stewardship Society
Rebecca	Gidney	Wildsight Creston Valley
Robin	Louie	Yaqan Nuʔkiy, Friends of Kootenay Lake Stewardship Society
Robyn	Usher	Creston Valley Rod & Gun Club
Tadhg	Howard	Creston Valley Rod & Gun Club, Creston Coexistence
Vanessa	Lozecznik	College of the Rockies

** Attended the 2020 Creston Valley Conservation Action Forum*

APPENDIX B: PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

Action #1: Develop a Landscape Scale Ecosystem-based Inventory of Biodiversity

Biodiversity and species at risk (turtles, skinks, northern leopard frogs, etc.) (presented by Marc-Andre Beaucher, Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area)

Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area (CVWMA) is a 7,000 hectares Ramsar wetland of international significance, also important locally, regionally, and provincially (protected under the *Creston Valley Wildlife Act*). CVWMA is recognized as the most important staging area for waterfowl in the BC interior and provides suitable habitat and conditions for numerous provincially and federally listed species at risk. Monitoring activities implemented since the last forum in 2020 were summarized. These activities highlight the spatial significance of the CWWMA for a wide range of species such as over 25 waterfowl species, Bobolink, Common Nighthawk, Forster's Tern, Western Grebe, Barn, Bank, and Cliff Swallows, rubber boa, Western skink, and Western painted turtle, just to name a few. Many species/groups are wetland or water-dependant and rely heavily on functional, continuous, and intact habitats for various life stages. While providing suitable habitat for a wide variety of wildlife, plant, and invertebrate species, the CVWMA wetlands offer invaluable ecosystem services to the Creston Valley as well as providing numerous research and educational opportunities. Moving forward, CVWMA staff are working on updating guiding framework documents for the next 5-10 years which will identify new habitat restoration priorities and funding sources, assess value of current programs and activities and adapt to future needs, and tweak monitoring programs to the organization's capacity and resources. Continuing to work with key organizations to supplement and facilitate the delivery of ongoing monitoring programs and future conservation activities will be key to CVWMA. More info on the CVWMA can be found at https://crestonwildlife.ca/.

Landscape level approach to biodiversity and connectivity (presented by Gitte Grover, Wildsight Creston Valley)

Wildsight worked with the Selkirk College GIS department to create the "Green Map" though combining 28 digital layers that identified many features on the landscape especially habitat quality. Additionally, through local knowledge and identification of "nodes" potential migration corridors though the valley were mapped. Adding on, a Living Lakes intern used LiDAR to map trees in the valley bottom by species which allowed an inventory of Cottonwoods along watercourses. A new addition planned is the mapping of elk exclusion fences through drone photography and AI-guided geospatial analysis. A successful pilot study identified fences in a 600 ha study area and was also able to identify Cottonwoods by 2 height classes. If Wildsight can secure funding, the whole valley bottom will be mapped and, working with farmers and orchardists, migration corridors could be established.

Bat conservation and monitoring in the Creston Valley (presented by Heather Gates, Wildlife Conservation Society Canada)

We acoustically monitored bat populations in the Creston Valley, British Columbia, for ten years through the North American Bat Monitoring Program (NABat). Each June, we sampled the Creston NABat grid cell for one week using four stationary detectors and two replicate driving transects. These long-term baseline data allow us to assess population trends and fill critical knowledge gaps ahead of the anticipated arrival of White-Nose Syndrome. To complement these surveys, we deployed solar-powered, long-term acoustic detectors at three strategic locations to document migratory bat activity year-round. These data help us understand seasonal timing, movement patterns, and habitat use by migratory bat species in the region.

To address the shortage of natural roosts, we created artificial tree roosts by converting young trees into snag-like structures. We either wrapped BrandenBark™ around trees to simulate exfoliating bark or used chainsaws to cut cracks and crevices that mimic natural defects. In areas with limited trees and good machine access, we installed BrandenBark™ on large poles to create roosting structures. To date, we have constructed 18 tree or tree-like roosts in the Creston Valley, including 15 within the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area and three at the Nature Conservancy of Canada's Frog Bear property. We also continue to monitor the Kuskanook bat condo through guano collection, acoustic detectors, and microclimate loggers. Genetic analysis of guano detected seven bat species at the tree-roost mimics, including the federally endangered Little Brown myotis. Yuma myotis continue to use the Kuskanook condo, where genetic analysis confirmed Little Brown myotis for the first time in 2024. Next, we will install locally produced Canadian BatBark and MiniBark roosts at three priority sites and monitor occupancy and microclimate to evaluate their effectiveness compared to nearby BrandenBark™ roosts. We will continue to monitor all previously installed roost structures by way of guano collection.

Updates on Northern Leopard Frogs and American Bullfrogs (presented by Devon Moore, MWLRS)

The Rocky Mountain population of the northern leopard frog is considered endangered in Canada, with the last known breeding population located in the Creston Valley. Ongoing recovery efforts focus on maintaining and increasing the abundance of this population while creating captive assurance populations and undertaking reintroductions to their historical range. This presentation addresses the current status of the northern leopard frog population in the Creston Valley through a discussion of the results of the 2025 field season. It describes egg mass distribution over the years, the recent results of the reintroduction program, and highlights of other work completed to recover this species. Also discussed are challenges facing the northern leopard frog, such as habitat loss and the increasing American bullfrog population in the Creston Valley, and a description of the efforts to address these challenges, including prescribed burns, habitat restoration, and the bullfrog control program. Helpful links include: Northern leopard frog Recovery Strategy; Northern leopard frog COSEWIC Status Appraisal; Northern leopard frog reintroduction program; and the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program.

Invasive Species Update (presented by Molly Tilden, Central Kootenay Invasive Species Society)

According to the World Conservation Union (IUCN), invasive species are the second most significant threat to biodiversity, surpassed only by habitat loss. As such, effective invasive species management is critical to maintaining the ecological health and functioning of the Creston Valley. Following the 2020 Creston Conservation Action Forum, the Central Kootenay Invasive Species Society (CKISS) has prioritized work under Priority Action #4: *Expand Stewardship Opportunities to Protect High Quality Habitats*. CKISS has advanced this action through a range of initiatives. One example is the Poison Hemlock Patrol program, launched in Creston in 2025 to support the eradication of poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), one of the most toxic plants in the world. Poison hemlock poses serious risks to human health, livestock, and wildlife, and the Creston Valley is a hot spot for this species. The program offers cash incentives to landowners and community volunteers to safely treat poison hemlock on private and municipal lands. While volunteer uptake was limited during the pilot season, landowner interest was strong, demonstrating a clear appetite for stewardship support. Based on this response, CKISS is continuing and refining the program in 2026.

Whirling disease, an invasive parasite that can cause high mortality in salmonid populations, is an emerging concern for Creston Valley watersheds. The disease was confirmed in Kootenay Lake in 2024, leading to the Columbia River watershed being designated an infected area. There is currently no treatment for whirling disease once it enters an aquatic system, making prevention and containment the only effective management options. In response, CKISS has focused on public education and awareness, promoting best management practices such as Clean, Drain, Dry, and Decontaminate to reduce the risk of spread between waterbodies. Feedback from 2025 surveys and meetings with First Nations suggests that many water users are still unaware of the risks and how their actions can prevent spread. In 2026, CKISS will expand our targeted education efforts.

CKISS also recognizes the importance of public participation in early detection and monitoring. Community observations submitted through iNaturalist play a critical role in identifying emerging threats. CKISS has developed regional iNaturalist guides to help users identify invasive flora and fauna, and observations of invasive plants made within the CKISS region are automatically linked to CKISS iNaturalist projects. This approach directly supported the detection of Black Henbane, a Provincial Early Detection Rapid Response (EDRR) species, which was identified in Creston last year.

Looking ahead, CKISS emphasizes the need for increased investment in invasive species management across all jurisdictions, sustained funding for community engagement and stewardship initiatives, and a stronger focus on prevention, reporting, and rapid eradication at the earliest stages of invasion.

Action #2: Enhance Landscape Connectivity and Corridors Through a Climate Change Lens

Grizzly bear and landscape-level connectivity in Creston (presented by Michael Proctor, Trans-border Grizzly Bear Project)

The Trans-border Grizzly Bear Project (TBGBP) started working in South Selkirk and Purcell mountains in 2004 and in the Creston Valley in 2012. Using DNA from hair traps they revealed a regional pattern of fragmentation of the grizzly distribution in southeastern BC corresponding to human settled valleys and major highways. The South Selkirk population to the west of Kootenay Lake was completely isolated – no exchanges of grizzly bears with the Purcells or the Central Selkirks north of the West Arm. Using GPS telemetry the TBGBP identified corridor habitat across the Kootenays including the Creston Valley in the Duck Lake area. This stimulated the implementation of management to increase connectivity of grizzlies across the Creston Valley. Activities included a cost-share electric fencing program, strategic land purchases by the Nature Conservancy Canada (NCC), non-lethal conflict response by the TBGBP and the BC Conservation Officer Service, access management in the NCC Darkwoods property within the S Selkirks and more. After 15 years of these activities, monitoring revealed that the S Selkirk grizzly population had reconnected with the south Purcells across the Creston Valley. In recent years, some backsliding has occurred with regards to coexistence with grizzlies in the valley. A local community group was then started to organize conflict reduction efforts, and a coexistence manager was hired. On another front, these conservation successes across the world-class Creston Valley Wildlife Area wetlands inspired the TBGBP to initiative an Ecological Corridors project with other Kootenay biologists. This initiative, Kootenay Connect, secured Environment and Climate Change Canada funding for species at risk habitat restoration work in 7 corridors across the Kootenays as the Kootenay Connect Priority Places project. They are also working to get one pilot corridor (around Columbia Lake) officially recognized by the Province of BC.

Frog Bear Corridor enhancement (presented by Marc-Andre Beaucher, Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area)

Marc-Andre Beaucher, Head of Conservation Programs at CVWMA guided attendees through some of the **Kootenay Connect Frog Bear Habitat Enhancement Projects** implemented from 2019 to 2025. Projects originated from a “connectivity or wildlife corridor” Master Plan developed with the help of a landscape architect intended to enhance connectivity and wildlife movement opportunities, and increase habitat complexity in an area south of Duck Lake. This area is a critical pinch-point in the Creston Valley for east-west grizzly bear movements between the Selkirk and Purcell Mountains. CVWMA and key partners, in particular the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), took the Master Plan to action, creating just over two hectares of new wetlands and watercourses, restoring some 15 hectares of habitat in wetlands and along drainage ditches, protecting roughly 23 hectares of sensitive riparian habitat from the impacts of grazing and other agricultural practices through fencing, and establishing 16 hectares of habitat for species at risk (e.g. Bobolink) where conservation actions and agricultural practices come together and complement one another through seasonal grazing management.

While every activity completed reached various levels of success, the fencing of the riparian and wetland edge habitat adjacent to the core northern leopard frog breeding area and along the east channel of the Kootenay River, to exclude cattle grazing, resulted in the vegetation rebounding rapidly after fencing. Cottonwood shoots over 1.5 meters in height were observed approximately a year after cattle exclusion and ground cover also increased considerably as a result of this activity as well as overall foraging and movement habitat quality for birds, invertebrates, bats, and mammals.

The addition of a sinuous wetland channel (500m in length) on CVWMA's West Meadows Farm's east parcel added significant habitat complexity to a portion of the cleared agricultural land and is now offering better movement, foraging, and breeding opportunities for amphibians, painted turtles, and many more species.

Moving forward, CVWMA staff intend to continue the monitoring of key species in the Frog Bear corridor (e.g., Bobolink, leopard frog, Barn Swallow) and add species if needed (e.g. marsh birds). Completing riparian habitat fencing (e.g., along east channel of Kootenay River) will be on the to-do list and as well as continuing to conduct targeted and/or broad-scale habitat treatments to restore and enhance habitat particularly for northern leopard frog breeding habitat. Finally, CVWMA will continue to partner with key organizations to implement monitoring and stewardship activities along the Frog Bear corridor.

More info on the **Frog-Bear Habitat Enhancement Project** can be found at https://kootenayconservation.ca/creston-frog-bear-corridor-habitat-enhancement/.

Barbed wire fence removal project (presented by Rebecca Gidney, Wildsight Creston Valley)

The Wire Fence Removal to Restore Habitat Connectivity (Wildflow Project) Project, in partnership with the Creston Valley Rod & Gun Club, in the Creston Valley aimed to improve habitat connectivity and reduce risks to wildlife by removing old, unsafe fencing along known wildlife movement corridors. Barbed wire fences can injure animals, block migration routes, and fragment habitats, creating safety hazards for both wildlife and humans. Over the course of the project, Wildsight contractors and community volunteers removed approximately 1,830 metres of derelict barbed wire fencing across seven properties in RDCK Electoral Area A, from Wynndel to Riondel. These locations were selected because they overlapped with observed wildlife migration paths and key habitat areas.

The objectives of the project were to restore safe passage for wildlife, reduce entanglement, injury and mortality, and demonstrate practical, low-cost solutions for landowners to balance property management with ecosystem health. Measurable results include the total length of fencing removed, the number of properties improved, and feedback from landowners confirming safer, more open landscapes for wildlife movement.

Through hands-on participation, the project also engaged community members in conservation, increasing awareness of local wildlife needs and encouraging broader adoption of wildlife-friendly practices. Overall, the project addressed habitat fragmentation and wildlife safety concerns, delivered tangible improvements to seven properties, and supported long-term conservation in the Creston Valley by removing barriers to safe wildlife movement. More information on this project, including a video, can be found here.

Action #3: Expand Stewardship Opportunities to Protect High Quality Habitats

Payment for Ecosystem Services for Farmers (presented by Dave Zehnder, Farmland Advantage)

Dave Zehnder, founder of the Farmland Advantage Program, provided information for the forum. Two major themes identified at the last forum as critical to the future health of Creston valley's ecology were connectivity of riparian habitats in the Creston flats, and bear and elk movement corridors through the wider Creston valley. There was also consensus amongst participants that farmland is critical to achieving this connectivity. Corridors that link crown lands, Indian Reserve Lands, Conservation properties and farmland were identified. Since that meeting in 2020 we have worked with partners to target farms in the zones deemed critical and established contracts with them to restore and maintain riparian corridors. It worked! This approach has proven effective and shows farmers' willingness to be part of the solution, they signed on and have been taking the necessary actions. What is required now is a scaling up of the concept. I propose a three-step process to achieve the scale required: 1) Establish a working group to guide the collaboration; 2) Secure the necessary funding to continue the process; and 3) Implement the model at scale.

Agriculture programs to support biodiversity: Kootenay and Boundary Farm Advisors and Environmental Farm Plan (presented by Rachael Roussin, Kootenay Boundary Farm Advisors)

Two programs were presented to highlight support for the agriculture sector that help farmers access advisors and financial support to enhance on-farm biodiversity. The Environmental Farm Plan and Beneficial Management Practices Program provide funding for "planning" and "projects." A plan will look at a specific area of a farm, such as riparian health, biodiversity, grazing, vegetative buffers and water management and provide recommendations that align with farm goals. Farmers can then access funding to implement projects identified in plans. Funding is also available for equipment and supplies that decrease a farm's impact on the environment.

The Kootenay and Boundary Farm Advisors (KBFA) is a local agriculture extension program producers can call for free advice and direction on navigating local and national programs. KBFA hosts many on-the-ground events for the agriculture sector, providing a good way for farmers to connect about important topics and production practices.

Wildlife Co-existence Solutions (presented by Dee Howard, Creston Coexistence)

Creston Valley Grizzly Coexistence Solutions promotes coexistence between grizzly bears and people through education, collaboration, and use of practical tools. Coexistence is made possible with correctly installed electric fencing to prevent bear conflicts and associated grizzly bear mortalities in low elevation linkage habitats that overlap with private agricultural land. The project provides grizzly bear safety education and bear spray training, has a local outreach coordinator, works with local First Nations, and facilitates a local working group. The presentation emphasizes that effective coexistence depends on prevention rather than reaction. Providing safe wildlife linkage areas, while carefully managing agricultural attractants, is a key strategy for reducing conflict that often results in bear mortality. At the same time, strong support for local food producers is essential to ensure that conservation strategies remain practical and economically sustainable. A balanced approach—one that protects people, livelihoods, and wildlife—creates the conditions necessary for long-term success. Ultimately, coexistence is not simply about minimizing conflict; it is about fostering resilient ecosystems and shared responsibility to ensure that both human communities and grizzly bear populations can thrive.

For more information on workshops, fence cost-sharing and updates, please go to our facebook page: Creston Coexistence Solutions. Another excellent source: www.transbordergrizzlybearproject.ca

Action #4: Restore Floodplain Connectivity of the Kootenay/Kootenai River System

Frog-Bear wetland restoration project (presented by Marc-Andre Beaucher, CVWMA and Adrian Leslie, Nature Conservancy of Canada)

To help support grizzly bears and northern leopard frogs, the Nature Conservancy of Canada restored three wetlands along with almost 2km of riparian habitat in their Frog Bear Conservation Corridor in the Creston Valley. Wetlands were initially restored in 2021, and revegetation efforts have been ongoing ever since. Despite challenges from excessive herbivory from elk, along with invasive plants and drought conditions over the past several years, the wetlands are being used by northern leopard frog, bears, many birds, turtles and pollinators while native vegetation is becoming established throughout.

Action #5: Perform Fire Maintained Ecosystem Restoration

Yaqan Nuʔkiy ɣuku kqaɣin Working Group (presented by John Cathro, Cathro Consulting, and Carter Kuiper, Yaqan Nuʔkiy)

The objectives of the Yaqan Nuʔkiy ɣuku kqaɣin working group are to: Coordinate wildfire resiliency activities in the Creston Valley; Promote alignment between funding agencies and projects; Coordinate messaging on ɣuku kqa·ɣin activities and issues with member organizations; Report out on challenges and opportunities; Share information between members to enhance collaboration; Coordinate information sharing internally with ɣuku kqa·ɣin members to support decision making of members; Develop and implement a methodology for prioritizing areas for the reintroduction of fire; Develop the structure, acquire the equipment and secure the training for a ɣuku kqa·ɣin Prescribed Fire Crew; and Reintroduce fire, based on a collaborative approach between members. The goals of this working group in 2026 are to: Establish the ɣuku kqaɣin Prescribed Fire Crew including training, equipment and contracts; Collaboratively plan 2-3 large burns; Conduct spring and fall burns with the ɣuku kqaɣin Prescribed Fire Crew and Working Group members. Membership consists of representatives from Yaqan Nuʔkiy, Creston Valley Community Forest, Huscroft Lumber, Canfor, Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area, Nature Conservancy of Canada (Darkwoods), Town of Creston, BC Wildfire Service, RDCK, and First Nations Emergency Services Society.

Action #6 (New): Address Elk and Agriculture Conflict

Creston Elk Project (presented by Emily Chow, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship)

Elk matter in the Kootenays because they support First Nations and resident hunters, play an essential ecological role, and hold intrinsic value on the landscape, while local agriculture is also vital for regional food security – yet coexistence between elk and farming often creates conflict with consequences either way. To improve coexistence and inform better management decisions, three key initiatives are underway: a proposed hunt targeting antlerless elk that remain year-round in agricultural areas (while also increasing surveillance for Chronic Wasting Disease), a drone survey trial to provide safer, more efficient, and more frequent population estimates than traditional helicopter surveys, and a collaring project that will deploy 12 GPS collars to gather data on elk movements, mortality, habitat use, and disease pathways. Together, these projects aim to address outdated population data, account for local differences in Creston elk, and build the knowledge needed to balance conservation, hunting opportunities, and agricultural sustainability.

Elk Mitigation Measures (presented by Colleen Cassady St. Clair, University of Alberta)

Colleen Cassady St. Clair from the University of Alberta has been working with graduate students to address human-elk conflict in contexts of human safety and agriculture over the past 25 years. They used behaviour-based methods of hazing, aversive conditioning, and deterrents. Core conclusions were that (a) human safety can be increased by repeatedly chasing elk with humans and dogs, (b) intensity of grassland use can be reduced by repeated herding on horseback, and (c) stationary deterrents with lights and sound cause elk to flee initially, but with rapid habituation. Variation in boldness among individuals contributes to the capacity of elk to inhabit human-dominated areas. A jurisdictional scan showed greater prevalence of four management tools across elk ranges; harvest of cows and young animals, coordinated and high-intensity hazing, selective fencing, and compensation for damage to crops and equipment. For more information on elk mitigation measure, please see the Jurisdictional Scan of Strategies for Mitigating Elk-Agriculture Conflict Report.

Elk Compensation package for landowners (presented by Taylor Griffin, Ministry of Agriculture and Food)

The Agriculture Wildlife Program supports producers for damaged by designated wildlife (including elk) to standing forage, grain and silage corn crops. The Creston Valley represents one area in the program which operates on a provincial wide scale. This program requires producers to pre-register to be eligible for compensation with an inspection for loss to be completed prior to harvest. Registration deadlines for irrigated crops is April 30th and June 15th for annual or single cut crops. Producers must notify the regional office to schedule an inspection, a minimum of 7 days prior to harvest. Compensation is strictly limited to lost tonnage by designated wildlife and is restricted to those who engage in on-farm mitigation or prevention activities in accordance with best management practices. Compensation is only provided up to a maximum of 80% of the inspected loss. Budgetary constraints may result in compensation levels or methodology being adjusted. For 2025 the compensation rate for silage corn, grain and forage crops was limited to 51% of value. If producers in the Creston Valley are interested in more information they are encouraged to visit the program website (Agriculture Wildlife Program - Province of British Columbia) or contact our Program Representative in Cranbrook via phone (250-420-6203 or 1-888-332-3352) or email (ProductionInsurance.Cranbrook@gov.bc.ca). Website Link: Agriculture Wildlife Program - Province of British Columbia

Chronic Wasting Disease (presented by Cait Nelson, Wildlife Health Biologist, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship)

Cait Nelson (WLRS) shared information on chronic wasting disease (CWD) which is a fatal and infectious neurological disease that is caused by an abnormal protein called a prion. The disease affects deer, elk, moose and caribou and will reduce survival rates and lead to population declines over time. CWD is not known to affect people, but it cannot be ruled out, so public health recommends that infected animals are not eaten. The disease has the potential to contaminate environments which makes it very challenging to manage and contain. Infected animals shed the disease agent through bodily fluids and or carcasses. When these prions enter the environment, they are persistent, virtually indestructible, impossible to clean up and will create an ongoing source of disease. Another challenging aspect about CWD is that most infected animals appear healthy. Infected animals are referred to as "silent carriers of CWD" because most show no sign of disease and animals with symptoms are rarely seen in the wild. Most animals that test positive for CWD are healthy looking hunter harvested animals. There is no way to tell if they are infected just by looking. The only way to know for sure is through testing. CWD surveillance and testing in wildlife has been ongoing for over 20 years in B.C. The first cases of CWD were detected in the Kootenay region in 2024 and there have been 9 cases of CWD confirm in B.C. to date. The cases in the Cranbrook area are of concern to Creston Valley but so are cases that have been identified south of the border in Washington, Idaho and Montana. Most concerning are the recent cases identified in Bonners Ferry only 20 kms from the border with the potential to move up the valley. The best chance to protect deer, elk and moose in these areas is to stay ahead of this disease before it establishes in B.C. populations. We can do this by following carcass handling and transport restrictions to avoid introducing CWD to new areas, by testing harvested and roadkill animals to identify new cases, so we know where CWD is on the landscape, by reporting sick or dead animals to the B.C. Wildlife Health Program and by learning about CWD and how you can get involved. This fight will require a team effort, and we welcome all partners to help guide and deliver this program. If you are interested in championing this effort in your community or through your organization, please get in touch and visit the B.C. CWD website for more resources:
www.gov.bc.ca/chronicwastingdisease

APPENDIX C: POTENTIAL PROJECT LIST FOR CRESTON VALLEY

These project ideas were proposed prior to the Creston Conservation Action Forum Check-In. Although the list is not exhaustive, it provides potential projects ideas for funding such as the Columbia Basin Trust Ecosystem Enhancement Program.

Develop a Landscape Scale Ecosystem-based Inventory of Biodiversity	
CKISS is leading a Community Poison Hemlock Eradication program in the Creston Valley. We will also be delivering a Whirling Disease education and prevention program at water bodies throughout the Columbia River Basin, including the Creston Valley.	*Central Kootenay Invasive Species Society*
Northern leopard frog recovery project and bullfrog control program	*WLRS, FWCP, northern leopard frog recovery and American bullfrog control*
Enhance Landscape Connectivity and Corridors Through a Climate Change Lens	
Creston Nectar Network – Pollinator Pathway	*Wildsight Creston Valley*
Recently wrapped up our Wildflow wildlife friendly fencing project	*Wildsight Creston Valley*
Expand Stewardship Opportunities to Protect High Quality Habitats	
Wildlife coexistence, predominantly Elk & Grizzly bear Agriculture conflict with Creston Valley; Grizzly Bear Coexistence outreach, and our current project is called Creston Valley Grizzly Coexistence Solutions.	*Creston Valley Grizzly Coexistence Solutions: CVRG*
1. Encourage the Creston community to plant native plants - provided this spring. 2. Encourage the planting of showy milkweed in an effort to encourage the western monarch to propagate here in an effort to increase its numbers. 3. Plan to save local areas rich in valued wild native flowers and shrubs.	*Wildsight Creston Valley*
Payment for Ecosystem Services on private agricultural land to restore riparian and other habitats done in a connected corridor.	*Windermere Farmers Institute*

Restore Floodplain Connectivity of the Kootenay/Kootenai River System

The Creston Valley Rod & Gun Club's Return of the Kokanee Salmon Project is moving into its fourth year. Following a detailed assessment of Kokanee salmon spawning and rearing habitat on Summit Creek and assessment of historic channel restoration, we are proposing the following: 1. Reconnection of historic channels to one another and to the historic floodplain on Summit Creek to improve existing Kokanee salmon migratory and rearing habitat.2. Restoration of ecosystem processes on Summit Creek that would reduce erosion, channel incision, and degradation while improving gravel retention, habitat diversity, and stream morphology. We are working with the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area and the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship to finalize a proposal for sharing with interested groups including the RDCK, Yaqan Nuʔkiy, and Wildsight Creston.	*Creston Valley Rod & Gun Club*
Are there solutions to getting water (pumping) from the Kootenay River into compartments 4 and 5 at Six Mile Slough in CVWMA? Working with DFO to figure out a solution is the key. Marc Andre could provide details. Getting water into these compartments would help restore critical habitats for Northern Leopard frog and complement the prescribed burn that just took place.	*Thomas Hill*

Perform Fire Maintained Ecosystem Restoration

The Creston Community Forest has completed wildfire risk reduction projects in the Creston Valley since 2018. These projects have predominantly been on Goat Mountain directly north of Creston. Additional areas include the areas close to Kitchener and in Canyon Lister. As part of the ecosystem restoration work we have been involved in, we have a prescribed burn scheduled in the spring 2026 close to Kitchener (Lower Birch) where we will be collaborating with the BC Wildfire Service.	*Creston Community Forest*
ɛuku kqaɛin provides a framework for collaborative planning, information sharing and re-introduction of fire in the Creston Valley. ɛuku kqaɛin includes multiple agencies and organizations with a shared interest in reintroducing fire in the Creston Valley for the purpose of ecological and cultural restoration as well as community wildfire risk reduction.	*Yaqan Nuʔkiy ɛuku kqaɛin Working Group*
The Kootenay Lake Fire Zone (BC Wildfire) supports prescribed fire implementation which may or may not provide for ecological enhancement or other conservation priorities within the Creston Valley. The clients we support include the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Authority, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Creston Community Forest, BC Parks, Yaqan Nuʔkiy First Nation, Monticola Forest Ltd. We may not have the ability to support all projects, but we are always open to having the conversation to see if opportunities do exist for BC Wildfire Service to support where we can.	*BC Wildfire Service*
I know there is upcoming Wildfire Risk Reduction work near Fox Tree Hill. I think the BC Wildlife Service lens is focused on the more forested areas and fuel management, but incorporating some aspect of ecosystem restoration (ER) in the Gb 03 that is part of this project would be really important. For both ecological and cultural values. Cathro Consulting is aware of this, we discussed it, but it's worth further conversation. Chloe Kuch at Cathro is a good contact for this.	*Thomas Hill*

There are several NDT 4 ecosystems north of Wyndell that could benefit from prescribed burning (Sanca, Martel Creeks etc.). Currently, there is no ER allowed in this area due to aspects of Caribou recovery in the South Purcell's. Although this herd has been extirpated for some time now this is still in place, yet logging continues but no ER. There are important questions about what is actually driving carrying capacity of ungulates in this area. To not allow ER in important biodiverse fire adapted ecosystems yet allowing reverting mature forest ecosystems to early seral stages is definitely a topic for conversation, at quite a high level though. It would be good to see low intensity fire re-introduced on this part of the landscape. I have polygons to share in the future if needed.

Thomas Hill

Address Elk and Agriculture Conflict

Project ideas:

- Elk inventory for next winter
- Trial drone surveys to count elk in agricultural areas
- Hiring a hunt coordinator to help support the elk LEH

BC WLRS

APPENDIX D: FORUM AGENDA

KCP Creston Valley *Conservation Action Forum - Check-In Meeting*

February 18, 2026
9:30 am – 4:00 pm LOCAL TIME (MT)
Creston Senior's Centre, 810 Canyon Street, Creston

BACKGROUND

In 2020, Kootenay Conservation Program and Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area co-hosted the Creston Valley Conservation Action Forum which brought together partners from this conservation neighbourhood to learn about the local landscape and collaboratively develop a set of shared conservation priorities. These forums are an opportunity to share insights from leading scientists and other knowledge keepers on key conservation actions that will make a difference for fish, wildlife, and habitats in the next five years. In 2020, the following five key actions were identified:

1. Develop a Landscape Scale Ecosystem-based Inventory of Biodiversity
2. Enhance Landscape Connectivity and Corridors Through a Climate Change Lens
3. Expand Stewardship Opportunities to Protect High Quality Habitats
4. Restore Floodplain Connectivity of the Kootenay/Kootenai River System
5. Perform Fire Maintained Ecosystem Restoration

The goal of this forum "check-in" is to provide updates on the progress of the key conservation actions identified in 2020, collaboratively identify new shared priorities moving forward, and discuss next steps. Thank you for joining us to contribute your knowledge and expertise, as we work together to advance these conservation priorities. KCP respectfully acknowledges that this event and associated conservation actions are taking place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Yaqan Nuʔkiy, whose values and cultures continue to inspire and guide stewardship of this region.

AGENDA

Purpose: To check in on the progress of the five priority conservation actions identified at the 2020 Creston Valley Conservation Action Forum and to identify next steps and beneficial collaborations moving forward.

9:15 Grab a coffee and get settled

9:30 Welcome

9:45 Introductions: Round Table

- Name, organization, were you at the 2020 forum? What is your connection to the Creston Valley? (< 1-minute each)

10:05 Agenda Review and Overview of 2020 Creston CAF

10:15 'Espresso Shot' updates on the Creston Valley Conservation Actions (3-4 min. each)

Action #1: Develop a Landscape Scale Ecosystem-based Inventory of Biodiversity

- Biodiversity and species at risk (turtles, skinks, northern leopard frogs, etc.) (Marc-Andre Beaucher, Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area)
- Cottonwood floodplains mapping and Green Map (Gitte Grover, Wildsight Creston Valley)
- Bat diversity and conservation in Creston Valley (Heather Gates, Wildlife Conservation Society Canada)
- Updates on Northern Leopard Frogs and American Bullfrogs (Devon Moore, MWLRS)
- Top invasive plants in Creston (Laurie Carr, CKISS)
- Q&A

10:45 Bio Break (15 min)

11:00 'Espresso Shot' Updates on the Creston Valley Conservation Actions cont.

Action #2: Enhance Landscape Connectivity and Corridors Through a Climate Change Lens

- Grizzly bear and landscape-level connectivity in Creston (Michael Proctor, TransBorder Grizzly Project) - **video**
- Frog Bear Corridor enhancement (Marc-Andre Beaucher, CVWMA)
- Barbed wire fence removal project (Rebecca Gidney, Wildsight Creston)
- Q&A

Action #3: Expand Stewardship Opportunities to Protect High Quality Habitats

- Biodiversity options in environmental farm plans (Rachael Roussin, Kootenay Boundary Farm Advisors) - **video**
- Payment for Ecosystem Services for Farmers (Dave Zehnder, Farmland Advantage)
- Wildlife Co-existence Solutions (Dee Howard, Creston Coexistence)
- Q&A

Action #4: Restore Floodplain Connectivity of the Kootenay/Kootenai River System

- Yaqan Nuʔkiy wetland restoration (Norm Allard, Yaqan Nuʔkiy) - **YouTube video**
- Frog-Bear wetland restoration project (Marc-Andre Beaucher, CVWMA and Adrian Leslie, NCC)
- Q&A

Action #5: Perform Fire Maintained Ecosystem Restoration

- Prescribed fire working group for Creston Valley (John Cathro, Cathro Consulting and Carter Kuiper, Yaqan Nuʔkiy)
- Q&A

Action #6 (New): Address Elk and Agriculture Conflict [or after lunch]

- Elk Mitigation Measures (Colleen Cassady St. Clair, University of Alberta) - **video**
- Elk Compensation package for landowners (Taylor Griffin, Ministry of Agriculture and Food) **- video**
- Chronic Wasting Disease (Cait Nelson, WLRS) - **video**
- Creston Elk Project (Emily Chow, MWLRS)
- Q&A

12:00 **LUNCH** (45 minutes)

12:45 Group Photo (outside)

1:00 **Emerging Priority Project Ideas**

- Discussion on what's missing/changed from 2020
- Current project ideas (full brainstorm)
- Current or potential funding opportunities (e.g. Columbia Basin Trust Ecosystem Enhancement Program; Farmland Advantage)

1:30 **Moving Forward: Next Steps For Key Actions and Discussion of Potential Collaborations**

Breakout groups for each Priority Action (or emerging actions).

- What is being planned already?
- What are the next steps to advance this action?

2:45 ish **BioBreak**

3:00 Report Out from Breakout Groups

3:30 Next Steps and Closing Remarks

4:00 Adjourn

Special thanks to KCP Program and Event Supporters