7CW Project Report for CWSP and Kootenay Connect 2025-2026

Conservation of Cottonwood Trees in Columbia Wetlands: Saving Important Wildlife Trees

By

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Kootenay Connect

KCP Kootenay Conservation Program

The Columbia Wetlands Stewardship Partners

Summary

This subproject focuses on monitoring and mitigating the impact of beavers on cottonwood/aspen stands throughout the Columbia Wetlands and includes the installation of wire guards on important cottonwood trees as well as assessment/repair of past wire guards on trees. Previously completed wetland mapping and canoe surveys have identified critical stands of cottonwoods for targeted wrapping.

Building on the work done in Year 6, the work in Year 7 included identifying high quality wildlife trees or cottonwood stands for wrapping using the CWSP wetland mapping. Mature cottonwoods with existing nest structures or evidence of wildlife use were prioritized, as well as stands with multiple mature trees and younger recruitment trees. All identified stands showed evidence of beaver activity.

Work Plan

1. Assess the status of the previous years' wire guards to protect cottonwood, i.e., did they protect the trees? Adjust wiring as required.

Results from several years of monitoring confirm that wire guards remain an effective, low-impact method for protecting cottonwood and aspen from beaver damage in the Columbia Wetlands. All previously wrapped trees that were assessed in earlier years showed no evidence of beaver chewing, despite widespread beaver activity in the surrounding area.

Based on these consistent results, and in consideration of available funding, trees wrapped during the 2024–2025 season were not reassessed and are assumed to remain adequately protected.

2. Locate additional large stands of cottonwoods and aspens in the Columbia Wetlands using the CWSP wetland mapping to:

    a) inform new sites to install wire guards on large wildlife trees and important stands of aspen/cottonwood; and

Prior to fieldwork, a desktop overview of the wetland mapping was completed. The wrapping sites for Year 7 of this project were chosen based on access, coverage of wrapped trees throughout the wetland, and areas of known high-quality wildlife trees.

    b) visit and assess the status of beaver damage.

In addition to installing wire guards on high-quality wildlife trees and cottonwood stands, the crew assessed beaver activity (i.e., presence of dams and lodges, gnawed trees and shrubs, tracks, etc.) along the Columbia Wetlands and made note of any observations. Gnawed trees and shrubs were observed at all wrapping sites. Slide paths and tracks along a side channel of the river were evident north of the Spillimacheen Bridge.

3. Install wire protectors in the most important wildlife trees and cottonwood stands along the Columbia River.

Stucco wire was installed on 36 trees on January 26th, January 27th, and January 28th, 2026. Wire was 48" tall with 2" x 2" squares, a minimum of 4" of space was left between the wire and the tree to

accommodate growth. The wire was anchored using branches and deadwood found on site, and flagged with ribbon to be easily found during future maintenance checks.

Measurable outcomes:

1. **Results and recommendations** from the assessment of how well the previous years' wire guards protected cottonwoods and aspens from beaver harvesting in the Columbia Wetlands.

Long-term monitoring and maintenance of previously wrapped cottonwood and aspen trees should be conducted periodically to ensure wire guards remain effective over time. Maintenance activities may include re-anchoring, reinforcement, and replacement of wire wraps where trees have fallen due to natural decay. To account for natural tree loss and to support stand-level conservation, we recommend wrapping multiple trees within various young and mature stands.

Strengthening communication and collaboration with private landowners could enhance habitat continuity and protection of trees and stands across the wetlands. Furthermore, securing access to stands during the planning phase would significantly streamline logistics.

Future projects could explore planting additional species such as, willow, poplar, birch, alder, and maple, to support beaver foraging needs while reducing pressure on large, mature cottonwood and aspen.

2. **Map of all locations where wire protectors** were installed on important cottonwood trees and stands in Year 7 as well as earlier years, i.e., Year 3 (2021-2022) and Year 4 (2022-2023).

See Appendix 1.

3. Install at least **30 wire guards** on a minimum of **10 important wildlife trees in 2 stands** along the Columbia River and in 2 stands of cottonwood/aspens in fall.

A total of 192 wire guards have been installed over the lifespan of this project, 36 of which were installed this year. Efforts were focused on wrapping high-quality wildlife trees and cottonwood stands where beaver activity was apparent, and no trees were wrapped yet. Ten cottonwoods were wrapped between Nicholson and Parson, 13 were wrapped along the banks of the main river channel south of the Parson bridge, and 13 were wrapped north of Spillimacheen (Table 1). Data collected at the time of installation included the stand age, a measurement of diameter at breast height (DBH), and the height class. Photos of some wrapped trees can be found in Appendix 2.

Table 1. Cottonwood protection sites visited in 2026.

Sites	Notes	Date Wrapped
Between Nicholson and Parson	• 10 trees wrapped • trees between 55 and 108 cm DBH • beaver chew observed on one of the trees wrapped	January 26th, 2026

Sites	Notes	Date Wrapped
Southside Parson Bridge	• 13 trees wrapped • trees between 25 and 73 cm DBH • historic evidence of beaver use observed and one tree was chewed within the last year	January 27th, 2026
North of Spillimacheen	• 13 trees wrapped • trees between 29 and 87 cm DBH • beaver tracks and slide path observed in a small side channel of the Columbia River.	January 28th, 2026

Limitations

Fieldwork in the wetlands during winter presents several limitations, primarily related to access and safety. Ice conditions can be unpredictable. With the milder winters the Columbia Valley has been experiencing, the ice over river channels and marshes was often too thin or non-existent to support safe travel, posing a risk to fieldworkers. Additionally, access was also restricted by private property boundaries, requiring permission or alternative routes that involved long walks through deep snow, around open water, and across ice.

To enhance coverage and efficiency, a motorized boat used during the summer would be highly beneficial, allowing fieldworkers to navigate more effectively through the wetland project area to wrap and check previously wrapped trees while minimizing physical strain and potential hazards.

Appendix 1. Project Map

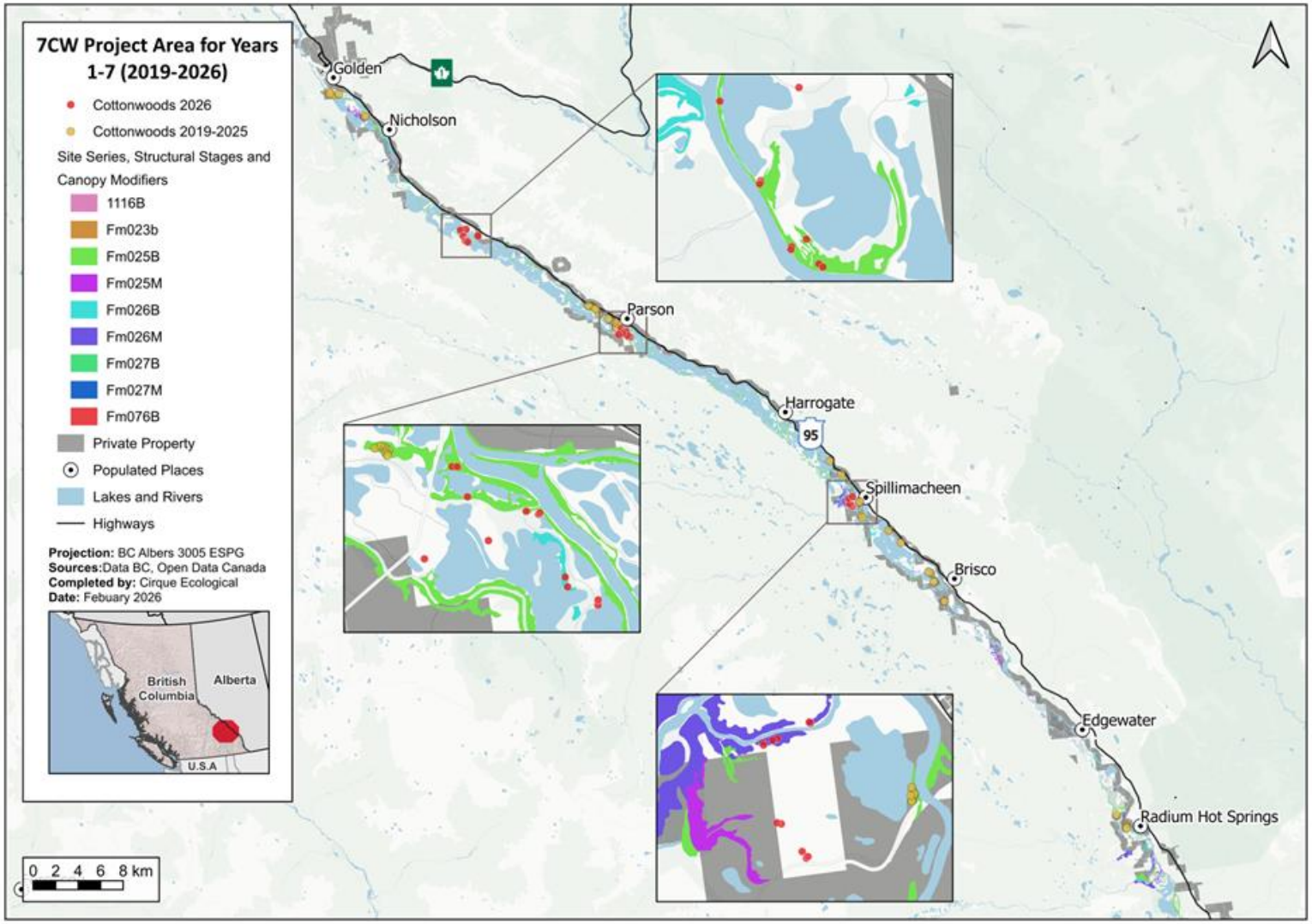

Figure 1. The project area for Year 7 of the Conservation of Cottonwood Trees Project in the Columbia Wetlands for CWSP and Kootenay Connect.

Appendix 2. Photos.

Table 2. Photos taken during winter fieldwork of various wrapped trees.

Large cottonwood with a nest wrapped.	Mature lone cottonwood being wrapped.
	
Wire guard installation completed on a younger tree.	Mature tree with recent bever chew likely to scar and recover.