

# Kootenay Connect Priority Places



## Connecting & Sustaining Exceptional Places of Biodiversity

The Kootenay region is a place of global ecological significance—from lush wetlands meandering in valley bottoms to dry forests skirting mountain slopes. However, pressures from increasing human impacts and climate change are ever present.

Kootenay Conservation Program and its partners responded to these challenges by taking a whole landscape approach. Given that ecological connectivity is the cornerstone of resilient landscapes, Kootenay Connect Priority Places was developed to sustain biodiversity and habitat corridors across Kootenay landscapes so wildlife can thrive.

Kootenay Connect Priority Places worked to address the dual crises of decreasing biodiversity and intensified climate disruption in the region for seven years, across seven landscapes.



34

Federally-listed  
species



40+

Partners and  
specialists

7

Priority places

\$12.6 M

Invested into  
local projects



40

Species of local  
concern

60+

Habitat  
enhancement  
projects





# What is Kootenay Connect Priority Places?

From 2019-2026, Kootenay Connect Priority Places supported a team of over 40 local partners and specialists with habitat-based projects in priority ecological corridors across the Kootenays.

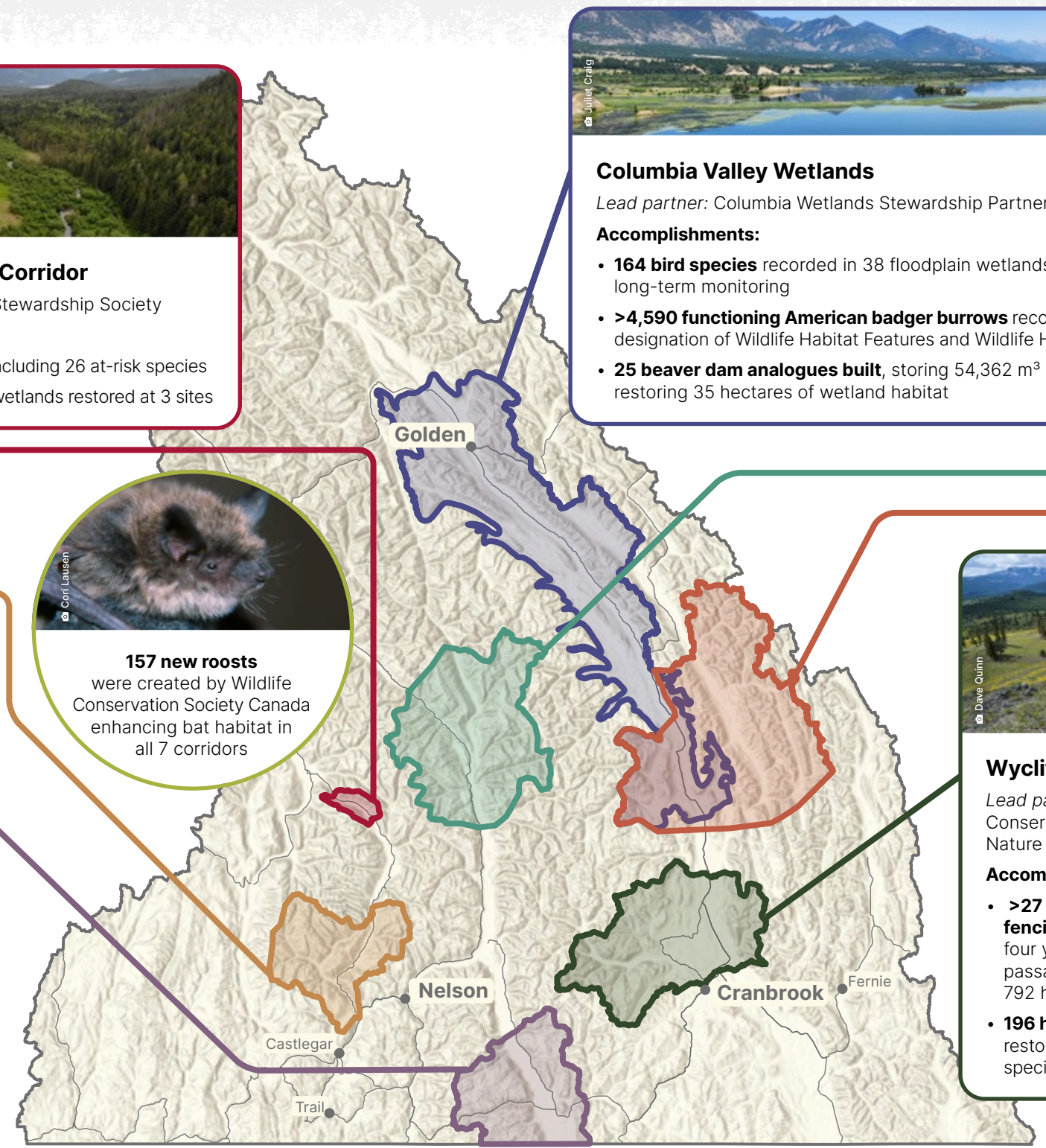
By applying leading-edge practices, our partners actively restored and enhanced local habitats—supporting the recovery of federally-listed species at risk and species of local concern.

**Our Approach**

- Takes a Multi-Species, Habitat-Based Approach
- Considers the Whole Landscape
- Emphasizes Ecological Connectivity
- Considers Climate Change Adaptation
- Mobilizes Diverse Partnerships

# Where Highlights Happen

On-the-ground projects took place in seven priority places that collectively encompassed 1,660,000 hectares: 20% of the Kootenay region. These places are biodiversity hotspots, linked by a variety of habitat types, and serving as potential climate change corridors and refugia. Projects occurred in the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Ktunaxa, Secwépemc, Sinixt and Syilx Okanagan peoples, whose values and cultures continue to inspire and guide stewardship of this region. Select accomplishments during the seven years of Kootenay Connect Priority Places are listed below.



**Slocan River Valley**  
*Lead partners:* Slocan Lake Stewardship Society and Slocan River Streamkeepers  
**Accomplishments:**

- **>3,500 live stakes and trees** planted to enhance 4.6 km of riparian shoreline
- **4,000 species** recorded, including 145 at-risk species
- **4 Lewis's woodpecker nests** observed with 26 fledglings

**Bonanza Biodiversity Corridor**  
*Lead partner:* Slocan Lake Stewardship Society  
**Accomplishments:**

- **1,425 species** recorded, including 26 at-risk species
- **17 hectares** of floodplain wetlands restored at 3 sites

**Creston Valley**  
*Lead partner:* Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area  
**Accomplishments:**

- **21 hectares** of shallow open water wetlands enhanced to improve habitat for endangered northern leopard frogs
- **120 ft<sup>2</sup> new "Swallow Resort"** constructed with 60 nesting compartments for endangered barn swallows
- **900 hectares** of wetland habitat improved at Six Mile Slough and Duck Lake by replacing and removing derelict water controls

**157 new roosts** were created by Wildlife Conservation Society Canada enhancing bat habitat in all 7 corridors

**Columbia Valley Wetlands**  
*Lead partner:* Columbia Wetlands Stewardship Partners  
**Accomplishments:**

- **164 bird species** recorded in 38 floodplain wetlands based on long-term monitoring
- **>4,590 functioning American badger burrows** recorded to inform designation of Wildlife Habitat Features and Wildlife Habitat Areas
- **25 beaver dam analogues built**, storing 54,362 m<sup>3</sup> of water and restoring 35 hectares of wetland habitat

**Duncan Lardeau**  
*Lead partner:* North Kootenay Consulting  
**Accomplishments:**

- **7 dams** built by re-located beavers doubled the wetland area of Argenta Slough and held water during drought
- Rare marsh birds and **>32 western painted turtles** benefited from enhanced riparian and wetland habitat

**Wycliffe Wildlife Corridor**  
*Lead partners:* Nature Conservancy of Canada, The Nature Trust of BC, Province of BC  
**Accomplishments:**

- **>27 km of wildlife-friendly fencing** work completed over four years to promote safe passage of wildlife, benefiting 792 hectares of habitat
- **196 hectares** of forest restoration to improve habitat for species at risk

**Columbia Lake**  
*Lead partners:* Nature Conservancy of Canada, The Nature Trust of BC, Columbia Wetlands Stewardship Partners  
**Accomplishments:**

- **44 active beaver dams** monitored holding 49,700 m<sup>3</sup> of water maintaining 38.5 hectares of benchland wetlands
- **84 hectares** of open forest-grassland habitat enhanced for species at risk
- **5 hectares** of rangeland treated to improve open forest-grassland and grazing areas



## How Corridors Are Connecting People

For over two decades, Kootenay Conservation Program has mobilized partners to work together. In the spirit of strategic collaboration, in 2019 we applied new research that identified important ecological corridors across the Kootenays. This guiding research\* proposed a science-based framework to stitch together

a regional network of important habitats, protected areas and climate refugia.

Blending the best available science, local and Indigenous knowledge, and community-based approaches, we use this landscape-level framework to promote collaborative action.

\* Proctor, M.F. and M.H. Mahr. 2019. *Kootenay Connect: Riparian Wildlife Corridors for Climate Change - A Preliminary Report*. Kootenay Connect, Kaslo, BC. 68pp.

## The Whole Landscape Matters

Many landscapes in the Kootenay region still function as wildlife corridors. While intact, these corridors conserve wildlife movement, at-risk species, and ecological functions that are being reshaped by a changing climate.

By focusing conservation activities within and between valley bottoms and mountain ranges, Kootenay Connect Priority Places protects all living things by strategically addressing habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation—especially in light of increasing human impacts and climate change.

## About Us

Kootenay Conservation Program is a broad partnership of over 96 organizations, First Nations, and other levels of government who work together to conserve the biological diversity and naturally-functioning ecosystems of the Kootenay region.

→ [kootenayconservation.ca/kootenay-connect-priority-places](https://kootenayconservation.ca/kootenay-connect-priority-places)

### *With Gratitude*

Kootenay Connect Priority Places is a Community-Nominated Priority Places project funded by a federal Canada Nature Fund grant, issued by Environment and Climate Change Canada. These projects also leverage significant local partner funding.

