



## Land Securement for Conservation Purposes at Cottonwood Lake

FWCP project # (COL-F22-W-3557)

Prepared for: Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program

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## Executive Summary

Cottonwood Lake Preservation Society has successfully protected the land adjacent to Cottonwood Lake which was slated to be logged by a private landowner, causing irreversible degradation to the area. This land conservation project aligns with FWCP's Columbia Region Upland & Dryland Action Plan, priority action COLUPD.ECO.LS.19.01, to secure upland/dryland habitats-P1. The FWCP action type is land securement of ecosystems. The project was initiated to protect all the sensitive ecosystems, watersheds, and wildlife at risk in this upland and dryland habitat. Although the immediate land surrounding the lake had been purchased by the RDCK and Columbia Basin Trust, the remaining 66% of at-risk land up slope from Cottonwood Lake was at risk of avalanche, mudslide, and increased run-off. The avalanches, mudslides and increased run-off could have impacted the land that we already acquired and further, threaten all the valuable ecosystems in the area leading to flooding, pollution of watersheds, and increased animal-human interactions. The urgency of the project was related to the purchase agreement the society has with the private landowner. After a long 24 months, we successfully required the funds for land securement which will be transferred to the Nature Conservancy of Canada to ensure the long-term protection and conservation of this important ecological area.

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## 1. Introduction

In 2018, the residents of Nelson and area learned that 180+ acres of forested slope around Cottonwood Lake were scheduled to be clear cut. Cottonwood Lake has become a beloved gathering place for the community and an important area for conservation. It provides crucial support for endangered species who are at risk of becoming extinct and are threatened or at-risk per the Species at Risk Act and Committee on Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada classification systems. The lake supports two watersheds which in turn support between 110 - 160 square kilometers of land. Most critically, Cottonwood Lake houses the best corridor in the region for the South Selkirk Grizzly bear, a species that is endangered. Our goal is to conserve and protect Cottonwood Lake.

Cottonwood Lake Preservation Society is working to conserve and protect the land adjacent to Cottonwood Lake which is slated to be logged by a private landowner. This land conservation project seeks to protect all the sensitive ecosystems, watersheds, and wildlife at risk. Although the immediate land surrounding the lake has been purchased, the remaining 66% of at-risk land is up slope from Cottonwood Lake and will be at risk of avalanche, mudslide, and increased run-off. The avalanches, mudslides and increased run-off will impact the land that has already been acquired and threaten all the valuable ecosystems in the area leading to flooding, pollution of watersheds, and increased animal-human interactions. The urgency of the project is related to the purchase agreement the society has with the private landowner. If we do not raise the funds required for land securement by February 28th, 2021, the vendor will log it, causing irreparable damage to this ecologically important area.

The CLPS spent considerable time engaging with groups community groups and stakeholders, including First Nations, the RDCK, Osprey Community Foundation, Sitka Foundation, Kootenay Conservation Program and the Nature Conservancy Canada (NCC). The NCC will receive the land once the funds have been raised and manage the maintenance and conservation of the area. The land will be transferred to the NCC by the Regional District of Central Kootenay. The society is raising funds for the land securement. Cottonwood Lake is a natural wilderness area that is open to the public year-round and is historically and ecologically significant. Historian Eileen Parkes identified that the site was utilized by the Sinixt as a passageway for Cariboo hunting. We have a responsibility to protect and preserve the historical and cultural significance of the land. Our goal is to work with our project partners to secure the land and ensure the land is managed for conservation purposes. The society will continue to engage with organizations with similar mandates and work to preserve the land for future generations by focusing on conservation, protecting wildlife populations, old growth forest and valuable ecosystems.

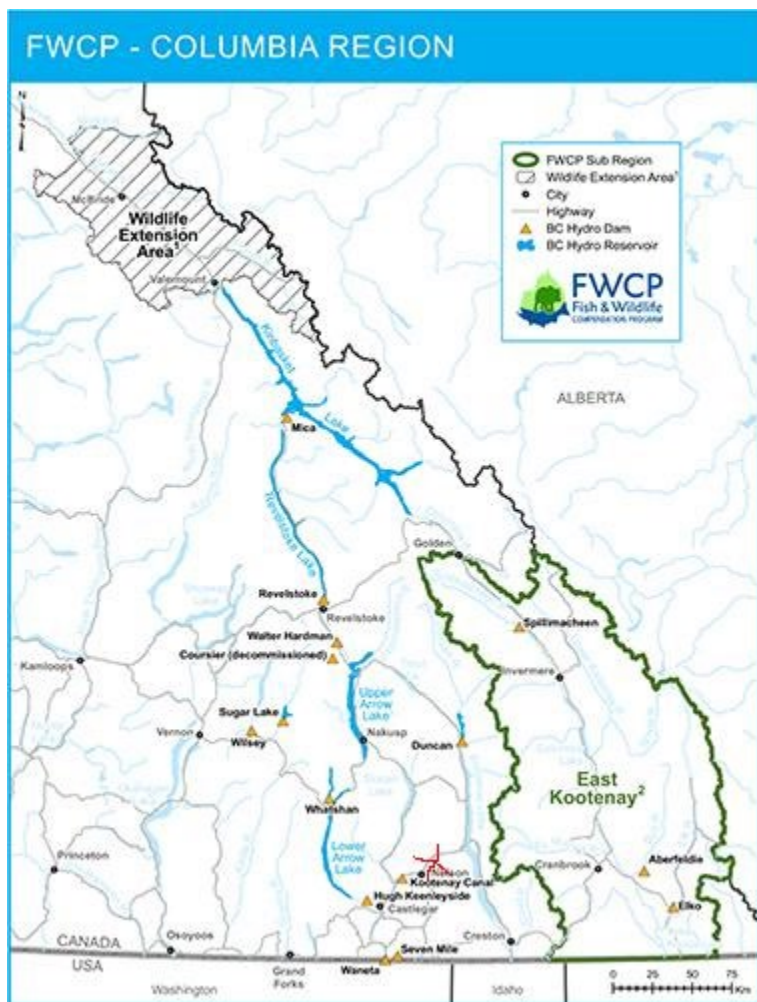
## 2. Goals and Objectives and Linkage of FWCP Action Plans and Specific Action(s)

The goals and objectives of this land securement project are closely aligned to FWCP's Columbia Region Upland & Dryland Action Plan, priority action COLUPD.ECO.LS.19.01 (to secure upland/dryland habitats) through land securement and to protect critical Upland and Dryland habitats. This specific area includes wide ranging animals, i.e., carnivores and the already endangered South Selkirk Grizzly bear. The goal is to secure and steward the at-risk land parcel that provides critical connectivity zones of upland and dryland habitats that support the movement of wildlife. This project aligns with FWCP's action plan to secure land and protect valuable ecosystems in upland and dryland areas.

Land securement of upland and dryland habitat aligns with the Cottonwood Lake Preservation society's efforts to secure the 49-hectare land parcel upslope of the lake. The land securement will protect a number of wide-ranging species that inhabit the area, including the South Selkirk Grizzly bear that uses the area as a corridor to pass through mountain ranges. By successfully purchasing this parcel of land, the Nature Conservancy will receive the land and ensure it is used for conservation purposes. This is a critical connectivity zone for wildlife and without this effort, it would have surely led to erosion and habitat loss.

### 3. Study Area

This land securement project is in the West Kootenays in the FWCP's Columbia Region. The conservation site is located upslope of Cottonwood Lake, south of the City of Nelson, BC.



### 4. Methods

This project had many phases leading up to securing the land for conservation purposes. The Cottonwood Lake Preservation Society, a group of concerned citizens worked together to form a society dedicated to preserving this land from being logged from a private landowner. A public phase soon followed, where community members donated funding (over \$56,000) to stop the logging of this critical upland and dryland area. The landowner entered into an agreement with the newly formed society and agreed to sell the land to the regional district for \$450,000. The society then partnered with the Regional District and a number of other funding partners to save this essential and beloved area. Leaders in conservation joined the local initiative like FWCP, Sitka

Foundation and the Columbia Basin Trust to raise the proceeds required to secure the land. Additionally, The Nature Conservancy of Canada agreed to accept the land and ensure its use for conservation purposes while incorporating Indigenous Knowledge and values. A large public campaign initiated public interest in protecting this critical ecological area and CLPS is now in the process of recognition and will work with the Regional District on acknowledgement and conservation trail posts at the site itself.

## 5. Results and Outcomes

121 acres of land successfully acquired and protected for conservation purposes. This land securement has protected critical upland and dryland habitats, including the already endangered south Selkirk grizzly bear and other various plants and species.

## 6. Discussion

There is unprecedented logging in rural and remote areas in British Columbia. Thanks to this environmental win and support of FWCP, we are now able to protect this land parcel that is home to 9-14 Grizzlies and several other species. We are seeing new developments arise such as the recent Zinton resort proposal that is now threatening another critical area in the region.

## 7. Recommendations/Next Steps

As of May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the land has officially been transferred to the Nature Conservancy of Canada who will steward the land in collaboration with the Regional District for conservation purposes.

Cottonwood Lake Preservation Society will engage in outreach/communication activities including organizing a community celebration event at the site itself to unveil the kiosk that acknowledged funders and community supporters/ first nations behind the initiative and unveil site information posts that include ecological information about the upland/dryland habitat. The society is aiming to have this event take place September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

A final press release will be sent out to the Nelson Star and other local media outlets acknowledging the transfer of the land to the NCC and encouraging community members to visit the site to learn more about its conservation story.

The RDCK and NCC will continue to monitor the area and ensure it is protected and will work with First Nations Groups re: traditional land use.

## 8. Acknowledgements

We would like to demonstrate our appreciation to FWCP in supporting this critical area and admire the great work you do in conservation.

This project speaks to the importance of conservation and wildlife and it is thanks to FWCP, numerous funders, businesses, and community members (some listed below) who supported the critical need to secure this upland/dryland habitat. The community, first nations groups and funders all worked together to make this happen. With great appreciation we thank the following funders and partners and will work with First Nations, Funders, and community alike to celebrate this achievement at the site itself. This list does not include all donors, please visit the website (<https://savecottonwood.com/>) for a full list of supporters.

Sitka Foundation

Regional District of Central Kootenay

Columbia Basin Trust

The Royal Bank

Nelson & District Credit Union

Kootenay Savings Credit Union

Fortis

Kootenay Conservation Program

Osprey Foundation

Valhalla Pure Outfitters

Shuswap Indian Band

Okanagan Nation Alliance

Shelley Boyd

Eileen Parkes

Selkirk College

Sinixt Nation

Ktunaxa Nation