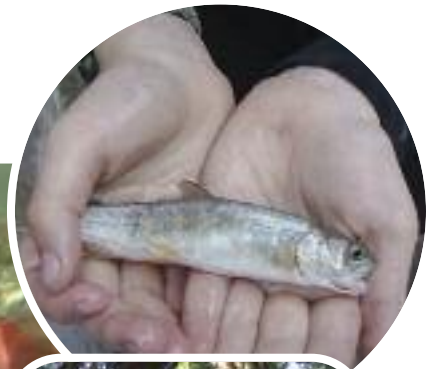


Annual Report 2008 – 09



Ministry of
Environment



Message From the Co-Chairs

The fiscal year April 1, 2008 to March 31, 2009 proved to be a successful year for the Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program (FWCP) in the Columbia Basin. Larger-scale projects such as the Nutrient Restoration Program, the White Sturgeon Aquaculture Program, Habitat Enhancement in the East and West Kootenay, and Land Acquisition, were all successfully completed. A variety of smaller-scale projects were also completed throughout the Columbia Basin, many of which involved local conservation volunteers, and benefited a wide range of fish and wildlife populations.

We are fully confident that the FWCP is meeting its mandate – to conserve and enhance fish and wildlife impacted by the construction of BC Hydro dams. The structure of the FWCP and the decision-making process is working well; from the Fish and Wildlife Technical Committees that ensure that each project is scientifically sound, to the Steering Committee that benefits from a wide range of input including program partners, public and First Nation representatives. The selected projects are professionally managed and delivered by FWCP staff, local contractors and/or community stakeholders.

There is always room for improvement of course. One major initiative underway is to bring the three compensation/restoration programs in the province closer together. In addition to the Columbia program, there are the Peace Williston Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program and the Bridge Coastal Restoration Program. While the three programs each have their own distinct flavour, the goals and objectives are largely the same. By bringing the three programs under one umbrella some synergies and efficiencies can be achieved while, at the same time, ensuring that local participation and decision-making is kept intact. Each program is also involved in strategic planning at the local level. The planning process will result in Basin Plans, outlining restoration priorities as well as Action Plans to meet those priorities. We look forward to reporting progress on this next year.

FWCP Fisheries

As in years past the bulk of fisheries spending was aimed at a number of large-scale projects, with the Nutrient Restoration Program (formerly the Fertilization & Monitoring Program) in Kootenay Lake and the Arrow Lakes Reservoir, comprising approximately two-thirds of FWCP fisheries spending. The Nutrient Restoration Program (NRP) is jointly managed and coordinated by the FWCP and the B.C. Ministry of Environment (MOE).

The Arrow Lakes portion of the NRP also receives a financial contribution from the Arrow Lakes Power Corporation (ALPC) to compensate for impacts from the Arrow Lakes Generating Station. New for this fiscal was a change in the structure of this contribution, from an annual fixed dollar amount to a percentage (25%) of the total cost. This change was important given the widely fluctuating cost of implementing the NRP. During last fiscal, for example, the cost of purchasing the nutrients rose by about 30%, and another double-digit increase was experienced this year. The agreement with ALPC will help share the burden and improve funding stability.

The NRP in both Kootenay Lake and Arrow Lakes Reservoir continues to help kokanee populations and other species that depend on them. Closely tied to the NRP in both water bodies are the kokanee spawning channels at Hill Creek (Arrow Lakes) and Meadow Creek (Kootenay Lake), both jointly operated by the FWCP and MOE. Returns of spawning kokanee in fall 2007 were good in both channels, and egg deposit targets were met. With careful management of the channels over winter, the egg-to-fry survival rates were high. Of particular note is the egg-to-fry survival at Hill Creek Spawning Channel which was the highest on record at 69.4%. This means that for every 100 hundred eggs deposited, nearly 70 fry successfully left the channel. Meadow Creek Spawning Channel was also above average with an egg-to-fry survival of 53.8%.

To highlight the NRP, two public events were carried out by the FWCP this fiscal, both well attended and with solid media coverage. One was an Open House at the Meadow Creek Spawning Channel to view the kokanee, and the other at the viewing platform at the outlet of Trout Lake to view spawning Gerrard rainbow trout.

Another cornerstone project of the FWCP fisheries is the White Sturgeon Aquaculture Program that is part of the Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative. The FWCP is a primary supporter in the raising and releasing into the Columbia River of thousands of ten-month-old white sturgeon. Columbia River white sturgeon are endangered and listed under the Species At Risk Act. During the year about 10,000 juveniles were released into the Columbia River. The FWCP organized schools and/or public release events near Trail, Castlegar and Creston.

All ten fisheries projects slated for this fiscal year were completed with the exception of Kootenay Lake Creel Survey Design which has been postponed until next fiscal. The total spending on fisheries projects during 2008/2009 was \$2,082,253 or 47% of the total FWCP budget.

FWCP Wildlife

Wildlife projects were more numerous than fisheries projects – a total of 19 wildlife projects were delivered during this fiscal, with a total spending of \$1,752,702 or 40% of the total FWCP budget.

The wildlife projects varied in scope from small project-based spending involving volunteers such as the wire-wrapping of cottonwoods in the East Kootenay (to protect heron rookeries from beaver damage), to large-scale land management operations and land acquisition.

The purchase of the property known as Darkwoods, just to the south of Nelson, was the single largest private land conservation purchase in Canadian history and FWCP was part of this land acquisition. At more than 100,000 hectares (equivalent to about 140 Stanley Parks) the property will help a wide variety of fish (with its many lakes and streams) and wildlife. The vast tract of land, now under the ownership of the Nature Conservancy of Canada, is home to 29 provincially-listed species-at-risk. The FWCP has committed its ongoing support with an annual contribution of \$75,000 toward land management operations.

Some of our smaller projects were large in scale. FWCP public representative Gerry Thompson donated his services to construct 27 massive (3.6 meters three in length) cedar bird boxes for Vaux's swifts. Traditionally the small, agile bird nested and roosted in hollow trees but much of its low elevation habitat has been removed due to reservoir creation, forestry and other human development. The project is already showing signs of success as one box was successfully occupied within months of being installed.

In addition to our very active volunteer public representatives, the public got in on the act too. This fiscal marked the first year that the FWCP requested the public's help to record sighting of several species-at-risk, including western screech-owls, common nighthawks, western skinks, badgers, great blue heron nests and mountain caribou. The information collected, much of it via the online reporting forms on the FWCP website, was extremely valuable. Three new heron rookeries were identified, for example, and have been earmarked for future monitoring. Of all the species, common nighthawks solicited the most reports throughout the region.

Help from another quarter, namely Rick Fillmore of the Trail Wildlife Association, was especially appreciated and acknowledged. Rick was the recipient of the FWCP's first Exceptional Volunteer Award, largely for his long-time contribution to helping wildlife as well as his efforts to establish the Fort Shepherd Conservation Area – a West Kootenay land acquisition supported by FWCP.

Other highlights include relocating an additional 10 bighorn sheep in the East Kootenay to help support dwindling herds, together with habitat restorations activities to increase their chances of survival; and an agreement negotiated with Vancouver Aquarium to house a captive breeding colony of northern leopard frogs.

Fiscal Overview 2008 – 09

When the FWCP was created, BC Hydro agreed to provide the organization with \$3.2 million (indexed to 1995 dollars) each year in perpetuity as part of its water licence agreement. These funds are earmarked to help fish and wildlife populations impacted by the construction of BC Hydro dams in the Columbia Basin. This year BC Hydro provided the FWCP with \$4,196,746 through this agreement.

A contribution of \$238,628 was received from Arrow Lakes Power Corporation for Arrow Lakes Nutrient Restoration Program to offset the impacts from the Arrow Lakes Generation Station.

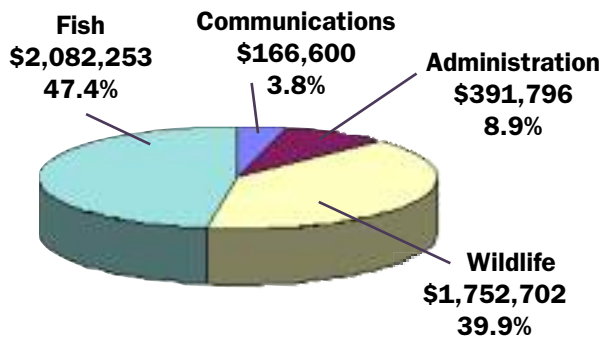
In addition to BC Hydro's contribution through the water licence agreement, the crown corporation also provided the FWCP with \$119,019 from Duncan Dam mitigation funding towards the operations of Kootenay Lake Nutrient Restoration Program.

FWCP funds are allocated across four core service areas;

- 1) Fish Projects;
- 2) Wildlife Projects;
- 3) Administration; and
- 4) Communications.

The breakdown of 2008-2009 FWCP spending (at a total of \$4,393,351) between the core service areas is shown below:

FWCP (Columbia) Spending 2008-2009



A complete list of all the fish and wildlife projects delivered in 2008-2009 is available at www.fwcp.ca and full reports about many of them can be found on our report database at www.fwcp.ca/version2/reports/index.php.

As co-chairs, we are very pleased with the work undertaken and the results achieved by the FWCP in the Columbia Basin during this fiscal year. The efforts have certainly helped the organization meet its goals and mandate on behalf of its three program partners, BC Hydro, B.C. Ministry of Environment and Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Most importantly it has been productive towards conserving and enhancing fish and wildlife populations impacted by the construction of BC Hydro dams in the region.

Kevin Conlin
Steering Committee
Co-Chair

Dave Dunbar
(Acting) Steering Committee
Co-Chair