

KNOWLEDGE BASE

Well-kept Secrets of the First Conservationists



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As the first conservationists, hunters were instrumental in the movement that brought wildlife back from the brink to the abundance we enjoy today. Such organizations as DU, RMEF, FNAWS, B&C

Club, and the HCTF are working hard to secure a sustainable future for our precious wildlife resources.

You're probably asking, "What's the HCTF?" It's one of North America's best-kept conservation secrets: a sportsmen-initiated program that has quietly, efficiently, and significantly advanced the conservation of wildlife, fish, and habitats in British Columbia. Born 26 years ago as a grassroots effort of the hunting, angling, trapping, and guide-outfitting communities, the HCTF evolved into an extraordinary partnership.

British Columbia is the most biologically diverse province in Canada and contains more big-game species than any other province or state in North America. BC citizens have a history of valuing these outstanding resources and they want to make a positive difference. Around 1980, concerned sportsmen in BC approached government with the idea of establishing a volunteer tax on hunting, fishing, trapping, and guide-outfitter licenses to be used for habitat acquisition and fish and wildlife enhancement. Enabling language was added to the Wildlife Act, and an historic public-private partnership, the Habitat Conservation Fund, was born. As the years went by and governments changed, the program evolved into the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, and then to its current form, the

independent Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation. (Learn more at www.hctf.ca.)

The mission of the HCTF is to invest in projects that maintain and enhance the health and biological diversity of British Columbia's fish, wildlife, and habitats so that people can use, enjoy, and benefit from these resources. The HCTF funds a variety of conservation work, including:

- Conservation projects that restore, maintain, or enhance native wild freshwater fish populations and habitats.

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- Conservation projects that restore, maintain, or enhance native wildlife populations and habitats.
- Studies required to initiate or to ensure the success of eligible conservation projects, as described above.
- Information, education, and stewardship projects that enhance users' enjoyment of fish, wildlife, and habitats or that foster human attitudes and behaviors favorable to management and conservation.
- Projects that acquire land or interests in land to secure the value of these areas for conservation purposes.

A proposal-driven organization, the HCTF

invites funding proposals from anyone who has a good idea that seeks to benefit fish, wildlife, or habitat in British Columbia. The work of the HCTF is carried out by a small staff of six members and a board consisting of eight volunteers and two government appointees. The board has a strong bias toward results, investing in projects that have real potential to realize a positive impact. The HCTF prides itself on keeping administrative charges below 10 percent—a level

only dreamed of by most non-profit organizations. Hunters, anglers, trappers, and guide-outfitters contribute to the HCTF's enhancement and education projects through license surcharges. Voluntary contributions, proceeds from the sale of educational materials, and court awards provide additional revenue.

The HCTF celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2006. This milestone marked the direct investment of more than \$90 million in nearly 2,000 conservation projects across the province. Leveraged to \$250,000,000 in partnership support and with the help of thousands of volunteers, HCTF investments have been a major force in shaping the conservation landscape of British Columbia.

In September 2007, the HCTF was presented with the Group Achievement Award at The Wildlife Society's annual conference in Tucson, Arizona. It was a proud moment for me personally, and not just because I serve on the HCTF Board. As a hunter, I appreciated this recognition from wildlife scientists, educators, and management professionals that the "first conservationists" remain at the forefront of wildlife conservation.

I wonder how many other "well-kept secrets" are out there? ■

