

# KNOWLEDGE BASE

## Win-Win Wildlife Investments



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Helping hunters to effectively invest their conservation dollars is serious business. The challenge is to focus funding on well-designed projects that are likely to make a real difference. Especially rewarding are “win-

win” projects that solve wildlife management problems in ways that involve and benefit the hunting community.

Three such projects stood out in a wildlife workshop I attended this November as the chair of the board for the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation (HCTF). Every year the HCTF invests \$5 to \$6 million contributed by hunters, anglers, trappers, and guides and outfitters in conservation projects throughout British Columbia. The workshop brought together HCTF board members, staff, and project leaders to review a selection of past investments and evaluate the difference these projects are making in British Columbia’s conservation landscape.

The first win-win example, the Lower Mainland Roosevelt Elk Recovery Project, emerged as an opportunity to address a nuisance elk problem while attempting to restore Roosevelt’s elk to historic ranges in the southern mainland coast of British Columbia. Elk have been missing here since around 1900, when they were almost extirpated by market hunting. In contrast, by the late 1990s Roosevelt’s elk populations along the

Sunshine Coast had grown to nuisance status in the area’s orchards, golf courses, and urban interface. That’s when the HCTF began funding efforts by government biologists and volunteers to relocate problem elk from the Sunshine Coast to historical ranges along the southern mainland coast and to also monitor individual animals and population responses. The effort has been highly successful, with 20 units thus far re-stocked with Roosevelt’s elk, and several of those are now open to hunting. The return of these “charismatic mega-fauna” is a real draw for tourism as well, making it a win-win-win situation for urban dwellers, hunters, visitors, and all others who appreciate the return of the Roosevelt’s elk to its former haunts.

The next example comes from British Columbia’s East Kootenay, where farmers complained about increasing elk depredation of fields and hay crops and over-grazing on Crown lands. The suggested culprits were non-migratory elk that had adopted a pattern of remaining at low elevation during summer instead of dispersing to the mountains. Government biologists proposed to remedy the problem by creating new hunting opportunities to selectively target the non-migratory animals. The HCTF stepped up to fund the experiment. It began with early cow/calf hunts on low-elevation Crown lands. Next came bow-only general open season and limited entry hunt permits, and further liberalization by adding a general open season for youth and seniors and increased limited entry hunt permits. Monitoring of elk

throughout the project shows the strategy is working to selectively reduce the non-migratory animals. Damage complaints are on the decline. The study is also documenting how elk abundance, distribution, and migration has changed in recent years. Farmers and hunters alike are winners in this work, and elk also stand to benefit as new information gives rise to improved management.

The third example is the Provincial Peregrine Falcon Monitoring Survey that the HCTF has helped support for many years. Peregrine falcons have been described as the “poster child” for endangered species. Once severely depleted by DDT and other pesticides, many peregrine populations are on a path to recovery. In British Columbia, surveys of known and historic nest sites conducted every five years enable biologists to track recovery and better manage the province’s falcon populations. One result is British Columbia’s ability to offer a limited annual harvest of nestlings to be raised and used for falconry. Although falconers are a small minority within the hunting community, falconry is a tradition well worth supporting. This project contributes a wealth of information for the provincial, national, and global recovery of peregrine falcons, and also is a winner with respect to sustainable resource use and the sporting tradition.

Hunters have always been generous supporters of science-based conservation. It’s great to see some of the benefits come directly back to them. ■

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**The Lower Mainland Roosevelt Elk Recovery Project is working to relocate problem Roosevelt elk that have grown to nuisance status in California’s orchards, golf courses, and urban interfaces to the southern mainland coast of British Columbia.**

