

Bummers Flats-Cherry Creek Wetland Restoration

The Issue

Wetlands are critical habitat for many different species and provide important 'ecosystem services' such as stormwater management, water storage and purification, and carbon sequestration. Many engineers and planners view wetlands as 'green infrastructure' and see wetland protection, restoration, or enhancement as a cost-effective way to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change.

Wetlands are also highly vulnerable to climate change. Direct climate impacts like rising temperatures and drought may stress the plants and animals that make up a wetland ecosystem or permit the invasion of non-native species. Indirect impacts like changes in the water cycle could also affect the quality and availability of water to support biodiversity. Natural disasters like floods, wildfires and landslides, which are expected to increase in frequency and intensity along with climate change, pose additional direct threats to wetlands.

With all the climate-related impacts that wetlands will experience in the coming years, ecologists believe that reducing stressors from human activities—such as land development and pollution—will be critical to ensuring the long-term resilience of these important components of our natural environment.

The Action

Recognizing the strategic location of the Bummers Flats – Cherry Creek Conservation Property Complex at the confluence of Cherry Creek and the Kootenay River and along a major bird migration route, The Nature Trust of BC began a 3-year wetland restoration project in 2016. Decades ago, the area's naturally occurring wetlands had been drained and leveled to support ranching.

The project involved restoring naturally appearing and functioning wetlands in the floodplain, including habitat features like islands and woody debris, and planting native vegetation. Prescriptions focused on creating diverse wetland habitats with varying depths, shapes, and seasonal water regimes. This variability will improve the area's resilience in an uncertain climate future.

Over the first two years of the project, 19 hectares of wetlands were restored or enhanced. The improved wetland habitats are already supporting a wide range of species, including amphibians, reptiles, shorebirds, waterfowl, ungulates and large carnivores. The Nature Trust of BC Kootenay Conservation Land Manager, Chris Bosman, said, "It's incredible to see how quickly nature can take back over, following a project like this."

The project received funding from the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program, Environment and Climate Change Canada's National Wetland Conservation Fund, the BC Wildlife Federation and the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation. Visit Columbia Basin Climate Source to learn more about other wetland restoration projects in the region.



Wetland restoration in progress (photo: Doug Newbigging/BCWF)



The Bummers Flats property during and after restoration (photos: Robin Annschild)