

# **Land Trusts and Conservancies in British Columbia**

**A survey by the Land Trust Alliance of British Columbia, 2003  
Summarized by John Scull**

## **Executive Summary**

In the autumn of 2003 a survey of land trusts was undertaken by the Land Trust Alliance of British Columbia in order to draw a picture of the state of land trusts in the province. One large organization and 12 local land trusts/conservancy organizations responded to the detailed survey.

- Four large land trusts and 25 local land trusts are working together and in partnership with foundations, all levels of government, and other conservation organizations to protect natural and heritage values on private land in British Columbia.
- These groups have a history of cooperating on acquisition projects and sharing information and expertise.
- To some extent these groups are in competition with each other for funds and volunteers. The large land trusts are in direct competition with local groups for local donations and fundraising and all the land trusts are in competition with each other for grants at the international, national, and provincial levels.
- All of the local land trusts and one of the large land trusts are fairly young, being founded in the 1990s. Many of the challenges facing the land trust movement are related to its youth and limited experience.
- In addition to acquiring and managing land and conservation covenants, many land trusts are engaged in community stewardship and stewardship education activities.
- Revenue varied widely among groups, with the four large land trusts having budgets approximately 50 times larger than those of local land trusts.
- Local land trusts make a positive economic contribution to their communities, bringing in approximately two dollars in outside funding for every dollar contributed or raised locally.
- Local land trusts are richly connected with the networks of environmental organizations and local governments in their communities.

The challenge facing the Land Trust Alliance of British Columbia is to provide the communications, training, and expertise required by this young and dynamic movement and to build bridges both within the land trust movement and between land trusts, government, other environmental organizations and the general public. The private land conservation movement as a whole needs to continue to work cooperatively and find ways to avoid conflict and competition.

## Overview

Historically, land conservation, including the receipt of land donated by private individuals and businesses, has been the responsibility of national, provincial, and local governments. Private land conservation is a relatively recent phenomenon. The Land Trust and Conservancy movement in British Columbia includes two categories of private organizations. Four large conservancy organizations work throughout the province and 25 smaller local land trusts work in specific communities or regions. There is also one quasi-government land trust, the Islands Trust Fund.

In the autumn of 2003 a survey of land trusts was undertaken by the Land Trust Alliance of British Columbia in order to draw a picture of the state of the land trust movement in British Columbia. Information about the large organizations was mostly taken from their websites or annual reports and verified with their staff. One large organization and 12 local land trust or conservancy organizations responded to a detailed survey. A copy of the survey questionnaire can be obtained by email from [info@landtrustalliance.bc.ca](mailto:info@landtrustalliance.bc.ca).

## Large Land Trusts

**Ducks Unlimited Canada.** The oldest wetland conservation organization and land trust operating in British Columbia is an international organization founded in 1938. Their total budget for Canada is more than \$70 million per year, of which 90% is spent on habitat protection, research, and public education. In BC, Ducks Unlimited has protected over 69,000 ha through purchase, conservation covenants, and management agreements and an additional 71,000 ha have been protected through agreements with various levels of government. The focus of Ducks Unlimited Canada is on conserving wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl, other wildlife, and people.

**The Nature Conservancy of Canada.** Founded in 1962, the Nature Conservancy of Canada has a national mandate to protect Canada's native biodiversity. Their national revenue is more than \$22 million, of which about 62% is spent on land acquisition and 20% is spent on stewardship of land holdings. The Nature Conservancy of Canada has 54 properties in British Columbia for a total of 179,200 ha of protected land. This includes about 37 properties owned freehold and 17 properties protected through conservation covenants.

**The Nature Trust of British Columbia.** Founded in 1971, the Nature Trust is focused on protecting BC's natural diversity of wildlife and plants and their critical habitat through the acquisition and management of ecologically significant land. Their average budget for the past 10 years has been about \$4.5 million. Over the past 30 years, The Nature Trust has invested more than \$50 million to secure over 21,000 hectares and oversee the sustainable management of an additional 40,000 hectares under crown tenure.

**The Land Conservancy of British Columbia.** The newest province-wide land trust was founded in 1997. Annual non-grant revenue is about \$2.7 million. They have about 2,500 members. They have protected more than 100 properties with a total area of about 36,000 ha through purchases and conservation covenants.

## Local Land Trusts

**History.** Community land trusts are a recent phenomenon in British Columbia. The founding dates of the responding organizations ranged from 1991 to 2000 with a median founding date of 1995. As a result of their youth, small size, limited resources and rural locations, local land trusts are just beginning to acquire the expertise and resources they need. Their need for training and professional support is likely to continue for many years.

**Protected land.** The 12 responding organizations typically own 1 or 2 properties and hold 2 to 4 conservation covenants. Two are currently involved in purchases and many reported between 1 and 5 conservation covenants in progress. They have begun to learn that completing conservation covenants is a slow and costly process. Many of their acquisition projects and conservation covenants have been partnerships with local government or with one or more of the four large land trusts.

**Voluntary stewardship.** Many local land trusts also engage in stewardship education, landholder contact, community stewardship, and voluntary land stewardship and restoration programs. 4 respondents reported a total of 512 properties temporarily protected by voluntary stewardship agreements or management agreements. Land stewardship outreach programs have probably reached many more landholders or members of the general public. For many landowners, participation in voluntary stewardship activities is a first step towards donating land, money, or conservation covenants to the local land trust or one of the larger province-wide organizations.

**Funding.** Revenue varied widely among respondents, depending on their age, size, and whether they are engaged in a land acquisition project. Revenues ranged from \$200 to \$400,000 with a median of \$88,000. Most of this money was used for land acquisition. Land trust operations and stewardship education costs ranged from \$200 to \$54,000 with a median of \$3,700 per year.

Reported sources of funding are listed below. Recently canceled provincial programs are indicated with an asterisk.

### Federal government

- Environment Canada
- Department of Fisheries and Oceans
- Human Resources Development Canada

### Provincial government

- Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection
- Fisheries Renewal BC\*
- Urban Salmon Habitat Program\*
- Environmental Youth Team\*
- BC Gaming Commission

### Local government

- Municipal government
- Regional District
- School District
- Land development grant

### Donations

- Memberships
- Endowment Fund income

- Fundraising events

Non-government grants

- Habitat Conservation Trust Fund
- Vancouver Foundation
- Pacific Salmon Foundation
- TD Canada Trust Friends of the Environment Fund
- Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative
- The Real Estate Foundation
- Public Conservation Assistance Fund
- Credit Unions

**Local Economic impact.** Geographically, the largest source of funding was national (median \$65,000) and the second largest was local (median \$33,000). Provincial sources were the lowest, with a median of \$16,000. A few years ago, prior to provincial cutbacks, this picture would have been very different. The 2:1 ratio between local and national fundraising is significant for rural local economies, indicating that land trusts have managed to leverage each local dollar with \$2 in contributions from public and private national donors. Nearly 100% of land trust spending is local, in wages, supplies, services and land purchases.

**Size and strength.** Membership ranged from 5 to 210 (median 35). Respondents reported a good deal of success in recruiting volunteers, both professional and general, with volunteers contributing between 6 and 2,000 hours of work each year, with a median of 70 hours per year. 4 respondents reported having 1 or 2 permanent staff members and 5 reported hiring seasonal or temporary staff.

**Communications.** 50% of respondents reported that they publish a newsletter either quarterly or semi-annually. The size ranged from 4 to 22 pages (median 6 pages) and the circulation ranged from 100 to 800 (median 240). These are predominantly paper newsletters -- of a total circulation of about 2,000, only 175 were reported to be distributed by Email. Only two respondents reported having advertising in their newsletters and the advertising income was small, \$50 and \$150 per issue.

The Land Trust Alliance of British Columbia's journal *The Kingfisher* is read by most staff and a minority of board members but is seldom seen by other members or volunteers.

Respondents reported issuing frequent press releases, with a range between 4 and 30 and a median of 10 per year. They reported less frequent use of paid advertising, with a range from 0 to 15 ads per year and a median of 2 per year.

**Networks.** In addition to the Land Trust Alliance of British Columbia, respondents reported membership or participation in the following coalitions, with numbers indicating the number of reported partnerships:

- One or more of the 4 large land trusts (11)
- Georgia Strait Alliance (4)
- Pacific Streamkeepers Federation (2)
- Wetlandkeepers
- Wildlife Tree Stewardship Initiative
- BC Environmental Network
- Federation of BC Naturalists

**Community Partners.** Respondents reported a high level of interconnectedness in their communities. Community partners included the following, with numbers indicating the number of reported partnerships:

- Other conservation NGOs, including stewardship groups (28)
- Other community NGOs (8)
- Other community land trusts/conservancies (6)
- Regional districts (5)
- Islands Trust (4)
- Naturalist groups (4)
- Municipalities (4)
- Hunting/fishing oriented NGOs (3)
- Department of Fisheries and Oceans - local (3)
- Sierra Club - local (2)
- West Coast Environmental Law Society
- First Nations
- Environment Canada - local
- Ministry of Water, Land, and Air Protection - local
- University College
- Credit Union

**Challenges.** The many challenges described by respondents fit in the following general themes:

- Board development and recruitment
- Volunteer and membership recruitment
- Learning: land management, covenants, acquisitions, organizational management, fund raising
- Long term planning in the face of uncertainty
- Educating the public about conservation and marketing the organization
- Core funding
- Expertise about conservation

**Successes.** Land protection through acquisition was at the top of almost everyone's list of successes. Other topics included:

- Creating an endowment fund
- Successful partnerships
- Stewardship education and resource centre
- Public education, landholder outreach
- Growth and continued existence
- Visibility and recognition in the community