



Stewardship Inspiration Guide



Ideas to empower outdoor recreation groups to become stewards of the places they love to explore.



**Outdoor Recreation
Council of BC**

About the Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia.

The Outdoor Recreation Council of BC is a charitable society with more than 80 organizational members spanning the entire spectrum of outdoor recreation user groups, including paddlers, hikers, mountain bikers, off-road motorcyclists, equestrians, snowmobilers, quad riders, and anglers. We voice the interests and concerns of the organized recreation sector to government, advocate for access and funding, and build capacity within the sector. We indirectly represent more than 100,000 British Columbians.

Join us by [becoming a member](#) or [making a gift](#).



About the author.

Ryan Stuart started writing about his adventures as a way to get paid to play. Twenty years later he's still at it. Look for his name in magazines like Outside, Men's Journal, Ski Canada, online at Hakai and The Narwhal. When he's not typing at his home office in Vancouver Island's Comox Valley, you can find him skiing, hiking, mountain biking, surfing, paddling or fishing somewhere nearby.

Introduction.

Stewardship: the job of supervising or taking care of something.

Inspiration: being mentally stimulated to do creative things

Guide: to show the way

Taken together the three definitions sum up why we created this Stewardship Inspiration Guide: to showcase creative ideas and stimulate new ones for how any group can take care of the places where they recreate.

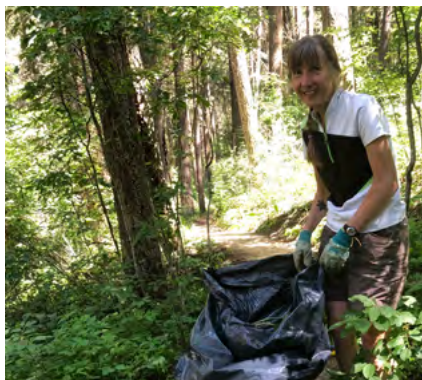
The need has never been greater.

As we all know, more people are recreating outdoors than ever before. Biodiversity is under threat. Habitat loss continues. And climate change poses an existential threat. The provincial government has responded by allocating billions of dollars to help on all fronts. That includes historic investments in recreation infrastructure and committing to protect 30 percent of the province's land and water by 2030. But it's never going to be enough. That's where stewardship comes in.

Every member of the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC has its own unique mission, but we all share a desire to preserve our outdoor playground for the next generations. Acting on that desire is stewardship.

For volunteer-run groups adding another project can seem overwhelming. But we hope the following pages will show that it is doable for any sized organisation. And, more importantly, that there's no end to the good of doing something.





How to use this guide.

Removing invasive species, building a trail to save old growth trees and cleaning up garbage. This inspiration guide highlights examples like these of stewardship projects taken on by groups like yours. Some are complex and costly. Others are easy and cheap. They're all meant to inspire – whether that's to copy or innovate, it doesn't matter.

After each case study we highlight a couple simple lessons and similar projects. None of this is in-depth. It's just meant to pique curiosity and generate ideas. To learn more follow the links and give the organizations involved a call. Most are happy to share their experiences.



Bridging what government can't.

How Minister Heyman defines Stewardship

Stewardship fills in the cracks and gaps.

That's how George Heyman, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, envisions the role of stewardship. With BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails BC under his purview, Heyman knows better than most the important role recreation stewardship plays in the province.

"As humans, we have an inevitable impact on the environment," he says. "Stewardship implies we are here to minimize our negative impact."

In an ideal world of limitless budgets and manpower, the provincial government would conduct all stewardship efforts, he says. The provincial government has invested more than \$100-million in the last three years in BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails. But it's still not enough.

And it never will be. That's why volunteer groups are so important to BC Parks, Recreation Sites and Trails and other parks and protected areas, says Heyman.

This is why the provincial government gave a historic \$10-million grant to the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC to establish a new endowment fund. The Outdoor Recreation Fund of BC will fund work by volunteer-run groups. Heyman says it's a recognition that, while the labour is free, the projects are not.

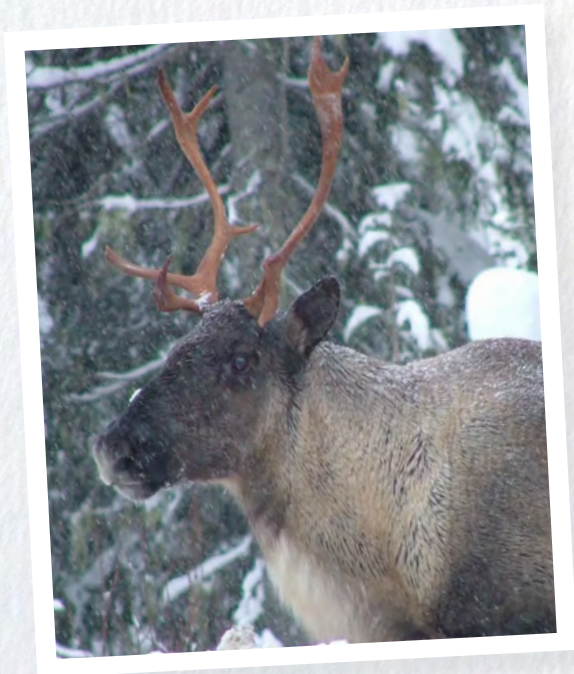
"We try to put the money in the system where it is needed," he says. "But we also recognize the tremendous contribution of volunteers. Whether it's trail maintenance, beach clean-ups, or interpretation programs, volunteering is an important way for people that care about nature to connect with nature and come away with a good sense of satisfaction."

Lead before you are asked.

Snowmobilers have been involved in wild-life recovery for decades. The [Revelstoke Snowmobile Club](#) may have been the first when it voluntarily closed part of a popular snowmobiling area in the early 1980s so riders wouldn't disturb sensitive mountain caribou. Now, with the ungulates considered threatened throughout their range, snowmobilers are again leading in balancing recreation access with protecting mountain caribou.

Between 1997 and 2019 the central Selkirk Mountains caribou population declined by 87 percent, from 222 animals to less than 30. This was due to a wide range of factors impacting their survival, including humans disturbing the animals. In response, the provincial government closed the herd's winter range south of Revelstoke to snowmobiling. But recognizing the significant economic and cultural importance the sport has in the region, provincial

“This project also recognizes that snowmobiles do not alter habitat and reinforces the idea that riders are stewards of the landscape”



government employees worked with the [BC Snowmobile Federation](#) and local sledgers to come up with an adaptable solution that supported recovery efforts, while also maintaining access when and where it did not impact recovery efforts.

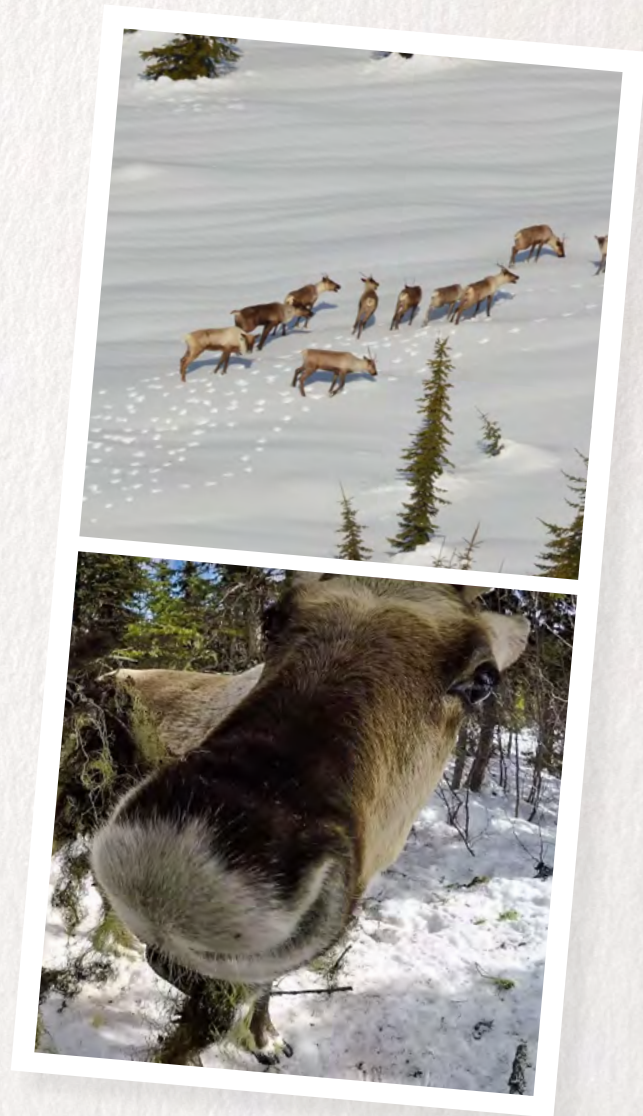
The result is the [Central Selkirk Snowmobile Management Area](#). The Adaptive Management Framework Plan automatically moves public recreation boundaries in response to caribou behaviour. The project first broke up the caribou's winter range into more than 60 zones. Every day at 3 am throughout the winter an automated system pings the location of the GPS collars on

each caribou group and updates a “smart” map. The map uses a complicated algorithm to calculate the caribou’s needed space and closes any zones within two kilometres of the herd groups to snowmobiling. Each morning the riders in the area check the maps and plan their day to only utilise open areas. One day they might be able to ride in one zone and then find it closed the next day.

The system ensures snowmobiling can continue without impacting caribou recovery efforts, says Donegal Wilson, the executive director of the BC Snowmobile Federation.

“This project demonstrates the government’s acknowledgment that the threat to caribou from snowmobile access can be effectively mitigated in real time,” she says. “The plan’s simplicity lies in the fact that closed zones indicate the presence of caribou, resulting in high compliance from riders. This project also recognizes that snowmobiles do not alter habitat and reinforces the idea that riders are stewards of the landscape.”

The same pilot system is now in place in two areas in the Peace River region of the northern Rockies.



Takeaways

Government is open to new solutions to stubborn problems.

Proving a user group’s economic impact helps open doors.

Other examples

Rock climbers in Squamish and elsewhere [close bluffs when nesting bird populations](#) are present.

Catch and release fishing opportunities in many rivers and lakes.

[Temporary trail closures](#) on Whistler trails while wildlife is in the area.

Little efforts lead to big gains.



The second biggest threat to biodiversity is alive and in plain sight: invasive species. Non-native plants and animals blend into the ecosystem but, whether they're bullfrogs taking over ponds or burdock bushes elbowing out native plants, they mess with the ecology. And climate change is making the problems worse. Non-native species tend to thrive in warmer weather, while endemic species suffer.

As the threat increases, recreational groups can play an important role in containing and eradicating the alien invaders.

"A lot of the spread of invasive species is through recreational pathways," says Kellie Sherman, the operations supervisor for the [Canadian Council on Invasive Species](#).

"Many places we recreate in are nice places because they are novel ecosystems with species at risk. If we lose some of those species, we lose some of what makes these places special."

Among its many efforts, the council partners with local chapters and recreation organizations to educate users about invasive species. The most important messaging encourages hikers, cyclists, boaters and off-road vehicle users to clean their equipment after each use, so they don't accidentally carry invasive species from one area to another.



But as the threat of invasive species grows, it's also important for clubs and associations to get proactive, says Clo Godbout-Gauthier, the education and outreach manager for the [Sea to Sky Invasive Species Council](#) (SSISC). Her group partners with nature and recreation clubs between Squamish and Pemberton to educate their members and get their hands dirty.



Historically that's been removing invasive species during a trail-building project or other development. More recently, SSISC is asking for more ongoing help.

The Adopt a Trail program, now called [Banish Burdock](#), encourages businesses, families and individuals to remove invasive common burdock plants along a section of trail in the Whistler area throughout the growing season. Initially launched in 2018, volunteers have removed thousands of kilograms of burdock from Whistler's

Valley Trail so effectively, this year, SSISC is expanding its focus to other trails in the area as well.

It's the kind of project any group or individual can take on, but Godbout-Gauthier says the key is taking the time to teach the volunteers how to properly remove the plant. She says each region of the province has its own invasive species council, whose mandate includes educating and partnering with clubs and groups on similar projects.

Takeaways

Incremental efforts can add up to big results.

Proper training of volunteers is a key ingredient to project success.

Other examples

The [Castlegar Invasive Fishout](#) targets invasive walleye in the Columbia River.

[Broom Busters](#) partners with community groups to cut Scotch broom across Vancouver Island.

Stewardship can be reconciliation.



A group of passionate sea kayakers started the [BC Marine Trails Network Association](#) in 2009 with the goal of connecting all 27,000 kilometres of B.C.'s coastline with a network of 2,000 campsites. Originally that meant a lot of advocating with the provincial government. Since 2018 that has switched to [engagement with First Nations first](#).

“Everything we do, from stewardship on the land, to guidance for how paddlers behave, to mapping where they should and shouldn't go, has a First Nations angle to it,” says Norman Marcy, the chair of the organization's First Nations Engagement Committee. “In the last five years, there's been a total culture shift.”

The change in approach came from a realization that the majority of the sites where boaters stop and camp on the coast are

Indigenous cultural and spiritual sites, says Cam Dalinghaus, the First Nations liaison for the BC Marine Trails. They are only available for recreation due to the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands. Many sites were developed with little input from First Nations in the past and are promoted by guidebooks and resources without consideration for the First Nations, he says.

Since the shift in approach the BC Marine Trails has worked to actively engage with more than 40 of the more than 74 First Nations who are rights holders to the land and water along the coast. “Each First Nation we work with is happy to have a platform to help direct recreation in their territory and have a greater say about what sort of messaging goes out to the recreational community,” says Dalinghaus.

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Engagement is a unique process with each First Nation. Some choose to work with the association to develop visitor guidelines, joint campgrounds or take an entirely new approach to respectful recreation. Most just want a say in choosing which sites the association promotes.

The latter process begins with the BC Marine Trails sharing its database of sites within a traditional territory – launches, campgrounds, campsites and day use areas. If the Nation has concerns about any, they are removed from [the digital map the BC Marine Trails maintains on its website](#). Of the BC Marine Trails’ 2,000 total sites, First Nations have approved about 500, flagged 100 for further research and requested 61 be removed.



There is sometimes pushback about closing sites, says Dalinghaus, but attitudes are changing.

“For a long time, there’s been a sentiment that we have a right to go where we want to,” he says. “I think when people realize we are all recreating on dispossessed land, not Crown land, it’s a lot harder to hold that position.”

Takeaways

Being proactive and transparent helps build trust and lasting relationships with First Nation governments.

First Nations often hold similar values as recreation groups, making them ideal partners.

Other examples

Several mountain bike clubs, including in Pemberton, Squamish and Penticton, [consult with First Nations](#) on trail routing and development plans.

The BC Federation of Drift Fishers is part of [The Lower Fraser Collaborative Table](#), which works with First Nations and commercial fishermen to resolve disputes.

The future of stewardship is green - and that means electric.

There's no greater challenge to the future of recreation than climate change, and tackling it is all inclusive. But figuring out the right projects for clubs and associations to take on can be tricky. Small things – say, holding virtual meetings or encouraging carpooling – can feel common sense. More ambitious goals – like going carbon neutral or large-scale tree planting – can feel overwhelming and out of reach.

Recreation groups in the east Kootenay town of Kimberley found a meaningful way to act by working together to embrace the electric future of playing outdoors.

“Interest in electric recreation is exploding,” says Kevin Pennock, the executive director of the [Kootenay Outdoor Recreation Enterprise](#) (KORE), an incubator for the outdoor gear manufacturing sector in the Kootenay region. “But no one has really studied the potential, and there’s not a lot being developed specifically to serve these users.”

KORE, which is based in Kimberley, partnered with [Kimberley Trails Society](#), Tourism Kimberley and Sustainable Kimberley to develop the [Electrify the Mountains project](#), a plan to turn the town into an electric



recreation hub. With \$851,522 from a provincial COVID tourism recovery fund, they completed the first phase of the project this year.

To cater to the growing e-bike touring market, they built a covered and secure electric bike charging station near the town's centre. In their mountain bike trail network, they renovated existing trails and built 12 kilometres of new ones for the unique needs and capabilities of electric-assist mountain bikes and accessible mountain bikes for disabled riders. And they built accessible washrooms to make the trails and village friendlier for disabled visitors.

In the future, Pennock wants to expand the project to the backcountry with an electric-bike packing route with charging stations at campgrounds and charge points for electric dirt bikes and snowmobiles. Both would help tackle the biggest hurdles to greater electric adoption for recreational vehicles, the lack of charging infrastructure and range anxiety. He hopes with more infrastructure, more riders would trade carbon-emitting gas engines for electric.

Even with just phase one, Kimberley is now home to one of the largest accessible trail networks in North America, making it a

destination for disabled and e-mountain bike riders, says Mike Riediger, the CEO of [Kootenay Adaptive Sport Association](#), which helped design Kimberley's electric trails. But more importantly, the development has also made the trails more accessible to Kimberley residents, young, old and everywhere in between.

"We live in the now," Riediger says. "But given enough time, we will all live with a disability of some sort. Don't we all want to keep riding as long as possible?"



Takeaways

Stewardship efforts often directly benefit users in other ways.

Partnerships help make bigger projects manageable for small organizations.

More inspiration

BC Nature [delivers climate change education](#) through webinars and other resources.

The [David Suzuki Future Ground Network](#) gives community groups the tools to develop their own climate action efforts.

Cleaning up is good for the environment and your reputation

Kim Reeves once voluntarily cleaned up a dump of old diapers. Someone had chucked the dirty nappies along a logging road and the [Four Wheel Drive Association of BC](#) (FWDABC) had stepped up to remove them.

“That was one of the more memorable clean-ups,” says Reeves, the president of the association. “Clean-ups can be fun, but they can also be nasty.”

The FWDABC runs two annual clean-up events on forestry roads in the Lower Mainland, and its 18 member clubs run their own when they spot dumps of garbage in the backcountry. Club members are already equipped to help haul garbage off logging roads and often have access to bigger machinery when necessary. Work parties have removed up to 60 tonnes of garbage in a day, though thousands of kilograms is more common.

Members voluntarily clean up garbage for two main reasons, says Reeves. One is the satisfaction of caring for the environment. “You arrive at a ravine full of garbage, carry it all out, and leave it as it should be,” he says. “Everyone wants to give selflessly and see the results of their work.”



The other is to change generalizations about off-road vehicle enthusiasts. When hikers and bird watchers see piles of garbage on the side of a forest service road, they often assume it was the guy in the truck who they passed a few kilometres back, says Reeves.

In fact, treading lightly is a core value of the association and performing volunteer clean-ups is one way to change what people see when a muddy Jeep drives by.



Takeaways

Stewardship projects feel good and are good PR.
Use club members' assets and skills to help guide efforts.

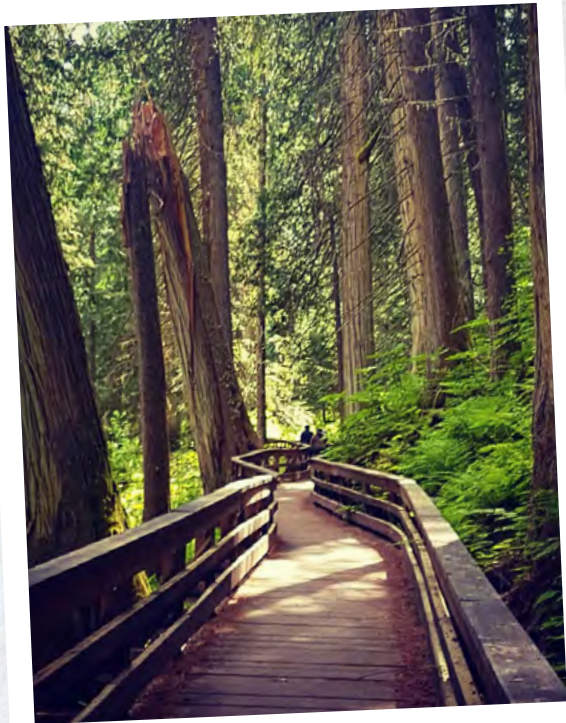
Other ideas

[Ocean Pro Divers](#) organizes scuba diving clean-ups of Lower Mainland lakes every month.

The [Ocean Wise Shoreline Clean Up](#) tasks clubs and individuals with removing garbage off waterways.

Perseverance protects parks.

One of the most biodiverse ecosystems on earth occurs in the Upper Fraser River valley, east of Prince George. The unique combination of high mountains beside the low-elevation Rocky Mountain Trench, deep soils and long summer days, creates an inland temperate rainforest home to more than 2,000 species, including thousand-year-old western red cedars.



The rare forest, about 1.5 hours east of Prince George, was slated to be logged until local naturalists and hikers fought to preserve it.

The ecosystem was unknown to science until 2004 when a student at the University of Northern British Columbia stumbled on the giant trees just off Highway 16, the major artery running across central B.C. When local recreation clubs heard about the trees, they quickly realized the value and the imminent threat.

[The Caledonia Ramblers](#), a hiking club, spearheaded efforts to build a trail into what it called the Ancient Forest. The tactic draws people to the area, which helped build awareness and support to protect the grove.

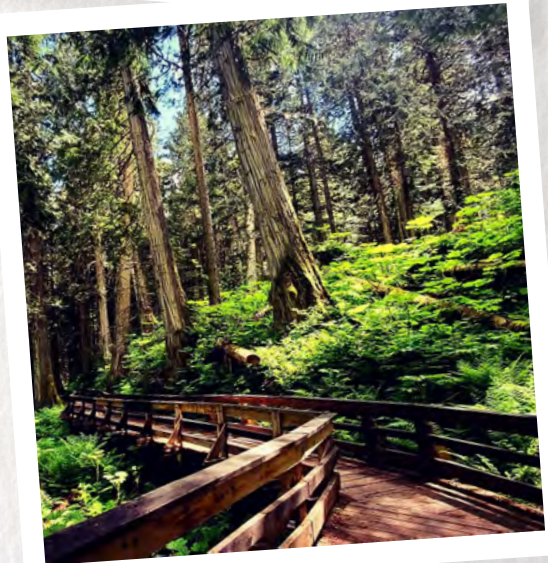
At the same time, more research showed just how important intact inland temperate rainforest ecosystems are, says Darwyn Coxson, an ecosystems science professor at the University of Northern British Columbia. A census revealed the forest is home to 2,400 species of plants, lichens and mosses, which is triple the biodiversity of coastal rainforest ecosystems. More than 20 species exist nowhere else. And only four percent of historic inland old growth cedar forest remains on the landscape.

“It’s a pretty rare component in the ecosystem now,” Coxson says. “Everyone realised we have something really special.”

To protect the forest, the Ramblers worked with the Lheidli T’enneh First Nation, whose traditional territory includes the Ancient Forest, and other environmental and recreation groups. They raised tens of thousands of dollars in donations and volunteered thousands of hours. Finally, in 2016 BC Parks protected 111 square kilometres of the area in, what is now known as, the Ancient Forest/Chun T’oh Whudujut Park.

In typical northern B.C. fashion, the creation of the park happened in a respectful and collaborative way, says Coxson, with industry, First Nations, recreation and government all working together.

“We didn’t have to be confrontational,” he says. “We just had to tell everyone how special this place is. Prince George is a resource town, but everyone appreciates natural values.”



Takeaways

Approach protection goals with the attitude that nature is a universal value. 30x30 conservation goals mean the government is looking to protect wild spaces, especially in collaboration with First Nations.

Other ideas

The [Cumberland Community Forest Society](#) has raised millions of dollars to purchase land from private timber companies. Rock climbers worked with nature organizations to [buy Skaha Bluffs near Penticton and turn it into a provincial park](#).

There is no downside to habitat enhancement.

There are so few coho salmon returning to spawn in the Thompson River watershed the subspecies is now considered threatened, the highest level of concern. All the factors involved are not known, but because coho spend more time in freshwater than other salmon species, habitat loss and a warming climate are definitely part of the problem. The [BC Wildlife Federation](#) is among many groups working on solutions.

On one of its most recent projects, the federation partnered with the Bonaparte First Nation to renovate a side channel on the Bonaparte River near Ashcroft, B.C. Fed by groundwater, side channels are important rearing habitat for juvenile coho because the water stays cooler in summer than the main river, and it provides cover from predators. But this one had become overgrown and clogged.



Crews from the BCWF worked with the Nation to double the length of the channel to one kilometre, clean out sediment, add rocks and woody debris, plant willow saplings to create shade and erect fencing along the entire length to keep cows and horses out.

“This project is going to benefit the people in the community,” says Sean Bennett, the Bonaparte First Nation’s CEO. “It’s going to increase the number of coho in the channel, which is going to hopefully realize benefits for sports fishermen, commercial fishermen and First Nations fishermen. There’s just no downside to these types of projects.”



Takeaways

Enhancing wildlife habitat has many downstream benefits.
Working with First Nations on wildlife projects is a natural fit.

Other ideas

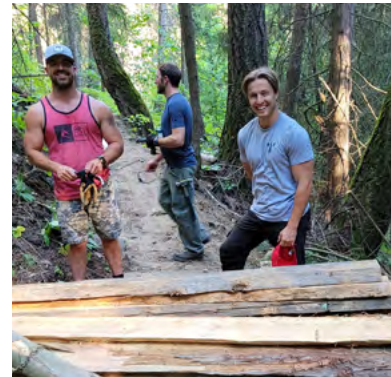
The United Riders of Cumberland [encourage mountain bikers to avoid effected trails](#) during the annual western toad migration.
[BC Nature](#) partners with First Nations on the Central Coast to study the impact of the herring spawn on the ecosystem.

Conclusion.

Recreation is often a selfish pursuit. It's about you blowing off some steam, enjoying your passion, re-centering, and having fun. There's nothing wrong with that. But it's when we take time to connect with ourselves, our friends and the environment that we return home from our passion a better version of ourselves.

The same is true about stewardship. Most outdoor clubs could argue they already do it. They exist to maintain trails or advocate for wildlife. But we hope this inspiration guide has shown that it's when groups reach beyond their niche to projects that benefit a larger community that they experience the most rewarding benefits.

With that in mind maybe there's a better definition of stewardship: to inspire individuals and groups to come up with creative ways of making the world around them a better place for everyone.



Stewardship:

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