

2023-24

ANNUAL REPORT



Freshwater Fisheries
Society of BC

2023-24 Highlights

352,500

anglers purchased an annual, eight-day,
or one-day fishing licence

5

new fishing docks
were installed
in 2023

4.94

million fish were stocked into 652 lakes



30,600

Learn to Fish participants attended 918 sessions
across the province

The Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC was formed as a non-profit organization on March 26, 2003. Working in partnership with government, industry, and anglers, our goal is to make fishing in British Columbia even better through the enhancement and conservation of B.C.'s freshwater fish resources.

Message from our President and Board Chair



ANDREW WILSON
PRESIDENT



GEORGE IWAMA
CHAIR

The Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC started the 2023-2024 fiscal year celebrating and reflecting on what we had achieved in the first 20 years as a non-profit organization. Since our inception in 2003, our commitment to enhancing and conserving B.C.'s freshwater fisheries for the benefit of the public remains at the core of everything we do. We value the strong relationships we have built and maintained with the Province of British Columbia, as well as other key partners and supporters, to help deliver our mandate while striving to make fishing in B.C. even better.

In 2023 we rolled out a new five-year strategic plan which will help chart the direction of our organization for the future. Our commitment to the angling community and strong conservation ethic are woven into all aspects of our business, and reflected in our core strategic objectives. Building resilience to climate change while continuously seeking ways to reduce our environmental footprint is a guiding principle of the new plan. We have also put a focus on removing barriers and providing equitable access – for both fishing and employment – to the diverse people who live, work, and recreate in British Columbia. We will support the Province with the implementation of their reconciliation mandate, while exploring measures to build and sustain respectful relationships with all Indigenous Peoples. And finally, maintaining and building collaborative partnerships will allow us to fund a broader scope of programs and services that benefit recreational fisheries, beyond the delivery of the provincial stocking program, while securing our viability as a not-for-profit organization in the years to come.

We wish to take this opportunity to thank our board, management team, and employees for creating an exceptional workplace. We are proud of the culture of innovation and quality shown by our staff, and the commitment to supporting diverse and thriving recreational fisheries across this province. We look forward to where the next twenty years as an organization take us, and know that the future is in good hands. We also wish to thank the organizations and partners who worked with us over this past year. Many of the projects highlighted in this report would not be possible without you! And finally, we thank the anglers of British Columbia who continue to support us each year by purchasing a fishing licence.

Board of Directors

Our organization is overseen by a Board of Directors. The Board is comprised of up to six independent members, two members appointed by the Province, and the Society's president. The Board sets policy, provides strategic direction, and monitors the financial and operational health of the organization. The president is a non-voting director responsible for the ongoing operations and management of the organization. New independent members are selected by the Board of Directors.

Board members for 2023-2024 are:

George Iwama, *Chair*

Kathy Ruddick, *Vice Chair*

Murray Jacobs, *Secretary/Treasurer*

Jamie Ross, *Director*

Steve Matthews, *Director*

Mike Ramsay, *Director*

Hillary Ward, *Director*

Andrew Wilson, *President*

Senior Management Team

The President and senior management team are responsible for all operations and programs delivered by the Society. We employ 68 full-time and 47 seasonal staff across our three divisions. Senior management team members for 2023-2024 are:

Andrew Wilson, *President*

Tammy Longbottom, *Director, Human Resources*

Natalie Power, *Vice President, Finance and Information*

Adrian Clarke, *Vice President, Science and Recreational Fishing Development*

Tim Yesaki, *Vice President, Operations*

Business divisions

Hatchery Operations

We own and operate six major fish hatcheries located in Duncan, Abbotsford, Summerland, Clearwater, Fort Steele, and Vanderhoof. Our hatcheries raise and release trout, char, and kokanee into 800 lakes around the province for the recreational stocking program. The Freshwater Fisheries Society also provides recovery and conservation programs for endangered species, such as white sturgeon.

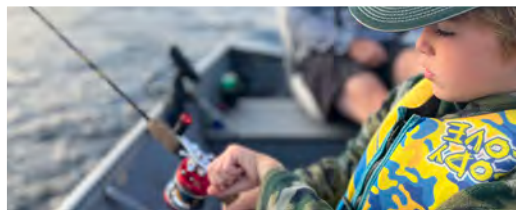
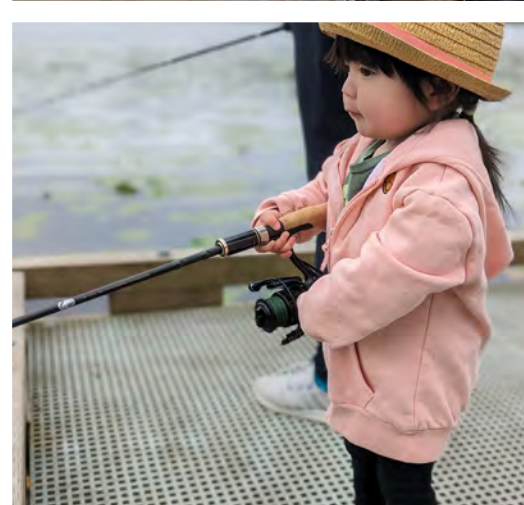
Science and Recreational Fishing Development

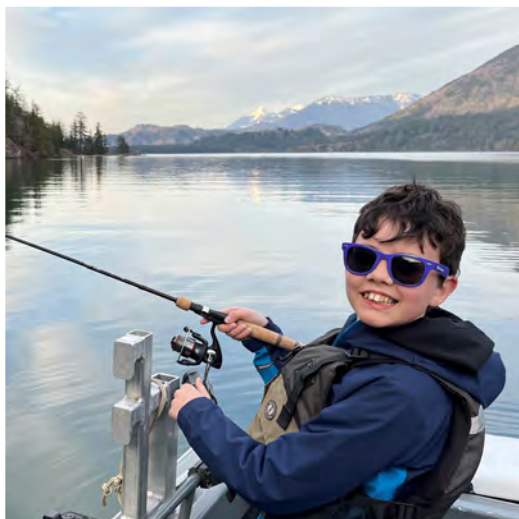
Our science and outreach staff provide professional support and leadership for program evaluation, applied research, planning, and development. As well, this division oversees projects to improve access to fisheries and the delivery of our Learn to Fish program.

Corporate Services

Based out of Victoria, this division provides financial, information systems, marketing and communication, human resources, and administrative coordination to support the Society's business.







An aerial photograph of a calm, greenish-blue pond surrounded by lush green grass and dense evergreen trees. In the upper left, a paved area with a white pickup truck and a white RV is visible. A small wooden dock with a ramp extends into the water on the right side. In the foreground, three people are standing on the grassy bank, fishing. Two blue plastic tubs are on the ground near them. The water is clear, and many small fish are visible near the surface. The title 'Year in Review' is overlaid in large white text.

Year in Review

Recruit, retain, and reactivate freshwater anglers



Learn to Fish

The Learn to Fish program was developed in response to a documented decline in angler participation that followed a peak in recreational fishing's popularity in the mid-1990s. Since 2006, the Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC has been introducing youth and adults to the passion of fishing through the program. At each session, Learn to Fish participants are taught how, when, and where to catch fish. In addition to the fishing basics, youth and adults also learn about fish habitat, how to identify their catch, and how to fish responsibly. They then practice what they've learned with hands-on fishing experience.

In 2023, we delivered 918 sessions to 30,600 participants, including 18,900 youth and 11,700 adults. Ninety-two percent of adult participants were either new, lapsed, or occasional anglers (with little to no prior fishing experience), and 62% of youth participants had never fished prior to

attending a session. Thirty percent of the adults reported purchasing a fishing licence after participating.

Thanks to the generous financial support of our partners, Learn to Fish events are offered free of charge at locations across British Columbia.

Vanderhoof community fishing pond

The construction of a new community trout fishing pond at the Nechako White Sturgeon Conservation Centre was completed in December, just before winter fully set in. Finishing touches – including an aeration system, landscaping, hydroseeding, and stocking the pond with trout – will happen in the spring. We look forward to inviting the public to cast a line in the summer of 2024. This project was made possible thanks to the support of the District of Vanderhoof and Northern Development Initiative Trust.

Community fishing ponds are stocked with catchable-sized rainbow trout, and are now located at four of our hatchery visitor centres including Fort Steele, Abbotsford, and Clearwater. The Abbotsford pond is for registered program participants only, but all others are open to the public from May 1 to October 31, dawn to dusk.

Fishing access

By leveraging funding and support from the Province, regional governments, and local fishing clubs, we've been investing in day-use facilities, trails, boat launches, and fishing docks. More than 90 docks have been installed in lakes around British Columbia over the past eight years, helping to make fishing more accessible for local residents and visiting anglers.

In 2023, thanks in part to a Destination Development grant from the Ministry of Tourism, we improved or added fishing access infrastructure to a number of lakes across the province. New docks were installed on Beavertail and Darkis lakes (Campbell River) on Vancouver Island, and on Herman (Blind Bay) and Badger (Kamloops) lakes in the Thompson-Nicola Region. Onion Lake (Terrace) in the Skeena Region received trail improvements in addition to a new dock. Recreation site improvements to road access, boat launches, amenities, and campsites were made at Bluey Lake in the Thompson-Nicola Region, and at Bog Lake in the Cariboo.

We also provided financial support to Tourism Fernie for the delivery of access improvements along the Elk River. The project, which is further supported by a grant from the Targeted Regional Tourism Development Initiative, includes improving boat launches, parking, road access, signage, and amenities at three key access points.



Fishing BC cooperative marketing partnership

Fishing BC entered its eighth year as a sector association, promoting British Columbia as a fishing tourism destination to markets in B.C., Canada, and the United States. Formed in 2016 by the Freshwater Fisheries Society, BC Fishing Tourism Association, and Sport Fishing Institute of BC, the sector receives matched funding from Destination BC's Cooperative Marketing Partnership Program. Fishing BC helps drive industry collaboration, leverage and align marketing efforts with provincial and regional strategies, and raise the profile of the fishing tourism sector – much of which takes place in rural communities. With 15 community and regional Tourism partners from across the province, advertising campaigns for 2023-2024 focussed on B.C. anglers, but also on capturing and re-growing Canadian and key U.S. markets.

New website

Our gofishbc.com website is a key communication tool for providing anglers with up-to-date stocking data, research updates, information about the Learn to Fish program, and tips on where and how to fish. With the existing website nearing its end of life, we made the decision to develop a new one, updating some features while moving key information to a new content-management system. Since launching the new site in July 2023, we've seen a 20% increase in visitor traffic to our website.

2

Supporting diverse and thriving recreational fisheries



Projects benefitting recreational fisheries around the province

Since 2015, fisheries biologists and managers from the provincial government and Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC have identified and prioritized projects that benefit recreational fisheries – both wild and stocked – around the province. Funding for projects approved by the Small Lakes, Large Lakes, and Rivers committees comes from licence fees. To date, the Society has approved over \$9 million for more than 500 projects.

For the ninth year of the program, the three technical fisheries committees recommended projects for a combined total of \$882,000 in funding, including 16 small-lakes projects, 14 large-lakes projects, and 19 rivers projects.

Examples of projects funded in 2023-2024:

- \$30,000 towards the restoration and protection of Penticton Creek, an important fish-bearing tributary to Okanagan Lake and the Columbia Basin. This multi-year, multi-partner initiative represents a major habitat investment to re-establish a natural kokanee stream through the urban core of the City of Penticton.
- \$20,000 towards a fertilization program to improve the growth of stocked trout and kokanee in four small lakes on Vancouver Island. It is challenging for many small lakes on the island to grow large fish because of lakes' naturally low nutrient levels. A nutrient boost, through fertilization, creates a cascade effect; more aquatic plant growth leads to more zooplankton (small aquatic animals) which provide more food for fish. Early results on a couple of the lakes look promising.
- \$27,500 to estimate the abundance of wild westslope cutthroat trout in the Elk River, a premier fly-fishing destination in the Kootenays. Population size is an important factor to consider when developing appropriate fishing regulations to both protect the fish and ensure that quality angling can be supported.
- \$90,000 to support a predator-reduction program and other tools identified in the Kootenay Lake Action Plan. The multi-pronged, multi-year approach to recover kokanee populations requires sustained efforts to be effective on such a large and complex waterbody.
- \$2,500 towards the final year of a five-year, in-depth evaluation of coastal cutthroat trout habitat use, movement, and fishery exploitation in Cowichan Lake. This wild trout population grows impressively sized fish, and supports an extremely popular fishery. The project resulted in a better understanding of the fish population, and helped ensure that appropriate regulations are in place to maintain the fishery.
- Stock assessment and monitoring projects on additional wild and stocked fisheries were completed, and funding support was provided for River Guardian programs, creel surveys, and angler questionnaires.

Native Trout Stewardship Initiative

Four community stewardship projects were funded in 2023-2024, for a total of \$40,000. Most funding went towards supporting two initiatives on the Saanich Peninsula, including ongoing restoration and monitoring efforts on Craigflower Creek, and restoration work on Teetayut (Sandhill) Creek. Both creeks support wild coastal cutthroat trout whose populations continue to provide a small but popular fishery in the adjacent estuarine habitats, and are highly valued by local anglers.



Scholarships

Since 2008, the Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC has awarded \$84,500 in scholarships to 51 students at various levels of post-secondary study. The scholarships recognize outstanding commitment to academic pursuits in the field of freshwater fisheries, and are available to students enrolled in fish culture or natural

resource management programs within a recognized post-secondary educational institution in British Columbia. In 2023, four scholarships were funded. Three were awarded by the Society to students enrolled in fish culture programs. Funds for the fourth scholarship were directed to Soroptimist International to support a scholarship targeted toward Indigenous female applicants.



3

Innovative and responsible freshwater fish culture

Raising and releasing fish to support recreational fisheries

Each year, in consultation with provincial fisheries biologists, we stock trout, kokanee, and char – from fry to a catchable size – to provide recreational fisheries for B.C. anglers. In the fiscal year 2023-24, our hatcheries raised and released 4.94 million fish into 652 lakes around the province. To support the Province's anadromous program, we also assisted in the release of juvenile steelhead and coastal cutthroat into a small number of coastal streams. Fish for the anadromous steelhead program are raised in a combination of Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC (FFSBC), Community, and Federal hatcheries.

Small Lakes Recreational Stocking

ADMINISTRATIVE REGION	COASTAL & WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT		EASTERN BROOK TROUT		KOKANEE		RAINBOW TROUT	
	FISH STOCKED	LAKES STOCKED	FISH STOCKED	LAKES STOCKED	FISH STOCKED	LAKES STOCKED	FISH STOCKED	LAKES STOCKED
Vancouver Island	12,800	9			6,950	2	168,346	48
Lower Mainland	4,000	5					95,332	35
Thompson			106,515	25	127,200	9	827,911	156
Okanagan			28,400	18	7,000	2	430,981	98
Kootenay-Boundary	2,346	4	13,750	9	52,717	13	232,528	79
Cariboo			62,500	7	887,086	18	1,393,684	91
Skeena			11,000	4	4,300	2	51,000	15
Omineca			61,070	10	85,800	4	221,250	43
Peace			12,000	3			32,200	12
TOTAL	19,146	18	295,235	76	1,171,053	50	3,453,232	577

Coastal Rivers Recreational Stocking

ADMINISTRATIVE REGION	PROGRAM	STEELHEAD		ANADROMOUS CUTTHROAT	
		FISH STOCKED	RIVERS STOCKED	FISH STOCKED	RIVERS STOCKED
West Coast – Vancouver Island	Federal	32,829	2		
	Community				
	FFSBC			8,548	1
South Coast – Lower Mainland	Federal	157,677	4		
	Community	16,261	2		
	FFSBC	36,857	2		
TOTAL		243,624	10	8,548	1



Conservation stocking support for recovery programs

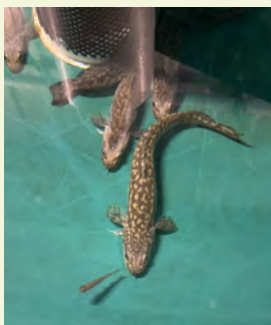
In addition to the recreational stocking program, we provide conservation recovery support to the Province for endangered species like white sturgeon. In 2023-2024, we provided fish culture services to support recovery initiatives for the following:

Nechako white sturgeon – 300 juveniles released into the Nechako Watershed

Columbia white sturgeon – 373 juveniles released into the mid- and upper-Columbia system

Kootenay Lake kokanee – 2,786,415 eggs planted for the Kootenay Lake recovery initiative

Supporting recovery of East Kootenay burbot



burbot population has shown no signs of recovery on its own. However, preliminary results indicate recovery actions in Idaho (below the Libby Dam) are helping

Limited data and anecdotal information suggest that the Kootenay watershed burbot population has been in a state of serious decline since at least the 1970s. The decline is attributed to overharvesting and the construction of major dam facilities. Despite closing the recreational fishery, the

to restore the lower Kootenay watershed burbot population.

A pilot conservation-culture program has been established at the Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC's Kootenay Trout Hatchery to evaluate the potential to raise and spawn burbot in captivity as a tool to support a recovery initiative in the upper Kootenay River watershed. This is the first-ever effort in Canada to rear burbot in captivity for conservation. We have 76 juvenile burbot on-hand from captures in the fall of 2021, 2022, and 2023. We are uncertain of the timing of maturity for these fish, but have equipment and infrastructure in place for a potential spawn in the winter of 2025.

Westslope cutthroat trout stocking program

The sole collection site for westslope cutthroat trout eggs is Connor Lake, located in Height of the Rockies Provincial Park. Eggs are collected every two years for the East Kootenay westslope cutthroat recreational stocking program. Unfortunately, the spawning returns in 2022 were below average. To maintain the local fish population, we did not take eggs for the hatchery program. Instead, a limited number of fish from the 2020 brood year were held for stocking in 2023.



Supporting recovery of endangered white sturgeon populations

Our current Nechako program goal is to release two-year-old juvenile sturgeon at 70 centimetres or 2.5 kilograms (equivalent in size to a wild, five-year-old sturgeon). As a result, our Nechako White Sturgeon Conservation Centre hatchery has two brood years on-site at all times. In June 2023, 300 juvenile white sturgeon were released at three sites on the Nechako River, and two in Fraser Lake.

Columbia white sturgeon are raised in our Kootenay Trout Hatchery from wild fertilized eggs collected on mats in the Columbia River each spring. Juvenile sturgeon from the 2022 brood year were released into the Columbia River near Trail and Castlegar. Juvenile sturgeon from the 2022 and 2021 brood years were also released into Arrow Lakes, at Shelter Bay. Columbia sturgeon are released at sizes ranging from 200 to 500 grams.



Partners and Sponsors

Our primary and contractual partner is the Province of B.C. through the Ministry of Forests. We work closely with and support the province's Fish and Wildlife Branch and regional fisheries biologists. To deliver many of the research, outreach, and conservation initiatives we are involved in, we rely upon the financial support of our valued partners and sponsors.

Research and Development

Carleton University
Department of Fisheries and Oceans
Genome BC
Genome Canada
Mitacs Accelerate Program
Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council
Simon Fraser University
Thompson Rivers University
University of British Columbia
University of British Columbia – Okanagan Campus
University of Calgary
University of Ottawa
University of Victoria
University of Windsor

Angler Access

BC Parks
Fishing Highway 24 Tourist Association
Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport
Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure
Province of British Columbia
Recreation Sites and Trails BC
Tourism Fernie

Learn to Fish and Outreach Programs

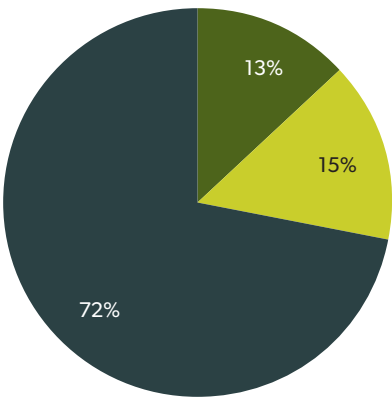
Backroad Mapbooks
BC Ram Dealers
B.C. Wildlife Federation
Canada Summer Jobs
City of Victoria
Columbia Basin Trust
Courtenay Fish and Game Association
Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation
Luhr Jensen and 13 Fishing
Mawer Investment Management Ltd
Mosaic Forest Management
Northern Lights Winery
Teck Highland Valley Copper
Yamaha Motor Canada Ltd.

Sturgeon and Kokanee Recovery Programs

BC Hydro
Carrier-Sekani Tribal Council
Creston Valley Rod and Gun Club
District of Vanderhoof
Ministry of Forests
Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
Nechako Environmental Enhancement Fund
Province of British Columbia
Rio Tinto

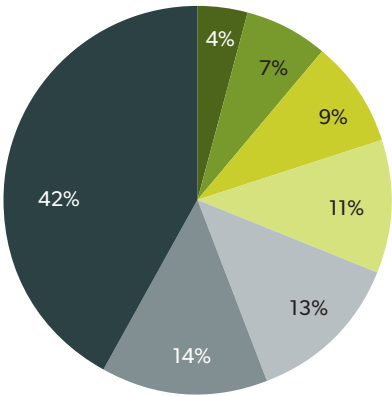
Revenue Sources ('000)

Freshwater Fishing Licence Fees	\$	11,237
Province of B.C.		2,352
Partners and Sponsors		2,064
TOTAL	\$	15,653



Expenses ('000)

Recreational Stocking Program	\$	6,675
Conservation and Restoration		2,256
Administration and Support Services		2,057
Outreach, Marketing and Development		1,807
Facility Upgrades and Innovation		1,419
Research		1,055
Fisheries Committee Projects		676
TOTAL	\$	15,945



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Your licence dollars at work.

100% of freshwater fishing licence fees go toward making fishing in B.C. even better.