

For Immediate Release:

Biodiversity and Bighorn Sheep saved through habitat purchase in South Okanagan

Skaha Lake property now protected from future development

March 11, 2022, South Okanagan, BC - Today, [The Nature Trust of British Columbia](#), one of the province's leading non-profit land conservation organizations announced that 29.2 hectares (72 acres) of ecologically important land has been purchased for conservation in the South Okanagan.

The property expands The Nature Trust's Skaha Lake Eastside conservation complex, south of Penticton. This new property is adjacent to the McTaggart-Cowan/nsek'lniw't Wildlife Management Area and provides valuable habitat for several species at risk.

The Skaha Lake Eastside conservation complex adds important habitat for Bighorn Sheep for foraging, lambing, and escaping predators. Due to its ecologically rare and important ecosystems including grasslands, open forests, and rocky terrains, Bighorn Sheep can have all their needs met on this property and the surrounding area including birthing lambs in the spring.

Open and native grassland cover less than 1 per cent of BC's land base and provide habitat for more than 30 per cent of BC's species at risk. Grasslands support more threatened and endangered plants and animals than any other habitat type in the province. With the South Okanagan irreversibly losing native grasslands due to human development and cultivation, it is crucial we protect the undisturbed grasslands that remain.

Bighorn Sheep are a species of provincial concern in British Columbia. They depend on mixed habitat to survive including cliffs, grasslands, and escape terrain. Human pressures on their habitat have reduced their distribution in the Okanagan. Their grassland habitat has experienced degradation, fragmentation and outright loss. Increased human activity has disrupted their movements, decreased population size, and increased their susceptibility to disease.

The mixture of diverse and sensitive ecosystems on the property will also protect habitat for a variety of species listed under *Canada's Species at Risk Act (SARA)*, including, Pallid Bat (threatened) American Badger (endangered), Lewis's Woodpecker (threatened), Western Screech Owl (threatened), Desert Nightsnake (endangered), Western Rattlesnake (threatened), and Great Basin Gophersnake (threatened).

Each species has a role to play in ensuring the persistence of biodiversity and a healthy ecosystem. Protected areas are the best way to ensure biodiversity can flourish undisturbed in perpetuity.

This project was made possible by the Government of Canada through the Natural Heritage Conservation Program, part of Canada's Nature Fund, Habitat Conservation Trust

Foundation, Wild Sheep Foundation (including Midwest and Eastern Chapters), Wild Sheep Society of BC, and many other individual supporters.

##

QUOTES:

“The Nature Trust of BC has been purchasing land for conservation in the south Okanagan since 1975. Protecting properties like Skaha Lake Eastside, with complex and sensitive ecosystems that support many at-risk species, is one of our top conservation priorities. When we save habitat for Bighorn Sheep, we also protect numerous other species at risk.

— Jasper Lament, CEO, The Nature Trust of BC

“The east side of Skaha Lake represents some of the most iconic and spectacular vistas and terrain the Okanagan has to offer. Increasing the resiliency of this conservation complex by protecting it in perpetuity is a remarkable accomplishment for NTBC, our partners and the wildlife that depend on these lands for their survival.”

— Nicholas Burdock, Okanagan Conservation Land Manager, The Nature Trust of BC

“By securing this latest piece of ecologically significant land, NTBC continues contributing to a growing assembly of conserved lands that provide important habitat for many wildlife species such as Bighorn sheep. Large landscapes with protected intact grasslands, forests and wetland habitats become more resilient to the impacts of climatic change and provide more connected linkages for wildlife. The Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation is excited to partner with NTBC and the other funding partners on the Skaha Lake Eastside conservation complex to conserve these habitats for wildlife into the future.”

— Dan Buffett, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, CEO

“The twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss are two sides of the same coin, and we must tackle them together. By working with partners such as The Nature Trust of British Columbia, we are helping to protect the natural environment in British Columbia and across the country. Programs like the Canada Nature Fund’s Natural Heritage Conservation Program are helping us progress toward conserving a quarter of lands and oceans in Canada by 2025.”

– The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change

FACTS:

- Skaha Lake Eastside is in the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen, and is adjacent to the McTaggart-Cowan/nsək’łniw’t Wildlife Management Area.
- The purchase of this property expands the network of conserved lands in one of BC’s biodiversity hotspots.

- Skaka Lake Eastside consists of ecologically rare and important grassland, forest and rocky terrain.
- Grasslands cover less than 1 percent of BC's land base and provide habitat for more than 30 percent of BC's species at risk. Grasslands support more threatened and endangered plants and animals than any other habitat type in the province.
- Skaha Lake Eastside is a haven for species of concern, particularly Bighorn Sheep. Due to the loss and fragmentation of their habitat, Bighorn Sheep distribution has been reduced in the Okanagan. Human activity has disrupted their lifecycle, decreased their population size, and increased their susceptibility to disease.
- Species at risk known to frequent the property include provincially blue-listed Bighorn Sheep, federally-listed Pallid Bat, American Badger, Lewis's Woodpecker, Western Screech Owl, Desert Nightsnake, Western Rattlesnake, and Great Basin Gophersnake.

ABOUT:

The Nature Trust of BC

The Nature Trust of British Columbia is a leading non-profit land conservation organization with a 50 year history of successfully protecting and caring for B.C.'s most critical habitats. Since 1971, The Nature Trust of BC and its partners have acquired more than 72,000 hectares (178,000 acres) of ecologically significant land to save vulnerable wildlife, fish and plants.

Natural Heritage Conservation Program

The Government of Canada's Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP) is a unique public-private partnership to support new protected and conserved areas by securing private lands and private interests in lands. The program is managed by the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC). Federal funds invested in the program are matched with contributions raised by NCC and its partners, Ducks Unlimited Canada and the country's land trust community.

LEARN MORE:

Nature Trust

Visit: www.naturetrust.bc.ca

Follow us on Twitter: @NatureTrustofBC twitter.com/NatureTrustofBC

Become a fan on Facebook: www.facebook.com/NatureTrustofBC/

CONTACT:

The Nature Trust of BC

Alicia Collyear, Communications Manager

Naturetrust@yulupr.com

604-558-1656

