Economic Case Study Series





The collective voice and coordinating body for BC’s watershed workforce

Supporting people, organizations, and systems that protect and restore watershed health across the province.

Watershed Fields

BC's watershed workforce spans six fields:



Economic Case Study

Ecological Restoration

Restoring Watersheds, Strengthening BC's Economy



This Economic Case Study was developed with support from WWF-Canada

Inside this **CASE STUDY**

How restoration contributes to BC's economy, what's working, and where the sector can grow.

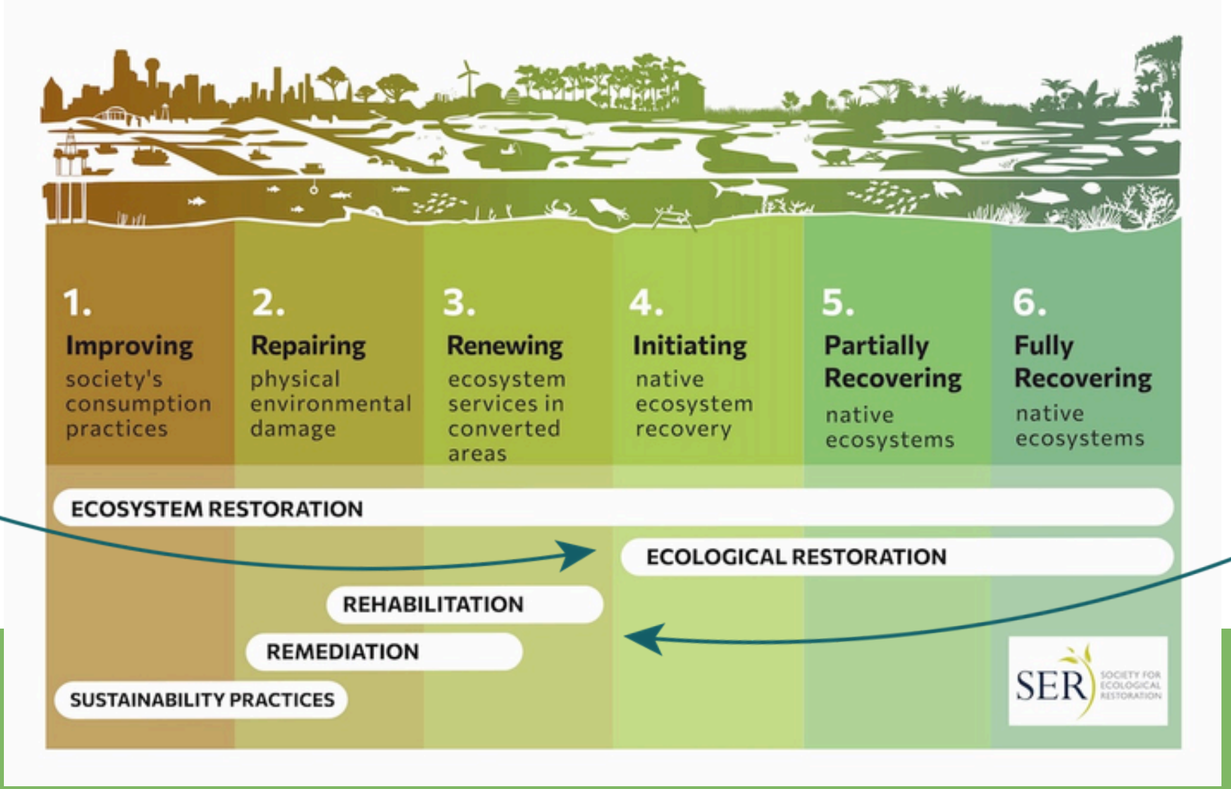
1. **Ecological Restoration**
2. **Restoration Economy**
3. **Success Stories**
4. **Growth Opportunities**
5. **Spotlights**
6. **Key Messages**

Note: All dollar values in this case study are provided in CA$ unless otherwise stated.



1 Ecological Restoration **AT A GLANCE**

Ecological restoration refers to the process of assisting the recovery of a native ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed.[1]



Remediation and rehabilitation are related activities that reduce degradation and support recovery, but sit outside ecological restoration.

Ecological Restoration **BUILDING MORE THAN ECOSYSTEMS**



2 Restoration Economy
FROM COST TO OPPORTUNITY



Restoration economy refers to economic activities, industries, and jobs that directly or indirectly contribute to restoring degraded or damaged ecosystems.[2]

This framing shifts restoration from an environmental cost to an economic opportunity that generates socio-economic benefits and attracts investment.

Restoration Economy
TANGIBLE ACTIVITIES

Supporting activities

Planning and Design

Site assessment, benchmark-setting, endpoint definition, cost-benefit analysis, risk assessment, and species selection.

Operations & Knowledge Systems

Native seed and plant supply, remote sensing, laboratory work, and data management and analysis.

Social, Institutional & Financial Support

Community co-design, Indigenous knowledge integration, regulatory compliance, operational support, training, and industry partnerships.

Field activities

A continuum of intervention from unassisted recovery to intensive reconstruction.
Planting, monitoring, sampling, maintenance, and equipment operation.

Restoration Economy
RISK & OPPORTUNITY



US$20:1 RESTORATION RETURNS

A global review accounting for broader economic, social, and environmental benefits found returns of more than US$20 for every dollar spent.[3]



US$259B AT RISK IN CANADA

Unchecked nature loss could put 11% of Canada's GDP at risk within the next 15 years, with fishing (26%) and forestry (25%) sectors most exposed to ecosystem degradation.[4]

Restoration Economy

PUBLIC SUPPORT

Canadians almost unanimously agree that nature is one of the country's most valuable economic assets and critical for long-term economic resilience and independence.[5]

Nature is one of Canada's most valuable economic assets



96%
91% in 2025

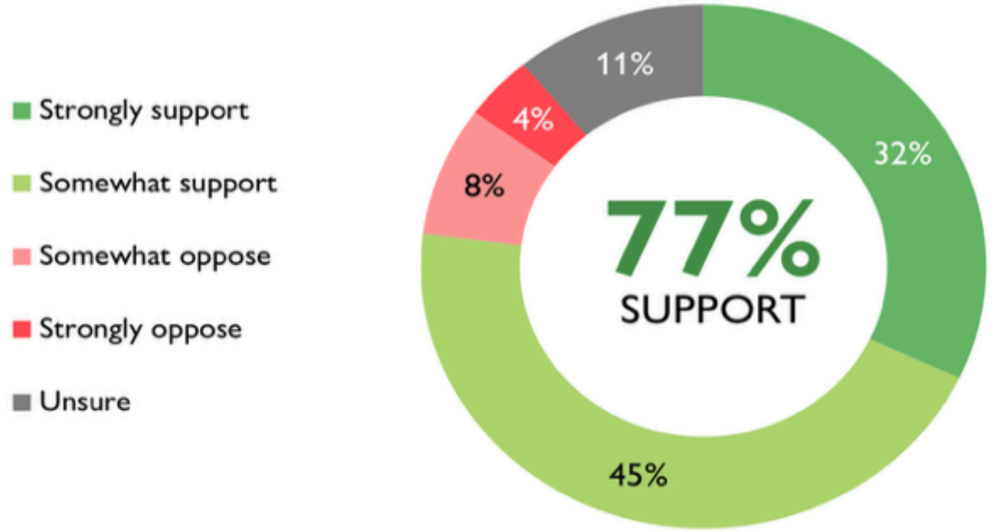
Nature is critical for long-term economic resilience and independence



93%
87% in 2025

Strongly agree Somewhat agree Disagree

More than three in four Canadians support treating investments that improve natural assets as investments in long-term economic resilience, similarly to roads, bridges and other infrastructure.[5]



Restoration Economy
WORKFORCE SCALE



7%

CANADA'S WORKFORCE[6]

Engaged in or supporting environmental protection, natural resource management, and sustainability activities.



480K

ADDITIONAL GREEN WORKERS[6]

Needed across Canada over the next decade, highlighting opportunities for job creation in the restoration economy.



4200

BC RESTORATION JOBS[7]

Jobs supported across Indigenous Nations, stewardship organizations, engineering, environmental consulting, and landscaping.

Restoration is part of a growing, diverse workforce, creating opportunities across technical, professional, community-based, and on-the-ground roles.

Restoration Economy

WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

Restoration draws on a diverse range of occupations, skills, and expertise across the economy.

BUILD & RESTORE

Tradespeople & Labourers

Provide practical skills in construction, maintenance, remediation, and reclamation that are foundational to delivering green infrastructure projects.

DESIGN & INNOVATE

Technicians, Technologists, Engineers & Scientists

Apply technical and scientific expertise to design, plan, and develop environmental solutions, including climate-resilient infrastructure, erosion management, and forest conservation.

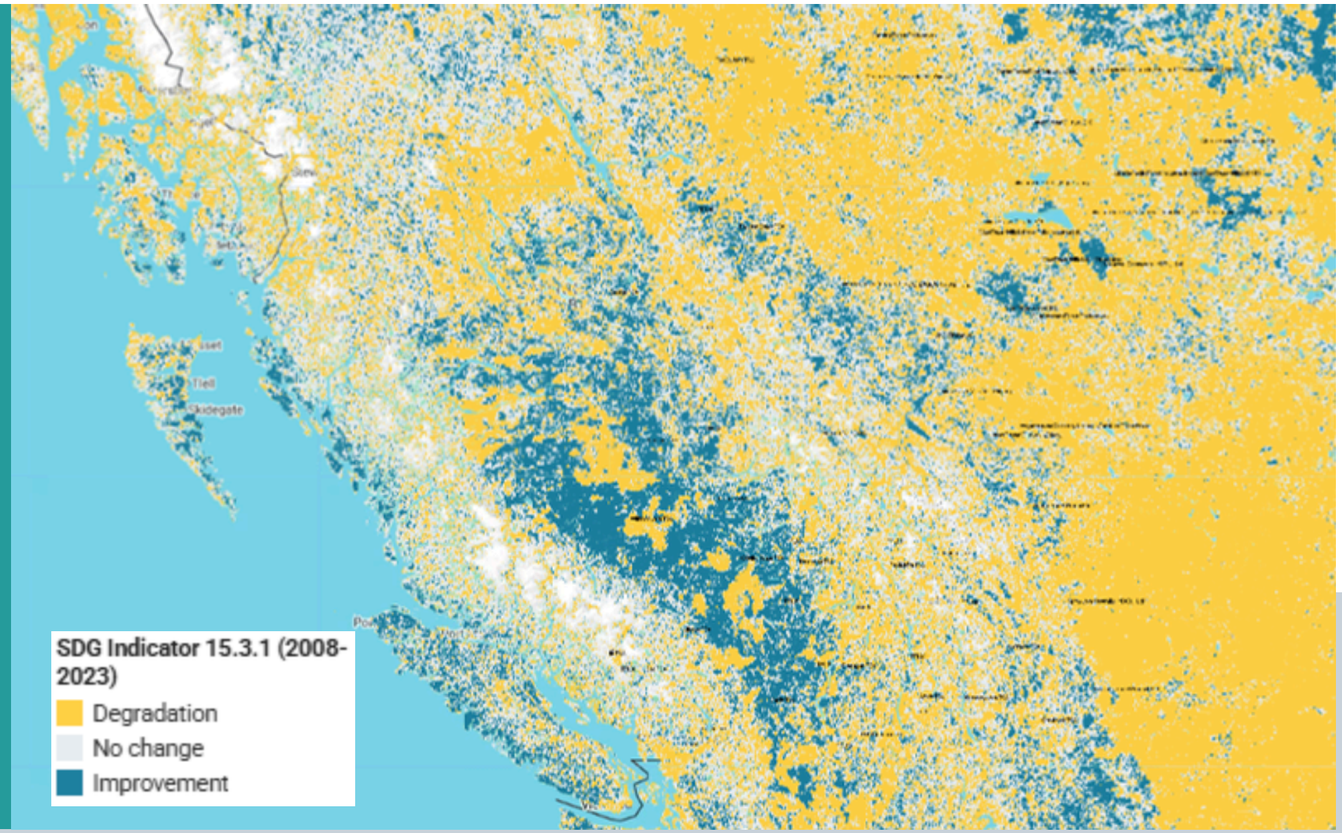
PLAN & COORDINATE

Managers & Supervisors

Oversee project implementation, coordinate teams, manage budgets and timelines, ensure regulatory compliance, and guide strategic decision-making.

Restoration Economy
AN OPPORTUNITY FOR BC

- Between 2008 and 2023, about 256,500 km^2 of land in BC showed signs of degradation based on a global-scale assessment.[8]
- In 2019, BC's restoration sector contributed $432M to provincial GDP.[7]
- Legislation is the primary driver for investment in restoration, especially where resource extraction dominates.



3 Success Stories
WATERSHED INVESTMENT

Watershed restoration investments have been highly successful job creators.

2021–2024: Provincial Watershed Investments

HEALTHY WATERSHEDS INITIATIVE

INDIGENOUS WATERSHEDS INITIATIVE

$57M
Provincial investment

1,800+
Jobs supported

110
Watershed initiatives across BC

Investments through the Healthy Watersheds Initiative and Indigenous Watersheds Initiative supported employment, particularly in rural and Indigenous communities.[9, 10]

CREATION OF THE WATERSHED SECURITY FUND

Building on Success: The Watershed Security Fund

Watershed Security Fund

$100M
Permanent endowment

The Watershed Security Fund provides a long-term, scalable model for coordinated watershed investment.

Over three years, $10M generated by the Fund plus $8M in philanthropic contributions has delivered:[11]

644
Jobs supported

$18M
Invested directly into communities

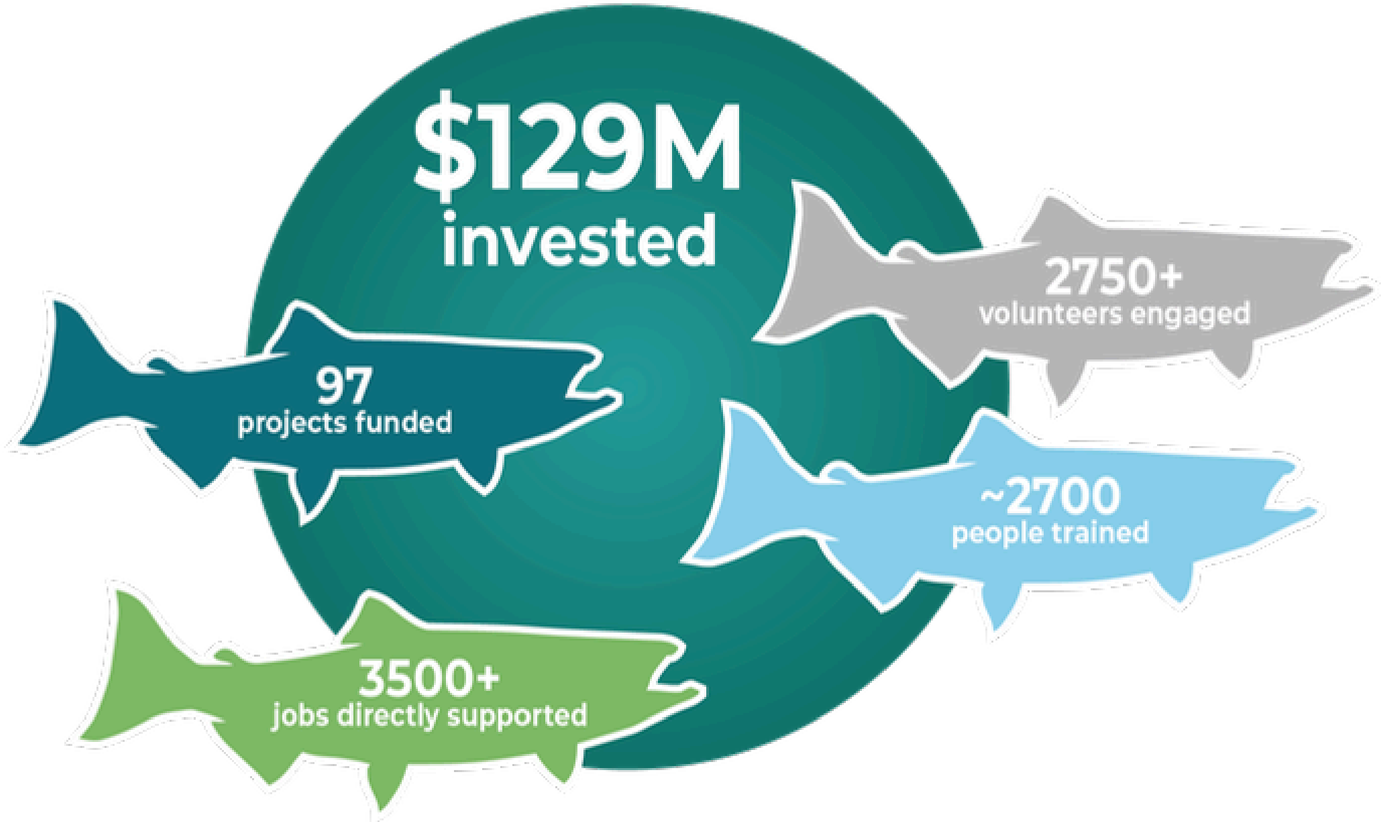
80
Watershed projects

Success Stories

SALMON RESTORATION

The British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund was a jointly funded contribution program led collaboratively between the Province of BC and the Government of Canada.

Between 2019 and 2024, the program supported employment and skill development across rural and urban communities to include a diverse workforce of project managers, Indigenous Guardians, biologists, technicians, and researchers.[12]



Restoration investment builds workforce capacity through jobs, training, and community participation.

Success Stories
INDIGENOUS GUARDIANS

Investment in Indigenous Guardians generates measurable economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits.



Across Canada, every $1 invested in Guardians programs generates an average of $12 in benefits for communities and provides an average of $9 in benefits for the people who participate.[13]

In BC, Coastal Guardian Watchmen programs generate an annual return of $10-$20 for every $1 invested.[14]

Success Stories
INDIGENOUS GUARDIANS



Beyond financial returns, Indigenous Guardians programs contribute to:

- Stronger stewardship and protection of land and water
- Preservation of cultural knowledge and practices
- Deeper connections to territory
- Youth engagement and strengthened cultural identity
- Improved information to support restoration decisions

4 Growth Opportunities
FUNDING AT SCALE

70%

Of surveyed Canadian investors expressed interest in allocating capital to ecosystem restoration, despite this, restoration financing continues to fall short of demand.[15]

Five Opportunities to Unlock Investment

1

Demonstrate Economic Value

Strengthen evidence of ecosystem benefits, restoration costs and returns, and viable business models.

2

Advance Indigenous-Led Finance

Support Indigenous-led restoration financing approaches.

3

Standardize Frameworks

Develop consistent policies, investment frameworks, and natural asset accounting.

4

Align Incentives

Encourage industry leadership and private investment in restoration outcomes.

5

Streamline Permitting

Reduce barriers to projects that restore natural function and deliver public benefits.

Growth Opportunities

BUILDING THE ECONOMIC CASE

Better economic data and analysis can strengthen the case for restoration investment.

Five Priorities for Economic Analysis

1 Define the Sector

Map BC's restoration economy, including companies, workforce, activities, and economic impacts.

2 Improve Data Collection

Standardize data and strengthen collection capacity.

3 Recognize Restoration Activities

Improve industry classification systems to better capture restoration activities and spending.

4 Value Restoration Benefits

Strengthen benefit accounting methods and project-level valuation guidelines.

5 Build Investment Cases

Support project developers and funders in preparing restoration business cases.

Growth Opportunities

GROWING THE RESTORATION WORKFORCE

A skilled workforce is what lets the sector scale.

84%

of British Columbians support training frontline workers to monitor, restore, and manage fresh water. [16]

Five Priorities for Workforce Development

1

Clear Pathways

Standard job codes, career pathways, and training aligned with on-the-job skills.

2

Targeted Training

Skills and workforce development programs for evolving sector needs.

3

Certification

Expand certifications such as Society for Ecological Restoration's Certified Ecological Restoration Practitioner Program.

4

Transitions

Help workers from sectors like forestry move into restoration jobs.

5

Coordination

Connect training providers, practitioners, consultants, government, and funders.

5

Spotlights



Spotlight #1: City of Vancouver
URBAN RESTORATION

Vancouver is taking a 50-year approach to transforming how rainwater and wastewater are managed across the city.

The Healthy Waters Plan combines conventional infrastructure with green and nature-based solutions to improve water quality, reduce flood risk, and restore more natural water processes within the urban landscape.



City of Vancouver
RESTORING THE WATER CYCLE

Restoration at city scale means bringing the water cycle back into the built environment.

The Healthy Waters Plan sets out an ambitious vision for returning watershed function to Vancouver's urban landscape.

Healthy Waters Plan Goals

43 km
BLUE-GREEN SYSTEMS

18 ha
FLOODABLE WETLANDS & PUBLIC SPACES

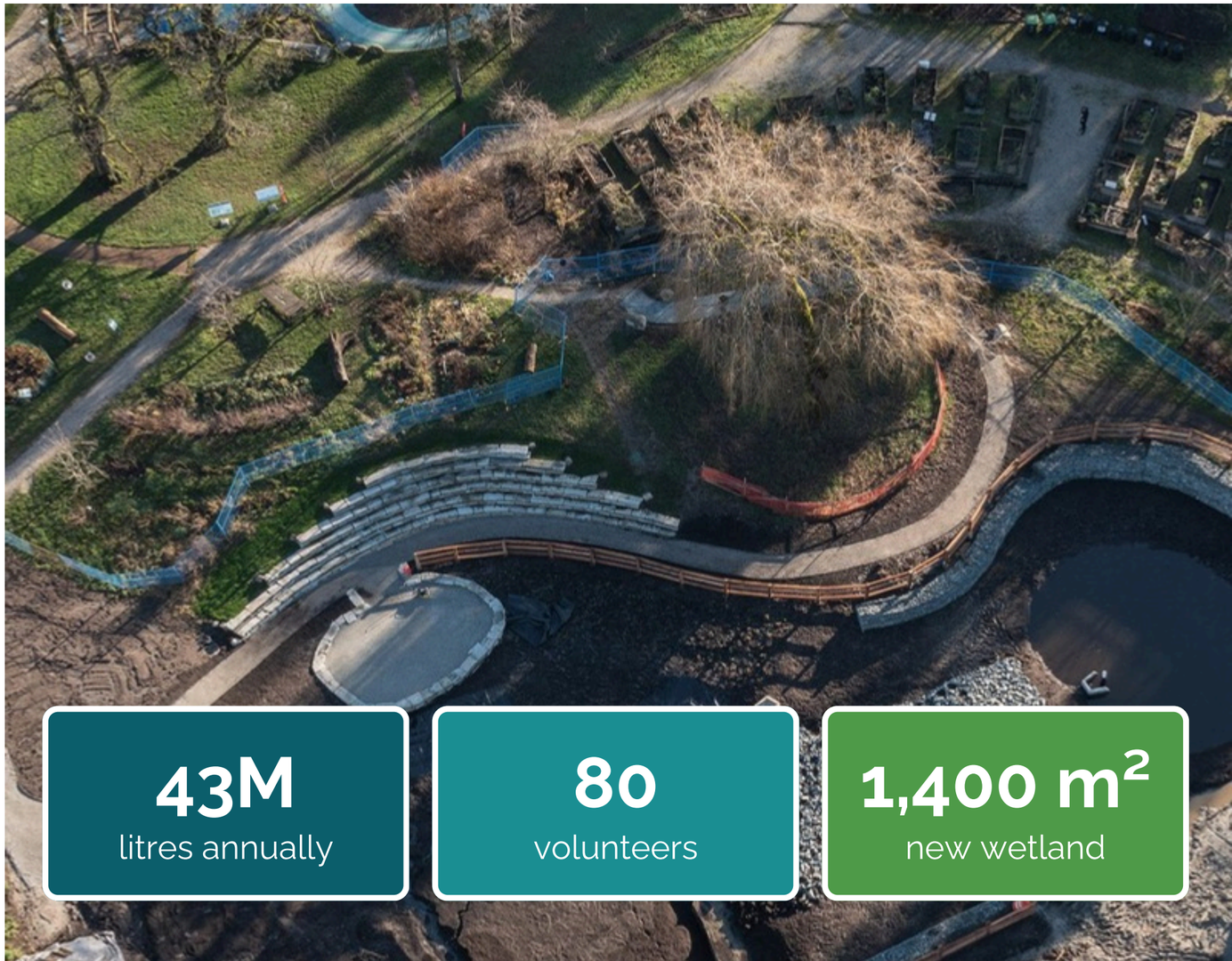
42 km
GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

4 km
WATERWAY RESTORATION

City of Vancouver
THE CASE OF STILL CREEK

Restoration in the Still Creek Watershed demonstrates how watershed health can be improved while creating habitat and opportunities for community stewardship.

Across the watershed, the City of Vancouver is integrating green rainwater infrastructure into urban parks to manage stormwater and restore more natural water flows.



City of Vancouver
RESTORATION WORKFORCE

Urban watershed restoration creates opportunities across professional, technical, trades-based and community roles.

From engineers and hydrologists to landscape architects, construction crews, project managers, and community engagement specialists, green rainwater infrastructure draws on diverse expertise.



32+ ha

of City land with rainwater runoff managed



400+

existing green rainwater infrastructure systems

City of Vancouver

INVESTING IN WATERSHED RESILIENCE

$10.4B

50-YEAR CITY INVESTMENT

The Healthy Waters Plan forecasts approximately $10.4 billion in City costs from 2026–2075, integrating investment in sewer and drainage infrastructure with green infrastructure, water quality and climate adaptation.

90%

OF ANNUAL RAINFALL

Vancouver has established a long-term target to capture and treat 90% of average annual rainfall using green rainwater infrastructure alongside conventional systems.

Vancouver is integrating nature-based solutions into long-term infrastructure planning to improve water quality, reduce flood risk and strengthen climate resilience.

Spotlight #2: Fort Nelson First Nation

RESTORATION AT A LANDSCAPE SCALE

Decades of oil and gas exploration have left an extensive network of roads, pipelines, and seismic lines across Fort Nelson First Nation territory, fragmenting boreal habitat and impacting Treaty Rights.

267,900 km of linear disturbance has been mapped across the broader Liard River Basin

FNFN is responding through an Indigenous-led, landscape-scale restoration program, creating a long-term opportunity to heal the land.



Fort Nelson First Nation

RESTORING BOREAL CARIBOU HABITAT

FNFN is restoring historic seismic lines to reconnect fragmented boreal habitat and support ecological recovery. The team is:

- **Replanting:** Planting black spruce seedlings to support forest regeneration.
- **Restoring Terrain:** Conducting mechanical hummock transplants in frozen and unfrozen conditions.
- **Delivering Locally:** Mechanical treatment of lines undertaken by Nation-owned Eh Cho Dene and other local companies.

481,000+ Seedlings planted to date

400km+ Total Lines Restored



Fort Nelson First Nation

BUILDING A RESTORATION ECONOMY

FNFN prioritizes Nation contractors and employees in delivering restoration activities.

- **Local Businesses:** Nation-owned contractors and local companies deliver restoration work.
- **Skills & Careers:** Partnership with Chalo School supports learning and mentorship pathways.
- **Long-Term Capacity:** Sustained investment strengthens local stewardship expertise and opportunities.

90%

Of restoration program spending stays with local businesses and workers



Spotlight #3: Northeast BC
REGIONAL RESTORATION ECONOMY



Northeast BC is becoming a focal point for restoration in the province.

Regulatory pressure, long-term restoration commitments, Indigenous leadership, and the region's history of natural resource development are creating growing demand for restoration services, workers, and local supply chains.

Northeast BC

THE REGIONAL ECONOMY

$200M

Blueberry River Restoration Fund

The Blueberry River Agreement created a $200M restoration fund and provided $35M directly to Blueberry River First Nations.

$50M

Restoration Funding for other Treaty 8 Nations

Another $50M was allocated for restoration by other Treaty 8 Nations

Restoration investment is creating a new regional market and an opportunity to build lasting economic capacity close to where the work happens.[17]

Northeast BC
BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITY

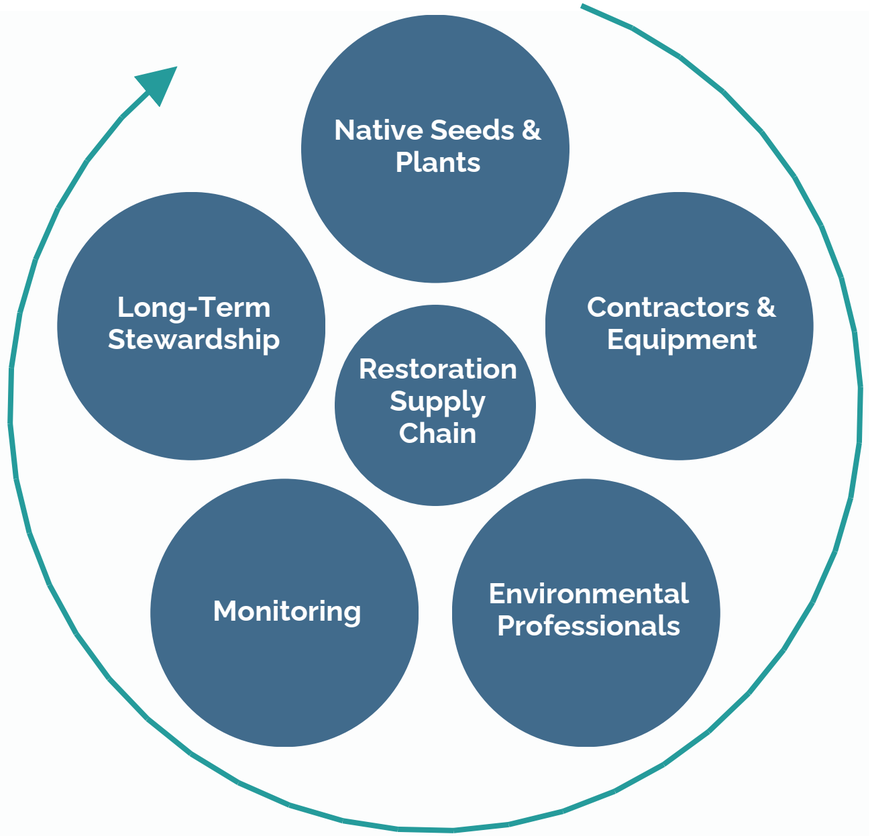
Across Northeast BC, Indigenous Nations and regional organizations are building capacity in native seed collection and propagation, ecological restoration, environmental services, land stewardship, and project delivery.[17]

Grandmother's Greenhouse, a Blueberry River First Nations-owned native plant and seed operation is supplying locally sourced plant material for restoration across Treaty 8 territory.

Aski Reclamation, a Saulteau First Nations-owned business restoring industrial sites through reclamation planning, native planting and environmental monitoring.



Northeast BC
A REGIONAL MARKET



Since 2023, the Society for Ecosystem Restoration in Northern BC has hosted a community of practice to strengthen connections within the supply chain, share knowledge, and advance restoration across the North.



THE CHALLENGE

Demand and supply need to grow together.

Predictable, long-term investment gives suppliers the confidence to grow alongside demand.

6 Key MESSAGES

1. **Restoration pays.** Every dollar invested returns more than US$20 in economic, social, and environmental benefits, while unchecked nature loss puts US$259B of Canada's GDP at risk.
2. **Restoration creates jobs where they matter most.** BC's recent watershed investments supported 1,800+ jobs, many in rural and Indigenous communities.
3. **Indigenous Nations are leading BC's restoration economy.** From Guardians programs to Treaty 8 restoration agreements, Nations are building local businesses, skills, and supply chains.
4. **77% of Canadians** support treating investments in natural assets like investments in roads and bridges.
5. **The restoration economy is ready to scale.** Getting there takes funding, a stronger economic case, and a skilled workforce.

What's **NEXT?**

BC's restoration sector is ready to grow, with a strong workforce as its catalyst.

Working for Watersheds' mission is to support and strengthen BC's watershed workforce through research, advocacy, and engagement to build jobs and career pathways that advance watershed health and security.

Connect with us to learn more about our projects and explore collaboration opportunities.

Stay Connected

Sign up for our newsletter

workingforwatersheds.ca

LEARN MORE

Curious what a career in restoration looks like?

Meet a true conservationist in the field.

Read Georgia's Story



Passionate change maker

Nature lover

Community-focused

Partners and **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This case study was developed with the support of partners advancing watershed restoration and workforce development in British Columbia.

Funding Partners

WWF

Restoration Spotlights

Fort Nelson First Nation

Nan wúújǫ anawúúdle

City of Vancouver

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Additional **READING**



Growth Opportunities:

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