

Kittitas Conservation Trust

*Protecting and Enhancing Critical Fish
and Wildlife Habitat in the Upper
Yakima River Basin for 22 years*

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



A braided life: Complex, connected salmon habitat is apparent nine years after the Cle Elum River Corridor Conservation and Restoration Project which added over 5 miles of side channel habitat and connected 240 acres of floodplain. Photo Credit: M. Long, 2024.

Kittitas Conservation Trust (KCT) was founded in 2002 with a simple goal to restore natural function through restoration and protection of areas with the highest conservation value in the diverse habitats of Kittitas County. KCT was created out of a cooperative agreement between the Yakama Nation, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Trendwest Investments, which is now Suncadia Resort LLC. KCT works with interested landowners, government agencies, and tribal partners to identify high-value conservation resources to protect and enhance our Upper Yakima River Basin. Through these partnerships, and support from the community, we can realize our mission goals here at Kittitas Conservation Trust.

Message from the Executive Director

Greetings,

2024 was a year of large investments in KCT's mission. Following on the footsteps of a big year in 2023, we have developed several projects that are primed for implementation in 2025 and beyond. Now more than ever our work is important to ensure we have resilient landscapes for the future of our fish and wildlife species in Kittitas County. From our headwaters to the floodplains, all are being impacted by a changing climate in ways far quicker than anticipated. KCT is rising to the challenge because we know that big challenges require big solutions. Over the last year we brought on new staff with can-do attitudes and a willingness to roll up their sleeves to get our work done. In the last 22 years we have diligently worked to protect and enhance critical fish and wildlife habitat. We conserved floodplains and forests, stewarded KCT owned lands, created fish passage, and restored critical river habitats for native fish species. We are not done, as there is much work to do. Conservation and restoration projects take many years of careful planning, fundraising, and permitting before they can even begin to be seen by our community. It has taken over 12 years for the Gold Creek Valley Restoration Project (slated to begin construction in 2025) to get to the point of breaking ground. All this work behind the scenes ensures that our projects are based in best available science and well supported by our communities and stakeholders. The Gold Creek Valley Restoration Project was recognized at the federal level as one of the top ten Transformational Fish Passage Projects in the nation. Through it all, it is the dedication of our staff and board that get the work done for our community in Kittitas County. Your support means that KCT can continue our critical work to benefit many future generations that follow in our footsteps.

Mitch Long—Executive Director
Kittitas Conservation Trust



Meet Mel Babik—KCT's Restoration Director

Mel Babik joined KCT in June 2023. She holds a Master of Science degree from Central Washington University as well as a Master in Elementary Education from Western Governor's University. Mel has an extensive history in the Yakima Basin. She served as a board member for Kittitas Environmental Education Network, worked as an Environmental Education Specialist for the Forest Service, taught 5th and 8th grades, was a Project Manager for Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group, and served as a Biologist for Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Mel has gained valuable experience enhancing headwater streams, leading restoration efforts post wildfire, managing forest health projects, and engaging communities in restoration. She led local beaver reintroduction efforts from 2011-2015 and sat on the statewide Beaver Working Group that developed a program to support Certified Beaver Relocators. Mel is so grateful to the partners and community members in the Yakima Basin that have supported her restoration and outreach efforts. When not focused on habitat restoration, Mel enjoys camping, hiking, rock climbing, and playing in the water with her husband, son, and buddies.



Some of KCT's Projects...



Decades long dry spell ready to be reversed: An unnaturally over widened Gold Creek at low flows. *Photo Credit: M. Babik July, 2024.*

Gold Creek Valley Restoration

Since 2012 KCT has been working to restore habitats and flow in the Gold Creek Valley. Permits and significant funding will be in place to begin the implementation of the 2.5 miles of planned instream restoration. This project will benefit threatened ESA Bull trout and other native fish species by improving flow conditions in this chronically impaired creek. By raising \$13.4M in federal and state funding in 2023, we are excited to finally begin this much needed restoration here in our headwaters of the Upper Yakima River Basin!

Hanson Ponds at Cle Elum

KCT is partnering with the City of Cle Elum to embark on a floodplain restoration project on the Yakima River. The goals of the project are to reduce flood risk for critical infrastructure, enhance fish habitat and floodplain function and improve recreational access to the City's Hanson Ponds site. The Ponds were dug to provide material for I90 construction in the 1970's, and have greatly reduced the floodplain connection required to support healthy habitats. This will be a large-scale restoration project that will require much thoughtful consideration in the design development. We are looking forward to finding a pathway to restoration!



InterFluve team getting the field work done!

Photo Credit: M. Speeg



Meeting of the forest minds. TNC Forester Workshop on Cle Elum Ridge. *Photo Credit: Hannah Letinich*

Checkerboard Partnership

KCT has partnered with The Nature Conservancy, Kittitas County, WA Dept of Natural Resources, non-profit, federal/state/municipal agencies, & local community members to help conserve over 30,000 acres of former Plum Creek Timber lands in the Upper Yakima Basin Watershed. Now we have the funding in place to help DNR acquire 9,700 acres of the Cle Elum Ridge. While there is much to do to finalize the acquisition, KCT is dedicated to conserving these lands to create healthy forested habitats and maintain wildlife migration corridors that lay the foundations for resilient forests and communities of the Upper Cle Elum Valley.

22 Years of Impact



Over 42,000 Acres Conserved

Kittitas County has diverse habitats from upland forests to floodplains and shrub steppe areas. All have unique features that are important for native fish and wildlife. These ecosystems also support the local communities and economy, now and into the future.



29 Restoration Projects

From fish passage to large-scale habitat enhancement, KCT has the ability to achieve recovery goals for our salmon and native fish species.



Collaboration with 25 Non-Profits, Tribes & Agencies

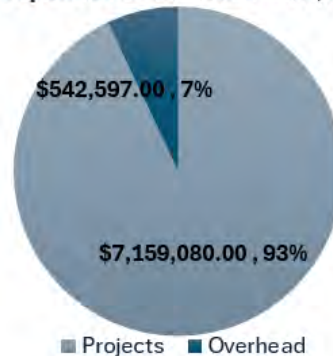
KCT's work cannot be done alone. With the help and support of our partners and communities we are able to get our large conservation and restoration work done.

We can proudly say that for every \$1 of funding we received from private sources, we generate almost another \$9 from state and federal grant sources. And for every \$1 that KCT receives, \$0.93 goes directly to our conservation and restoration projects. By keeping our overhead low and our mission priorities high, we are able to do things that larger organizations and agencies cannot. But as the need and our projects grow, we need to be mindful of our capacity as an organization. KCT is excited to form an Board Advisory Committee to help with finances and fundraising. We are also looking to hire a third employee to help manage our projects and lands. This will come at a cost that is difficult to shoulder on grants alone. If you support our mission, consider investing in KCT's growth to meet the challenges of the future. If you live in or visit our beautiful county, help us to maintain resilient habitats and ecosystems to support not just fish and wildlife, but our collective future. There is no option but to continue to make our small corner of the planet thrive for our great-great grandchildren.



Scan to Give today!

Total Expenses 2019 - 2023 = \$7,701,677



Revenue 2019 - 2023 by Source

