



COMOX VALLEY  
**LAND TRUST**

## COMOX VALLEY LAND TRUST ANNUAL REPORT

April 1, 2021 – March 31, 2022

In many ways this year appears to have had only one month: March 2022 and it heralded a most inspirational conservation story.

At the start of the reporting year, we were still in the grips of COVID-19. After 12 months we finally began to see light at the end of the pandemic tunnel. And, in the last month of the reporting year, another light suddenly shone brightly. CVLT's largest conservation initiative, the Puntledge Watershed program, received a \$3.5 million grant from the federal government.

### Land Protection Program



In the first 11 months of the fiscal year, we made slow but steady progress on completing and finally registering the Lower Perseverance Creek covenant. Before completing that project our



partners, the Cumberland Community Forest Society, started fundraising for a 17-hectares extension to the earlier acquisition.

For the Morrison Creek Headwaters Phase 2, our discussions with Comox Timber, a wholly owned subsidiary of Manulife Investment Management, focussed on boundary delineations of this approximately 290-hectares site.



Comox Timber's timber reserve on the BC Hydro-owned lands, straddling both sides of the Puntledge River for about 4.5 kilometres also appeared on our radar screen. This 100-hectare site looks and feels like a park, except that the trees are owned by Comox Timber, an unusual arrangement dating back to the Dunsmuir coal mining era. The forest company gave notice in 2020 of its intention to harvest the site but has deferred this temporarily while CVLT works to raise the funds to purchase the timber reservation.

The board also learned that the Comox Valley Regional District and the K'omox First Nation had resolved that the Morrison Phase 1 land should be renamed qax mot Conservation Area. qax mot translates as "lots of medicine" in recognition of the rich variety of medicinal plants on these lands. The naming is consistent with the board's interest to develop a more robust relationship with KFN.

In January 2022 our executive director advised that he had received positive feedback about a proposal, which had been submitted to the federal government. Lo and behold, in the last week of



February, CVLT learned that Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) had awarded us \$3.5 million for three projects in the Puntledge Watershed: the Lower Perseverance Creek extension, Morrison Creek Phase 2 and the Puntledge Timber Reserve. These projects will protect critical habitat and environmentally sensitive areas at risk from logging.

The federal funds are to be matched on a 1:1 basis and projects completed within a tight time frame. A minimum \$7 million investment in Comox Valley conservation initiatives was instantly launched in March, the last month of this reporting year.

In March CVLT operations turned into an all-hands-on deck situation to start implementing CVLT's largest one-time conservation program. The many activities included:

- Recruiting a new legal team
- Concluding the contribution agreement with Environment and Climate Change Canada
- Developing a contract with the Cumberland Community Forest Society to facilitate flow of ECCC funds for the Lower Perseverance Creek project
- Selecting a real estate appraiser and a timber rights appraiser
- Generating and reviewing draft purchase and sale agreements with Manulife Investment Management
- Obtaining a legal opinion on the rights and responsibilities of timber rights' holders
- Reaching out to Vancity Credit Union for bridge financing
- Reaching out to potential funders: BC Hydro; the provincial government; Sitka Foundation; BC Parks Foundation; Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation; Pacific Salmon Endowment Fund Society
- Establishing a negotiating team

Both the executive director and board members became intensely involved in getting this important project underway.

## Conservation Partnership Program

Once again the partnership's reputation soared as 2 new organizations, the Puntledge River Forest Protection Society and the Comox Youth Climate Council, joined the group and CVCP's interactions with local governments intensified.

Early in the year the University of British Columbia offered CVCP the opportunity for up to five sustainability scholars to conduct research in the summer of 2022. UBC would fund the research and CVCP would cover the transportation costs. By the end of this fiscal year four students had been selected to update CVCP's research captured in the Nature without Borders, Second Edition published in 2013.

Significant input was provided into the City of Courtenay's Official Community Plan (OCP) process. Our program coordinator was part of a working committee and several formal CVCP submissions helped to define the emerging OCP.

Courtenay also forwarded numerous development permit referrals, which were reviewed and commented on in consultation with the affected watershed groups.





Interactions with the Comox Valley Regional District took place in many areas of shared interests including the Comox Lake Watershed Advisory Group, the Comox Valley Community Water Monitoring Initiative and the proposed regional park service. The regional park service has the potential of creating a larger pool of funding for region-wide land protection priorities. CVLT has shared its extensive database with the regional parks working group and their consultants. When the service is eventually established, it will be a substantial dividend derived from CVCP's research and advocacy since its inception in 2008.

CVCP also launched a semi-annual newsletter to spread the news of its activities more broadly with the partnership's member groups.

### **Conservation Science**

This fiscal year saw the continuation of our successful, multi-faceted bat research program. The bioacoustics data we have collected over the past 3-years through funding support from the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program is now being used to create a Habitat Suitability Map for the Endangered Little Brown Bat in the Puntledge Watershed using the latest machine-learning algorithms and scientific modelling. We are excited to be adding this layer of information into our land protection strategies once completed. Similarly, our work as the northern Vancouver Island chapter of the BC Community Bat Program continues to be busy with roost counts, education and outreach as well as providing support to landowners or others with specific questions or concerns about bats. We also completed year 4 of our participation in the North America Bat Monitoring Program. By the end of year 5, we will have a strong statistical basis from which trend analyses will be possible going forward. We are grateful for the hundreds of hours of community volunteer effort applied to the projects!



This year also kicked off a new partnership with the Pacific Megascops Research Alliance. This new project leverages our bioacoustics skills to better understand Western Screech Owl populations, habitat preferences, and interactions with potential competitors and predators. This research includes the use of Autonomous Recording Units (ARUs) and Call-Playback surveys which are similar to the tools and techniques used in our bat research programs.



### Organizational Update

The board established an operating reserve to take care of possible rainy days and a Natural Climate Solutions Fund (NCSF) to help fund climate change solutions. These measures are based on the conservation, restoration and management of forests, grasslands, and wetlands.

The NCSF and its associated year end fundraising effort proved hugely successful with a year-end balance of \$39,000.



To draw public attention to the role of carbon in breaking down organic material we initiated the



“Soil your Undies” campaign. A video collection of lighthearted cotton underwear burials followed by exhumation videos 60 days later did generate some publicity for CVLT and illustrated how different soil types can make a difference in decomposition rates.

Our recently updated website and social media platforms were further refined and regularly updated with the help of a couple of new consultants. Traffic data suggest our reach has been extended.

## **Welcomes and Farewells**

At the board level we welcomed Nick Page and Lesley Giroday as directors. Both became intensely involved in the month that defined the year.

Nick, a biologist, was raised in the Comox Valley and has recently returned to his place of birth. His intimate Valley knowledge and his ecological perspective offer valuable insights in our decision making.

Lesley, a retired lawyer, moved to the Valley in 2021 and has a wealth of experience working with First Nations and conserving ecologically sensitive lands in the Kootenays.

A significant change in our consultant team involved the CVCP program coordinator. In December Erin Novak left the organization to join the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. We welcomed Francoise Gervais as the new coordinator. She is a land-use planner by training, and she worked with Ducks Unlimited Canada, and also as a marine life researcher and tour guide in both the Arctic and Antarctica.

To manage and update our website and social media platforms we brought on Tanis Gower and Kera McHugh as consultants.

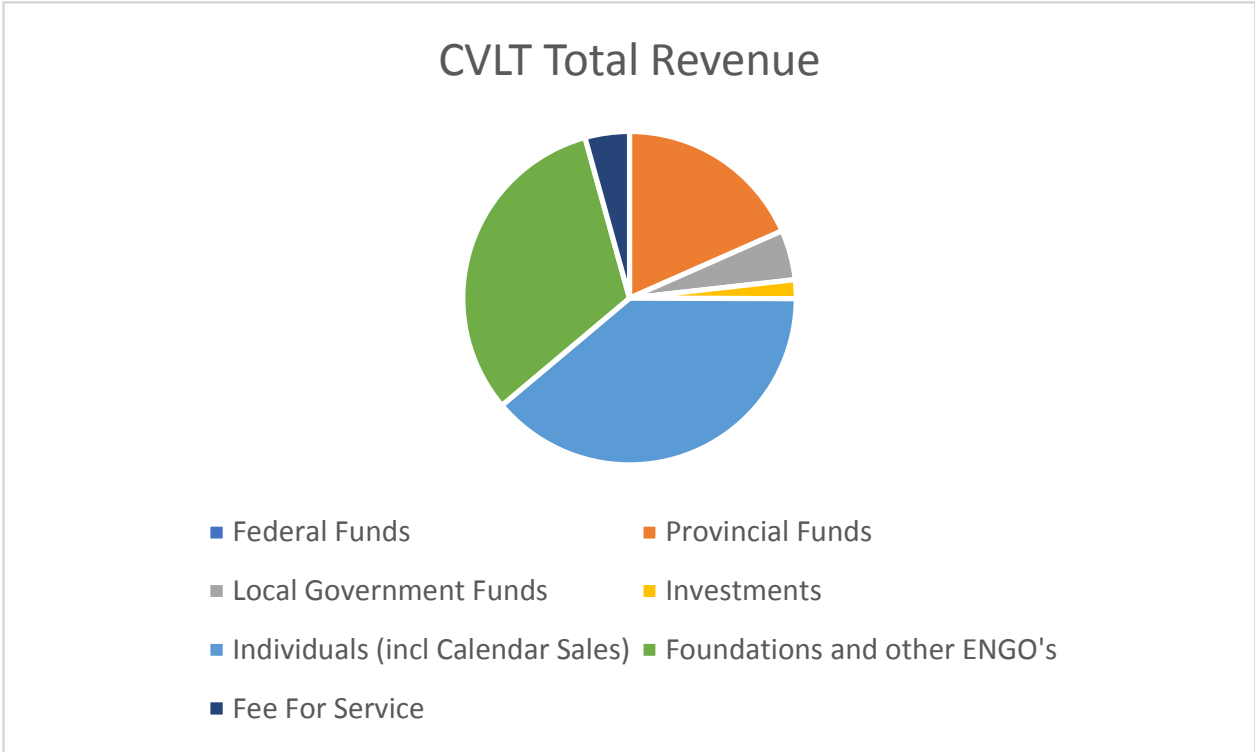
## **Thank You**

Thanks to you, our members, volunteers, donors, board directors and our entire consultant team for outstanding contributions to protect the Comox Valley’s natural heritage in 2021/22.

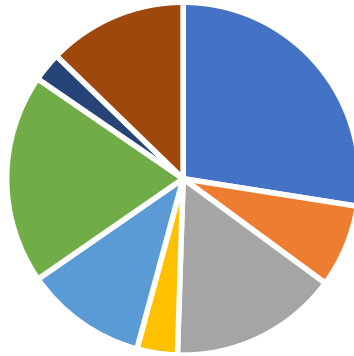




### Comox Valley Land Trust 2021/22 Revenue and Expenses



## CVLT Total Expenses



- Overhead
- Fundraising
- Education and Outreach
- Land Protection
- Policy and Development Referrals
- Environmental Research
- Endowment Fund contributions
- Land Securement

