



OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN  
**STEWARDSHIP**

# 22-23 Annual Report



We gratefully acknowledge that our stewardship initiatives take place on the traditional unceded territories of the Syilx and Secwépmeč people- the first stewards of these beautiful lands.  
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# THANK YOU

We are very grateful to our funding partner, members, donors, and volunteers without whose support our projects would not be possible:

Environment and Climate Change Canada  
Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation  
Okanagan Basin Water Board  
Regional District of North Okanagan Trails & Natural Spaces  
North Okanagan Conservation Fund  
Community Foundation of the South Okanagan|Similkameen  
South Okanagan Conservation Fund  
BC Community Gaming Grant  
Canada Summer Jobs

## 2022-2023

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dianne Bersea	Chair
Jennifer Miles	Vice Chair
Jill Bisaro	Secretary-Treasurer
Margaret Holm	Member at Large
Amanda Miller	Member at Large
Jill Bisaro	Member at Large
Melanie Pieorecky	Member at Large

### STAFF & CONSULTANTS

Alyson Skinner	Executive Director
Lia McKinnon	Stewardship Biologist
Valerie Blow	Stewardship Officer
Tess McCall	Field Technician
Zoe Vriends	Field Technician
Veronica Vinge	Planning Consultant
Jessica Hobden	Outreach Consultant
Mike Sarell	Snake Expert
Allison Haney	GIS Consultant
Tanya Brouwers	Agriculture Outreach



# INTRODUCTION

The Okanagan-Similkameen is an exceptional place, known for its spectacular landscapes, iconic wildlife, amazing outdoor opportunities, world class wines and diverse agricultural products. The region is also home to some of the greatest concentrations of species diversity and species-at-risk in Canada and is recognized as one of Canada's most endangered natural systems.

Many of the wildlife and natural areas in the Okanagan are threatened because of the impacts from the very things which make this such a desirable place.

Stewardship is our shared responsibility in order to maintain healthy ecosystems that support wildlife and humans alike.

## WHAT IS STEWARDSHIP?

Stewardship is the act of taking care of fish and wildlife habitat by people like you





# A NEW LOOK AND A NEW PLAN



Along with a brand new logo designed by OSS Director Dianne Bersea, 2022 also brought about a new strategic plan- a refining of our key strategies and desired results.



## VISION

We all care for the land and nature so that they thrive.

## MISSION

Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship helps people and communities to be stewards of the land and nature.



# CORE VALUES

## ACCESSIBILITY

Our events are free and open to all. We are evaluating barriers that prevent people from participating in conservation and stewardship and trying to break them down, such as ensuring that we use plain language.

## DIVERSITY

Diversity means a lot of different things to OSS. It means that we work in all of the habitats in our area, promote stewardship for all of our wildlife including birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, plants, insects, fungi and lichens. It also means that we work with all ages of people from all backgrounds, who may or may not own land, and who all use land in different ways.

## RESPECT

We are passionate about creating space for conversations with people, where we listen without judgement.

## TRUST

We guarantee landowner confidentiality and see every project through to success.

## PARTNERSHIP

We believe stewardship is a shared responsibility. We work in partnership with landowners and communities to develop win-win solutions that benefit both land users and wildlife. We believe that collaborating with partners can extend our reach and build capacity for conservation.







# OUTREACH

**15** workshops and talks

**178** volunteers at hands-on planting events

**22** tables at local events and farmers markets

**840** newsletter subscribers

**874** people engaged in community stewardship



This year, OSS held its first workshop in Armstrong! The recent expansion into the Armstrong area created the opportunity to connect with locals using one of our most popular topics - Beginner Birding. Generously hosted by the Armstrong library, the workshop was attended by nearly 20 people wanting to learn the ins and outs of identifying birds "on the fly". Despite only seeing a handful of birds in the chilly, icy conditions, the group did find tracks and scat from a family of otters that were living somewhere nearby!

In addition to Beginner Birding, we also hosted bioblitzes for the first time at some of our restoration projects. Bioblitzes are events that focus on finding and identifying as many species as possible in a specific area over a short period of time. More than 30 volunteers came out to help us catalogue the species at Skaha Park Pond, North Vernon Park, and Swan Lake. The location with the highest biodiversity was Skaha Park Pond, where we documented over 100 different species!



# OUTREACH

In addition to the new endeavors, we continued to deliver a variety of workshops on many popular stewardship topics throughout the year. Talks on amphibians, native plants & pollinators, snake smarts, and owls were well received in 3 different communities, including a new talk on Sharing Spaces with our Species in the Valley Bottoms as part of the Brown Bag Lunch lecture series at the Penticton Museum

We attended 22 markets and events in 9 communities, engaging with those who may not have the time to attend a specific stewardship talk. Nora the Gophersnake was a star at several of these markets, drawing many folks in to talk about their love (or lack thereof...) of snakes.

Skaha Park Pond, North Vernon Park, and Swan Lake Nature Reserve were the site of 6 planting projects and provided great opportunities to engage with middle school students and local residents, and help them become active participants in stewardship activities in their communities.





# HABITAT RESTORATION

**46**

restoration  
projects

**2695**

native trees &  
shrubs planted

**2622**

kg of invasive  
plants & garbage  
removed

## Eneas Creek Community Project

Since 2016, Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship (OSS) has been working with local landowners along Eneas Creek and in the Garnet Valley to enhance and restore wildlife habitat along the creek. Between 2016 and 2019, we planted 2100 native trees and shrubs on the Okanagan Crush Pad property and have been doing invasive plant management since then.

In the summer of 2022, we focused on removal of Yellow Flag Iris from the creek. Yellow Flag Iris is a destructive invasive plant that chokes the creek and reduces habitat quality for wildlife. It also increases local flooding where it forms dense mats and blocks water flow. In addition to spreading via floating seed dispersal, it also spreads through underground rhizomes.

To remove the iris, expert Dr. Catherine Tarasoff recommends cutting back plants and installing a thick benthic barrier (PVC) for one year to suffocate its roots. Work such as this needs to be conducted with appropriate Permits or Notifications and in the fisheries work window.

In areas where there are single plants, removing the individual plant is recommended. The entire rhizome/root must be dug out- if part is missed, it will grow a new plant. Equally important is removing any seed pods, which we kind of think look like shishito peppers. If left, the seeds float downstream and grow new infestations of the iris.

Six new stewards joined us through this initiative, and we completed iris removal on 9 Wildlife Habitat Stewards' properties, starting in upstream locations and working downstream in the direction that seeds are spread, improving over 11km of creek through the reduced seed bank.





# HABITAT RESTORATION

## North Vernon Park

With support from the Okanagan Basin Water Board and RDNO Greater Vernon Natural Areas and Trails grant, we hosted several opportunities for local residents to get involved in stewardship of this park. We have held several events and talks so far, with hundreds of community members attending, including: invasive plant walk, beginner birding, volunteer weed pull days, planting days, snake smart, all about amphibians, attracting native pollinators, an owl prowl and a bioblitz. We also planted in the fall with the Awaken Inquiry and Adventure Okanagan class.

### More protection for local snake population

When Deleenheer Rd was constructed, there was a berm created between it and North Vernon Park. Huge rocks were placed there and the empty spaces between were filled in. Not every gap was filled though, and the underground network of small tunnels and chambers formed a winter hibernacula (den) site that houses both Common and Terrestrial Gartersnakes!

A number of years ago, the North Okanagan Naturalists Club constructed wooden fences around the den entrances and placed a line of large rocks along the park for extra protection. This summer, OSS increased the den protection by placing large rock piles around and over the den entrances too, which created even more shelter and basking areas for the snakes.

While it may look like the den entrances are blocked, the areas directly above the entrances were kept clear and there are many, many gaps and crevices between the rocks through which the snakes will access their dens.





# LANDOWNER CONTACT

**660**

new landowners  
contacted

**11**

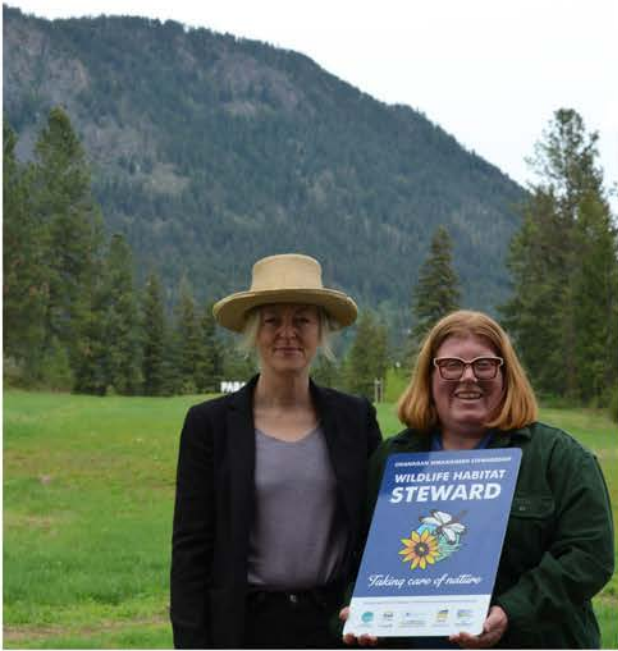
new stewardship  
agreements negotiated

**125**

stewardship  
agreements in total

**6276**

acres supported



## OSS welcomes 125th Wildlife Habitat Steward

Through the Wildlife Habitat Stewardship Program, OSS has been able to support the conservation of 6276 acres of critical wildlife habitat in our region. This program empowers individuals and organizations to take action in their own communities and make a real difference for wildlife. Caravan Farm Theatre recently signed on as OSS's 125th Wildlife Habitat Steward. Their commitment to environmental stewardship and the opportunity for on-site community engagement makes them a perfect fit for this program.

**We are thrilled to see Caravan Farm Theatre using their platform to promote conservation and inspire action.**

This new partnership builds on Caravan Farm's existing conservation commitment to the five acres around Coyote Rock in their "back 40", and their ongoing partnership with local bee farmers. We hope our partnership with Caravan Farms inspires audiences to protect both pollinators and indigenous plant species.



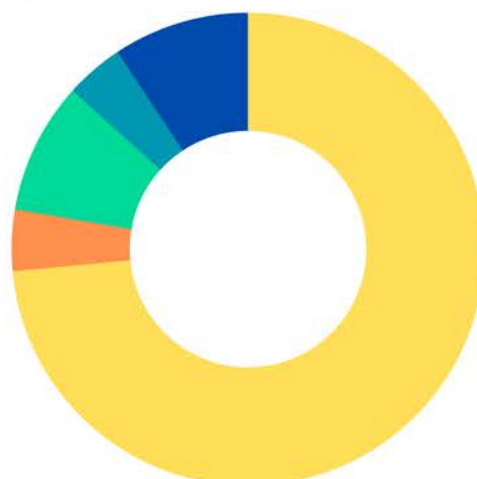
# 2023 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

## Revenues



- Memberships & Donations (1.6%)
- Other (6.4%)
- Foundations (17.9%)
- Local Governments (27.2%)
- Provincial (14.8%)
- Federal (32.8%)

## Expenditures



- Program Delivery-related HR (73.5%)
- Travel & Mileage (4.2%)
- Field Supplies & Habitat Restoration (9.0%)
- Communications & Outreach (4.03%)
- Administration & Overhead (9.3%)

## Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Society Statement of Operations

Year ended March 31

2023

2022

### Revenues

Grant revenues	\$ 300,635	\$ 265,053
Donations	7,453	11,294
Membership dues	370	450
	<u>308,458</u>	<u>276,797</u>

### Expenditures

Salaries and related benefits	219,937	202,930
Habitat restoration	22,129	37,745
Travel and automotive	13,189	10,249
Program contract services	10,933	903
Rent	10,148	10,908
Outreach	8,593	2,363
Board development and administration	7,611	-
Professional fees	4,929	4,059
Office supplies	3,624	3,206
Field supplies	3,097	3,719
Telephone and utilities	2,306	1,452
Advertising and promotion	1,765	446
Insurance	1,594	1,513
Field supply and tool storage	1,104	-
Equipment rental	934	250
G.S.T. expense	851	1,525
Amortization	654	943
Interest and bank charges	396	680
Software and computer expense	284	1,322
	<u>314,078</u>	<u>284,213</u>

Deficiency of revenues over expenditures

\$ (5,620)

\$ (7,416)



