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ANNUAL REPORT



A Network Connecting Science with Conservation
Un Réseau pour la science et la conservation

Our Mission: To be the authoritative, primary source of accessible, current, and reliable information on the distribution and abundance of Canada's natural diversity—especially species and ecosystems of conservation concern

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Note: For species identified in this annual report, their global conservation status as determined by NatureServe is identified by the letter "G" followed by a number, with 1 corresponding with "Critically Imperiled", 2 with "Imperiled", 3 with "Vulnerable", 4 with "Apparently Secure", and 5 with "Secure." For more information on NatureServe's methodology for assigning conservation status ranks, see www.natureserve.org/conservation-status-assessment.

Cover photo: bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*, G4) at Wilcox Pass, Jasper National Park. Photo credit: Dan Minkin, CC BY-SA 4.0

From the Chair and Executive Director

FUNDING REDUCTIONS IN FISCAL 2025-26 presented NatureServe Canada (NSC) with unique challenges in delivering on our core biodiversity data workplans.

Thanks to our member program Conservation Data Centres (CDCs) in accepting reduced allocations, we were able to develop a budget that saw NSC and the CDCs weather the financial headwinds. The power of the NSC and NatureServe Networks!

In addition to advancing our core business of developing, managing, and sharing subnational, national, and global species spatial and taxonomic data, NSC made impressive progress on our Ecosystem-based automated range (EBAR) project, the Canada Key Biodiversity Areas initiative, the Canadian National Vegetation Classification, the Canadian Terrestrial Ecological Framework, species distribution modelling, and expanding and refreshing the data made available to the public on the Explorer Pro Open Data platform. All of these projects are collaborative efforts that are pooling resources, expertise, and capacity of dozens of agencies, organizations, and individual experts. Their overarching goal is to advance biodiversity science in Canada to ensure that conservation decision-making is informed by accurate, comprehensive, current, and publicly available (at no cost) biodiversity information.

Due to the sun-setting of project funding, the end of fiscal 2025-26 saw the wrap up of our EBAR project. A big "thank you" to the project team, including our lead contractors Sam Stefanoff, Randal Greene, and Katrina Gaibisels for their multi-year contributions and leadership. Please visit the project website via www.natureserve.ca to access EBAR products and documentation. The project could be restarted pending funding—please reach out if interested to discuss!

A big "thank you" to our members, partners, and funders for your ongoing work and support towards our shared biodiversity science and conservation goals.



Chris Friesen,
Chair of the Board



Patrick Henry,
Executive Director



About Us

CANADA IS HOME TO ABOUT 80,000 known species, with thousands more species to be scientifically identified or first discovered. These organisms belong to a vast tapestry—the diversity of life at genetic, species, and ecosystem levels, vital for environmental, economic, and social health.

At NatureServe Canada, our vision is for the natural heritage of Canada to be thoroughly documented, for that information to be readily available to the public, and where conservation of biodiversity and resource decision-making are guided by high-quality scientific data and information. Our mission is to be the authoritative, primary source of accessible, current, and reliable information on the distribution and abundance of Canada's natural diversity—especially species and ecosystems of conservation concern.

NatureServe Canada and its network of provincial and territorial Conservation Data Centres (CDCs) work together and with other government and non-government organizations to develop, manage, and distribute authoritative knowledge regarding Canada's plants, animals, and ecosystems. NatureServe Canada and the Canadian CDCs are members of the international NatureServe Network, spanning over 60 government and non-government organizations in Canada and

the United States.¹ NatureServe Canada is the Canadian affiliate of NatureServe, based in Arlington, Virginia that provides scientific and technical support to the international network.

NatureServe Canada, based in Ottawa, Ontario, is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of representatives of its Constituent Member provincial and territorial CDCs. Our membership includes Associate members Nature Conservancy of Canada and NatureServe (North America). The NatureServe Canada Network is further complimented by non-member federal government partners which are responsible departments for the Species at Risk Act: Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada. Our members and partners collaborate on national projects which promote coordination of biodiversity data and information development, and distribution, to inform research and land, resources, and conservation decision-making.

Each CDC adheres to NatureServe's rigorous scientific methods and standards developed since the 1970s. Together, NatureServe Canada and the Canadian CDCs strive to answer questions such as: What species and ecosystems exist in each province or territory? What is the condition and conservation status of their populations? Which species or

ecosystems are at risk of extinction (global) or extirpation (from Canada or a province or territory)? Where precisely are species at risk and rare ecosystems found?

We presently maintain information on 76,947 species and 5162 ecological communities. Our Network steadily adds new knowledge about biodiversity, including about species newly documented for Canada or species newly described to science. The Network also helps document the most important places for biodiversity in Canada, to aid in management decisions concerning them. ■



A little wood satyr (*Megisto cymela*, G5) a butterfly photographed at Bronte Creek Provincial Park in southern Ontario, CC BY-SA 4.0

¹ See: <https://www.natureserve.org/natureserve-network>



In Gratitude to Wasyl Bakowsky!



Wasyl Bakowsky at the pristine and globally rare Bend Bay Alvar, on Manitoulin Island.
Photo credit: Christine Terwissen, NHIC

NATURESERVE CANADA EXTENDS its heartfelt congratulations to Wasyl Bakowsky on his retirement in August 2026, following more than 30 years of dedicated service with Ontario's Natural Heritage Information Centre (NHIC).

Wasyl began his career with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources in the early 1990s. He joined the NHIC at a time when approaches to Ecological Land Classification (ELC) and biodiversity tracking were rapidly evolving. Wasyl soon became a central figure in advancing the understanding of Ontario's vegetation communities, helping to develop and refine the province's ELC framework and discovering rare plant communities across the province. His work brought consistency, scientific rigor, and clarity to how plant communities are identified and assessed. He authored many reports on plant communities that will forever inform the work of future ecologists.

Throughout his career, Wasyl conducted extensive fieldwork, travelling across Ontario documenting rare species and identifying rare plant communities such as alvars, tallgrass prairies, and savannahs, as well as disjunct populations of arctic alpine plants. Wasyl's botanical expertise and comprehensive knowledge of the role of soils, landforms, and ecological processes in creating unique plant

communities made him a trusted authority that people from the Ministry and all over Ontario could rely on for information. His contributions have been foundational to conservation planning, species-at-risk assessments, and land-use decision-making throughout the province.

Approachable, likeable, and entertaining, Wasyl has been an invaluable mentor and collaborator. He shared his knowledge generously with colleagues, partners, and the broader conservation community. As happy to learn as to share, Wasyl's enthusiasm for the natural heritage of the province was evident in every interaction. His influence can be seen not only in the data and systems he helped build, but in the many professionals he guided throughout his career.

Beyond his work with the NHIC, Wasyl has contributed to numerous provincial and national initiatives focused on biodiversity conservation, bringing his expertise to projects that have shaped how natural heritage information is collected and applied. His dedication, depth of knowledge, and enduring passion for Ontario's natural landscapes will be greatly missed. NatureServe Canada thanks him for his remarkable career, and we wish him all the best in his retirement. ■



NatureServe Canada: Building the NatureServe Explorer Pro database

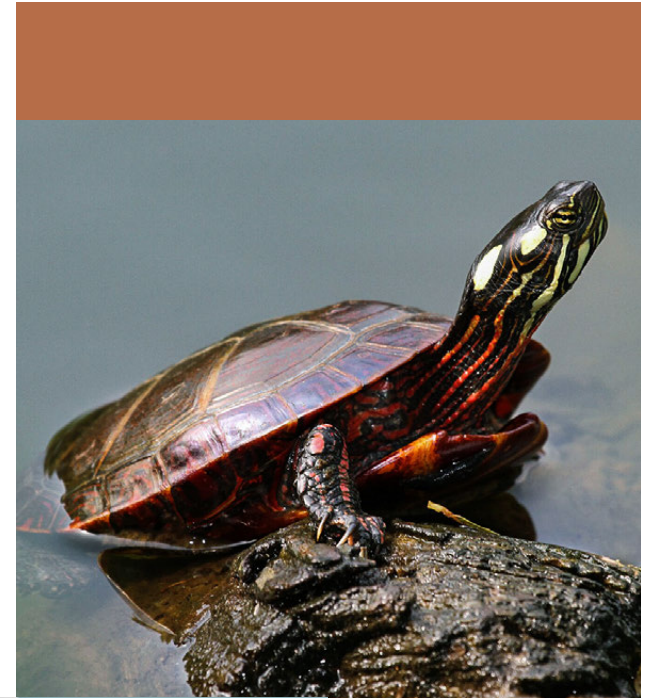
NATURESERVE CANADA (NSC), Wildlife Conservation Society Canada, and Birds Canada are the lead organizations of the Canada Key Biodiversity Areas project (KBA Canada). NSC's role in the project has been focused on the gathering, management, and distribution of species occurrence data (except for birds, which is led by Birds Canada), and the production of Ecosystem-Based Automated Range (EBAR) maps to inform KBA identification.

Since 2019, NSC has collected over 45 million species occurrence records from the NSC Network of Conservation Data Centres (CDCs), and from over 280 non-CDC data providers including iNaturalist, the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), the US-based Biodiversity Information Serving Our Nation (BISON) database, and independent biologists. Leveraging the expertise and tools of the NSC Network, we undertake review of the data including removing duplicates, and reconciling taxonomy. We make the reviewed data available to KBA Canada experts to inform KBA analyses, and to the public via the NatureServe Explorer Pro Open Data platform.

In 2025-26 NSC began fundraising to expand the database (e.g., filling taxonomic and geographical data gaps) and to promote its use by the public, governments, Indigenous communities, industry, and academia. Thanks

to confirmed base funding from the Royal Bank of Canada and the McLean Foundation we will advance this project in 2026-27 and work to secure the remaining funding. The project will see NSC work with existing and new partners to integrate their biodiversity data in the database and to build a self-sustaining business model based on pooled investments, shared capacity, and subscriptions. The public data layer in Explorer Pro will remain available at no cost.

The overarching objective is to ensure that biodiversity research and decision-making in Canada is informed by the best available data. Learn more via the project webpage <https://www.natureserve.org/canada/ebars-canada-kbas>, and contact us should you wish to discuss accessing and contributing to the database. ■



Above: Photo of an eastern painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta picta*, G5). Photo credit: Greg Schechter CC BY 2.0.



Left: A map generated in NatureServe Explorer Pro, showing generalized painted turtle distribution in a portion of Maine, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia.



Atlantic Canada: Documenting rare lichens along the Saint John (Wolastoq) River

ORIGINATING IN QUÉBEC AND MAINE before flowing into New Brunswick, where it empties into the Bay of Fundy, the 673-kilometre long Saint John River (“Wolastoq”, meaning “beautiful river”) is the longest river in eastern Canada. Within New Brunswick the river region has a high diversity of provincially rare plants in the rich floodplain soils, many of which have a southern and western distribution in North America and are disjunct on the river. Many tree species are also common here that are absent or uncommon elsewhere in the province, including butternut (*Juglans cinerea*, G3), bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*, G5), silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*, G5), and green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, G4).

Recent fieldwork on two rare lichens along the river in New Brunswick highlights how much remains to be learned about epiphytic biodiversity in the province. Pale-bellied frost lichen (*Physconia subpallida*, G2) and cupped fringe lichen (*Heterodermia hypoleuca*, G5) were discovered in New Brunswick in 2022 by New Brunswick Museum lichenologist Stephen Clayden, but their range, abundance and habitat associations in the province remained largely unknown.

In 2025, the Atlantic Canada Conservation Data Centre (ACCDC) received funding from the New Brunswick Environmental Trust Fund

to undertake targeted surveys along the middle reaches of the river to better document these species. Fieldwork focused on mature floodplain and shoreline habitats with mature green ash. Over 24 survey days, ACCDC staff surveyed ecologically rich shoreline and floodplain habitats on the river.

Surveys substantially increased the number of known occurrences for both species in New Brunswick. Thirty host tree occurrences of pale-bellied frost lichen, and 72 host trees occurrences of cupped fringe lichen, were documented. In addition to green ash, cupped fringe lichen was found on two additional host tree species: American basswood (*Tilia americana*, G5) and balsam poplar (*Populus balsamifera*, G5). These represent the first Canadian observations of

cupped fringe lichen on either genus.

The results significantly increase knowledge of where both species occur in New Brunswick and Canada, as well as their host tree and climatological preferences. At the same time, the reliance of these lichens on green ash is concerning, particularly in the context of the emerald ash borer (*Agrilus planipennis*): this invasive beetle is rapidly spreading in the Fredericton area, and it will significantly impact all ash species in the region.

The ACCDC’s significant discoveries build a substantial foundation for assessing the future status of pale-bellied frost lichen and cupped fringe lichen. They also support future conservation planning concerning the Wolastoq River. ■

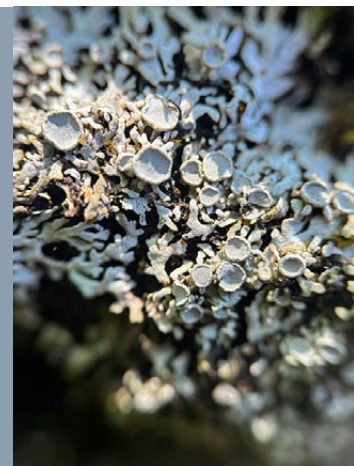


Photo at far left:
cupped fringe lichen
(*Heterodermia hypoleuca*).

Photo at near left:
pale-bellied frost lichen
(*Physconia subpallida*).

Photos credit: Iain Crowell,
ACCDC



Ontario: Identifying flood-scour riverine prairie

PRAIRIE COMMUNITIES DEVELOP where conditions limit the establishment of forest vegetation. In flood-scour riverine prairie communities, disturbance is driven by flood scour, where high energy water currents remove organic debris, including above ground plant parts, and soil from the shoreline. Characteristic plant species of flood-scour riverine prairie include big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*, G5), indiagrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*, G5), prairie cordgrass (*Sporobolus michauxianus*, G5), and smooth aster (*Symphyotrichum laeve*, G5).

Flood-scour riverine prairie is highly resilient to changes in vegetation composition because plant species must tolerate repeated and sometimes intense scouring events. These communities most often occur on the outside of river bends and along straight river sections where gravel bars form, particularly below and adjacent to rapids.

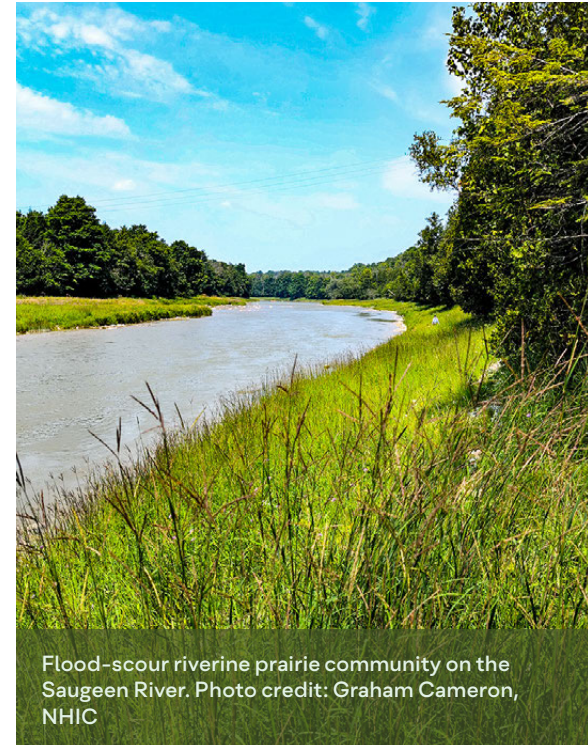
Flood-scour riverine prairie is restricted to river reaches and shoreline habitats with sand or gravel substrates that experience regular scouring from seasonal flooding. It typically occurs as a narrow, linear feature ranging in width from a few to approximately 30 metres wide, and stretching approximately 100-850 metres in length. As a result, its potential distribution in Ontario is limited to a small number of southern rivers. Based on

recent fieldwork by Ontario Natural Heritage Information Centre (NHIC) staff, confirmed occurrences are known from the Saugeen, Sauble, Maitland, Ausable, Grand, and Madawaska rivers, with additional rivers having potential for future discoveries.

An interesting example—the most extensive example of flood-scour riverine prairie currently known in Ontario—occurs along the lower Maitland River, where an exposed limestone floodplain has developed prairie vegetation in the soil filled cracks between the bedrock. Here, the community is about 300 metres wide and extends for more than one kilometre along the river.

Flood-scour riverine prairie is threatened by the same pressures affecting prairie ecosystems more broadly, primarily the loss or alteration of natural disturbance regimes. If river channels are stabilized, redirected, or otherwise altered such that flood scouring no longer occurs, competing woody and invasive species may establish and eventually displace prairie vegetation. Due to the persistence of annual or near-annual flood disturbance, flood-scour riverine prairie may represent one of the most resilient forms of tallgrass prairie in Ontario.

In contrast to railway prairie remnants, which historically depended on fires ignited by passing trains and now experience little disturbance, flood-scour riverine prairie



Flood-scour riverine prairie community on the Saugeen River. Photo credit: Graham Cameron, NHIC

continues to be maintained by natural hydrological processes. These systems are well adapted to losing all above-ground biomass, regenerating each year from extensive root systems that both anchor plants during floods and enable rapid recovery once waters recede. Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) has been observed at some sites and could present a threat. Although European reed (*Phragmites australis australis*) has not yet been recorded within these communities, it poses a potential future threat. ■



Manitoba: Using genetic analysis to delineate salamander ranges



An eastern tiger salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*).
Photo credit: MBCDC

PLAYING A UNIQUE ROLE in prairie and wetland ecosystems, tiger salamanders are an essential part of southern Manitoba's biodiversity. They are widely distributed across this region but occur as distinct species, in distinct populations, and in areas of potential genetic mixing. Although ranked as Globally Secure (G5), both the eastern tiger salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*) and western tiger salamander (*Ambystoma mavortium*) are at risk of extirpation from Manitoba. They are also federally listed as "Endangered" and "Special Concern", respectively. Restrictive habitat requirements and human impacts from agricultural development, wetland draining, and

high road-kill mortality are key factors in the at-risk status of each species.

The tendency of both species to have highly fluctuating populations located in small, isolated areas means gathering accurate information on each species is difficult. This is compounded by overlapping ranges and similarities in species morphology.

In surveying tiger salamanders previously, the Manitoba Conservation Data Centre (MBCDC) used the Red River as a range dividing line: east of the Red River encompassed eastern tiger salamanders, while west encompassed western tiger salamanders. However, while the available data was helpful for determining salamander

presence or absence in given areas, there was uncertainty in identifying specimens by species.

To remedy this, the MBCDC since 2014 has been collecting tissue samples of both salamander species, subjecting the tissues for genetic analysis, and building a database of information from field observation and genetic analysis. This database furthers understanding of population ranges and assists external researchers who may be looking for tiger salamander tissue from Manitoba.

Drawing on the database, a recent technical report prepared by the University of California at Los Angeles and Environment and Climate Change Canada further delineated the range of each salamander species throughout Manitoba. The MBCDC's tissue samples helped illuminate the distribution of two genetically isolated eastern tiger salamander populations, one residing in the Sandilands Provincial Forest and the other more westerly in the Red River floodplain area. While the findings also largely support the Red River as a divider between the two species, genetic analysis has revealed hybridization of the two species occurring in the area. This suggests that the boundaries between the two species are not strictly defined. By genetically analysing survey data to determine species, the MBCDC has been able to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the tiger salamander genus in Manitoba. ■



Saskatchewan: Documenting rare plant range extension and Canadian toad presence in the Manitou Sand Hills

SPANNING 425 SQUARE KILOMETRES in size and one of western Canada's most distinctive landscapes, the Manitou Sand Hills surround much of the southern half of Manitou Lake, an 81 km² salt lake situated within a 700 km² Important Bird Area (a globally important area for bird conservation). This region is within a migratory corridor for the globally "Critically Imperiled" (G1) whooping crane (*Grus americana*), supports many other migratory birds, and is also an Important Plant Area (a globally important area for plant conservation).

In the summer of 2025, the Saskatchewan Conservation Data Centre (SKCDC) undertook extensive fieldwork in the Manitou Sand Hills to study the northern range of smooth goosefoot (*Chenopodium subglabrum*), a globally "Vulnerable" (G3) rare plant species which is listed under the federal Species at Risk Act as "Threatened". As well, fieldwork resulted in new information to support an upcoming conservation status assessment, by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, on the Canadian toad (*Anaxyrus hemiophrys*, G4). The SKCDC also documented potential Canadian toad overwintering habitat.

In June SKCDC staff completed vegetation

inventory surveys, identified sand dunes for possible locations of smooth goosefoot, completed amphibian auditory surveys with a focus on the Canadian toad, and deployed autonomous recording units at two wetlands to monitor for Canadian toad breeding activity.

In July, and working with the non-profit Nature Saskatchewan, the SKCDC continued surveys for smooth goosefoot—and found the plant further north in Saskatchewan than from any previous observations. Visual surveys for toads were also successfully completed around wetland areas, and adjacent upland areas with burrowing mammal activity were flagged as potential toad overwintering sites.

In September SKCDC staff returned to the Manitou Sand Hills to complete the final round of vegetation inventory surveys, and to identify additional upland locations near waterbodies for possible toad overwintering sites. These locations will be re-visited in early spring 2026 to check for signs of toad emergence.

All in all, the above work by the SKCDC confirmed a northerly range extension of smooth goosefoot; documented the presence of 12 other provincially rare plant species; and confirmed Canadian toad breeding activity at both locations served by the autonomous recording units, as well as at



Photo above: Pin flags mark the locations of individuals of species of interest, help to make accurate population counts, and help to define species population boundaries. Photo credit: Beth Dolmage, SKCDC

Photo below: A Canadian toad observed during SKCDC fieldwork in the Manitou Sand Hills in 2025. Photo credit: Erin Swerdfeger, SKCDC



some other wetlands in the area. Possible toad overwintering habitat locations were identified. Future work includes Canadian toad overwintering habitat (emergence) searches in the spring of 2026. ■



British Columbia: Building capacity for conservation status assessments

IN THE WINTER OF 2025-26, ecologists from the British Columbia Conservation Data Centre (BCCDC) took on a challenge that had been building quietly for years: how to improve the quality and consistency of ecosystem conservation status assessments across the province. The solution turned out to be both practical and powerful: teach the process.

The BCCDC Ecology unit developed a training program focused on conservation status assessment, grounded in NatureServe methodology, and tailored to the ecological and operational context of British Columbia. The training was delivered through a series of webinars, bringing together a competitively selected group of contracted regional experts from across the province. These ecologists were chosen not only for their expertise, but also for their ability to contribute operational experience and thoughtful discussion.

The need for the training was clear. Over time, BCCDC staff had observed substantial variability in the quality of conservation status assessments completed by contractors. This variability reflected differences in experience, but also differing interpretations, and occasional misinterpretations, of the NatureServe conservation status assessment

methodology. If assessments are to inform conservation decisions, policy, and funding priorities, it is critical that they are developed in a consistent manner.

The training focused on reinforcing foundational NatureServe concepts, clarifying content from key guidance documents, and integrating emerging research and relevant guidance from the IUCN Red List of Ecosystems

Criteria and Guidelines. Importantly, it also addresses features unique to British Columbia, such as the Biogeoclimatic Ecosystem Classification (BEC) system and Terrestrial Ecosystem Information (TEI) ecosystem mapping products. Participants worked through a practice assessment using real data, with ample time for discussion and comparison of approaches.

The results of their work were vetted by BCCDC ecologists and will be published during our 2026 data release.

As often happens, teaching the material deepened understanding for everyone involved, including instructors. Questions raised by participants surfaced assumptions, sharpened guidance, and improved shared interpretations, which are now being used to develop new and improved guidance documents for NatureServe. In addition to the live sessions, materials from the training such as the slides, recordings, and a companion guidance document will continue to support early career ecologists and others who are new to NatureServe. Together, these resources help advance the BCCDC's broader goal: improving the quality, consistency, transparency, and efficiency of conservation status assessments. ■



The arctic rush—Alaska plantain estuarine ecological community was ranked S1 but had not been assessed since 2007. A ranking practice exercise included ecologists with extensive experience mapping ecosystems on the coasts of Vancouver Island and Haida Gwaii. After discussion and integration, the resulting status was changed to S2S3, with much improved confidence. Photo credit: Jason Straka, BCCDC



Summary Financial Data

From NatureServe Canada's audited financial statements for 2025-26: to access the full statements, please contact finances@natureserve.ca

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION		
Year ending March 31	2026	2025
ASSETS		
Current		
Cash	638,405	791,677
Accounts receivable	448,492	370,506
Prepaid expense	1,234	1,234
	1,088,131	1,163,417
Capital Assets	1,236	—
Total Assets	1,089,367	1,163,417
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Current Liabilities		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	735,742	796,811
Deferred revenue	—	—
	735,742	796,811
Net Assets	353,625	366,606
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	1,089,367	1,163,417

STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS		
Year ending March 31	2026	2025
REVENUE		
Charitable organization/foundation funding	92,440	122,200
Dues	13,500	16,500
Government funding	1,873,744	2,661,283
Other	13,540	25,237
Total Revenue	1,993,224	2,825,220
EXPENDITURES		
Contracts	1,867,440	2,684,536
Office costs	52,912	26,506
Other	3,397	3,317
Professional fees	21,619	21,793
Sponsorship	—	—
Travel, annual meeting, workshops	60,837	92,265
Total Expenditures	2,006,205	2,828,417
Excess (Deficiency) Revenue Over Expenditures	(12,981)	(3,197)

An Invitation to Contribute to Conservation Science

A financial investment in conservation science is an investment in knowledge about nature, upon which depends the health of the environment, the economy, and our society. NatureServe Canada is a registered Canadian charity (#862330529RR0001). We welcome tax deductible donations in support of our business—conservation science. As well, membership in NatureServe Canada is available to organizations that support our mission, which manage data of conservation value, and/or are active in promoting science-based conservation action nationally or sub-nationally.

For inquiries, contact: Patrick Henry, Executive Director, pherry@natureserve.ca; 613-986-1535 ■





In Gratitude for Cooperation and Contributions in 2025-26—Thank You!

NatureServe Canada is deeply grateful for the cooperation and contributions of our Constituent and Associate members, and Federal Government Collaborators—thank you!

CONSTITUENT MEMBERS

Alberta Conservation Information Management System
Atlantic Canada Conservation Data Centre
British Columbia Conservation Data Centre
Manitoba Conservation Data Centre

Northwest Territories Conservation Data Centre
Nunavut Conservation Data Centre
Ontario Natural Heritage Information Centre
Saskatchewan Conservation Data Centre
Yukon Conservation Data Centre

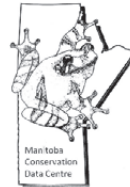
ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Nature Conservancy of Canada
NatureServe

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT COLLABORATORS

Environment and Climate Change Canada—
Canadian Wildlife Service

Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Parks Canada



Environment and
Climate Change Canada

Environnement et
Changement climatique Canada



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada

Pêches et Océans
Canada

Canada



Parks
Canada

Parcs
Canada



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