



Miistakis
Institute

Miistakis Institute

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

Staff Reflections

Over the course of a year Miistakis works on dozens of applied conservation research projects – many that we conceptualize, design and implement and some that others come to us with for our support, based on our conservation expertise. 2023/24 was no exception. Over the year we worked on 25 different projects with 55 different partners. Often, we get wrapped up in our work and need to remind ourselves to pause and reflect on the conservation contributions we have made and to celebrate our successes. We encourage you to read this report and see for yourself where our biggest impacts have been. Here we share with you some of our own reflections from the past year.



Danah

At a recent Connectivity Summit in Montreal, it was clearly demonstrated that ecological connectivity has become mainstream with examples of connectivity being considered in land use planning and policy around the world, and even dedicated funding streams! Miistakis has been working to highlight the importance of ecological connectivity for over 25 years and at times it has felt like progress is slow and incremental. However, recent advances in the recognition of the importance of ecological connectivity has made me very proud of our contributions to this success.

Nilo

This past year, I was pleased with the success of a large multicomponent project we completed with The City of Calgary. For me, this was a great example of what Miistakis does best. We brought together experts and great partners to solve a tangible problem by using cutting edge analyses and gathering input from city staff doing on-the-ground work. The project provided The City with new tools to assess wetlands in the field, assess wetlands remotely using a model and GIS-based characteristics, prioritize their wetlands for protection and restoration, and outline beneficial management practices to keep those highly valuable natural assets healthy. We are excited to see how these tools will continue to evolve and support City staff.





Holly

With over 10 years of experience helping Albertans coexist with beavers, realizing the ecosystem benefits they provide, the Working with Beavers collaborative has completed the Alberta Beaver Beneficial Management Practices, a guidance document and decision tree that provides information about available beaver management tools with the goal of improving implementation of beaver coexistence tools in Alberta. It is our hope that the BMPs will support coexistence with beavers, enhancing watershed resiliency across Alberta.

Sara

A highlight for me was the publication of our 5 year Calgary Captured technical report. The results from this work will help support ecological connectivity in the wider regional area around Calgary while fostering partnerships between local conservation groups and multiple levels of government.



Ken

Over the last year we have seen a significant increase in our private donations which is direct recognition of the contributions we are making and confirmation of the value others see in our work.



Tracy

This year Alberta Transportation and Economic Corridors constructed a wildlife overpass over the Trans-Canada Highway and recently announced plans to build additional crossing infrastructure along the Trans-Canada Highway, Highway 1A and Highway 3 in the Canadian Rocky Mountains. For over two decades, Miistakis has been undertaking research to demonstrate the need for these investments to improve both motorist safety and wildlife movement across our busy provincial highway network. We are thrilled with this significant conservation contribution and look forward to continuing to contribute to our understanding of how best to protect and maintain ecological connectivity.



Vision

A world where communities have genuine access to the science and research they need to make choices that promote healthy landscapes.

Mission

The Miistakis Institute brings people and ideas together to promote healthy communities and landscapes. We study the landscape, so we can help people maintain it; and we work to make innovative research accessible to communities and decision-makers.

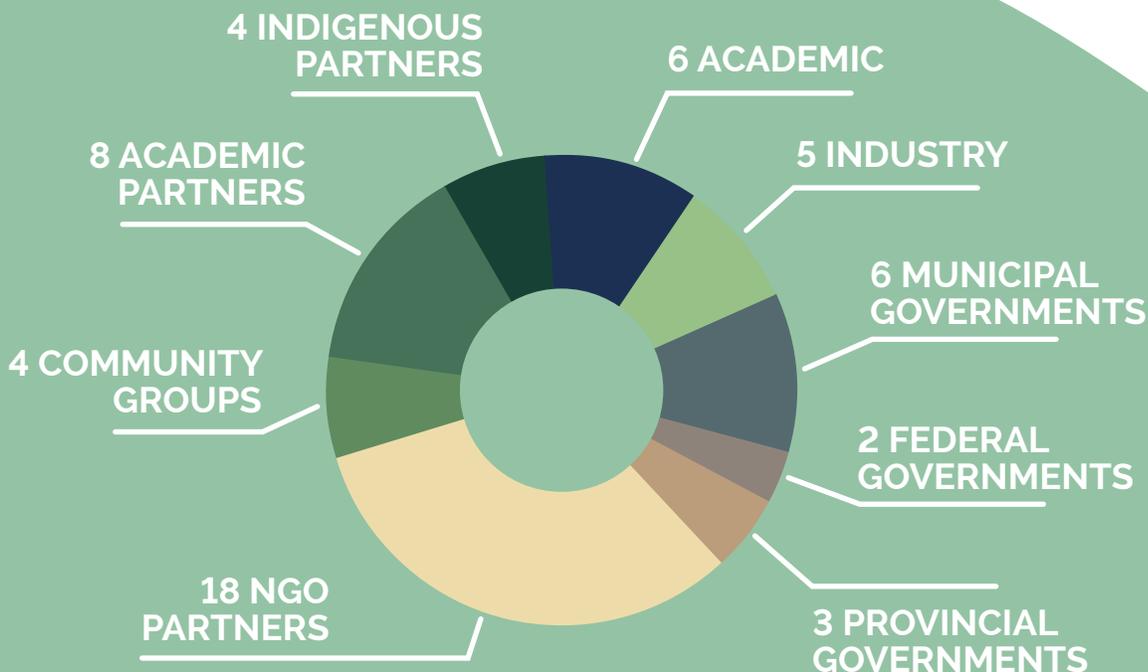
About Us

The Miistakis Institute is a registered charity that undertakes applied conservation research to enable responsible and sustainable decisions to support biodiversity, ecological connectivity and nature-based climate adaptation.

Miistakis is a Blackfoot word that translates to 'backbone of the world'. When Miistakis was first formed in 1997, the work of the institute focused on the Crown of the Continent ecosystem. The Crown of the Continent is a geographical area centered on the Waterton-Glacier International

Peace Park and stretches along the axis of the Rocky Mountains spanning southwest Alberta, southeast British Columbia and northern Montana, a place known to the Blackfoot people as the backbone of the world.

Miistakis works collaboratively with all sectors, developing our research in partnership with end knowledge users. In 2023/2024 we worked with 55 partners, including federal, provincial and municipal governments, industry, Indigenous communities, ENGO's, academics, and community groups.



Mount Royal University

Miistakis is an affiliated institute with Mount Royal University. The objective of the affiliation is to facilitate collaboration and cooperation between the Institute and the University and University researchers in mutually beneficial activities. We work closely with MRU staff and undergraduate students to find innovative solutions to complex environmental challenges and apply those in real-world efforts to advance conservation and environmental outcomes. In 2023/24, we employed three Mount Royal summer students and we worked with 7 undergraduate students at both MRU and SAIT supporting integrated work learning and capstone projects. We also worked with a graduate student from Concordia University and a post-doctoral fellow from the University of Toronto.

Supporting undergraduate and graduate research is crucial for Miistakis as it not only cultivates the next generation of conservation leaders but also fosters innovation and excellence in the field. By engaging students in applied research projects, the Institute provides them with valuable hands-on experience, allowing them to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and research skills that are essential for their future careers. This experience also helps them gain a deeper understanding of environmental issues and conservation practices, inspiring them to become advocates for sustainable practices in their communities and beyond.



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May 6, 2024

It's #amphibianweek! What a great day to start our eDNA field season for #calgaryconnect...

OUR RESEARCH

Ecological Connectivity

Ecological connectivity is a nature-based solution that maintains and restores natural pathways for wildlife movement and ecological processes, enhancing ecosystem resilience and supporting biodiversity in the face of environmental changes. Miistakis works to conserve natural landscapes by addressing ecological connectivity, ensuring

wildlife and ecosystems are linked across the landscape. We conduct research on wildlife corridors and species movement, collaborate with government agencies and communities to protect key habitats, and advocate for land-use policies that prioritize connectivity.

Wildlife Xing

Wildlife Xing aims to support the movement of wildlife across the Northern Sagebrush Steppe with a focus on pronghorn. Key barriers to pronghorn migration and daily movements include roads, fencing and development such as industrial or residential development. Over the past year our work has focused on developing a pronghorn connectivity action plan, where we developed strategies to maintain or improve pronghorn movement. The plan included three supporting research components, an assessment of **behavioural response of pronghorn to fencing**, identification of high valued ecological connectivity areas based on multi-species connectivity modeling, and **confirmation of road mitigation sites important for grassland species conservation**.

WORKING TEAM

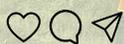
- Alberta Conservation Association
- Alberta Transportation
- Economic Corridors
- Saskatchewan Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure
- Alberta Environment and Parks
- Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment
- Saskatchewan Government Insurance
- The National Wildlife Federation

FUNDERS

- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- Alberta Conservation Association
- Environment and Climate Change Canada



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September 19, 2023

Great day visiting potential pronghorn road mitigation sites along the TransCanada Highway in Alberta. We discussed the feasibility of road mitigation!



Supporting Ecological Connectivity in Municipal Planning

Over the past few years Miistakis has worked to promote important conversations between municipal decision-makers, planners, developers, and scientists to promote education and policy on how development can occur simultaneously with better environmental outcomes. Decisions on what to develop and where are made with little consideration of the natural environment, the ecosystem services provided by the natural environment, or the degree of connection between natural environments present on a landscape. We continue to work on expanding and updating the **Connectivity Risk Assessment (CRA)** tool developed by Miistakis that enables municipalities to explore how a proposed development may impact connectivity and allows the consideration of possible mitigations to reduce impacts to connectivity. Work over the past year has focused on meeting municipal planners and development officers to outline improvements to the CRA tool including an updated mitigation recommendations report. In addition, we are currently delineating an ecological network for the M.D. Pincher Creek to enable CRA tool deployment.

COLLABORATORS

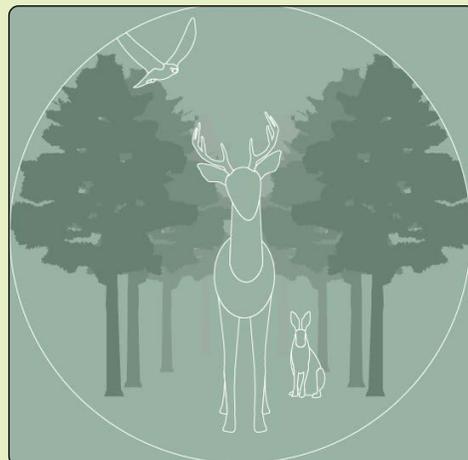
- Rocky View County
- Foothills County
- Municipality of Crowsnest Pass
- M.D. of Pincher Creek
- M.D. Willow Creek
- Oldman River Regional Services Commission

FUNDERS

- Wilburforce Foundation
- Woodcock Foundation
- Alberta Real Estate Foundation



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October 25, 2023

Over the past two years Miistakis has worked to promote important conversations between municipal decision-makers, planners, developers, and scientists to promote education and policy...

Calgary Connect

Building on the success of Calgary Captured, Calgary Connect continues to use remote cameras to monitor terrestrial wildlife in key ecological corridors, while working to understand and integrate a broader regional ecological network into decision making in Calgary and neighboring jurisdictions. We released [a five-year technical analysis from the remote cameras project](#) and documented species activity within three ecological corridors in the city.

We continue to engage with jurisdictions surrounding Calgary to inform development of a regional ecological network. Lastly, we completed a second season of amphibian eDNA sampling to build on our knowledge of wildlife in the region and to enable modeling of wetland networks to support biodiversity.

PARTNERS

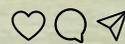
- City of Calgary
- Weaselhead/Glenmore Park Preservation Society
- Friends of Fish Creek Provincial Park Society
- Alberta Forestry and Parks
- University of Toronto Mississauga

FUNDERS

- The Calgary Foundation
- TD Friends of the Environment Foundation
- Enbridge



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April 22, 2024

Set up our first acoustic monitors of the season for #CalgaryConnect today! Heard meadowlarks and boreal chorus frogs and saw the most beautiful field of crocuses. What a great way to spend earth day!

Linking Landscapes

We continue to undertake research to better understand wildlife movement across the Highway 3 Transportation Corridor in southwestern Alberta. To understand how wildlife use existing mitigation infrastructure on Highway 3 we set up remote cameras at culverts and bridge structures in two key wildlife corridors. We compared species activity on the surrounding landscape with activity at crossing structures and documented which species were using existing structures. Our work highlights the need for road mitigation to enhance crossing opportunity for wildlife through building of new structure and/or modification of existing structures to enable safe wildlife movement across Highway 3. We **documented our findings in a new report** along with an assessment of animal vehicle collision data to improve our **understanding of cost effectiveness of road mitigation**.

PARTNERS

- Nature Conservancy of Canada

FUNDERS

- Woodcock Foundation
- Wilburforce Foundation
- Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation



OUR RESEARCH

Biodiversity

Biodiversity, or biological diversity, encompasses the number, variety, and variability of living organisms within an area. A landscape rich in biodiversity signifies a healthy ecosystem that sustains essential natural processes humans rely on, such as food production, clean water, medicine, and clean air. However, human activities like land use changes (e.g., urbanization), over-exploitation, climate change, and pollution are leading

to alarming rates of biodiversity loss globally. This loss diminishes the ability of ecosystems to function effectively, impacting economic, recreational, cultural, and scientific opportunities. Over the past year, Miistakis has focused on enhancing our understanding of biodiversity, supporting the maintenance and restoration of biodiversity and promoting the importance of biodiversity.



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November 1, 2023

Private land conservation (PLC) is an important strategy for conservation in Alberta...

Value Of Private Land Conservation in Alberta

Private land conservation (PLC) is an important strategy for conservation in Alberta with PLC making significant contributions to watershed resiliency, climate change resiliency, biodiversity, and human well-being. Last year we built an [interactive website](#) to highlight the value of land trusts and private land conservation in Alberta. This year we reached out to partners, funders and other interested participants to get feedback on the website, the [technical report](#) describing the value of PLC, and identified which metrics and [resources](#) they found most helpful. We will use this feedback to refine and update these resource to support and promote the value of private land conservation in Alberta.

PARTNERS

- Alberta Conservation Association
- Crooked Creek Land Trust
- Ducks Unlimited Canada
- Edmonton Area Land Trust
- Foothills Land Trust
- Legacy Land Trust
- Nature Conservation of Canada (Alberta office)
- Southern Alberta Land Trust Society
- Western Sky Land Trust

FUNDERS

- Government of Alberta Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program
- Alberta Ecotrust Foundation
- Environment and Climate Change Canada

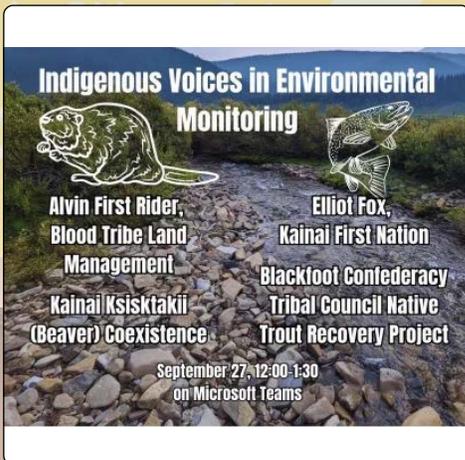
Supporting the Alberta Citizen Science Community of Practice

Citizen science supports environmental conservation by enabling widespread data collection, and by increasing public engagement and awareness, fostering a deeper understanding and advocacy for environmental issues. This collaborative approach empowers communities, informs policy, and sustains long-term environmental monitoring and conservation efforts.

The Alberta Citizen Science Community of Practice (CoP) aims to bring together and support citizen science practitioners, researchers, environmental managers, educators, project coordinators, and volunteers by promoting coordination and collaboration among them. Over the past year Miistakis has undertaken the design and creation of the Alberta Citizen Science CoP Collaboration Hub, to support the CoP, which will include a repository of resources for practitioners, support the building of connections within the CoP and include examples of citizen science successes and impacts across Alberta.



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September 15, 2023

Join the Alberta Citizen Science Community of Practice on September 27th at noon to hear from two leaders in Blackfoot conservation...



Improving Urban Wetland Management

To support biodiversity goals, Miistakis partnered with The City of Calgary on a comprehensive four-part project to inform wetland management, protection and restoration. The first component, the **Aquatic Condition Index (ACI)**, involved the development of an innovative rapid field assessment to score urban wetlands on hydrology, water quality and ecological function, and roll up to a combined score to indicate overall ecosystem health; for this field-based process, we developed a **field manual** to provide detailed instructions. The second component, the **modelled-ACI**, took a remote approach and identified and modelled the overall ecosystem score and its component parts based on GIS-derived characteristics of each wetland. For the third component, a **prioritization framework** was developed to conserve wetlands and corridors. The prioritization framework combined the modelled ecological function score with other factors, such as whether the **wetland contained habitat suitable to all three amphibian species** that can be found in Calgary or whether the wetland is part of The City of Calgary's ecological network, to prioritize each wetland or corridor for protection or restoration. In the fourth and final component, we developed an operational **beneficial management practices** document to support urban wetland biodiversity. The project relied heavily on expert input from Dr. Felix Nwaishi (MRU, Associate Professor), Dr. Irena Creed (UofT, Professor), and Dr. Lea Randall (Wilder Institute, Calgary Zoo).

PARTNER & FUNDER

- The City of Calgary

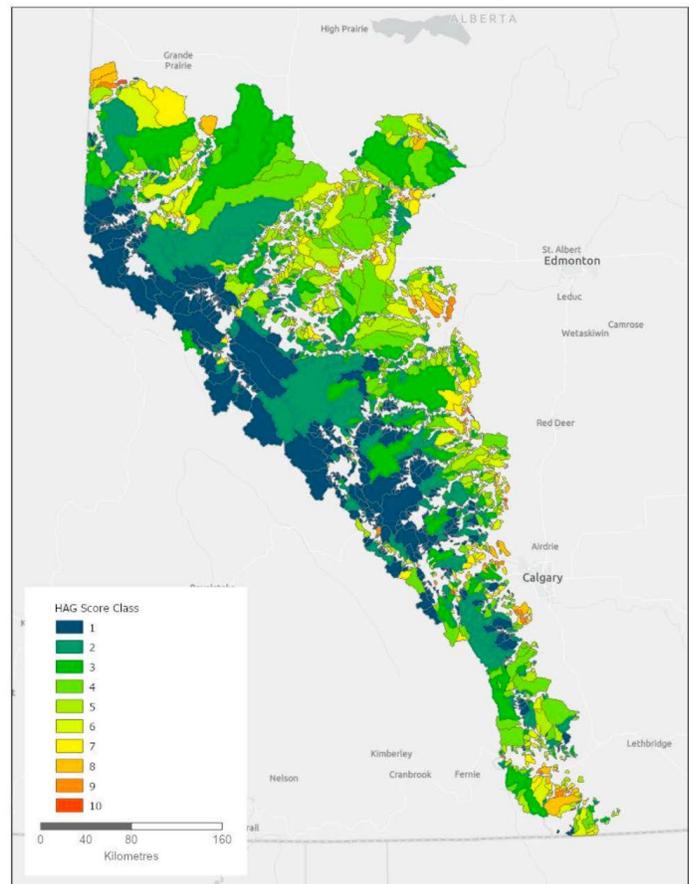


Supporting Development of an East Slopes CABIN Reference Condition Model

The Canadian Aquatic Biomonitoring Network (CABIN) is an initiative led and maintained by Environment and Climate Change Canada that provides standardized and widely used methods for monitoring water quality based on benthic invertebrate species composition. Applying CABIN methods to evaluating the health of a stream ecosystem is even more robust when a reference condition model is in place for the area. We partnered with the Oldman Watershed Council to provide GIS analysis support to help guide site selection for potential reference sites. The **outcome of this project** will be used by a number of partners in an East Slopes collaborative that plan to contribute to the development of an East Slopes Reference Condition Model.

PARTNER & FUNDERS

- Oldman Watershed Council



Waterton Biosphere Region

Biodiversity monitoring is fundamental to understand the effectiveness of conservation and sustainable management activities that occur in a biosphere reserve. It can assist in conservation assessment, early detection of changes, evaluating the effectiveness of conservation or restoration projects, scientific research, providing baseline data for decision-making, education and awareness and international reporting. This past year, we led the Waterton Biosphere Region Association in a process to identify and prioritize biodiversity indicators and measures to support

the development of a structured biodiversity monitoring program. The process was included a workshop, informed by a pre-workshop survey, where we identified potential data sources and discussed availability and repeatability of the data as well as whether the measure linked to existing WBRA programming. We provided a list of measures with priority score for each and recommendations for next steps.

PARTNER & FUNDER

- Waterton Biosphere Region



Alberta Grasslands Scan

Grasslands play a pivotal role in the ecological balance of our planet and contribute many ecosystem services such as biodiversity, ecological connectivity, and carbon storage. A recent increase in interest in grasslands coupled with advances in remote sensing technologies has resulted in a surge in datasets, resources and initiatives related to characterizing grassland extent and condition. We partnered with Alberta NAWMP partnership to explore this space through interviews with researchers and data users, and examination of the datasets themselves. We conducted interviews with key organizations and individuals who either develop spatial datasets or use spatial datasets to understand grassland extent and condition. We asked questions to help gain an understanding of the range of resources available, their strengths and limitations, and how they are being applied underscoring the importance of considering the purpose of the dataset when determining it's application.

PARTNER & FUNDER

- Alberta North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) Partnership

OUR RESEARCH

Ecosystem-based Climate Adaptation

Miistakis prioritizes ecosystem-based climate adaptation as a strategy to maintain resilient, healthy landscapes in the face of a changing climate. Ecosystem-based climate adaptation refers to a variety of approaches that involve the conservation, sustainable management,

and restoration of ecosystems, and is aimed at reducing the vulnerability of humans to climate change hazards. Examples of approaches include habitat restoration, wetland management, and sustainable forest management practices.

Working with Beavers

The ongoing [Working with Beavers](#) project aims to foster coexistence, highlighting the significant ecosystem and watershed benefits beavers contribute to the landscape. We have successfully completed a citizen science initiative called Beavers from Space, where volunteers searched through satellite imagery for beaver dams to inform stream restoration site selection while also raising awareness about the benefits of beavers. In addition to this work and building on the success of our first beaver dam analogue (BDA) installed in 2022 for stream restoration, in 2023 we installed two additional BDA sites (8 structures) on the Kainai Reservation, in partnership with Blood Tribe Land Management - Environmental Protection Division and Cows and Fish – Riparian Management Society. At the BDA sites we will be

monitoring changes to water storage and riparian health over several years. We've continued to create educational awareness materials, host webinars and workshops, and have completed engagement on the [Alberta Beaver Beneficial Management Practices](#) resource.

PARTNERS

- Cows and Fish – Riparian Management Society
- Blood Tribe Land Management

FUNDERS

- Government of Alberta's Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program
- Alberta Innovates
- The Calgary Foundation
- Alberta Ecotrust Foundation



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April 17, 2024

We had a fantastic first field day of the season pretending to be beavers...



Bow River Regional Wetland Datasets

Wetlands are natural assets that play a vital role in climate change adaptation and mitigation. They provide ecosystem services like flood and drought mitigation, water purification, and enhanced biodiversity. Accurate wetland mapping is essential to keep connected, functional wetlands on the landscape. We partnered with the Bow River Basin Council and Fiera Biological Consulting to develop and share four wetland-focused datasets to support municipalities and Indigenous communities in decision making and operations related to wetlands. To facilitate easy access to the datasets and explanation of what they are and how they can be used, we built a [website](#) with a [spatial viewer](#). We gathered an advisory committee made up of representatives from 11 municipalities and watershed groups and provided them with an [introduction to the datasets](#) and early access to the data. The advisory committee provided feedback on the utility of the website, feedback on the datasets themselves, and examples of how they would apply the datasets to their work. We also worked with a Capstone student from SAIT's Integrated Water Management Program. The student worked with us to add storm ponds to the wetland dataset and a mixedwood class to the land cover dataset to increase utility of the datasets in response to the ideas provided by the advisory committee. We co-hosted a [webinar](#) with the BRBC to introduce these datasets to the public.

PARTNERS

- Bow River Basin Council (BRBC)
- Fiera Biological Consulting
- Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT)

FUNDERS

- The City of Calgary
- Anonymous Donor



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The Bow River Regional Wetland Datasets

are a new resource to support land use planning, wetland management, conservation and restoration for municipalities, Indigenous communities and watershed groups in the Bow River Basin.



January 30, 2024

Discover the wonders of Bow River Regional Wetland Datasets with us during your lunch break...

Our Reach

Miistakis take a diverse approach to our outreach and extension. We focus our efforts on creating communication products that will support end-users in conservation decision-making – this means our research includes peer-reviewed publications, reports, infographics, presentations, newsletters and social media.

30,351

Resource Downloads

Demonstrating the impact our freely available on-line resources have, with over 430,000 downloads over the past 10 years

14

Media Articles

29

Website Visits per Day

With over 98,000 page views over the year

22

Presentations

To over 1400 people

SOCIAL MEDIA

(INSTAGRAM, FACEBOOK, X, YOUTUBE)



16,900

Miistakis YouTube channel video views



162%

Increase in new followers



71%

Increase in reach



23%

Increase in engagement



58%

Increase in posts

2023/24

Publications & Reports



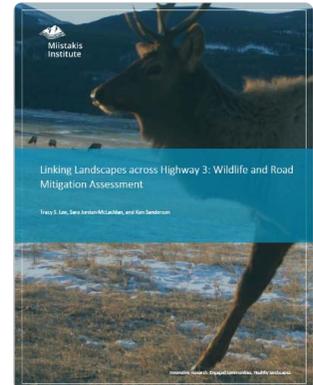
Pronghorn Connectivity Action Plan



Linking Landscapes: Helping wildlife move around the Crowsnest Pass



Pronghorn Fencing Permeability in the NSS



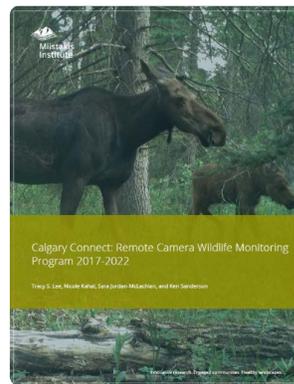
Linking Landscapes across Highway 3: Wildlife and Road Mitigation Assessment



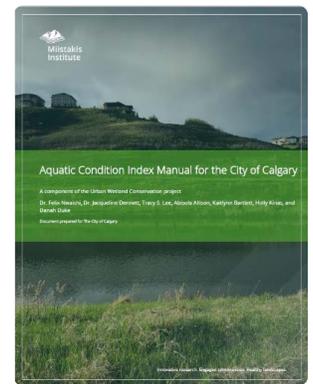
Using community science to advance grizzly bear conservation



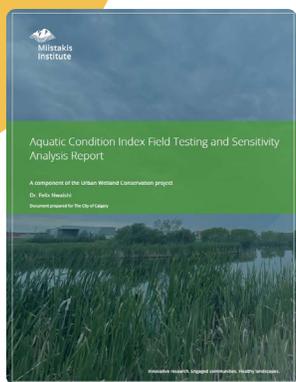
Beaver Restoration Modelling for the CIPHER Project



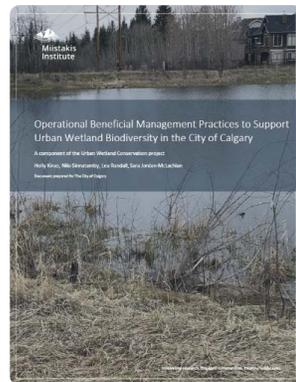
Calgary Connect: Remote Camera Wildlife Monitoring Program 2017-2022



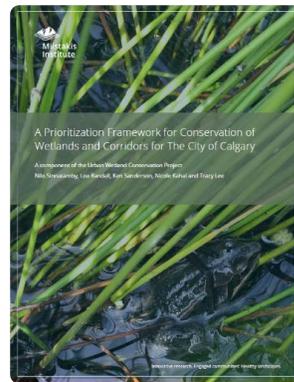
Aquatic Condition Index Manual for the City of Calgary



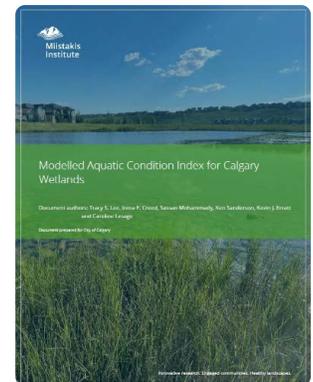
Aquatic Condition Index Field Testing and Sensitivity Analysis Report



Operational Beneficial Management Practices to Support Urban Wetland Biodiversity in the City of Calgary



A Prioritization Framework for Conservation of Wetlands and Corridors for The City of Calgary



Modelled Aquatic Condition Index for Calgary Wetlands

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Accelerator, Nature Conservancy Canada*

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Conservation Analyst

NICOLE KAHAL,

Conservation Analyst

SARA JORDAN-MCLACHLAN,

Conservation Analyst

ELLIOT FOX,

Indigenous Conservation Consultant



FINANCIALS

Statement of Financial Position

	2024	2023
ASSETS		
Current		
Cash	\$591,900	\$473,707
Accounts receivable	\$148,140	\$135,965
Accrued project receivables	\$16,910	\$85,838
Short term investment (Note 2)	\$358,309	\$356,881
Goods and services tax recoverable	--	\$2,028
Prepaid expenses	\$1,705	\$1,123
	\$1,116,964	\$1,055,542
Investments (Note 3)	\$482,864	\$453,889
Equipment (Note 4)	\$18,432	\$10,764
	\$1,618,260	\$1,520,195
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Current		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	\$28,463	\$173,405
Wages payable	\$75,583	\$61,683
Deferred contributions related to operations (Note 5)	\$696,970	\$669,079
	\$801,016	\$904,167
Deferred contribution related to equipment (Note 6)	\$295	\$393
	\$801,311	\$904,560
NET ASSETS		
Invested in equipment	\$18,137	\$10,370
Internally restricted (Note 7)	\$380,000	\$380,000
Unrestricted	\$418,812	\$225,265
	\$816,949	\$615,635
	\$1,618,260	\$1,520,195

FINANCIALS

Statement of Operations

	2024	2023
REVENUE		
Services	\$533,539	\$521,893
Foundation and other grants	\$425,942	\$148,376
Government grants	\$290,477	\$397,883
Donations	\$149,418	\$58,411
Events	\$6,800	--
Endowment income (Note 8)	\$3,435	\$3,738
	\$1,409,612	\$1,130,301
EXPENDITURES		
Wages and benefits	\$684,471	\$557,613
Subcontract	\$446,406	\$412,204
Professional fees	\$35,422	\$32,820
Travel	\$29,736	\$19,844
Workshop	\$15,823	\$2,018
Rent	\$12,300	\$12,300
Software	\$11,328	\$9,801
Supplies	\$10,574	\$26,500
Insurance	\$7,958	\$7,975
Amortization	\$5,019	\$3,926
Telephone and utilities	\$966	\$1,723
Training	\$677	--
Advertising and promotion	\$294	--
Interest and bank charges	\$25	--
	\$1,260,999	\$1,086,724
Excess of revenue over expenditures before undernoted items	\$148,613	\$43,577
OTHER INCOME (EXPENSE)		
Unrealized (loss) gain on investment	\$7,786	(\$8,628)
Gain on investments	\$14,312	\$8,218
Dividend income	\$10,905	\$9,691
Interest	\$19,698	\$8,754
	\$52,701	\$18,035
Excess of revenue over expenditures for the year	\$201,314	\$61,612

FINANCIALS

Statement of Changes in Net Assets

	Invested in equipment	Internally restricted	Unrestricted	2024	2023
BALANCE BEGINNING OF YEAR	\$10,370	\$380,000	\$225,265	\$615,635	\$554,023
Excess (deficiency) of revenue over expenditures for the year	(\$4,920)	--	\$206,234	\$201,314	\$61,612
Purchase of equipment	\$12,687	--	(\$12,687)	--	--
BALANCE END OF YEAR	\$18,137	\$380,000	\$418,812	\$816,949	\$615,635