

The South Okanagan-Similkameen Conservation Program's Partnership-based Approach to Species At Risk Recovery and Stewardship

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As one of Canada's most endangered ecosystems, the South Okanagan – Similkameen area of British Columbia presents a unique and complex situation in terms of the recovery and conservation of species at risk. Within this relatively small geographic area, there are 42 COSEWIC listed plants and animals, and an additional 87 animals and 137 plants listed as threatened or endangered by the provincial government. Known for its beaches, vineyards, orchards, spectacular weather, and beautiful scenery, this area has experienced rapid urban and agricultural growth. This popularity has resulted in tremendous pressure on the area's unique desert-like ecosystem and the diversity of rare species that it supports. Conservation and recovery planning in the South Okanagan – Similkameen has recognized that the conservation needs of the area can not be met solely on a species-by-species basis, and that a multi-species, landscape level partnership based approach is needed.

In an effort to focus and promote local conservation and stewardship efforts, the South Okanagan-Similkameen Conservation Program (SOSCP) was formed in the summer of 2000. This unique partnership has grown to include 34 non-government and government organizations¹. Through this partnership, SOSCP's member organizations are working under a coordinated approach to protect and conserve species at risk and the habitats they need to survive.

One of the key strategies of SOSCP is to promote private land stewardship and related initiatives. The Land Conservancy of BC (TLC) has assumed the lead role under the stewardship arm of the program. With so many species at risk concentrated in one area, the South Okanagan-Similkameen has drawn a lot of attention from organizations and individuals interested in protecting the region's unique biological diversity and richness. This has sometimes resulted in a duplication of stewardship efforts, and confusion on the part of landowners. This presentation will outline the efforts being undertaken by TLC and the SOSCP Stewardship Team to deliver a coordinated partnership-based approach to private land stewardship and how they relate to species at risk recovery efforts.

¹ SOSCP partners include TLC The Land Conservancy of BC, The Nature Trust of BC, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service, Department of Fisheries & Oceans, BC Ministry of Water, Land & Air Protection, BC Ministry of Forests, BC Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, and many other local and provincial non-government organizations.