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our trust

Stories of people and places in the Columbia Basin

The Power of Community



FALL 2026

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Cover Photo: Tyler Zhao

OUR PRODUCTION-PROCESS DECISIONS RESULTED IN SAVING:

51.8 TONS OF WOOD

EQUIVALENT TO 337 MATURE TREES, COVERING AN AREA ROUGHLY EQUAL TO 3.4 TENNIS COURTS.

55,590 KG OF WATER

EQUIVALENT TO THE VOLUME OF 1,469 FIVE-MINUTE SHOWERS.

7,327 KG OF CO2 E.

EQUIVALENT TO 29,427 KM DRIVEN BY A GASOLINE-POWERED SEDAN, OR 3 ROUND TRIPS BETWEEN MONTREAL AND VANCOUVER.

223 GJ OF ENERGY

EQUIVALENT TO THE ANNUAL ENERGY CONSUMPTION OF 2 CANADIAN HOUSEHOLDS.

9,580 KG OF RECOVERED FIBRE

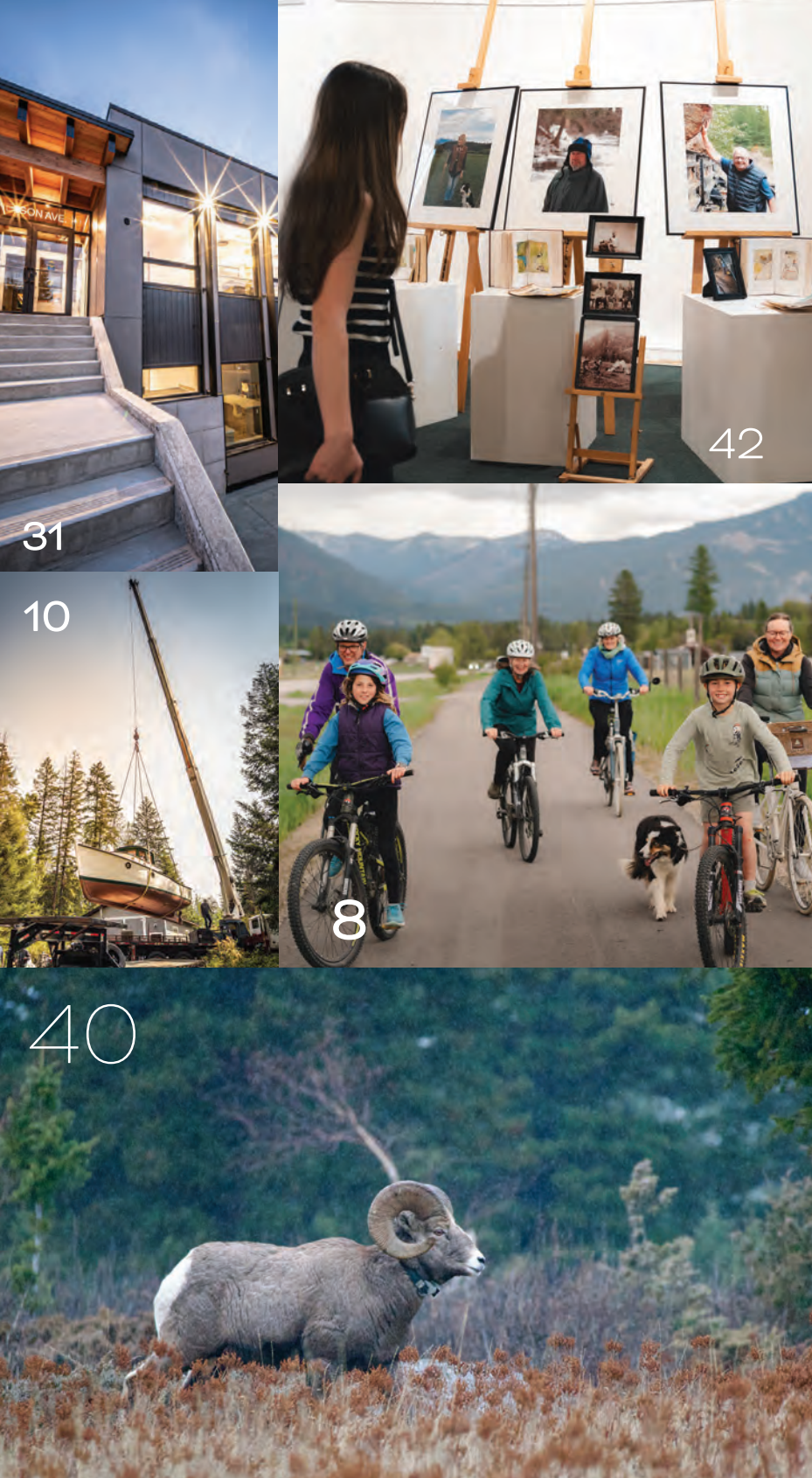
WERE USED IN MANUFACTURING, REPRESENTING MATERIAL THAT OTHERWISE COULD HAVE ENDED UP IN A LANDFILL OCCUPYING 17 CU METRES OF LANDFILL SPACE

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Columbia Basin **trust**

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Columbia Basin **trust**

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Fresh Flavours, Bright Futures

One summer job, big lessons for the future



WHEN SOLANA PENNER joined programs at New Denver's Outlet Youth Centre at age 12, she was looking for activities and opportunities to connect with other young people. Years later, she was helping run the Pop-up Salad Bar at the local farmers' market, gaining hands-on experience in customer service, food handling, teamwork and responsibility.

Through community youth networks across the Columbia Basin, young people build practical skills, explore new interests and gain confidence through real-world experiences.

For Penner, working at the salad bar was more than a summer job. "At a young age, it taught me responsibility, time management and professionalism," she says.

Photos: Whitney Taylor



FALL 2026



A TASTE OF MÉTIS CULTURE

More than a meal: a celebration of culture, family and tradition

FOR MORE THAN 20 years, residents and visitors in Trail and area have gathered at the Bison Burgers & More food trailer for hearty meals, friendly conversation and a taste of Métis culture. Operated by volunteers from the Kootenay South Métis Society, the trailer serves traditional foods such as bison burgers alongside family favourites at community events throughout the region.

The trailer's new design reflects the stories and traditions behind the food. Created by Métis artists, the artwork features imagery inspired by Métis history, culture and identity, including bison, voyageurs and traditional dance. Each element helps tell a story while celebrating the community's heritage.

For volunteers like Kaitlynn Fischer, the trailer is also a place where traditions are passed from one generation to the next. Family members work side by side, preparing food, sharing stories and teaching younger volunteers about their culture and community. "That's what Métis people are about: feeding people. There's always good food, good stories, laughter and good times."

Photos: Spencer Legebokoff



Creating a Backcountry Legacy

What it takes to keep Columbia Basin trails open for adventure

TWENTY KILOMETRES northeast of Fort Steele, the Mause Creek/Tanglefoot recreation trail winds through forests and meadows on its way to Tanglefoot Lake, a destination enjoyed by hikers and outdoor enthusiasts. For years, however, a washed-out crossing created safety concerns and made access more difficult.

To restore the route, a crew from Recreation Sites and Trails BC (RSTBC), supported by volunteers, built a new bridge over the braided creek. While materials could reach the site by road, much of the work still had to be done by hand. Volunteers and staff worked together to carry materials, install the bridge and restore safe access to the trail.

The project was supported through a partnership between RSTBC and Columbia Basin Trust, creating jobs while helping maintain and improve trails throughout the region.

For those involved, the work is about more than infrastructure. It's about ensuring residents and visitors can continue exploring the landscapes that make the Basin special.

"It feels good knowing we've helped more people access the backcountry," says Recreation Technician Aaron Canuel.



Photo: Recreation Sites and Trails BC

Listening to the Basin



Forty episodes, countless stories waiting to be discovered

DID YOU KNOW the walkie-talkie was invented in Rossland? Or that one of Canada's enduring mysteries is connected to Verigin Memorial Park? Through 40 episodes of the Headwaters podcast, listeners can explore the history, landscapes and people that make the Columbia Basin unique.

Produced by Kootenay Mountain Culture Productions in partnership with Columbia Basin Trust, the series shares stories of local innovators, artists, historians, outdoor enthusiasts and community builders, alongside explorations of topics ranging from old-growth forests and ghost towns to recreation, culture and the environment.

Explore all 40 episodes at headwaterspodcast.com



More Than Child Care

The people behind every drop-off and pickup

EVERY WEEKDAY, families across the Columbia Basin rely on child care so they can go to work, attend school and participate in community life. Behind each drop-off and pickup is a team of Early Childhood Educators helping children learn, play and build confidence during some of their most important developmental years.

At Goat Mountain Kids Centre in New Denver, educators create a safe, welcoming environment where children can explore, develop social skills and gain independence through play-based learning. Founded to address a local need, the centre helps ensure families can access child care close to home.

For educators like Jasmeen and Meenu, the work is about helping

children grow while seeing the world through their curiosity and enthusiasm. The impact extends well beyond the classroom. Reliable child care helps support the teachers, healthcare workers, tradespeople, business owners and others who keep communities running every day.

As communities work to increase access to affordable child care, qualified Early Childhood Educators continue to play an essential role in helping children, families and communities thrive.

"Seeing children grow in confidence and independence, achieve milestones and express themselves brings a great sense of fulfilment," says Meenu.



Building Better Connections

Making it easier to walk, ride and get where you need to go

ACROSS THE Columbia Basin, communities are making it easier for residents to leave their vehicles behind and choose active ways of getting around.

From upgraded commuter routes and new trail connections, to bike repair stations that keep riders rolling, active transportation projects are helping people safely reach work, school, recreation

opportunities and local services. In the process, they're supporting healthier lifestyles, reducing emissions and strengthening community connections.

Supported by Columbia Basin Trust, recent projects in Rossland, Jaffray and the Slocan Valley show how investments of different sizes can make a meaningful difference in everyday life.



Photo: Spencer Legebokoff

Connecting Communities

Local investments in trails and pathways will make it easier for residents to walk, cycle and connect with the places they need and want to go to.

For Sam Troy, improvements to Rossland's Centennial Trail have enhanced a route she uses almost every day. As a ski patroller, bike patroller and dispatcher at RED Mountain Resort, Troy has spent two decades working on the mountain. She bikes the three kilometres to work 95 per cent of the time—even in winter.

"Commuting by bike is just part of my life," she says.

The City of Rossland recently upgraded sections of Centennial Trail, which connects downtown Rossland to recreational destinations, including the ski hill. The work included reshaping and paving sections of the pathway, improving drainage, enhancing road crossings and signage, and installing glow stones that help illuminate the route and improve visibility for users after dark.

"I appreciate all the improvements to Centennial Trail," Troy says.

While the upgrades haven't changed the length of her commute, she says they have made the trail more accessible for a wider range of users.

"The paving has made the trail safer for increased use by more people who may not have used it before, including elders and parents with strollers," she says.



Photo: Tyler Zhao



Photo: Craig Lawrence



Photo: Spencer Legebokoff

Meanwhile, in Jaffray, a new trail is helping residents connect to both their community and the surrounding landscape.

Built in 2025 by the South Country Trails and Recreation Association, the 2.4-kilometre Jaffray Frontage Trail runs alongside Highway 3 and links the community to an existing trail network west of Jaffray.

For resident Erin Boehm, the trail has transformed how she gets around.

"Before, I had to walk along the highway for more than a kilometre or drive just to reach a safe trail," she says. "Now I'm connected to everything."

The trail provides a safer option for walking, running and cycling, while also making it easier for residents to access local destinations without a vehicle. The project is expected to reduce local vehicle use and cut greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 30 tonnes annually.

"I see people on the trail all the time," says Boehm. "Kids are skateboarding and riding safely to school. It has become part of everyday life for a lot of locals."

Removing Barriers to Active Transportation

While trails create opportunities for active transportation, infrastructure can also play an important role in helping people choose to ride.

Along the Slocan Valley Rail Trail, cyclists now have access to three bike repair stations located near the Crescent Valley Trailhead, the Passmore Trailhead and the Village of Slocan. Each station includes repair tools and a multi-valve air pump, giving riders a convenient way to tackle anything from a loose bolt to a flat tire.

Installed by the Slocan Valley Rail Trail Society, the stations are intended to support both trail users and local residents who may not have easy access to bike-repair tools.

The stations help remove one more barrier to cycling, giving people confidence that help is close at hand if something goes wrong during a ride.

Whether through safer routes, new connections or practical amenities, these projects share a common goal: making active transportation a realistic and appealing part of everyday life. For residents across the Basin, that means more opportunities to connect—with their communities, their neighbours and the places they call home. ■



Photo: Slocan Valley Historical Society



Photo: Randle & Brenda Mathews family



Photo: Whitney Taylor



Photo: Whitney Taylor

Keeping Memories Alive

One survivor's story helps connect a community to its past

THE FIRST THING Gene Kinoshita remembers is the snow.

He was seven years old when he stepped off a train into the Slocan Valley in November 1942, clutching what little his family had been allowed to carry.

"We had no idea where we were going," he says. "We didn't know what was waiting for us."

What awaited was a Japanese Canadian internment camp, located three miles south of the village of Slocan. Today, a new interpretive site will honour people like Kinoshita, telling the story of what they were forced to endure while also strengthening community bonds by connecting residents to their past.

Keeping Memory Alive

Located along the rail trail in the heart of Slocan, the Merriwake Interpretive Centre will be a place to learn about and reflect on the history of Japanese Canadian internment in the Columbia Basin. Constructed by the Slocan Valley Historical Society and designed by Kinoshita himself, a retired architect, the centre will preserve and share the stories of the thousands of Japanese Canadians who were forcibly uprooted from their homes and sent to internment camps during the Second World War, many of which were in the Basin.

At the heart of the site is the Merriwake, a 31-foot gillnetter built in 1929. Like many fishing vessels owned by Japanese Canadians, it was seized during the war and sold without its owners' consent. Decades later, after being recovered from Kootenay Lake and restored by the Slocan Valley Historical Society, the boat has become a symbol of the livelihoods that were lost.

Supported in part by Columbia Basin Trust, the fully accessible interpretive centre will be open year-round at no cost. Through interpretive panels and the restored fishing boat, visitors will explore the history of Japanese Canadian internment and better understand its lasting impacts on individuals, families and communities throughout the Basin.

A Reluctant Home

In Kinoshita's case, his family of five lived in a single room. Meals were taken at the Slocan hockey rink, repurposed as a mess hall serving thousands. At school, he received Japanese-language instruction from Japanese teachers. His father, who had operated a fish market in Vancouver, found work in a small on-site grocery store.

When the war ended in 1945, interned Japanese Canadian families were given three options: repatriate to Japan, move east of the Rockies, or remain where they were. Returning to the coast, the place many still considered home, was prohibited until 1949.

The Kinoshitas chose to stay.

Years later, Kinoshita graduated from high school in Slocan. His father eventually took over the grocery store, renaming it Kino's Market. "Mr. Kino," as he became known, was a well-loved figure in the community until retiring and returning to Vancouver in the 1970s.

A Contribution That Will Carry Forward

Now 91 and living in Ontario, Kinoshita has not returned to Slocan since a high school reunion in 1980. But when asked to help design the interpretive site, he agreed without hesitation.

"I still think about the beauty of the area and often wonder what it's like today," he says. "Even after everything, I would still love to return."

The site he helped create sheds light on the past, helping residents better understand the history that has shaped their community and the people who live there.

As Joyce Johnson, President of the Slocan Valley Historical Society, puts it, "If you don't know the past, you can't make the future any better." ■



Photo: Gene Kinoshita

The Kinoshita family, Slocan, 1952. Gene Kinoshita, standing left.



Photos left and right: Adrian Wagner Studio



COME ONE, COME ALL

Creating spaces where everyone can participate and belong



LIFTING UP PATRONS

"FOR OVER 12 YEARS I've been getting around by wheelchair, trikes, a scooter," says Revelstoke resident Chris Miller. "I don't walk, I roll."

Like Miller, many Columbia Basin residents have differing needs related to mobility, vision or hearing when it comes to fully accessing community spaces and participating in activities. To lessen barriers, organizations across the region are improving buildings and outdoor spaces, making it easier for everyone to join in.

As a history aficionado, one of Miller's frequent destinations is the Revelstoke Museum and Archives. "I love looking at everything at the museum, but Brown Bag History is definitely one of my favourites." However, there was a challenge.

"Our program room is on the second floor because there's not enough space on the first," says Cathy English, Curator. "We realized we were excluding people."

The museum received Columbia Basin Trust support through its Basin ARTS program, which helps museums, galleries and live-performance venues become more accessible, welcoming and inclusive. The Trust also offers similar programs for libraries through Basin READS and children's recreational spaces through Basin REACH.

"The funding we received from the Trust was primarily to help install a lift," English says. It also supported the addition of an accessible washroom.

By increasing accessibility and inclusion, projects like this help ensure everyone has places to gather and connect. A community where everyone can take part is a community that thrives.

Miller says the new lift is "a necessity for someone like me, for parents with strollers and for anybody who has accessibility challenges. It's a game changer."



Photos: Zoya Lynch

PLAY WITHOUT LIMITS

In the West Kootenay community of Balfour, residents work out at the fitness centre while children climb and slide at nearby John Roos Spirit Park.

Recently, the Balfour Recreation Commission upgraded the playground by adding accessible pathways and ramps, adaptive play equipment and barrier-free surfacing for children who use mobility aids such as wheelchairs or walkers.

"We had recycled rubber surfacing installed," says Julie Poetsch, Administrative Assistant. "There's also a sensory system with a wheel and bells, and a fun mirror."

The safe, welcoming environment has encouraged more people to participate in outdoor play. Poetsch says the commission has seen multigenerational families using the park, with people of all ages benefiting from the accessibility features.

"The new additions to the playground are especially awesome for families with younger kids," says resident Britteny Larsen, who lives nearby. "When my kids were smaller, there were times when the playground felt too advanced, so the new equipment makes it more family-friendly for people of all ages."



Photos: Adrian Wagner Studio



TURNING A NEW PAGE

On Saturday mornings, children gather at the Invermere Public Library for storytime and crafts. On weekday afternoons, members of a cookbook club meet to share food and discuss their latest read. These are just two of the ways the library helps bring people together.

To improve accessibility, the library has purchased mini-players that read stories aloud, expanded its e-book collection for those who find digital formats more accessible and acquired noise-cancelling headphones for visitors who may be sensitive to sound. As of this fall, they are offering loanable sensory support kits and cognitive care kits to support seniors with memory loss.

It has also launched a bookmobile. "Bringing the library to the people definitely has value," says Blair McFarlane, Director. "The idea is to create equitable access to library services because not everybody has a vehicle, and public transport can be quite limited." Overall, she adds, "We want to know about how our layout works for families and other visitors. We're very flexible about adjusting our programs as we get feedback." ■



Photos: Tracy Connery



Refreshed & Renewed

Finding success through partnership, purpose and growth

FERNIE RESIDENT Isabelle Randell has been visiting the renovated 1908 schoolhouse in the heart of downtown, home to Spa 901, for nearly 15 years. With original brick walls, expansive windows that flood the space with natural light, and calming scents and sounds, it is a place designed for relaxation. Outside, a hot pool tucked into a private patio completes the experience.

"It's very warm and inviting," Randell says. "It's a calm, quiet space that almost feels like my second home. Actually, I joke that I might love it more than my first. I would move in if they let me."

Spa 901 offers everything from Japanese head spa treatments to "Old School" pedicures, a favourite of Randell's 82-year-old mother. Beyond its tranquil atmosphere, the spa is also a thriving business and a testament to resilience, friendship and growth.

Opportunity Knocks

Jessica Riley and Laura Frost met after each was drawn to Fernie for different reasons. Riley arrived for the skiing and stayed for the community, while Frost, originally from the Crowsnest Pass, returned home after living and working in Toronto.

"I missed the mountains," Frost says. "And then the opportunity at the spa came up."

After joining Spa 901 as employees in 2013, the pair took a leap just two years later and purchased the business together. For more than a decade, they have worked side by side as co-owners, but the journey has not always been easy.

"We had four kids between us in four years while running the business," Riley says. "Then COVID hit, and we were trying to do everything ourselves. We were completely burnt out."

Without a clear direction, they faced a difficult choice: sell the business or find a way to move forward.

That turning point led them to Columbia Basin Trust's Basin Business Advisors (BBA) program, which provides entrepreneurs with mentorship, resources and expert guidance to strengthen and grow their businesses.

Setting a Clear Path Forward

In 2024, Riley and Frost entered the program and found the support they needed.

"The advisors pushed us to look at everything from a data-driven perspective," Frost says. "Quantifying our goals was huge."

With guidance from BBA, they built an organizational chart, clarified roles and responsibilities, and learned to delegate more effectively. Instead of reacting to every issue, they began making strategic decisions grounded in data and long-term planning.

Just as important, their advisors recognized the strength behind the partnership itself.

"They helped us see our own potential," Frost says. "They really made us believe in what we're capable of."

Building a Future Together

Today, Spa 901 is both a beloved local retreat and a destination for visitors to Fernie. The business continues to evolve with the addition of a clinical aesthetics division offering medical-grade skin care and treatments.

A year after joining the BBA program, Riley and Frost say their workplace and their lives have transformed.

"Our team morale is higher than ever," Frost says. "We're happy, healthy and growing."

While their business success is clear, it is their partnership that stands out most.

"We've been in business together 11 years," Riley says. "We've grown the business, but we've also grown as partners. Our friendship is truly special."

Long-term customer Randell agrees, pointing to the atmosphere the pair has cultivated.

"They've excelled in every way," she says. "The staff are incredible, the services are top-notch, but, most importantly, it's how they make people feel. When locals want to connect, we meet there. It has become that kind of place." ■

ourtrust.org/bba

Photos: Matt Kuhn Photography



Kitchen Literacy

Cooking classes that nourish skills, confidence and connection



THE MOUTHWATERING smell of sautéed spinach and green onions drifting into the hallway of Creston's College of the Rockies (COTR) building—paired with happy chatter and laughter—can only mean one thing: the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy (CBAL) is hosting a cooking class for seniors.

Taste of Greece, offered in spring 2026, brought together cooks of all abilities to explore Greek culture while learning how to prepare affordable, nutritious and delicious meals. Participants strengthened their food literacy and sense of confidence, all while building connections in the kitchen.

"I needed to learn how to boil water," jokes participant Bonnie Cameron.

Others brought some experience but still found value in the class. Paula Harper, who visited Greece in her 20s, appreciated the renewed insight into Greek cooking through simple, quick recipes and the opportunity to learn alongside others.

"It brought community members together and gives you confidence in your ability to cook, learning from someone who's an expert," she says.

Across 77 Columbia Basin communities, CBAL's 16 literacy co-ordinators promote literacy and lifelong learning on topics ranging from exercise to gardening for people of all ages and newcomers to Canada. Programs are often delivered in partnership with community organizations, such as COTR in Creston.

For more than 20 years, Columbia Basin Trust has supported these efforts. It is now helping CBAL expand its programming for seniors, focusing on food, financial

literacy, health and wellness, with the additional aim of reducing social isolation. This involves offering workshops like Creston's cooking classes.

Instructor Eleni Pantelaiou led participants through Greek cuisine, followed by a later course focused on Syrian dishes taught by Nasren Ismal. Both instructors are former students of CBAL's English as a Second Language program, and continue to build their skills while giving back.

"They help me with English, and I teach them to cook," says Pantelaiou, who moved to Creston from Greece 15 years ago with her family.

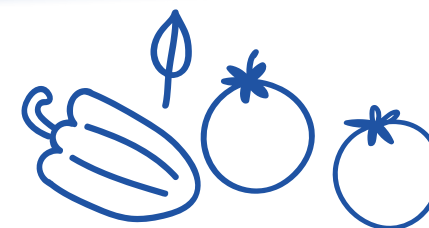
After gaining experience with another catering company, Pantelaiou launched her own business, Gefsis Catering, in 2025. She has since led other cooking classes, sharing both traditional recipes and insights gained through her own experimentation.

"People like to learn something new," she says. "I like to share, and to figure out my own way why something works or how it can be better or faster."

For the CBAL team in Creston, the benefits extend far beyond cooking skills.

"We've seen meaningful moments of connection in the kitchen, with participants building relationships while cooking side by side, and even requesting future programming, such as sourdough workshops," says Gillian Wells, Community Literacy Outreach Co-ordinator. "When people come together in this way, they not only learn new skills but also meet new people, form friendships and often continue those connections well beyond the program." ■

ourtrust.org/cbal



Photos: Andrew Bibby Photography

Bringing a Wetland Back to Life

Working together to restore a treasured natural space

ON A COOL SPRING MORNING, a group of Grade 9 students from Valemount Secondary School walks along a wooden boardwalk, notebooks in hand, observing the world around them. Birds call from cattails, muskrats ripple the water's surface, and the wetland hums with life.

This is Cranberry Marsh, a place where locals, visitors and members of Simpcw First Nation connect with the natural world.

"Our nature journalling starts before things bloom so students can watch the transformation," says teacher Rich Cooper.

"I encourage them to use all their senses to document patterns: bird behaviour, water levels, species identification, sound maps and more. We also learn about how families came to this area, how Indigenous Peoples have been here since time immemorial, and how the landscape has changed."

Also known as the Starratt Wildlife Management Area, Cranberry Marsh spans roughly 350 hectares and sits less than two kilometres from downtown Valemount. It is co-managed through a partnership that includes the Province of British Columbia, the Nature Trust of BC, Ducks Unlimited Canada, the Village of Valemount, and a robust group of volunteers from the Yellowhead Outdoor Recreation Association and general community. Together, they steward a rich mosaic of open water, wetlands and wildlife habitat.

To help ensure the marsh thrives into the future, Simpcw First Nation launched a five-year restoration effort in 2022, with support from Columbia Basin Trust's Ecosystem Enhancement Program. The program supports projects that strengthen ecological health and resilience across the Columbia Basin.

At Cranberry Marsh, restoration work focuses on increasing native plant and wildlife diversity, including pollinators and snakes, while managing invasive species like thistle and knapweed and carrying out revegetation with drought-tolerant, native plants. Cultural elements are also central to the project, such as interpretive signage that shares Simpcw Indigenous knowledge in a variation of the western dialect of Secwepemctsin.

"We held site visits and educational days with Simpcw community members, Elders and the Language and Cultural Department," says Mandy Ross, Senior Ecosystem Biologist with Simpcw Resources Group, which is leading the project in collaboration with the co-managers. "People were eager to share knowledge—plant and animal names, stories and memories. We also learned about the importance of the area to Simpcw ancestors."

Early results are already visible. A snake hibernaculum, once an exposed grassy area, has been enhanced with logs and rocks

that provide basking spots, shelter and habitat for prey species like mice and voles. Beavers have also contributed, building dams that temporarily flooded part of the trail, an example of natural processes reshaping the ecosystem.

Looking ahead, partners are working together to support long-term conservation through joint land management, future acquisitions and improved wildlife corridor connectivity. The goal is to extend the habitat linkages across the broader Canoe Valley, allowing wildlife to move, breed and thrive across a connected landscape.

"The partnerships we've built are integral as we expand habitat mapping and connectivity work across the province and beyond," Ross says.

For the Valemount community, a healthier marsh brings far-reaching benefits, from richer biodiversity to cleaner water and a stronger sense of place.

"Cranberry Marsh is home to over 120 species of birds and waterfowl, along with muskrats, beavers, deer, bears, moose and more," says Marcie Down, Executive Director of Tourism Valemount. With its boardwalk, walking trail and viewing towers, she adds, the wetland is "our unique little jewel!" ■

ourtrust.org/eep



Photos: Wildly Ruby Photography



For the Valemount community, a healthier marsh brings far-reaching benefits, from richer biodiversity to cleaner water and a stronger sense of place.

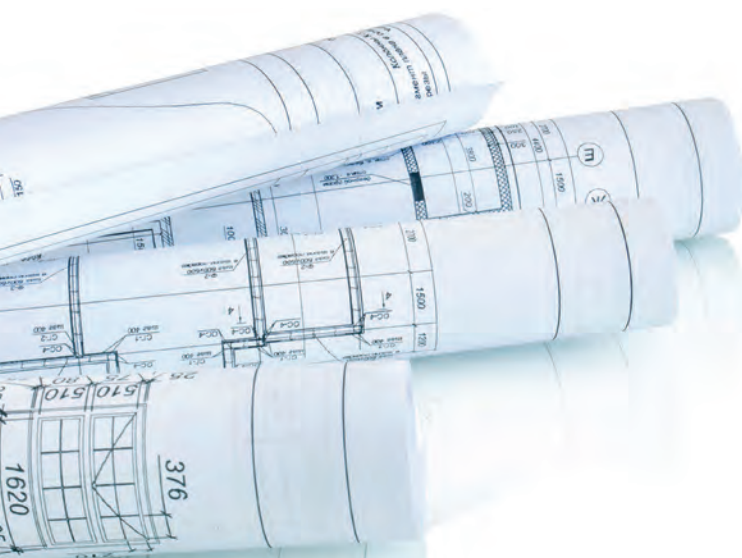
Photo: Wildly Ruby Photography



Photo: Melissa Koehler, Columbia Basin Trust

RETHINKING HOUSING

A new model for creating homes in small communities



PASSBY Arrow Heights in Nakusp and you'll likely see signs of everyday life: someone carrying in groceries, a child heading out on a bike or a resident enjoying the sunshine from a lawn chair.

For Emily Sheele, it's a place she's proud to call home.

Since summer 2024, she and her young adult son have lived in the rental housing complex.

"I was looking for a place in Nakusp and that's not easy to come by," she says.

After facing high rents and spending time in temporary accommodations, including a van and a camper, Sheele was eager when an opportunity opened up at Arrow Heights.

"I was approved and it's really great," she says. The unit is fully accessible—exactly what she needs.

In the five years since Arrow Heights opened, many tenants have found stable, affordable housing there. Just as telling is the waitlist of people still hoping for a place to live. Soon, another rental housing development in Nakusp will help meet some of the demand through a new approach.

"It'll be amazing," says Tim Payne, Executive Director of Arrow & Slocan Lakes Community Services (ASLCS), which built and manages Arrow Heights and will also manage the new development.

"Housing development is very complex and time consuming and the tedious and troublesome steps have been taken away."

That's because, instead of leading the project from concept to construction as it did with Arrow Heights, ASLCS will receive the completed building once construction is finished.



Artist renderings: Studio 9 Architecture + Planning Ltd.



A New Role for the Trust

Most recently, the Trust has taken on the role of developer itself—a first for the organization and a new approach it intends to use in other communities.

For decades, the Trust has supported rental housing in various ways, but community organizations have typically been responsible for advancing projects, most often with the help of a development consultant. As housing shortages intensify, however, the Trust recognizes that smaller and rural communities often face challenges finding the resources and capacity needed to deliver complex housing developments efficiently.

"So far, the Trust is doing all the hard work and heavy lifting," Payne says.

Once the six new units are complete, ownership will be transferred to ASLCS for long-term operation and management.

"The only thing we really need to focus on is filling the units and how to manage those units once they're filled," he says.

By taking a more active role—and by leveraging funding and partnerships with local governments and other potential government partners—the Trust can help move housing projects from planning to construction more quickly.

More Homes on the Way

In Nakusp, the new development is intended for low- and moderate-income households. It will include six rental units—a mix of one- and two-bedroom homes—including one fully wheelchair-accessible unit.

The building will feature energy-efficient design and construction, as well as a rooftop solar array. Together, these features are expected to help lower heating and cooling costs, support long-term affordability and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The goal is to welcome tenants in spring 2027.

Payne is quick to praise the Trust—not only for its involvement in this project and Arrow Heights, but for its ongoing support of ASLCS over the years.

"They always have the heartbeat of the community," he says. "They really know what's going on and they address the needs—not only in our community, but in communities throughout the Columbia Basin. I can't imagine what we would be without them."

The need for rental housing remains significant, he adds. Many people who access other ASLCS services are also searching for homes. He knows of families and individuals who would like to move or return to the area—some with jobs already lined up—but without a place to live.

That's why he's looking forward to the day the new units are ready. "Once those are available, they'll be full in a minute." ■

ourtrust.org/housing

Great Food for All Ages

Fresh food, better access, stronger communities

AT FARMERS' MARKETS throughout the Columbia Basin, people wander the stalls in search of heads of crisp lettuce, pyramids of plump tomatoes and cartons of freshly collected eggs. Bags full, they depart ready to nourish their bodies with healthy, locally grown, delicious food.

In Invermere, one of these buyers has been Evelyn Walker, Executive Director of Windermere Valley Child Care. In summer 2025, she attended the market to purchase food for the centre's children, who are "berry-aholics," she says. Down the highway, in Golden, senior Carol Caldwell frequents the market, too, and loves "all of the fresh fruit and vegetables."

Like Carol and these kids, many people have been able to enjoy local harvests thanks to the BC Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program. The program enables lower-income families, pregnant people and seniors to obtain coupons to purchase items such as vegetables, fruit, eggs and meat.

In 2025, Columbia Basin Trust worked with the BC Association of Farmers' Markets (BCAFM) to include seniors living in affordable housing and licensed child care providers as part of the initiative. Through its partnership with BCAFM, the Trust helps make access to this kind of local, healthy food possible.

Helping Little Ones Grow

At its busiest times, about 60 children enliven the rooms of Windermere Valley Child Care. The centre provides morning snack. "We wanted to make sure that all of our kids had a good start to their day," Evelyn says. The coupons "gave us the opportunity to really support local food, and to buy things that we weren't otherwise able to afford for our kiddos. They could try things like Basin blueberries and locally grown strawberries. They were pretty excited."

Some of the children even did a taste test between store-bought and Basin-grown blueberries. "Which ones are bigger and which ones are juicier and which ones are plumper?—and they could tell. They were like, 'This is the best blueberry ever!'"

Sustenance for Seniors

In Golden, seniors have access to the resources they need to thrive through programs like Better at Home and the Seniors' Community Connector. In that community, both of these groups offer the coupons.

Photo: Elora Braden



Carol found the coupons especially valuable while her husband was ill. "The fresh vegetables were wonderful. The ability to feed him healthily was huge."

She freezes or cans the food that doesn't get eaten immediately, so it's available in winter. And, in an act of looking out for each other, the seniors who receive the coupons are also known to share their farmers' market finds.

Expanded Recipients—and Benefits

The Trust has been supporting the coupon program since 2018, and the benefits extend beyond food. The children in Invermere, for example, learned about what can be grown nearby thanks to the area's climate. "It has opened so many doors," Evelyn says.

And Carol and other Golden seniors enjoy the social aspect of the market. "A lot of us go for coffee and tea afterwards and have a good catch-up."

So if you wander a farmers' market and see a sign posted at a stall—FARMERS' MARKET NUTRITION COUPONS ACCEPTED HERE—know that children, families and seniors alike are enjoying wholesome, tasty food while supporting the farmers that make the Basin so nutritionally rich. ■

Photo: Tracy Connelly



A Farmer's Perspective

Like the families and seniors who benefit from the program, local farmers also see its impact firsthand.

Weaver's Bee Co. runs one of the farmers' market stalls in Windermere, selling honey, fruit and vegetables—in addition to berries (including those popular blueberries) from nearby farms that have been pollinated by the apiary's bees. The business accepts BC Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupons.

"For many people, Nutrition Coupons make it possible to choose fruits and vegetables they otherwise couldn't afford, giving them a variety of healthy foods that support well-being," says co-owner Shannon Root.

The program supports farmers, too. "We are busier because of the program and are so grateful that the very thing helping so many people eat healthy is also helping us feed our family. It's helping small farmers and apiaries like ours stay afloat in challenging times."

Photo: BC Association of Farmers' Markets



Photo: Elora Braden



Photo: Elora Braden



Protecting What Matters

*Volunteers investing in
the places people depend on*



ON A SUMMER morning in Wasa, neighbours line up for pancakes topped with berries, with eggs or sausage on the side and coffee close at hand. The pancake breakfast isn't just about food—it's about people coming together in a place they share and care for.

The event reflects how community happens in this small East Kootenay location. While it takes place on the grounds of the Wasa & District Lions Club, it's organized by the Wasa Recreation Society, which runs the adjacent Wasa Community Hall. Both groups are run entirely by volunteers, and both are responsible for spaces that support everyday life in Wasa, from sports and social gatherings to meetings, weddings and community meals.

As wildfire risk increases and energy costs rise, protecting those shared spaces, and keeping them usable and affordable, has become a priority.

Keeping Community Spaces Safe and Usable

For decades, the Lions Club grounds have been a hub of activity. Children play baseball and hockey, residents gather for events and visitors stop in for seasonal celebrations. Ensuring those spaces remain safe and available is increasingly important.

"We want these buildings to still be here for the people who use them," says Sharon Prinz, Secretary of the Wasa & District Lions Club. "They're part of everyday life in Wasa."

Earlier efforts focused on reducing wildfire fuel on the grounds. More recently, attention turned to the buildings themselves, including the kitchen, bathrooms, pump house, Zamboni garage and eating area where the community

enjoys its well-known pancake breakfasts.

To better protect people and activities, the club replaced deteriorating vinyl siding with fire-resistant Hardie board, added insulation to improve comfort and efficiency, and installed energy-efficient windows with security shutters in the kitchen.

"In a wildfire, embers can travel a long way," Prinz says. "The shutters help prevent embers from getting inside. Now it's sealed up tight."

A new heat pump in the pump house and garage, along with other upgrades such as LED lighting and weatherstripping, will make the space less expensive to operate.



Photos: Tyler Zhao

A Hall That Stays Comfortable, Affordable and Open

Just steps away, the Wasa Community Hall plays an equally vital role. The hall hosts indoor pickleball, craft fairs, coffee socials and quilting sessions. It's a popular wedding venue and meeting place, and it houses offices, a small gym and a community library.

For many residents, it is where they stay connected. "With a small community like ours, this building really matters," says Karen Markus, a member of the Wasa Recreation Society. "It's where people gather year-round."

Keeping the hall comfortable and affordable had become increasingly difficult as energy costs continued to rise.

"Heating and cooling costs were huge," Markus says. "It was getting harder to manage."

In 2025, the society did the same type of work as the Lions Club, trading vinyl siding for Hardie board, boosting insulation and getting energy-efficient windows with shutters. The improvements are noticeable.



"It stays cooler in the summer and holds heat better in the winter," Markus says. "And it just feels better to be in."

The most significant change came with the installation of 68 solar panels in 2021, which dramatically reduced energy bills and helped keep the hall affordable for community activities.

"Both grants have contributed to a great, all-around successful project," Markus says. "It helps keep the hall open and accessible."

Building Resilience Together

The work at both sites was supported by Columbia Basin Trust, primarily through its Non-profit SMART program, which helps non-profits and First Nations in the Columbia Basin improve energy efficiency, generate renewable energy and adapt to a changing climate.

For Wasa's volunteer-run groups, that support made it possible to act on goals they already shared: protecting community spaces people rely on and planning for an uncertain future.

The benefits extend beyond individual buildings. Ongoing fuel reduction work, a water tanker housed on Lions Club grounds and a relatively new volunteer fire society have strengthened wildfire preparedness across the area. The projects have also sparked interest from neighbours, some of whom followed suite with solar upgrades of their own.

"Our area is now pretty safe and easily defended," Prinz says. "We feel it's important to lead by example."

By investing in safety, efficiency and resilience, these volunteer groups are helping ensure Wasa's shared spaces remain places where neighbours can gather. That includes pancake breakfasts, pickleball games, celebrations and everyday connection for years to come. ■



The Power of Community

Message from the Chair and CEO

As you turn these pages, you'll meet young people gaining confidence through their first jobs, families supported through quality child care, volunteers improving trails, communities preserving important histories, and residents working together to address challenges ranging from housing to access to healthy, local food.

While each story is unique, they share a common thread: the power of community.

Across the Columbia Basin, people come together every day to support one another, share knowledge, solve problems and create opportunities. Whether through volunteer efforts, local organizations, businesses, cultural initiatives or community partnerships, these collective actions help strengthen the region and enrich the lives of those who call it home.

The stories in this magazine celebrate many different accomplishments, but they also reflect something deeper about our region: a belief that lasting change happens when people work together. Time and again, we see residents stepping forward with ideas, energy and determination to improve their communities and create opportunities for others.

At Columbia Basin Trust, we are proud to support these efforts and help communities bring their visions to life. The creativity, resilience and generosity found throughout the Basin continue to inspire us every day.

Thank you for being part of this region. We hope these stories leave you feeling as inspired and optimistic about the future of the Columbia Basin as we are.

Susan Clovechok
Chair, Board of Directors

Johnny Strilaeff
President and Chief Executive Officer



Photo: Tracy Cornery



Photo: Adrian Wagner Studio



Photo: Kathleen Hart, Columbia Basin Trust

A Region Connected

The Columbia Basin Trust region is made up of communities connected by a shared watershed, a shared history and a shared commitment to building a strong future together. We are grateful to live and work within the traditional territories of the Ktunaxa, Lheidli T'enneh, Secwépemc, Sinixt and Syilx Nations.



Why the Trust Exists

How local voices helped transform a shared challenge into a lasting legacy for the Columbia Basin

Columbia Basin Trust exists because Basin residents believed their communities deserved a stronger voice in shaping their future.

Beginning in the 1960s, construction of dams under the Columbia River Treaty transformed the region. Reservoirs flooded valleys, displaced communities and changed the landscape in ways that are still felt today. While the Treaty generated significant benefits, many residents felt the region had not shared them fairly.

By the early 1990s, people from across the Basin began working together to advocate for change. Local governments, First Nations, community leaders and residents united around a common goal: ensuring the region would benefit from the resources generated within it.

Their efforts led to the Columbia Basin Accord and, on July 6, 1995, the creation of Columbia Basin Trust. The Trust was established to support the social, economic and environmental well-being of the region and to ensure benefits continue to flow back to Basin communities.

Today, that legacy continues through investments in housing, child care, local businesses, recreation, community facilities, environmental stewardship and many other initiatives shaped by local priorities. The Trust remains rooted in the same principle that inspired its creation more than 30 years ago: when communities work together, they can shape their own futures.

Timeline



1960s–70s
Dams built under the Columbia River Treaty.



1992
Residents begin organizing around a shared vision for the Basin.



1993
Columbia River Treaty Committee formed and first Basin Symposium held.



1994
Columbia Basin Accord signed.



1995
Columbia Basin Trust Act signed into law.

How the Trust Works

Columbia Basin Trust has two core functions: managing assets and investments on behalf of Basin residents, and using the income generated from those assets to deliver benefits throughout the region.

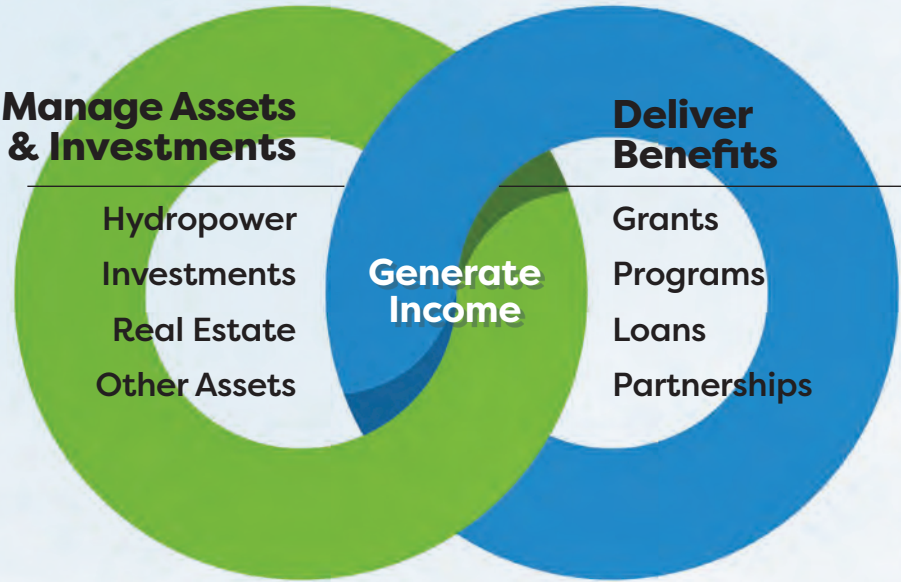
Working alongside residents, Indigenous Peoples, local governments, businesses and community organizations, the Trust learns about emerging needs, opportunities and priorities across the Basin. Those perspectives help shape the Columbia Basin Management Plan, which guides the Trust's work.

Income generated through Trust assets and investments is reinvested through grants, programs, loans, partnerships and initiatives that support communities today while creating opportunities for future generations.

Guided by Community Priorities

Residents helped create the Trust, and community voices continue to shape its work today. Through ongoing engagement and the Columbia Basin Management Plan, community priorities help inform how resources are invested across the region. ourtrust.org/ourfocus

Supporting Communities Across the Basin



- Arts & Culture
- Local Food
- Education & Training
- Community Spaces
- Housing
- Environment
- Business & Jobs
- Children & Youth
- Recreation

Photos: Columbia Basin Trust Archives

A Legacy That Lasts

Resources generated in the Basin continue to benefit Basin communities.

More than 30 years after Basin residents came together to advocate for a stronger future, Columbia Basin Trust continues to reinvest resources in the social, economic and environmental well-being of the region. The Trust manages assets on behalf of Basin residents and uses the income generated from those assets to support communities throughout the Columbia Basin.

A significant portion of that income comes from the four hydropower facilities co-owned with Columbia Power Corporation, along with other investments and assets managed by the Trust. Together, these resources create a sustainable source of funding that helps respond to community needs and opportunities today while supporting future generations.

Financial Snapshot

➤ \$2.0 Billion

Book value of assets

➤ \$105 Million

Benefits delivered in 2025/26

➤ 2,700+

Projects supported in 2025/26

➤ 62

Programs and initiatives

➤ \$1.02 Billion

Invested in the Basin since 1995

For the most recent detailed financial statements and annual results, ourtrust.org/annualreport.

Our Team

Columbia Basin Trust staff help steward resources, build relationships and support communities across the region.



Photo: Tracy Connelly

Board of Directors

Susan Clovechok (Chair)	Fairmont Hot Springs
Ron Oszust (Vice-Chair)	Golden
Jared Basil	yaqan nuʔkiy (Lower Kootenay Band)
Katrine Conroy	Pass Creek
Angus Graeme	Nelson
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Christine Hoechsmann	Cranbrook
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Am Naqvi	Nelson
ourtrust.org/board	

Contact Us

Our team would love to hear from you.

info@ourtrust.org
1.800.505.8998
ourtrust.org

Visit us in person in Castlegar, Cranbrook, Golden or Nakusp.



Photo: Adrian Wagner Studio

From First Office to Permanent Home

Nakusp was home to the Trust's first regional office in 1999. Today, with offices in Castlegar, Cranbrook, Golden and Nakusp, the Trust remains connected to communities throughout the Basin. The new permanent Nakusp office builds on that history while providing a welcoming, accessible space for meetings, conversations and collaboration.

ARROW LAKES GENERATING STATION



Photo: Shawn Talbot Photography

BRILLIANT DAM AND GENERATING STATION



Photo: Shawn Talbot Photography

WANETA EXPANSION GENERATING STATION



Photo: Larry Doell

BRILLIANT EXPANSION GENERATING STATION



Photo: Shawn Talbot Photography

Growing Local

Three businesses creating jobs and opportunity

ACROSS THE Columbia Basin, local businesses play an important role in supporting communities, creating jobs and delivering essential services. Whether launching a new venture, expanding operations or transitioning ownership, access to financing from Columbia Basin Trust can help entrepreneurs take the next step.

The following stories highlight three businesses at different stages of that journey and the people working to build strong futures for their companies and communities.

Learn more about business financing and advisory services at ourtrust.org/investments.



Photo: Gillian Santangeli

Built for the Long Haul

As owners of Nelson's JY Contracting, Brady Wright and Alex Cherry manage projects ranging from landscaping and septic systems to roadbuilding and subdivision development. "We're busy," Wright says. "And that's a good thing." Since acquiring the company in 2022, the pair have grown the operation into a 10-person business with a full roster of projects across the region. "We take it right from the beginning, through to digging basements and landscaping the finished homes," Cherry says. "You're on those projects for years. You get to see the whole thing come to life."

The company is also helping build a six-unit affordable rental housing project in Nakusp that will eventually be operated by a local non-profit. For Wright and Cherry, ownership is a balancing act. "You've got to be in *here* getting the jobs and doing the paperwork," Wright says, "but you also have to be out *there* making sure the work is done right." For now, the focus is simple: keep the machines running, maintain high-quality work and keep building projects that shape the region.

Photo: Kurt Brosch



Photos: Greg Martinello



A Foundation of Friendship

Iron Creek Excavation, based in Revelstoke, was built on a partnership that began in Grade 3. Co-owners Mike Boglitch and Greg Martinello grew up together and brought their shared experience into the excavation industry, eventually launching their business. "We decided we were ready to do it, but to make it happen we needed help," Martinello says. Today, the company operates a fleet of trucks and excavators supporting forestry, residential and large-scale site preparation projects across the region, employing seven full-time staff and two part-time employees. "Being able to work with your best friend—it doesn't get much better than that," says Boglitch.

Passing the Torch

In Revelstoke, TJ Developments & Roofing is carrying on a long-standing local reputation under new ownership. "People aren't just hiring us for the work; they're hiring us for the name, the warranty and the fact that we're right here," says co-owner Riley MacLeod. MacLeod and her husband, Brinley Blayney, took over the business through a phased succession. "We started small," Blayney says. "By the time we took over fully in 2025, we were already doing most of the work." With steady demand and a growing community, the business now employs six to eight people during peak season. "We wouldn't be here without the Trust," MacLeod says. "They helped us take a chance on our future. Now we get to build something lasting for Revelstoke."

Photos: Mike Graves



Ready When It Matters Most

PREPARING COMMUNITIES FOR WHATEVER COMES NEXT

WHEN IT comes to emergency preparedness, communities benefit from collaboration. In places like Rosebery, neighbours look out for one another to protect a beautiful place anyone would be lucky to call home. And for communities in the Regional District of Kootenay Boundary, new tools are strengthening disaster response, such as a mapping project designed to improve decision-making during emergencies.



Photo: Whitney Taylor



Photo: Whitney Taylor



Photo: Spencer Legebokoff

RDKB at the Ready

In the Regional District of Kootenay Boundary (RDKB), Manager of Emergency Programs Mark Stephens has been working on a mapping system to support emergency response during events like wildfires.

“We’ll be able to show responders where water sources are, hiking and quad trails, and any gates that may block access,” says Stephens. “We’re also integrating evacuation data so we know how many people are in an area. It really speeds up how quickly information moves from the site to the emergency operations centre.”

The system, developed with support from the Trust, will help ensure accurate information is shared quickly, whether the aim is to identify evacuation zones or track fire locations. Faster access to reliable data helps get critical support to affected communities when they need it most.

Stephens notes the RDKB is also partnering with the regional districts of East Kootenay and Central Kootenay to share resources, expertise and best practices—strengthening emergency preparedness across the Columbia Basin. ■



Photo: Spencer Legebokoff

Rosebery Gets It Done

When Miles Maxinuk stepped out of his farmhouse in Rosebery one evening in 2024, he received an unexpected call from a neighbour: the hillside near his home was on fire. An ember had jumped Slocan Lake, igniting a massive blaze unlike anything seen in recent memory.

The experience was an eye-opener for the community. While Rosebery sits on a stunning lake, it’s surrounded by Crown land, with one highway in and one highway out—making wildfire management critical. The 2024 Wilson Creek fire demonstrated just how vulnerable the area could be.

“With a grant from Columbia Basin Trust, we were able to get a lot of wildfire fuel mitigation work done in different pockets of forest, reducing vegetation that can contribute to the spread and intensity of wildfires,” says Kay Schwitzer, Chairperson of the Rosebery Community Association (RCA). “We treated 10 hectares in 2025 and another 10 in 2026, including the Galena Trail.”

The work, supported through the Columbia Basin Wildfire Resiliency Initiative, a partnership between the Trust and the Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Forests and BC Wildfire Service, included clearing brush and debris, helping improve access for fire crews.

“That’s a critical piece,” says Jeff Wilson, RCA member and project manager for the second phase. “The forests are quite dense here, so we need trails cleared enough that crews can get in and fight fires on the ground if needed.”

While many residents undertake FireSmart measures on their own properties, Schwitzer says landscape-level work makes a significant difference.

“To be able to get 20 hectares professionally treated to reduce wildfire risk is just amazing,” she adds. “I think we’ll see a big difference.”



Photo: Whitney Taylor

Small Communities, Big Impact

Local ideas creating lasting change

ACROSS THE Columbia Basin, every community is different. Some have projects ready to move forward but need extra capacity or coordination. Others are still exploring possibilities and benefit from connections, guidance and a sounding board.

That's where Columbia Basin Trust's Community Liaisons come in. Working alongside local governments, First Nations communities, community organizations and volunteers, they help communities identify opportunities, navigate challenges and connect with resources that can turn ideas into action.

In Trout Lake and Wardner, that support helped community-led efforts enhance gathering places that serve as hubs for connection, celebration and emergency preparedness. While each project was unique, they shared a common approach: listening, collaboration and support tailored to local needs.



Photo: Stefan Wichanuk

The Park Wardner Built

Located in the East Kootenay, Wardner has a population of about 70 residents. During the summer months, that number nearly doubles as visitors arrive to enjoy nearby Lake Kootenay. Residents and visitors also enjoy the local park.

When Wardner residents began imagining the future of this community park, they started with a simple goal: create a space that reflects the community and brings people together.

What followed was nearly two years of planning, conversation and volunteer effort. Through community meetings, an open house and ongoing discussions, residents helped shape a shared vision for the park and the role it could play in community life.

Today, that vision is taking shape. Led by the Wardner Community Association and supported by the

Trust, the project has transformed the park into a more welcoming place to gather, play and connect. Improvements throughout the site have created new opportunities for recreation and community events while enhancing a space that already holds an important place in the lives of residents.

But for many involved, the project is about more than the physical changes. It reflects the pride, commitment and co-operation that helped bring it to life.

As the community looks ahead to future phases of development, the park stands as an example of what can happen when residents come together around a shared vision—and work together to make it a reality.



Photo: Max Webster | Webster Film & Photo



Photos: Adrian Wagner Studio

Trout Lake's Happening Spot

In the tiny West Kootenay community of Trout Lake, neighbours are eagerly anticipating the arrival of two babies. A community baby shower is already being planned at the hall—one of many gatherings that bring people together throughout the year.

On any given day, the Trout Lake Community Hall might host a musical jam session, potluck dinner, seed swap, fitness class or wedding reception.

Originally built as a school, the hall was moved from Beaton to Trout Lake in 1967. Decades later, the building required significant upgrades to continue serving the community.

Led by the Trout Lake Community Club, the project included a new foundation, heating system and backup generator, along with fire-resistant siding and more accessible washrooms.

For residents, the improvements are about more than maintaining a building.

"Having a secure place to gather is really important," says Lise Tataryn, Club President. Frequent power outages and wildfire threats have highlighted the hall's role as a place where people connect, support one another and access information during emergencies.

"We're grateful for the funding," says Tataryn. "We love our little hall."

Today, the upgraded facility continues to serve as one of the community's most important gathering places while strengthening local resilience for years to come.



Wardner's Range of Improvements

Kelsey Bullock, a Board member with the Wardner Community Association, takes pride in the local community hall.

"We rent it out for birthdays and weddings," she says. "We have a full kitchen, so for events like Wardner Days we host a pancake breakfast, and for other events at the park, everyone heads to the hall for dinner, darts and music."

To continue meeting community needs, the hall needed substantial upgrades. The Wardner Community Association led improvements that included solar panels, a backup generator, a furnace replacement, a smart thermostat, LED lighting, new siding and energy-efficient windows.

The project also included planting 50 trees along the edge of the property.

The solar installation has already resulted in significant reductions to power costs, helping lower operating expenses and improve the hall's long-term sustainability.

The upgrades have also strengthened the hall's ability to serve as an emergency response centre, increasing the community's capacity to respond during power outages and other emergencies.

For a small community with a busy community hub, those improvements will help ensure the hall remains a welcoming and reliable gathering place for years to come. ■



Photos: Max Webster | Webster Film & Photo



PRESERVING A COMMUNITY HUB

Keeping an important community asset in local hands

IN DOWNTOWN Creston, the Armitage Building occupies a prime location between the town's iconic red grain elevator and ʔakuʔni (akoothnee), home to the popular farmers' market. Eye-catching for its murals depicting historic life, the building is equally notable for its diverse mix of tenants. Home to an art gallery and studio space, forestry office and visitor centre, it has become an important community hub—whether you're interested in art, planning a camping trip or learning about local forests.

"Without this building, there would be a gap in the space that best serves the community's needs in arts, culture and economic development. Keeping this asset in community hands means the Town can determine its future based on local priorities and opportunities," says Creston Mayor Arnold DeBoon.

To ensure the building remains viable, the Town of Creston purchased it in 2024 from the Creston Valley Chamber of Commerce,

with support from Columbia Basin Trust.

"Our location just off Highway 3 makes the Creston Valley Visitor Centre a convenient first stop for travellers exploring the region," says Visitor Centre Manager Amy Maddess. "As a central hub of activity, we're easy to find and well positioned to welcome visitors, answer questions, share local knowledge, and help people discover everything the Creston Valley has to offer."

Tourists aren't the only ones drawn to the building. Community participation is a defining feature of the non-profit Tilted Brick Gallery Association (TBGA), which operates two artist spaces in the building.

In the basement, nearly 20 members use TBGA's ArtSpace to work across a variety of media, connecting with each other and the public through workshops, exhibitions, collaborative projects and events. Upstairs, the gallery offers a curated exhibition space designed to support artists through fair exhibition fees and meaningful

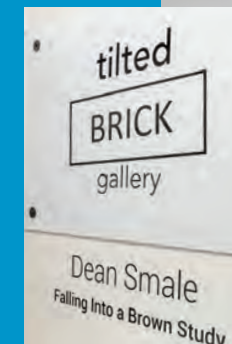
professional exposure.

"ArtSpace is committed to making art welcoming, accessible and engaging for everyone," says Anne Fetterly, member artist and co-curator of the Tilted Brick Gallery. "It encourages participation from artists and non-artists alike, creating opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to connect through creativity. Together, TBGA's spaces foster an inclusive, supportive environment where contemporary art becomes an active and meaningful part of everyday community life."

For 16 years, the building has also been home to the not-for-profit Creston Community Forest (CCF), which focuses on reducing wildfire risk, managing recreational trails and supporting long-term forest sustainability. Its location next to the farmers' market makes it an ideal venue for open houses and public education events, including workshops on bear safety.



Photo: Andrew Bibby Photography



All photos: Andrew Bibby Photography



"The Armitage Building is important to the CCF not only because of its convenient location in the heart of Creston, but also because it shares space with the visitor centre," says Forest Manager Daniel Gratton. "This gives the community forest greater visibility during the tourist season, when travellers are stopping in to learn about things to do while visiting."

The building has also fostered unique partnerships. For example, the CCF collaborated with the Tilted Brick Gallery on "Healing Forests: In Honour of What Forests Give Us," a juried exhibition exploring the relationship between forests, well-being and community.

"Exploring the positive impacts that forests have on people through art is a powerful way to bring together the work of local artists and foresters," Gratton says.

All told, the Armitage Building is a vital community asset—and, thanks to this recent acquisition, it will continue serving Creston for years to come. ■

Photo of Visitor Centre exterior: Brian Lawrence/Inverted Image Photography



BRINGING BALANCE BACK TO Wigwam Flats

Partners working together
to restore a unique landscape



FOR PEOPLE like Brad Mason, Wigwam Flats near Elko is more than just a place to visit—it's where he and his family have spent meaningful time outdoors. That personal connection is shared by many who value this open-forest grassland, an ecologically important habitat that supports wildlife such as Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep.

That connection is also what brought Mason out in spring 2025, alongside more than 20 other volunteers to give back to the landscape and the wildlife that depend on it,

even though it meant travelling from his home in the Slocan Valley. "I felt compelled to volunteer and give back to an area that means so much to me and my family," he says.

Popular for hiking and birdwatching, Wigwam Flats also plays a critical ecological role, providing forage and key movement corridors for wildlife. After decades of fire suppression altered the natural balance of the landscape, continued restoration work is required to restore ecosystem health.

Photo: Cali Lewis

Photos: Dex Dog Media—Aidan Jones

To build on efforts that have already taken place and accelerate work done by the Province of British Columbia and other parties, the Fernie Rod and Gun Club (FRGC) initiated a five-year ecosystem restoration and enhancement project spanning 250 hectares, with funding from Columbia Basin Trust. The project is managed by Todd Penke of Biodiversity Pathways with guidance, oversight and financial support from the Province of BC and Yaqit ?a·knuqli't First Nation. Other partners include The Nature Trust of British Columbia, Nature Conservancy of Canada, East Kootenay Invasive Species Council and Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resource Society. In addition to Columbia Basin Trust, over 20 organizations and clubs have contributed matching funds.

ON-THE-GROUND RESTORATION
Started in 2025, the main goal of this project is to improve ecosystem health, returning the landscape to a healthier, more natural state. This involves increasing

both the quality and quantity of forage for animals like deer, sheep and elk, while improving sightlines so they can better detect predators like cougars and wolves. Reducing

wildfire risk and building long-term resilience to climate change are other important benefits.

For Joe Caravetta, who grew up in Fernie, the work is deeply personal. "I was fortunate enough to be introduced to this area as a young fellow," he says. "It became one of my favourite places."

Those early encounters helped inspire Caravetta's career as a conservation officer. Today, as a member of the FRGC, he is helping oversee the restoration efforts at Wigwam Flats. These include reducing tree density, improving sightlines through pruning, removing invasive species such as St. John's wort, applying seed and fertilizer to enhance existing grasslands, creating wildlife trees, and using monitoring tools like wildlife cameras and collars to better understand how animals are using the area and responding to habitat improvements.

EVERYONE PITCHING IN
"The number of partners and people involved really shows how important the area is," Penke says. "All of these efforts are meant to bring the habitat back into balance."

Volunteer days have brought together individuals and groups, including other rod and gun clubs. Local schoolchildren have also played a role, working with the FRGC to build birdhouses for species like bluebirds and swallows—small but



SUPPORT THAT MAKES IT POSSIBLE

A major funder of the project is Columbia Basin Trust, through its Ecosystem Enhancement Program. The program supports projects that deliver meaningful, measurable and long-lasting landscape-scale impacts that strengthen the health and resilience of the Columbia Basin's natural environment in a changing climate.

ourtrust.org/eep

After decades of fire suppression altered the natural balance of the landscape, continued restoration work is required to restore ecosystem health.



youth & seniors



CLOSING THE AGE GAP CREATIVELY

Building connections through stories, art and curiosity

"I hope future generations will put aside their technology from time to time, step outside, and truly experience the beauty and peace that this area has to offer."

— Alan Ansell, Kimberley



SENIORS LIKE Alan Ansell have words of wisdom, fascinating life histories and first-hand accounts of how communities and landscapes have changed over time. And youth are eager to listen. That was certainly the case in Kimberley, where members of the Kimberley Youth Action Network conceived and carried out Voices of the Land, an intergenerational storytelling project. The network is one of 27 youth networks supported by Columbia Basin Trust and is designed by youth, for youth. Youth interviewed 14 seniors, asking questions like, "What has your relationship with the land been over your lifetime here in Kimberley?" They then transformed the conversations into written stories, portraits and artwork. The exhibit, which included watercolours displayed in frames

made from repurposed books, was shared with the public at Centre 64. The seniors' stories reflect lives shaped by careers in mining, logging, teaching and farming. They describe what it was like growing up in the area and recount memories of climbing mountains in St. Mary's Valley and playing hockey at Wasa Lake. Beyond preserving local stories, the project created meaningful connections across generations. "Older generations have valuable experiences, knowledge and stories to share, while younger people bring new perspectives and curiosity," says Imogen Cvetko-Lueger, who interviewed Ansell. "If we want to build a greater future for all, I believe we need to understand the past and learn from those who came before us." ■

Photos: Tyler Zhao



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