

## 1. Connecting the upper Columbia Valley: Habitat linkages for species at risk

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Since 2009, the Columbia Wetlands Stewardship Partners (CWSP <http://www.cwsp.ca>) have been engaged in a process to facilitate the linkage of habitats in the Upper Columbia Valley between the communities of Canal Flats and Edgewater, a linear distance of 65 km. Valley bottom lands below 1100m are the main focus. This area represents a mosaic of land use planning. Applications include recovery planning for species at risk, especially habitat restoration and acquisition targets for land conservation organizations.

### Work completed to date:

1. *Summarize how wildlife habitat is incorporated into various land use plans in the study area.*

This varies widely, though the trend is progressive. The most recent OCP is Lake Windermere (2008) which includes significant wildlife habitat measures. Historically, little consideration was given to wildlife habitat.

2. *Identify species at risk by habitat type, data and habitat mapping available and any recovery planning:*

Species were categorized by Aquatic, Wetland, Grassland, Closed Forest, Generalist habitats and Wide-ranging Carnivore. Over 30 species have been considered, including some which have not been assessed as —at risk|. The most recent work on identifying specific corridors between Stoddart Creek and Edgewater has focused on badger and bighorn sheep.

3. *Divide study area into blocks based on land use planning, land tenure and natural boundaries:*

This was done for two reasons: it highlights where changes occur in planning guidance, where pinch points or natural barriers may occur. The study area was divided into 5 aquatic / wetland blocks, 9 terrestrial blocks on the west side and 13 terrestrial blocks on the east side.

4. *Identify critical areas for linkages or pinch points:*

This was a key step in 2010. We looked at north-south linkages along the Rocky Mountain Trench and broad east-west cross-Trench linkages. For aquatic systems, movement is generally unimpeded within the Columbia mainstem. For terrestrial movements, one key barrier was identified on the west side of the *CMI Annual Researchers' Meeting 2011 - Abstracts and descriptions of field trips* 4Trench: Toby Canyon and Invermere. On the narrower east side potential barriers / pinch points occur at Canal Flats, Fairmont, Windermere and Radium townsites and surrounding developments.

5. *Identify potential linkage corridors:*

Possible east-west cross-trench corridors occur at Canal Flats, Akisq'nuk / Hoodoos, Dry Gulch and north of Edgewater. There are good cross-trench options both north and south of the study area. The Dry Gulch corridor appears to be the best option in the congested Invermere – Radium area.