SPLAT UPDATE

Activity Report for 2024-25

Amphibians are more than just fascinating creatures: they are essential indicators of environmental health and contributors to human well being. They serve crucial functions in ecosystems, offer potential medical benefits, and have even facilitated Nobel Prize-winning advances in developmental biology. However, they are currently the most threatened vertebrate group, facing a myriad of challenges including habitat destruction, disease, and climate change. Their decline mirrors broader environmental and societal challenges, making their conservation a shared responsibility.

Amphibian Survival Alliance



Contents

Research & Monitoring:



Taking care of Western Toads at Frederick Lake



Identifying, assessing, and protecting wetland habitats



Learning to stop the spread of Invasive Yellow Flag Iris

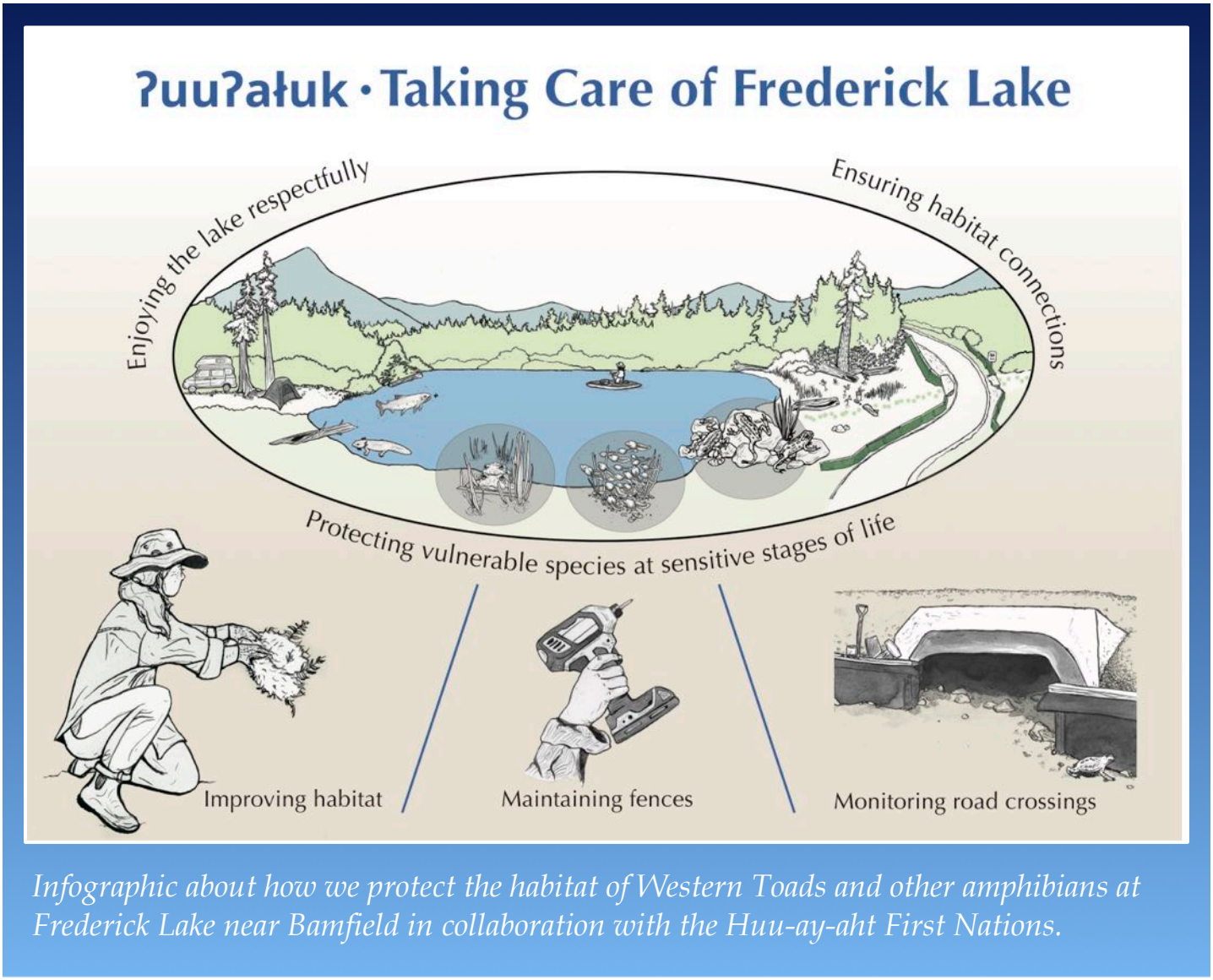
Education & Outreach:



Sharing the joy of being a wetland steward

The Association of Wetland Stewards for Clayoquot & Barkley Sounds is a charitable organization that works with First Nations, federal and provincial government agencies, and other non-governmental organizations to improve the survival of amphibians on the west coast of Vancouver Island. This newsletter provides highlights of our stewardship activities and acknowledges our supporters in 2024-25.

Frogs and salamanders face many challenges at the local level - being squished by cars during breeding migrations and losing wetland and forest habitats to land development and invasive species. This past year, we made progress in addressing these challenges. We hope that sharing our efforts will help inspire you or someone you know to contribute to the conservation of amphibians and their habitat where you live.



Infographic about how we protect the habitat of Western Toads and other amphibians at Frederick Lake near Bamfield in collaboration with the Huu-ay-aht First Nations.

Western Toads are a species at risk. They have declined in the southern part of their range and breeding populations on the west coast of Vancouver Island seem to be few and far between. Frederick Lake, near Bamfield, is the breeding site for one of these populations. We have been taking care of the toads at Frederick Lake in collaboration with the Huu-ay-aht First Nations over the past four years.

Adult toads cross the Bamfield Forest Service Road to breed at the lake in spring. Juvenile "toadlets" cross the road when they leave in mid-summer. In 2021 and 2022, we surveyed to find the peak crossing locations of both adults and toadlets. Those spots are where the Huu-ay-aht First Nations installed two new concrete box culverts. We built fencing to guide toads to those and two existing drainage culverts. In 2023 and 2024, we added more fencing and repeated road surveys to test whether the fencing kept toads off the road. At the same time, we photographed what went through the culverts with wildlife cameras. By January 2025, we were excited with the results of the monitoring. Although some toads still made it onto the road, we photographed over 100 adult toads and 1000s of toadlets moving through the culverts each year.

Continued on page 3





Huu-ay-aht Guardians (left) & our crew (right) after extending fences to keep toads off the Bamfield Road.

Steep terrain, large logs, and a spur road made it challenging to construct fencing along the entire road crossing "hotspot". Consequently, many toads still got onto the road. In March 2025, Huu-ay-aht Lands and Natural Resources staff asked backroad users whether we could temporarily close the spur road and extend a fence across it during the adult breeding migration period. The answer was "yes". We were grateful to the Huu-ay-aht Guardians for building the temporary fence extension with a little bit of help from us!





Road surveys happened on rainy nights through April and May. Each time an amphibian was seen, we identified the species and sex, took the GPS coordinates, and helped them along their way!

All photos by Barb Beasley unless indicated. Photos of fence at "57 m" and toad by Jess McGregor.



Identifying, assessing and protecting wetland habitats within the Clayoquot Sound UNESCO Biosphere Region

In 2024-25 we worked closely with the Clayoquot Biosphere Trust (CBT) to support their joint effort with Environment and Climate Change Canada to conserve biodiversity within the Clayoquot Sound UNESCO Biosphere Region. The main task was to figure out ways of maintaining wetlands outside the boundaries of existing protected areas. Wetland habitats are not only essential for amphibians, they are biodiversity hotspots and provide many other benefits such as water storage, flood protection, erosion control, and resilience to climate change.

We "waded in" to the unsettled waters of delineating and protecting wetlands in the face of land development in our region. It has come to the fore that some types of wetlands are challenging to identify. When mistakes are made, for example when wetlands are misidentified as forest, we can lose them. If that happens, further construction work can be delayed while appropriate mitigation and compensation are decided upon. This has led to significant extra costs for development projects.

We participated in a CBT-hosted workshop with wetland experts to learn what we can do to ensure that development proponents and their contractors have resources to help them correctly identify and avoid impacts to wetlands. The workshop made us realize the importance of gathering and sharing more information about wetlands in our region. This led us to explore a few wetlands that we had never visited before which resulted in identifying another breeding site for Red-legged Frogs in Tofino!

Next on our plate is determining the best way to share the information we have collected over the years with the people who will find it helpful in protecting the wetlands in our region.

Photo shows a constructed wetland created to compensate for damage to natural wetlands during land development in Ucluelet.

Stopping the spread of invasive Yellow Flag Iris



Yellow Flag Iris evokes love-hate emotions in those concerned with sustaining natural ecosystems. You can't help but admire the beauty of its flowers.... while at the same time disliking its negative effects on biodiversity and hydrology. In past years we removed small patches of iris from Big Beach in Ucluelet. With success there, we decided to face a much more daunting task - removing larger and denser patches at a salt marsh at the end of Kimoto Drive. We began the task in a group discussion with an international group of students visiting the Clayoquot Biosphere Region. Then two small but mighty groups of volunteers came out to clip flowers before the iris could release seeds into the ocean - an important way to prevent the spread of the species to other parts of the coast.



Volunteers clipping flowers to prevent the spread of seeds.

Top photo: Transdisciplinary International Learning Lab visit taken by Graham Sakaki.

Sharing the joy of being a wetland steward!

It was a pleasure to share what we do to conserve amphibians with the kakaẃinmi̓nḥ - a group of Yuułuʔiłʔatḥ youth. We brought them to a wetland within their traditional territory where lots of frogs and salamanders breed. We timed the visit so everyone could keep their feet dry and photograph some of the recently metamorphosed juvenile tree frogs. The tiny colourful creatures definitely stole everyone's heart! It was part of a photography/story-telling course taught by Sam Rose Phillips for West Coast NEST.

We also spent time talking about how we monitor amphibians at Frederick Lake with the Huu-ay-aht Warriors at the lake and in three classrooms at the Bamfield Community School. We brought our survey gear and the younger students had fun dressing up in waders, high visibility vests and polarized sunglasses while we showed them how to use a GPS and set a camera trap. We hope this will inspire youth to get involved in future stewardship activities.

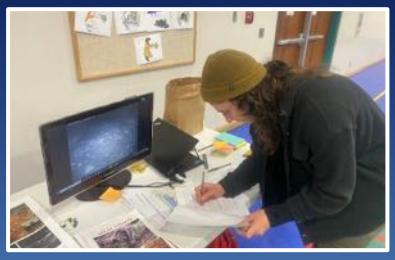
Our main outreach event happened at the House of Huu-ay-aht where we co-hosted a potluck dinner for community members with Stella Peters. We presented highlights of the Frederick Lake project, including a video showing amphibians moving through the Bamfield Road culverts. We used the opportunity to receive feedback on what local residents would like to do next to take care of Frederick Lake.



Marsh visit with Yuułuʔiłʔatḥ youth in the kakaẃinminḥ group. They were excited to find juvenile Treefrogs!

Photo: Sam Rose Phillips





Sharing food, information and getting feedback about the Frederick Lake Toad Project at a potluck for the communities of Anacla and Bamfield.

We have many people to thank for their collaboration & support in 2024-25!

We respectfully acknowledge and appreciate being able to work within the territories of the Huu-ay-aht First Nations, Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation, Toquaht Nation Government, and Yuułuʔiłʔatḥ Government.

Grantors:

HABITAT CONSERVATION TRUST FOUNDATION

WEST COAST NEST

clayoquot BIOSPHERE TRUST

FESBC Forest Enhancement Society of British Columbia

BRITISH COLUMBIA Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure

Government of Canada

Donors: *Corinne Dulberg, Alyssa Fleishman, Kathleen Shaw, Pat Sieber, BC Provincial Employees Community Services Fund & anonymous donors who gave through the CBT Giving Catalogue*

Board of Directors: *Barb Beasley, Crystal Bolduc, Ewen Brittain, Tanya Dowdall, Gerry Schreiber & Jackie Windh*

Collaborators/Volunteers by Project:

Frederick Lake Toad Project: *HFN Lands & Resources - Scott Cheyne, Tyra Fabrick, Christine Gruman, Rita Johnson, Tom Joe, Amelia Vos, Daniel Zayonc; HFN Guardians - Duane Nookemus, Jayson Nookemus, Brian Peters, Kevin Peters; Schramm Design - Barbara Schramm; Cawak?qin Forestry - Dean Fauchon; Stella Peters; LGL - Krysia Tuttle; BC MoTI; BC MoF - Melissa Todd; Volunteers - Carter Burtlake, Lake Butler, Taylor Ford-Sahibzada, Jesse Patterson, Gerry Schreiber*

Wetland Habitat Protection: *Clayoquot Biosphere Trust - Janessa Dornstauder, Colin Robinson; Redd Fish Restoration - Kasia Kistowska, Mara McLaughlin; BC Ministry of Water, Lands & Resource Stewardship -Olivia Currie, Sacha O'Regan*

Yellow Flag Iris Removal: *Volunteers - Joe Atkinson, Naas Charleson-Parlee, Rebecca Hurwitz, Silva Johansson, Lori Johnson, Jadyn Patton, Gerry Schreiber, Carl Sieber, Clair; District of Ucluelet - Wanda McAvoy & Public Works Crew, RES - Hannah Richards, Derek Zandvliet, Embeth & Erica*

Egg Mass Surveys: *Destiny Poruchny; Parks Canada - Ian Cruickshank, Katie Kushneryk, Michelle Segal, Sarah Tyne*

Toquaht Waaʕit Surveys: *Volunteers - Ewen Brittain, Bronte Elphick-Miner, Justine Kaseman, RES - Derek Zandvliet, Embeth, Sacha*

Highway 4 Fence Maintenance: *RES - Derek, Embeth, Erica & Sacha*

Contractors: *Renee Adams, Barb Beasley, Gerry Schreiber & Katie Turner*

Seasonal Staff: *Jess McGregor & Cierra Nookemus*

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WETLAND STEWARDS FOR CLAYOQUOT & BARKLEY SOUNDS

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Please be in touch if you would like to contribute to our projects! As a charity we issue charitable tax receipts for donations and we're often looking for volunteers to assist with field and outreach activities!

