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## **MAKING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY FOR TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE A REALITY: THE ENVIRONMENTAL ENHANCEMENT FUND IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

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### **Abstract**

The award winning Environmental Enhancement Fund developed by the British Columbia Ministry of Transportation demonstrates environmentally sustainable transportation projects can be achieved through innovative private and public partnerships.

The award winning Environmental Enhancement Fund (EEF) was established by the British Columbia Ministry of Transportation (BCMoT) in 2004. The fund was conceived by the Ministry's Executive to promote environmental stewardship in the Ministry and foster partnerships with outside agencies.

EEF was initiated as a one year program in 2004, and extended in 2005. In 2006, as a result of its outstanding success and support from other government agencies and non-government organizations (NGO's), the EEF was made a permanent program by BCMoT. The EEF supports BCMoT's commitment to the British Columbia Government's goal to lead the world in sustainable environmental management, with the best air and water quality, and the best fisheries management.

The EEF is an innovative program that has helped BCMoT highway projects ensure:

1. High benchmarks for environmental stewardship are set and achieved;
2. Environmental Best Management Practices (BMP's) are more results driven and performance based;
3. Partnerships with provincial and federal agencies, First Nations and NGO's are established to ensure environmental sensitive areas and habitats are protected and/or restored, and function on a sustainable basis; and
4. Goodwill, trust and positive working relationships are established and sustained with provincial and federal agencies, First Nations, NGO's, and private landowners.

Working closely with other provincial and federal agencies, First Nations, NGO's, including the Nature Trust, Ducks Unlimited, the Pacific Salmon Foundation, the Land Conservancy of British Columbia, and private landowners, BCMoT has been involved in over 100 EEF-supported projects throughout British Columbia.

EEF projects fall under four general categories of on-ground and in-stream environmental projects that directly enhance, restore and/or protect fish and wildlife resources:

1. Fish passage improvements and restoration at highway stream crossings through culvert retrofits and replacements, enabling salmon and trout to return to their former levels in previously accessible habitat.
2. Strategic and timely acquisition of environmentally sensitive properties for conservation purposes and protection in perpetuity, with property owned and managed by non-Ministry agencies, NGO's or other organizations.
3. Fish and wildlife habitat enhancement works, in partnership with provincial and federal environmental agencies and NGO's, to: construct salmon and trout rearing habitat and spawning channels; establish water storage to create wetlands or wetted habitat and to augment low summer streamflows; increase habitat complexing and daylighting; restore highway footprint impacts; and enhance riparian areas.
4. Other fish and wildlife projects: including restoration of wild fish populations or wild fish transplants; and wildlife crash mitigation by relocating rare or endangered species, such as Roosevelt Elk, to more remote areas to establish new herds or enlarge existing ones.

Many projects have significant spin-off benefits for water and/or air quality. The projects also provide a capital environmental return and are linked directly to the BCMoT's highway infrastructure.

Since its inception, the EEF has garnered numerous accolades and awards from Federal and Provincial agencies and high profile NGO's. In 2005, Ducks Unlimited Canada awarded its most prestigious award, the Platinum Award, to BCMoT for environmental mitigation land donations associated with Ministry projects, such as the Vancouver Island Highway Project. Also in 2005, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) presented industry awards to fourteen BCMoT staff involved with highway fish passage restoration projects in the Province's northwest. In 2006, the EEF won the Transportation Association of Canada (TAC) Environmental Achievement Award. The TAC award, coveted by transportation agencies throughout Canada, provides national recognition of the importance and need of the transportation sector to continue protecting and enhancing the environment.

The EEF consistently delivers high value, tangible environmental projects linked to the highway infrastructure, in a cost-effective manner through private and public partnerships that restore and conserve British Columbia's natural resources. Given its success, the EEF model can be adopted by transportation agencies and municipalities to foster environmentally sustainable transportation projects.