



FARMLAND ADVANTAGE

IMPACT REPORT **2024/25**

Farmland Advantage is an IAF program that partners with farmers and ranchers in BC to protect and conserve critical lands, streams, and habitats.

The IAF logo is a stylized, bold, white 'IAF' set against a dark background. The letters are interconnected, with the 'I' and 'A' sharing a vertical stroke and the 'F' having a unique, angular design.

Bank erosion restoration at Beardale Farm, Port Alberni

THANK YOU

IAF gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the the governments of Canada and British Columbia, through the Resilient Agricultural Landscapes Program (RALP) under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (Sustainable CAP), a 3.5-billion, 5-year agreement between the federal, provincial, and territorial governments.

IAF gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Government of British Columbia as well as the Government of Canada through Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) as a part of the British Columbia Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund (BCSRIF).



Off-River Watering at Kootenay Natural Meats

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ACRONYMS

AF	BRITISH COLUMBIA MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD
ALR	AGRICULTURAL LAND RESERVE
BCSRIF	BRITISH COLUMBIA SALMON RESTORATION AND INNOVATION FUND
BCWS	BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDFIRE SERVICE
BMP	BENEFICIAL MANAGEMENT PRACTICE
DFO	FISHERIES AND OCEANS CANADA
ECCC	ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE CANADA
FLA	FARMLAND ADVANTAGE
IAF	INVESTMENT AGRICULTURE FOUNDATION OF BC
OKIB	OKANAGAN INDIAN BAND
PES	PAYMENT FOR ECOSYSTEM SERVICES
SAR	SPECIES AT RISK
SME	SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT
WLRS	BC MINISTRY OF WATER, LAND AND RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

INTRODUCTION

The 2024/25 fiscal saw continued growth with new sites that were added and work on existing sites. It was also one of reflection and transition for IAF's Farmland Advantage (FLA) Program. This report provides an overview, results achieved and a window into the future of FLA.

FLA is a BC-based [Payment for Ecosystem Services \(PES\)](#) program that identifies sensitive ecosystems and high stewardship opportunity areas on agricultural lands. Farmland Advantage targets agricultural lands within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) with sensitive riparian and grassland ecosystems. More recently, FLA has also begun targeting sites which have the potential to mitigate wildfire risk under the program's Wildfire Risk Reduction Pilot Project.

Through FLA, IAF works with farmers, ranchers and Indigenous communities to restore, maintain, and enhance ecosystem services on lands under their stewardship. Ecosystem services are the beneficial natural processes arising from healthy ecosystems, such as purification of water and air, pollination of plants, soil carbon sequestration, flood control, climate regulation, and many others. FLA provides financial compensation to farmers and ranchers to restore riparian areas, enhance native grassland ecosystems, protect Species at Risk (SAR), and contribute to wildfire risk reduction.

The success of FLA is based upon new and established relationships with farmers and ranchers, Indigenous community partners, industry associations, non-profit organizations, academia, and local, regional, provincial, and federal governments.





FARMLAND ADVANTAGE GOAL:

BC farmers are celebrated and compensated for actively undertaking sustainable agricultural practices and stewardship activities that measure, maintain, and enhance ecosystem health over the long term.

APPROACH

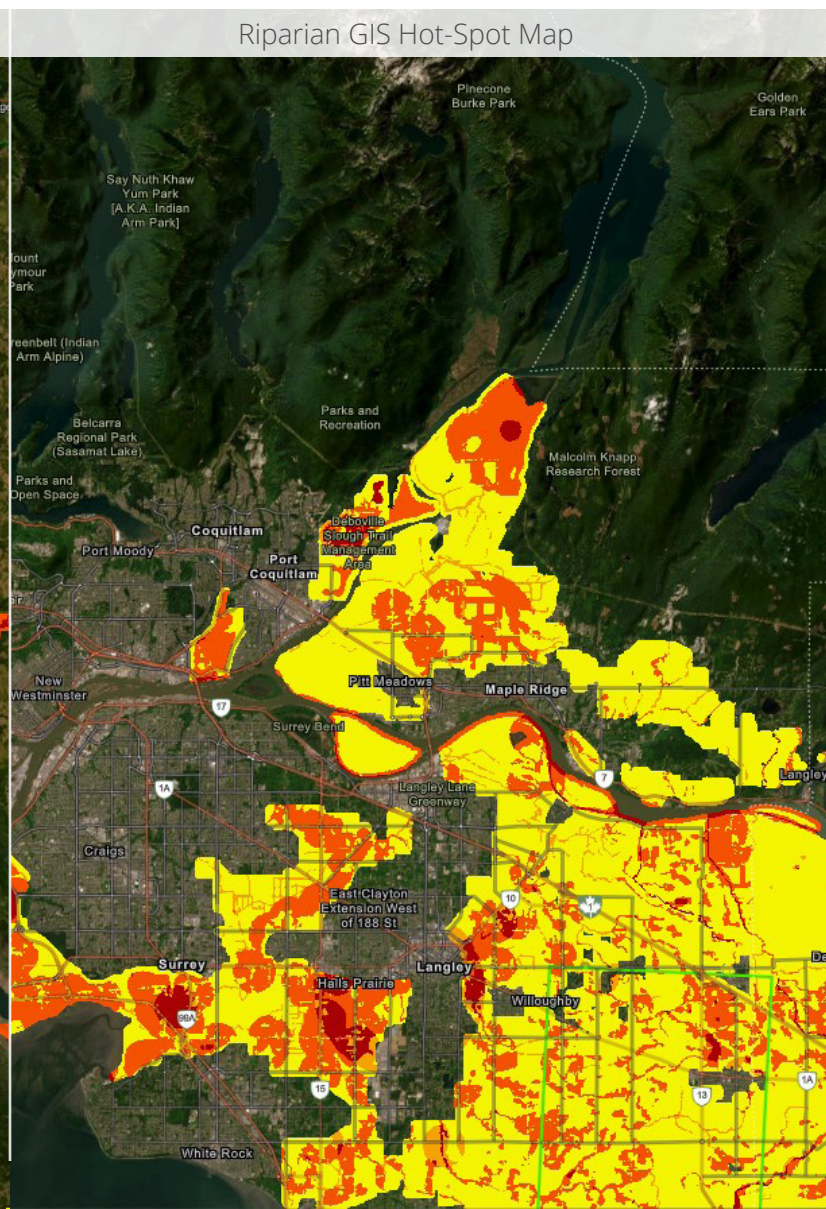
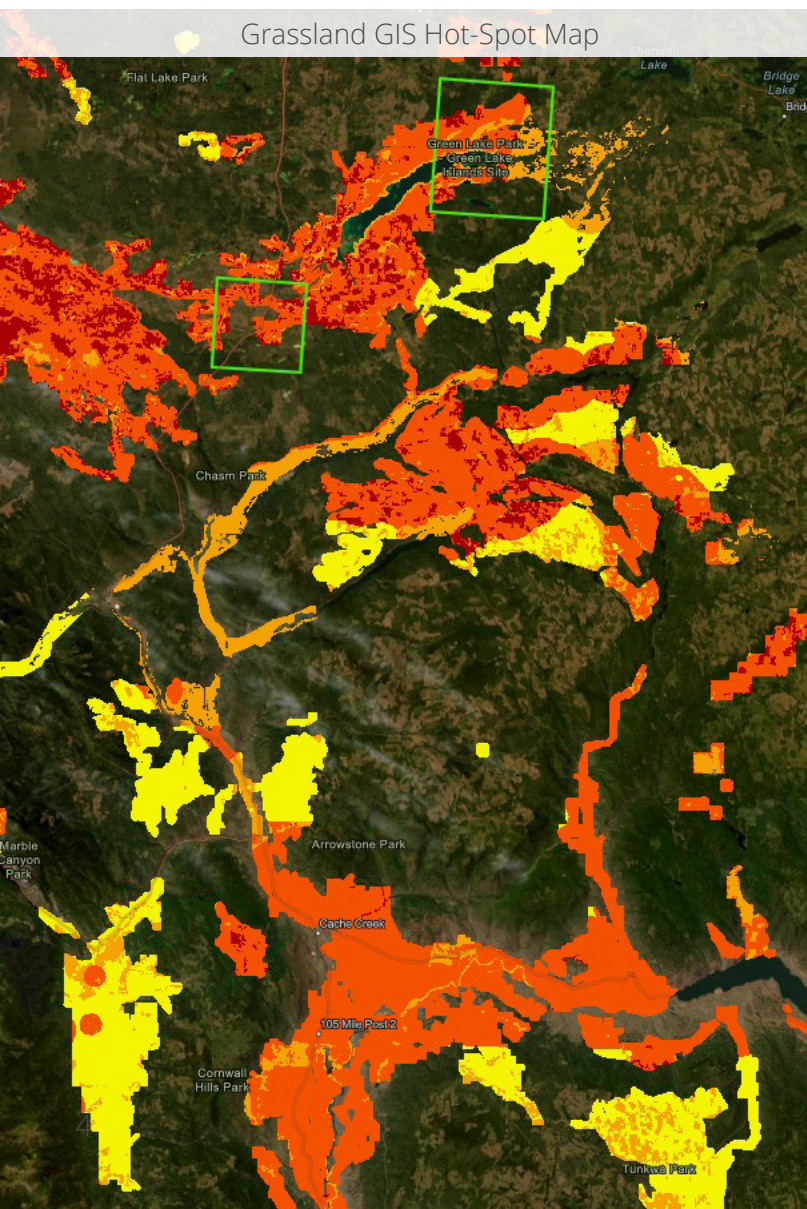
IAF uses a specific GIS targeting methodology to identify important regions, watersheds, and sites where it conducts and revises ecosystem health assessments; implements measures for improvement; and evaluates results.

Site Selection

FLA sites are selected based on rigorous site selection methodology. Using GIS Hot-Spot Mapping, IAF identifies areas of convergence of the ALR, SAR habitat, critical grasslands and riparian habitats, and potential for wildfire risk reduction.

The maps below show potential areas of interest for restoration and conservation on grassland and riparian habitats. Several mapping layers are used to identify

the hot-spots on each map. The map's dark red "Very High" areas have all layers overlapping. The lighter red and orange colours have a combination of multiple layers, but not all. Lastly, the yellow areas on the map are habitats in the ALR but have no other mapping characteristics. The green boxes indicate areas where IAF currently has FLA sites.



Participating in Farmland Advantage

Once an area is identified by the program's site selection process and GIS hot-spot mapping, IAF works with Advisors and Restoration Partners in the region to conduct outreach and encourage farmers and ranchers to participate. When a farmer or rancher agrees to participate, their project moves through several steps:

STEP 1

FLA Advisors visit farms to conduct an initial health assessment of the riparian, grassland, or other ecosystem under consideration.

STEP 2

FLA Advisors present ecosystem restoration and/or enhancement actions to the farmer/rancher through a proposed Management Plan and prescribe Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs) to improve ecosystem services.

STEP 3

Farmers agree to the proposed plan and work with IAF to implement the BMPs on their land, and to maintain and monitor the BMPs into the future. Restoration Partners, including local, non-profit organizations and/or registered professional contractors, may be involved in on-farm restoration work.

STEP 4

FLA Advisors conduct annual site visits to monitor and evaluate the restoration work and the BMPs' efficacy, and to ensure restored areas are being maintained.

STEP 5

Annual payments are issued when a farmer/rancher has successfully met or maintained the actions outlined in their Management Plan.

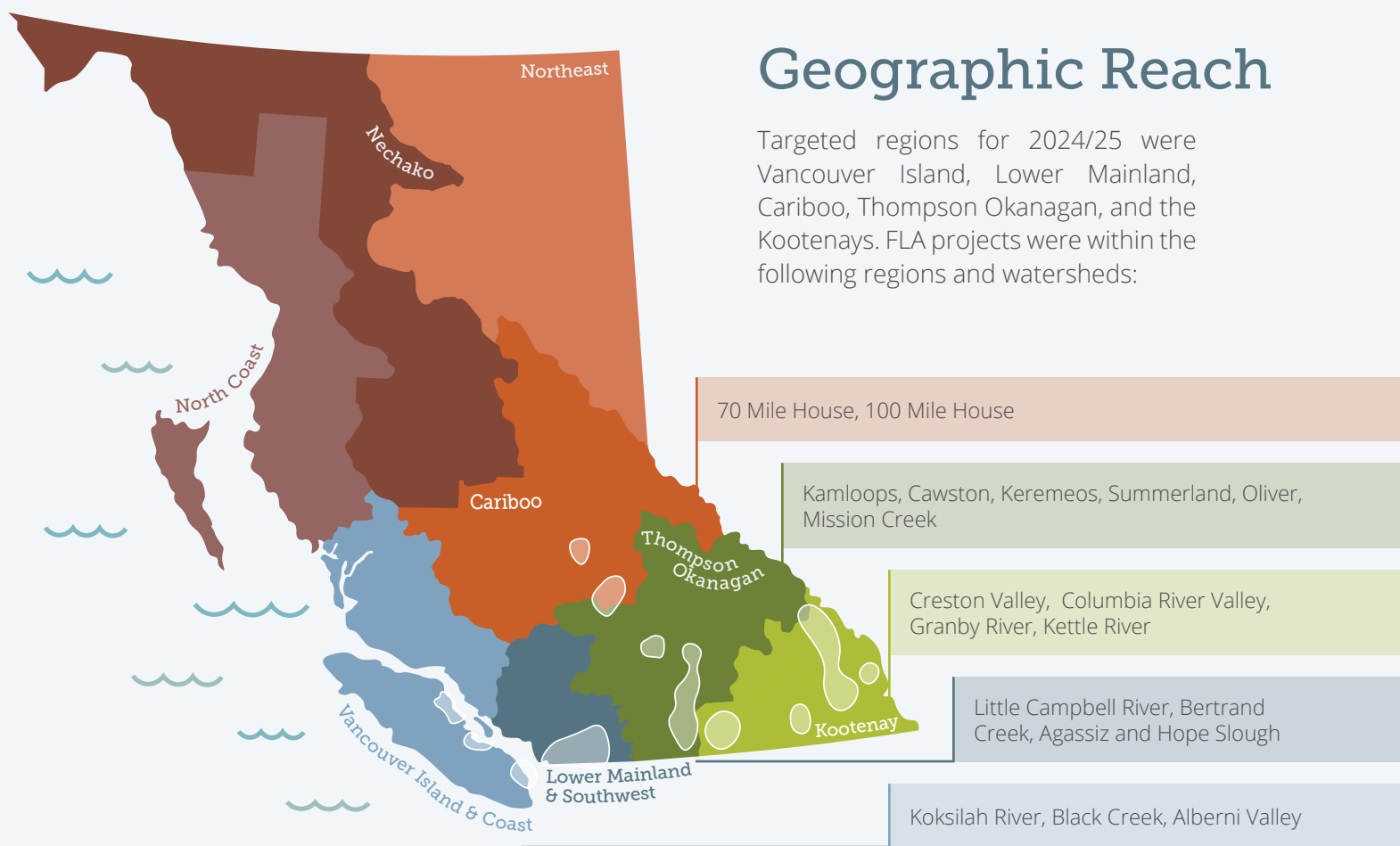


34.2

Acres of riparian zone
created, improved, or
widened

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The FLA program continued to be delivered in key geographical areas in 2024/25. The number of participating farms are 129, who have a total of 129 projects underway. Of those projects, 35 were new in 2024/25.



By the end of the 2024/25 fiscal year:

129

Total
Projects

129

Farms
under contract

35

New
Farms

96

Riparian
Projects

26

Grassland
Projects

7

Wildfire Risk
Reduction Pilot Sites

Riparian Ecosystems

Riparian zones are the areas surrounding lakes, streams, rivers, or other bodies of water. They provide important ecosystem services such as vital wildlife habitat, water storage and flood control, and improved water quality for salmon and other species of fish. Collectively, rivers, streams, lakes, and wetlands provide habitat for at least 25% of BC's vertebrate, invertebrate, and vascular plant species.¹ Much of BC's agricultural lands are adjacent to, and intersecting with, riparian areas. Agricultural threats to riparian habitats include cropland expansion and development, livestock grazing, nutrient loading, and invasive plants.

In 2024/25, a total of 96 riparian restoration projects were implemented on the ground through the FLA program. Of these, 28 were newly initiated, while 68 were ongoing projects that began in previous years.

For each new project site, a riparian health assessment was completed, followed by the development of a site-specific restoration prescription. Restoration activities were carried out by qualified partner organizations and included actions such as removal of invasive species, replanting of native vegetation, livestock exclusion fencing, and streambank stabilization.

For ongoing projects, farm contracts were extended from 2023/24 to ensure continued stewardship and maintenance of previously restored areas. Maintenance efforts focused on invasive species control, watering of new plantings, and fence repairs. In some cases, additional restoration work was required to further enhance ecosystem health, which was completed during the 2024/25 period.



21,882

Number of plants planted

Summary of Riparian and Fencing Activities

2.3

Acres of riparian zone stabilized with engineered erosion controls

12.4

Acres of created or restored wetlands

32.5

Acres of riparian zone cleared of invasive/noxious species

9.9

kms of fencing installed to improve riparian health

10.25

kms of shoreline or reach protected (on both sides)

16.3

kms of fences to prevent livestock damage

72.9

Acres of sensitive habitat rejuvenated or enhanced by restoration

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Grassland Ecosystems

Healthy grasslands provide ecosystem services such as increased biodiversity, forage for livestock and wildlife, soil retention and nutrient cycling, and water and carbon storage. Native grassland ecosystems are a declining habitat and the most endangered ecosystem in Canada.² More than 30% of BC's SAR depend on grasslands for their survival, even though these habitats occupy just 1% of BC's total area.³

In the 2024/25 fiscal year, IAF supported the restoration, enhancement, or maintenance of grassland ecosystems across 26 sites. Of these, seven were newly initiated projects, while 19 continued from previous program years. Sustained engagement with farmers and ranchers over multiple years has enabled ongoing habitat conservation for species at risk (SAR) and contributed to wildfire risk reduction.

For each new site, a grassland health assessment was conducted, followed by the development of a site-specific restoration prescription. On most sites, restoration and maintenance activities were producer-led, and included fence installation and maintenance for targeted grazing, wildfire risk mitigation, and habitat restoration and protection for SAR.

Many FLA-supported grassland sites overlap with critical habitat for numerous SAR, including the American Badger, Bobolink, Lewis's Woodpecker, Spotted Bat, Big Sagebrush, Needle-and-Thread Grass, Alkali Saltgrass, and others.

26

Grassland
Projects

25.2

kms of fencing
repaired or
maintained

Site Highlight: Restoring Mission Creek

With support from the Farmland Advantage Program, administered by IAF on behalf of funders, farmer Ron McMillan was able to tackle long-standing flood and infrastructure issues on his family's farm along Mission Creek, outside of Kelowna.

"There's been a lot of changes going on there—both policy-related and climate change-related," Ron explained.

Up until the early 2000s, the creek was cleared regularly. But without maintenance, upstream material started building up gravel bars, raising the creek bed and increasing the risk of flood events. "It [was] almost to the point of touching the bottom of the bridge," he said.

At the same time, extreme weather has become more common. "In the last 10 years, I think we've had about 3 1-in-100 flood events," said Ron. "They're not 1-in-100 events anymore."

With FLA funding, Ron replaced failing culverts and cleared out channels where a 3-foot-deep ditch had filled with sand. "Everything's flowing really good right now," Ron said.

At IAF, we're proud to deliver programs that make a real difference for BC farmers and the ecosystems they care for.



Wildfire Risk Reduction Pilot

Many ecosystems in BC rely on natural fires to regenerate and thrive, but fire can be devastating for communities when out of control. Agricultural lands are often at the interface between human development and natural areas, therefore reducing fire risk on these lands by treating and managing sections of private forests and grasslands may reduce the risk or intensity of wildfires impacting nearby communities. Well-managed healthy grasslands

have less forest in-growth and lower fine fuel levels which can help reduce the risk of a catastrophic, high-intensity fire. During the 2024/25, wildfire risk reduction activities were completed across seven sites. The pilot project partnership with the BC Ministry of Forests concluded in the 2024/25 fiscal year.

7

Wildfire Risk
Reduction Pilot Sites

Site Highlight: Coldstream Ranch Reduces Wildfire Risk

In 2024, Coldstream Ranch in Lumby worked with IAF to reduce wildfire risk through the Farmland Advantage Wildfire Risk Reduction Pilot.

The historic working ranch—known for cattle and crops like fruit, corn, and cereals—sits in a region vulnerable to wildfire. Dense forest, low tree canopies, thick underbrush, and encroaching brush in grasslands had created ideal wildfire conditions. Through IAF’s delivery of the pilot, the ranch received expert planning and support to make changes on the ground.

In spring, an FLA advisor and a Registered Professional Forester visited the ranch and created a management plan. Their recommendations included selective pruning, brush clearing, and reseeded with fire-resistant forage to improve both safety and productivity.

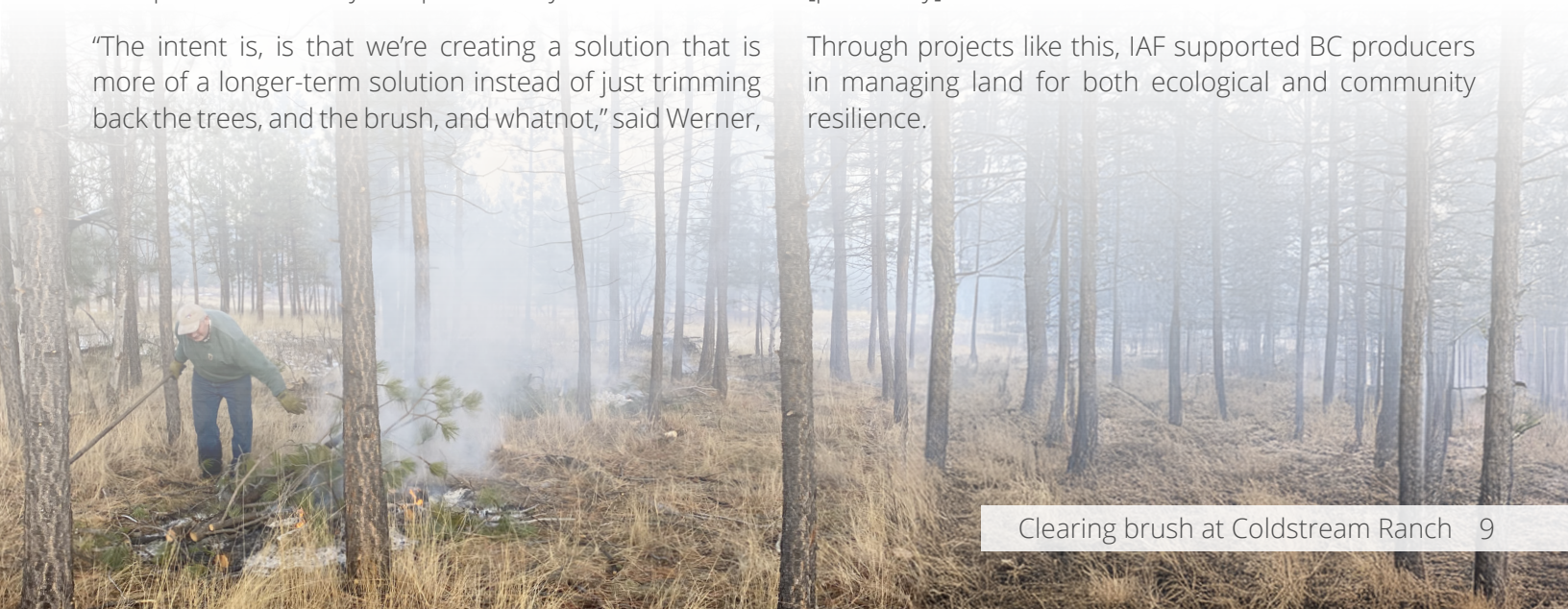
“The intent is, is that we’re creating a solution that is more of a longer-term solution instead of just trimming back the trees, and the brush, and whatnot,” said Werner,

the Registered Professional Forester. “We’re hoping to replace that vegetation with a forage that will be controlling the ingress of brush and timbers.”

By fall, tree limbs were pruned, brush was mulched into the soil or burned, and drones seeded a hardy grass blend to stabilize the ground. Once the grass established, Coldstream CEO Trish Balcaen implemented targeted cattle grazing using fencing to guide the herds and prevent regrowth.

“You know, if you’re forestry, you don’t think about cattle. If you’re cattle, you don’t think about forestry,” said Balcaen. “But, in bringing us all together, you actually have a chance for that kind of mimicking [that] nature would have done... better than the siloed of approach we [previously] took.”

Through projects like this, IAF supported BC producers in managing land for both ecological and community resilience.



OPPORTUNITIES

Several opportunities were identified throughout 2024/25 and actions were taken to capitalize on them.

Key opportunities and lessons in 2024/25 included:

● ALIGN PROGRAM FUNDING WITH SEASONALITY OF RESTORATION WORK

Restoration work has seasonal limitations and must be coordinated around farming activities. Longer-term funding agreements allow for the better alignment of activities and support multi-year restoration projects. For instance, for some projects, site selection and assessment are completed in the first year and restoration work begins in the second year.

● ENHANCE DATA COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT

IAF will continue to explore enhanced digital tools for standardized data collection and centralized management. This builds on the 2023/24 data methodology review, which identified opportunities to streamline and expand data collection to improve tracking of conservation impacts and landowner engagement.

● FURTHER PARTNERSHIPS WITH FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

IAF will continue to advance efforts that foster meaningful engagement and collaboration with First Nations communities.

● EXPAND THE ACTIONS THAT FLA FUNDS

Several opportunities to expand FLA activities have been highlighted, including additional invasive treatments, virtual fencing, and other technological solutions. IAF will explore these enhancements for future inclusion, should program direction and funding allow.

● ENHANCING STEWARDSHIP THROUGH TARGETED AGRICULTURAL INITIATIVES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

In 2024–25, the FLA program transitioned into two distinct initiatives—Agri-Ecosystem Stewardship Initiative (AESI) and Scaling the Implementation of Riparian Restoration (SIRR)—to better reflect current funding sources and priorities. These programs will continue supporting BC farmers and ranchers in restoring and conserving ecosystems through collaborative, on-farm restoration efforts.



Indigenous Outreach and Partnerships

In 2024/25, the Investment Agriculture Foundation (IAF) and Farmland Advantage (FLA) continued to prioritize meaningful engagement and collaboration with First Nations communities across British Columbia. FLA maintained its focus on contracting Indigenous-owned sites for ecological restoration, fostering long-term partnerships and stewardship.

In the Kootenays, successful restoration work was completed on grassland sites owned by Métis Nations, marking a significant milestone in expanding our collaborative efforts in the region.

On Vancouver Island, the Cowichan Tribes remained key restoration partners in the Koksilah River watershed. Most of this work took place along the Koksilah River, Xwulqw'selu Sta'lo', within the traditional territories of the Cowichan Tribes and Malahat Nation, reflecting a continued commitment to culturally grounded environmental restoration.

FLA also deepened its relationship with the Okanagan Indian Band throughout 2024/25. This ongoing partnership will guide the identification and development of additional restoration sites in the coming years.

Site Highlight: Protecting Western Toad Habitat with OKIB

Through the FLA, IAF partnered with the Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB) to restore critical riparian habitat on reserve lands in Vernon, BC. The first project site: a small wetland now known as Toadlet Pond.

Chosen for its ecological significance, Toadlet Pond is home to the Western Toad—a species of concern under Canada's Species at Risk Act. Thousands of tiny toads were spotted during an early site visit, inspiring the name. The surrounding grasslands are used for grazing, but years of livestock and feral horse traffic had degraded the shoreline and left the area vulnerable to invasive plants.

To protect the pond, a restoration plan was developed with guidance from FLA Planning Advisor Rob

Dinwoodie. Fencing was installed to prevent further disturbance, invasive species were removed, and native vegetation was planted to help the ecosystem recover.

This project builds on a longstanding relationship between Rob and Patrick Riley, OKIB's Manager of Research and Environmental Programs. Restoration training was also provided by FLA partner Chris Wellman to support OKIB in leading future projects.

IAF looks forward to continuing this partnership and supporting OKIB's efforts to protect culturally and ecologically important lands.



REFERENCES

1. Government of BC. Riparian areas. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/agricultural-land-and-environment/water/riparian-areas#:~:text=Collectively%2C%20rivers%2C%20streams%2C%20lakes%2C%20and%20wetlands%20provide%20habitat,vegetation%20that%20surround%20wetlands%2C%20lakes%2C%20streams%2C%20and%20rivers>
2. Iverson K. 2004. Grasslands of the Southern Interior. Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. Retrieved on March 22, 2021.
3. Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia. <https://bcgrasslands.org/>



FINANCIAL SUMMARY

PROGRAM CONTRIBUTORS		2024/25
Investment Agriculture Foundation	\$	228,151
BC Ministry of Environment	\$	233,050
Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada	\$	200,000
BC Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship	\$	67,753
BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food through the Resilient Agricultural Landscapes Program (RALP)	\$	1,158,055
Fisheries and Oceans Canada	\$	1,305,160
BC Ministry of Forests	\$	595,472
TOTAL REVENUES		\$ 3,787,641
EXPENSES		2024/25
Program Delivery Costs	\$	337,761
Activity Related Costs	\$	591,044
Direct Project Costs	\$	2,858,835
TOTAL EXPENSES		\$ 3,787,641



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