



*Nechako Environmental
Enhancement Fund*

2025
Annual Report

www.neef.ca

Report from the Chair

NEEFS administers funds for projects in the Nechako watershed, and acknowledges the traditional territories of the Cheslatta Carrier Nation, Dakelh Communities, Nadut'en, Takla, Stelat'en, Wet'suwet'en Yintikh, Nadleh Whut'en, Yekooche, Nee Tahi Buhn Band, Skin Tyee Nation, Tl'azt'en Nation, Nak'azdli Whut'en, Lheidli T'enneh Band, and Saik'uz First Nation.

In 2025, NEEFS disbursed over \$734 thousand in grant payments to active projects, advancing practical restoration, research, and stewardship across the watershed. Since inception, NEEFS has dispersed \$9.9 million in support of projects in the Nechako. We continued to prioritize work that strengthens habitat and community resilience, which remained important in a year that again brought low streamflows in parts of British Columbia.

Looking ahead to 2026, our focus remains on supporting the health and resilience of the Nechako watershed. NEEFS remains committed to a disciplined and adaptive approach that reflects evolving watershed conditions, available resources, and the importance of long-term outcomes.

On behalf of the Board, thank you to our project partners, Indigenous governments and communities, researchers, stewardship groups, and volunteers. Your work on the ground and in the river keeps this watershed moving in the right direction.



Ray Pillipow
Chair
Province of BC

About the Nechako Environmental Enhancement Fund Society (NEEFS)

What is the Fund?

The Nechako Environmental Enhancement Fund (NEEF) was established under the 1997 BC/Alcan Agreement between the Province of British Columbia and Rio Tinto (formerly Alcan). Under this Agreement, Rio Tinto committed up to \$50 million, on a matching basis, to support the improvement of environmental conditions in the Nechako watershed. Following its execution, a NEEF Management Committee (NEEF MC) was formed to review and assess options for the use of the Fund. In 2001, the NEEF MC decided that a Cold Water Release Facility be constructed at Kenney Dam to enable downstream enhancement of the Nechako watershed.

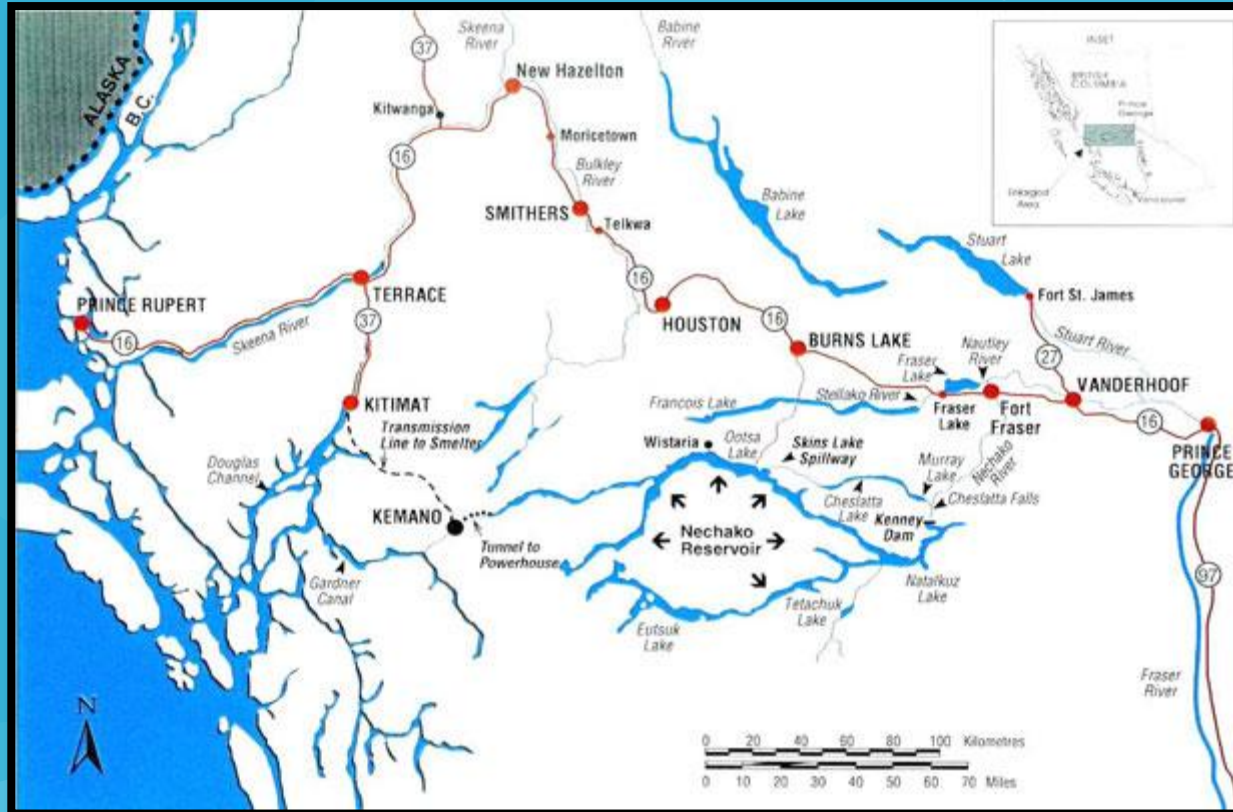
2012 Decisions and Expanded Funding Approach

Informed by additional technical studies and consultation, the NEEF MC reconvened in 2012 to determine how the Fund could be applied to achieve a broader range of environmental outcomes across the Nechako watershed. This process established a clear framework for use of the Fund and expanded the range of eligible opportunities beyond a single solution. The resulting decisions defined four objectives and enabled restoration, research, stewardship, and education initiatives across the Nechako.

Governance Today

Established in 2015, the Nechako Environmental Enhancement Fund Society (NEEFS) was created to administer the Fund under the framework set out through the 2012 decision-making process. The Society is governed by a Board of Directors responsible for funding decisions, project approvals, and agreement oversight.

Geographical Scope



Geographical scope of NEEFS funding: the Nechako watershed downstream of the Nechako Reservoir, ending at the confluence of the Fraser River in Prince George.

Objectives of the NEEF Fund

Projects funded by NEEFS must support one or more of the objectives below and align with the funding categories and decision framework established for the Fund.

- 1. Changes in flow (Cheslatta & Nechako Rivers):**
Options related to modifying flows in the Cheslatta and Nechako Rivers, including changes linked to Skins Lake Spillway discharges or other enhancement initiatives.
- 2. Fish habitat and populations (Cheslatta & Nechako Rivers):**
Options that rehabilitate fish habitat and fish populations in the Cheslatta and Nechako Rivers.
- 3. Education and stewardship of water (Nechako & Cheslatta watersheds):**
Options that promote education and stewardship of water in the Nechako and Cheslatta watersheds.
- 4. Improving flow regulation decision making:**
Options that improve how water flow regulation decisions are made, considering environmental aspects.

Grant Funding Application Process Annual Timeline

November 1

Application
Deadline

March 1

Applicants
notified of
funding
decisions

March-April

Funding Agreements developed
and executed.

*For multi-year projects, funds
must be utilized and matched
on a calendar-year basis.*

Availability of Funds

Funds are available on an annual basis until 2050 or longer as follows:

- \$7.4 Million (approximately \$200,000 per year) allocated to Cheslatta Watershed Restoration and Stewardship
- \$27.2 Million (approximately \$850,000 per year) allocated to Nechako Watershed Restoration and Stewardship
- \$6.4 Million (approximately \$200,000 per year) allocated to Post-Secondary Research



In addition, the Province of British Columbia and Rio Tinto may agree to allocate uncommitted funds to a single major project, (e.g., a spillway at Kenney Dam) subject to the terms of applicable decisions and agreements.

Active Projects 2025

- FFSSBC – Nechako White Sturgeon Conservation Centre
- UNBC – Integrated Watershed Research Group In The Nechako River Basin (Phase 3)
- NEWSS – Restoring Watershed Connectivity using Beaver Dam Analogs
- Noot'senay – Cheslatta River Fish Rehabilitation and Data Collection
- WLRS – Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery (Phase 2)
- WLRS – Restoring Cottonwood and Wildlife Habitat in the Nechako River Corridor
- NEWSS – Fish Passage and Juvenile Chinook Use of Beaver Dam Analogues
- EDI – Upper Nechako Resident Fish Survey



Nechako White Sturgeon release, June 6, 2025 (NWSSC).

L–R Mike Manky (FFSSBC), Jake Zimich (FFSSBC), Janis Bilau (NEEFS).

Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC

Nechako White Sturgeon Conservation Centre

Total NEEFS Funding (2025) \$321,195

The Nechako White Sturgeon Conservation Centre plays a central role in the recovery of the endangered Nechako White Sturgeon. The Centre supports recovery through an integrated approach that includes conservation fish culture, applied research and recovery actions, and education and outreach, all aimed at restoring a self-sustaining and genetically diverse population.

The Centre raises juvenile sturgeon to support population recovery, contributes to research and monitoring programs that inform management and habitat restoration efforts, and serves as an important hub for education and community engagement through tours, school programming, and public outreach that promote long-term stewardship of the Nechako River.



White Sturgeon egg collection for conservation spawning



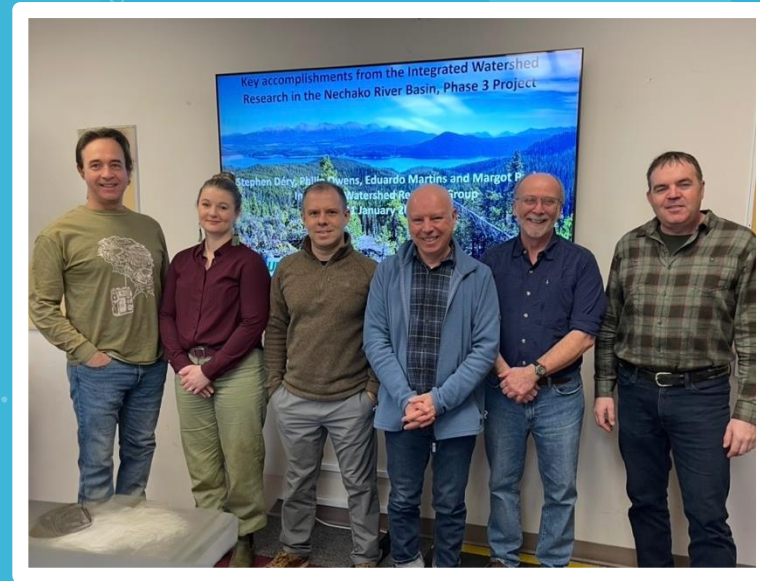
NWSCC Operations Facility

University of Northern British Columbia

Integrated Watershed Research Group (Phase 3, Completed 2025)

Total NEEFS Funding (2023-2025) \$400,000

Phase 3 of the Integrated Watershed Research project concluded in 2025, delivering a coordinated program of climate, hydrology, sediment, and fish research across the Nechako Watershed. Key outcomes included expanded long-term monitoring networks, improved understanding of wildfire and climate impacts on water and aquatic ecosystems, and significant advances in fish ecology research. Phase 3 also strengthened collaboration with First Nations, community partners, and agencies, and enhanced access to data and knowledge through the Nechako Watershed Portal, leaving a lasting foundation for future watershed research and decision-making.



The IWRG 2025 Final Report presentation to NEEFS. (L-R) Ray Pillipow, Chair, NEEFS; Jordan Cranmer, Director, NEEFS; Dr. Eduardo Martins, IWRG; Dr. Stephen Déry, IWRG; Dr. Philip Owens, IWRG; Andy Lecuyer, Director, NEEFS. *Dr. Margot Parkes, IWRG, not pictured.*

Nechako Environment and Water Stewardship Society

Restoring Watershed Connectivity using Beaver Dam Analog

Total NEEFS Funding (2024-2026) \$330,000

This project is implementing Beaver Dam Analogues (BDAs) to retain water on the landscape, rebuild riparian function, and improve watershed resilience, with monitoring to inform placement, design and fish use.

BDAs are intended to slow water movement, reduce erosion, and help reconnect floodplains, supporting healthier riparian vegetation, improved soil moisture, and increased resilience to drought and climate variability. These structures also lay the groundwork for improved aquatic conditions and fish habitat as water availability returns during freshet periods.



Completed BDA,
Knight Creek



Completed BDA, Knight Creek

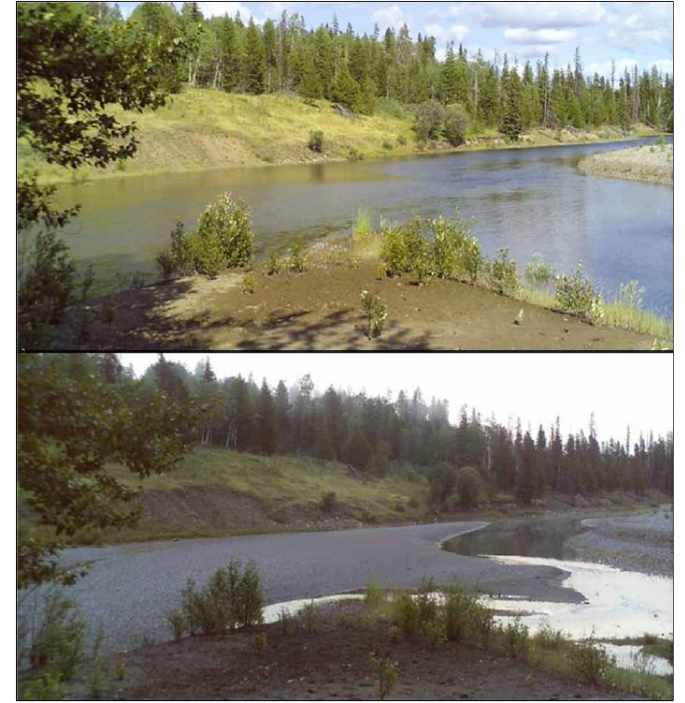
Noot'senay Consulting LP

Cheslatta River Fish Rehabilitation and Data Collection (Completed 2025)

Total NEEFS Funding (2024-2025) \$102,000

This project concluded in 2025 with a comprehensive, multi-year assessment of fish stranding risk along the Cheslatta River. Detailed geomorphological, hydrological, and biological data were collected at confirmed high-risk stranding locations, using a combination of field surveys, remote cameras, data loggers, and aerial reconnaissance.

Findings confirmed that rapid flow reductions associated with spillway operations are a primary driver of fish stranding and identified priority sites and management options to reduce risk. The project established a critical baseline dataset and practical, site-specific recommendations to guide future restoration, operational improvements, and pilot mitigation efforts that support fish survival while respecting the dynamic nature of the river system.



A comparison of water levels in 2024 between July 25th at 4:15 PM (upper photo) and July 26th at 5:48 AM (lower photo) to show the changes in levels with the fluctuation in discharge from the Skins Lake Spillway.

Water, Land & Natural Resource Stewardship (BC Government)

Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery (Phase 2, Completed 2025)

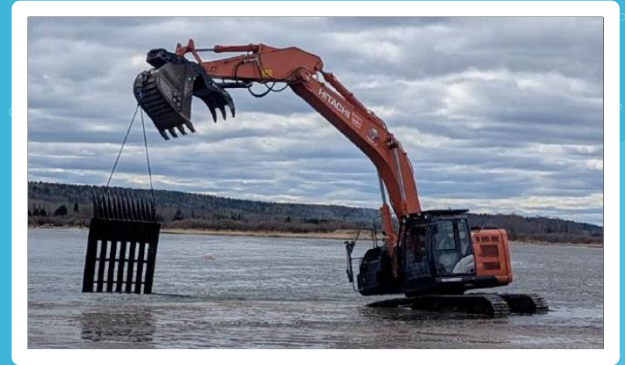
Total NEEFS Funding (2024-2025) \$170,000

Phase 2 of the Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative concluded in 2025, advancing large-scale testing of spawning habitat restoration methods in the Nechako River.

This phase focused on addressing critical knowledge gaps related to river geomorphology, sediment dynamics, and early life-stage habitat needs. While restoration trials highlighted the challenges of improving spawning habitat in large, dynamic river systems, the project delivered valuable scientific and practical insights that are now guiding future habitat restoration strategies and long-term recovery planning for this endangered population.



Freeze core sample of the ambient substrate in the restoration site before testing of the tubescreen sediment sorting tool.



Sled used during the larger-scale restoration

Water, Land & Natural Resource Stewardship (BC Government)

Restoring Cottonwood and Wildlife Habitat in the Nechako River Corridor

Total NEEFS Funding (2025-2027) \$225,000

Mature cottonwood trees are among the most important streamside features for wildlife, providing food and critical cavity habitats for a wide diversity of mammals and birds. While mature cottonwood wildlife trees are readily found along the Nechako River, the prevalence of younger cohorts is insufficient to replace these aging trees.

Initiated in 2024-2025, this project aims to restore cottonwood recruitment along the Nechako River through large-scale riparian planting. Early results show strong survival and are informing best practices, while partnerships with First Nations and local organizations support long-term wildlife habitat, biodiversity, and ecosystem resilience.



Cottonwood Island Nature Park, Nechako River



Cottonwood Island Nature Park, Nechako River

Nechako Environment and Water Stewardship Society

Fish Passage and Juvenile Chinook Use of Beaver Dam Analogues

Total NEEFS Funding (2025-2026) \$75,900

Approved in 2025, this first year of the project established a comprehensive monitoring program to evaluate juvenile Chinook salmon use of non-natal tributaries and fish passage around beaver dams and Beaver Dam Analogues (BDAs). Field work included water temperature and flow monitoring, tributary connectivity assessment, and PIT-tagging of juvenile Chinook and other fish species in representative Nechako River tributaries.

Initial results confirmed that juvenile Chinook routinely use non-natal tributaries for rearing, particularly during warmer summer periods when tributaries provide cooler water refugia. While dry conditions limited direct evaluation of fish passage at BDAs in 2025, findings from natural beaver dams revealed important patterns in fish movement and habitat use that will inform restoration design, BDA placement, and Nechako River flow management in future years.

Release of PIT tagged wild-origin juvenile Chinook salmon and other fishes back into Clear Creek, September 2025.



Inventory and length measurement of PIT tagged hatchery-origin Nechako River chinook by volunteers prior to their release into Clear Creek, August 23, 2025.

EDI Environmental Dynamics Inc.

Upper Nechako Resident Fish Survey

Total NEEFS Funding (2025-2026) \$50,000

This project is establishing a current fisheries baseline for the upper Nechako River, its tributaries, and the Nechako Canyon upstream of Cheslatta Falls. Field work combines conventional fish sampling with environmental DNA (eDNA) analysis to document species presence, distribution, and seasonal habitat use across a wide range of aquatic environments.

Interim results indicate that tributary streams provide important seasonal rearing habitat for juvenile fish, including Chinook salmon, while deep pools in the Nechako Canyon appear to support a subset of resident fish species year-round. The information generated through this project will provide essential baseline data to support future watershed planning, fish habitat restoration, and evaluation of potential changes to water management in the upper Nechako watershed.



Measuring a juvenile sockeye salmon during a Nechako River fisheries assessment.

Electrofishing survey to assess resident fish populations in a Nechako River tributary.



Expenditures to Date

As of December 31, 2025

A detailed expenditures statement is provided on the following page.

Nechako Environmental Enhancement Fund Balance

As at December 31, 2025

Projects by Decision	Total Commitment	Amount Paid to Date	Amount of Commitment Remaining
Rio Tinto - Decision 2			
Cheslatta Carrier Nation - Cheslatta LiDAR Project	200,000.00	-200,000.00	0.00
Cheslatta Carrier Nation Umam Surveys	45,535.50	-45,535.50	0.00
Noot'senay Cheslatta River Fish Stranding Assessment	106,407.50	-106,407.50	0.00
Noot'senay Fish Rehabilitation and Data Collection	102,000.00	-102,000.00	0.00
Total for Rio Tinto - Decision 2	\$453,943.00	-\$453,943.00	0.00
Rio Tinto - Decision 3			
Biochronology of Wild-Recruited Nechako White Sturgeon	10,000.00	-10,000.00	0.00
EDI Upper Nechako Resident Fish Survey	50,000.00	-25,000.00	25,000.00
FFSBC Nechako White Sturgeon Conservation Fish Culture Program (2013-2023)*	4,257,963.06	-4,257,963.06	0.00
FFSBC White Sturgeon Conservation Centre (2024-2034)	3,679,118.00	-888,910.10	2,790,207.90
NEWSS Evaluation of Fish Passage at BDAs	75,900.00	-37,950.00	37,950.00
NEWSS Nechako River Sustainability	333,218.00	-333,218.00	0.00
NEWSS Restoring Watershed Connectivity through BDAs	330,000.00	-159,524.84	170,475.16
NTLSS - Macrophyte Harvesting Program Feasibility Study	20,000.00	-20,000.00	0.00
WLRS Restoring Cottonwood and Wildlife Habitat	225,000.00	-112,500.00	112,500.00
WLRS Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative Phase 1	445,000.00	-445,000.00	0.00
WLRS Nechako White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative Phase 2	170,000.00	-85,000.00	85,000.00
Total for Rio Tinto - Decision 3	\$9,596,199.06	-\$6,375,066.00	3,221,133.06
Rio Tinto - Decision 4			
UNBC Integrated Watershed Research Phase 1**	559,117.52	-559,117.52	0.00
UNBC Integrated Watershed Research Phase 2	499,950.00	-499,950.00	0.00
UNBC Integrated Watershed Research Phase 3	400,000.00	-400,000.00	0.00
Total for Rio Tinto - Decision 4	\$1,459,067.52	-\$1,459,067.52	0.00
Rio Tinto - Decision 5			
Administration	1,895,944.00	-523,530.03	1,372,413.97
Total for Rio Tinto - Decision 5	\$1,895,944.00	-\$523,530.03	1,372,413.97
Rio Tinto - NEEF MC Process			
NEEF MC Process - Sept. 2012 Report	1,156,092.00	-1,156,092.00	0.00
Total for Rio Tinto - NEEF MC Process	\$1,156,092.00	-\$1,156,092.00	0.00
TOTAL	\$14,561,245.58	-\$9,967,698.55	4,593,547.03
Nechako Environmental Enhancement Fund Balance	\$50,000,000.00	-\$14,561,245.58	35,438,754.42

*includes \$40,000 GST Payment not accounted for in previous report.

**includes \$40,077.52 paid direct by Province of BC not accounted for in previous report.

2025 Board of Directors

Nechako Environmental Enhancement Fund Society



Ray Pillipow
Chair
Province of BC.



Andy Lecuyer
Director
Rio Tinto



Jordan Cranmer
Director
Independent Public Member

The Nechako Environmental Enhancement Fund Society (NEEFS) was established in 2015 to administer the Nechako Environmental Enhancement Fund. NEEFS is governed by a Board of Directors, which is responsible for reviewing funding applications, approving projects, entering into funding agreements, and overseeing the disbursement of funds in accordance with the applicable agreements and decisions that guide use of the Fund.