

— COTTONWOOD CREEK REVIVAL PROJECT —

# COMMUNITY MEETING REPORT

FEBRUARY 13, 2024 • NELSON, BC





KOKANEE SALMON IN THE COLUMBIA BASIN © NICOLE TRIGG

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Living Lakes Canada acknowledges that our water stewardship work originated in the unceded traditional territories of the Ktunaxa, Secwepemc, Sinixt and Syilx Nations who have stewarded these lands for generations. Recognizing Indigenous People as the rightful caretakers of their unceded territories, we work to complement their intergenerational work and Indigenous-led water stewardship initiatives.

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*The Cottonwood Creek Revival Project is a collaboration between:*



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## INTRODUCTION

Flowing from Cottonwood Lake Regional Park through Cottonwood Falls Park, trickling through Railtown and entering Kootenay Lake at the Nelson Dog Walk, Cottonwood Creek is an important part of the surrounding community. However, parts of the creek are in poor condition and lack habitat that promotes biodiversity.

Living Lakes Canada, Friends of Kootenay Lake Stewardship Society and the Nelson District Rod Gun Club and Conservation Society have partnered to assess the condition of the creek and explore opportunities that could improve the health of the creek in the long term.

On February 13, 2024, project partners hosted a public meeting where community members could learn more about the watershed, and add their voices to the conversation about the stewardship of Cottonwood Creek.

Thirty participants attended the meeting representing a range of sectors, including local and regional government, First Nations, academia, environmental consultants, local community groups and watershed residents.



WATER SAMPLING ON COTTONWOOD CREEK © LLC PHOTO



PARTS OF THE CREEK ARE IN POOR CONDITION © LLC PHOTO



COMMUNITY MEETING PARTICIPANTS © LLC PHOTO

Presentations by Alan Thomson of Mountain Station Consultants and Living Lakes Canada provided insight on the current state of the watershed. Following the presentations, meeting participants considered discussion topics in small groups, and recorded their own feedback individually. This report summarizes the feedback received related to three key areas: community values, concerns and visions for the watershed.

*Note: To avoid repetition, not all participant responses were included in this report and some responses have been lightly edited for punctuation and clarity.*

### **Background Resource:**

Thomson, A.R., (2024). Cottonwood Creek Water and Aquatic Resources Assessment. Consultant's report prepared for Living Lakes Canada. 56 pp. including Appendices. [Resource]. Columbia Basin Water Hub. <https://data.cbwaterhub.ca/dataset/cottonwood-creek-revival-project/resource/32a597fd-e80a-43f0-9482-75e9aaf01709>





I think that the way we treated Cottonwood over the years exemplifies how we've treated the land more generally. It's important to me that a focal point of our community... should be healthy and vibrant and not degraded.

A destination for people to seek tranquility and beauty, for the residents of Nelson and our many visitors

It has the potential to sustain aquatic wildlife, birds, and fish.

Water passing through a community should be cherished.

Recognition of the creek's inherent value, exclusive of its extractive or economic value.

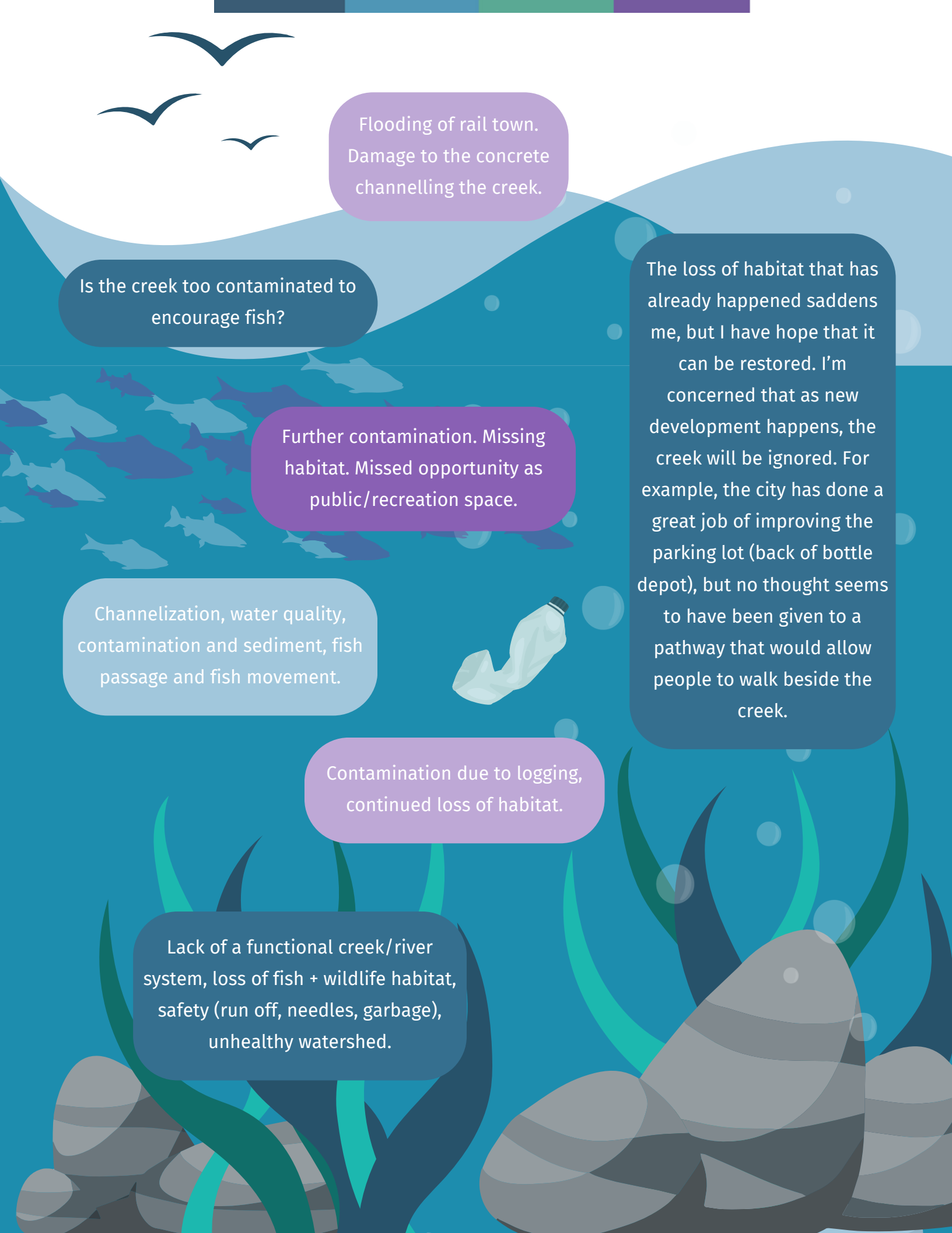
Love that there is a beautiful aquatic ecosystem that I can get to easily with my family from Nelson... love the urban/native interface at Cottonwood Falls Park and opportunities to enjoy the area within the city limits.

Beautiful falling water. Soothing to the soul – a place of respite for my mama when she was experiencing Alzheimer's. Shady during hot days. A place where I bring newcomers and visitors, it's almost a secret garden.

The presence of such a valuable natural resource in the community is a treasure, often overlooked. The creek provides a place for our citizens – from kids to seniors – to experience nature very close to home.







Flooding of rail town.  
Damage to the concrete  
channelling the creek.

Is the creek too contaminated to  
encourage fish?

Further contamination. Missing  
habitat. Missed opportunity as  
public/recreation space.

Channelization, water quality,  
contamination and sediment, fish  
passage and fish movement.

Contamination due to logging,  
continued loss of habitat.

Lack of a functional creek/river  
system, loss of fish + wildlife habitat,  
safety (run off, needles, garbage),  
unhealthy watershed.

The loss of habitat that has  
already happened saddens  
me, but I have hope that it  
can be restored. I'm  
concerned that as new  
development happens, the  
creek will be ignored. For  
example, the city has done a  
great job of improving the  
parking lot (back of bottle  
depot), but no thought seems  
to have been given to a  
pathway that would allow  
people to walk beside the  
creek.





Green space around the creek in Railtown to help with potential flooding, but also just to allow people to enjoy the creek.

Restore it to historic status as a wildlife corridor for deer, grizzly, etc.(bridges for wildlife to cross highway, e.g., Silverking Road). Restore the natural function of the creek and watershed to promote biodiversity.

It would be great to see it as a fish-bearing and spawning creek with increasing natural habitat.

Railtown plan, connecting creek to mouth, daylight, further upstream, restore native plants, steward, manage storm system better, see it restored so fish, animals and birds can use it, restore trees, gun club tried to restore spawning habitat.

Vegetation of banks (opportunities for vegetated riprap) in areas that need to be armored rather than concrete or bare rock. Management of storm system to remove sand/sediment before entering creek. Wetland at outlet to lake.

I'd like to see Cottonwood Creek acknowledged, respected, enjoyed, and cared for from Cottonwood Lake to Kootenay Lake. This includes improved pathways suitable for people walking, the removal of concrete channels, signage along the whole creek with stories, etc. The Nelson Izu Shi Friendship Society is putting up signs in the park this spring with stories of the creek. I'd like to see similar recognition all along the creek.

Re-naturalization – would solve many problems, including flooding, contamination since the buffer area between development + creek would be wider, it would be more costly to discharge untreated storm water, fish and wildlife habitat would be restored, and wildlife corridors would be re-established.

Make it a good place for fish, birds and animals, and it would be a good place for people too.

Restore channels. Rehabilitated banks with walking trails. Pedestrian bridge over train tracks, connecting to trail along airport, creating a missing loop. Kokanee spawning habitat – creating tourism attraction in town.

No logging in watershed. Restoration of lower creek area to evaluate Kokanee spawning and fish habitat. No more mining in watershed.

A pretty, natural, living stream.

Clean up of old dump site, build a park, allow the floodplain at mouth to return to a more natural state. Identify sediment sources + remediate if possible. Organized garbage cleanup (i.e., dedicated garbage cans along creek).



A naturally functional creek/river ecosystem with healthy fish + wildlife habitat, riffles, shade, meandering water, no more “hard structures”, walking paths, fish spawning habitat, cottonwood trees + other natural vegetation, signage to explain the importance and history of creek, Indigenous values, etc. American dippers + healthy macroinvertebrates, no garbage.

My ideal vision for cottonwood creek would be full restoration and naturalization. Daylight the creek, dechannel the creek. Having floodplains offer buffers for stormwater and would reduce sedimentation and contamination from the city. Increase wildlife habitat and continue to provide a designated recreational area along the creek.

Fish ladders. Healthy fish. Attractive environment, peaceful place to sit, place to sit and watch the water go by. Limited access. Was garbage dumped up the creek by the city?

Ideally, we would daylight the creek as much as possible, de-channelize it and improve shoreline habitat with native plants. Stewardship and core back into shape

A clean natural creek with a minimum 15 metres setback. No sediment issues, introduction of spawning gravel.

Return the creek to a more naturalized system, Riparian areas re-established. Remove channelizing structures (concrete). Meanders, riffles, pools, wood, steps, cascades, etc. Fish spawning, dippers feeding, E.P.T. (*Ephemeroptera*, *Plecoptera*, *Trichoptera*). Recreational areas – safer for children to play in the creek. Involve Selkirk Students in restoration projects – planning, plantings, stream restoration design.

Ideally I would like to see Cottonwood Creek support Rainbow Trout and Kokanee year round, bring back a hatchery.

A stream with healthy insect populations, fish species (habitat); an overstory that helps regulate temperature, shore vegetation for bird monitoring, no garbage! Dippers feeding, macroinvertebrates, no logging in riparian area.

Complete restoration of the creek from Cottonwood Lake to Kootenay Lake. Create laws that when Creekside property is sold, river setbacks come into effect.



## CONCLUSIONS

From the feedback provided, it is clear that the community of Nelson and surrounding areas deeply values Cottonwood Creek for a multitude of reasons. People have significant concerns about the current state of the watershed, but also see great potential for it to be restored.

Further conversations with local and regional governments, First Nations and others will continue to be pursued. Living Lakes Canada and project partners will continue to carry out the necessary assessments required to identify restoration opportunities in the future.

## CONTACT

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