COLUMBIA BASIN TRUST
A Story of People, Power and a Region United
In the Columbia Basin, the waters mirror the sky and reflect a vast and spellbinding landscape of thick green forest...
... and dramatic mountain peaks.
At the heart of the Basin lies the Columbia River. The river’s headwaters rise from Columbia Lake, nestled deep in the Rocky Mountain Trench of southeastern British Columbia.
From there, the river winds northwest through the Columbia Valley until it bends southward, rushing downstream and gaining strength from its many tributaries.
Stretching 2,000 kilometres across two countries, the Columbia River runs through British Columbia, Oregon and Washington before it meets the Pacific Ocean.
We would like to express our gratitude and thanks to all those that contributed to this book by lending your voice, your knowledge, your wisdom, your archives, your expertise, your time, your passion and so much more. So many memories, stories, conversations, newspaper clippings and artifacts have been woven together to share this story of how the people of the Columbia Basin came together to change our collective future and create the Columbia Basin Trust.

Thank you to the team at Know History Inc. and Chris Rowat Design for bringing it all together on these pages.
For the visionaries who imagined the impossible, for the founding directors who charted a path forward, for all of the directors and staff who brought us here, and for all the people of the Columbia Basin who put their trust in us to create a legacy now and for future generations, this book is dedicated you.
Twenty-five years ago, our first Board of Directors gathered on the steps of the B.C. Legislature to celebrate the passing of the Columbia Basin Trust Act. This moment was the culmination of years of hard work and dedication by Columbia Basin residents seeking greater influence over their communities and the Basin region. The founding of Columbia Basin Trust represented a new chapter, a new opportunity and the start of a remarkable journey.

Standing on those steps, the Board members could not have imagined what the Trust would eventually become. Since our founding in 1995, we’ve grown alongside the people of the region to help them transform their ideas into reality. With this support, they’ve better able to achieve their goals and make a difference in their communities.

Our growth didn’t follow a perfect path. We’ve had to learn to adapt to many roles—from funder, partner and investor to manager, guide and facilitator. We’ve had to discover how to turn problems into opportunities. We’ve had to develop and deploy expertise where it was most needed, while preserving our grassroots origins. There have been mistakes along the way for certain, but Basin residents have always been there to guide us back when needed.

This commemorative book marks our 25th anniversary. From small steps to major milestones, it explores how we grew from a seed of a concept into a community organization with an established presence around the region, with multiple offices, staff members, partners and assets.

It also highlights the Basin’s people. It’s the residents who saw the need for the Trust, created our organization and have guided our development. Residents, Board members, staff, partners and others opened up to us to describe their personal experiences during extraordinary times. No one book could capture all these valuable memories, but this one provides a glimpse. We thank everyone who shared.

The Trust was once described as a social experiment that succeeded despite the odds. After 25 years, there is much to be proud of, but an even greater future to imagine. We invite you to explore this story and join in the celebration of individual and collective persistence and resiliency.

Johnny Strilaeff
President and Chief Executive Officer
In the Columbia Basin, the waters mirror the sky and reflect a vast and spellbinding landscape of thick green forest and dramatic mountain peaks. At the heart of the Basin lies the Columbia River. The river’s headwaters flow from Columbia Lake, nestled deep in the Rocky Mountain Trench of southeastern British Columbia. From there, the river winds northwest through the Columbia Valley until it bends southward, rushing downstream and gaining strength from its many tributaries. Stretching 2,000 kilometres across two countries, the Columbia River runs through British Columbia, Montana, Oregon and Washington before it meets the Pacific Ocean.

Life in the Basin has been guided by the powerful waters of the Columbia River for thousands of years. This is the traditional territory of the Ktunaxa, Lheidli T’enneh, Secwepemc, Sinixt and Syilx Peoples, whose ancestors relied on the Columbia and its tributaries. The lands and waters of the Basin are central to their creation stories, to their cultures and identities, and they are the source of their livelihoods. The first Europeans arrived as explorers, mapping the terrain, waterways and resources of the Basin. They were followed by fur traders who forged trade relationships with First Nations and established routes along the waterways, the arteries of the fur trade. In the 1860s, hundreds of hopeful prospectors flocked to the region after gold was discovered at Wild Horse Creek on Kootenay River and on the Big Bend of the upper Columbia River. After the glitter of the gold rush faded, prospectors stayed to mine lead, copper and zinc. Others turned to agriculture or forestry. Communities grew and new ones sprang up, populated by settlers carried to the region on the newly completed Canadian Pacific Railway.

The growth of settlement and industry created new demands for power. In 1896, British Columbia’s first hydropower plant opened on Cottonwood Creek to supply electricity to the city of Nelson. The following year, hydropower was used to fuel industry for the first time when a plant opened in the mining town of Sandon. The plant fuelled operations at Silversmith Mines and the local mill.

The Basin is particularly well-suited for hydropower because of the abundance of water and the diverse landscape through which it flows; deep valleys and tall mountain peaks create natural changes in elevation, which are needed to produce power. Small powerhouses and hydropower dams continued to be built throughout the region on tributaries of the Columbia River. Hydropower was still a young technology, and these smaller, less powerful waterways provided enough energy to meet the demands of turn-of-the-century industry and infrastructure.

The 1930s marked the beginning of North America’s “big dam era,” when large-scale damming projects

The flooding of Arrow Lakes Reservoir in 1967 displaced 3,335 people and submerging entire communities, like Arrow Park, Galena Bay, Needles, Renata, Syringa Creek and others. While most buildings were burned or bulldozed, some were saved and moved to higher ground, including St. John the Divine Church in East Arrow Park. The church was loaded onto a barge and floated 20 kilometres north along Upper Arrow Lake until it reached Nakusp, where it was reconsecrated as St. Mark’s Anglican Church.
were built not only to generate hydropower, but also to control flooding and improve irrigation. By this time, technology had advanced enough to harness the mighty Columbia River. Grand Coulee Dam in Washington was the largest project to be built on the Columbia River during this era, and remains so today. When completed in 1942, nine years after construction began, Grand Coulee was the world’s largest dam, chronicled by American folk singer Woody Guthrie as “the biggest thing that man has ever done.” Although it decimated the fish population, Grand Coulee was a boon to agriculture and industry, and the United States quickly began plans to build additional dams on the river.

**THE COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY**

In Canada, wartime industry sent power demands soaring and it too began to contemplate large-scale hydropower development on the Columbia River. In 1944, three years after Grand Coulee Dam’s turbines began to spin, the United States and Canada ordered an investigation into how they might jointly develop the river. Both countries hoped to benefit from the construction of a series of storage dams on the upper Columbia River in British Columbia that would allow for the manipulation of water volume and supply, optimizing power generation at facilities downstream. Directing the flow of water would also help the two countries prevent flooding. In 1948, the Columbia River swelled to near-historic levels. The flood destroyed the city of Vanport, Oregon, displacing 18,700 residents and killing at least 16. In British Columbia, the city of Trail was hit particularly hard. Winding through the city centre, the river divides Trail in two, and rising waters posed a significant threat. Ordinary life ground to a halt as flood levels reached between 30 and 40 feet. Homes were evacuated. Water crept up to the box office window of the local theatre and lapped at the roof of the old skating arena. Residents relied on canoes to navigate the streets. Similar scenes played out in towns and cities across the Basin. Canada and the United States were more motivated than ever to produce a water management system that might prevent another catastrophe. However, it would take another 10 years before the necessary plans and recommendations for such a complicated strategy were completed. In December 1959, the International Joint Commission—which had been tasked with drafting this plan back in 1944—released a report recommending the construction of three storage dams on the upper Columbia River in British Columbia. It also included the option to build an additional dam on Kootenay River in Montana; this too would require water storage north of the international border. After several rounds of negotiations between Canada and the United States, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker and President Opposite, top: Cottonwood Creek Dam was built by the Nelson Electric Light Company in 1906. It was the first hydropower plant in B.C.

Opposite, bottom: Today, Sandon is a ghost town, but in the 1890s it saw a mining boom and the site of the first hydropower generating station built to fuel mining operations in B.C.

Above: Although Grand Coulee Dam, completed in 1941, was the largest dam built on the Columbia River, the first one completed was Rock Island Dam, in December 1932. Bonneville Dam (pictured) was the second dam completed. It too drew many tourists, who flocked to the site when it opened in 1938.
Communities across the Columbia Basin were devastated by the 1948 flood. In British Columbia, the city of Trail was hit particularly hard. As waters surged up to 40 feet, many residents took to canoes and small boats to navigate city streets. Roads collapsed under the weight of the water, and pumps ran constantly to keep water away from the city, struggling to keep pace with the rising tide. Downtown businesses closed their doors as water seeped in through the windows. When the two-week fight was finally won, newspapers celebrated the victory, and residents breathed a sigh of relief as they began to repair the damages.
Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Columbia River Treaty in Washington, D.C., on January 17, 1961. The process was far from over, though. Canada had yet to reach an agreement with the Government of British Columbia.

The federal and provincial governments had conflicting ideas about how to implement the Treaty. Prime Minister John Diefenbaker’s energy policy envisioned a national power grid in which hydro-rich provinces like British Columbia would share power with other provinces in order to evenly distribute access to affordable, reliable power. This would promote greater industrial and economic growth across the country, rather than restrict opportunities to regions that already had access to cheap hydropower. This contradicted British Columbia Premier W.A.C. Bennett’s provincial power strategy. Bennett wanted to build a series of hydropower dams on the Columbia and Peace rivers to generate cheap power for the province and make money that could be put back into the provincial economy. Sharing the power and profits gained through the Columbia River Treaty with Canada did not fit within Bennett’s plans. Instead, he wanted to see British Columbia paid cash in exchange for downstream benefits — the additional power that could be generated in the United States as a result of the dams.

Canada and British Columbia resolved their competing visions for the Treaty in 1963, when Diefenbaker’s Progressive Conservative government was replaced.
by the Liberal government of Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. Pearson believed the Diefenbaker government had rushed into the Treaty, bowing to Washington’s demands rather than trying to advance Canadian interests. Contrary to previous federal policies that barred the long-term export of electricity, Pearson supported Premier Bennett’s wish to sell the downstream benefits instead of distributing electricity to other provinces. In July 1963, the British Columbian and Canadian governments signed an agreement to transfer the rights, benefits and operations related to the Treaty and proposed Treaty dams to British Columbia. With negotiations complete, Prime Minister Pearson, United States President Lyndon B. Johnson and Premier Bennett signed an updated Columbia River Treaty on September 16, 1964. The signing took place at the Peace Arch, located on the international boundary at Surrey, British Columbia, and Blaine, Washington. Like the 1961 document, the ratified Treaty covered two main objectives: optimize hydropower production and coordinate flood control. To accomplish these outcomes, Canada was required to provide 15.5 million acre-feet of water storage annually through the three storage dams it would construct in British Columbia at Duncan, Mica Creek and Arrow Lakes. The Treaty also gave the United States the option to build a fourth dam at Libby, Montana, which would rely on British Columbia for water storage. There was a strict timeline for the completion of the Canadian Treaty dams. Duncan Dam and Reservoir were to be completed by 1967, followed by High Arrow Dam (Arrow Lakes Reservoir) in 1968 and Mica Dam (Kinbasket Reservoir) in 1973. The Treaty had no expiration date but was guaranteed for a minimum of 60 years. The earliest date either country could terminate the agreement was 2024, providing they gave written notice 10 years prior to withdrawal. The Treaty also included what is known as the Canadian Entitlement. In exchange for water storage, by the Liberal government of Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. Pearson believed the Diefenbaker government had rushed into the Treaty, bowing to Washington’s demands rather than trying to advance Canadian interests. Contrary to previous federal policies that barred the long-term export of electricity, Pearson supported Premier Bennett’s wish to sell the downstream benefits instead of distributing electricity to other provinces. In July 1963, the British Columbian and Canadian governments signed an agreement to transfer the rights, benefits and operations related to the Treaty and proposed Treaty dams to British Columbia. With negotiations complete, Prime Minister Pearson, United States President Lyndon B. Johnson and Premier Bennett signed an updated Columbia River Treaty on September 16, 1964. The signing took place at the Peace Arch, located on the international boundary at Surrey, British Columbia, and Blaine, Washington. Like the 1961 document, the ratified Treaty covered two main objectives: optimize hydropower production and coordinate flood control. To accomplish these outcomes, Canada was required to provide 15.5 million acre-feet of water storage annually through the three storage dams it would construct in British Columbia at Duncan, Mica Creek and Arrow Lakes. The Treaty also gave the United States the option to build a fourth dam at Libby, Montana, which would rely on British Columbia for water storage. There was a strict timeline for the completion of the Canadian Treaty dams. Duncan Dam and Reservoir were to be completed by 1967, followed by High Arrow Dam (Arrow Lakes Reservoir) in 1968 and Mica Dam (Kinbasket Reservoir) in 1973. The Treaty had no expiration date but was guaranteed for a minimum of 60 years. The earliest date either country could terminate the agreement was 2024, providing they gave written notice 10 years prior to withdrawal. The Treaty also included what is known as the Canadian Entitlement. In exchange for water storage, 

Hydropower is produced from the energy of falling water as it flows through a turbine. Hydropower generating stations are built on rivers where there is a natural drop in elevation or alongside dams, which create a reservoir of stored water that can be released according to power demand. By controlling the volume of water and the elevation at which it falls, dams can increase the amount of power that is generated. Hydropower is produced from the energy of falling water as it flows through a turbine. Hydropower generating stations are built on rivers where there is a natural drop in elevation or alongside dams, which create a reservoir of stored water that can be released according to power demand. By controlling the volume of water and the elevation at which it falls, dams can increase the amount of power that is generated.

Water from the upper elevation, or forebay, flows down a pipe called a penstock, and hits the blades of a turbine, causing it to turn. The turbine is connected to a generator by a drive shaft. As the generator spins, magnets inside move past copper coils, stimulating electrons to create an alternating current (AC) of electricity. Power lines convey the electricity to a substation, where its electrical energy is transformed to a higher AC voltage (HVAC) for long-distance transmission to utility markets. The HVAC is transformed back to lower voltage AC before reaching its final destination in the homes and businesses of consumers.

The average household in B.C. uses 10,800 kWh of hydropower per year.

How Hydropower Is Generated

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and the additional hydropower and flood control that this storage enabled, Canada was entitled to half of the anticipated downstream power benefits generated in the United States. \(^\text{10}\) For the first 30 years, British Columbia opted to exchange this entitlement for a cash payment. Rather than collecting its share of the downstream benefits in the form of hydropower, British Columbia used much of this money to finance dam construction. After the first 30 years, the agreement could be renegotiated.

With an agreement in place and dam construction set to begin, these massive hydropower projects were under way. The Basin was on the cusp of irreversible change and, as Basin residents would soon discover, power came at a price.

### THE PRICE OF POWER

If the voices of Basin residents seem absent from the origin story of the Columbia River Treaty, it is because, on the pages of the Treaty, they were. The Treaty was negotiated and ratified in the interests of national and provincial economic growth. Despite their vocal opposition, the people of the Basin became casualties on the road to prosperity. Had their concerns been considered and acted upon, the Basin and those who called it home might have been spared some of the severe social, economic and environmental impacts of the Treaty dams. Instead, both land and lives were forever changed by an agreement that rendered residents powerless against development.

To store the 15.5 million acre-feet of water required of Canada under the Treaty, British Columbia needed land—270,000 acres of it. “The dams would create large reservoirs that flooded lowlands in the river valleys, either permanently or intermittently throughout the year. The sites of the Treaty dams—Mica Creek, Arrow Lakes, Duncan and Libby—were already home to dozens of small communities that were now in the way. Lloyd Sharpe, a lifelong resident of the East Kootenay whose land, along with that of 70 other property owners, was expropriated for Libby Dam in 1971, voiced the distress of people living throughout the Basin when he said, “We were people in the way. And the attitude was to get rid of them.”\(^\text{12}\)

Across the Basin, the people in the way totalled 2,300. The majority resided in the Arrow Lakes region, where High Arrow Dam (later renamed Hugh Keenleyside Dam) displaced over 15 communities, like Burton, Edgewood, Faquher and Howser. Christopher and Jean Spicer had a 60-acre farm in Nakusp that they tended for 15 years before it was flooded to make way for the dam. Like other landowners in the area, the Spicers hoped a Treaty promising such significant profits would surely...
The Berry Family

Ethel Berry couldn’t watch as her husband, Charlie, set fire to their family home near Burton in 1967. Although it was customary for BC Hydro to burn any buildings located below the high-water level on dam reservoirs, Charlie wanted to keep their land as long as they didn’t interfere with the portion flooded by Arrow Lakes Reservoir or the new access road that cut across their property. BC Hydro owned the water, but the Berry owned the land. It was not a solution offered to others, as far as Charlie knew, but one he had insisted upon. “This is our property,” Charlie told BC Hydro. “Our name is on the deed. You cannot take it from us.”

However, they did have to agree to leave the property for several years while construction and flooding took place. They moved to Nakusp, along with many other families in the Arrow Lakes region who lost their lands permanently. Burton had been a close-knit community, and the Berrys missed that sense of connection with their friends and neighbours. Though people kept in touch, Charlie and Ethel’s daughter Vivien remembered “there was still that sense you lost something along the way.”

Charlie and Ethel returned to their property in the late 1970s. They built a new house and moved, but this did little to soften the harsh reality of losing their homes and land. The Berrys felt fortunate they had gotten their land back, but never recovered the sense of home and community they had once enjoyed. Years later, however, Ethel still found it difficult to see photographs of their burning home. “There was still that sense you lost something along the way.”

The Berrys felt fortunate they were not losing their land entirely. They had struck a deal with BC Hydro known as a “flowage easement,” which allowed them to keep their land as long as they didn’t interfere with the portion flooded by Arrow Lakes Reservoir or the new access road that cut across their property. BC Hydro owned the water, but the Berry owned the land. It was not a solution offered to others, as far as Charlie knew, but one he had insisted upon. “This is our property,” Charlie told BC Hydro. “Our name is on the deed. You cannot take it from us.”

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reality. Families had to abandon the land or farms they had cultivated for generations and start over. Pete and Maria Peters had orchards in Renata but decided to move when most of the community — including the school, the post office and stores — was sacrificed to make way for Hugh Keenleyside Dam and Arrow Lakes Reservoir. “We’d still be at the Arrows if it hadn’t been for that dam,” Pete said. “We’d still be there.”

The land had value that no amount of money could repay. When the reservoirs flooded, the water also washed away residents’ ties to home, land and community. Wally Penner grew up in Renata. “You can’t go back to the place where you were a kid, where you used to play in the sandbox, and your homestead,” he said. “You can’t do that and that’s one of the hardest things . . . Renata is still here but you look at the stumps of the trees that were cut, the fruit trees where you used to pick. You look at the foundation of your home that is left. I used to come back and look at what is there and try and picture it.”

The Spicer family discovered that, although BC Hydro had offered them $60,000 for the farm, anything similar would cost at least $175,000. Their land was lost and so too the prosperity and livelihood they had enjoyed in Nakusp.

First Nations suffered the destruction of ancient and important cultural sites. Archaeologists estimate that Libby Dam and Lake Koocanusa reservoir alone flooded some 400 archaeological sites. “When those lands were flooded,” recalled Hazel Squakin of the Syilx First Nation, “they did not consider what damage it would do to the Native Peoples’ villages, to the Native Peoples’ sweat lodges. And they did not do it by consulting the people. There were burial grounds, which I know people protested loud and clear, but they were not heard.”

The Ktunaxa suffered significant impacts from the loss of cultural sites and land that had long been a source of identity and emotional significance. “Our history forever changed,” said Kathryn Teneese, chair of the Ktunaxa Nation Council. “Access to ancient villages, ancient places, you know, they don’t exist anymore because they’re underwater because of a dam, because of a relationship that we have with the nation states south of the 49th.”

On the piece of land that was flooded out. “Once they learned their land would be flooded by Arrow Lakes Reservoir, the Spicer family drove across the province in search of comparable land where they could rebuild. They discovered that, although BC Hydro had offered them $60,000 for the farm, anything similar would cost at least $175,000. Their land was lost and so too the prosperity and livelihood they had enjoyed in Nakusp.

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The loss of territory also disrupted...
Construction Begins

Construction on the Canadian Treaty dams began in 1965 with Duncan Dam. Duncan was the first to be completed, opening in 1967. It was followed by High Arrow Dam (renamed Hugh Keenleyside Dam), completed in 1968, and Mica Dam, completed in 1973. Aerial photographs show the immense impact the dams had upon the landscape, not just once the reservoirs were flooded, but during construction as well. Large swaths of land were cleared to make way for the dams, leaving bare, sandy ground where there was once greenery and trees.
traditional activities, such as fishing, hunting and gathering, which First Nations had practised in the Columbia and Kootenay watersheds for thousands of years. BC Hydro made many promises to Basin residents to ease their concerns about the impacts of the dams. Residents were assured reservoirs would create beautiful recreational lakes, with boating and beaches that would draw tourists to the area; however, they quickly learned this was not the case. During periods when water levels dropped, the lakes disappeared to reveal vast expanses of dust and gravel. Debris and tree stumps populated the land where BC Hydro had promised sandy beaches. “Nobody wants to come see stumps,” said Balfour resident Josh Smienk. “They want to see water lapping on the shores, kids running on normal beaches.”

Any hope of tourism at the reservoir “lakes” was further dimmed by their questionable safety. Dust stirred up by high winds along the reservoir banks aggravated allergies and respiratory difficulties. Even today, airborne silica from Kinbasket Reservoir poses a health risk to nearby residents. Not only did the dams fail to create the new tourist sites BC Hydro promised, but they flooded existing ones as well. The natural Canoe Hot Springs in Valemount was a prime example, lost under the waters of Kinbasket Reservoir. Recreational fishing and boating on flooded rapids and falls were eliminated. Residents
and tourists had reduced access to sites such as Hamber Provincial Park; in 1961, the park boundaries were redrawn to make way for Kinbasket Reservoir, and Hamber was reduced to just a small fraction of its original size. Damming and fluctuating reservoir levels also impeded canoeing, kayaking and other boating activities.

The dams hurt the forestry industry as reservoirs destroyed thousands of acres of productive forest lands. Flooded logging roads cut off access to forests, and forestry companies lost money as they were forced to construct replacement roads or take longer, more expensive routes. Damage to the timber supply led to job loss; for example, up to 60 forestry jobs were lost in Valemount and 72 in Golden. Potential jobs were lost too; reports estimated that if the flooded forest lands had been harvested before dam construction, thousands of workers could have found temporary employment in places like Golden and Arrow Lakes.

People hoped dam construction would at least create jobs and boost local economies. The Treaty required that Duncan, Hugh Keenleyside and Mica dams be completed by 1967, 1968 and 1973, respectively, so jobs were created to complete the work on time. At Hugh Keenleyside Dam, the workforce peaked at 1,600 workers in spring 1967. BC Hydro estimated that the construction of Mica Dam would employ an average of 1,200 workers at any given time, with a peak of 2,700. But construction introduced new challenges to nearby communities. The influx of workers strained social, health, educational and recreational services in communities like Revelstoke, where food and housing prices rose and the number of people requiring social assistance increased by 43 per cent. Employment was only temporary and created unavoidable cycles of boom and bust. Once the dams were complete, the jobs disappeared and local economies suffered.

By the early 1990s, Basin residents understood the damaging emotional, social, economic and environmental impacts that occurred in the name of progress. Residents were forced to adapt to changing communities, environments and ways of life. As promises were made and broken, residents lost any hopes they might have had for the Treaty or for fair compensation. As the 30-year anniversary of the Treaty approached, so too did the end of the original Canadian Entitlement agreement. British Columbia would have the opportunity to draft a new agreement around the downstream benefits they had exchanged for money in those first decades. Basin residents wanted change. This was their chance to make sure that, this time, their voices were heard.

Opposite. Mica Dam was the largest of the Canadian Treaty dams and, originally, the only one designed to generate power. During its construction, the Columbia River was diverted through two 45-foot tunnels, each stretching over 1,000 feet. With the water diverted, construction could begin on the empty riverbed.

Above, left. Land was cleared only haphazardly before the reservoirs were flooded. The tree stumps and debris that were left behind in places like Arrow Lakes are visible when reservoir levels are low.

Above, middle. Arrow Lakes Reservoir displaced 2,000 residents, who received letters like this from BC Hydro, informing them that their land would be flooded.

Above, right. “People in the way” became a common phrase to describe the people impacted by the Columbia River Treaty. In 1973, J.W. Wilson used it as the title of his book chronicling the stories of displaced residents and landowners.
On a spring day in 1992, Ed Conroy arrived at Castlegar’s local baseball park, a trailer of cows in tow. A cattle rancher, Conroy was moving his cows to summer pasture but paused for a meeting. He had recently been elected to the provincial legislature representing Rossland-Trail, and he was concerned about the impact of the Columbia River Treaty on the people and land in the place he called home. Sharing Conroy’s concerns were politicians Larry Brierley, Corky Evans, Josh Smiek and Dieter Bogs, who were waiting at a picnic table. They had gathered to discuss how they might work together to address the approaching end of the Treaty’s downstream benefits agreement and ensure some of the revenues from the sale of hydropower could be returned to the region. This meeting — participants later referred to it as the “cow meeting” — represented a watershed moment in the history of Columbia Basin residents’ concerted, grassroots efforts to lobby the Province for a share in the Treaty’s profits. It also laid the groundwork for the founding of Columbia Basin Trust.

COMING TOGETHER
Several years before the “cow meeting,” Corky Evans found himself at another baseball field, this time in the Slocan Valley. He was serving as a director for the Regional District of Central Kootenay and had been approached by the local baseball team about maintenance and repairs to the community diamond. Evans learned there was no money available to restore the field. The region had a low tax base, largely due to a special order passed by W.A.C. Bennett’s government in 1968, which exempted BC Hydro from paying full property taxes on its dams along the Columbia and Peace rivers — part of his vision to advance the provincial economy by developing hydropower projects along these river systems. BC Hydro paid grants in lieu of taxes as a way of partially compensating municipalities. Evans was frustrated to learn that these grants were much lower than what BC Hydro would have paid in taxes, and that regions were losing out on significant potential tax revenues.

Without that money, communities had a difficult time funding essentials, like emergency and fire, waste management and hospital services. Realizing the powerful effects this had on his district and its communities, Evans spoke with other Central Kootenay directors who agreed that, if BC Hydro was taxed on its Columbia River assets, it should pay taxes on its Columbia River assets. It was “discrimination on the grounds of geography,” said district director Martin Vanderpol. “People in this area are being cheated.”

Together, in 1982, the district directors in Central Kootenay sought legal representation to challenge the Treaty. They worked with lawyers who helped them understand their legal options. They learned that BC Hydro was paying much lower taxes on its Columbia River assets than it would have paid in its absence. They realized this was an opportunity to challenge the Treaty and its downstream benefits agreement. In 1984, the group, which included Evans, brought a lawsuit against the Province of British Columbia and the federal government, arguing that the Treaty was invalid because it violated the constitutional rights of the Province to manage its own resources.

The lawsuit was heard in the Supreme Court of Canada, and in 1986, the court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs. The decision was a significant victory for Evans and his colleagues. It opened the door for other regions to challenge the Treaty and its downstream benefits agreement.

The “cow meeting” and the lawsuit were key moments in the history of Columbia Basin Trust. They represented a turning point in the fight for a share in the Treaty’s profits and set the stage for the creation of the Trust. In the years that followed, the Trust would become a powerful force in the fight for a fair share of the Treaty’s profits, working to ensure that some of the revenues from the sale of hydropower could be returned to the region. It would also work to ensure that the region was able to fund essential services, like emergency and fire, waste management and hospital services.

The Trust’s success in attracting investments, corporations that were willing to make a difference in their communities, and other local governments and community groups, and its ability to work with these groups to bring about positive change in the area, has made it a model for other regions across the country. The Trust’s approach to community development has been praised for its focus on collaboration, inclusion, and the principle that everyone has a right to a healthy and prosperous future.

On a sunny day in July, Ed Conroy arrived at Castlegar’s local baseball park, a trailer of cows in tow. A cattle rancher, Conroy was moving his cows to summer pasture but paused for a meeting. He had recently been elected to the provincial legislature representing Rossland-Trail, and he was concerned about the impact of the Columbia River Treaty on the people and land in the place he called home. Sharing Conroy’s concerns were politicians Larry Brierley, Corky Evans, Josh Smiek and Dieter Bogs, who were waiting at a picnic table. They had gathered to discuss how they might work together to address the approaching end of the Treaty’s downstream benefits agreement and ensure some of the revenues from the sale of hydropower could be returned to the region. This meeting — participants later referred to it as the “cow meeting” — represented a watershed moment in the history of Columbia Basin residents’ concerted, grassroots efforts to lobby the Province for a share in the Treaty’s profits. It also laid the groundwork for the founding of Columbia Basin Trust.

COMING TOGETHER
Several years before the “cow meeting,” Corky Evans found himself at another baseball field, this time in the Slocan Valley. He was serving as a director for the Regional District of Central Kootenay and had been approached by the local baseball team about maintenance and repairs to the community diamond. Evans learned there was no money available to restore the field. The region had a low tax base, largely due to a special order passed by W.A.C. Bennett’s government in 1968, which exempted BC Hydro from paying full property taxes on its dams along the Columbia and Peace rivers — part of his vision to advance the provincial economy by developing hydropower projects along these river systems. BC Hydro paid grants in lieu of taxes as a way of partially compensating municipalities. Evans was frustrated to learn that these grants were much lower than what BC Hydro would have paid in taxes, and that regions were losing out on significant potential tax revenues. Without that money, communities had a difficult time funding essentials, like emergency and fire, waste management and hospital services.

Realizing the powerful effects this had on his district and its communities, Evans spoke with other Central Kootenay directors who agreed that, if BC Hydro was taxed on its Columbia River assets, it should pay taxes on its Columbia River assets. It was “discrimination on the grounds of geography,” said district director Martin Vanderpol. “People in this area are being cheated.” Together, in 1982, the district directors in Central Kootenay sought legal representation to challenge the Treaty. They worked with lawyers who helped them understand their legal options. They learned that BC Hydro was paying much lower taxes on its Columbia River assets than it would have paid in its absence. They realized this was an opportunity to challenge the Treaty and its downstream benefits agreement. In 1984, the group, which included Evans, brought a lawsuit against the Province of British Columbia and the federal government, arguing that the Treaty was invalid because it violated the constitutional rights of the Province to manage its own resources.

The lawsuit was heard in the Supreme Court of Canada, and in 1986, the court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs. The decision was a significant victory for Evans and his colleagues. It opened the door for other regions to challenge the Treaty and its downstream benefits agreement.

The “cow meeting” and the lawsuit were key moments in the history of Columbia Basin Trust. They represented a turning point in the fight for a share in the Treaty’s profits and set the stage for the creation of the Trust. In the years that followed, the Trust would become a powerful force in the fight for a fair share of the Treaty’s profits, working to ensure that some of the revenues from the sale of hydropower could be returned to the region. It would also work to ensure that the region was able to fund essential services, like emergency and fire, waste management and hospital services.

The Trust’s success in attracting investments, corporations that were willing to make a difference in their communities, and other local governments and community groups, and its ability to work with these groups to bring about positive change in the area, has made it a model for other regions across the country. The Trust’s approach to community development has been praised for its focus on collaboration, inclusion, and the principle that everyone has a right to a healthy and prosperous future.
advice about suing the provincial government over BC Hydro’s tax exemptions.* By 1989, directors from the regional districts of Kootenay Boundary, East Kootenay and Columbia-Shuswap were on board. BC Hydro offered an extra $4.4 million in grants in lieu of taxes to be distributed over two years among regional districts affected by Treaty dams. The regional districts were not satisfied with this offer and continued to plan for a lawsuit. A year later, in 1990, the provincial government and BC Hydro increased the grant money and adjusted how grants were distributed, which eased some of the frustration felt within the regional districts.

Other lobbying efforts related to Columbia River Treaty impacts gained traction across the Basin. In Valemount, Mayor Jeannette Townsend sought compensation for the forestry industry. The construction of Mica Dam had flooded forest areas and cut off access to logging roads, causing timber shortages and eliminating potential work in the area. Townsend was anxious to prevent further challenges. When she became mayor in 1990, she pressed the provincial government to award local lumber company Slocan Forest Products a contract to harvest 100,000 cubic metres of available forest lands. Slocan Forest Products was the community’s biggest employer and winning the contract would help create job stability. She spoke about the issue on CBC Radio and, while Slocan Forest Products was only awarded half of the contract, her interview alerted other Basin politicians to the issue.* People across the Basin were beginning to recognize...
their common fight against Treaty impacts. Ongoing damage to fisheries was also a cause for action. Dam construction, beginning with Grand Coulee Dam in 1933 and made worse by the construction of the Treaty dams, blocked fish migration routes and destroyed fish habitats. This devastated fish populations. In 1988, BC Hydro announced a $12 million fund to address dam-related issues and wildlife caused by dams in the Peace and Williston areas. Organizations in the Basin called for the same consideration, demanding a similar fund be created for their region. Concerned about declining fish populations in Kootenay Lake, the Nelson Rod and Gun Club called on BC Hydro to address the problem. Club President Jes Ridge echoed the sentiment of many Nelson residents when he insisted, “If we’re going to be used, and we’re going to be used further in the future (more dams are planned), we’ve got to have proper compensation.”

Josh Smienk, a director for the Regional District of Central Kootenay, shared the club’s concerns. Smienk was associated with the Kootenay Lake Fisheries Advisory Committee and was searching for a solution that might offset economic losses caused by damage to local fisheries. He brought the issue to the Association of Kootenay Boundary Municipalities (AKBM), which agreed to form a committee on the subject. Smienk was appointed chair and was joined by Trail City Councillor Dieter Bogs and Kimberley Mayor Jim Ogilvie. The AKBM contributed funds to conduct research into the Columbia River Treaty, and the committee would present its findings at AKBM’s annual meeting in 1992. The hope was that the committee could better inform the AKBM about the Treaty and its impacts so it could craft a unified plan to gain a fair deal for the Basin.

The political shift that took place in the region and across British Columbia in 1991 made it easier to take collective action throughout the Basin. That year, the Social Credit government, which had been in power for the better part of four decades, was defeated by the New Democratic Party (NDP) in a landslide victory where the NDP won 51 out of 75 seats in the legislature. In the Basin, all four elected Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) belonged to the NDP: Corky Evans became MLA for Nelson-Creston, Jim Doyle for Columbia River-Revelstoke, Ed Conroy for Rossland-Trail and Anne Edwards for Kootenay. Edwards also became Minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources in the provincial cabinet. While the Treaty was not a central election issue, the Basin MLAs were united by their common understanding of the Treaty’s impacts and a shared goal of obtaining benefits for the region and the people who lived there.

It was good timing. The grassroots and political movements to secure shared benefits for the region aligned with the end of the Columbia River Treaty’s downstream benefits agreement, in which British Columbia had sold its share of the downstream power benefits to American utility companies in exchange for a cash payment. British Columbia and the United States entered negotiations for a new deal, and the Province’s new premier, Mike Harcourt, played a lead role in demanding benefits for the region. Going forward, the Province wanted to receive its share of the benefits directly as hydropower, not money. BC Hydro could then distribute and sell the power at market prices, ideally generating greater profits than a cash payment based on anticipated prices. Knowing negotiations were about to start, Basin lobbyists and politicians began to prepare for the major role they hoped they would play in these talks and how to move forward with sharing benefits. Josh Smienk echoed the sentiments of many when he told the AKBM that the efforts of individual communities would not be enough to achieve that goal. “If we don’t organize as one group we will be in the same boat in the year when the Treaty expires,” Smienk warned. The call for unity had been made; it was up to Basin communities to answer it. It was during this call for collective action that the “cow meeting” took place. As Ed Conroy’s cows rested in a shady spot nearby, he and Larry Brierley, their common fight against Treaty impacts.
Basin Stories

Herb Marcolli

“I helped to build the dams, which in turn destroyed my history.” For Herb Marcolli, the Treaty dams brought mixed experiences. He was among the few thousand workers who were employed in dam construction. Herb helped clear land where Hugh Keenleyside Dam and Arrow Lakes Reservoir were built and serviced equipment during the construction of Mica Dam. This was a big boost for his young family: his yearly earnings on the dam projects were double what he might have made in logging work.

During construction on Mica Dam, Herb lived in one of the construction camps, going home to Revelstoke whenever he could. After nine-hour shifts, workers played cards, darts and pool. Each labour union formed a baseball team and held regular games and tournaments. Despite the good wages and the memories he made, years later Herb found it difficult to reconcile that the work he did erased his own family history. Herb’s ancestors had arrived in the Arrow Lakes area in the early 1900s and established farms and orchards. The farms had remained in the family until they were bought out by BC Hydro. “Then, it was good for me because I had lots of work,” Herb reflected. “Now I look at it — I can’t go back and show my grandkids or great-grandkids where we came from.”

As support for the cause grew, Basin politicians needed to organize themselves more formally. In 1993, the Columbia River Treaty Committee (CRTC) was formed to protect the interests of Basin residents and make sure they were treated fairly in the upcoming renegotiation of the downstream benefits agreement. The committee, chaired by Smienk, addressed problems and prioritized the concerns of Basin residents relating to the original downstream benefits agreement such as its impacts on the environment, forestry and mining industries; fisheries; economic development; and social well-being. “CRTC membership included representatives from five regional districts: Central Kootenay, Columbia-Shuswap, East Kootenay, Fraser-Fort George and Kootenay Boundary. It also included two representatives from the Ktunaxa-Kinbasket Tribal Council (KKTIC).”

At first, the KKTIC was hesitant to join. It initially pursued its concerns independently, conducting careful research on the Treaty’s impact on Indigenous fisheries.” The KKTIC was determined to stabilize water levels and nutrients and revive the fisheries that had been depleted by damming since construction on Grand Coulee Dam began in the 1930s. Local politicians Corky Evans and Anne Edwards recognized they shared the same goals and hoped the KKTIC would join efforts to protect the Basin. “When we started to realize in the discussions that this was a way that we could bring back the salmon,” Chief Pierre recalled, “that was the clincher.” She acknowledged the significance of this new collaboration:

Among the CRTC members whose discussions led to the formation of Columbia Basin Trust were Corky Evans (left) and Sophie Pierre of the Ktunaxa-Kinbasket Tribal Council.
Up until that point, any time the Ktunaxa, or any Indigenous group in Canada, quite frankly, wanted to be recognized or to be involved in something, you usually had to go and bang on the doors and you were very seldom invited to come in and participate. And this was a little bit different, you know, right off the bat. People that were involved ... in the renegotiation, they recognized that the only way that we were really going to have any benefits come back into the Basin was to have everyone involved and for all of us to be working together.

Although representatives had different reasons for joining the CRTC, all hoped to improve the well-being of their districts and communities. “There’s more strength in numbers,” Valemount Mayor Jeannette Townsend said.

Garry Merkel, KKTC representative and vice-chair of the CRTC, agreed that “this was us as residents trying to have a conversation and build something that we wanted. Our job was to try to distill it and bring it back to them, so it rang true and resonated.”

Residents were already talking at restaurants, hotel rooms, kitchen tables and community halls about the renegotiation of the Treaty’s downstream benefits. To bring these conversations together, the CRTC hosted its first symposium in June 1993. It was the first of three symposiums that gave Basin residents a platform to tell provincial representatives their opinions and ideas about the Treaty and the downstream benefits agreement. Held in Castlegar, the first event was sponsored in partnership with the Province of British Columbia.

While the provincial government wanted to carefully vet the list of symposium participants, the CRTC insisted the event should have balanced representation from across the Basin, with both residents and government representatives in attendance. The CRTC was so eager for this balance that its members were willing to do whatever it took to ensure that Basin residents were able to attend the meeting, whether by covering mileage costs or paying babysitting fees. Over three days, the symposium drew 150 participants who represented residents, as well as regional districts, municipal governments, unions, BC Hydro and the provincial government.

Basin residents knew if they wanted to present a united front in negotiations with the government, they needed to agree upon what those benefits would look like, how they would be distributed, and to whom. Among those who attended were people who had been relocated, lost their homes and lived with the impacts of the Treaty daily. Others who attended were not as severely affected but still hoped to see the region benefit from hydropower profits.

For some people, the symposium was their first opportunity to address BC Hydro and provincial politicians. Emotions ran high. "I've waited more than..."
By the 1960s, Charles and Lita’s parents had both passed and the siblings were running the farm. At this time, rumours began to spread that landowners throughout the region would be displaced by flooding caused by Libby Dam. “We were the first ones,” Charles said. “[We were] at the border and we were the first ones to get hit.” The Department of Highways handled land acquisitions for Libby Dam (the only Treaty dam not handled by BC Hydro) and offered the Lynns $100 an acre for their cleared land. “It should have been $1,000 an acre. If you wanted to buy similar land anywhere it would have cost you $1,000 an acre for cleared land,” Charles said.

Years later, Charles and Lita learned that other flooded landowners received very different prices. They were bothered by a sense of inconsistency and unfair treatment. Ultimately, however, “everybody went through their own hell,” Lita said. “We had that beautiful house and suddenly we had no land and the house was going to be destroyed. It’s not easy to lose your place.”

27 Charles Lynn and Lita Salanski
Growing up on the Lynn family farm near Newgate, siblings Charles Lynn and Lita Lynn (married name Salanski) never imagined their home would some day be underwater. “We had a lovely log home that our parents built,” Lita recalled. “We loved that house. It was just the centre of our world, really.” Outside, Lita enjoyed horseback riding while Charles fished on Kootenay River, near where the family had additional land located on river islands. They pitched in on the farm where the family kept cattle and grew corn and wheat.

28 In 1967, he had lost both his home and his family’s business after being displaced by the flooding that created Arrow Lakes Reservoir. He spoke about the stress this experience had placed on his family and the damaging effects that persisted throughout the Arrow Lakes region. But he also spoke about new beginnings and ensuring that past wrongs were not repeated. “If this Symposium did anything,” the Castlegar Sun reported, “it redefined and reaffirmed the strength of the people who call the Columbia Basin ‘home.’ It redefined not only a strength in character, but a strength in will. The will to no longer ask, but demand that the rest of the province sit up and take notice [of] just who has done the giving.”

29 Learning how other communities had been affected was eye-opening for symposium delegates. Corky Evans remembered learning for the first time about the impact the Treaty had on ranchers and orchardists in Renata and Valemount. “It was different areas of the Columbia Basin have different problems.”

30 Joe Tatangelo, a CRTC member representing the Regional District of Kootenay Boundary, had a similar experience: “Different areas in the Columbia Basin have different problems... A lot of them I never knew even existed.”

31 The symposium allowed people like Tatangelo and Evans to understand the perspectives of all affected areas. Karen Hamling, a municipal councillor in Nakusp, saw the importance of guaranteeing that every community was part of the process.

32 The future of the Basin included all communities, not just those flooded by the dam. The conversation then shifted. “We got all our anger out on the first night, then, by the next day, we could start talking. People were able to get an awful lot off their chests,” said East Kootenay Regional District director Roy Millar.

33 “People came away prepared to move forward,” said Nakusp Mayor and CRTC member Rosemarie Johnson.

34 Symposium participants began to discuss the future of the Basin, rather than argue over who was most deserving or damaged. They agreed that, even though those who had lost their land and livelihoods undoubtedly suffered, it was more important to look forward than it was to make amends for the past.
“The government realized that, here’s 160,000-some people that are united and they are serious… they want some changes and they want some benefits, and we better be there and we better do something about it.”

DIETER BOGS, COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY COMMITTEE MEMBER AND TRAIL CITY COUNCILLOR

Evans remembered the change in attitude as people began to realize, “We can’t abandon the future generations and we can’t abandon the ducks and geese that used to land in the wetlands…and the elk and caribou and the grizzly bears, and we can’t abandon the future of this land base.” Delegates wanted to see solutions to these problems. They wanted reservoir levels stabilized, fisheries restored, and industries protected.

The decision was made that individuals who had been relocated or similarly devastated by the Treaty should not receive compensation. Instead, the Basin prioritized a sustainable future where downstream benefits money was used to support a wide variety of issues and ideas. The 1993 symposium reinforced the conviction of CRTC members that the Treaty’s downstream benefits belonged to all the people of the Basin. “We’re not people in the way,” Castlegar Mayor Audrey Moore told the delegates. “We’re people to be reckoned with.”

CRTC member and Nakusp Mayor Rosemarie Johnson hoped the symposium had “cemented the groundwork to stride into the future by growing beyond the anguish of the past.”

When British Columbia and the United States reached an agreement about the downstream benefits in September 1994, the Province announced its commitment to return a share of those benefits to the Basin. The collective action taken by Basin residents to secure a piece of the downstream benefits was becoming too loud to ignore. “That’s why we were successful,” Dieter Bogs said. “The government realized that, here’s 160,000-some people that are united and they are serious… they want some changes and they want some benefits, and we better be there and we better do something about it.”

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Discussions between the Province and the CRTC continued. The collective action taken by Basin residents to secure a piece of the downstream benefits was becoming too loud to ignore. “That’s why we were successful,” Dieter Bogs said. “The government realized that, here’s 160,000-some people that are united and they are serious… they want some changes and they want some benefits, and we better be there and we better do something about it.”

The CRTC agreed. Columbia River Treaty Committee Inc. was officially incorporated on November 18, 1994. This was only a temporary solution. Even as an incorporated body, CRTC Inc. would not have the power to distribute benefits or participate in political negotiations or economic development initiatives. A formal, organized entity needed to be established if the Basin was to obtain control over the promised benefits.

In the lead-up to the 1994 symposium, the CRTC realized that, even with the letter of intent, it had no legal right to sign an agreement. Lawyer Don Lidstone offered a solution: if the CRTC were to incorporate, it would become an independent legal entity with the power of a natural citizen, meaning it could negotiate binding agreements with the Province and take legal action against the government or BC Hydro if necessary.

To start on this path, symposium participants agreed the first symposium should have control over its assets and operations and function at arm’s length from the Province. It’s board of directors would be appointed by the region, not the Province, and all revenues would be retained and controlled by the authority. The result was a form of customized Crown corporation with an unprecedented level of autonomy.

As discussions progressed, committee members began to refer to the proposed entity as a trust. Details on the trust’s scope, mandate and membership were on the agenda for the 1994 symposium. Held in Cranbrook from November 4 to 6, the event welcomed representatives from local, regional, provincial and First Nations governments and BC Hydro, along with interested parties from across the Basin. In total, approximately 190 delegates gathered to hear and contribute to the CRTC’s proposal about the four principles that should guide the trust.

First, it should represent the entire Basin region; second, it should retain local control over decisions; third, any activities it undertook should benefit the region as a whole; and fourth, those activities should not favour one region over another but instead maintain a Basin-wide perspective. Symposium delegates agreed the trust should act in the interests of future generations through long-term and sustainable investment and development in the Basin. Finally, the trust should not simply exist as
Max Wiesner

When his family lost their Renata home to Arrow Lakes Reservoir, Max Wiesner took something unusual with him: the town schoolhouse. “I bought the schoolhouse for $15,” Max said. “We pulled it across the creek with skids I built.” Constructed in 1911, the schoolhouse was one of Renata’s oldest landmarks — but that was not why Max salvaged it: “I wanted to get even with the schoolteachers in there ‘cause they kicked me out of school . . . I figured now’s my chance to buy it and I can go back to school to learn what I want to learn and when.”

Only a few buildings in Renata were saved before the reservoir flooded the town. Max recalled that the Morgenstein and Reimer families moved their houses on a barge that carried them across the creek. Other buildings were bought by locals, including Max, and dismantled for lumber and other materials. Several congregations in the Arrow Lakes region moved their churches to higher ground. As for the schoolhouse, Max kept it intact and used it as a summer cabin.

It was difficult for Max to watch as his community disappeared. Condemned buildings were painted with an X, he remembered, and left to be bulldozed or burned. These were the homes, businesses and gathering places where Renata families had lived for generations. “All their livelihoods that were there since the 1800s, you know, and all of a sudden everything goes up in smoke,” Max said.

an investment corporation. It should be an advocate for residents and celebrate the Basin community.° The CRTC was adamant the voices of Basin residents be at the centre of the trust. At the same time, the provincial government wanted to ensure it too had a voice, arguing that any new entity must include one-third of its representatives from the Province, and two-thirds from the region. A few delegates wanted board representation to be determined by population size to safeguard against one voice or another becoming too dominant, and to support diversity and representation of all parties. Symposium participants agreed communication and public involvement in the trust were crucial. Among the suggestions were the creation of advisory groups, an annual meeting or symposium and an educational role by which the trust would provide residents with materials and information on sustainability, environmental issues and investment options.

The other topic of discussion at the 1994 symposium was how downstream benefits money should be spent. Many delegates believed funds should be used to develop tourism and heritage resources to make the area affected by the Treaty dams a more attractive place to live and visit. Value-added initiatives, such as resorts, interpretive centres and heritage attractions could draw people and money to the region. Kimberley Mayor Jim Ogilvie noted that money should be invested in a wide variety of projects to help strengthen the regional economy. Others preferred to see money put toward initiatives that would counter some of the environmental damage caused by the Treaty dams.

Another option was to invest in hydropower. This option was raised by British Columbia Employment and Investment Minister Glen Clark, who told delegates the provincial government hoped to invest the downstream benefits money in hydropower projects in order to generate long-term revenue.° The Province was already considering building a generating station at Hugh Keenleyside Dam and had recently acquired expansion rights to Brilliant and Wusata dams. Transferring these rights to the proposed trust would allow it to build and profit from generating stations at the dams. Investing in hydropower would provide a sustainable source of income and allow the trust to gradually grow its funds rather than deplete them over time.

Although this investment opportunity was tempting to some at the symposium, others were cautious. After all, hydropower dams were responsible for many of the Basin’s woes in the first place. Nakusp councillor Karen Hamling looked around the room to see varied responses to Clark’s suggestion. “We just all looked at him and thought he was nuts,” she remembered. “There was a bunch of people who thought it was a great idea and other people thought, ‘Uhh my God,
Basin home control over their own future. The Act grants the Trust an unprecedented amount of autonomy, giving those who call the Province of British Columbia in which the Trust operates similarly to a Crown corporation its obligations to the region, but instead creates a relationship between the Trust and the economic and environmental benefit of the region. This does not relieve government from the Trust is mandated to invest, spend and manage its assets for the ongoing social, organization’s purpose, structure and relationship to government. document by which the Trust is governed, and defines the passing of the Columbia Basin Trust Act. The Act is the CREATING THE TRUST 1989–1995. The Act was officially established in 1995 through Lawyers, and other industries. prove a less attractive option compared to investing in our, but dissenters argued that investing in the energy sector did not guarantee stable employment and might 'Let's let the people of the region have a say in their destiny for a change.’

GLEN CLARK, MINISTER OF EMPLOYMENT AND INVESTMENT
regulations, the trust would ultimately have the power to choose how it operated and how it spent and invested its funds. Some politicians vehemently opposed granting this unprecedented level of regional control, but proponents like Minister Glen Clark had faith in the people of the region, while acknowledging things would not be perfect. However, it was not about perfection; it was about the people of the Basin having control over their own home and future. “Let’s let the people of the region have a say in their destiny for a change,” Clark said.

Every element of the Columbia Basin Trust Act—and through it Columbia Basin Trust—was debated, contemplated and negotiated in the B.C. Legislature. It was tailor-made for the needs, desires and people of the Basin. The Act received royal assent on July 6, 1995. CRTC members and the Lieutenant Governor attended a small reception at the provincial legislature in Victoria. The celebration was captured in photographs taken on the legislature’s steps. The next day, July 7, 1995, the final meeting of the CRTC became the first meeting of Columbia Basin Trust, as the group gathered in the Birch Room of the legislature. Corky Evans was proud of what the people of the Basin had accomplished. He realized they had “done something that no other region of British Columbia has ever tried.” Against all opposition, he said, “We got it done.”

“We got it done. Against all the people who said, ‘Don’t create another level of government and you can’t decentralize power,’ and all the naysayers and all the people who said regional districts could never get along and all the people who said Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people couldn’t get along and all the people who said the province and the region couldn’t get along — we now have done something that no other region of British Columbia has ever tried.”

CORKY EVANS, MLA FOR NELSON-CRESTON

Top: After the signing of the Columbia Basin Trust Act, CRTC members—now Trust Board members—celebrated their achievements at the B.C. Legislature with MLA Anne Edwards (second from left) and Lieutenant Governor Gorden Gadsden (middle). Board members pictured are Josh Smienk (left) and third right Ed Connery, Shelby Harrows and Dieter Bogs.

Middle: (Left to right) Minister of Employment and Investment Glen Clark celebrated with new Trust directors Josh Smienk, Jim Christy and Dieter Bogs.

Bottom: Josh Smienk addressed the crowd gathered to celebrate the occasion.

Opposite: Several months before the Act was passed, CRTC members gathered in Castlegar for the signing of the Columbia Basin Accord. Speakers included CRTC member and Nakusp Mayor Rosemarie Johnson (left) and B.C. Premier Mike Harcourt (right). Both Johnson and Harcourt signed the Accord alongside other politicians and CRTC members, including Kamloops MLA and Minister of Energy and Mines Anne Edwards and CRTC chair Josh Smienk (middle).
Board members of the newly established Columbia Basin Trust returned from Victoria no longer committee members seeking to improve the lives of Basin residents, but as representatives of an organization with the power and resources to make that dream a reality. But the Trust’s work was just beginning. The Columbia Basin Trust Act required that its Board set out long-term objectives, priorities and programs based on input from Basin residents. In the meantime, Board members needed a plan to guide them in the short term, as well as office space and staff. The Trust was eager to get these things in place so it could fulfill its commitments to Basin residents to return benefits to the region and create a legacy of well-being. Building on the same hard work and dedication that led to the Columbia Basin Accord and the Columbia Basin Trust Act, the Trust set about charting a clear path forward.

**CHARTING A PATH**

In autumn 1995, the Board began a nationwide search for a chief executive officer (CEO) and evaluated some 250 applicants. In the end, the successful candidate was Ivan Robinson. Robinson came to the Trust from the Calgary Regional Planning Commission, where he served as director for over 15 years. A “planner by nature,” Robinson helped guide the Trust and Basin residents as they determined how to structure and operate the new organization and how to distribute benefits.

One of the first orders of business was to find a location for the Trust’s head office. The Trust chose Nakusp, where the rise and fall of water levels in Arrow Lakes Reservoir made visible the ongoing impacts of the Treaty. Corky Evans viewed this as a powerful reminder to employees and Board members that their work was necessary and meaningful: “I want [them] to be able to look out the window and see the water go down,” Evans said, “and the water come back, and the children try to go swimming across the mud flats.” In August 1995, the Trust announced Nakusp would become its first headquarters.

Although its head office was in Nakusp, the Trust was active across the Basin. It hosted a series of open houses in autumn 1995 to share information about the Columbia Basin Trust Act and obtain community input on its short- and long-term goals. These were held in 11 communities: Cranbrook, Creston, Golden, Invermere, Jaffray, Kaslo, Nakusp, Nelson, Revelstoke, Trail and Valemount. Residents shared their questions, ideas and concerns about the newly formed Trust and its plans for investing downstream benefits. Kaslo residents, for example, were concerned they would not see the same economic return as people in the Castlegar-Trail area, where power projects were located. They wanted to see the Trust investing in diverse...
options that would benefit present and future genera-
tions across the Basin.

Information gathered through these open houses was the basis for discussion at the 1995 symposium. Wanting to keep residents at the heart of all decisions, the Trust used the symposium to bring people up to speed on the Trust’s goals and structure. Greg Deck, who attended the symposium as a Trust Board member, recalled the overarching question that shaped the event: “What are we going to do with the money we’ve got?”

Participants came up with varied responses. Larry Brierley, a director of the Regional District of Central Kootenay, suggested the creation of a “Columbia Trail,” modelled after the West Coast Trail on Vancouver Island. Other suggestions were similarly geared toward developing recreation and tourism, with particular interest in heritage tourism opportunities. Participants also encouraged the Trust to explore restoration opportunities, such as a Natural Heritage Reserve between Canal Flats and Donald.

The lands between the two communities featured wetlands, grasslands and hoodoo formations and would appeal to tourists interested in nature and natural history.

Delegates also recommended spending on environmental initiatives, such as water management, energy conservation, fish and wildlife enhancement, and waste reduction.

Regaining control over water-management decisions that had been made outside the Basin for more than 30 years was a common refrain, especially when it came to stabilizing reservoir levels behind Treaty dams. Not only could stabilizing water levels optimize power benefits and perhaps reduce hydropower costs for consumers, but it could also boost tourism and recreation and improve hunting and fishing after years of environmental damage. Ultimately, environmental initiatives would help ensure the long-term sustainability of the Basin and create opportunities for social and economic gains.

The 1995 symposium participants also discussed the hydropower investments that were outlined in the Columbia Basin Accord signed earlier that year. Where the Accord indicated the possible expansion of Brilliant Dam, one suggestion at the symposium was that the Trust should in fact purchase the dam. While some delegates were cautiously optimistic about investing in hydropower, others were more hesitant. An editorial published in the Golden Star stated that, although such projects would not involve any new flooding, the Trust’s “grand scheme” was still unclear. The Trust was cautioned not to repeat the mistakes made on past hydropower projects.
Despite the many and varied suggestions received at the symposium, participants agreed that any investments the Trust made should concentrate on the entire Basin rather than any individual community, that the Trust should aim to provide employment opportunities and improve quality of life for Basin residents, and that any management plans or long-term objectives should reflect those ideas. Delegates were also clear that the Trust had an intergenerational responsibility to “protect and enhance the well-being of people, land and water of the Basin.”

No matter what the Trust chose to invest in, clear communication with Basin residents was critical. People wanted regular opportunities to respond to the Trust and evaluate its work. Pleased with the results of previous symposiums and open houses arranged by the Columbia River Treaty Committee, residents asked that the Trust continue to hold public events as a way of keeping them informed of the Trust's activities and measuring their progress. Residents also wanted to ensure they were at the centre of all the Trust’s decisions, since they were the ones who would live with the results. Symposium delegates recommended the Trust establish public advisory groups to help it create short- and long-term plans. During the planning phase and beyond, these advisory groups could identify issues, provide feedback to the Trust and communicate with residents.

Through public engagement, residents hoped the Trust would represent diverse interests and remain accessible to people of all ages, cultures and geographies. Part of this was a continued commitment to including First Nations in Trust decisions and operations. Participants at the 1995 symposium wanted to see even greater First Nations representation, recognizing “the special relationship of First Nations to the land and water of the Basin.” Like the Columbia River Treaty Committee, the Trust’s Board included representation from the Ktunaxa-Kinbasket Tribal Council.

“THE POWER IS IN THE PLAN”

Armed with clear directives from Basin residents, the Trust set to work on the Columbia Basin Management Plan (CBMP). According to the Columbia Basin Trust Act, the Trust had until July 1997 to create a long-term plan that would establish “objectives, priorities, and programs to achieve the social, economic and environmental purposes of the Trust.” The plan would serve as the “backbone” of the Trust, to make the Basin secure for generations to come. “The power is in the plan,” said Vice-Chair Garry Merkel. “This is not a compensation package. The Trust was not made to hand out money. We are here to listen to the public and build a plan. We want our great-grandchildren to eventually be part of the Trust.”

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“The power is in the plan.”

JOSH SMIENK, CHAIR, 1995–2006
One of the key tasks of the 1997 symposium was to review and refine the Columbia Basin Management Plan (CBMP). In the year leading up to the symposium, the Trust held workshops and consulted with residents and advisory committees to bring up valuable knowledge. The Trust also held sessions throughout the Basin to gather feedback on regional values and priorities. Using this feedback, the Trust created a draft CBMP for symposium participants to discuss when they gathered in Revelstoke in April 1997. These discussions helped the Trust further refine the CBMP, which was finalized three months later.

By March 1996, the Trust had made significant strides toward engaging the public in its work. It established an advisory committee of seven individuals who reflected “the diverse interests of the region” to advise the Board’s Corporate Planning Committee on a short-term strategy for the organization. One of these committee members was Lloyd Sharpe, who had lost his family farm to the floodwaters of Lake Koocanusa reservoir. He was joined by Laurel Douglas of Nelson, Don Bennett of Valemount, Shu McKay of Trail, Bill Green of Kimberley, John Bergsnes of Skookumchuk and Paul Hambruch of Golden. Hambruch recalled the early days of the Trust: “That was a very important time. I mean, that was when we had to figure out what the Trust [was] going to be all about. We couldn’t imagine that the Trust would ever have more than 10 employees in those days.”

The short-term strategy included a draft mission statement and core function, as well as criteria to evaluate the Trust’s efforts and outcomes, corporate priorities and operational strategies. The Corporate Planning Committee presented the plan to the Trust’s Board of Directors at a meeting in June 1996. Next, the Board established a second advisory committee to design the CBMP. This committee comprised 12 representatives from Basin communities, such as Valemount, Golden, Winlaw and Kimberley. The representatives included three members of the original advisory committee—Bill Green, Lloyd Sharpe and Paul Hambruch—as well as one youth representative, Kristen Carlson.

To develop the CBMP, the Trust and the advisory committee established an outreach program to share information with and receive feedback from residents across the region. The Trust also created a workbook for individuals to fill in, and planned workshops to stimulate dialogue. It encouraged people to sit down in a “kitchen table-style” setting and discuss ideas with others. The workbooks presented the current plans and directives for the Trust and asked residents to indicate what they agreed or disagreed with, and to comment on what they wanted the Trust to accomplish. Residents recorded their responses on tear-out sheets and mailed them back to the Trust’s office in Nakusp. Of the more than 2,000 workbooks distributed across the Basin, some 500 tear-out sheets were returned.

1997 Symposium, Revelstoke
“The most difficult task the Trust faces is maintaining the balance between its broad environmental, economic, and social objectives. It does not appear we’ve had to compromise any of these with this plan.”

IVAN ROBINSON, PRESIDENT AND CEO, 1996–1998

“dove into the 80-page draft document with zeal” as they discussed job creation, employment equity, youth education and environmental issues.

In principle, delegates agreed with the kind of sustainable and secure future outlined in the plan. They stressed the Trust must adhere to high standards of accountability and equitability. The Trust had to create tools and processes to monitor the organization and its progress, such as expanded advisory committees and regular symposiums. Further, it had to create projects and programs valuable to the wider Basin and not just to individual interests, groups or regions. The delegates also wanted to make sure that decisions on the future of the Basin would continue to be made at the grassroots level, and the Trust would seek input and reflect those grassroots interests and priorities in its work.

Narrowing down the final version of the CBMP was difficult. Garry Merkel remembered the challenge the Trust faced in ensuring the plan captured their values and visions.

There was a large volume of material and suggestions to bring together in the final version. Residents and Trust members wanted the language of the document to be easy to understand. Corky Evans said the plan needed to be manageable and asked for the “little plan” to Evans the next day.

The final CBMP was not as little as Evans’ gift, but the Trust managed to consolidate the ideas into a 35-page version that was shared with Basin residents in July 1997. The plan emphasized that the Trust’s initiatives and funding decisions should stand on the three pillars — social, economic and environmental — developed before the Columbia Basin Trust Act was passed.

These were reflected in the Trust’s mission to establish social, economic and environmental — developed before the Columbia Basin Trust Act was passed.

Of this mission, CEO Ivan Robinson explained that the “most difficult task the Trust faces is maintaining the balance between its broad environmental, economic and social objectives. It does not appear we’ve had to compromise any of these with this plan.”

HYDROPOWER INVESTMENTS

At the same time as the CBMP was taking shape, the Trust started work on its hydropower projects in partnership with Columbia Power Corporation, a Crown corporation created in 1994 to hold the Province’s expansion rights to Brilliant and Waneta dams.

The Province purchased the expansion rights to the dams so it could expand the power plants and take full advantage of the potential hydropower.

After lengthy negotiations, British Columbia purchased the expansion rights to Brilliant and Waneta dams for $3.2 million. To hold those rights, the Province established Columbia Power Corporation. When Columbia Basin Trust was established a year later, it was granted a share. It would co-own the rights to expand Brilliant and Waneta in partnership with Columbia Power.

The partners also shared rights to a third project, Arrow Lakes Generating Station. Under the Columbia Basin Accord, the Trust and Columbia Power would operate and develop these hydropower projects for the benefit of the Basin.
From the beginning, Columbia Power did things differently, said President and CEO Lorne Sivertson. The company recognized the legacy of the Columbia River Treaty and the complex relationship Basin residents had with hydropower projects as a result. For these new projects, Columbia Power would prioritize residents’ involvement. Opening its headquarters in Castlegar, the company worked and communicated closely with the Trust and the people of the Basin. It also committed to creating jobs in the region. “It was local hiring to the maximum amount,” said Sivertson. “Local training, local contractors. We broke up the bid packages so local companies could compete.”

To sustain these jobs, work on hydropower projects occurred in stages. Not only was this more manageable for Columbia Power as a small company, but it also protected the regional economy and labour market against cycles of boom and bust.

The first project was Arrow Lakes Generating Station. This involved constructing a new powerhouse downstream from Hugh Keenleyside Dam to take advantage of excess water, otherwise spilled when levels at Arrow Lakes Reservoir were high. Originally built as a storage dam, Hugh Keenleyside Dam did not generate its own power but instead prevented flooding and controlled the flow of water to power producing dams downstream in the United States. Preparations for Arrow Lakes Generating Station began in 1995.

Determined not to repeat the lack of community consultation that characterized the original Treaty dams, Columbia Power consulted extensively with Basin communities on the Arrow Lakes project. Between 1995 and 1998, the company met with stakeholders, the wider public and special interest groups. It also met with First Nations elders and citizens about the proposed route for the transmission line connecting the new powerhouse with the Selkirk Substation, and provided them with resources to conduct traditional-use studies along that corridor.

To facilitate community relationships, Columbia Power opened a public consultation office in Castlegar to receive feedback on the project proposal.

Efforts to involve the wider community did not stop with the consultation process. The project was expected to generate direct employment for 1,000 people during its first four years of construction and operation. Columbia Power earmarked $50 million in direct wages, 85 per cent of which was targeted to area residents.

While planning on Arrow Lakes Generating Station progressed, the Trust and Columbia Power acquired the rights to another hydropower asset: Brilliant Dam. Previously owned by mining corporation Cominco, Brilliant Dam was constructed during the Second World War to keep up with the demand for power at the company’s Trail smelting facility. In 1996, Cominco

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Hydropower Assets

Columbia Basin Trust and Columbia Power Corporation share equal ownership in four hydropower facilities in the Basin: Arrow Lakes Generating Station, Brilliant Expansion, Waneta Expansion and Brilliant Dam, the latter of which the partners acquired in 1996. Developed, constructed and completed over two decades, these projects generated hundreds of jobs and injected millions of dollars into their home communities. They continue to provide the Trust with a sustained source of revenue to enrich the lives of people in the Basin.

Brilliant Dam and Generating Station
Purchased: 2006
The Trust and Columbia Power purchased Brilliant Dam from mining corporation Cominco for $130 million. Although not part of their original asset agreement, the dam had potential revenues that made the investment more than worthwhile. Since purchasing the dam, the partners have invested $100 million in upgrades and repairs, transforming what was once a 125-megawatt station into one capable of producing 140 megawatts of energy.

Arrow Lakes Generating Station
Constructed: 1999 to 2002
This was the first project that the Trust and Columbia Power developed. Located near Castlegar on the Columbia River, the generating station takes advantage of water spilled by Hugh Keenleyside Dam. It has the capacity to generate up to 185 megawatts of electricity. Despite some costly repairs and setbacks during its first few years of operation, it provided a successful model for subsequent hydropower projects and received several technical and environmental awards. Over 80 per cent of the workers hired to construct the facility lived within 100 kilometres of Castlegar, and at peak construction the project employed up to 400 workers.

Brilliant Expansion Generating Station
Constructed: 2003 to 2007
Brilliant Expansion is the smallest of the Trust and Columbia Power’s four hydropower facilities, located on the Kootenay River near Castlegar. A single-turbine powerhouse was constructed below Brilliant Dam. Eighty-five per cent of workers employed during the construction phase were local, and these wages injected an estimated $50 million into the local economy. The facility can generate up to 120 megawatts of electricity.

Waneta Expansion Generating Station
Constructed: 2010 to 2015
The fourth and final project the Trust and Columbia Power developed was Waneta Expansion. It involved adding a second powerhouse adjacent to Waneta Dam on the Pend d’Oreille River and a new transmission line that would deliver electricity to BC Hydro’s Selkirk Substation, 10 kilometres northeast of the dam. Waneta required an unprecedented investment by the partners, along with a third partner, Fortis Inc., which assumed 51 per cent ownership. Not only did Fortis contribute much-needed funds and expertise to the $900-million project, but it agreed to purchase surplus power not required by BC Hydro, ensuring the project was profitable enough to make the partners’ investments worthwhile. In 2019, the Trust and Columbia Power bought back Fortis’s shares in Waneta Expansion, successfully cementing their full and joint ownership over all four of their hydropower assets.
Before approaching Cominco with an offer, the partners had to negotiate with West Kootenay Power Limited (WKP), which had a right of first refusal for Brilliant Dam. This meant that Cominco had to give WKP the chance to purchase the dam before opening it up to other bidders. Columbia Power approached WKP with the request that it waive that right. The two organizations spent weeks in negotiation meetings before they agreed that WKP would not purchase Brilliant Dam on the condition that Columbia Power and the Trust would sell WKP the power that it generated. The Trust and Columbia Power approached Cominco with their proposal to purchase Brilliant Dam. Josh Smienk recalled sitting at Cominco’s boardroom table in Trail, with four Trust and Columbia Power representatives on one side and a crowd of Cominco officials on the other. Although their contingent was small, the partners’ offer was not: Columbia Power and the Trust offered $10 million more than the highest existing offer. When the deal went through in January 1996, the partners paid a total of $130 million for the dam. It was a costly investment, but one that promised an immediate source of revenue for the Trust, since the dam already had a generating station that was producing power. The decision also aligned with the joint partners’ commitment to the economic well-being of the Basin. Cominco could continue its Trail operations, protecting thousands of jobs in the region.

**Benefits Begin**

Much of the Trust’s first two years were spent planning. By the time the Trust released its management plan in 1997, people in the Basin were anxious to see benefits start to flow back into the region. The plan outlined a spending program based on 34 objectives in eight goal areas. The Trust knew that meeting its spending goals would happen over time, and they could not do everything at once. The Trust resolved to tackle their goals one by one. The CBMP identified partnership development as a preferred approach for the delivery of benefits. The Trust would work with partners such as local governments, non-profit organizations, community groups, and First Nations bands and councils to distribute benefits. It would provide funding to those local partners, which would use the money to deliver programs. Communities could make their own decisions on how funding and programs were used, fulfilling the desires of residents to see decisions made at a local level. Working with partners in the Basin also allowed the Trust to support a variety of priorities across the entire region without duplicating another organization’s work or competing with their programs.

In autumn 1997, the Trust developed an educational partnership with the Royal BC Museum in Victoria. Living Landscapes was a joint program that gathered and shared information about the natural and human history of the Columbia Basin. This information was then communicated to students, teachers and communities through a website and a series of 31 research and public-education activities. The Trust committed $180,000 to the project. Kootenay MLA Erda Walsh applauded the initiative for its work to “help people better understand the environmental and historical changes that have occurred and are occurring through-out the Basin.”

Living Landscapes funded a wide variety of projects, including the study of butterflies in the Pend d’Oreille Valley, the production of a study guide for the Nikkei Internment Memorial Centre in New Denver, which explored the history of Japanese internment at the site.
During the Second World War, an inventory of underwater heritage sites in the West Kootenay, and an exhibit at Fort Steele Heritage Town titled “Don’t Let the Sun Set on My Face,” which examined the racism experienced by immigrants to the area and featured interviews with their descendants. The culmination of the Living Landscapes project was a conference at Fort Steele Heritage Town in 1999, which brought together the knowledge gathered and shared through the educational initiatives and funded projects.

In the 1997–98 fiscal year, the Trust devoted significant resources to environmental projects and awareness. Partnering with the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program, created by BC Hydro in 1993 to compensate for the impacts of Treaty dams, the Trust supported projects put forward by Basin residents and backed by the community.

It delivered a total of $500,000 to 33 community-initiated fish and wildlife projects across the Basin.

For example, the Trust worked with the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area to provide short-term operating funds and help develop long-term strategies to support conservation efforts and wetlands protection. The wetlands are both nationally and internationally recognized for their biological diversity, but greater funding was required to continue wildlife conservation efforts and programming, including building an interpretive centre where visitors could learn about local flora and fauna and enjoy interpretive walks or canoeing through the marshes. The Trust’s assistance enabled the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area to maintain and expand its work and make steps toward self-sufficiency.

The Trust’s efforts to foster a legacy in the Basin during its first three years were successful. It was just starting construction on Arrow Lakes Generating Station, had purchased Brilliant Dam and was preparing plans for the Brilliant and Waneta expansion hydro-power projects. It had finalized the CBMP and established advisory committees. In addition, it had started its first spending programs and supported Basin projects and initiatives.

After three years of hard work putting plans in place for the Trust’s ongoing and future operations, 1998 marked the end of CEO Ivan Robinson’s contract. Robinson had played a central role in building the organizational foundation of the Trust and drafting the 1997 management plan. Greg Deck lauded Robinson and his wife Jackie’s “generosity of character.” They had established themselves as part of the local community of Nakusp and set the tone for later CEOs and Board members to do the same. The leadership could now be passed with confidence to the Trust’s second CEO, Don Johnston. The next phase of the Trust’s life began. People in the Basin had waited a long time to become partners in the development of their region and, in the coming years, would enjoy even greater rewards. 
By 1999, Columbia Basin Trust’s mandate and infrastructure were formally in place, and a clear path forward was mapped in the Columbia Basin Management Plan. The first full year of delivery of benefits was completed in 1998. Construction had begun on Arrow Lakes Generating Station, the first hydropower project undertaken by the Trust and its partner, Columbia Power Corporation. The Trust was eager to build on this momentum and act on what it was created to do: improve the lives of Basin residents and empower them to make decisions about their own future. Over the next few years, the Trust would expand its influence in the Basin through new projects and initiatives, including non-power investments, social programming and environmental strategies.

The Trust would also face significant challenges in balancing its roles as an investor, funder and community partner. A mix of both triumphs and lessons learned, this period of growth and trial would be characterized by incoming CEO Don Johnston’s determination “to be willing to take risks and to learn from our mistakes.”

Johnston was brought on as CEO in February 1999 to help the Trust navigate the unfamiliar territory of grants and programming. Originally from Nelson, Johnston had served as program director for the Vancouver Foundation, a non-profit, community-oriented funding organization.

The long-term strategies outlined in the Trust’s management plan were, in Johnston’s words, “daunting.” But, he said, “if there was ever an organization that is about potential and striving for that potential, it is the Columbia Basin Trust.” He initiated several changes to the Trust’s structure and operations that would help the Trust achieve its goals, while keeping the people of the Basin at the heart of all decisions. The first step was to relocate the Trust’s head office. Nakusp, the Trust’s original headquarters, was far from an airport and its hydropower projects with Columbia Power. The Trust selected Castlegar, which had a small airport and was close to both Arrow Lakes Generating Station and Brilliant Dam. At approximately 7,200 people, Castlegar also had one of the largest populations in the Basin.

While Nakusp would still have an office, the Trust’s main operations would be moved. The decision did not pass without criticism. While many agreed Castlegar was a more strategic location, others saw it as a repeat of past decisions — the Columbia River Treaty itself came to mind — that overlooked small communities in favour of larger city centres.

In response, Johnston explained the move made sense for both staff and Basin residents. “Unfortunately, even though we live in a high-tech age, physical presence at meetings is often necessary,” said Johnston, “particularly when building relationships around the
in specific areas of programming: water management, economic development, the social sector, education and training or arts, culture and heritage.

**DELIVERING BENEFITS**

The Trust’s delivery of benefits work expanded as well. Two of the first programs it introduced were the Community Initiatives and Affected Areas Programs — both of which still exist today. Working with local government partners, those programs distribute funds annually to projects identified and selected by individual communities. The Affected Areas Program gives additional funding to the areas most impacted by the Columbia River Treaty dams. Individual communities decide which projects get funding and each community has its own selection process. In Nakusp, for example, people seeking project funding present their ideas in a community setting. After viewing displays and speaking to project representatives, residents select their top three or four choices. The votes are then tallied, and the projects with the most votes are approved. Karen Hamling, who served as mayor of Nakusp from 2005 to 2018, highlighted the popularity of the process: “We get more people normally voting for that than for the elections.”

The Community Initiatives and Affected Areas Programs have funded thousands of projects, from bear-proofing in Revelstoke to keeping bus service running in Elk Valley to new vehicles and equipment for search-and-rescue operations across the region. Community halls have been renovated, playgrounds built and libraries filled.

Millions of dollars have been injected directly into Basin communities, which control how the money is spent and prioritize the unique needs of their residents. Literacy support was one of the Trust’s earliest priorities. The Trust announced the Resources for Family Literacy Program in 2000, inspired by funding requests from Basin residents. The program was devised to support existing family-literacy programs while addressing barriers preventing families from participating in these programs, such as poverty, lack of transportation and access to child care. To achieve these goals, the Trust partnered with the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy (CBAL), which brought together literacy organizations and programs from across the region under one umbrella to provide communities with equal access to services. One of CBAL’s early managers, Leona Gadsby, remembers seeing clear partnership potential in the Trust. CBAL shared the Trust’s goal of ensuring the social and economic well-being of Basin residents. Literacy skills, Gadsby said, enable people to finish school, go to college and find employment. “People with good literacy skills are able to take part in the whole of society, socially and economically,” she explained. “The Trust
Youth Links was a summer program for youth aged 17 to 19. For six weeks, participants travelled the Basin to learn more about the social, economic, and environmental issues facing the region. They contributed to community projects and developed their own. “I was really impressed by the commitment from the youth to work on the projects and really get as much out of the experience as they could,” said program coordinator Kelly Comishin. “These young adults have a lot to offer our communities.”

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Since 2001, Youth Links has been helping to create strong and resilient communities by advancing the literacy skills of learners of all ages. Its diverse programs promote lifelong learning through meaningful, community-focused programming. One of these programs, Books for Babies, began in 2001 and encouraged new parents to develop literacy in their children from infancy. CBAL also offers adult tutoring, language services for immigrants and early language development initiatives. Since its inception, CBAL has worked with over 54,000 adults and seniors, 48,962 children and youth, and distributed over 94,000 books and other materials.

Youth programming was an early priority for the Trust. Photographs from 1999 show a group of 12 youth hiking Rogers Pass through the Selkirk Mountains, pulling knapweed from a field and building a tipi alongside members of the Sinixt Nation. For six weeks, they travelled the Basin as part of the Trust’s Youth Links summer program. They visited communities across the region, exploring social, economic and environmental landscapes while building friendships and gaining valuable work experience. “In this and subsequent summers, Basin youth toured museums and heritage sites, studied plant and animal species, and learned about issues facing First Nations in the area. They viewed the Basin’s economy and industry at the Trail headquarters of mining company Teck Cominco and during tours at Hugh Keenleyside Dam and the Arrow Lakes Generating Station construction site. Not as familiar with the impact of the Columbia River Treaty as their parents and grandparents, they also visited farms affected by the Treaty dams. “Not only did I learn more about specific issues, but also about the Basin as a whole and how different areas relate,” one participant said. “We were given awesome opportunities to learn in ways that wouldn’t normally be accessible to us.”

The Youth Links program was designed for youth to leave a lasting legacy in the places they visited and use what they learned to extend that legacy to their own communities. Participants volunteered at community events like Nelson's Streetfest and the BC Seniors Games. They painted the community hall in Silverton; built trails near Fernie, Invermere and Revelstoke; and did stream restoration work at Kokanee Creek and Wolf Creek near Wasa.

At the end of the summer, participants received grants to complete follow-up projects in their home communities using the skills and knowledge gained during their time with Youth Links. In 2004, program participant Brittney Hood organized a sexual health workshop for teenage girls in Elkford,
while Mikhail Proulx of Trail designed a website that gave a panoramic view of the city and its surrounding hiking paths.\(^*\)

Youth Links was just one of many initiatives the Trust introduced in the early 2000s to engage young people. From its symposiums, the Trust knew youth were eager to participate and make their voices and concerns heard. Youth faced their own set of challenges: the lack of educational and employment opportunities; poor transportation between communities; bullying and violence; racism, homophobia and discrimination; and lack of support and resources.\(^*\) To provide space for youth to discuss these issues and form solutions, the Trust sponsored the first Basin Voice Youth Action Forum in April 2001. Held at Blue Lake Camp near Canal Flats, the forum drew 90 young people from across the Basin. At the conclusion of the forum, a clear message emerged: youth wanted opportunities to connect, network and share information.

To continue those conversations, the Trust established a youth committee to provide young people with a place in the organization in 2001. The committee, composed of members aged 15 to 25, offered input on the Trust’s programming and funding and created new opportunities for young people in the Basin. The committee promoted and encouraged involvement through training and workshops for youth groups and organizations, employment and leadership opportunities, grant programs to fund youth projects and inter-community events and activities.\(^*\)

Scratch Magazine also emerged from the Youth Action Forum. Youth wanted a way to network, exchange ideas and access information relevant to them.\(^*\) Scratch encouraged youth to “scratch” their ideas down in the form of articles, poems and drawings. It was entirely written and produced by Basin youth. The theme of the first issue, published in spring 2002, was self-esteem and self-image and explored topics like body issues, commercialism, sex, skateboarding, feminism, abuse, employment and Basin life.\(^*\) Later issues covered a broad range of topics, including environmental conservation, educational opportunities and photography.

Another concern that Delivery of Benefits programming sought to address was the environment. In the early 2000s, 30 years after the Columbia River Treaty brought great environmental change to the Basin, the region’s concern over environmental issues sharpened. This reflected the larger, global environmental consciousness that gained momentum in the 1990s with the United Nations International Panel on Climate Change and the signing of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. In the Basin, water management was of primary concern. Kindy Gosal, one of the Trust’s first community liaisons, recalled a spike in conversations among Basin residents at the dawn of the 21st century about fluctuating water levels, the social and cultural importance of water and its role in the Basin economy. “All of those discussions were happening at a community level,” said Gosal.\(^*\)

The Trust surveyed residents, commissioned a report on water management, brought in consultants to review the Columbia River Treaty and water management agreements, and worked with American organizations...
and assessing sprinkler systems. As taking samples from creek beds Initiatives Program involved Created in 2001, the Water 106 Golden Life Management, founded three years earlier housing for seniors. In 2001, the Trust partnered with the Trust. One of its early investments was affordable in non-power opportunities boosts regional industry non-power investments to deliver benefits. Investing The Trust uses revenues from both hydropower and investing in communities The Trust uses revenues from both hydropower and non-power investments to deliver benefits. Investing in non-power opportunities boosts regional industry and business, while also generating income for the Trust. One of its early investments was affordable housing for seniors. In 2001, the Trust partnered with Golden Life Management, founded three years earlier by Cranbrook resident Endre Lillejord. Golden Life builds and operates affordable housing for seniors, allowing them to remain in their home communities while still receiving the support they need for quality of life. The Trust’s initial investment of $5.8 million helped Golden Life build its second care facility, Castle Wood Village, in Castlegar.29 Golden Life was part of the Trust’s real estate investment portfolio, which became a profitable source of revenue that the Trust continues to use to deliver benefits to the Basin. Not all investments were financially successful. During the early 2000s, the Trust suffered substantial losses on two investments, St. Eugene Golf Resort and Casino and HeatWave Drying Systems Limited. The facilities were aptly named “villages,” and the Invermere, Kimberley and Nelson. Basin communities of Cranbrook, Castlegar, Creston, Fernie, Fruitvale, Golden and Invermere are served by the Trust’s education strategy and published guides and other resources on water management. 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Golden Life 106 LEARNING CURVES 1999–2005 to better understand transboundary questions relating to the Columbia River’s ecosystems. Armed with this knowledge, the Trust formed a water management committee and created the Water Initiatives Program in 2001 to educate Basin residents about and involve them in water-management issues. The Trust developed an education strategy and published guides and other resources on water management.28 In 2004, it launched a new website on water issues, dedicated to building an understanding, said Gosal, of “where the water comes from, how it is managed, where it goes and more complex things, like global water shortages and the reorganization of the Columbia River Treaty, which could impact all Basin residents and could occur as early as 2044.”29 Water Initiatives encouraged residents to get actively involved in the effort to safeguard Basin waters for future generations. 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During the early 2000s, the Trust suffered substantial losses on two investments, St. Eugene Golf Resort and Casino and HeatWave Drying Systems Limited. The facilities were aptly named “villages,” and the Golden Life and the Trust continue to collaborate. Eight of Golden Life’s 17 locations have been completed with the Trust’s support, in the Basin communities of Cranbrook, Castlegar, Creston, Invermere, Kimberley and Nelson. Golden Life 106 LEARNING CURVES 1999–2005 to better understand transboundary questions relating to the Columbia River’s ecosystems. Armed with this knowledge, the Trust formed a water management committee and created the Water Initiatives Program in 2001 to educate Basin residents about and involve them in water-management issues. The Trust developed an education strategy and published guides and other resources on water management. 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In the 1990s, Cranbrook resident Endre Lillejord was struggling to find a home for his mother, Ivy. He was disappointed to discover that housing options were scarce for seniors who, like Ivy, needed some assistance but were still largely independent. Lillejord quickly realized his family was not alone: seniors and families across the Basin were looking for alternatives to institutional care. Lillejord decided to take matters into his own hands.


The hotel and golf course opened in 2000, with plans to expand. St. Eugene by building a casino and an addition to the hotel. On the surface, the project was a financial success; however, the project had fallen deep into debt. This was not helped by the fact that its first seasons were hampered by a regional downturn in tourism due to wildfires, inflated fuel prices and fears over global terrorism and the SARS and West Nile outbreaks.48 St. Eugene filed for bankruptcy protection in December 2001 in an attempt to restructure its finances and operations. In the meantime, because St. Eugene was unable to make payments on the Trust’s loan, the Trust foreclosed the loan as a “non-performing” investment. This thought by some to be a disappointment. By 2004, the Trust had only recovered a small portion of its original investment in HeatWave Drying Systems. On the surface, the project appeared to be a success; however, the project could not get past the testing phase, and failed to produce technology that could be sold in time to make good on its loans before other investors backed out. With a lack of income, financial support and resources, HeatWave dissolved. The Trust wrote off its remaining capital.49

Underperformance on investments like HeatWave and St. Eugene resulted in a poor return on the Trust’s investments in 2004–05.50 These losses contributed to a deeper internal pressure during this period, as the Trust struggled to offset multiple growing pains: navigating additional revenue losses and tensions with its closest partners, while still delivering programs and funding to Basin residents.

### Power Struggles

The Trust encountered difficulties relating to its hydro power investments as well. All was going according to plan at Arrow Lakes Generating Station was completed on budget and ahead of schedule in 2004, with construction on Brilliant Expansion beginning the following year. However, the Trust and Columbia Power’s attention was diverted back to Arrow Lakes Generating Station in 2004 when cracks were discovered in an intake channel, forcing two long and expensive shutdown periods over the next two years. Although repair costs and the loss of revenue during the shutdowns meant low investment returns for the Trust, significant funds were recovered through insurance. Once all repairs were completed in May 2006, the project became profitable again.51

Basin residents started to question the Trust’s priorities when, in spring 2003, the Trust and Columbia Power announced their intention to acquire four generating stations owned by West Kootenay Power.52 The purchase of the stations, located between Nelson and Castlegar and not connected to the partners’ existing hydropower assets, was subject to approval by the BC Utilities Commission. In October 2001, the commission denied the application, citing the possibility that rate-payers would lose money.53 Some Basin residents were relieved the deal fell through; they did not want the Trust to heavily concentrate on hydropower projects, and they worried the acquisition of new power projects was outside the Trust’s mandate. Trail City Councillor Norm Gabana was a harsh critic of whether or not he perceived as the Trust’s over-involvement in hydropower projects, going so far as to urge the Province to “dump the whole organization and put it in with BC Hydro.”54

Gabana’s comments were not entirely out of the blue. While the Trust was investigating new power projects, a provincial review process threatened to upset the organization completely. In May 2001, the provincial NDF government that helped create the Trust was replaced by a Liberal majority. The new government took swift action against the hefty provincial debt, which had doubled over the past decade and was projected to reach $34.7 billion by 2002.55 Under Premier Gordon Campbell, the Liberals introduced a deregulation and cost-effective services review process to examine all provincial programs and activities, determine the government’s core roles and responsibilities and identify ways to make government services more efficient and cost-effective for taxpayers.56 As a provincial organization, the Trust was subject to all these changes. One Nakusp resident complained that “we feel like it’s being hijacked,” said one protester.57

Residents accused the Trust of being complicit in these changes. One Castlegar business owner, who had attended a public meeting where the Trust was presenting its findings to the public, out public input: “In Nelson, a town hall meeting drew 150 unhappy citizens who accused the Trust of lacking transparency. “The Trust has been a huge success, and it feels like it’s being hijacked,” said one protester.58

Even after the core services review concluded in 2002, the Trust’s anxieties remained. It began to look at the costs of drying large dimensions of wood, options to preserve its independence and avoid being absorbed by the provincial government in the future.
Located in the community of Tadanac just outside Cranbrook, St. Eugene Golf Resort and Casino is owned and operated by the Ktunaxa Nation. The resort lies at the end of Mission Road and is set against a backdrop of tall mountains and the blue waters of St. Mary River. Surrounded by manicured lawns and colourful gardens, the scene stands in stark contrast to the one First Nations children witnessed when St. Eugene was used as a residential school operated by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate from 1912 to 1970.

The final bend along Mission Road was known to these children as Crying Corner, marking the spot where they entered the 55-foot-tall concrete structure where, far from their homes and families, they were locked into a language and culture barrier. Throwing up their hands, the Ktunaxa Nation had their culture and children deliberately and亟亟地 stolen from them.

One of these children was Sophie Pierre, who spent nine years at St. Eugene, beginning at age six. Pierre grew up to become a Nasu’kam of the Ktunaxa Nation and an advocate of the St. Eugene project. The idea to transform St. Eugene into a resort arose gradually and with reluctance. Pierre recalled, “As the building sat vacant for over 20 years, falling into disrepair while the community, whose children had been forced to attend the school. The building was unsafe for over 20 years, falling into disrepair, and the Ktunaxa struggled to reconcile the conflicting opinions about what to do with the site. Some wanted to tear it down and destroy this physical monument of trauma that reminded them, Pierre, who spent nine years at St. Eugene, growing up to become a Na’su’kam of the Ktunaxa Nation and an advocate of the St. Eugene project. The idea to transform St. Eugene into a resort arose gradually and with reluctance. Pierre recalled, “As the building sat vacant for over 20 years, falling into disrepair while the community, whose children had been forced to attend the school. The building was unsafe for over 20 years, falling into disrepair, and the Ktunaxa struggled to reconcile the conflicting opinions about what to do with the site. Some wanted to tear it down and destroy this physical monument of trauma that reminded them, Pierre, who spent nine years at St. Eugene, growing up to become a Na’su’kam of the Ktunaxa Nation and an advocate of the St. Eugene project. The idea to transform St. Eugene into a resort arose gradually and with reluctance. Pierre recalled, “As the building sat vacant for over 20 years, falling into disrepair while the community, whose children had been forced to attend the school. The building was unsafe for over 20 years, falling into disrepair, and the Ktunaxa struggled to reconcile the conflicting opinions about what to do with the site. Some wanted to tear it down and destroy this physical monument of trauma that reminded them of the culture and childhood deliberately and violently stolen from them.

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“Since it was within the St. Eugene Mission School that the culture of the Ktunaxa Nation was taken away, it should be within the building that it is returned,” Ktunaxa Elder Mary Paul stated who words became the cornerstone of the St. Eugene project and are now displayed on the walls of the resort. But Sophie Pierre sometimes thought some time before the community understood exactly what their Elder meant, that transforming St. Eugene must highlight the cultural, social and economic order that had crumbled under the residential school system. The halls where children had been forced to cut and go to bed hungry, where they had been punished for speaking their own language, and where they had suffered constant physical, sexual and emotional abuse—these were the places where the Ktunaxa would repair their culture and find healing. Empowered by Elder Mary Paul’s words, the Ktunaxa Nation began the slow process of transforming St. Eugene Golf Resort and Casino.

The golf course opened in schedule in 2000. The first year was a success, with golf Digest rating it one of the top three best new Canadian courses. In 2001, St. Eugene was named the most improved golf course in Canada. The second year was dismal, however, the project was falling into debt. Then, in September 11, 2001, travel decline, reduced hotel prices, regional wildfires and outbreaks of SARS and the West Nile Virus all contributed to a downturn in visitors to the region. Decreased tourism meant lower earnings for St. Eugene, and the project struggled to build the planned addition to the hotel and casino. St. Eugene filed for bankruptcy protection in December 2003 in an attempt to restructure its finances and operations. But the Ktunaxa Nation persevered. In 2004, the St. Eugene project was saved from financial collapse through a partnership between the Ktunaxa, the Samson Cree Nation in Alberta and the Rama First Nation in Ontario. It was the first time First Nations from across the country had partnered on such an initiative. Two years later, the resort began to turn a profit. Elder Phoebe of the Ktunaxa Nation Council agreed that “while there were significant obstacles, as we went on, the will to finish the resort grew even stronger.”

St. Eugene is a point of pride for its creators. Sophie Pierre declared that, somehow, “without two nickels to rub together,” the Ktunaxa and their partners “managed to put together a $40 million resort.” An RV park was added in 2007 and, in 2012, St. Eugene was the host hotel for the BC Seniors Games. The resort hosts writers’ conferences and partners with nearby wineries for wine tastings and festivals. St. Eugene employs between 200 to 300 people year-round. Pierre believes that St. Eugene helped foster relationships between the Ktunaxa Nation and non-Indigenous organizations in the Basin and cemented the fact that “the Indigenous community is going to be involved now.”
Stories of Impact

In spite of the challenges the Trust faced surrounding its power projects, it completed many successful programs and initiatives. Its annual reports showcased the social, economic, and environmental work the Trust accomplished during this time.

The option that came to the forefront was to sell its shares of power projects and abandon its hydropower investments entirely. The stress placed upon the Trust by the core services review and the tremendous effort required to run hydropower projects caused the Trust to grow increasingly wary of its involvement in hydro-power operations. Greg Deck remembered the Board’s frustration as members began to ask, “Why don’t we just sell our hydroelectric assets and put our money into the market somewhere and quit bashing our heads?”

In October 2004, the Trust and BC Hydro announced discussions about a proposal to sell the Trust’s $260 million of hydropower assets to BC Hydro. The Trust could use the money from the sale to continue its delivery of benefits and to invest in other opportunities. The Trust never intended to become a power corporation in the first place, Josh Smienk reminded the public. In a news release, he argued that, while these were valuable investments, an end to power operations would free up the Trust’s resources to focus on the delivery of benefits.

Basin residents opposed the sale. The headlines that splashed across newspapers included “Selling Off Our Legacy,” “Power Sale Divides Kootenays,” and, echoing the Columbia River Treaty deal decades earlier, “Sold Down the River – Part 2?” Letters poured in to newspapers and directly to the Trust. Although they supported the Trust’s vision to gain greater independence from the provincial government, residents did not agree that selling hydropower assets was the right solution. Early Trust Board members Ed Conroy and Corky Evans were vehemently against the sale. “They’re buying us off with our own money, and they’re selling our heritage to do it,” Conroy said. Evans agreed: “I’m not saying it’s wrong for people to sell their heritage, I just think they should have a say.” The Trust seemed to be rushing into the deal without consulting Basin residents. “It took five years to do this deal,” Evans said of the Trust’s original purchase of hydropower assets. “If you spent five years deciding to get married, why would you get divorced in a month?”

The Trust insisted it was doing its due diligence. It held eight public meetings across the region, at which upset residents expressed their disapproval. In Nelson, it was reported that, in a crowd of over 200 people, not one person supported the proposed sale. In Trail, the reaction was described as “overwhelmingly negative.” For Nelson Daily News columnist Stephen Fowler, the sale of the assets was a betrayal of “those people who fought long and hard to get us those things, as well as our children who will depend on that profit and control if the Columbia Basin is going to remain a desirable place to work and live.” He added, “At least as part owners, we have a say in how that profit [from the hydropower projects] is invested. We’ll lose that control once BC Hydro takes over.”

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Residents’ opposition could not be ignored. In December 2004, the Trust announced it would not proceed with the proposed sale. In retrospect, Board member Greg Deak acknowledged, “the group intelligence was much wiser than ours. They weren’t living our frustration.” Chair Josh Smirnoff reflected on the Trust’s change of heart:

Columbia Basin Trust, since its inception, has always been a grassroots organization that’s taken its direction from the public. It’s part of our Columbia Basin Management Plan that before we make decisions on items of our large investments such as this, we consult with the public and the public has come back and overwhelmingly said that they do not want to be out of the power business.

Although the sale of power assets was off the table, the Trust still sought independence. Part of this desire was an increasingly strained relationship with its partner, Columbia Power. Although Columbia Power was meant to operate and provide expertise on their shared power projects, the Trust started to challenge many of its decisions. The Trust wanted Columbia Power to pay grants in lieu of taxes on Arrow Lakes Generating Station as early as 2004, a request Columbia Power refused on the grounds that BC Hydro already paid grants for Hugh Keenleyside Dam upstream. Nor was the generating station fully operational. Columbia Power also temporarily resisted pressure from the Trust to relocate its head office from Victoria to its regional office in Castlegar. As criticism and demands from the Trust piled up, Columbia Power executives were upset they were excluded from Trust meetings, where they might have had the opportunity to explain their decisions. In what was meant to be equal ownership and a collaborative partnership, Columbia Power felt it had been treated unfairly.

A legacy for the people

In 2006, the Province offered the Trust $10 million to shelve the Option Agreement. The Trust accepted. In addition to the $10 million, the deal acknowledged the Trust’s desire for regional control over hydropower assets, giving the Trust greater influence by granting it one-third of the seats on Columbia Power’s Board of Directors. It was agreed the CEO of Columbia Power should live in the Basin, not Victoria. These measures meant the partners would work together more closely. Although Columbia Power was frustrated at the Trust for pursuing the Option Agreement without its input, this was a step forward in improving their relationship while protecting the region’s influence over hydro-power projects and decisions.

While the Trust was absorbed with its investigations and negotiations about its hydropower assets and relationships with Columbia Power and the Province, Basin residents grew frustrated at the lack of communication from the Trust. In its scramble to address the many stresses of its first 10 years of operation—underperforming non-power investments like St. Eugene and HeatWave, revenue losses on Arrow Lakes Generating Station and increased external tension with its corporate and government partnerships—had the Trust inadvertently lost its way? However, in the midst of disappointments, there were many positives on which the Trust could build. Residents were pleased with the social and environmental programs introduced from 1999 to 2005 and wanted to see continued spending in Basin communities. But there were many stresses of its first 10 years of operation—underperforming non-power investments like St. Eugene and HeatWave, revenue losses on Arrow Lakes Generating Station and increased external tension with its corporate and government partnerships—had the Trust inadvertently lost its way? However, in the midst of disappointments, there were many positives on which the Trust could build. Residents were pleased with the social and environmental programs introduced from 1999 to 2005 and wanted to see continued spending in Basin communities. But there were many stresses of its first 10 years of operation—underperforming non-power investments like St. Eugene and HeatWave, revenue losses on Arrow Lakes Generating Station and increased external tension with its corporate and government partnerships—had the Trust inadvertently lost its way?
After 10 years, three of the Trust’s four hydropower projects were in operation or under way, revenues were rising and programs were being introduced. But rapid growth tested the Trust. Basin residents had grown frustrated at the Trust’s lack of transparency regarding hydropower projects, especially as it struggled to determine what the future of those projects would look like. They felt the Trust had neglected to involve them in important decisions. There were worries the Trust had grown preoccupied with its investments and strayed from its grassroots origins. Residents and the Trust had become disconnected from one another. The collaborative culture that had characterized the Trust’s early years was weakening. Further growth was inevitable, but the Trust needed to become stronger and more resilient to move forward. It needed, as well, to restore the trust of Basin residents.

What challenged the Trust also made it successful. Hydro projects continued to create jobs, boost the economy and generate wealth, even as the Trust debated ownership questions. Increasing revenues meant that, although it needed to introduce new measures to keep up with its financial growth, the Trust could deliver more benefits to the region. Expanding programs meant new solutions, new partnerships and new possibilities. Once it learned to better manage growth and relationships, the Trust would be poised more than ever to deliver on its vision.

REFLECTING AND RECONNECTING

Seven years had passed since the Trust’s last symposium, so the 2005 event was a long-overdue opportunity for the Trust to reconnect with the people of the Basin. Over 240 delegates gathered in Cranbrook, anxious to voice their grievances. “Within the fabric of the CBT that we built together, it feels as though there is a thread unravelling,” said one delegate. Decisions over hydropower assets especially had been anything but transparent. The Trust had not shared sufficient details. “We no longer understand what’s going on,” one symposium-goer complained. “You need to figure out how to talk to us and keep us educated.” Residents wanted a continuous, Basin-wide dialogue. Symposium delegates agreed the Trust should promote that dialogue. One said, “If we spend funds learning to talk to each other, those pennies are worth as much as any other investment.”

The meeting was a reminder of the deep sense of ownership people felt over the organization. Board members and staff left Cranbrook determined to honour that ownership and restore residents’ trust.

Changes were already in motion. In March 2005, the Trust announced a shift in leadership. CEO Don Johnston had navigated the Trust through a challenging period as it faced the core services review and grappled with its future in hydropower. Despite these challenges, the Trust had expanded its presence and programs across

Beginning in 2005, the Trust worked hard to restore the trust of Basin residents, who felt they had been left out of important conversations and decisions in recent years. By the 2010 symposium, pictured here, the Trust had successfully rebuilt its relationships with residents, ensuring their voices remained at the heart of all decisions.
“We, as a relatively young organization, are still growing. We are also growing together with our various partners and with residents of the Columbia Basin. Understanding this, and striving to continue with this objective in mind, will allow us all to contribute to the growth of our Basin.”

NEIL MUTH, PRESIDENT AND CEO, 2005-2016

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The Brilliant Dam People

Over 400 people were employed to construct the Brilliant Expansion between 2003 and 2007. The workforce included heavy-construction labourers, heavy-equipment operators, carpenters, ironworkers, cement masons, pipemakers, millwrights and boilermakers. More than 85 per cent of workers were locals who lived within 100 kilometres of the dam site.
Power’s Community and Regional Affairs Executive Director. “The sense of ownership people felt for the project was not just through their stake in the Trust. Eighty-five per cent of workers hired for Brilliant Expansion — about 400 people overall — lived within 100 kilometres of the site.”

In September 2006, long-time Chair Josh Smienk announced he would be retiring when his term expired the following year. Smienk had been with the organization since 1992, when it began as the Columbia River Treaty Committee. He had seen the Trust through its transformation from a tiny group of like-minded individuals into a Crown corporation with funds and resources the committee could have never imagined. After nearly 15 years, the time had come for someone else to lead. “When you build an organization from scratch, the founding chair at some time has to leave,” Smienk explained.

Founding Vice-Chair Garry Merkel stepped into the role. Smienk’s departure was part of a wider shift in the organization as founding members and early directors began to retire. Within the next few years, the Board would comprise almost entirely of new voices. Through these shifts, the Trust’s staff was relied on. With their extensive knowledge of the Trust’s goals and operations, they were its memory. Long-time employee Aimee Ambrosone described the staff’s responsibility “to keep the culture, the spirit of the Trust alive. It’s also to indoctrinate the next generation in that spirit.”

Many Trust employees across the Basin have enjoyed long careers with the Trust, sharing their skills and commitment across a variety of roles.

PLANS AND PRIORITIES

Achieving its mission has been a continuous process for the Trust. The organization must adapt to the Basin’s evolving needs and ideas. To make this happen, the Trust sought ways to grow through renewal and specialization. Part of this involved updating the Columbia Basin Management Plan (CBMP). Close to 10 years had passed since the Trust had created the original plan in 1997. In 2005, it began preparations for a renewed plan. As had been done when creating the original CBMP, the Trust invited residents to contribute. After working a year and a half with residents and advisory committees, the Trust prepared a draft plan and shared it at nine open houses across the region. Participants reviewed the plan to ensure it reflected their visions for the Basin. At the 2007 symposium, nearly 300 delegates gathered to share their ideas on the draft. “[W]e’re not just going out there to say, ‘This is what we’re doing. Thank you very much,’” explained Neil Muth. “We really want a two-way discussion.” The final plan incorporated what was heard at the symposium and open houses. The consensus was positive. The Trust was on the right track.
The updated CBMP was divided into two parts: a charter to establish the Trust's long-term vision, and a strategic plan to guide short-term priorities. By separating the document in this way, the Trust was able to keep its mandate alive while becoming more responsive to the Basin’s specific needs. The Trust’s founding vision had not changed. It would continue to work toward the same long-term goals for the Basin that were outlined in the 1995 plan. The Trust was dedicated to collaborating with residents and communities to achieve a legacy of social, economic and environmental well-being, and the updated charter reconfirmed the organization to values of respect, accountability and transparency in its operations. The vision and values communicated in the charter were the original plan and purpose for which the Trust was created and provided a launching pad for ongoing work.

Setting strategic priorities allowed the Trust to be adaptable in how it achieved its vision. While the original CBMP included a set of objectives, defining those objectives in a separate document gave the Trust flexibility in responding to shifting needs and ideas. The priorities continue to be updated about every five years based on public consultation. They focus on improving community engagement, ensuring the Trust’s resilience as an organization, fostering quality of life and addressing critical issues in the Basin.

The Trust introduced formal strategic plans in 2005 to implement the priorities. The first strategic plan grouped priorities into three categories: social, environmental and economic. Like the strategic priorities, these plans are updated periodically based on public input. They underline goals and desired outcomes within each plan, and identify what steps are needed to meet them. Often, this has meant creating new programs and partnerships. The Enterprise Non-profits Program, for example, grew out of the Social Strategic Plan, with the goal of building the capacity of non-profit organizations in the Basin. The program provided guidance and grant money to help non-profits plan or operate a social enterprise. “Creating a social enterprise can give an organization the flexibility and revenue to be able to respond to a broader range of community needs,” said Rona Park, executive director for the Nelson CARES Society. Nelson CARES took advantage of the Enterprise Non-profits Program to expand its Earth Matters Recycling initiative, which provides recycling services to local apartments and businesses. The initiative provided employment opportunities for people with disabilities, and the organization used profits to fund its emergency shelter, legal advocacy centre, seniors’ transportation service and other programming.

Strategic plans also expanded existing programs, like the Land Conservation Initiative. Started in 2002, the Land Conservation Initiative received renewed support through the 2009-2012 Environmental Strategic Plan. The plan-outlined land conservation and stewardship as a way to support communities, build partnerships and strengthen the Basin’s ability to meet environmental challenges. The Trust took action by supporting community efforts to conserve places like Valhalla Mile and Slocan Island, building relationships with organizations like the Nature Conservancy of Canada to protect Lot 4 on Columbia Lake and Darkwoods Conservation Area.

Just as the Trust had consulted with people in the Basin to update its CBMP, resident input helped to refine the Trust’s investment policies. By 2005, the organization’s investment portfolio had just surpassed $43 million and continued to grow. The organization hired Johnny Strilaeff to oversee this portfolio as manager of investments. In this newly created position, Strilaeff guided the development of official investment policies and procedures. The Trust consulted with both residents and experts to prepare the final policy. “We didn’t just lock ourselves in a room one day and say, ‘Here’s what we’re going to do,’” Strilaeff explained. “It took 64 drafts before the policy was approved in 2007. The final Statement of Investment Policies and Procedures maintained the Trust’s enduring commitment to a way to support communities, build partnerships and strengthen the Basin’s ability to meet environmental challenges.

The updated charter recommitted the organization to the same long-term goals for the Basin that were outlined in the 1995 plan. The updated charter honoured the original plan and purpose for the Basin and expanded the Trust’s mandate for ongoing work.

For thousands of years, grizzly bears, mountain caribou, wolves and countless other wildlife species shared this land with First Nations. In 1897, they were joined by settlers when Nelson & Sheppard Railway acquired the land, and later by multiple forestry corporations. It was not until 1987 — when it was purchased by German Duke Carl Herzog von Württemberg — that Darkwoods got its name, in reference to Germany’s Black Forest.

Darkwoods became the annual attraction spot of Duke von Württemberg and his family, and a potential escape should Germany be overtaken by the Soviet Union. He also ran a small forestry operation on the land. But when fourth son and heir, Henry Duke von Württemberg, inherited the property, he sold the land to someone who would conserve and protect it from destruction. The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) purchased the property in July 2008 in order to secure a legacy land acquisition for conservation purposes and undertake initial stewardship. The NCC contributed $500,000 to NCC’s efforts to protect Darkwoods. The Duke made a further contribution to a single land conservation initiative.

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NCC BC Regional Vice President Nancy Newhouse, who added that the Trust’s “clear commitment to conservation has helped to make a real, on-the-ground difference to the people, wildlife and ecosystems of the Columbia Basin region.”
Students and businesses across the Basin have benefitted from the Summer Works and School Works programs. In recent years, students have completed summer jobs at places like Purcell Timber Frame Homes in Nelson, Happy Cow Ice Cream in Fernie, The Pickle Patch in Creston and Derailed Sports in Golden.

(such as bonds and stocks) and private placements. Private placements involved a direct investment in Basin businesses, either through loans or equity partnerships. The revenue from all investments would be used to fund delivery-of-benefits activities, cover operating costs or be further invested.

The strength of the Trust's investment portfolio shielded the organization from the impacts of the global economic downturn of 2008. Because most of its investments were based on fixed, long-term agreements, the Trust's revenues remained steady. For example, 85 per cent of revenues came from hydropower investments based on prearranged power sales agreements with BC Hydro and FortisBC.

In fact, the Trust's revenue was increasing. In 2009, a reported $9 million was delivered in benefits to the region, up 70 per cent from the previous year.

The organization's steady revenue, in spite of the 2008 recession, meant it could assist Basin communities that were not so fortunate. In the Basin, employment rates in 2008 declined by just over seven per cent and approximately 5,600 jobs were lost. The housing market was also down, and the forestry industry was in crisis. Forestry exports, already suffering because of continuing softwood lumber disputes between Canada and the United States, were reduced further when the demand for lumber plummeted in the wake of the American housing crisis.

There were shutdowns across British Columbia, including Timber's East Kootenay operations, where 1,100 workers were affected by the temporary closures of the Elko and Canal Flats sawmills, the Cranbrook lumber plant and the Skookumchuk pulp mill in 2009. Shutdowns had a domino effect, impacting contractors who provided transportation and other services and eliminating wages that otherwise would have been pumped back into local businesses.

The Trust could not fix the recession or forestry crisis, but it could support the economy by providing training and employment programs, creating job opportunities and investing in services such as affordable housing. The Trust and Columbia Power hired over 400 local labourers to work on the Waneta Expansion project when construction began in 2010.

It launched Summer Works and School Works in the early 2010s to provide small businesses with wage subsidies to hire high school and post-secondary students. The early success of these programs led to co-op placements and apprenticeships to assist individuals interested in the trades. As affordable housing became a growing concern, the Trust invested in new developments and continued its support for seniors’ housing. The organization found a balance between responding to present economic and social challenges and securing protections against future issues.

The Trust supports workers and businesses through a variety of grant and investment programs. Through the Co-Op Wage Subsidy program, university student Harshit Kandpal gained valuable work experience with the City of Nelson. In 2019, the Apprenticeship Wage Subsidy Program helped Cranbrook’s freightline hire an apprentice mechanic. The year before, the Training Fee Support Program helped Althea More of Winlaw gain the training he needed to become a logging truck driver.
The final piece of the Trust's investment puzzle was Waneta Expansion. With construction beginning in 2010, Waneta Expansion added a second powerhouse that shares the existing hydraulic head, generating clean, renewable, cost-effective power from water that would otherwise be spilled. An ambitious project, valued at over $900 million, it was the Trust and Columbia Power’s biggest and most expensive undertaking, requiring nearly 10 years of planning and preparation before construction moved forward.

Equally ambitious was the partnership model. Extensive feasibility studies and lengthy power sales negotiations revealed that the Trust and Columbia Power needed a third partner to make the project viable. Not only was the project expensive, but it would need a buyer for the surplus capacity: the excess energy not required by the primary customer, BC Hydro. That third partner — and buyer — was Fortis Inc., Canada’s largest private utility company. Fortis signed an agreement with the Trust and Columbia Power in October 2010. The deal gave Fortis 51 per cent ownership over the project, with the remaining shares going to Columbia Power (32.5 per cent) and the Trust (16.5 per cent). Waneta Expansion became the first power project in British Columbia to be developed through a public-private partnership.

Any reluctance about the decision to bring in an external partner was eased by the many benefits it produced. The project created job opportunities for women and people with disabilities. A First Nations liaison was brought on to maximize opportunities for First Nations workers. The Ktunaxa-owned contracting company Nupqu Development Corporation cleared the land to make way for the transmission line. Columbia Power also upheld its commitment to social and economic growth by ensuring that at least 70 per cent of the workforce was local. Waneta Expansion created over 4,000 jobs, which went a long way toward boosting employment in the Basin as the region continued its recovery from the 2008 recession. It helped strengthen residents’ confidence in the Trust and signalled that the organization was back on track.

The Trust had put residents first and restored the trust that had been eroding. It was working to manage its growth without losing sight of its original vision. Nor did the organization waver in the delivery of benefits, as it repaired relationships, fixed mistakes and readied itself for the future. Continued growth meant finding a balance between planning and action. The Trust had a clear charter and strong strategic priorities, an investment plan, refined policies and procedures and ways to measure and maximize success. It was a solid foundation upon which to continue. The Trust could move forward with a renewed sense of purpose and vision.
The Trust's 15th anniversary in 2010 was an occasion for celebration. It was also a time for thinking back and looking ahead. Garry Merkel remembered “a lot of growing. It’s hard to believe it has been 15 years since myself and other founding Board members were present in the British Columbia legislature signing the CBT Act.”

From the first moment of its establishment in 1995, the Trust has sought opportunities to collaborate, educate, facilitate and create. Supporting the efforts of Basin people and communities means much more than financial help, said Johnny Strilaeff. “It’s about expertise; it’s about knowledge; it’s about shared visioning. It’s about bringing folks together.”

The Trust stood on solid footing. It had overcome the challenges of earlier years and was balancing internal operations with external responsibilities. The Basin’s faith in the organization was renewed as the Trust listened and responded to residents’ concerns. The Trust’s revenues, resources and reach had expanded and, along with them, the organization’s capacity to make a difference. The evolution and growth continued. Entering its next chapter, the Trust strengthened relationships, supported new ideas and led the Basin toward enduring and transformative change.

MORE THAN A FUNDER

Founded on the idea that Basin residents and communities should have control over their own future, the Trust strives to involve them in many ways. In addition to holding symposiums and workshops, building partnerships and working with advisory committees, the Trust works to promote grassroots funding decisions. In 2011 and 2012, the Trust introduced three programs that prioritized community input. Community Directed Funds and Community Directed Youth Funds placed decision-making in the hands of community steering committees. Community Directed Funds gave funds to linked communities (sub-regions) and groups across the basin bound by similar interests, which then made their own decisions on how to allocate those funds. Community Directed Youth Funds emphasized youth voices by collecting and incorporating their feedback and giving them a place in making decisions. Engaging youth ensured they would benefit from activities and services that addressed their unique needs. The fund supported youth centres and groups like the Outlet Youth Centre in New Denver and Beaver Valley Youth Club in Montrose.

Similarly, in 2012 the Trust started the Social Grants Program, which continues to fund community-initiated and community-supported projects. Decisions are made by a committee of volunteers with experience in the social sector and community development.

In 2016, the Trust founded the Basin Youth Network as an extension of the Community Directed Youth Funds. The network provides youth and communities...
with the opportunity to collaborate and learn from one another when it comes to youth programs and services. People were pleased to see the grassroots model used to direct the youth fund continue. “I know that others joining the network will see success because of this approach too,” said Revelstoke Youth Liaison Megan Shandro. “It allows us to identify local priorities and act on them.”

As the Trust matured, so too did its capacity to act creatively and flexibly. Senior staff member Aimee Ambrosone said the Trust’s role had grown to “give a grant, to develop a partnership, to launch a program, to address a gap, to be an information resource, to be a facilitator of discussion, to own an asset, [and] to make sure that asset creates benefits back to the region.”

In 2013, the Trust established a new branch called Special Initiatives, dedicated to research and development. Executive Director of Special Initiatives Kindy Gosal explained that the Trust’s work in the Basin had increased, and it was being called on to play different roles, sometimes in areas in which the Trust had no experience or expertise. Special Initiatives remains dedicated to understanding problems, finding solutions and determining how to best offer support.

The Trust’s breadth of experience and resources allows it to adapt and meet challenges. One of these was poor internet connectivity, an issue residents began to battle in the early 2000s. As technology evolved,

“You can start with a vision, but you should be willing to change your vision over time. You need to learn from what you’re doing, listen to what people are saying.”

—LAURIE PAGE, BOARD MEMBER
rural internet infrastructure was either outdated or non-existent. This placed the Basin at a disadvantage. Businesses could not compete in the global economy, freelance workers were forced to commute or move to larger centres and students struggled to access educational material. Local governments fell behind in how they managed and shared information. The high-speed connection required to connect to the digital world of social media, online marketplaces and the entertainment landscape was absent or inaccessible.

The undeniable gap in internet services was not easily filled. Communities struggled to attract telecommunications providers because of the immense expense involved in laying new infrastructure, while efforts by community organizations to construct a broadband network fell short. The Trust helped fund some of those efforts: in 2001, it was involved in establishing the Columbia Mountain Open Network (CMON), a non-profit organization that aimed to create a Basin-wide open-access network. After successfully building network infrastructure in the Castlegar and Trail area, CMON’s work was stalled by financial difficulties. Basin residents’ need for connectivity persisted. The Trust answered the call in 2011 when it acquired CMON’s assets and announced plans to take up where CMON had left off.

The Trust established a new subsidiary to manage the task: Columbia Basin Broadband Corporation (CBBC). Laurie Page described this as a good lesson for all the Trust’s programs. “You can start with a vision, but you should be willing to change your vision over time,” said Page. “You need to learn from what you’re doing, listen to what people are saying, look at what’s needed, evaluate the opportunities and then, you know, try something else or try something new or try something the same.”

As it had done years earlier when acquiring hydro-power assets, the Trust suddenly had to learn the ins and outs of an unfamiliar industry. CBBC would not only develop and operate a broadband network, it would own that network and be responsible for attracting and selling to internet service providers. In some instances, CBBC itself took on the work of internet service provider to deliver connections straight to customers. CBBC and the Trust continue to fund broadband initiatives and to collaborate with regional committees and governments. Since 2013, CBBC has activated a network of over 900 kilometres. Its success demonstrates the Trust’s commitment to invest in people and communities.

The Trust also encouraged residents’ involvement in the renegotiation of the Columbia River Treaty. In 2014, both British Columbia and the United States gave notice of their wish to renegotiate the Treaty. When British Columbia began to investigate options for an updated

“\textbf{I’m very confident that the foundation we’ve laid together will continue to serve the Basin well. I hesitate to predict exactly what our many diverse communities will aspire to, but I am confident — I have no doubt at all — that the Trust will find clever and innovative ways to get there.}”

\textbf{GREG DECK, CHAIR, 2013–2015}
Agreement, the Trust helped ensure that the Province consulted Basin residents and other stakeholders. It provided input to the government on the consultation process and helped draft a Memorandum of Understanding to guide that process.\(^{57}\)

The Trust itself was not engaged in negotiations but helped educate and inform residents on issues surrounding the future of the Columbia River. It provided resources to Basin residents, governments and First Nations and advocated for these groups to be involved in the process. The Trust encouraged people to attend community meetings on the subject, and they co-hosted a regular Columbia Basin Transboundary Conference round the future of the Columbia River. It provided resources to Basin residents, governments and First Nations and advocated for these groups to be involved in the process. The Trust encouraged people to attend community meetings on the subject, and they co-hosted a regular Columbia Basin Transboundary Conference.

The Trust’s responsibilities remain driven by its strategic priorities. The first, set in 2007, helped guide the Trust’s three-year plan. Since then, the organization has updated its strategic priorities every five years. The update slated for 2018 coincided with an unprecedented revenue increase because of a new power sales agreement at Arrow Lakes Generating Station and the completion of Waneta Expansion. With more revenue, the Trust could deliver more benefits back to the Basin. According to Kindy Gosal, the organization would “be going from approximately $22 million, the expenditures for delivery of benefits [in 2014], to about $35 million in a three to five-year time period. That is a significant jump in resources.”\(^{58}\)

True to all its big decisions, the Trust made sure residents had a say in how the money would be spent. As it prepared to set its strategic priorities, the Trust recognized it could support them with better funding than ever before. The money, however, was not what was most important. In September 2014, the Trust launched a year-long public engagement process called Our Trust, Our Future. The goal was to reach people in their communities, hear their concerns and ideas and determine how the Trust could help. Johnny Strilaeff remembered those days: “We were literally talking with people at their kitchen tables,” said Strilaeff. “We were in community halls, alongside roads, and we were in gymnasia.”\(^{59}\)

At the centre of Our Trust, Our Future were 21 communities, 109 municipalities, three First Nations, 13 tourism associations, 12 business associations, 20 clubs and societies, 12 local government associations, 10 chambers of commerce and other organizations. True to all its big decisions, the Trust made sure residents had a say in how the money would be spent. As it prepared to set its strategic priorities, the Trust recognized it could support them with better funding than ever before. The money, however, was not what was most important. In September 2014, the Trust launched a year-long public engagement process called Our Trust, Our Future. The goal was to reach people in their communities, hear their concerns and ideas and determine how the Trust could help. Johnny Strilaeff remembered those days: “We were literally talking with people at their kitchen tables,” said Strilaeff. “We were in community halls, alongside roads, and we were in gymnasia.”

The community of Passmore was one of only two communities in the Trust’s project area that already had fibre. The Trust needed to serve at least 101 communities, 115 municipalities, 17 First Nations, 19 tourism associations, 14 business associations, 16 clubs and societies, 11 local government associations, nine chambers of commerce and other organizations. Twenty-five years ago, no one could have painted a picture as to what the Trust would be like today . . . To paint a picture of what the Trust is going to look like 25 years from now? I think we’ll all be amazed.”

RICK JENSEN, CHAIR, 2015–2019

The Trust recognizes that to be successful, this region needs better broadband services and a fast-track Internet network. The map shows the Trust’s fibre-optic network of over 975 kilometres and its projects currently under construction.
community workshops that invited participants to explore and collaborate on their visions for the Basin. People crowded into halls filled with displays and banners that provided information on the Trust’s activities, accomplishments and possibilities. They gathered at tables to listen and share ideas with their neighbours. They answered questions like “What’s most important?” and “What makes your community great?” They discussed what the Trust was doing well, and what it could do to improve. Blank pages and whiteboards overflowed with colourful notes at the close of each workshop, a visual symbol of the excitement residents felt for the future of the Basin and their belief in the Trust’s capacity to help them achieve their goals.

In addition to the workshops, the Trust set up information booths, created an interactive website, distributed workbooks and met with partners and collaborators. By the end of Our Trust, Our Future, the Trust had connected with over 3,000 residents and received more than 17,000 suggestions for the social, economic and environmental future of the Basin. Trust staff, advisory groups and Board members studied the intelligence they gathered to determine key ideas and translate them into strategic priorities.

Our Trust, Our Future produced 13 strategic priorities to focus the Trust from 2016 to 2020. Several priorities were familiar: ongoing support for the environment, economic development and helping communities identify and address their own challenges. New strategic priorities included recreation and physical activity, early childhood and childhood development, and renewable and alternative energy.

The Trust implemented fresh measures to address these priorities. It updated existing strategic plans that guided its social, economic and environmental goals and created more specific plans. Each priority had customized plans with details on how the Trust would approach and evaluate the success of particular objectives. For example, the Housing Initiatives Strategic Framework outlined three objectives: to support local and regional efforts to address housing priorities; to support Indigenous housing; and to strengthen the Basin’s social and economic well-being by funding, constructing and investing in multiple housing options. The plan identified two primary roles for the Trust in meeting these objectives: a funding partner and a project development advocate. Through its First Nations Housing Sustainability Initiative, for example, Our Trust, Our Future served first nations communities by providing funding, technical assistance and capacity building to help them develop and implement housing plans.

“This organization was an audacious idea, as audacious of an idea that I’ve ever been part of on either a personal or professional level. The individuals, the creators, the visionaries, the entire region that came together…they weren’t focused on a corporation. They were focused on an idea and an accomplishment.”

JOHNNY STRILAEFF, PRESIDENT AND CEO, 2016–PRESENT
the Trust assists First Nations communities in planning new projects. At the same time, it provides grants to help finance on-reserve builds, increase the capacity of communities to develop and manage housing assets; and support building repairs, energy retrofits and health and safety enhancements.38

The Trust further met strategic commitments by integrating aspects of its investments and delivery of benefits. The organization began to explore how it could deliver benefits—traditionally delivered through grants, partnerships and programs—through its investment portfolio. Investments could generate income to finance the Trust’s grants and programs, but they could also directly help the Basin. This was the principle behind the Impact Investment Fund, established in 2015. “Sometimes an opportunity doesn’t generate high financial returns, but it does generate other benefits,” explained CEO Neil Muth. “For example, it may create jobs, or support the well-being of people in the community, or help the environment. If so, we may now consider investing in it.”39

CHARTING A PATH     2010–2020

Through the Impact Investment Fund, the Trust and its delivery partners have supported an Impact Investment loan. The objective was to brew up local jobs and breathe new life into a historic Kaslo building made it a solid candidate for an Impact Investment loan. Angry Hen Brewing Co.’s mission to give back to the community. Aaron Davidson, founder of nutrition and fitness app Cronometer, was able to turn his part-time gig into a business with eight employees based in Revelstoke. “We’re offering a place for those people who have high potential,” said Davidson. “At least a couple of those people would have left Revelstoke if this work opportunity had not come about.”39

THRIVING IN CHANGE

The Trust’s internal resilience was tested in late 2016 with the sudden death of long-time CEO Neil Muth. For 11 years, Muth had guided the Trust as it grew and expanded services and investments across the Basin. He had led the Trust as it strengthened its relationships with people and communities. Members of the Trust relied on each other as they confronted operational and personal challenges after Muth’s death. “The [Trust] family kind of stuck together and weathered it, and services to residents were not impacted,” Board member Laurie Page remembered.40 Through the Impact Investment Fund, the Trust and its delivery partners have supported a range of business endeavours that create local jobs and support building repairs, energy retrofits and health and safety enhancements.40

The relatively smooth transition to a new CEO after Muth’s passing was a testament to his leadership.40 He had already begun discussions about a succession plan for his eventual retirement. Johnny Strilaeff became the new CEO. Formerly the Trust’s Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer, he had already begun discussions about a succession plan for his eventual retirement. Johnny Strilaeff became the new CEO. Formerly the Trust’s Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer, he had already begun discussions about a succession plan for his eventual retirement. Johnny Strilaeff became the new CEO. Formerly the Trust’s Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer, he had already begun discussions about a succession plan for his eventual retirement. Johnny Strilaeff became the new CEO. Formerly the Trust’s Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer, he had already begun discussions about a succession plan for his eventual retirement. Johnny Strilaeff became the new CEO. 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Formerly the Trust’s Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer, he had already begun discussions about a succession plan for his eventual retirement. Johnn...
Strilaeff had worked closely alongside Muth for many years. In fact, they had started with the Trust the same week in 2005. Strilaeff was a crucial force for the Trust’s ongoing growth, guiding the establishment of investment policies and procedures while serving as head of the investment portfolio. Like his predecessors, Strilaeff had a personal connection to the Basin, having been born and raised in Castlegar. He understood the uniqueness of the region and its importance. With firm policies and procedures in place at the Trust, his leadership style could prosper. “I recognize the importance of planning,” he said, “but I really embrace and excel at action and achievement.”

A forward-thinker, Strilaeff was excited to see what the Trust and the Basin could achieve. The Trust’s resilience under pressure demonstrated the strength of the organization and its staff. The Trust had easily adapted to change and had guided Basin communities to do the same. “Thriving in Change” was the theme of the 2017 symposium. Recognizing the inevitability of change in the Basin and around the world, the event encouraged participants to think creatively and collaboratively, and to anticipate challenges and find solutions.

With 450 delegates, the 2017 symposium was the Trust’s biggest one yet, and it had a guest to match. In his keynote address, astronaut Chris Hadfield encouraged residents to dream big and set “audacious” goals. Hadfield’s words echoed through the Kimberley conference centre. “The things we accomplish in life,” he said, “are a reflection of the edges of our expectations.” This rang true for the Trust and the communities and people it served. What could be accomplished together was unlimited.

This sense of limitlessness would spill over into the coming years as the Trust, together with people and communities, continued to improve the Basin’s society, economy and environment in ways large and small. In January 2019, the Trust reached a long-anticipated milestone: after several years of sharing ownership of Waneta Expansion with Fortis, the Trust and Columbia Power bought out the private utility company to gain full ownership over the powerhouse. Buying back Fortis’s 51 per cent share had a hefty price tag of $991 million. It was made possible through a loan from the provincial government.

The purchase was a critical milestone for the Trust and Columbia Power, which now had equal ownership over all of their hydropower assets. “That’s one of the
mandates that we successfully concluded,” said Board Chair Rick Jensen. “The Trust and Columbia Power had achieved their goal of owning, developing and operating all four hydropower assets for the benefit of the Basin. The next generations will reap the rewards of the Waneta Expansion deal, along with the revenue from Arrow Lakes Generating Station, Brilliant Dam and Brilliant Expansion. The spirit of the Columbia Basin Trust Act was being fulfilled.

TRUSTED FOUNDATIONS

Through the Trust, the people of the Basin have created legacies of social, economic and environmental well-being and a foundation for future success. Together, they transformed the devastating impacts of the Columbia River Treaty into an opportunity for growth and improvement. Using the money endowed to them through the Treaty’s downstream benefits, the Trust has invested in the Basin in a thousand ways and grown into an organization that facilitates change, generates thought, empowers residents and forges solutions alongside its communities. Whether to improve literacy, ease homelessness, connect residents to the internet or transform a residential school from a place of hurt into
a place of healing, the Trust partners with residents and gives them the tools, resources, funds and support necessary to achieve their goals. The Trust co-operates with environmental groups seeking to conserve land and wildlife; organizations building affordable and accessible housing for families, seniors and First Nations; and those advancing arts and culture in the Basin. The Trust works and shares information with local and regional governments. Programs and networking opportunities for youth engage the Basin’s young people, who will inherit the Trust and its legacy. As of 2020, the Trust has over 70 active programs and initiatives, each making a special and unique contribution.

Reflecting on astronaut Chris Hadfield’s words at the 2017 symposium about audacious ideas, CEO Johnny Stilp described the Trust as “an audacious idea, as audacious of an idea that I’ve ever been part of on either a personal or professional level. The individuals, the creators, the visionaries, the entire region that came together . . . they weren’t focused on a corporation. They were focused on an idea and an accomplishment.”

What had begun as the dream of a handful of individuals seeking to overcome the damage caused by the Columbia River Treaty dams has exceeded the expectations of thousands of Basin residents: those who gathered at Castlegar’s ballpark in 1992 to discuss the Treaty and its impacts; the members of the Columbia River Treaty Committee; the Trust’s first Board of Directors who stood on the steps of the provincial legislature the day the Columbia Basin Trust Act was passed; those who shared their thoughts, both positive and critical, at community meetings and symposia; and everyone who contributed, partnered or worked with the Trust along the way. “I’m very confident that the foundation we’ve laid together will continue to serve the Basin well,” said Board member Greg Dock. “I hesitate to predict exactly what our many diverse communities will aspire to, but I am confident — I have no doubt at all — that the Trust will find clever and innovative ways to get there.”

As it looks toward the future, Columbia Basin Trust is steadfast in its commitment to inspire and empower the people of the Basin to thrive and dream about the unlimited possibilities they can accomplish together.
An idea. For community. For people. The Columbia Basin Trust began with an idea. Twenty-five years ago, no one could have imagined all that might be possible. Thank you to the people of the Basin for your remarkable efforts. Together, we are strengthening the places we love.
Many of the visionaries who formed the Trust had experienced firsthand the adverse impacts to the Basin region resulting from the Columbia River Treaty. Rather than dwelling on those negatives, they chose instead to look forward, and in doing so they empowered residents to create a better region, one that would be influenced by the dreams and aspirations of all Basin residents.

Twenty-five years later, as we conclude this book, the people of the Basin are again facing extraordinary challenges. As the coronavirus pandemic disrupts all of society, people of the Basin are banding together, unified in their focus to persevere and be more resilient.

In partnership with the Trust, Basin residents have made tremendous strides in improving social, economic and environmental well-being in the Basin. Even as the world throws curve balls, residents continue to develop bold, innovative ideas for the future of the region, and we continue to provide the resources needed to transform those ideas into reality.

The possibilities for our next 25 years are vast. In 2019/20, we offered over 70 programs, including some tailor-made for the pandemic, which supported more than 2,160 projects. If our past is any indication, these numbers will only continue to rise. With this support, there’s no limit to what the people of the Basin can achieve.

Residents old and new often speak with conviction that their children and grandchildren will inherit and benefit from the Trust. As we set out on the next leg of our journey together, we hope to make the next generation proud.

Jocelyn Carver
Board Chair

The AFTERWORD
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
1995–2020

CURRENT DIRECTORS
- Adam Chisholm 2018–2021
- Bob Kraft 2015–2020
- Darryl Johnson 2018–2020
- Don Macdonald 2017–2020 (Chair)
- Eda McDonald 2017–2020
- Howard McDonald 2019–2020
- James Olden
- Jinny Olden

FORMER DIRECTORS
- Mike Birdstone 2001–2003
- Jeff Chisholm 1997–1999
- Mike Chisholm 1997–2000
- Joe Conroy 2003–2005
- Jim Doyle 1997–2002
- Greg Deck 2006–2014
- Peter Deck 2000–2013
- Ivan Robinson 1996–1998
- Neil Muth 2016–2019
- Johnny Strilaeff 2019–2021

FOUNDING BOARD OF DIRECTORS, JULY 1995

- Josh Smienk 2012–2014 (Chair), 2015–2019

TRUST PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS
- Johnny Strilaeff 2020–present
- Neil Muth 2020–2021
- Ivan Robinson 1995–2006
- Neil Muth 2016–2019
- Johnny Strilaeff 2019–2021

OUR LOGO

In 1996, the Trust held a competition to determine its first logo. It received 109 submissions. The successful logo, featuring an arrow curving through three mountains, first appeared in the Trust’s 1997 Annual Report. The logo was updated in 2001, retaining its focus on the natural landscape. In 2014, the trust introduced a new visual identity. The new logo features a mosaic of vibrant greens and brilliant blues to highlight the collective value of “trust” that the organization shares with Basin residents and partners.

"Trust introduced a new visual identity. The new logo features a mosaic of vibrant greens and brilliant blues to highlight the collective value of “trust” that the organization shares with Basin residents and partners."
Half a century ago, the lives of people in the Columbia Basin changed forever when a series of dams altered their homes and landscapes. This book is the story of how people took their power back. By raising their voices, facing challenges and putting in years of hard work, the region’s residents created Columbia Basin Trust. Since 1995, they have supported this exceptional resource as it, in turn, has supported them. Learn how Basin residents and the Trust have travelled this unprecedented path together, bringing life to dreams and helping the region flourish.