



Restoring Nature's Balance.

News Release

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For Immediate Release

Gaming Grant Funds Restoration Projects

A \$266,000 community gaming grant from the BC Government will contribute to East Kootenay grassland restoration in 2010.

Work is well underway on the first grant-funded contract, a thinning project on Cutts Pasture, a high-priority restoration site along Hwy 93 south of Elko.

East Kootenay MLA Bill Bennett toured the project site today with members of the Rocky Mountain Trench Ecosystem Restoration Program.

Bennett, a long-time supporter of the restoration program, said he is always impressed by the wide range of benefits such projects generate.

Eight fallers and three equipment operators, employed by Scott Wills Contracting of Cranbrook, have been working since late January on the 110-hectare Cutts Pasture restoration project.

The crew is hand falling dense stands of pole-sized trees, mostly ponderosa pine, then machine skidding and piling them for possible future sale as pulpwood.

Thinning will reduce forest cover from 2550 trees per hectare to 150. Removing the small trees and leaving the biggest ones restores the site's grassland characteristics, which will provide significant benefits to a number of wildlife species as well as domestic cattle.

Two endangered birds, Lewis's woodpecker and long-billed curlew, inhabit the site. The woodpecker requires large open spaces for foraging, and big standing dead trees for nesting. Curlews nest on the ground in grasslands and feed on the insects found there.

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Cutts Pasture is also within designated ungulate winter range, and is a tenured grazing site for a local ranching operation. Opening up the forest canopy will encourage growth of the native grasses and shrubs that provide forage for elk, deer and cattle.

Soil in the thinned area is the type preferred by badgers, another endangered species that thrives in grasslands and will benefit from restoration.

Thinning will be followed within a few years by a controlled burn to remove saplings and rejuvenate grassland vegetation.

The area has high archaeological value for the Ktunaxa so machine work is carried out to minimize disturbance on locations that may contain evidence of historical First Nations use.

Ray Morello, chair of the restoration program's steering committee, said up to 50 per cent of the region's grasslands and open forests have been overtaken by forest ingrowth and tree encroachment.

"This grant is much appreciated. It will contribute to restoration projects from Radium Hot Springs to the US border," Morello said.

A coalition of stakeholders representing government, industry and the public directs the restoration program. The stakeholder group, established in 1998, is responsible for planning, funding and delivering on-the-ground operations and related activities. The goal is to restore about 107,000 hectares of Crown grassland and open forest over a 30-year period.

Visit www.trenchsociety.com for more information on ecosystem restoration in the Rocky Mountain Trench.

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At the Cutts Pasture project site. Above from left: Mario Rocca, Fernie, East Kootenay Wildlife Association; Steve Temple, Fernie, Tembec; Dan Murphy, Cranbrook, Trench Society; East Kootenay MLA Bill Bennett; Ray Morello, Cranbrook, Ecosystem Restoration Program Chair; Don Lancaster, Mayook, Kootenay Livestock Association; Randy Harris, Cranbrook, Ecosystem Restoration Program Team Leader; Scott Wills, Cranbrook, contractor. Below: thinning underway.



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Rocky Mountain Trench Ecosystem Restoration Program

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PROGRAM PARTNERS

- BC Parks & Protected Areas
- BC Timber Sales
- East Kootenay Wildlife Association
- Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program (Columbia Basin)
- Galloway Lumber Co. Ltd.
- Kootenay Livestock Association
- Ministry of Agriculture & Lands
- Ministry of Environment
- Ministry of Forests & Range
- Nature Trust of BC
- Parks Canada
- Range Advisory Group
- Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resources Society (Trench Society)
Representing Cranbrook Archery Club, East Kootenay Wildlife Association,
Kootenay Livestock Association, Rocky Mountain Naturalists, Southern
Guides & Outfitters Association, The Land Conservancy of BC – Kootenay
Region, Waldo Stockbreeders Association, Wildsight, Windermere District
Farmers Institute
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