

DATE OF MEETING MAY 21, 2025

AUTHORED BY KIRSTY MACDONALD

SUBJECT COMMUNITY WATERSHED RESTORATION GRANTS 2025

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To allocate the funds for the Community Watershed Restoration Grants (the “Grant”) for this year.

Recommendation

That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council approve a total of \$20,000 in accordance with the Community Watershed Restoration Grant Guidelines and Criteria as attached to the Staff Report titled “Community Watershed Restoration Grant 2025”, dated 2025-MAY-21, and that the grant allocations be as follows:

- a) Nanaimo Area Land Trust - \$4,166
Project: Maintenance of Beaver Dam to Secure Flows
- b) Wellington Action Committee - \$3,800
Project: Diver Lake Western Painted Turtle Protection
- c) Pacific Garden Co-Housing - \$7,034
Project: Habitat Restoration Project-Chase River
- d) Wildcoast Ecological Society - \$5,000
Project: East Wellington Park’s Ecosystem Restoration and Wildlife Education Program

BACKGROUND

The Community Watershed Restoration Grant was initiated by Council in 2021 to support organizations, environmental non-profits, or individual residents that aim to carry out projects that advance the City Plan’s green goals such as watershed restoration projects, urban stream and riparian restoration enhancement, natural environment protection, and climate change adaptation solutions.

The Grant intake for 2025 was launched on 2025-FEB-14 and remained open until 2025-APR-07. Grant information was posted on the City’s website and advertised through news releases, social media, and direct emails to neighbourhood associations and community stewardship groups. Staff also offered an information session on 2025-FEB-20 to discuss the Grant guidelines and Grant goals with prospective applicants. The evaluation of applications involved an integrated review committee with Staff from several divisions of Parks, Recreation and Culture as well as the Finance department.

DISCUSSION

Five Grant applications were received totalling \$31,636 in requests. Staff reviewed the applications according to the Grant guidelines and criteria (Attachment A) and City Plan and the Integrated Action Plan priorities. Below is a summary table of the Grant.

Table 1: 2025 Community Watershed Restoration Grant Application Summary (in ranked order).

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Project</u>	<u>Requested Amount</u>	<u>Recommended Amount</u>
Nanaimo Area Land Trust	Maintenance of Beaver Dam to Secure Flows	\$4,166	\$4,166
Wellington Action Committee	Diver Lake Western Painted Turtle Protection	\$3,800	\$3,800
Pacific Garden Co-housing	Habitat Restoration Project-Chase River	\$8,670	\$7,034
Wildcoast Ecological Society	East Wellington Park's Ecosystem Restoration and Wildlife Education Program	\$5,000	\$5,000
Kayla Zielke	Chase River Watershed Project	\$10,000	<u>0</u>

1. Nanaimo Area Land Trust

The Nanaimo Area Land Trust has a successful track record of improving watershed health through this grant and submitted the strongest ranked application this year. In 2024, they carried out a benchmarking monitoring project along the Cottle Creek as well as a partnership “cleanup” project along Joseph Creek with students from Rock City School. Their application this year focusses on a beaver dam assessment and restoration proposal in Linley Valley Cottle Lake Park at the outlet of Cottle Creek. This dam has undergone change over the last 20 years that the City has owned this park and the project is of benefit from a parks management and downstream health perspective. Staff look forward to learning more about the dam dynamics and their consultant's recommendations.

2. Wellington Action Committee

The Wellington Action Committee received grant funding in previous years for water quality monitoring at Diver Lake and Long Lake (2023) and an environmental assessment of Diver Lake (2024). They are actively removing invasive plants at Diver Lake Park and other neighbourhood locations under the Partners in Parks program. Their application for this year focusses on surveying nests and basking sites for the Western Painted Turtle. This work would be done in partnership with the City, Nanaimo Area Land Trust and the Province. Staff feel that this is a worthwhile project that can benefit the park, the overall Diver Lake watershed, and our knowledge of this red-listed species. Staff would also like to ensure that this project raises public awareness about this and other special turtle habitat areas in Nanaimo (mapping, signage, videos etc.). Staff will also ensure that this project is done to accordance best practices for this species and without duplicating any ongoing work by the project partners.

3. Pacific Garden Cohousing

The Pacific Garden Cohousing submitted the only request for funds to spend on private property. In 2023, they received funding from this Grant to develop a wetland on their property. In 2024, they received additional funds to remove invasive plants (primarily reed canary grass and blackberry) and replace with native vegetation. This year they are again reapplying to remove invasive plants on an additional 1 acre and replant with native vegetation. Staff feel that this application is worthy and that efforts over the last few years are improving the health of the Chase River watershed. As part of this year's recommended partial funding toward this ongoing project, staff would also like to see this group work with our staff to further market and share this successful work with the public through partnerships tours/videos.

4. Wildcoast Ecological Society

The Wildcoast Ecological Society is a newer organization in Nanaimo, with a past project track record in the Lower Mainland. Their application focussed on removal of invasive plants and replanting along the Millstone River in East Wellington Park as well as a collaboration project with the Stream of Dreams Mural Society. Staff are very supportive of the workplan for East Wellington Park and would like to proceed with funding the proposed invasive removal and riparian planting efforts at this site which are consistent with Nanaimo's Integrated Action Plan and the East Wellington Park Management Plan. Staff were not supportive of funding the suggested art and school projects and would like to focus this group on watershed restoration and planting to support the Millstone watershed and East Wellington Park. It is unclear if the group has been successful in several of the partner grants that they are applying for, but staff would like to work with them on a narrowed and focussed scope.

5. Kayla Zielke

Kayla Zielke is a local biologist with aspirations to improve habitat in the Chase River. Supporting health in the Chase River is a focus of City Plan and Nanaimo's goals. Staff would like to learn more about this project and potentially support it at a future time. However, there were many gaps in this application including where the issues were geographically, who's jurisdiction they are under, how the site would be accessed physically to carry out the work, what professional assessments have been completed to support the needs and impacts, who the Partners would be and what communication/collaboration with Snuneymuxw' might be carried out, and budget details. Consequently, no funding is recommended at this time.

OPTIONS

1. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council approve a total of \$20,000 in accordance with the Community Watershed Restoration Grant Guidelines and Criteria as attached to the Staff Report titled "Community Watershed Restoration Grant 2025", dated 2025-MAY-21, and that the grant allocations be as follows:
 - a) Nanaimo Area Land Trust - \$4,166
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 - d) Wildcoast Ecological Society - \$5,000
Project- East Wellington Park's Ecosystem Restoration and Wildlife Education Program
- The advantages of this option: The recommended funding supports projects that fulfill the criteria of the grant and advance City Plan green goals. These are all projects that are community driven and would not otherwise get done without partnerships and efforts.
 - The disadvantages of this option: None of the projects are identified in the Integrated Action Plans or were previously priority projects in the Parks Operations workplans. Due to the smaller scale and nature of the projects, it's hard to measure or quantify their significance and impact.
 - Financial Implications: Council will not have the option to spend the funds on other projects in 2025 or on late applications.
2. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council not approve the \$20,000 expenditure of the \$20,000 allocated for the 2025 Community Watershed Restoration Grant, but instead suggest priority site(s) as identified in the Integrated Action Plans and invite all groups to focus on that project i.e. Millstone River riparian area restoration as identified in the East Wellington Park Plan, Departure Creek and Catstream enhancement, or Linley Point environmental management.
- The advantages of this option: This would help advance already identified strategic priorities.
 - The disadvantages of this option: Volunteers and community groups have their own goals and priorities that may not align with City projects. They may not participate in re-focussed projects.
 - Financial Implications: Allocated money would not go to community organizations but instead would be spent internally or by contract on trees, plant material and other project needs.
3. That Council provide other direction.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The Community Watershed Restoration Grant supports community volunteers and organizations with up to \$20,000 available for projects that advance Nanaimo City Plan's policies and initiatives.
- Staff received five applications, with total requested funding of \$31,636 in the 2025 intake.
- The City supports environmentally focused community organizations and partnership projects through a number of funding sources and collaborations including the Community Watershed Restoration Grant, Community Environmental Sustainability Project grant, and Partners in Parks process and program.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: COMMUNITY WATERSHED RESTORATION GRANT 2025.
ATTACHMENT B: HYPERLINK TO APPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY WATERSHED
RESTORATION GRANT 2025 |

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