



# Connections

## Newsletter

Connecting and protecting habitat from  
Yellowstone to Yukon  
so people and nature can thrive.

Camas to Condors is a landscape-scale climate resilience initiative in Nez Perce Territory. Photo: Scott Brennan

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*The Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative is a trans-border, non-profit organization that connects and protects 3,400 kilometers (2,100 miles) of landscape, to support the health of people and wildlife. It's no simple task, but together with our supporters and more than 460 partners over our history, we're making it happen.*

### 3 EXCITING WINS FOR NATURE

... you helped make possible! More at [y2y.net/2022](https://y2y.net/2022).



#### FUNDING ACQUIRED!

>\$1.9M in federal funding from Canada will directly support connected habitats in B.C. and Alberta, improving wildlife movement across Highway 3 through a series of wildlife crossings.

#### CONNECTIVITY RESTORED!

Y2Y and Vital Ground Foundation protected another 49 acres of a key wildlife corridor in Montana, helping grizzly bears and other wildlife travel across the valleys between the Cabinet and Bitterroot mountain ranges.



#### CORRIDOR UNDERWAY!

Idaho's first wildlife overpass and fencing under construction near Boise will help the 50,000 deer and elk migrating here annually.



## PROGRESS MADE

### *Pluie's trail: Clearing the way for wildlife connectivity*

**P**luie the wolf: the famous female canine has long wowed researchers and nature-lovers alike. In 1991, this radio-collared wolf traveled a remarkable distance 15 times the size of Banff National Park and 10 times that of Yellowstone National Park!

Her movements through epic mountain landscapes were eye-opening and inspiring. But not unusual. Other animals, from lynx to bull trout, have also been shown to travel great distances.

However, it's Pluie's story that intertwines with Y2Y's beginnings. To this day, her travels inspire the work we do for all wide-ranging wildlife. She showed us how effective conservation must go beyond borders and reduce human-created barriers to movement.

In discovering how far this one wolf could wander, we learned more about what needed to be done to help wildlife stay connected and protected for years to come. And since then, we've come a long way with your help!

Today, 30 years since Y2Y started, we can celebrate how far we've come in accomplishing our mission — and the 'we' includes you! Because of your support, hundreds of wildlife crossing structures are now enabling wildlife like grizzly bears and wolves to cross roads safely; herds of nearly extinct caribou are recovering; growing numbers of protected areas are benefiting ecosystems and communities; and more.

Explore the stories within this newsletter and get a glimpse at the incredible impact of your support over the years, combined with a bit of patience, many partners, and lots of perseverance. Thank you!



Camas plants grow in seasonal floodplains and wet meadows.  
Photo: Brittney Le Blanc

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# A resilient future for people and nature

## *Your support strengthens the link between land and well-being*

When Pelah Hoyt, Y2Y’s director of landscape connectivity, thinks about her connection to nature, two people come to mind: her grandmother and mother.

Her grandmother was an artist, creating paintings inspired by the natural world. Pelah’s mother was a public radio reporter.

In the 1990s, her mother went to the Nez Perce Tribe’s reservation in Idaho to cover stories about their salmon recovery and wolf reintroduction efforts.

More recently, Pelah returned to the region alongside Y2Y staff and our board of directors as part of our spring board meeting and project field trip.

“I can remember when I first learned about the Nez Perce Tribe’s approach to conservation. I was in awe of their vision and dedication to bring back all the animals that were once here,” recounts Pelah. “Today, they continue their work to heal the relationship between people and the land.”

As part of the field trip, the Y2Y team learned about tribally-led climate resilience initiatives, including a

data collection program led by Nez Perce gatherers, analyzing climate change impacts to traditional wild foods.

Since 2018, Y2Y and partners have been working with the Nez Perce Tribe on their Indigenous-led ‘Camas to Condors’ initiative.

The goal is to create landscape-scale climate solutions to support connectivity for wildlife, restore habitats with traditionally harvested plants, and nurture traditional lifeways.

This initiative recognizes that people whose cultures emerged from deep intimacy with their homelands are well positioned to be its most responsive advocates and stewards.

“We know how to do this work and lead this work. We’re healing as a people. It’s a whole system restoration,” says one gatherer from the Tribe.

Y2Y is proud to fund this program, and support collaborative planning efforts to bring the project’s vision to life.



In June 2023, Y2Y staff and board joined Nez Perce members for a tour of the Camas to Condors initiative.  
Photo: Meadow Wheaton

Its namesake, the camas plant, is a deep-purple flower found in wetlands, while the critically endangered California condor is the largest North American land bird. Together, they represent the resilience of ecosystems the Nimíipuu — the Nez Perce people — have stewarded since time immemorial.

Extending from the mouth of the Columbia River to West Yellowstone, the Nez Perce Tribe’s traditional territory and usual and accustomed areas are home to some of the largest undeveloped tracts of public and protected land in the U.S.

Restoring the landscape here supports Y2Y’s mission of connecting and protecting habitat so people and nature can thrive.

As someone who supports this mission, you’ll understand why preserving this large, undisturbed landscape is so important.

Climate change is disrupting the balance that sustains biodiversity in this region. Drought, heat waves, fires, and erosion are killing fish and spreading diseases in wild game. These extreme shifts also impact the availability and quality of wild gathered foods and medicines.

These changes are not mere inconveniences to the Nimíipuu — they represent an existential threat to their way of life.

“Traditional gatherers in the Nez Perce Tribe have sounded the alarm about climate impacts on cultural plants for years,” says Pelah.

“Following the leadership of the Nimíipuu will heal these landscapes for plants, wildlife, and people for generations to come.”

Central to this work is the connection between nature thriving and people’s healing. Nimíipuu Behavioral Health and the Wellbriety Program are part of the initiative, welcoming people in addiction recovery into this work to restore connection with the land, their culture, and their well-being.

“By knowing our cultural ways and having a relationship with the land, that’s how we’re going to be ok,” says another gatherer from the Tribe.

You are helping projects like Camas to Condors come to life and advancing Indigenous-led climate action.

Together, we’re supporting climate solutions and landscape connectivity at a scale nature needs.

Thank you for supporting projects that heal people and nature across the Yellowstone to Yukon region.



### qem'es plant

qem'es is the Nez Perce word for camas. The plant has a starchy bulb that is a culturally important food and is a focal species for Camas to Condors, a landscape-scale climate resilience initiative.

Photo: National Park Service



The Stoney Nakoda Exshaw wildlife arch just east of Canmore, Alta.  
Photo: Tim Johnson

# Connecting wildlife in Alberta and beyond

## *Thanks to you, animals are crossing the road safely*

**M**att Balestrieri, a Y2Y monthly donor, vacationed with his wife in Canmore, Alberta, years ago. They dreamed of moving to the Bow Valley region one day, known for the Canadian Rocky Mountains, turquoise lakes, and iconic wildlife, including moose, elk, and bears.

He recently returned with his father to admire the newest addition to the network of safe animal crossings in the Yellowstone to Yukon region: the Stoney Nakoda Exshaw wildlife arch on the Trans-Canada Highway, just east of Canmore.

“This wildlife crossing is the combination of something practical and beautiful,” says Matt. “Wildlife need to have as normal a life as possible as we encroach into nature with roads. Wildlife crossings are a great tool to protect both animals and people.”

Y2Y champions connectivity and collaboration in conservation. The Stoney Nakoda Exshaw wildlife arch is the result of more than a decade of advocacy and support from people just like you. After years of research and advocating for this crossing, the overpass and fencing are scheduled for completion by the end of November. We are now much closer to achieving safer roads for both wildlife and people, and this progress is truly thrilling!

This overpass will reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and help animals reach critical habitats through the Bow Valley and beyond. Maintaining strong populations of wildlife is also an essential step in realizing First Nations’ Treaty rights by supporting their efforts to rebuild connections with the landscape and their culture.

This is the first wildlife overpass in Alberta to be built outside a national park. Every year, millions of vehicles travel this highway, and this number is predicted to increase. Evidence of unsuccessful animal crossings is visible along the highway’s edges, with scattered bones serving as a grim reminder of the need for better solutions. All right where the crossing arches over Highway 1.

“Animals such as deer and elk cross the highway for food, water, and shelter. Larger animals, like grizzly bears and wolves, need space to roam to keep their gene pools diverse and connected, ensuring they don’t go extinct by getting stuck in one small and fragmented landscape,” says Tim Johnson, Y2Y’s landscape connectivity specialist. “Our hope is to see a series of smaller crossings and wildlife fencing linked to this arch, creating a system of continuous connectivity from the Kananaskis River and through Banff National Park, all the way to Yoho National Park in British Columbia.”

This project is proof of the power of people coming together to build a system of safety across large landscapes. And it’s not the only one. Many other wildlife crossing structures in the Yellowstone to Yukon region are currently in various stages of implementation. Watch for a new crossing count update in 2024!

Thank you for believing in our vision: a region where wildlife can roam freely across large and intact landscapes, where healthy nature supports animals and communities, and where people can experience nature safely.



Caribou newly released from the calving pen.  
Photo: Wildlife Infometrics

# Marking a decade of Indigenous-led caribou recovery in B.C.

*You helped save a population of mountain caribou on the brink of extinction*

Ten years ago, a population of caribou in northeast British Columbia (B.C.) was on the brink of local extinction. Only 38 caribou roamed the landscape — a far cry from the thousands that once traveled these same lands.

But the Klinse-Za\* caribou herd is increasing in size, thanks to the tireless leadership from the Saulneau First Nations and West Moberly First Nations, the commitment Y2Y, other partner groups and governments, and your support. Today, more than 114 caribou, including 17 new calves, live in the Klin-se-za\*/Twin Sisters Protected Area, a critical habitat you also helped expand in 2020.

Dr. Libby Ehlers, Y2Y's director of conservation science, was recently invited to join Saulneau First Nations for their Pemmican Days Festival, an annual celebration of tradition and culture. This gathering and event also highlighted a decade of success for the caribou recovery project and its cultural significance to the Nations and conservation community.

During the festivities, Libby saw the Saulneau First Nations' caribou maternal pen for the first time, watching as Indigenous caribou guardians, Starr Gauthier and Lucas Talving, cared for the female caribou and calves — strengthening them for their release back into their habitat.

"Caribou are an important part of a thriving ecosystem," says Libby. "For the West Moberly and Saulneau First Nations, an increasing population of Klinse-Za caribou brings hope for the return of an animal that has been central to their culture and way of life for thousands of years."

More than just a maternal pen, this project is a landscape-level, Indigenous-led recovery effort with support from

partners and people like you to create a protected home for these caribou.

All of your efforts to write letters, donate, and show up for caribou is making a difference for people and nature. You proved to decision-makers that caribou need urgent action and healthy habitats to persist and thrive.

Your actions helped lead to the 2020 caribou partnership agreement, protecting roughly 7,500-square-kilometers (1.8 million acres). This area is critical in the recovery success of caribou we see today.

Because of you, we continue to support West Moberly First Nations and Saulneau First Nations to restore degraded land impacted by industrial development and rebuild the caribou population so plants, wildlife, and people can not just survive, but thrive.

"We're just like the caribou. We're in their territory. To share it with them and help them thrive is pretty special," adds Starr Gauthier, Caribou Guardian and member of the Saulneau First Nations, in an interview for *Caribou Homeland*, the moving documentary showcasing the impacts of this Indigenous-led initiative.

We aim to protect more land, recover more caribou, and advance Indigenous-led conservation.

"Bringing this caribou herd back from the brink of extinction is a collective effort. Your support has been felt by the Y2Y team, First Nations and decision-makers alike," says Libby. "Together, we are ensuring caribou remain part of the landscape for generations to come. Now that's something to celebrate."

\*Note: The spelling of Klinse-Za and Klin-se-za differs according to use and is intentional.

# Protecting nature for good

## Supporting Indigenous-led protected areas also supports Y2Y's vision

The Yellowstone to Yukon region is North America's most intact large mountain landscape — and that's not by accident. It's because people like you came together to make sure it stayed that way.

Since 1993, you have helped Y2Y and partners increase protected areas across the region by more than 80 percent! This includes supporting a growing number of Indigenous-led conservation efforts, such as Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) and other Indigenous-led protected areas in Canada.

In the Y2Y region, a quarter of protected areas are managed or co-managed by Indigenous Peoples, with more to come. These agreements and declarations are a powerful expression of Indigenous rights; and they play a crucial role in connecting and protecting landscapes on a large scale so nature and people can thrive — the heartbeat of everything we do.

People like you are also at the heart of this important work. In 2023, your support enabled Y2Y to develop

a report on the benefits of IPCAs for people, our communities and the ecosystems we all depend on. The report shares examples where Indigenous Peoples are taking the lead, and ways non-Indigenous people can be part of this work.

Y2Y is working to be a trusted ally in Indigenous-led conservation in the ways that also support our vision. With many First Nations' capacity stretched, and a lack of clear legal frameworks to create IPCAs, non-Indigenous partners, including Y2Y, play crucial support roles: building political will, public awareness and support, and resources needed to ensure the protection of some of the most biodiverse landscapes in the region.

Your support of conservation solutions — including Indigenous-led protected areas — is critical in fostering a thriving future for people and nature.

**Learn about IPCAs and why they matter in Y2Y's report: [y2y.net/ipca](https://y2y.net/ipca).**

## Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative



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To make a donation call us toll-free at (800) 966-7920 or make a secure donation online at [y2y.net/donate](https://y2y.net/donate). The Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative is a 501(c) 3 public charity in the United States, IRS #81-0535303. In Canada, the Initiative is a Registered Canada Revenue 149(1)(f) Charity, Business Number 86430 1841 RR0001. Y2Y holds a four-star rating with Charity Navigator.

## Monthly donors are the cornerstone of our work.

Your consistent and dependable gift ensures we can continue to connect and protect essential habitat, and supports on-the-ground projects that keep our wild places wild, communities healthy and our water and air clean and pure.

### Contact information

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### I support Y2Y

Yes, I would like to donate \$ \_\_\_\_\_ / month, applied to my credit card on the first (1st) of each month.

Yes, I would like to make a one-time donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### Payment method

My check is enclosed, made payable to the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative  
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Signature: \_\_\_\_\_