

Manitoba Habitat
Conservancy



2025 Annual Report

Table of Contents

5 Overview

- 5 Message from the Chair and CEO
- 6 2025 At A Glance
- 7 Since 1986
- 8 Trusts Summary
- 11 Programs Summary
- 12 Financial Overview

14 Defining Moments

22 Thank You







Message from the Chair and CEO

As we close out another remarkable year, we find ourselves reflecting not just on what we've achieved, but on the people and partnerships that made it possible. In 2025, our Program Delivery team perpetually conserved 3,392 acres of habitat. Over 500 acres of habitat that was protected through four donations valued at \$721,800. Behind every one of those acres is a landowner who placed their trust in us, and a team that showed up to honour it.

This year also brought a milestone we've been steadily working toward: surpassing \$60 million in cumulative granting through our Conservation and GROW Trusts. A \$10.5 million investment from the Trust is resulting in over \$33 million in conservation funding across the province. We're seeing the ripple effects across Manitoba; wetlands restored, cleaner water, and working lands stewarded with care. These aren't just numbers on a page; they represent local organizations, farmers, and communities doing the hard, rewarding work of conservation every day.

With our 2021 Strategic Plan now successfully implemented, we spent this year planning for what comes next: a new strategic direction focused on extending our brand, deepening partnerships, and strengthening the operational foundations that will carry us forward. We welcomed five new hires, celebrated three promotions, and continued to invest in a culture that our team describes as supportive, collaborative, and genuinely connected. As one team member put it, the diversity of experience, strengths, and knowledge within MHC is what builds our capacity as an organization. We couldn't agree more.

Looking ahead, 2026 will mark a particularly meaningful chapter: our 40th anniversary. Four decades of Homegrown Conservation, made possible by generations of landowners, partners, funders, staff, and board members who believed Manitoba's natural heritage was worth protecting. As we prepare to celebrate that milestone (and as you read this now, we are likely in the middle of those celebrations!), we want to thank everyone who has been part of the journey and everyone who will help shape what comes next. Conservation, as we've learned again and again, begins with people, trust, and the shared belief that conserving Manitoba's natural heritage is a responsibility that belongs to each and every one of us.



This year wasn't just about the land. It was about the people who **make this work possible.**



RHIAN CHRISTIE //
CHAIR



STEPHEN CARLYLE //
CEO

// OVERVIEW

2025 at a Glance

PROGRAMS

3,392

acres of habitat conserved
across Manitoba

522

acres of land donated to MHC

17,067

acres of land enhanced for wildlife and
landowners

74

enhancement projects complete province-
wide



THE TRUSTS

4,729

acre feet of flood storage created,
enough to fill 2,330 Olympic swimming pools

294,000⁺

lbs of phosphorus removed,
enough to stop algae blooms in dozens of
lakes

59,000

tonnes of CO2 sequestered,
equal to removing about 12,700 cars from
the road for a full year.



Since 1986



\$60M⁺

invested from The Trusts

16,000⁺

acres of MHC-owned,
publicly accessible lands

15

species at risk benefitting
from conservation

270,000

acres of land permanently conserved

‘25

Trusts Summary

\$10.5M

IN TRUST FUNDS APPROVED

\$22.5M

IN MATCH FUNDS

36

FUNDED PROJECTS

About

The Conservation, GROW, and Wetlands GROW Trusts are long-term investments in the future of Manitoba's natural landscapes. Established by the Province of Manitoba and managed by The Winnipeg Foundation, these trusts generate annual funding that supports conservation efforts across working landscapes in Manitoba, from wetlands to grasslands and riparian zones to forests. As the administrator of these funding programs, we are proud to review and approve projects, monitor their progress, and report on outcomes. Every step ensures that conservation dollars are spent where they can have the greatest impact on both people and nature.







‘25 Programs Summary

20,000

acres of land conserved or enhanced

\$3.7M

in payments and donation receipts to
landowners.

522

acres of land donated
roughly 10x the size of
The Forks in Winnipeg

Financial Overview

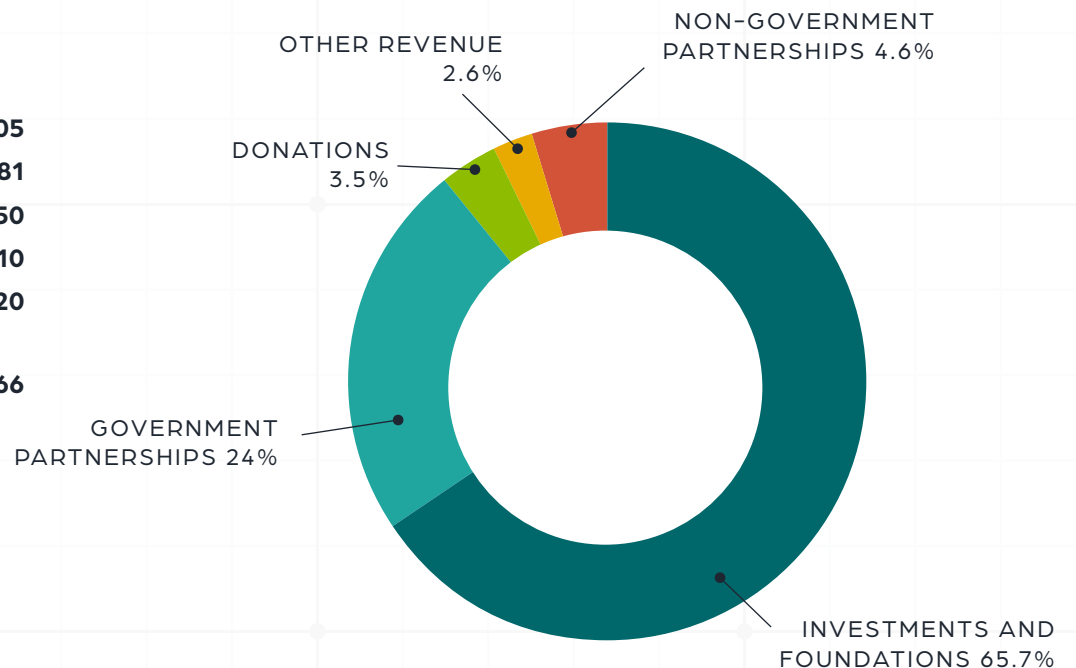
Manitoba Habitat Conservancy's financial discipline, grounded in high standards of transparency, accountability, and trust, ensures every dollar entrusted to us delivers the greatest possible conservation impact for Manitoba. In fiscal year 2025, we directed 93% of funds into habitat conservation.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to stewarding our funders' investments with the same rigour and care. We extend our deep appreciation to the partners and donors whose ongoing support empowers us to protect Manitoba's habitats for generations to come.

‘25

FUNDING SOURCES

INVESTMENTS AND FOUNDATIONS	\$13,867,305
GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS	\$4,983,981
NON-GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS	\$968,150
DONATIONS	\$734,510
OTHER REVENUE	\$550,920
TOTAL	\$21,104,866



ADMINISTRATION 7.2%

PROGRAMMING 35.3%

CONSERVATION INVESTMENTS

GRANTING	\$11,713,267
PROGRAMMING	\$7,210,991
ADMINISTRATION	\$1,474,784
TOTAL	\$20,399,042

GRANTING 57.4%

**FULL FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
AVAILABLE AT MBHABITAT.CA**



Defining **Moments**

Stories of 2025

Common Ground: How Producers and MHC Conserve Manitoba Together

Drive through southwestern Manitoba and you may expect most of the province's conserved habitat to be behind park entrances. The truth is, you'll actually find it on working farms and ranches, in grazed pastures, in wetlands tucked between fields, or in grasslands held by the same families for generations. This mosaic of working lands and wildlife habitat is the exact reason why MHC has been able to conserve over 270,000 acres of land.

The vast majority of southern Manitoba's intact wetlands, grasslands and riparian areas sit on privately owned agricultural land, meaning there is no path to conserving them that doesn't run through the farm gate. Grasslands in particular depend on the disturbances of hooves and the grazing of animals, namely cattle. Mixed-grass prairie (one of the most endangered ecosystems on earth) evolved under grazing. When bison left our landscapes, well-managed cattle herds became the next best thing. That is just one of the nuances of conservation work among a vast sea (or wetland!) of nuances to navigate, and why it is crucial to work with our local producers.

At the core of that idea is our Conservation Agreement program. Landowners receive financial compensation for permanently conserving habitat, and the land stays under their stewardship. Haying and grazing can continue. Hunting remains at the landowner's discretion. In most cases, the way a family uses their land today is the way they keep using it; the agreement simply ensures the habitat can't be broken, drained or developed. In 2025 alone, MHC conserved 3,392 acres and provided \$3.2 million directly to landowners.

Grassland Stewardship Agreements and restoration programs round out the toolkit with slightly different methods, but with the same outcomes: land that works harder for the producer and for wildlife.

Part of what makes these partnerships work is who's on the other end of the handshake. Our habitat conservation specialists live in the communities they serve, with many being farmers themselves. Scott Beaton, one of MHC's conservation specialists, runs a mixed grain farm with a cow-calf herd near Balmoral.

"I've had the pleasure of working with some very forward-thinking people who grew up with nature and really see value in preserving natural areas for future generations," Beaton says. "Rewarding landowners who keep the most sensitive areas in a natural state makes good financial sense for everyone through improved air and water quality, reduced infrastructure costs and the bugs, birds and wildlife that are all important parts of a functioning agri-ecosystem."

The model draws in producers at every stage of farming life, from multi-generation cattle families keeping marginal soils in perennial grass, to young first-generation farmers near Virden who conserve 918 acres of prairies, woodlands and wetlands in an area where land conversion is happening all around them.

With farm economics pushing habitat conversion across agro-Manitoba, these partnerships matter more now than at any point in our history. The farmers and ranchers who choose conservation are among some of the most important conservationists in the province.

Bringing New Life to Winnipeg's Seine River Greenway

Not all of the conservation work happening in Manitoba is hours away from your home (if you live in the city). Some of it happens within earshot of busy traffic, along a quiet, tree-lined river that more than 20,000 Winnipeggers walk, run, paddle and ski every year.

The Seine River greenway winds 26 kilometres through the heart of the city, threading past backyards in St. Boniface and St. Vital and through the Bois-des-Esprits. At 117 acres, it is one of the largest urban forests in Canada and the longest continuous stretch of protected riverbank woodland in Winnipeg. It's a beloved local amenity, but like urban ecosystems everywhere, it's under pressure. Dutch elm disease, emerald ash borer and cottony ash psyllid are thinning the canopy, invasive plants like European buckthorn are choking out natural regeneration, and riverbank erosion is accelerating.

Being true to their name, that is where Save Our Seine (SOS) takes action. Through a \$100,000 Conservation Trust grant, SOS delivered a two-year restoration and enhancement project along the greenway. The work restored more than 10 acres of urban woodland in priority areas where the canopy had been lost. It enhanced riparian habitat and created new pollinator habitat, complete with nesting structures for birds, bats and butterflies.

The project's signature piece is the SOS Ecological Restoration and Enhancement Living Laboratory, a demonstration and education hub in the Glenwood neighbourhood where visitors can see riparian restoration up close. Enhanced trails, benches and interpretive signage with QR codes connect greenway users to information on species identification, invasive plants and the wildlife that depends on a healthy urban river corridor.

SOS also brought a new level of science to its stewardship, working with a University of Manitoba geomatics specialist to build a GIS mapping and reporting system. The system gives the volunteer-driven organization a baseline to track forest conditions and prioritize emerging issues while ensuring meaningful measurement of the impact of their work.

It's exactly the kind of project the Conservation Trust was built for. Because the endowment generates funding every year, groups like SOS can plan beyond a single season.

Local knowledge and volunteer energy are critical to furthering conservation, and MHC is proud to help support the work organizations like SOS are doing across our province.



IMAGE CREDIT: SAVE OUR SEINE



Wild At Heart: Michelle Weighell's Story

Michelle Weighell will be the first to tell you she didn't set out to become a conservation champion — but lo and behold, she has become one. After a difficult year, she moved back to Rapid City with her teenage son Liam and ended up on the 80-acre property her parents had always planned to pass down: a place she'd grown up exploring, and that had stubbornly resisted every attempt to farm it.

"It was almost like this property just had its own thing about it," she reflects. "I swear it grows rocks sometimes."

Now, through a conservation agreement and a grassland stewardship agreement with Manitoba Habitat Conservancy (MHC), that land has long-term protection.

What the property lacked in agricultural potential, it made up for in ecological richness. Sitting at the edge of the Assiniboine River valley, it holds natural wetlands, a spring that runs through winter, abundant lady slippers, and at least 40 species of wildflowers and native plants that Michelle and Liam catalogued on foot.

Ask Michelle what lives there and settle in for a while. Monarch butterflies visit in numbers. A rare black-billed cuckoo landed on her deck railing. A

confirmed snake hibernaculum explains the impressive sightings, including a memorable three-footer, a neighbour named Henrietta. One morning something bolted past her foot — "all my brain registered was, that was a snake with legs" — leading her to prairie skinks, rarely recorded in the area. Moose, elk, bears, and wolves move through the valley, coexisting peacefully with her horses and goats.

Every time my son and I go out and do one of our little nature walks, we always find something more amazing.

Michelle even credits the land with saving her pony, a mare so ill her farrier advised putting her down. After grazing freely on goldenrod and other native species, the pony recovered — and at 25 is still in residence. For Michelle, who spent much of her nursing career learning about traditional plant medicine in First Nations communities, it's entirely plausible: "It's something the elders I worked with always knew."

Her connection to MHC began as a question about leaving the property to conservation in her will and grew

into something more. Nine friends and neighbours built the fence line over the two hottest weekends of August 2024. "It's probably one of the most crooked fences you'll ever see," she concedes — but it marks the edge of a property now permanently protected.

Why protect it? She doesn't hesitate: "To maintain that natural diversity and natural beauty that is pretty rare to find nowadays, so that future generations can experience it — and hopefully encourage more people to do it."

She already has a head start, taking neighbours and elderly residents of Rapid City out to see the wildflowers. "You've become the local park," MHC's communications specialist remarked during their interview.

"That's right," Michelle agreed. "Guess we've got to get some signage."



A Lifetime on The Land

After 35 years working to protect some of Canada's most iconic wild places, Stephen Cornelson has found his own. Tucked along the Assiniboine Valley near Virden, the 80-acre property he shares with his wife Janice is a living mosaic of prairie, meadows, and parkland — and now, through a conservation agreement with Manitoba Habitat Conservancy (MHC), that diversity has a measure of permanent protection.

Stephen's career with Parks Canada took him from Banff and Jasper to Wood Buffalo National Park, before two final decades at Riding Mountain National Park, where he served as resource conservation manager. But when it came time to retire, neither Stephen nor Janice was pulled back toward the peaks. "Both my wife and myself are in love with the prairies and the open landscapes," he says. When a friend pointed them toward the property near Virden, they knew immediately. "Our own little slice of heaven, basically."

The land more than delivered. "We've got shortgrass, mixed grass, tall grass, oak, aspen parkland — it's got everything," Stephen says. "If you

took an 80-acre parcel pretty much anywhere in Manitoba, I bet we've got the most biological diversity of all of them."

An active iNaturalist contributor, Stephen has documented many species of wildlife, including some at risk. He has recorded over 100 types of grasses and forbs, and rare finds like native prickly pear cactus, and plains spadefoot toads.

His years at Riding Mountain, where much of his work centred on the Biosphere Reserve and the essential role of neighbouring landowners, shaped how he sees the property. With a Wildlife Management Area across the valley and a municipal park to the east, his 80 acres form part of "a pretty unique little protected corridor going along this river."

For the Cornelsons, whose goals were always aligned with conservation, the decision was easy. "It's a no-brainer for us," Stephen says. "Having a conservation agreement doesn't change how we had planned to manage the property. The goals are all aligned."

Asked what it means to know the protection will last long after they're gone, his answer reflects a lifetime of experience: "Every little piece that can be protected is important, no matter how big or small. The more of these little pieces we can put together, the better chance of more species surviving into the future."

But for right now, Stephen and Janice aren't going anywhere.

// **Having a conservation agreement doesn't change how we had planned to manage the property. It's a complementary process.**







Thank You For Being a Part of a Conservation Legacy

Thank you for making 2025 a success. In 2026, we're celebrating 40 years of conservation, a milestone made possible by the dedication and generosity of our community. As we mark this achievement, we invite you to be part of what comes next and help make our 40th year a reflection of everything we have built together!



MHC Offices

Main Locations

HEAD OFFICE

302-140 Bannatyne Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R3B 3C5
204.784.4350
info@mbhabitat.ca

BRANDON

930 Victoria Avenue East
Brandon, MB
R7A 2A4
204.784.4350

Field Offices

MINNEDOSA

30 Main Street
Box 1044, Minnedosa, MB
R0J 1E0
204.509.7190

STONEWALL

302-140 Bannatyne Ave.
Winnipeg, MB
R3B 3C5
204.471.9663

SHOAL LAKE

306 Elm Street
Box 28, Shoal Lake, MB
R0J 1Z0
431.235.3058

BOISSEVAIN

930 Victoria Avenue East
Brandon, MB
R7A 2A4
431.777.8965

RESTON

402 4th Street
Box 189, Reston, MB
R0M 1X0
204.509.7953

TREHERNE

208 Railway Avenue
Box 164, Treherne, MB
R0G 2V0
204.724.5115

