



**SKEENA
SUSTAINABILITY
ASSESSMENT FORUM**

ANNUAL REPORT

2021/2022

Included in This Report

Page 3.....	Executive Summary
Page 4.....	Opening Letters
Page 6.....	Background
Page 8.....	Our Work
Page 14.....	Engagement
Page 18.....	Capacity Building
Page 19.....	Financials
Page 23.....	Looking Forward
Page 24.....	Appendix A: Aconym Glossary
Page 25.....	Appendix B: List of Figures and Tables
Page 26.....	Appendix C: Infographic

Executive Summary

The Skeena Sustainability Assessment Forum (SSAF) Environmental Stewardship Initiative (ESI), a partnership between ten Skeena Nations and the province of BC, creates shared and trusted data through the environmental monitoring of five shared values: Medicinal Plants, Grizzly Bear, Fish and Fish Habitat, Moose, and Wetlands.

In fiscal year 2021/2022, SSAF ESI focused on progressing monitoring, assessment, and engagement work on Moose, Wetlands, Grizzly Bear, and Fish and Fish Habitat. The year saw the public release of State-of-the-Value (current condition) reports for Grizzly Bear, Wetlands, and Fish and Fish Habitat, which are currently published on the Skeena Salmon Data Center and BC Data Catalogue websites, while Moose work focused on developing a State of the Data Report. In addition to dedicated values work, which was carried out through Indigenous Stewardship Projects, SSAF ESI focused on the development of a cultural indicators project, as well as endorsed the conceptual design of a future data system.

Some highlights of SSAF engagement work over the year include the development of a Forestry Working Group that continues to bring together forestry licensees with SSAF ESI provincial and Nation representatives, a 3-day Fish and Fish Habitat workshop that brought together individuals from all over BC, and the development of an engagement scoping process. Additionally, SSAF ESI committed to leading a collaborative technical working group for the Bulkley and Morice Timber Supply Review processes and endorsed the decision to aid the Lakes Resiliency Project.

In fiscal year 2021/2022, SSAF ESI spent a total of \$1,172,450. The majority (85%) of this amount was received from the Indigenous Funding Program administered through the BC Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, and the majority (63%) of these funds were spent on Indigenous Stewardship Projects.

Looking forwards, SSAF ESI is focused on developing tools for governments and industry to use in decision making and planning and developing management directives that tie into these decision support tools.

FROM THE SSAF

“Our people need to work closely with the scientific experts when they do their studies. Our degrees come from the land, our cultural knowledge and experience carried on for thousands of years. Our knowledge keepers are able to find things that science has not been able to, because we spend more time on the Lax’yip, not just a short study and then leave.”

— Brian Williams, Gitxsan Hereditary Chiefs

“True collaboration is not easy. However, when we approach our work together in the spirit of a better future, and when we approach our work together in recognition of stewardship of the land we all live on to sustain us, and when we approach our work respectful of reciprocity, relevance, and equity, we are able to breathe life into the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples.”

— Leigh-Anne Fenwick, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

FROM THE SSAF

“It so important for our people to have our database to store the results from the cultural indicators, to store our traditional knowledge for decision-making and the future generations. Government needs to share their data with us, and we need to share our harvest and cultural data with government. That is the only way for decisions on the land to improve. Climate change affects us all, and its time to work together.”

— Valbert Williams, Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs

“What we teach our kids helps ensure sustainability. We teach them to use all the edible parts of the fish or moose, to not waste anything. We teach them the seasonal activities, to harvest in the summer and fall, then to store for winter and share with the Elders. It starts when they are five years old, they help carrying the fish and watching and learning.”

— Evelyn George, Lake Babine Nation

What is SSAF ESI

The Skeena Sustainability Assessment Forum (SSAF) Environmental Stewardship Initiative (ESI) is a collaborative process involving ten Skeena Nations and multiple Provincial agencies working together on environmental stewardship. The forum creates shared and trusted data through the collaboratively designed and implemented environmental monitoring of five shared values: medicinal plants, grizzly bear, fish and fish habitat, moose, and wetlands. The Nations involved in SSAF ESI include the Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs, Gitwangak Hereditary Chiefs, Gitxsan Nation, Lake Babine Nation, Witset First Nation, Nee Tahi Buhn Band, Office of the Wet'suwet'en (representing Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs), Hagwilget Village, Skin Tyee Nation, and Wet'suwet'en First Nation.

SSAF ESI is one of four regional forums in the Environmental Stewardship Initiative (ESI), established in 2014. The forum is proud to be incorporating Indigenous perspectives, knowledge and science into their monitoring and assessment protocols, and providing a model for collaboration on stewardship that gives meaningful effect to reconciliation, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and British Columbia's (BC's) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act).



SSAF ESI Structure

- *The Project Team (PT)* is the management table of SSAF ESI. First Nation and provincial representatives collaboratively provide direction to and endorse the work of all sub-committees.
- *The Science and Technical Committee (STC)* is the technical arm of SSAF ESI. A consensus-based committee, the STC works to collaboratively develop monitoring and assessment protocols to be delivered on the land and provides recommendations up to the PT.
- *SSAF Sub-Committees* report either to the PT or STC. Examples of subcommittees that report to the STC are value based sub-committees such as Moose, Fish and Fish Habitat, Wetlands, Grizzly, and Medicinal Plants. There are also sub-committees that report directly to the PT, such as the Communications sub-committee.

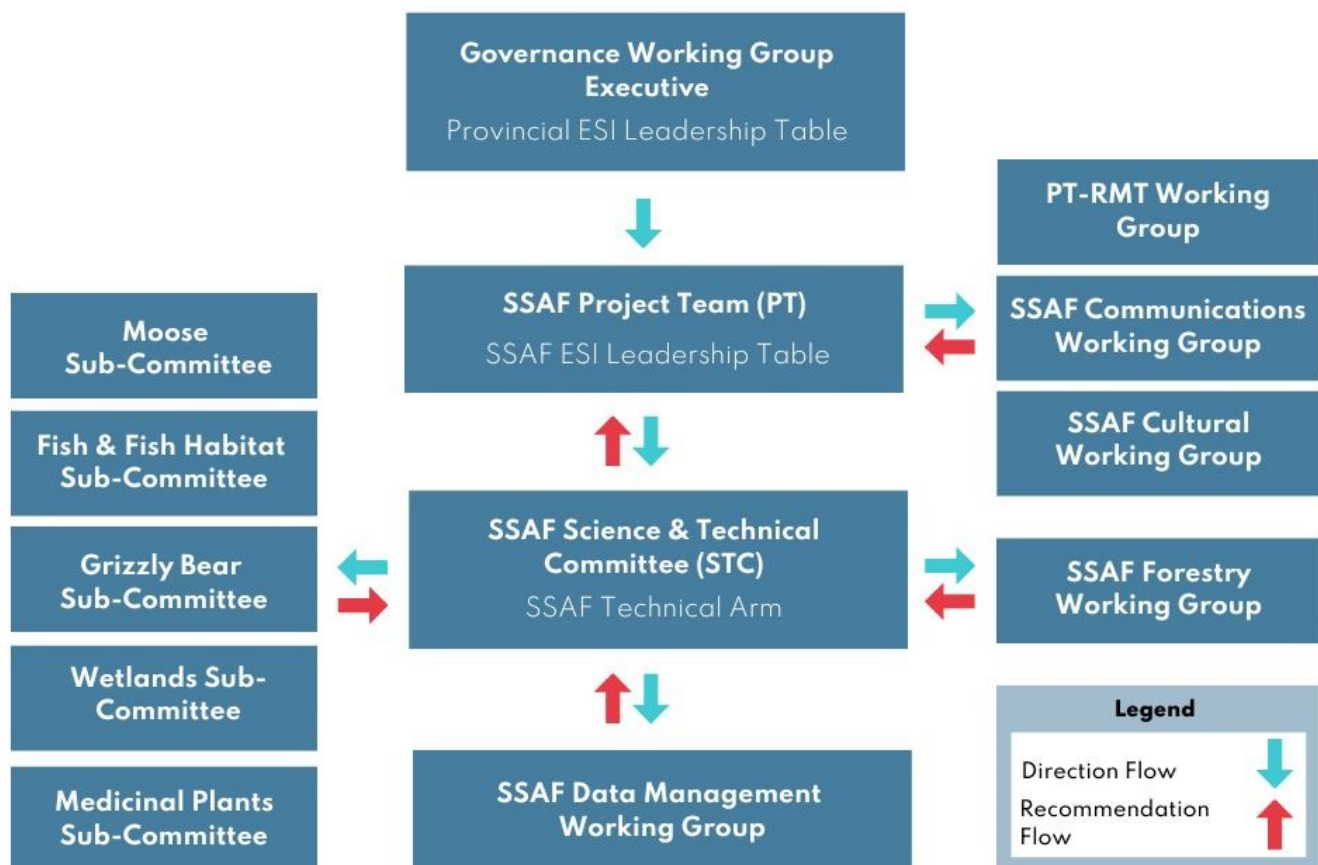
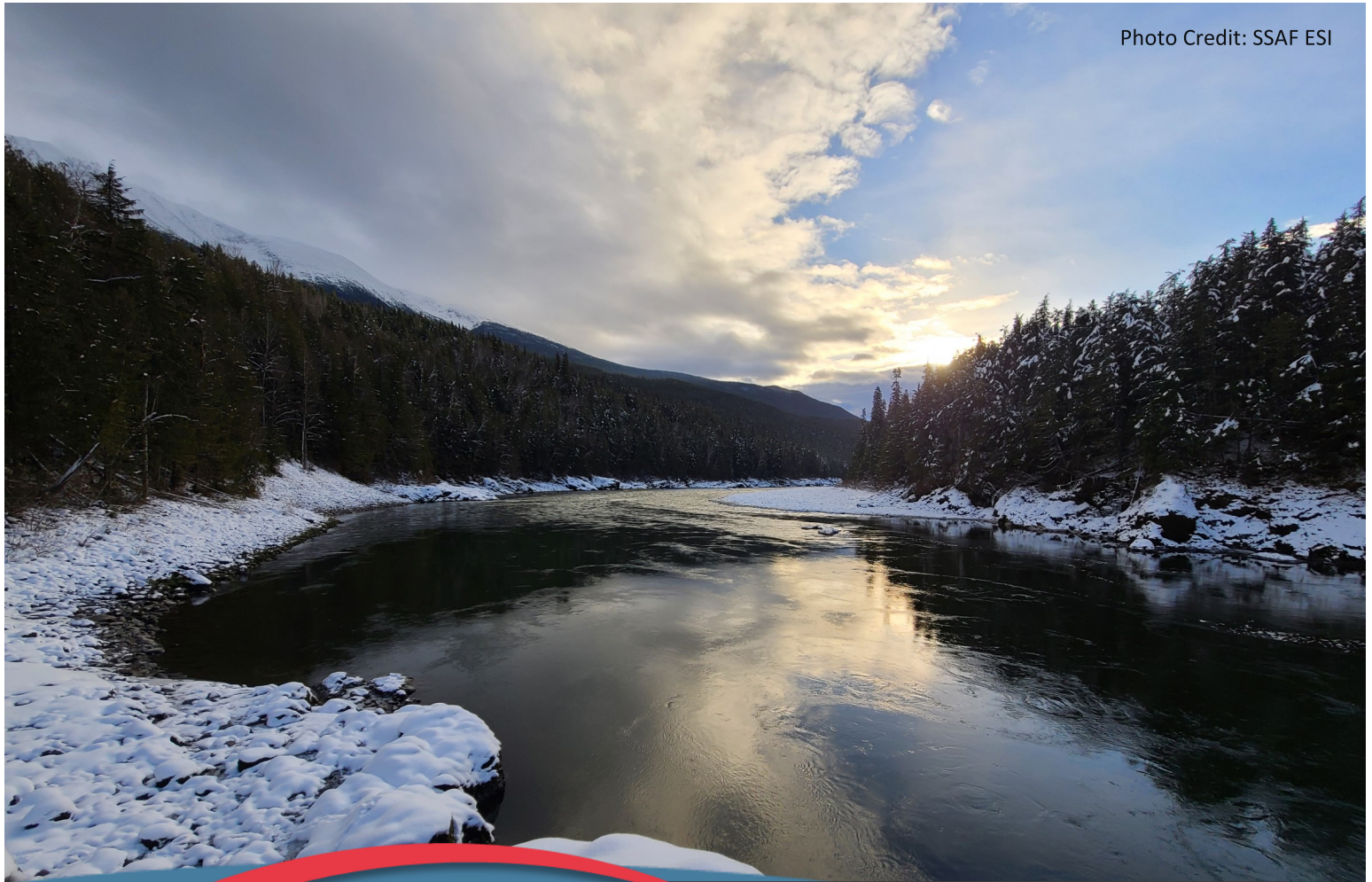


Figure 1: SSAF ESI Structure, Direction, and Recommendation Flow



OUR WORK

In this Section

Page 9.....Fish and Fish Habitat

Page 10.....Wetlands

Page 11.....Grizzly Bear

Page 12.....Moose

Page 13.....Data Management;
Cultural Indicators

In 2021/2022, SSAF ESI focused on progressing monitoring, assessment, and engagement work on Moose, Wetlands, Grizzly Bear, and Fish and Fish Habitat. The following section provides an overview of the progress made on these values.

Fish and Fish Habitat

- Released the SSAF ESI State of the Value (SOV) Assessment Report for Fish and Fish Habitat for the SSAF ESI study area in accordance with the First Nations Information Governance Centre's OCAP¹ principles.
- Completed 6 CABIN/eDNA (Canadian Aquatic Biomonitoring Network) samples. This work provides a baseline of the site.
- Completed EFN (Environmental Flow Needs) Meso-Habitat training and mapping. This work is required to identify restoration sites.
- Completed fish passage and fish habitat confirmation assessments along with the Society for Ecosystem Restoration in Northern BC (SERNBC) and Canadian Wildlife Federation (CWF) in the Bulkley Watershed. This work contributes to fish passage restoration work being completed in partnership with CWF and SERNBC.
- Co-organized and delivered a Fish and Fish Habitat conference with partners from the North Coast Cumulative Effects Program (North Coast ESI), Skeena Wild, DFO (Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada), and SERNBC. The workshop was attended by over 110 participants from the Skeena watershed and beyond and built priorities for the watershed.

Notes:

1. See page 11 for more information about OCAP

Read the State of Value Assessment Report for Fish and Fish Habitat:

- ◇ <https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/ssaf-skeena-east-esi-fish-and-fish-habitat-state-of-the-value-report-2020>
- ◇ <https://data.skeenasalmon.info/organization/skeena-sustainability-assessment-forum?groups=esi-ssaf-fish-and-fish-habitat-collection>



Photo Credit: SSAF ESI

Wetlands

- Released the SSAF ESI State of the Value (SOV) Assessment Report for Wetlands in the SSAF ESI study area in accordance with OCAP principles.
- Completed 32 Wetland Ecosystem Services Protocol assessments in the SSAF ESI study area. This work finishes this portion of our wetland work and is being used to produce and validate a Wetland Ecosystem Services Protocol Model.
- Completing Quality Assurance on the wetlands data to be used to validate the Wetland Ecosystem Service Protocol Model.
- Engaging through the Forestry Working Group with Forest Licensees on the Wetland SOV Protocol with the goal improving the next iteration of the Wetland SOV.

Read the State of Value Assessment Report for Wetlands:

- ◇ <https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/ssaf-skeena-east-esi-wetland-state-of-the-value-report-2020>
- ◇ <https://data.skeenasalmon.info/organization/skeena-sustainability-assessment-forum?groups=esi-ssaf-wetlands-group>



OCAP

All SSAF ESI State of the Value Assessments follow the First Nations principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession.

To learn about OCAP, visit:
<https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/>



Grizzly Bear

- Released the SSAF ESI State of the Value (SOV) Assessment Report for Grizzly Bear in the SSAF ESI study area in accordance with OCAP principles.
- Produced a two-page summary of the SOV data.
- Collected approximately 15 hair snare samples that will be used in a population assessment.
- Completed Grizzly Bear habitat assessments and Moose Habitat Assessments to inform the South Skeena Grizzly Bear Model.

Read the State of Value Assessment Report for Grizzly Bear:

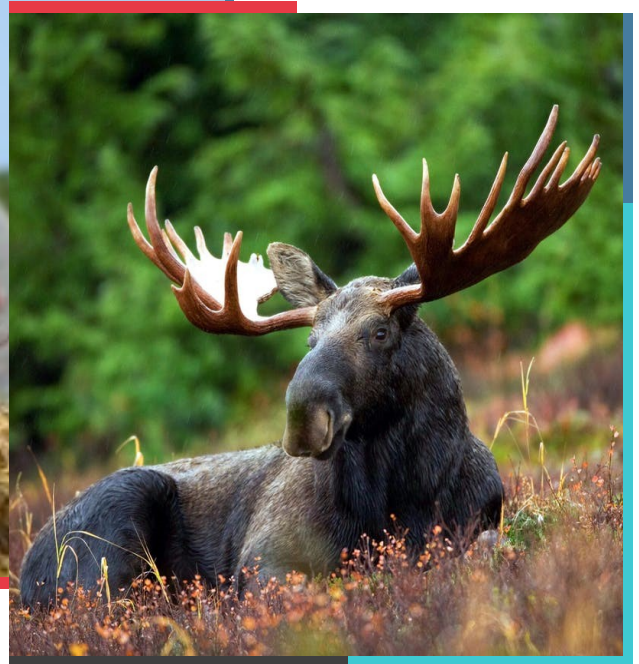
- ◇ <https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/ssaf-skeena-east-esi-grizzly-bear-state-of-the-value-report-2020>
- ◇ <https://data.skeenasalmon.info/dataset/?q=SSAF&groups=esi-ssaf-grizzly-bear-collection>

Moose

- Worked on a State of the Data report, yet to be released.
- Worked on a landscape level protocols for Moose population and Moose habitat.
- Completed moose summer and winter habitat assessments to validate the moose component of the South Skeena Moose Model.
- Completed another year of the SSAF ESI Moose Health program where 30 samples were collected and analyzed.
- Participated in the Lakes Timber Supply Area Moose Ungulate Winter Range engagement to inform the development of Ungulate Winter Range.



Photo Credit: SSAF ESI



Medicinal Plants

- The 2021/2022 funding did not yield the ability to conduct any work to progress the medicinal plants value.

Data Management

- Continued support for the SSAF ESI Collaborative Storage System.
- Scoped a SSAF ESI Data Management System, resulting in an endorsed conceptual design of our future data system. This data system will collect, house and produce dashboards to display the trusted data.
- Scoping work on data visualization/decision support tools to put SSAF ESI trusted data into decision making processes.

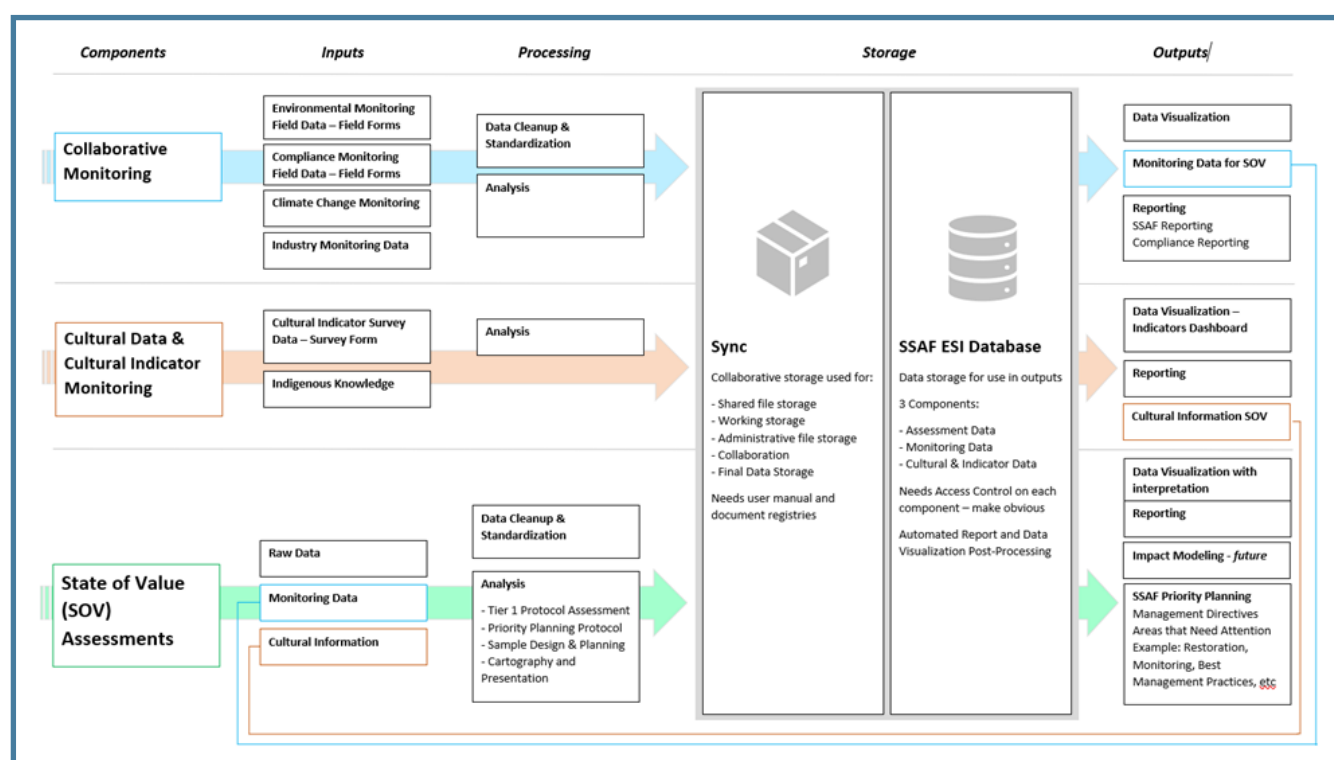


Figure 2: Conceptual Design for SSAF ESI Future Data System

Cultural Indicators

- Developed a cultural indicators project through the Cultural Working Group. This is a survey-based project that will use data collected on Indigenous practices from community members, hunters, and harvesters to identify trends of SSAF ESI values.
- A strategy, implementation plan, and training program was developed in 2021/2022.
- Community surveys are planned for 2022/2023 to continue this work.

In this Section

Page 15.....Forestry Working Group

Page 16.....Confluence of Minds: Skeena Fish &
Fish Habitat Workshop; SSAF ESI
Engagement Scoping Process

Page 17.....Bulkley and Morice Timber Supply
Review Processes; Lakes Resiliency
Project

ENGAGEMENT

In contrast to previous years of the project, the 2021/2022 season had a focus on increasing connections and awareness of the SSAF ESI and associated projects, as part of the one-year 'extend and engage' mandate. This shift in prioritizing external engagement arose after Minister of State Nathan Cullen agreed to help support the SSAF as long as the public, industry and others were brought along on the journey.

Forestry Working Group

In the Spring of 2021, the Forestry Working Group (FWG) had its inaugural meeting, bringing together a total of 12 forest licensees, SSAF First Nations, and provincial staff. The purpose of the SSAF Forestry Working Group is to provide a venue for the Province, Indigenous Governments/Communities and Forest Licensees/BC Timber Sales (BCTS) to collaboratively work together to improve stewardship and build relationships. The FWG is a collaborative safe space that allows SSAF members, forest licensees and BCTS to develop trusted relationships, trusted data, and trusted assessments for consideration in planning and decisions by all parties.

A Terms of Reference was collaboratively developed by the representatives, confirming the roles, responsibilities and goals for the group:

- Develop trusted relationships, data, protocols, and assessments
- Collaboratively develop State of Value Reports 2.0
- Collaborate on monitoring, management, and planning or other recommendations to improve stewardship through forestry practices and planning
- Strive to develop consensus recommendations for the Project Team

Membership of the Forestry Working Group includes representatives from the following organizations/governments:

• Province of British Columbia	• Canfor Houston
• Gitxsan	• Pacific Inland Resources – West Fraser
• Office of the Wet’suwet’en	• Fraser Lake Sawmill – West Fraser
• Witset First Nation	• NorthPac Forestry
• Wet’suwet’en First Nation	• Skeena Sawmills
• Lake Babine Nation	• Lake Babine Nation Forestry
• Gitanyow	• Hampton Lumber
• Chinook Community Forest	• Babine Lake Community Forest
• Burns Lake Community Forest	• BCTS Babine
• BCTS Skeena	• Wetzin’kwa Community Forest

Table 1: Forestry Working Group Representation

Confluence of Minds – Skeena Fish & Fish Habitat Workshop

In February of 2022, the SSAF's Fish and Fish Habitat Sub-Committee, in collaboration with SERNBC, DFO, SkeenaWild and members of the North Coast Cumulative Effects Project, organized and facilitated a workshop called Confluence of Minds – Fish & Fish Habitat in the Skeena Watershed & Estuary. The workshop brought together fish experts and enthusiasts from all over the province to discuss priorities for addressing fish and fish habitat protection and restoration in the Skeena Watershed and Estuary.

Spanning 3 half-days, the workshop had over 110 attendees, 25 presenters and 36 collaborative sessions, resulting in a list of 25 shared priorities. Due to the popularity of the workshop and positive feedback received, the planning committee hopes to deliver another workshop in the future.

SSAF ESI Engagement Scoping Process

As SSAF ESI evolves and SSAF ESI trusted data becomes foundational to informing decisions, processes, and plans, the SSAF ESI Engagement Scoping process was developed. This is a structured process that allows provincial or other initiatives to request engagement with the forum. Three types of engagement were identified: Strategic, Technical and Collaborative Technical Engagement. Through this scoping process collaborative technical engagement is being organized for the two initiatives discussed on page 17.

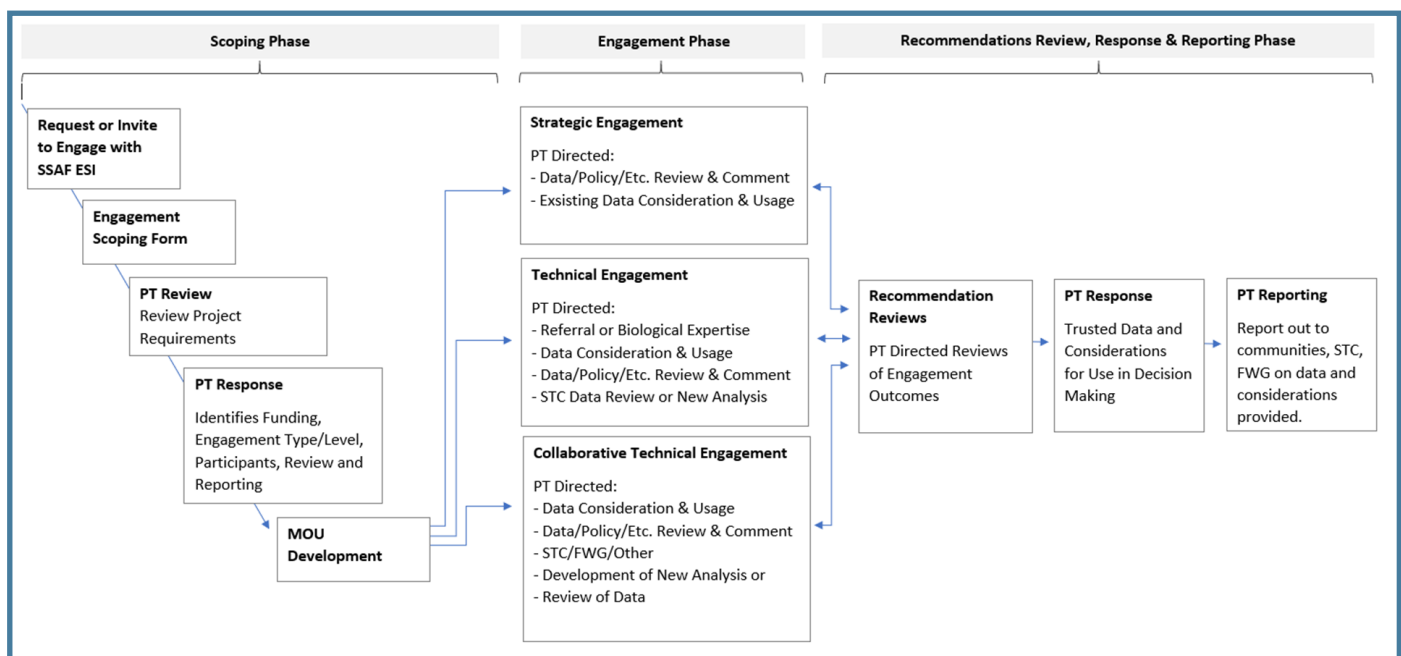


Figure 3: SSAF Engagement Scoping Process

Bulkley and Morice Timber Supply Review Processes

In the Spring of 2022, the Office of the Chief Forester approached SSAF ESI through the SSAF ESI Engagement Scoping Process. As result of this process, SSAF ESI committed to leading a collaborative technical working group for the Bulkley and Morice Timber Supply Review process.



Lakes Resiliency Project

In the Spring of 2022, the Project Team endorsed the decision to aid the Lakes Resiliency Project at the technical level. The Lakes Resiliency Project is comprised of two Sustainable Resource Management Plan amendments as well as the completion of a Forest Landscape Planning Pilot. Through the SSAF ESI Engagement Scoping Process, SSAF ESI participation in the project was defined and SSAF ESI will lead two technical working groups that will contribute to the development of the Forest Landscape Plan: Aquatics and Terrestrial Wildlife.

Forest Landscape Plans are established as a legal order by the Chief Forester, have a duration of 10 years, and set both landscape and stand level expectations for forest management. They only apply to the forest sector. Once established they would replace existing Forest Stewardship Plans that apply to the Forest Landscape Plan area.

The overarching goals of the Lakes Resiliency Project are to establish a more resilient forested land base, conserve ecological values, address wildfire risk, and contribute to community stability.

One of the many ways SSAF ESI has found success is through its ability to build capacity bilaterally, meaning that both Nation and Provincial staff have the opportunity to gain skills and knowledge in various areas.



SSAF ESI functions using Shared Cost Arrangements (SCAs) which directly fund Nations to award and manage contracts, hire and train staff, and fulfil administrative duties including attending meetings, presenting at conferences and producing annual reports. At the same time, provincial staff gain an understanding of traditional governance and the cultural practices and traditions of each Nation they work with.

In this Section

Page 20...Funding Source

Page 21...Expenditure by Category

Page 22...Expenditure by Value

FINANCIALS

In fiscal year 2021/2022, SSAF ESI spent a total of \$1,172,450*. Spending can be broken down into the following categories.

*Not all funds received in fiscal year 2021/2022 are reflected in this amount, as funds carried forward to fiscal year 2022/2023 are being used in the 2022/2023 budget and workplan and will be reported on following the associated fiscal year.

Funding Source

\$995,000 (85%) of the total spent in fiscal year 2021/2022 was core funding received from the Indigenous Funding Program (IFP) through the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation (IRR), while \$177,450 (15%) came from other sources. Of the funding that came from other sources (non-core funding), \$121,000 (10%) was from the Together for Wildlife strategy through the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD), \$26,450 (2%) was secured from other FLNRORD sources, and \$30,000 (3%) was provided by the Canadian Wildlife Federation.

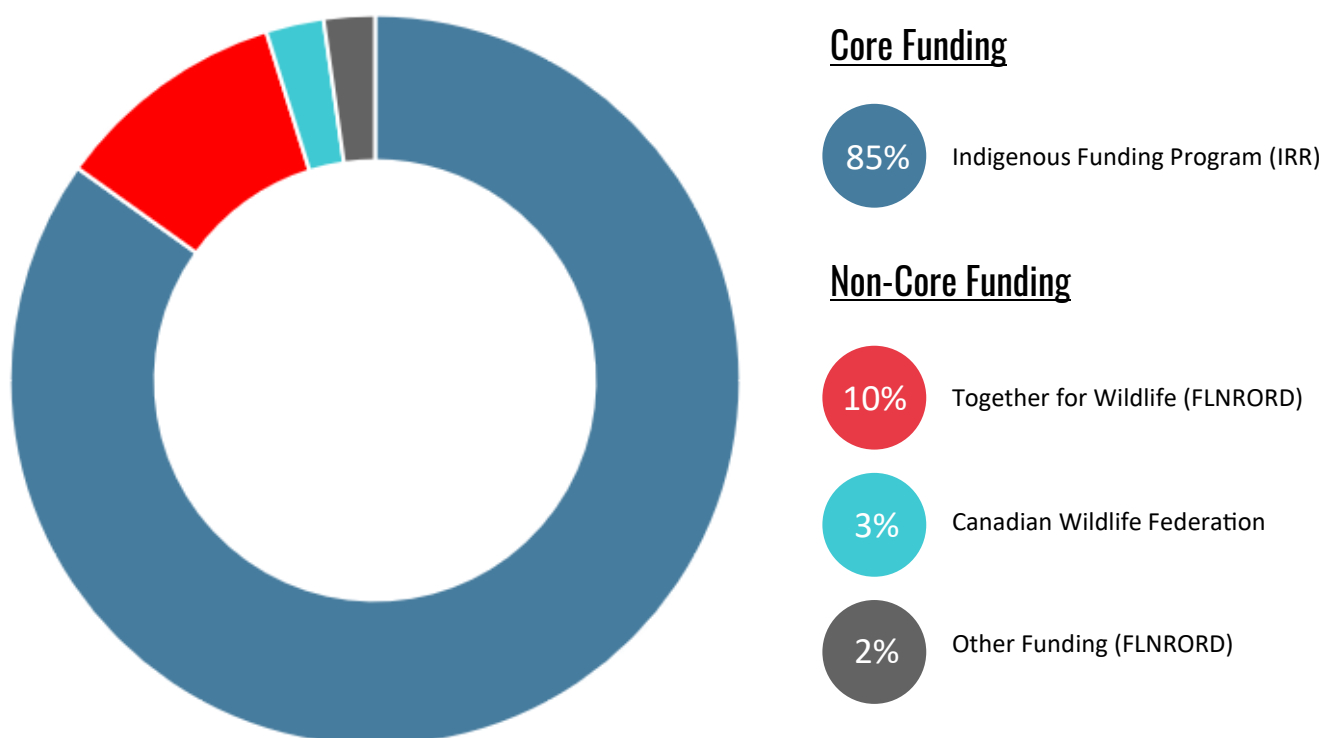


Figure 4: Breakdown of SSAF ESI Funding Sources for Fiscal Year 2021/2022

Core Funding	
Indigenous Funding Program (IRR)	\$995,000
Non-Core Funding	
Together for Wildlife (FLNRORD)	\$121,000
Canadian Wildlife Federation	\$30,000
Other Funding (FLNRORD)	\$26,450
Total	\$1,172,450

Table 2: Breakdown of SSAF ESI Funding Sources for Fiscal Year 2021/2022

Expenditure by Category

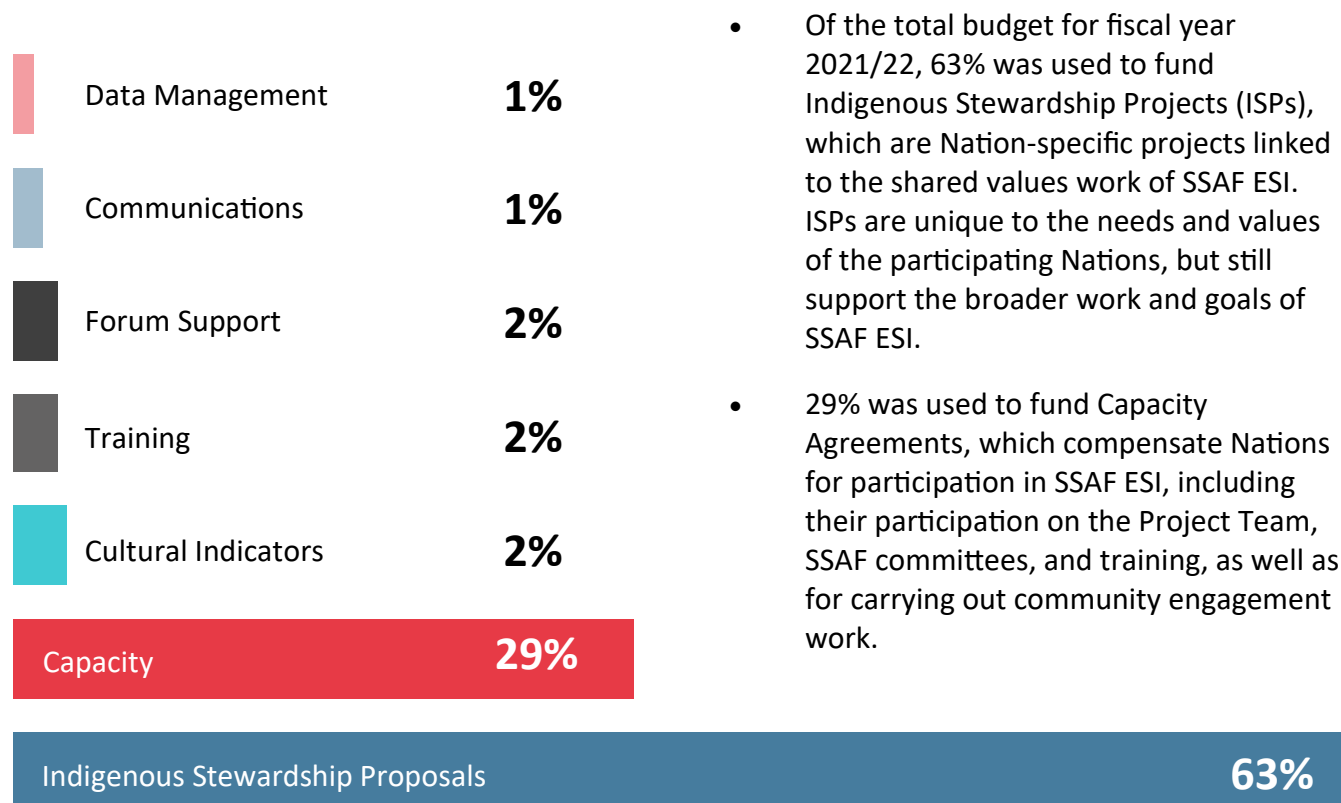


Figure 5: SSAF ESI Expenditures for Fiscal Year 2021/2022 by Category

- 2% was spent on Cultural Indicators work, which looks at observable, measurable facts about the state of the five Skeena ESI values derived from cultural practices of SSAF ESI First Nations.
- 2% was spent on Training. This category refers to the cost of administering training (e.g., trainer costs, equipment and supplies etc.). Costs to cover Nation participation in training falls under 'ISP' and 'Capacity' agreements.
- 2% was spent on Forum Support, which includes Tier 1 (Nations only) meetings, facilitation, and shared reporting. Shared reporting refers to the hiring of a third party to consolidate, analyze, and develop one shared report per value.
- Of the remaining amount, 1% was spent on Communications (e.g., graphic design, photography, videography, and promotional products) and 1% was spent on Data Management. Data management included maintenance and support for shared storage drives and the creation of a backup system.

ISP	\$737,000
Capacity	\$335,450
Cultural Indicators	\$28,500
Training	\$23,430
Forum Support (Tier 1, Facilitation, Shared Reporting)	\$23,070
Communications	\$15,000
Data Management	\$10,000
Total	\$1,172,450

Table 3: SSAF ESI Expenditures for Fiscal Year 2021/2022 by Category

ISP Expenditure by Value

Of the \$737,000 spent on ISPs, an estimated* 60% was spent on Moose value work, 26% on Fish and Fish Habitat value work, 11% on Wetlands specific work, and 3% on Grizzly Bear.

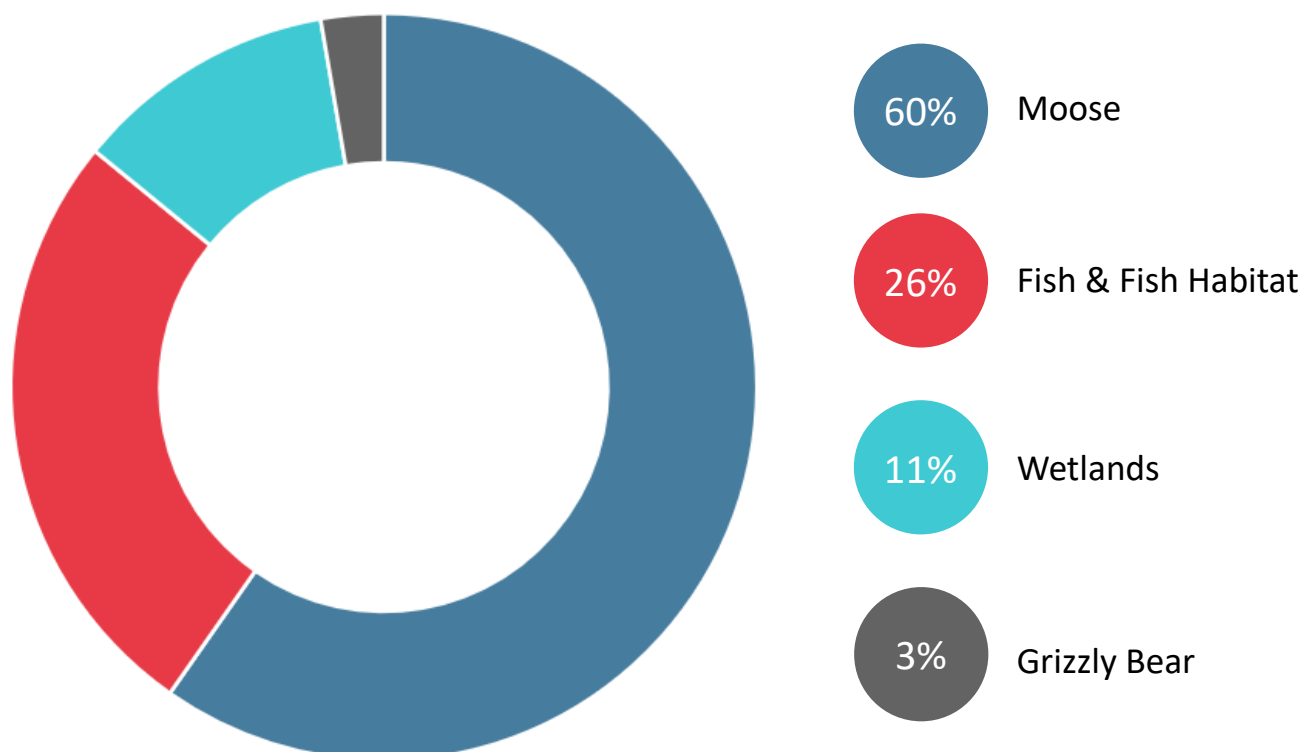


Figure 5: SSAF ESI Expenditures for Fiscal Year 2021/2022 by Value

*ISPs often span multiple values, and thus have overlap of associated budget items. These percentages are therefore estimations only.

SSAF ESI is eager to move forward with the co-developed joint recommendations on the long-term future of ESI forums with a transition from an initiative to a program. This will provide SSAF ESI with the ability to develop five-year plans to progress the collaborative work.

SSAF ESI will continue the work with the Provincial Skeena Region Management Team to set shared priorities. A newly formed working group with the SSAF ESI Project Team and Skeena Region Management Team is bringing leadership together to work toward shared interests.

Trusted Data to Trusted Decisions

We are in a place with three values where the State of Value Assessment Reports are complete and trusted data can be used in planning and decision making. Next fiscal year, SSAF ESI will turn our minds to developing tools for governments and industry to use in decision making and planning. Another focus of the year is to develop management directives that tie into our decision support tools.

Collaborative Monitoring

SSAF ESI plans to bring industry into the collaborative monitoring work to increase capacity and understanding of the program.



Photo Credit: Walter Joseph

Acronym Glossary

BCTS: BC Timber Sales

CWF: Canadian Wildlife Federation

DFO: Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada

ESI: Environmental Stewardship Initiative

FLP: Forest Landscape Plan

FLNRORD: Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development

FWG: Forestry Working Group

IFP: Indigenous Funding Program

IRR: Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

ISP: Indigenous Stewardship Project

LWRS: Ministry of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship

PT: Project Team

SCA: Shared Cost Arrangement

SERNBC: Society for Ecosystem Restoration in Northern BC

SoV: State of the Value

SSAF: Skeena Sustainability Assessment Forum

STC: Science and Technical Committee

UNDRIP: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Figures

1: SSAF ESI Structure, Direction, and Recommendation Flow.....	7
2: Conceptual Design for SSAF ESI Future Data System	13
3: SSAF Engagement Scoping Process.....	16
4: Breakdown of SSAF ESI Funding Sources for Fiscal Year 2021/2022	20
5: SSAF ESI Expenditures for Fiscal Year 2021/2022 by Category.....	21
6: SSAF ESI Expenditures for Fiscal Year 2021/2022 by Value.....	22

Tables

1: Forestry Working Group Representation.....	15
2: Breakdown of SSAF ESI Funding Sources for Fiscal Year 2021/2022.....	20
3: SSAF ESI Expenditures for Fiscal Year 2021/2022 by Category	22

