

**For Immediate Release**

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**More than a Spooky Symbol of Halloween –  
*Special Project Underway to Save BC's At-Risk Bat Population***

**VANCOUVER, BC and WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Considered by experts to be one of the world's most misunderstood mammals, a major move is afoot to protect southern British Columbia's seriously at-risk bat population. BC is home to 16 species of bats, half of which are currently listed as at-risk due to one or more conservation concerns, including disease introduced by humans.

With the assistance of a Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) conservation grant, the Nature Conservancy of Canada is currently working to educate the public on the importance of bats, as well as document the locations and health of bat habitat, which will in turn provide better knowledge to conservationists tasked with protecting this sensitive species.

"Bats are portrayed as dangerous pests, especially at this time of year," says Cori Lausen, Wildlife Conservation Society Canada's Bat Biologist. Lausen is working closely with the Nature Conservancy of Canada on this critical bat conservation effort. "The reality is that bats are some of our most important species. The public would be surprised to know that bats are incredibly helpful to humans. They eat large quantities of insects that are harmful to our agriculture and forestry industries and in some areas of the world they play a key role in pollination, as well as help in seed dispersal."

"We know that healthy forests need bats. They're key indicators of ecosystem health," says Andrew de Vries, SFI Vice-President, Conservation and Indigenous Relations. "This project was an obvious choice for an SFI conservation grant as it meets our important conservation and research requirements, which are aimed at promoting biological diversity, protecting wildlife habitat and helping SFI participants manage special forest sites."

One of the biggest issues facing bats is White Nose Syndrome, a fungus that is causing mass bat die-offs across North America. Human access to bat hibernation sites may spread this pathogen. Additionally, preventing human disturbance to bats during hibernation is critical. When bats are disturbed during hibernation they may abandon their sites, using important energy reserves they need to survive the winter.

White Nose Syndrome was discovered in 2006. While yet to be found in BC, it's quickly spreading across North America and has virtually wiped out bat populations – more than six million bat deaths – in some areas of Eastern North America including Canada's Maritimes.

The project will receive a total of \$50,000 through the SFI Conservation and Community Partnerships Grant Program over two years. In addition to the Nature Conservancy of Canada, partners include Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program Columbia Basin, the British Columbia Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, and BC Timber Sales, and SFI-certified International Forest Products Ltd.

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Bats are also known to take up residence in both residential and commercial buildings. Lausen says, "If you come across a colony of bats in your home or business, it's best to contact wildlife officials with this information, as we are trying to determine significant locations of roosting bats. If you'd like to get involved in bat protection there are volunteer bat programs emerging in many BC communities that can use your help educating the public and advancing tolerance of these unique creatures."

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### **Get Involved with Bat Conservation**

Learn more about bats, how to build your very own bat house, where you can get involved in community bat programs, and what to do if you ever come across bats on your property at <http://www.kootenaybats.com/>.

### **About Sustainable Forestry Initiative**

SFI Inc. is an independent, nonprofit organization that is solely responsible for maintaining, overseeing and improving the internationally recognized Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) program. Across Canada and the United States, more than 100 million hectares (more than 240 million acres) are certified to the SFI forest management standard. In addition, the SFI program's unique fiber sourcing requirements promote responsible forest management on all suppliers' lands. SFI chain-of-custody (COC) certification tracks the percentage of fiber from certified forests, certified sourcing and post-consumer recycled content. SFI on-product labels identify both certified sourcing and COC claims to help consumers make responsible purchasing decisions. SFI Inc. is governed by a three-chamber board of directors representing environmental, social and economic sectors equally. Learn more at <http://www.sfiprogram.org/> and <http://sfiprogram.org/Buy-SFI>.

### **About The Nature Conservancy of Canada**

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is a private non-profit organization working for the direct protection of natural habitats and wild spaces across this country. Since 1962, NCC and our partners have protected over 2.6 million acres of ecologically significant land and water for its intrinsic value and for future generations. More than 1 million of these protected acres are located in British Columbia. It is the goal of NCC to protect, manage, and where appropriate, restore natural areas so they can sustain the ecosystems and species that define them. Learn more at <http://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/>.

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