# **Ghost Bear Institute Annual Report 2023**

#### A Message from the Co-Executive Directors: Jill Cooper & D. Simon Jackson

Have you ever driven along a 10 kilometre stretch of road at 10 kilometres an hour for 10 hours straight in the middle of winter? No, just us?

Anyway, here we were, in the winter of 2020, looking for the elusive Canada lynx and failing miserably.

As people do when they're bored out of their mind, we began discussing what ills our society. Like a stubborn string hanging from a favourite sweater, we started pulling at the thread of the problems facing Canada.

And pulling it. And pulling it.

Before we knew it, a wee little string ended up unravelling the whole darn sweater; what we thought were a couple of isolated problems, we began to realize, were interconnected and serious and eroding the democracy of the place we love and call home.

And when you're cold and bored and startled by a sudden realization, there is only one thing you can do: Pull out the trusty stack of Post-It notes, a sharpie and design Nature Labs.

That, friends, is how Nature Labs was born. And, now, seven years later – *SEVEN YEARS* – we are on the brink of crossing the finish line. Well, the start line really, as completing the Nature Labs platform is really just about starting a much bigger journey as we push towards our goal of advancing nature literacy and creating a more thoughtful society.

But to get to this point? We had a few hurdles to clear.

Chocolate – our original main character for the project – disappeared on *day three of production* and then some really weird stuff happened. There was a bad car accident. A concussion. *Another* concussion. We had a fire *and* a flood in our apartment. Our home lost essential services and we had to move. Our new apartment lost essential services; we had to move again. Our next apartment's rent increased by 50%; we moved for the third time in 15 months. Plus, there was that whole global pandemic thing, a round of nasty long-haul COVID, a rare neurological disorder, multiple family health crises, the family dog ran away (twice)...

You can't make this stuff up.

Like Nature Labs itself, this wasn't a simple journey. And if we knew how hard it would be, who knows if we'd actually have taken the plunge. But we did and here we are. Our dream has *almost* become a reality.

Since we first partnered with BC Parks and created our initial storyboard in November 2018, we've averaged 15 hours of work a day, 365 days a year, to build this mammoth beast.

What we produced? It *is* an experiment. It's the by-product of our passion and drive to do our part to help find new answers to old problems. And, yes, we followed an unusual path – one that didn't follow the tried-and-true rituals of Silicon start-ups – in the hopes we could avoid political trip wires, adhere to the curricula of 13 different jurisdictions and create something relevant and fresh for both students and teachers, no matter where they live and no matter their world view.

Nature Labs isn't perfect because, as you we have so clearly demonstrated, we're not perfect.

But it's our sincere hope that the foundation we have nearly finished will be a chance to test and refine our vision; a chance to grow our team and augment our skills; a chance to take what we have and enhance it in ways *you* want to see.

We've tried to tell nature stories in new ways – tried to make Nature Labs a little more TikTok than David Attenborough. And we've never allowed others to influence what students will see; we haven't and never will tell students what to think.

We hope this tool makes education more exciting, more fun, more relevant. We hope students will see the connections between what can be boring, dry curricula and real-world issues. We hope students will better understand why nature matters – why every decision we make every single day interconnects and impacts nature and our future in ways big and small.

Mostly, we hope we've helped challenge and empower a new generation to be better stewards *and* citizens, today and every day. Because that's nature literacy and that's our dream. And thanks to you, we're one step closer to realizing it. We're forever grateful.



Simon & Jill

#### **Ghost Bear Institute: Our Story**

This is our answer to a year of listening to teachers and students, communities and perspectives, from coast to coast to coast.

This is our attempt to help 13 different jurisdictions learn from the same material for once, while still meeting the diverse curricula in all 13 jurisdictions.

This is our attempt to help educators find a diversity of tools and lessons and resources and opportunities needed to bring our real world to life in the classroom for all learning types, without asking educators to analyze biases or search for different perspectives or draw curriculum connections or wedge-in US content into the Canadian context.

And it's not perfect, but we refuse to let perfect be the enemy of the good; we refuse to at least not try to do our part – to do something different and see what's possible when we unleash the ingenuity and imaginations of the next generation.

Today, we're testing and editing our all-written version of Nature Labs with select students and teachers across the country. And in 2023? We aim to finish our biggest goal: an all-audio and all-video version of the platform, releasing Nature Labs to high school schools everywhere, a la carte for a range of subjects and grades, or as a fully plug-and-play program, focused on grade 10 Science, Language Arts, Careers, Art and Social Studies.

Nature Labs has been a journey.

We thought we could pilot a simple version of Nature Labs...and then we realized why so few try to make national, curricula-connected education platform.

We hoped we could hire a team to augment our skills...and then discovered no community could agree on funding that lacks a real or perceived bias.

We hoped we could find a few key perspectives to link classrooms to nature and nature to our world and our world back to the communities where students live...and then realized the diversity of perspectives required to really tell the balanced story.

And we've been thrown a few curveballs along the way.

In no particular order, our apartment flooded. It caught fire. Our main character died. We were told he was alive for a year when he wasn't. We got into a serious car crash while in the field, and suffered a serious concussion in addition to the car accident. Our apartment lost heat and hot water, in the middle of winter. We had to move and then move again because, I mean, who provides heat and hot water these days? Simon's dad suffered a major heart attack and Jill's family is tackling a major health crisis. And we're still dealing with our own health crisis: Jill has been battling Long COVID for over a year, having been hospitalized repeatedly in 2022; Simon is battling a serious neurological disorder that brings a heightened risk of stroke.

Look, it's been a lot. It's still a lot. And we'd lie if we said we're not exhausted. But who's not? These are hard times and they're unlikely to get easier for you, for us, for anyone.

We can't quit. More than that, we all must try to do better if we actually want to demand better. And we should all be demanding better.

For us that begins with Nature Labs.



## **Ghost Bear Institute: Our Vision**

#### **Our Mission**

We seek to inspire, educate and spark a new generation to foster a better balance between people and nature.

#### **Our Vision**

We believe the discourse surrounding the environment has become highly divisive and overly simplistic, hurting both the environment *and* the economy. And little effort is being made to tackle the root of the problem: a society lacking nature literacy and increasingly unwilling to learn from differing viewpoints. Too few people have a personal connection to the land and, far more troubling, even fewer have been schooled in the relationship between nature and cultural diversity, healthy communities and a strong economy.

We believe that a generational shift is needed in our understanding and appreciation for nature. Where to begin? The *most cost-effective tool in our tool-kit*: education. We need to build on the nature literacy foundation that students acquire in their primary years and create the affordable, virtual experiences – fortified by curriculum-connected resources – that can help students appreciate that we're a world of ecosystems, inclusive of the communities they house.

After all, nature is a fundamental building block of life, transcending politics, geography and age. Canadians need to be inspired to put aside their differences and engage in hard conversations, be open to thinking critically about the problems at hand and, together, rally behind promising solutions that allow innovation to trump compromise.

This is our dream. We hope it's yours too. Together, let's make it a reality.

#### Signature Program: Nature Labs

Ghost Bear Institute was founded with the single purpose of incubating our signature program, Nature Labs. It is our hope, when we prove the concept, that we can find a long-term, non-partisan home for the education platform, allowing us to dissolve the non-profit Ghost Bear Institute umbrella.

#### What is Nature Labs?

Nature Labs is a **virtual** high school textbook. Built on a foundation of **storytelling**, we provide teachers with **plug-and-play**, **inquiry-based** resources to help students use nature as a **real-world** example of class lessons in order to **advance nature literacy**.

#### How?

Imagine the wonder of a science centre brought to life online in every high school classroom and enhanced by **crossdisciplinary master classes in citizenship**, with nature acting as the common starting point for learning. Now imagine the expensive, outdated textbook being replaced with an immersive virtual experience that is **relatable and responsive** to the world where students live, with information being **updated in real-time**. All of this? Brought together with **balanced storytelling** that blends *60 Minutes* fundamentals with the pacing of *Vice* or *Juice Media* and the visuals of *National Geographic* to create the kind of **multi-media content** needed to spark a passion.

#### This is Nature Labs.

Our online classroom is enhanced by unit and lesson plans **designed by a teacher for teachers** to ensure every aspect of the platform is **curriculum-connected** and plug-and-play, **delivering what educators actually need**. Nature Labs aims to make education more effective, creating time for teachers to work one-on-one with students, while providing students with the tools to transform their lessons into projects to better their community and the natural world.

# Now imagine you're one of Canada's 400,000 grade ten students. The latest unit your teacher introduces doesn't begin with a textbook assignment or a lecture, but with a story.

Chocolate was the dominant bear in the Rocky Mountain ecosystem of Mount Robson – until he was hit by a semitrailer. With an injured back, he used swimming as a tool to ease his pain and navigate a landscape increasingly littered by roads and railways and pipelines. He succeeded until the day he couldn't cross the railway fast enough to avoid a train. His last surviving offspring? Two bears – a male and female – who, despite conventional wisdom, refused to separate after being run off by their mother. For three years, instead of becoming competitors, these bears have spent every waking second together – grazing, hunting, denning. Playing. They've learned to survive in an increasingly complex world for large carnivores by helping each other thrive. This is not just a story about an indicator species. It's a visual metaphor for our relationship with nature: fragile, yet resilient. It's also a metaphor for how we can find a better balance in a changing world: by working with each other – with unlikely allies in unlikely circumstances – we can find new solutions to old problems.

The story unfolds across the lessons in each of the five courses fundamental to understanding the interconnectivity of nature and decision-making: Science, Socials, Language, Art and Career. The lessons connect outward from the lives of the bears and the ecosystem they call home, to the larger issues that shape their world and ours. As students explore curriculum requirements like career trends, the food chain and policy-making, their teachers are not only the bears, but also 150 diverse citizens – from former prime ministers to top chefs – whose daily choices affect our entire society, including the future of these bears.

By the end of Nature Labs, students will connect the story of these bears to global issues and back to the communities where they live. They'll understand the relevance of the lessons they've learned and how they relate to current events, good citizenship and their future career. And by showcasing the importance of listening and empathizing with those we might disagree with, we can help students think more critically and act more creatively – for people and for nature – today and tomorrow.



# What does success look like?

With more than four million students going through grade ten in Canada in the next decade alone, if just 1000 classrooms - or 25,000 students - in four core subjects participate in at least ten Nature Labs lessons, more than one million hours of time will be spent using the platform.

If this happens?

**Thousands of teachers** will gain access to critical resources that can enable them to deliver better education.

Hundreds of thousands of students will learn to understand and appreciate nature – and put that knowledge into practice by designing newer, better ideas for moving forward.

This matters. Why?

If **millions of Canadians** act with a foundation of nature literacy in all that they do, we can start creating a better discourse and a better balance between the needs of people and nature. Meet the Co-Founders & Co-Executive Directors:

#### **JILL COOPER**

Growing up in rural Ontario, Jill discovered her passion for the outdoors at an early age and realized in her teens that her professional calling was in education.

For a decade, Jill worked to create connections between technology and nature as a high school geography and media arts teacher, promoting experiential education and leading numerous excursions, including a science-focused field trip to Nicaragua.

When she found resource gaps, Jill worked to fill them – first off the side of her desk and eventually in the full-time pursuit of system-wide education resource development. Jill has advised the establishment of a school council for the Jane Goodall Institute of Canada and helped design of the Spirit Bear Youth Coalition's award-winning education program. And for the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity she worked to build a new multi-faceted training program that seeks to better equip teachers to execute STEAM techniques.

No matter the project, Jill's hallmark has been an approach that strives to be fair in her research and communication: Presenting unbiased facts to ignite a passion in others to think critically, work collaboratively and demand better of themselves and our world.

For each endeavour Jill has journeyed, she has proven an understanding of how to develop innovative programming from development to curriculum integration to classroom implementation. It's this unique insight that is at the heart of the Ghost Bear Institute's projects.







Meet the Co-Founders & Co-Executive Directors:

#### SIMON JACKSON







Simon is a storyteller, connector and movement builder who has dedicated his life to finding a better balance between the needs of people and nature.

At the age of 13, Simon founded the Spirit Bear Youth Coalition in the quest to unite the voice of young people to save Canada's endangered white Kermode or spirit bear. Through the Youth Coalition, Simon led the campaign that helped raise international awareness about the plight of the rare bear, transforming the organization into the world's largest youth-led environmental movement with a global network of more than 6 million in over 85 countries.

After almost two decades of work, the spirit bear is now saved, with its last intact habitat having been set aside from development through one of the largest land protection measures in North American history.

Simon has received several honours for his work to save the spirit bear, including being awarded Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee Medal, being named as one of the 100 Angels of the Earth by UNESCO and, most notably, being honoured as one of Time Magazine's sixty Heroes for the Planet – one of only six young people selected from around the world. His life's work was the focus of an internationally televised movie, *Spirit Bear: The Simon Jackson Story*.

Simon is an accomplished motivational speaker with agency Speakers' Spotlight and an award-winning photographer and a widely published writer. Having contributed images and chapters to eight books, he has also had hundreds of essays and opinion editorials published in newspapers, magazines, academic journals, web sites and textbooks around the world – many underpinned by his photography. Simon has served as a columnist for CBC.ca and the Huffington Post and recently co-authored the book *A Geography of Hope: Saving Primary Forests*. His writing led him to being named a Fellow of the International League of Conservation Writers.

His varied work has enabled Simon to travel coast-to-coast-to-coast to share the lessons from his journey, as his powerful story is a reminder that one person can make a difference. Indeed, Simon's storytelling ability, combined with his understanding of how successful movements are built, underpins the work of the Ghost Bear Institute.

## Meet the Ghost Bear Institute's Founding Board of Directors

#### LIBBY GARG | ENTREPRENEUR & BUSINESS LEADER - VICE CHAIR

Libby Garg is from BC's Okanagan Band, and grew up in BC's rural Shuswap and Okanagan Valleys. She credits her work ethic, as well as deep love and admiration for animals and nature, to growing up on a working dairy farm.

Libby Garg holds a Bachelor of Commerce and Economics, as well as a Juris Doctor from the University of British Columbia. In 2010, while still in law school, Libby was the co-founder and the managing partner of the private investment partnership DGH Capital. Most notably, Libby led the strategy that invested in Facebook prior to its IPO, as well as Privateer Holdings.

Libby left the practice of law in 2016 to return to entrepreneurial pursuits in opening her first quick service restaurant, Freshii. Her location is one of the top performing stores measured by sales.

Building on her expertise in the quick service restaurant industry, Libby founded WorkSolute, a payroll company that services industries with high employee turnover, and hourly waged based employees. WorkSolute won the Ignite Business Competition in 2016, which provided initial start up capital. Relying primarily on organic growth, the company is now forecasted to pay approximately 1200 employees per pay period this year alone.

In addition to being Vice-Chair of Ghost Bear Institute, Libby sits on multiple boards in both her business and personal communities – and believes that the world would be a better place if more people were like animals. In her free time, she enjoys exploring Toronto with her husband and their dog Jack, a rescued pug-russell.





#### AMANDA GIERLING | FINANCE & ACCOUNTING SPECIALIST - TREASURER

Amanda Gierling is a Chartered Professional Accountant, who works at the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions. Previously, Amanda spent four years at Ernst & Young LLP while studying for her accounting designation, where she gained extensive experience serving clients in the not-for-profit sector, and spent nearly a decade working at Travelers Canada, a leading property and casualty insurer. Amanda brings invaluable financial expertise to the role of Treasurer on the Ghost Bear Institute's board, helping support the growth of Nature Labs.

As a mother, Amanda understands the need for a modern curriculum that takes advantage of current technologies and fosters a respect for nature in a way that is fun and relatable for the next generation of students.

Amanda earned her undergraduate degree in management and organizational studies from Western University in London, Ontario. She currently lives in Toronto with her family.

## Meet the Ghost Bear Institute's Founding Board of Directors



# MEHERNOSH PESTONJI | EDUCATOR & EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING DESIGNER – SECRETARY

Mehernosh Pestonji was born in India and came to Canada in 1972 as a landed immigrant. Those first formative years growing up in a developing county, as well as his subsequent visits to India, Cambodia, Tanzania and other far-flung corners of the world, sparked his life-long passion for social justice, environmental issues and community development.

This passion has infused Nosh's teaching and related professional pursuits during a diverse, three decade-long career in public and independent schools, including teaching exchanges in England and Thailand. He has taught in elementary and secondary schools, and is a co-founder of T.E.A.M. Project Milliken, an award-winning project-based alternate education program for at-risk youth. In 2002, Nosh moved to the independent school system, as a Geography teacher, later taking on the role of Director of Outreach and developed a dynamic and diverse Outreach Program.

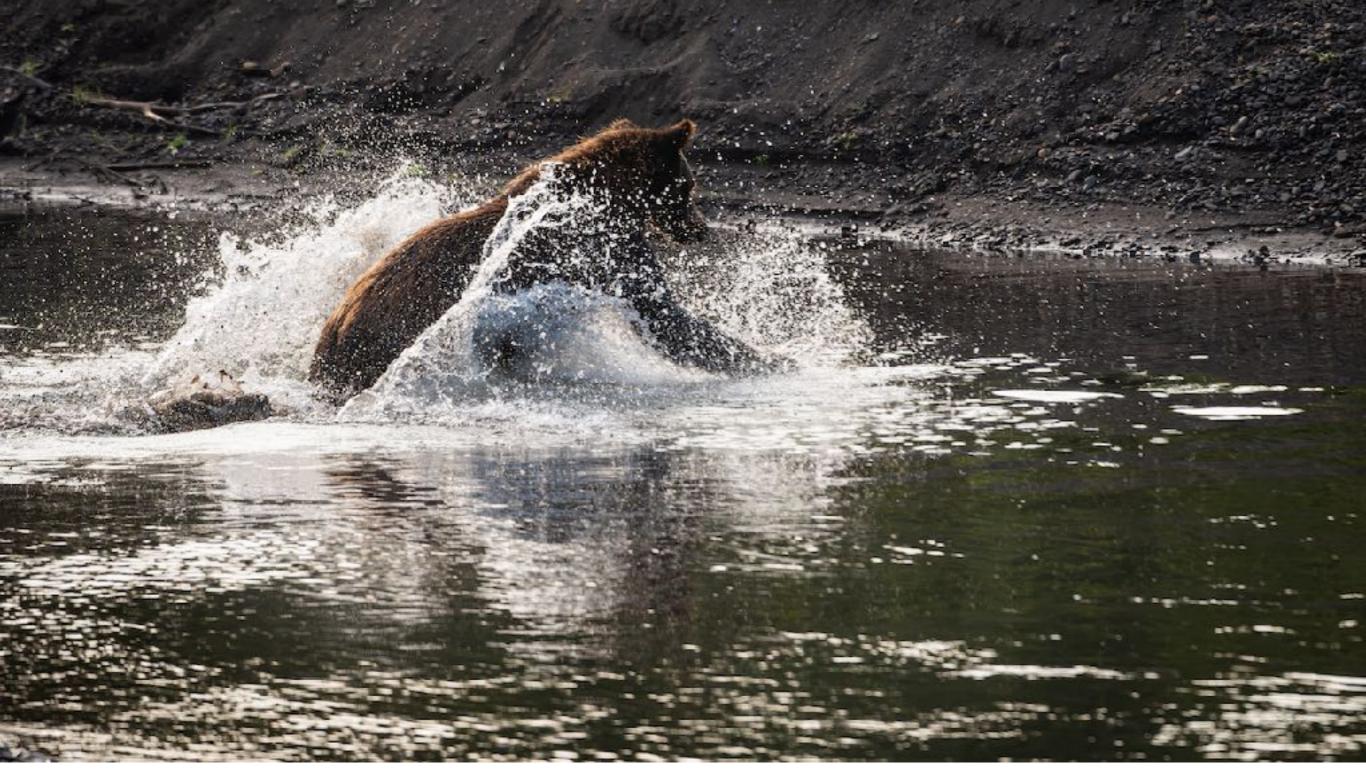
Whether introducing elementary students to the wonders of Mayan civilizations, leading urban teenagers in back-country canoeing expeditions, exploring contemporary world issues with Grade 12 students, or leading Learning Service Expeditions around the world, Nosh has worked to help students expand their environment and the world view. He is a strong believer that helping rising leaders gain new and different perspectives is at the heart of personal transformation and fundamental to creating a more thoughtful society. It's also proven to be one of the most exciting and rewarding aspects of his life's journey.

#### KERRIE BLAISE | ENVIRONMENTAL LAWYER & PUBLIC POLICY ANALYST - CHAIR

Kerrie Blaise is lawyer and advocate based in Ontario, Canada, passionately dedicated to environmental and public interest law. After years of volunteering with many environmental non-profits, including the Spirit Bear Youth Coalition; obtaining a Masters of Science from the University Edinburgh, where she studied the marine impacts of offshore oil development; and graduating from Osgoode Hall Law School in 2016, Kerrie is honoured to join the Ghost Bear Institute as its Chair.

Kerrie continues to work in the non-profit sector, representing clients and community groups seeking to uphold the government's commitments on environmental protection. She frequently appears before tribunals, at conferences and in consultations with government officials on issues spanning nuclear reactor safety and environmental protection, international trade agreements, natural resource use and endangered species.







# **ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

For the year ended December 31, 2023

# **Unaudited Statement of Financial Position**

As at December 31			
In Canadian dollars	2023	2022	
Assets			
Current			
Cash and cash equivalents	24,790	12,380	
Total current assets	24,790	12,380	
Capital assets, net [note 3]	25,424	18,397	
	50,214	30,777	
Liabilities and net assets			
Net assets			
Unrestricted	50,214	30,777	
Total net assets	50,214	30,777	
	50,214	30,777	

See accompanying notes

## Unaudited Statement of Activities

For the year ended December 31

In Canadian dollars	2023	2022
Revenue		
Grants	15,000	
Fundraising/Patreon	37,030	34,687
Image sales	7,146	6,249
	59,176	40,936
Expenses		
Travel costs	4,529	5,264
Project development	523	711
Domain, server and security	2,323	1,178
Phone and internet	2,212	1,329
Office and software	1,474	1,163
Insurance	2,759	2,325
Car maintenance	892	1,257
Printing and mailing		648
Not-for-profit organization fees	124	107
Capital asset amortization	6,581	4,654
Loss on disposition of capital assets	1,165	-
Honourariums	15,00 <b>0</b>	15,000
PayPal and Patreon fees	2,157	2,691
	39,739	36,327
Excess of revenue over expenses	19,437	4,609

# Unaudited Statement of Cash Flows

For the year ended December 31		
In Canadian dollars	2023	2022
Operating activities		
Excess of revenue over expenses for the year	19,437	4,609
Add (deduct) items not affecting cash:		
Amortization of capital assets	6,581	4,654
Loss on disposition of capital assets	1,165	-
Cash provided by operating activities	27,183	9,263
Investing activities		
Capital asset additions	(18,421)	(4,330)
Proceeds from disposition of capital assets	3,648	-
Cash used in investing activities	(14,773)	(4,330)
Net increase in cash and cash equivalents	12,410	4,933
Cash and cash equivalents, beginning of year	12,380	7,447
Cash and cash equivalents, end of year	24,790	12,380

See accompanying notes

## Notes to the Unaudited Financial Statements

December 31, 2023

#### 1. Nature of the organization

Ghost Bear Institute [the "Institute"] is a federally incorporated not-for-profit organization with a permanent establishment only in Calgary, Alberta. The Institute seeks to inspire, educate and spark a new generation to foster a better balance between people and nature and works to achieve this mandate through its signature program, Nature Labs – a virtual high school textbook that aims to advance nature literacy.

#### 2. Significant accounting policies

These financial statements are prepared in accordance with Part III of the *Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada ["CPA Canada"] Handbook – Accounting* "Accounting Standards for Not-for-Profit Organizations", which sets out accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations in Canada and includes the significant accounting policies summarized below:

#### [a] Revenue recognition

The Institute follows the deferral method of accounting for contributions. Unrestricted contributions and fundraising grants are recognized as revenue when received or receivable if the amount to be received can be estimated and collectability is reasonably assured. Externally restricted contributions are deferred and recognized as revenue in the period in which the related expense is recognized. Fees for service are recognized when the service has been rendered.

#### [b] Financial instruments

Investments are recorded at fair value. Transactions are recorded on a trade basis and transaction costs are expensed as incurred.

Financial instruments, including accounts receivable, accounts payable and accrued liabilities, are initially recorded at their fair value and are subsequently measured at amortized cost, net of any provisions for impairment.

## [c] Capital assets

Capital assets are recorded at acquisition cost less accumulated amortization. Amortization is recorded on a straight-line basis over the estimated useful lives of the related assets at terms ranging from five to ten years.

#### [d] Contributed services and materials

The Institute is governed and supported by numerous volunteers. Contributed services and materials are not reflected in these financial statements as determining their fair value is not practicable.

#### [e] Use of estimates

The preparation of financial statements requires management to make estimates and assumptions that affect the reported amounts of assets and liabilities at the date of the financial statements, and the reported amounts of revenue and expenses during the reporting period. Examples of such estimations and assumptions include the useful lives of capital assets and vehicle maintenance and insurance costs. Actual results could differ from those estimates.

#### 3. Capital assets

Capital assets consist of the following:

	2023		2022	
	Cost \$	Accumulated amortization §	Cost S	Accumulated amortization \$
Computer equipment	16,281	6,973	13,961	4,536
Camera and audio equipment	23,088	6,972	17,246	8,274
	39,369	13,945	31,207	12,810
Less: accumulated amortization	13,945		12,810	
Net book value	25,424		18,397	

The Institute disposed of capital assets with a net book value of \$4,813, which resulted in a loss on disposition of \$1,165.

## 4. Financial instruments and risk management

The Institute's financial instruments include cash and cash equivalents, accounts payable and accrued liabilities. The Institute is not currently exposed to credit, interest rate and foreign exchange risk.

## Liquidity risk

The Institute is exposed to the risk that it will have difficulty in meeting obligations associated with its financial liabilities. The Institute has in place a budgeting process to help determine the funds required to support the organization's normal operating requirements on an ongoing basis.



Written Version

Audio Version

Video Version

150 of 150

Interviews Completed

100

Terabytes (TB) of Content Gathered

17 Months in a Tent

**97%** 

Website Construction Completed

1.5

Million Words Written

# 150 of 150

**Teacher Resources Completed** 

5000

**Resources Analyzed** 

700 of 700

Hours of Footage Metalogged

300

Individuals & Organizations

Consulted

60,000

Images Sorted and Edited

530

**Media Productions Completed** 

100 of 100

Podcasts Completed



We don't want to create a new generation of activists. We want to help every student *act with a foundation of nature literacy* in all that they do. In succeeding, we can help enhance *critical thinking skills* that are necessary to *create a thoughtful citizenry* and a more *creative workforce* - one that strives to find a better balance between the needs of people and nature.

Let's build Nature Labs. Together.

And we are, thanks to: BC Parks, Aldonna, Alice, Alyssa, Amanda, Amy, Arika, Ashley, Avram, Bob, Candace, Carl, Carol Ann, Chantelle, Chris, Claudia, Clive, Colleen, Daniel, Dave, Davin, Dawn, Dev, Diane, Diliana, Erica, Frances, Ganesh, Gayle, Gena, Harold, Isobel, Jade, James, Jamie, Jane, Jean, Jen, Jennifer, Jessie, Joan, Judi, Judy, Katie, Kerri, Kristen, Lois, Lori, Lorraine, Marie-Eve, Marjorie, Marnie, Marilyn, Michelle, Nick, Nicholas, Nicholas, Nikki, Nosh, Ollie, Ozpirate, Patricia, Pattie, Paula, Peter, Pierre, Rob, Robin, Robyn, Salimah, Scott, Sean, Shannon, Stephen, Susan, Tanya, Terri, Theresa, Timothy, Tom, Victor, Warren, Yemisi