

Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society



December 2015 Newsletter

Cooperation Gets Us Through the Drought of 2015

The summer of 2015 will go down as the driest on record for our community. The expected drought did materialize and we had almost no precipitation until the end of August. Our community leaders worked together to get the word out and encourage water conservation. Water usage restrictions were imposed and brown lawns and dirty cars became desirable symbols of our determination to reduce water consumption. By September, water usage was about half what it was in June. River flows and lake levels were a serious concern and Catalyst worked with government agencies, local governments, Cowichan Tribes and local conservation groups including the CLRSS to determine the best course of action. River flow was reduced to a minimum of 4.5 CMS in July and we got to within 2 weeks of our river running dry when the life-sustaining rains came at the end of August. Soon there was enough water for our salmon to get to their spawning grounds and the health of our river was restored.



The Shoreline Stewardship Project wrapped up in September and our crew restored ten properties this summer. Five on the lake and five on the river. Christine Brophy led the crew of Mandy Hobkirk, Raimond Mullin, James Cummings, Mackenzie Lacon and alternate Tanner Cummings. Several CLRSS volunteers pitched in as well. We restored 2105 square meters of shoreline and planted 1375 riparian plants this year. Work was also done at Saywell Park where members and volunteers repaired some damage that was inadvertently done by city crews that were cleaning up the area.

Our Annual General Meeting was held on October 18 and was a great success. We have a new President, Leroy Van Wieren and two new Board members, Rose Davidson who will take over as Treasurer and Maureen Quested, member at large. Past President Dianna Gunderson will serve as Vice-President. Longtime members George DeLure and Bill Gibson were honoured with lifetime memberships for their years of tireless effort, primarily with stream signage and water quality monitoring. We had a fun quiz where tables competed for prizes based on their knowledge of our watershed and CLRSS history and initiatives.



The Annual River Cleanup was a great success again this year. We had 108 volunteers and together we removed 1,400 pounds of garbage from the river between the weir and Sandy Pool. 2,835 returnable bottles and cans were also gathered and taken to the bottle depot. We are starting to notice a decrease in the numbers of cans and the garbage in the river from year to year. This is good news as it seems people are getting the message about keeping our river clean. The most unusual find this year was a rail car axle, which was quite a challenge for the divers to remove. Many thanks to all of our volunteers and sponsors. Country Grocer again provided food and drinks for the wrap-up barbecue and the food was expertly prepared by the staff from Jakes at the Lake.



Salmon Fry Rescue and Monitoring wrapped up in August with well over 100,000 salmon fry saved. CLRSS volunteers worked alongside Cowichan Salmon Enhancement Society and Lake Cowichan Band members with support from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to determine what species of salmon were utilizing each tributary creek of Cowichan Lake. DNA samples were taken from fry in many of the creeks trying to determine their species with most interest in chinook fry utilizing the tributaries. Chinook were indeed found to be spawning in Ashburnham Creek, the Robertson River and Sutton Creek, which was very interesting scientific information. Work was also done on determining the size and genetic composition of summer run chinook salmon. The summer run chinooks were

once the predominant run and have been reduced to a remnant population. A fish counter placed in the river this summer counted over 200 salmon that swam up the river in the lowest and warmest water of the year, proving their strength and resilience. This information has proven to be very interesting and research will continue again next summer supported by DFO and Cowichan Tribes with CLRSS volunteer support.

A Gerald Thom Environmental Studies Bursary was created this year by CLRSS to honour Gerald's work and to highlight his emphasis on the importance of education and involving youth. A \$750 bursary was awarded to Alex Werk from Lake Cowichan School and presented by Caroline Thom.



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President Leroy Van Wieren and all CLRSS Board Members thank you for your support and interest in the Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society. Join us as we continue to work hard to protect our lake and river for future generations.