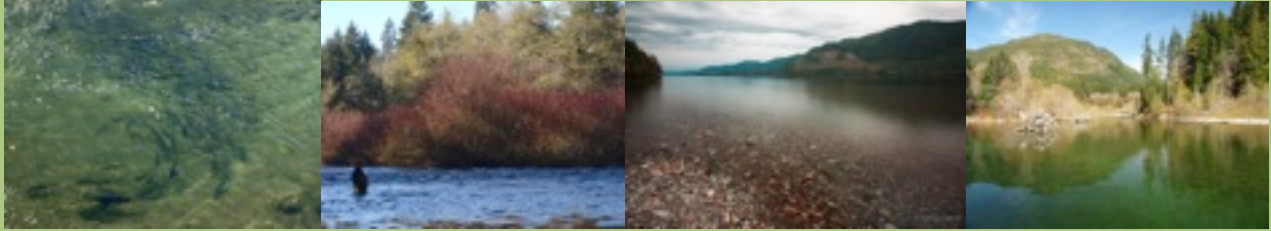


Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society



September 2014 Newsletter

CLRSS Members Honour Gerald Thom with Completed Tasks

The tragic passing of our President Gerald Thom this summer did not deter us in our efforts to protect and preserve our lake and river. Many of us were working with him on July 26, the day he died pursuing his passion for flying and we are resolved to continue and redouble our efforts in his memory. His spirit lives on with our group and we know we will all work hard to continue the momentum he was so instrumental in creating in our Society.



The Cowichan Shoreline Stewardship Project (CSSP) was started this spring and by September we had completed restoration on seven lakefront properties by removing invasive plants and planting over 2,000 native riparian plants in their place. This was the first year of the three year project and funding of \$80,250 was raised from several sponsors and government agencies to complete the work. We hired a crew of four secondary school students and Christine Brophy, a VIU Environmental Studies student to supervise the restorations.

Work was done in July at Paradise Village RV Park where our students and 34 volunteers planted 640 riparian plants and the Lake Cowichan First Nation lands where 33 volunteers placed 850 native plants. In August five private residences had significant restorations done by our summer student crew.

We will soon begin the process of selecting the properties to be restored next year. Every one completed moves us closer to our goal of restoring 3% of altered shoreline to a natural state.

Riparian property visits were continued this summer and we have now talked with 143 of the 411 identified riparian properties around the lake and upper river since we started the visits in 2012. During these visits, CLRSS members discuss riparian issues with a view to helping the property owners understand the importance of intact and functioning riparian ecosystems. Our riparian brochures are left with the property owners and many of them have asked to be a part of the CSSP.

Surveys were added to our riparian visits this summer. One of our CSSP funders is EcoAction Canada and they are interested in how successful we are in creating riparian awareness in our community over the life of the 3 year project. We developed a 10 question survey where participants are asked to choose photographs that demonstrated various riparian values and conditions. The survey was a great way to introduce our canvassers and lead into discussions of riparian values. Most people were happy to take it and we have now surveyed almost a quarter of the riparian properties in all areas of the community. We will continue the surveys for the next two years and will be able to see how public awareness of riparian values might have changed during the duration of the CSSP.



The Annual River Cleanup was another great success this year. Over 100 volunteers pitched in for the CLRSS upper river cleanup and we removed one ton of garbage and 4,000 returnable bottles from the river this year. We also found 600 pounds of recyclable metal including a large ship anchor. Water Woman



showed up at the barbecue to express her gratitude for all our efforts in cleaning up the river before she drew the winning ticket in our raffle that was won by Lake Cowichan Mayor Ross Forrest. Many thanks to all of our sponsors for the prizes, food and drinks that were donated and given to all participants.



Interpretive signs are now installed at Saywell Park to explain the riparian restoration and new dock construction that was done in the past year. There are signs that show some of the plants that were placed near the water after blackberries were removed and others that show the birds and fish that live in our riparian areas, river and lake. These signs complement the restoration efforts taken and provide information to those visiting the park about the importance of intact riparian ecosystems.

2014 has proven to be another drought year. We have had little precipitation this summer and the lake and river are near historic lows for this time of year. We had a mild winter with little snowpack and below normal precipitation that led to very low lake levels as summer began.

We are very concerned about the returning chinook salmon that are now staging in the estuary, unable to enter the river because of low water. The CLRSS is working with other community groups and all levels of government to encourage water conservation and prepare to do what we can to help the salmon get to their spawning grounds. A large trucking operation is being planned to move the fish up the river again this year. Long term solutions to our recurring drought problems are being studied, including the reconstruction of the weir to enable more water storage in the lake. Climate change has reduced our summer precipitation by 35% since the 1980's and we will need to adapt to these changes in order to preserve our aquatic ecosystems.

Our Annual General Meeting will be held at the Lake Cowichan Curling Club Lounge at 10 am Sunday October 19th. All members as of September 19, 2014 are eligible to vote.

Join us online at www.cowichan-lake-stewards.ca Facebook www.facebook.com/cowichanstewards



President Diana Gunderson 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.