

volunteers in parks



This Season in Parks

From Concession to Nature Centre

AUTUMN 2007

Volunteers In Parks is a quarterly newsletter produced by Capital Regional District Parks



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People must be eating healthier today than when I was a kid. In the 60s when my family would go to the beach we'd always visit the concession stand, but concession stands today seem to be going the way of the dinosaur. Look at Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park for

had the shell of building we could begin to use. Thank you to Park Services North interpreter Robyn Sealy and her friend (and sometimes Regional Parks caretaker) Emily Grav, the interior central wall was decorated with a stylized mural of Beaver Lake.



The Beaver Lake Nature Centre, Before (L) and After (R)

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example: There used to be concessions at Eagle, Hamsterly and Beaver beaches and now they are all empty—all except Beaver! Last year we decided to take the slogan *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle* to a whole new level and turn the newly vacated concession at Beaver Beach into a nature centre.

The first step was to remove all of the grills, fryers, freezers and home-made shelves and counters from the building. A good steam cleaning was in order to remove the aroma of decades of French fries and to make sure you didn't risk life and limb on the grease slick floors.

Windows were inserted into the order and pick-up openings and with a new coat of paint inside and out we

That first year we used the building primarily for school programs and with a modest supply of exhibits, it was open on weekends for the summer of 2006.

As fall approached it quickly became apparent that without insulation and heating the Lodge at Beaver Lake was only going to be a seasonal building. Richard Waterfield, the operations supervisor for Park Services North, came to our rescue and arranged for new lighting, insulation and heating to be installed last winter.

With a new computer plotter at the Regional Parks office and the desktop publishing skills of our interpretive staff we've been busy developing

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The E&N Rail Trail Gets Underway

The Esquimalt and Nanaimo (E&N) Rail Trail Initiative is a “Rail-with-Trail” project, building a multi-use trail beside the existing E&N rail track from the Johnson Street Bridge in the City of Victoria to the city of Langford and Goldstream Provincial Park.

The corridor is wholly owned by the **Island Corridor Foundation**, who



has agreed to lease the land needed for the rail trail. The E&N corridor was identified in the CRD Parks Master Plan as a potential regional trail from the Johnson Street bridge to the Old Island Highway in the Town of View Royal. Under the Board’s direction,

this initiative now extends westward into Langford. Municipalities along the corridor include the City of Victoria, Township of Esquimalt, Town of View Royal and the City of Langford.

The trail will be built within the rail corridor, while allowing the continuation of passenger rail service on the rail line itself. The trail will be managed by CRD Parks, and will connect with the already successful **Galloping Goose and Lochside regional trails**. It will create a significant cycling and walking route between downtown Victoria and the West Shore, and provide a ‘green’, healthy alternate means of moving through the communities it serves.

Some funding for the trail has already been secured, and a call for proposals will be going out within the month for the detailed engineering and

design of the trail. Once the detailed design has been prepared, construction can begin. The goal is to have the trail open before the Winter Olympics in 2010.

*Don Watmough
Parks Planner*

From Concession to Nature Centre

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new exhibits for the nature centre: in celebration of the Saanich Strawberry Festival we have a new display about wild strawberries with live examples on exhibit; last year’s yellow jacket, owl, hummingbird and woodpecker displays have been updated; and by summer’s end we should have a new observation beehive.

Our plan for this fall is to paint the exterior of the building to make it look less bunkerish. Emily Grav has done a beautiful design chronicling the seasons that will make the building much more

attractive from the outside. Thanks to the initiative of one of our summer interpreters, Ashley Akins, we’re also exploring the possibility of installing a living roof on the nature centre.

Each year we will be adding new exhibits as our budget and supply of artifacts allow (if you have any skulls, pelts, feathers, etc. you’d like to donate we’d be happy to receive them). Hopefully, there will always be something new each time you visit the Beaver Lake Nature Centre.

*Scott Mair, Coordinator of
Environmental Interpretation*

Seeing the Blooms of Our Labour

Beginning in 2002 CRD Parks, with the help of countless volunteers, has actively removed two invasive species, Scotch broom and Daphne, from Mill Hill Regional Park. These non-native shrubs not only compete directly with native plants for light, water, and nutrients, but also increase the likelihood of a high-intensity fire and alter soil chemistry. Removing invasive species is an important aspect of the restoration plan for the park. That plan aims to enhance and protect the ecological integrity of the Garry oak ecosystem on Mill Hill, which contributes to the less than 5% remaining in all of its historic range. Protecting and restoring remaining Garry oak ecosystems is so important, as many plants and animals found nowhere else are now at risk of extinction.

At the beginning of the Mill Hill Restoration project, a plant inventory documented eight species of plants listed as rare or endangered by the Provincial government at 32 locations. In the past five years, over 30 metric tonnes of broom was removed from almost 13 hectares! And the fruits of that effort are being realized. By 2005, the number of rare plants increased to 14 species at more than 170 locations! In May, the wildflowers create an impressive carpet, where just a few years ago only a wall of shrub existed. The endangered sharp-tailed snake and two rare butterflies were also seen! But the job isn’t done yet.

Scotch broom is such a successful species partly because of its prolific seed production. One plant can produce over 18,000 seeds in one year! Those seeds can

Visitors Gone Astray = Restoration

remain dormant in the soil for decades. As result, areas of Mill Hill that have been cleared of mature broom plants are becoming re-infested with young broom plants. Lots of them! More than ever CRD Parks needs help from devoted volunteers to remove these young broom plants, before they start producing more seeds. We are hoping to recruit over 100



Cheryl, Restoration Volunteer

volunteers this year. Please join our team who have already signed up or pass the word onto your network of friends and family. Dates are October 13, 20, 27, and November 3 and you can participate for a full or half day. We will provide refreshments, tools, and recognition. Get out & give back and see the blooms of your labour!

Call Karen at 478-3344 to add your name to the list or send an email to parksvolunteer@crd.bc.ca.

*Jennifer Psyllakis
Environmental Conservation
Specialist*

Striking a balance between environmental and recreational values in parks is always a challenge. Many parks are established because they possess a wealth of natural and / or cultural values; however the creation of a park to protect these values inevitably results in the attraction of visitors who wish to experience them. Consequently, the mitigation of visitor use impacts is an integral aspect of park management.

Through an examination of the amount of vegetation present along the trail and in the water, the width of the trail, soil compaction, the amount of trail braiding, and the number of invasive plant species present, Regional Parks has determined that the impacts of visitor use on ecosystem function are greater than acceptable along the trails at Thetis Lake Regional Park.

Figure 1: Trail braiding (dashed line) occurs when park visitors repeatedly stray from the trail corridor (solid line).



One example of how ecosystem function has been affected at Thetis Lake pertains to soil erosion. Since vegetation is lacking along the trails, and since the soil in these areas has been compacted through visitor use, water is no longer able to filter through the trails' soil as it should. Instead, water runs over the ground's surface, causing channelling and erosion, and carrying fine particles into the lake where they affect water quality. Soil compaction and erosion are particularly noticeable in areas where visitors have continuously wandered off the trail, causing trail braiding (Figures 1 and 2). Ecosystem function has also been affected at the numerous locations where dogs have been running into the lake from the trails. In these areas, trampling by dogs has resulted in the loss of riparian and aquatic vegetation. Since aquatic vegetation and its associated organisms function as water filters, the loss of this vegetation can result in negative impacts to water quality in the lake.

In recognizing that Thetis Lake and its associated ecosystems have been substantially impacted by visitor use, CRD Regional Parks has planned a multi-phase restoration project along Thetis Lake's trails. The objectives of this project are to:

1. Minimize trail braiding by:
 - Clearly defining the trails
 - Improving trail quality to reduce trail avoidance by park visitors.
2. Restore vegetation in impacted areas.
3. Remove invasive plant species (e.g. English holly, Daphne, Scotch broom) that have taken residence along the trails.

This restoration project is consistent with the Thetis Lake, Francis/King, and Mill Hill Regional Parks Management Plan, approved by the CRD Board in October 2004; the plan provides a vision for the management of the three interconnected parks listed above. For a copy of the plan, please check out our web site at www.crd.bc.ca/parks/library.htm or give us a call.



Figure 2: In this portion of the Lower Thetis Lake Trail, visitors have strayed from the trail, which runs along the stairs to the left of the image, causing vegetation loss, as well as soil compaction and erosion toward the centre of the image.

The first phase of the project will target the Lower Thetis Lake Trail, which runs along the east (right) side of Lower Thetis Lake. This phase is scheduled for the fall, beginning in September. Because of the magnitude of the project, the trail will be closed throughout construction activities. Interpretive signs will be posted prior to project implementation so that visitors can learn more about the important ecological benefits of the restoration project.

Regional Parks appreciates everyone's understanding and effort in making our collective footprint a little bit lighter.

*Pam Wesley & Jennifer Psyllakis
Environmental Conservation Specialists*

Who's That VIP?

It's a challenge keeping up with Gil Parker, whether listening to his life's adventures or walking behind him during his weekly VIP Warden walk up Mount Wells.

Gil's mind seethes with ideas and his life is a testament to the fruition of many of them. Twenty years ago he wanted world peace and social justice.



Gil Parker, VIP Warden

Today, although he still works towards the change, he's keen on results. He cites a desire to make a difference as his reason for volunteering with Regional Parks, and likes being able to accomplish a little something every week in service to his surroundings.

Gil's email signature bills him as a "peripatetic writer"—a word that most of us must consult the dictionary to understand. Simply put, it involves wandering about, and Gil has done plenty of that. His travels have taken him from Vancouver Island's high spots all the way to Russia.

An invitation in 1986 offered him a shot at both wandering and making a first step towards some sort of mutual understanding and appreciation between nations at odds with each other. While working as a structural engineer, Gil traveled to Ottawa to learn how to build structures resistant to nuclear fallout. With his penchant for peace, Gil realized he had to do something about

the nuclear arms race.

With the help of the World Federalists and the Rotary Club, Gil organized an exchange where he and six other Canadians would travel to Russia. Russia in turn chose six of their own to visit Canada, including the humour editor of a Russian magazine and the mayor of a small city in Lithuania. Thus began

Gil's 15 year romance with Russia and its many peoples and cultures.

A total of 15 trips to Russia culminated in a self-published book (one of several), which Gil reads from during Rotary speaking engagements.

When asked about his next venture, Gil smilingly says, "To live a few more days," but we know it will be a bit more than that. In fact, Gil wants to encourage more people to get outdoors and enjoy the natural wonders. His 10-year-and-counting conquest of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), along the spine of mountains from Mexico to Canada via the west coast, has inspired him.

After treading along 400 kilometres of the PCT this year, Gil had an idea: He'd like to be part of establishing a trail, which he calls "The Spine," that steers wanderers across the ridge of mountains from southern to northern Vancouver Island. No small undertaking, but knowing Gil, achievable.

Peg Christian, Coordinator of Volunteers

Upcoming September Nature Programs:

Saturday, September 15

Ugh! A Slug!

Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park, 1 p.m. All ages.

Banana or licorice, slimy or ticklish, these misunderstood creatures are way cool! Follow a slime trail, get some slug power and learn more about one of nature's best recyclers. Meet at the information kiosk in the main Beaver Lake parking lot.

Sunday, September 16

Matheson Lake Canoe Adventure

Matheson Lake Regional Park, 8–11 a.m. 5 years and older.

Saturday, September 22

Nature's Buffet

Witty's Lagoon Regional Park, 1 p.m. All ages.

Which wild plants are edible? Where can you find them? How do you prepare them? Learn all of this and the ethics of wild plant gathering. There may be tasty samples. Meet at the Nature Centre in the parking lot off Metchosin Road.

Sunday, September 23

Mayne-ly Up

Mount Parke Regional Park (Mayne Island), 1 p.m. All ages.

Join a Mayne Island naturalist to explore hidden treasures on the way to the summit. The views are the best in the Gulf Islands. Meet in the parking lot at the end of Montrose Road.

Sunday, September 30

Hawk Watch

(Special Drop-in Event), East Sooke Regional Park, 11 a.m. – 3 p.m. All ages.