

# volunteers in parks



## This Season in Parks

### Are They Returning?

WINTER 2007

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



Capital Regional District  
**PARKS**

490 Atkins Avenue  
Victoria, BC V9B 2Z8  
tel (250) 478-3344  
fax (250) 478-5416

e: [CRDPARKS@crd.bc.ca](mailto:CRDPARKS@crd.bc.ca)  
[www.crd.bc.ca/parks](http://www.crd.bc.ca/parks)

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When ornithologist Bob Harrison saw the Ivory-billed woodpecker in Arkansas in February of 2004, he sat down on a log, put his head in his hands and cried: "It was very emotional for me. Finding an ivory-bill was a 33-year dream come true." This supposedly extinct woodpecker, last sighted over 60 years ago, was indeed alive! How wonderful to witness the return of a species once lost to us.

Consider the sea otter. Sea otters (*Enhydra lutris*) are true marine mammals, capable of living their entire lives in the ocean. Lacking the insulating blubber of most marine mammals, they rely on their fur for warmth in frigid ocean waters. Thicker than that of any other living mammal, their fur has about 100,000 hairs per square centimetre. To maintain an insulating air layer between the cold water and their skin, adults spend up to 15% of their time grooming their fur by licking and blowing into it. Meriweather Lewis (of the Lewis and Clarke expedition) said of this fur, "...it is the richest and I think the most delicious fur in the world, at least I cannot form an idea of anymore so." It was this luxurious fur that led to the sea otter's near demise worldwide.

For 2.5 million years sea otters flourished in the North Pacific. Rafts of these charismatic marine mammals floated on their backs amongst the expansive kelp beds of the Pacific Coast. Feeding on urchins, abalone, clams and other shellfish, sea otters were integral to the delicate balance of the coastal

kelp bed ecosystem. Then the balance began to tip.

With the arrival of the fur trade in 1774 the sea otter stood little chance. Before the sea otter hunt there were as many as 100,000 to 300,000 in the North Pacific. By the time hunting



Sea Otter Photo: Don Enright

these mammals was prohibited in the International Fur Seal Treaty of 1911, there were less than 2000 remaining in the world. The last sea otter off Vancouver Island was taken in 1929.

Sea otters are considered a keystone species.\* Coastal kelp beds are vital for the survival of many fish, marine invertebrates and marine mammals that feed on them. Kelp beds are at their healthiest when sea otters are present. Kelp is eaten by sea urchins and sea urchins are eaten by sea otters. With no sea otters, sea urchin populations multiplied and by 1910 California's kelp beds were

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# VIP Recognition 2006

On the morning of Saturday, November 4, we celebrated you, the volunteer, and your commitment to Regional Parks at our annual recognition event. We were treated to a delicious hot buffet breakfast at Dunsmuir Lodge and led by our Master of Ceremonies, Scott Mair. I know it would not be a stretch to say that we were completely engaged by the stories, our keynote speaker, Nancy Turner. We gained a new perspective for the future and were encouraged to continue with our commitment to our parks.

## One Year Recipients:

Paul LeGroulx  
Elise Hoefler  
Nancy Harrigan-Lambert  
Kem Luther  
Michelle Meier  
Joanna and Mike Preston  
Catrin Brown  
Dave and Lil Charles  
David Gellately  
Mai Lin Hagen  
Tawnya Jones  
Ann and Hu' King  
Kaye Leicester  
Nevada Reddon

## Five Year Recipients:

Chloe Faught  
Heidi Roemer  
Randy MacDonald  
Ian Gesman  
David Boag  
Steve Grundy  
Dave and Gail Nash  
Gil Parker  
Gary Schroyen

## Ten Year Recipients:

Vern Lhotzky  
Heather Luck  
Colin Ranson

## Fifteen Year Recipients:

Lynda and Rob Grant

## Twenty Year Recipient:

Ron Bradley

Lloyd Rushton reflected on his fondness for growing up on the east coast as the place where his love for nature began. He led us through the path his life took from one coast to the other, beginning his career at Regional Parks as a VIP Warden at Island View Beach in 1983 and now as General Manager, Parks and Community Services. John Ranns, Vice Chair of the CRD Parks Committee echoed the sentiment of all staff and committee members when he expressed heartfelt thanks for your commitment to Regional Parks and your community.

We honoured the volunteers who achieved one, five, ten, fifteen and twenty years of volunteer service and presented each with a gift. Ron Bradley, VIP Warden at Witty's Lagoon, celebrated his 20 years of service with us!

There was a great amount of history being shared, old friends reconnecting and new friendships starting. We now have great new memories of celebrating our annual recognition during Regional Parks 40th Anniversary to become part of that history.

A sampling of the comments we received after our celebration:

• *Thanks to CRD Parks for the great breakfast at Dunsmuir. Very good food. Nancy Turner was inspirational, as usual.*

• *What a treat we had on Saturday! Good food, inspiring words, useful exchanges and wonderful recognition for volunteer "pleasure." Thank you.*

• *Thank you for the great VIP appreciation breakfast at Dunsmuir. CRD certainly makes its volunteers feel appreciated.*

We announced that our annual recognition will be held during National Volunteer Week (April 15-21) in 2007. Across Canada, organizations that integrate volunteers with their mission come together as a group to highlight the achievement of volunteers in their community and celebrate as a unified voice for recognition and promotion of volunteer involvement. We are looking forward to seeing you there and news about the event will be coming soon!

## Meet Peg, our New Coordinator of Volunteers

Hello, everyone! As the new Coordinator of Volunteers for the West, I'm living a great adventure. In March 2006, after two years of working through Canadian residency processes, I entered Canada from Blaine, Washington, onto Highway 99.

Seven months later I joined the team at CRD Parks, much to my delight. I have a passion for the outdoors, and am licking my chops at the opportunities that await me on Vancouver Island. I hope you enjoy reading about me, and I look forward to getting to know you better.

I cut my outdoor teeth in New Zealand (NZ) from 1987-1995, where I scored a cooking job my first summer with a mountaineering school in Mt. Aspiring National Park ([www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)). I didn't know much about mountaineering, but located an ice axe, ice hammer, crampons, and a couple of snow stakes. Off I went for an amazing summer walking glacially carved valleys and summitting rugged peaks surrounded by glaciers (New Zealand's South Island has over 300 glaciers!).

At the end of that summer, I spent a month camping and rock climbing at Mt. Arapiles amongst the gum trees and kookaburra song of southeastern Australia. I still reflect upon my journals and poetry from that time, today. Jogging in the mist every morning through the wallaby herds is a memory that lingers.

To support my thirst for the outdoors, I earned my professional ski instructor pin in 1989 and worked in Colorado and New Zealand for a total of eight seasons (that's two winters per year!).

Four extended bike tours showed me other less secret but no less beautiful parts of NZ.

# Are They Returning? (continued from page 1)

Now I try to visit “down under” about every two years, where I explore new surroundings and visit some favourite old “home spots.”

Upon returning to North America to attend university in 1995, I spent 11 years in South-west Colorado, earning an undergraduate and a graduate degree (the latter in Negotiation and Conflict Management). The nearby Weminuche Wilderness, the largest wilderness area in Colorado, became my second home ([www.wilderness.net/index.cfm](http://www.wilderness.net/index.cfm)). Much of my free time was spent exploring this area. I also volunteered for Durango Nature Studies for five years, as a naturalist leading children’s walks.

It wasn’t all play in Colorado. I developed from the ground up a volunteer mediation program from inside the criminal justice system that evolved into a non-profit organization. Over eight years, we grew from 4 volunteers and 12 cases the first year to 35 skilled volunteers and more than 165 cases annually. During that time, a “Pedal for Peace” took a friend and I 236 miles over five alpine mountain passes along the San Juan Skyway ([www.wilderness.net/index.cfm](http://www.wilderness.net/index.cfm)) on a four day bike trek. What a fun way to raise money for peace! We enjoyed it so much that we did it again the next year.

As a newcomer to Canada, Victoria, and CRD Parks, I honour the diverse experience and history that you bring to your volunteer roles. Preserving wild areas means a lot to me and I imagine that we have that in common. As a lifelong learner, I also value education, and believe that wild areas are best preserved by all of us together understanding our role in this greater ecosystem we call Earth.

*Peg Christian*  
Coordinator of Volunteers

rare. Hunting the sea otter to near extinction meant the loss of the vital coastal kelp beds. In our region, the extirpation of the sea otter caused the populations of clams, urchins and abalone to balloon to beyond their natural populations. The coastal peoples began to harvest and depend on this new richness for their livelihood.

Between 1969 and 1972, efforts began to return sea otters to our coast. Alaskan sea otters were relocated to Washington State (59 otters) and northern Vancouver Island (89 otters). Last count showed British Columbia with over 2500 otters, and the Washington population at 743. Still, most reported sightings turn out to be our much more common river otter. True sightings around our region are extremely rare.

And then, this past summer, I received two reports of sea otter sightings—one off the coast of East Sooke by a VIP Naturalist, and one off Point No Point by park visitors. Both saw the otter in its characteristic pose: floating on its back with a sea urchin on its belly. I contacted the Marine Mammal Research Group to report the sightings. Apparently a number of corroborated sea otter sightings—in the San Juan Islands, Sooke, East Sooke and even Oak Bay—made summer 2006 unusual.

Is this really the return of the sea otter to our area? While the sea otter fur trade is behind us, sea otters are still threatened. Abalone poachers shoot them, as do fishermen who mistakenly believe they are a threat to their fishery. Native shellfish harvesters fear that the return of the sea otter will decrease shellfish stocks. Worst of all are oil spills. Oil in the otters’ fur causes rapid heat loss and death from hypothermia and pneumonia. Toxic oils ingested while feeding, drinking and grooming after a spill poison them.

The odds seem stacked against them. Yet we are beginning to see these furry marine mammals more frequently. Are they returning? Will they stay? It’s early days, yet but much depends on us. Will we be wiser this time around? I hope so. What a wonderful thing to witness the return of a species once lost to us.

*Deb Thiessen*  
Park Interpreter, Regional Parks

\*Organisms that play dominant roles in an ecosystem and affect many other organisms are called keystone species. The removal of a keystone predator from an ecosystem causes a reduction of the species diversity among its former prey.

## Sea Otter or River Otter?

**Sea Otter:** Found only in the ocean, tail appears shorter, paddle-shaped hind limbs, spends much time floating on back, and more naturally seen in large groups.

**River Otter:** Swims in rivers, streams and ocean, frequently comes on shore, tail longer, webbed hind legs, does not float on back, rarely occurs in groups larger than a single family.

Think you have seen a sea otter? Report sightings to the Marine Mammal Research Group at 1-800-665-5939 (toll free).

For more complete information on sea otters, download the *Wildlife at Risk in B.C.* information brochure on Sea Otters at <http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/wld/documents/otter.pdf>

# Who's That VIP?

Being in Tawnya Jones' presence is just like having a box of chocolates—it makes you smile. The box would contain a healthy dose of white chocolate as that is Tawnya's favourite! I arrived at the Garth Homer Centre to be greeted at the door by Tawnya, and was taken care of by her the entire hour we spent together; while I gathered knowledge on this 23 year old wonder.

Born in Mission, BC, Tawnya arrived in Victoria when she was about seven years old. One of her favorite hobbies is reading, on the top of her current list



**Tawnya Jones, VIP Warden**

is *Harry Potter: Goblet of Fire*. Another hobby is writing poems that are inspired by things in daily life, and I was treated to a recital of one while we met. Tawnya loves working on the computer, either sending emails or playing games like *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. But do not think that Tawnya always likes to be quiet and reflective. She loves being outdoors and especially likes walking her dog Emma, a black 7 year old lab, on the Galloping Goose Regional Trail and visiting with people she meets.

Tawnya is working toward a long term goal of being employed; she participates with the Community Access Team at the Garth Homer Centre. The Garth Homer Society creates opportunities for independence, growth and participation in the community with people who strive to overcome developmental and physical obstacles.

Tawnya's version says it all: "It is a good place to come and meet friends and work." Tawnya is a warden on two teams, one for the Galloping Goose Regional Trail and the other for Coles Bay Regional Park. Tawnya reflected on her last hike on the trail: "We met a couple walking with a baby boy in a buggy—they were quite nice and I warned them about a branch on the trail as that is my job as a warden." When I asked her why she has been volunteering with CRD for the past two years, she explained that she "likes the parks, enjoys keeping them clean and visiting with people." Tawnya loves to "hear the birds sing, watch the squirrels and enjoy the peacefulness" while in the parks. She thinks it is "wonderful to see people using the parks and trails."

Each day of the week is filled with an opportunity for Tawnya to be part of the various communities of Victoria. A sampling of her other volunteer roles include keeping toys germ-free and helping with crafts at Neighbourhood House, serving refreshments and reading to seniors at Glenn Warren Seniors home, as well as hanging clothes to get ready for sale at the James Bay Community Closet. Tawnya explains that being a volunteer is "just part of my life."

She enjoys the opportunity to meet new people and be active. When I asked her how others view her, she said, "People know me as helpful, a very good friend." She is fun to be spend time with and it is not surprising to know that she places spending time with friends as the highest priority in her life.

Amazed at Tawnya's outlook on life, I asked her to share a few words of wisdom with us. Without hesitation, she said, "Believe in yourself, do not make a situation too complicated and remember that it takes more muscles to frown than smile!" My hour with Tawnya was well spent. She saw me to the door and as I reached my car I realized that I was happier than when I arrived. It is true when she says, "I bring happiness!" Just like chocolate....

*Karen Preston, Coordinator of Volunteers*

## Mill Hill Broom Pull Marks Fourth Year

In October of 2006, volunteers again massed to pull broom seedlings as part of the larger, ongoing Mill Hill Garry Oak Restoration Project. Thirty-three volunteers, including students from Pacific Christian School, worked over three days, contributing 140 hours to the restoration process.

Two thousand and seven will be a big year for Volunteer Services (VS), as we've been asked to recruit 108 volunteers to conduct an October maintenance sweep across areas in Mill Hill done one to two years ago.

Strategically, VS is utilizing this mandate to develop a model, from recruitment to wrap up, which can be moved to any park within the jurisdiction of CRD Parks, in future years. The model includes a May recruitment "kick-off" event in a downtown area for the general public, working with schools to incorporate the tenet of environmental conservation into curriculum (students who pull broom in the autumn can take walks in the spring to see the wildflowers where they worked), and perhaps collaboration with area universities and colleges.

Precise planning by the Environmental Conservation Specialist and Coordinators of Volunteers will ensure that selected areas are ready for volunteers who will work over four Saturdays in October. Effective orientation and supervision are also critical. And of course we want to make it fun! Great food and recognition gifts provide incentive and support for volunteers.

Interested in helping with the kick-off event, the actual broom pull, or have a great idea? Please contact Peg via email at [pchristian@crd.bc.ca](mailto:pchristian@crd.bc.ca), or by phone at 478-3344. Viva los voluntarios!