

The Shuswap Watershed

The Shuswap watershed is part of the traditional territory of the Secwepemc people who have resided here for over eight thousand years. A provincial treasure, the Shuswap forms the major southeast contributor to the Fraser River watershed and provides key habitat for a significant percentage of provincial fish stocks. Home to diverse wildlife and plant species, the watershed also provides water for drinking, development and agriculture. A popular location to live, visit, recreate and earn a living, the watershed deserves the best environmentally sustainable management and greater public awareness of its many values.

Shuswap Watershed Facts

- The drainage area of the watershed is 1,552,058 hectares or 5,993 square miles
- The Shuswap watershed is located near the headwaters of the Fraser River system
- The highest point completely within the watershed is Mt. English at 2,701 metres above sea level
- The lowest point in the watershed is the exit of Little Shuswap Lake at Chase at only 346 metres above sea level
- Shuswap Lake produces 19% of the Sockeye population of the entire Fraser River system
- Of the Shuswap fish population, 70% require shoreline habitat for their survival
- Shuswap Lake is the 7th largest lake in B.C.

Key Threats

Invasive species –

Non-native plant and animal species can have detrimental impacts on the ecosystem. They can compete with native species for food, shelter and habitat which may change ecosystems dynamics and can lead to the extinction of both fish and wildlife species. Some examples of non-native species include perch, bass, sunfish, and European starling.

Resource use –

Extraction of resources for agriculture, forestry, mining, and urban/rural development can impact aquatic and wildlife habitat.

Clearing land results in increased sediment transport and erosion that can lower water quality and destroy fish and wildlife habitat through in-filling and burying plants, insects, and spawning areas.

Foreshore development –

Shoreline development such as retaining walls, creation of beaches, beach grooming, landscaping, removal of shoreline vegetation, the construction of docks, boat houses, and boat launches alter the natural shoreline functions and result in cumulative impacts on wildlife and aquatic species. Alterations to foreshore areas degrade the quality and quantity of habitat available to fish species for rearing, migrating and spawning activities.

Pollution –

Sewage effluent, agricultural run-off, fuel and oil spills, houseboat grey-water and storm-water run-off decreases water quality and increases the likelihood of algae blooms and

aquatic weed growth. Decreased water quality may result in fish kills or raise human health issues.

Recreational use –

The Shuswap watershed is subject to a high level of recreational use including boating, fishing, hiking, and hunting activities. Fuel or oil spills, erosion of foreshore areas, creation of docks or clearing of brush can all result from recreational use. These can lead to reduced habitat and survival for all species of wildlife that rely on the lake and its resources.

Climate change –

As the planet continues to warm up there will be an increased potential for flooding, erosion, and drought, as well as more forest fires.

Fish and Fisheries

There are a wide variety of fish species that rely on the natural resources of the Shuswap watershed. These species use the rivers, streams and lakes of the Shuswap for rearing, food supply, spawning, and migration. Fish habitat not only includes the water they live in, but also the adjacent land, animal and plant communities. The Shuswap watershed is home to several fish species including rainbow trout, bull trout, lake char, kokanee, whitefish, and 4 of the 5 species of Pacific salmon (coho, chinook, sockeye and pink salmon). The most well known population of fish in the system is the world famous Adams River sockeye.

Wetlands

Within the Shuswap drainage area are significant wetlands that include swamps, marshes and bogs. Wetlands are a critical part of a healthy ecosystem. They absorb floodwaters, provide habitat for a vast number of animals, filter toxins and chemicals from our water systems, and hold water in reserve to supply the ecosystem through hot, dry summers. Wetlands are found on only three percent of Shuswap Lake's shoreline.

First Nations

The fact that the Shuswap Nation and its vast traditional territory is named after the Shuswap watershed shows how significant Shuswap Lake and its tributaries are to all the Secwepemc people.

Re Sewllkwe (Water) yiri7 tekwemite7 re txexetens re Secwepemc. Stslex yem yiri7 ren tsuwet.s re Secwepemc. Ne stspetékwlés-kucw ri7 re slxéy'ems re stet'ex7éms-kucw yew k yiri7 k skectéls-kucw re Tqeltk Kukpi7 te sq'ilye es yucwmins-kucw, ell-ekwe qwel7ey'ens re swumecs re qweltsen ell re sewllkwe es knucwens re sq'ilye tkenhe7e es yucwmenstés re Secwepemc e qweqwentsinmenses le ullcwes ne sq'ilye.

Water has always been sacred to the Secwepemc people since time immemorial, as the appreciation of water's life sustaining values have long been part of Secwepemc culture. As our Stspetkwle (our oral histories) teach us, one of the few gifts we received from Old

One, our Chief on High, was the Sq'ilye (sweat lodge) - our place of prayer and meditation and cleansing and healing. Our Tqeltk Kukpi7 instructed the Fir Boughs' Spirit and the Water Spirit to assist the Spirit of Sq'ilye in answering the prayers of the Secwepemc.

The Sacred Healing Powers of Water for the Secwepemc, by Dr. Ronald E. Ignace, PhD

Links

Pacific salmon information: www.thinksalmon.com

Shoreline living information: The Living by Water Project: www.livingbywater.ca

Wetland information at Ducks Unlimited: www.ducks.ca

BC Lake Stewardship Society: www.bclss.org

Shuswap environmental news and information: www.seas.ca

Fraser Basin information and news: www.fraserbasin.bc.ca

Federal salmon management: www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Watershed resource guide and maps: www.shuswapwatershed.ca

Shuswap trails: www.shuswaptrails.com

Shuswap Lake mapping project, community plans, liquid waste water management plans, regional parks: www.csr.d.bc.ca