

Looking after our Shuswap watershed

A Shuswap Passion column for the Shuswap Market News

April 20, 2012

by Jim Cooperman

Shuswap residents can take pride in knowing that the protection of their watershed is continuing to improve thanks to the work of the Shuswap Lakes Integrated Planning Process (SLIPP). At the April 12th all-committee meeting, government and public representatives were provided with updates on all the projects underway.

There are four streams of activities within SLIPP: recreation; water quality; foreshore development; and education, compliance and enforcement. Significant progress is occurring for all these programs, through the work of government agencies and volunteer organizations.

While efforts have been underway for sometime in the other three streams, work on the recreation program, which focuses on water based activities, has just begun. A draft situational analysis report about Shuswap water based recreation has been prepared and once it is complete it will be made publicly available in the fall. Many of the water-based recreational sites have also now been identified and mapped.

Recreation expert consultants based at Thompson Rivers University have been tasked to review best management practices; complete the mapping; identify the issues, the diverse community values and use patterns; and present their findings to the SLIPP committees. The final step will be to prepare a recreational management plan with strategies that recognize our region's carrying capacity and identify a vision for the ideal future condition.

A few statistics about recreation were provided that shows just how significant this activity is to the Shuswap life style and economy. With three types of users, permanent, short-stay and seasonal, there are an average of 32,000 marine park visits per season, 35-40,000 angler days, thousands of bird watchers and many millions of dollars that go into our local economy. But, with so many vastly different types of user groups from families to backcountry adventurers to hard-core partiers, conflicts do occur. Concerns that need attention include, noise, waste, safety, health and habitat and cultural resource destruction problems, as well as access conflicts and a host of compliance and enforcement issues.

Water quality monitoring has been both comprehensive and cooperative so that efforts are no longer duplicated and timing ensures optimal results. Not only are samples now being taken throughout the lakes, but also in those creeks and rivers where there are the highest potential impacts from agricultural practices. Early results are already showing high concentrations of carbon, nitrogen and phosphorus during spring run-off times. The public can now find useful information about the water quality monitoring program at the slippbc.ca website and will soon be able to

access the results for specific locations using the map-based database.

The shoreline development stream is providing some of the best results, especially for its restoration activities. Thanks to a \$100,000 grant from the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, the most serious shoreline modifications such as illegal concrete boat ramps, large rock groynes, and abandoned docks are being removed and the natural condition of the shoreline is being restored. Fifty-three of the most critical sites have been identified and numerous sites have been rehabilitated at no cost to the property owners, who have been primarily supportive of the program. More education will be underway soon, so that lakeshore property owners have an improved understanding of the importance of the shoreline for fish habitat, as salmon fry utilize the gravel and rocks during the year they spend in the lakes.

In addition, a comprehensive inventory has been completed for the Sicamous Channel that shows how and where dock structures are consistent with existing tenures. Some of the old, unpermitted structures will be removed and others will be rebuilt with an improved design, which will help restore important salmon habitat features in this channel.

The compliance and enforcement program has benefited from additional staffing and new vessels, with joint patrols on long weekends. As well, there was a houseboat used by the team that was stationed in the Cinnemousun Narrows, so that patrols would be located closer to where problems occur. Thanks no doubt in part to this program; the fatality rate was the lowest last year with only one death.

We are fortunate that local governments are now taking a very active role in helping to protect the Shuswap watershed, as not only our economy but also our way of life is dependent on the maintenance of a healthy ecosystem. While monitoring water quality is key, so will be the next step, to take action to reduce the level of pollution entering the system. And at some point, SLIPP needs to be expanded to include the entire watershed with a new name that better fits this mandate.