

Shuswap's iconic lakes

A *Shuswap Passion* column for the Shuswap Market News

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June 3, 2011

The geography of the Shuswap never ceases to intrigue me, as there are always new topics to investigate, areas to explore and compare and issues to understand. Some of our key features are the lakes, but aside from the ones adjacent to highways and communities, most of us have little knowledge about the many lakes hidden in the hills and mountains. Central to our region is Shuswap Lake, which at 290 sq. km., ranks as the province's tenth largest water body, just below Upper Arrow and Okanagan Lakes. The Shuswap's next largest lake, Adams Lake, scores a bit higher in the record books as it is B.C.'s second deepest lake and the 24th deepest on earth at 457 metres, which is 93 metres less than Quesnel Lake.

Just how many lakes are there in the Shuswap? After studying the maps, it becomes apparent that one would need to consider only those lakes large enough to rate more than a passing glance, as there are a plethora of small, high-elevation lakes. Using the 176-hectare Gardom Lake as the approximate minimum size for enumeration purposes, I counted 34 large and medium size lakes in the Shuswap watershed. This number is far less than adjacent regions, the Thompson and Cariboo.

For comparison purposes, those lakes that are either partially or entirely protected in provincial parks could be deemed significant because there is less chance that these lakes will suffer negative impacts from human activities. The largest of these is Hunakwa Lake, the key part of Anstey-Hunakwa Provincial Park, which was created in the year 2000 after years of conservation efforts and land use planning processes. It could also be one of the largest low-elevation, non-roaded lakes protected in the province and possibly the largest throughout the entire Pacific Northwest. Other protected Shuswap area lakes include White Lake, Greenbush Lake, Momich Lakes, Upper Harbour Lake and Tum-Tum Lake.

There are also some very small, protected lakes, including Grizzly Lake in Pukeashun Park and Spectrum, Peters and Margie Lakes in Monashee Park. While park status does offer greater ecological protection, it offers no help from the onslaught of climate change impacts, such as forest fires and insects. In the summer of 2009, Momich Lake Park was devastated after a forest fire burnt nearly every tree. The campsites there are now closed and the road is unsafe due to the threat of landslides.

Sport fishing is the reason people visit many of Shuswap's smaller lakes, although this sport has declined in popularity during the last few decades. It is not the lack of trout, however, that this sport is declining, as many lakes are re-stocked by the fish and wildlife branch every year. At one time, fishing lodges dotted many Shuswap lakes, but these were forced to close when the forest industry insisted the lodges take out expensive insurance to cover the costs of any timber that might be burned by a forest fire started by

one of their clients. Some of the most popular fishing lakes are White Lake, Adams Lake, Arthur Lake and tiny Joyce Lake near Falkland.

Another way to enjoy Shuswap lakes is to camp next to one, as there are over 50 lakeside recreation sites scattered throughout the region. Some lakes are more suitable for those that appreciate camping away from the crowds, such as Greenbush Lake and Humamilt Lake, both of which are perfect for canoeing or kayaking. For the real wilderness experience, there are many alpine lakes without road access and many without names, such as the group of lakes north of Eagle Pass Mountain and near Grace Mountain.

Perhaps the least known lakes in the Shuswap are the ones found in the Aberdeen plateau, an area that most people think is part of the Okanagan. Water from Grizzly, Specs, Haddo and Aberdeen Lakes flows into Duteau Creek, then into Bessette Creek and finally into the Shuswap River, except for the flow destined for Vernon area residents and farmers. In the 1920s, these lakes were converted into reservoirs for irrigation. There are eight rec sites in just this one area and many more at nearby lakes that drain into the Okanagan. Perhaps the least known of any of the mid-sized Shuswap area lakes is the unnamed lake that drains into Meadow Creek, which feeds into Cayenne Creek and eventually flows into the Momich system and then into Adams Lake.