

So many reasons to celebrate the Shuswap

A *Shuswap Passion* column for the Shuswap Market News

By Jim Cooperman

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There was no shortage of topics for the 35 songwriters to choose from as they pondered over possible wording for their songs for the Shuswap. We have so many attributes to rave about here in the Shuswap that it would be tough to decide which ones to sing about. Shuswap residents are fortunate to live in a watershed so blessed with geographic features, many of which are unique to our region. And now that the full extent of our watershed has been identified and mapped, we can celebrate our region's many values.

The Shuswap has many characteristic qualities; productive farmland, extensive and diverse forests, bountiful water supplies (except on years like this one), close-knit communities filled with arts and culture, by and large healthy wildlife populations, amazing parks and wilderness areas, four species of salmon, and an abundance of recreational opportunities on our numerous lakes, rivers and trails.

Alongside most travel corridors and from within most settlements there are fabulous views of lakes, rivers, creeks, hills and mountains. It would be hard to pick the best viewpoint, but there are many favourite ones; the view of the narrows from the road to Seymour Arm, the view of Bastion Mountain from Kault Hill that was used on B.C. drivers licenses for years, the view of the Enderby Cliffs from the Shuswap River, the views of the lake from the Blind Bay and Lee Creek bluffs, and the 360 degree view from atop Eagle Pass Mountain.

Often overlooked is our region's rich history, from the fur trade to the gold rush to the building of the CPR, to the steamboat era and then the early days of settlement. Although we can celebrate our two centuries of settlement, we must also acknowledge the many injustices inflicted upon the Shuswap's original inhabitants, the Secwepemc people by reminding ourselves that we remain visitors in their land.

Somehow the Shuswap has still avoided the mad rush of population growth that has engulfed the Okanagan and the lower mainland, although we now must endure some areas of irresponsible recreational development along parts of Shuswap and Mara Lakes. Throughout the world, there are exceptionally beautiful areas like ours that have been loved to death from overdevelopment, too many tourists and as a result, so much pollution that the views are obscured by smog, the water is no longer safe to even swim in and the wildlife has long ago been extirpated.

Along with celebrating our glorious Shuswap, we must also assume greater responsibility for protecting what we are celebrating. We must avoid the mistakes that have plagued other paradises by becoming more aware of not only the values we cherish but also the threats to those values and the measures needed to avert future problems. Thankfully, our local governments are only too aware of these issues and thus there are either plans in place and planning processes underway to help ensure a sustainable future. But these plans will only succeed if there is ongoing support and dedication to implementation and the processes will only work if residents participate responsibly.

During the Celebrate the Shuswap Week from April 18 to 24, not only did local residents have opportunities to enjoy great original music written for the Shuswap, but they learned more about how we are all connected through the flow of water from Malakwa to Chase and from Cherryville to Seymour Arm. In addition to viewing the beauty of our region as captured by some of Shuswap's best photographers, there were opportunities to learn about the threats to our watershed and what can be done to fix these problems. Plus there were guided hikes, informative tours and many schools took part in stewardship activities to restore and enhance watershed features.

The Shuswap finally has an established identity that is now mapped and residents have opportunities to learn more about their region so they can better appreciate its many values. And for the first time, conservation

groups who usually focus on advocacy have teamed up with government agencies, local First Nations, schools, businesses and community groups to collaboratively work together on a project dedicated to the health of our wondrous watershed. To learn more about Shuswap Watershed Project, visit www.shuswapwatershed.ca.