

Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society



June 2015 Newsletter



The driest May on record has added to concerns about another severe drought in 2015. A mild winter resulted in no snowpack in the mountains has led to warm lake temperatures and low lake levels. CLRSS members have been monitoring lake temperatures and visibility and have noted elevated temperatures and much reduced clarity in our lake due to algal blooms. The algal blooms were first noticed in early May and caused a boil water advisory for the town of Lake Cowichan. The species was identified as *Euglena*, a common form of lake algae found in south island lakes. The last time it was noted in Cowichan Lake was in 1941, which was the last time on record that there was no snow in the mountains in May. The blooms have thankfully diminished significantly although our secci disc clarity readings have still not returned to normal.

Tributaries are drying and the lake is well below full storage and dropping. Without significant rain this spring we will once again run the risk of reaching zero storage in the lake and a drying river this fall, with the potential loss of thousands of salmon. River flows will be reduced again this summer to below the desired levels in order to conserve as much water as possible for the fall. Water conservation must be practiced by everyone in our community to help us get through this severe drought.

There is hope on the horizon as the CVRD has applied for funding to reconstruct the weir to store more water and the legal challenge launched by six lakefront property owners seeking to deny increased summer water storage has been denied. The way is now clear for us to store more water in the summer so we can save our aquatic ecosystem and avoid these annual destructive low water events. Climate change is happening quickly and we must act just as quickly to adapt to it. If we can store water when we get it in the winter we can relax and enjoy the sunny dry summers we can look forward to in the coming years.



The Cowichan Shoreline Stewardship Project (CSSP) will continue this summer. The project is in the second year of a three year program and we are well on our way to meeting our goals for 2017. There are eight properties scheduled for restoration this summer. Maintenance work parties on the 2014 sites have been completed. On May 28 twelve volunteers worked at the LCFN site in the morning, marking plants and cutting back the new blackberries and broom. On June 9 and 10 four volunteers and Christine Brophy worked at the Gina Moore site in the mornings, pulling the new invasive sprouts, planting replacement and additional plants, putting up protective fencing, and

spreading many bags of mulch. Please check our [volunteer page](#) if you would like to help with riparian restoration work parties this summer.

Our Student Team is in place for 2015: Project Manager: Christine Brophy, Assistant Manager: Mandy Hobkirk
Secondary School Students: Raimund Mullin (supervision duties), James Cummings, Mackenzie Macon and Tanner Cummings (alternate).



Riparian visits/surveys began on June 5 and will continue this summer. CLRSS members discuss issues with a view to helping owners understand the importance of intact and functioning riparian ecosystems. We are hoping to expand our survey team in order to meet our target numbers.



Fry rescue operations were started months earlier than usual to respond to the thousands of salmon fry stranded in drying rivers in our watershed. CLRSS members worked with other groups to monitor fry and move those that were stranded in drying pools. We have worked every Tuesday since March, putting in hundreds of volunteer hours. The project started as a fry monitoring program, designed to see if chinook salmon were spawning in lake tributaries. This research is important for understanding how chinooks utilize habitats and we were also seeking DNA from fry to see if there are genetically distinct spring and fall run chinooks. Chinook fry were positively identified in Ashburnam Creek and DNA tests

are being done. The lack of snowpack and rain has caused the tributaries of Cowichan Lake to dry up quickly and huge volumes of gravel in the streams has created many disconnected pools full of fish. This shifted the emphasis of our efforts to rescuing fry stranded in drying pools. To date we have saved over 20,000 fry with many more to be rescued. Only about one in a hundred fry will survive to return as an adult so these little fish need all the help they can get. R&D was done and we have improved the pole seine nets used for fry rescue. Operations will continue into the summer.





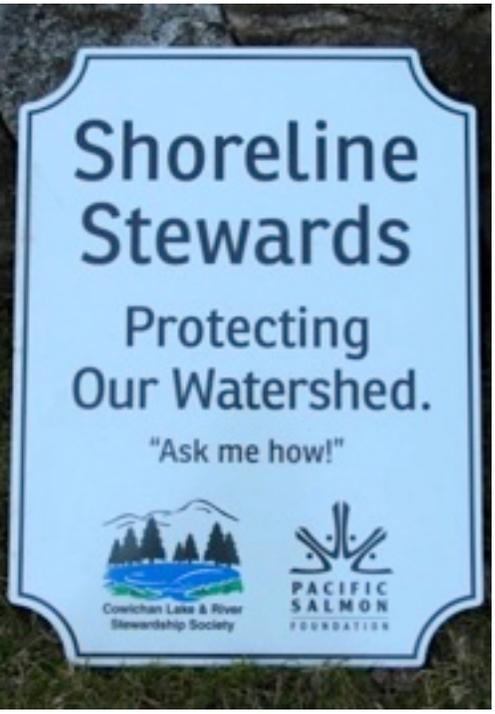
Boating safety continues to be a focus of the CLRSS. At a public meeting held on April 18th we heard concerns about excessive speed near shore, alcohol use, excessive noise and what appears to be a “conscious disregard for the law”. Lack of resources for policing continue to be a challenge. As a result of this meeting the CLRSS in conjunction with the RCMP has launched a short, clear and powerful campaign between May 15th and July 1st to raise the issue and create public support. A new logo has been developed that we hope to see on fridges throughout our community that will encourage citizens to **Observe, Record and Report Violators** by calling the RCMP at **250-749-6668**. On Saturday May 16th eleven CLRSS members, Area F Director Ian Morrison and RCMP Sergeant Wes Olsen greeted boaters as they launched their craft at the public boat launch.

Shoreline Steward signs have been created to show our appreciation for those lake and riverfront residents who have protected and preserved their riparian areas in a natural state. Those who qualify for a sign will sign a Riparian Declaration confirming their intent to keep their foreshore as natural as possible.

Signs will be awarded to those that have met five criteria:

1. Their riparian area is in a natural state, vegetated with native species.
2. There are no retaining walls or other barrier structures present.
3. All invasive plants have been removed.
4. No overwater structures are present, access to docks is via a bridge.
5. Access to the water is done thoughtfully with minimum impact.

Signs will be awarded to all participants in the Shoreline Stewardship Program and qualifying residents will sign a Shoreline Stewards declaration. Contact us if you qualify and would like a sign to show you care.





Watershed Tours given by Cowichan Watershed Board coordinator Rodger Hunter are always a hit. The Retreads hiking group, which includes several CLRSS members, was lucky to take a tour this spring and really enjoyed the experience. The tour starts at the lake and participants learn about the summer weir control, lakeshore riparian zone, restoration efforts and the Greendale pinch point that is responsible for the winter high water. The tour continues down the river to Stoltz Park to see the silt remediation work done there that has led to a resurgence in salmon numbers and ends at the Cowichan Estuary Interpretive Centre in Cowichan Bay.



The Annual River Cleanup is scheduled for August 15. This fun and effective event has grown in popularity over the years and we have removed tons of garbage from the river every year. We also recycle what we can and return all bottles and cans for refunds. We break up into teams and each is assigned a specific area to clean up. Every year we find some pretty strange and funny stuff. If you would like to help reg-



istration starts at 9:00 am at the Lake Cowichan town hall and a barbecue will follow. If you would like to join the party see our website www.cowichan-lake-stewards.ca for details.



Join us online at www.cowichan-lake-stewards.ca Facebook www.facebook.com/cowichanstewards

President Diana Gunderson and all CLRSS Board Members thank you for your support and interest in the Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society. Join us as we continue to work hard to protect our lake and river for future generations.