

Watershed Mapped

By Barb Brouwer, Salmon Arm Observer, March 3, 2010

Shuswap: Project to become community resource.

It was accolades all round last Thursday at the official launch of a project to raise awareness and improve understanding of the Shuswap watershed.

"What began as a map of the watershed has become much more," said Ted Bacigalupo, Columbia Shuswap Regional District director, at a Feb. 25 press conference. "The Shuswap Watershed Project is long overdue and sets the sensitive ecosystem into perspective."

The large, colourful poster has a wealth of information on it. It is the result of time, talent, co-operation and support provided by some 30 government and non-government agencies and businesses. Three thousand copies of the poster have been printed for free distribution to area schools and, in time, will be supported by a resource guide to provide teachers and students with ideas and more information.

Kim Fulton, retired teacher and educational coordinator on the Shuswap Watershed Project, said one of the most important aspects of the poster and guide is the opportunity it will give students to take part in protecting the watershed. He said the guide will include information from the Living By Water project, a national program created by Gardom Lake environmentalists Sarah Weaver and Clive Calloway. "I hope students will take on projects they feel passionate about," said Calloway. "It will give kids the feeling they can have some control in their lives if they can take on small projects."

School District #83 superintendent Doug Pearson agreed, saying water will be the number one issue in the future. "If you want change and sustainability, you have to do it through the children."

Shuswap Trail Alliance coordinator Phil McIntyre Paul said it is clear that we are a people defined by the watershed – from the values, culture, language and civilization of the First Nations to today's residents. "The health of the watershed will decide the health of our communities," he said. "They (natives) have been trying to teach us this for years."

While the praise was passed around the CSRD conference table in good measure, much of it was directed toward Jim Cooperman, president of the Shuswap Environmental Action Society. Seen as the chief proponent and catalyst in getting the project recommended in the Shuswap Lake Integrated Planning Process (SLIPP) report, Cooperman said he first got the idea when he saw a similar poster of the Okanagan area.

Cooperman described the support he received in the two years it took for the map-turned poster to come to life. "I have to acknowledge the group (partners), not fighting but working collaboratively," he said, noting the support from such agencies and businesses as The Integrated Land Management Bureau, Silvatech and the federal Department of Fisheries. "Silvatech had an amazing role in advancing the GIS (geographical information systems) platform," he said, noting the company made available an important learning opportunity. "It was their idea to then go to the Grade 10 and 11 GIS class." Explaining how printed matter is often quickly out-of-date, Cooperman noted that Mascon has offered to host the project's website, www.shuswapwatershed.ca for free, and the site is being designed by another local company, Mediability.

DFO's Jeremy Heighton told the group how impressed he has been with the lack of politics and in-fighting in the process. "Advocacy is often seen by government as a challenge," he said. "But advocacy can work and it is important to give Cooperman accolades for pulling all the partners together."