

Working together for the watershed

A *Shuswap Passion* column for the Shuswap Market News

By Jim Cooperman

April 2, 2010

Many exciting events are planned for “Celebrate the Shuswap Week”, as part of the Shuswap Watershed Project. The project has an ambitious goal; to help improve public understanding and appreciation of the Shuswap watershed and thus improve its protection. The publication of the watershed poster was the first step in this collaborative effort by government agencies, local businesses and conservation organizations to raise awareness of watershed issues.

At the heart of the project is the website that will serve as a resource guide for teachers, students and anyone interested in learning more about the watershed. Within this site there will be reports, plans, data, maps, power-point slideshows, images, videos and teaching aids for elementary and high school classrooms. As well, this website provides news about all the events planned for the upcoming Celebrate the Shuswap Week from April 18th to 24th.

Project organizers realize that it takes more than a poster and a website to achieve its goal and thus many events are being planned that will help connect people to the watershed through outdoor activities, educational events and through entertainment devoted to the Shuswap. During the week, there will be guided hikes throughout the region and stewardship projects undertaken by students of all ages, including storm drain marking, tree and shrub plantings and stream clean-ups.

Nearly every sector of the community will be involved, including Shuswap photographers, artists and musicians. The ‘Song for the Shuswap’ songwriting contest is attracting interest from all types of musicians, from rock and roll, to country, to blues and the final judging will take place on April 22nd at the Salmar Classic Theatre, when these songwriters will share the stage with Shuswap photographers whose images of the Shuswap will be shown on the big screen.

The Project recognizes that the key to improving understanding and respect for the watershed should involve young people, and one way to involve students has been through the essay, art-poster and song writing contests. As well, the key event of the week, the Shuswap Watershed Conference, will involve students, teachers, and the public as well as government agencies and is being held at Salmon Arm Secondary Sullivan Campus on the afternoon of a professional development day, Friday, April 23rd.

The objective for the conference is to explore how best to conserve, protect and restore the watershed. Considering all the threats to the watershed, including from development, sewage treatment, agricultural run-off, houseboat greywater, invasive species, resource development and recreation; coming up with solutions is no easy task. And there are no easy, local solutions to perhaps the biggest threat of them all, the impacts of climate change.

The conference will begin with what is called a “poster session,” where participants have an opportunity to view the displays set up by government agencies, conservation groups, and students, as well as meet with representatives from these groups. The sit down portion of the conference will begin with students reading the winning essays about what they can do to help protect the watershed.

The conference keynote speaker is Watershed Watch Salmon Society executive director, Dr. Craig Orr, who will speak about the water, salmon and resilience: maintaining healthy watersheds in the face of climate change. Joining him will be Michelle Walsh, with the Secwepemc Fisheries Commission, who will talk about the connection between groundwater and salmon.

Conference participants will have an opportunity to pose questions to a panel comprised of staff from all levels of government and King Campbell with Ducks Unlimited Canada, who will provide their perspectives on what actions are needed to protect the watershed. The conference will end with a summary talk about what was learned from the presentations and what needs to be done in the future.

A low cost dinner comprised mostly of food sourced locally from Shuswap farmers will be served to conference participants after the talks. The event will finish with a concert that begins with the Song for the Shuswap songwriting contest winners followed by an all-ages dance to Old Man’s Beard sponsored by Askews.

The conference will be free, but pre-registration is recommended. Registration forms will be available soon at Wickett Business Services and Buckingham Palace. Participants will also be able to register online at www.shuswapwatershed.ca.