



Friends of French Creek
Conservation Society

Creekside News

Friends of French Creek Conservation Society
Spring 2022 Newsletter

Message From Your President

The French Creek has seen several Coho salmon frenzies as the fish headed upriver this past fall. Spawning grounds are visible out of our kitchen window, and the thrashing of fish, along with eagle cries, draws our attention to the creek. The first run of Coho consisted of some larger fish than we have seen in a while, so that was exciting for everyone.

Later this winter we had at least one gathering of the resident Steelhead salmon, which was a real treat as we see a few young juveniles in summer pools during the summer months, but not usually the adults who are pretty elusive around humans, for good reasons. The stocks are few so we rejoice that they are still alive and reproducing.

It is so important to keep the health of French Creek vital. We need shade along the creek, clean water, and hiding places for young fish (woody debris along the edges) for the fish to thrive, not just survive. Trees along the creek's edge are vital, and yes, they fall into the creek sometimes. After a few good storms, most of the time they become that woody debris. Those of us who live along the various floodplains of a creek do get worried about our homes and yards.

We are lucky enough to be able to take a fatalistic view. After many years of having a summer garden near the creek, we have bowed our heads to the thundering river waters, running knee deep across what we think of as 'our yard'. We built new raised bed gardens far, far away from the edge of the river, and will let the old summer garden go wild to the raspberries. Let the river be herself and plant more trees and bushes that don't mind occasional floodplains of the creek doing their job.



Photo by Peter Giesen

-Sunshine Goldsberry, March 2022



Time to Renew Your Membership!

In spite of the pandemic and past lockdowns, we have continued many of our regular activities on French Creek. Your continued support and membership are as important as ever. In fact, even more so during these quickly changing and unpredictable times. We need you!

Memberships cost \$15 annually per individual, and are vital in the funding of research projects, volunteer field work, public education and conservation site monitoring. Please find our Membership/Renewal form along with payment and mailing information at the bottom of this newsletter. We are incredibly grateful for your support over the years, and if you're a first-time member, welcome to the French Creek family!

Meet Your Board!



Sunshine Goldsberry - President

Sunshine transplanted herself and a toddler to Vancouver Island more than 50 years ago, and was not sorry to find herself rooted deeply into the soil of Coombs a few years later. She's always worked with people in paying jobs, but her hands were also always in the soil, making gardens and planting trees. Sunshine's farm business, Goldstream Grange Gardens, is still a regular vendor at the Errington Farmers Market, helping to make it one of the local hot spots for meeting people and finding good food through the months of May to October.



Eamon Stinson – Vice President

Eamon lives and works along the banks of the French Creek. He has a focus on and passion for alternative energy systems, their application, and widespread integration. Eamon can be found tending to orchards and developing soil during the warmer months of the year, and skiing in the cold ones.



Liberty Bradshaw - Secretary

Liberty has lived by French Creek on a small fourteen-acre farm in Coombs for 35 years. At certain times of the year, she can see the salmon spawning from her kitchen window. There is always something to see on this beautiful creek that she is so grateful to live beside.

As a long-time member of Friends of French Creek Conservation Society, she has enjoyed working with others in supporting French Creek and watersheds. She has planted lots of trees, dug hog weed and shared laughter. For the past eight years, Liberty has also been the Secretary for the FFCCS Board.



Barb Riordan – Treasurer

Barb was born and raised in southern Ontario, and graduated from the University of Guelph with a degree in Biology. She worked as a Biologist for the Ministry of Natural Resources in Timmins, Ontario and then as Environmental Superintendent at Endako Mine in the central interior of BC. Barb decided she had her fill of Arctic-like winters and non-existent summers, so she moved to Vancouver Island with her husband in 2011. She then became entangled with a number of shady characters in the Friends of French Creek Conservation Society and is now hooked on conservation and habitat restoration.



Sandy Robinson – Director

Sandy is a charter member of the Friends of French Creek Conservation Society, and has been a director for all but one year of the society's existence. He has been involved in many of its projects, including stream bank restorations, hogweed eradication, water flow and water quality measurements. Also, he has been active in promoting the Eagle Preserve in the French Creek estuary by helping with fundraising and estuary restoration.



Rene Pelkman - Director

After graduation in Forestry from the University of Toronto, Rene spent 30 years with the Forest Service in the N.W.T. and Yukon, specifically Resolute Bay/High Arctic Islands, Fort Simpson, Fort Liard, Carmacks, and Whitehorse.

He is happy to be involved with the Friends of French Creek, who have accomplished so much with removal of invasive species, riparian zone plantings, salmon habitat improvement, erosion control, and public education about the importance of protecting and maintaining our natural environment.



Antonia Colapinto CPDT-KA, SBA - Director

Antonia holds several professional designations in force free and fear free canine training, as well as canine behaviour consulting/rehabilitation with a specialty in shelter behaviour and fear aggression.

She has found deep fulfilment in volunteering much of her time with not-for-profit organizations that focus on the preservation and rehabilitation of our precious Vancouver Island wildlife and their various fragile habitats.

What We're Up To

Current Projects

Splendid News for the French Creek Estuary Lands By Robin Robinson

It's almost time to celebrate the preservation of the French Creek estuary lands! It has been a long journey since the founding of the Friends of French Creek Conservation Society (FFCCS) in January of 2004.

At the time the, the primary goal was the preservation of the creek's estuary lands.



Photo by Melanie Leeson Photography

We are now pleased to tell you that as of February 24, 2022 the BC Parks Foundation has come into the picture and have secured an exclusive agreement to purchase 18 acres in the heart of the estuary lands! This, along with the 5 acres of land previously donated by French Creek House Ltd. (which are currently RDN parkland) will make a total of 23 acres. This ecologically valuable land will become a BC Parks Natural Area Park in perpetuity, containing Vancouver Island's First Eagle Preserve.

An independent appraisal established the land's value to be \$5,180,000. FFCCS and Save Estuary Land Society (SELS) have been working together since August 2020 and have raised over \$200,000 towards the purchase of the estuary lands. These dollars, along with the funds the partners BC Parks Foundation has found, will significantly reduce the remaining dollars to be raised by April 10, 2022.

The landowner, French Creek House Ltd. has generously agreed to donate land (valued at \$3,280,000) as part of their commitment to seeing the nature park and Eagle Preserve becoming a reality.



The Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) has committed \$400,000 towards the purchase of the land.



Dax Dasilva and his non-profit, Age of Union Alliance which supports on-the-ground groups working to protect the planet's threatened species and ecosystems, has agreed to provide a landmark **gift of \$1,000,000 in matching funds if the remaining \$300,000 is raised by April 10, 2022.**



Since February 24, 2022 over \$100,000 of the \$300,000 has been raised!

As of March 17, 2022 \$194,000 remains to be raised.

So now FFCCS members, it is time to contact anyone you know to see if they will donate some money to establish the Eagle Preserve and natural area. If they have already donated, please thank them and encourage them to please give a little more.

Will you give? We are nearly there!
Please donate to bcparksfoundation.ca

Water Quality Measurements at the French Creek Estuary

By Sandy Robinson



Sandy Robinson looking for water at the French Creek Estuary Pond, Winter 2021

One of the follow-up projects associated with protecting the French Creek estuary as an Eagle Preserve and Nature Park is the restoration of the estuary land. FFCCS has joined with Save Estuary Land Society, Vancouver Island University, Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region, Regional District of Nanaimo, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Mid Vancouver Island Habitat Enhancement Society, Arrowsmith Naturalists, DR Clough Consulting and others in the restoration activities.

One aspect of the restoration project is to collect basic water quality and quantity data on creek flows, and at the estuary pond and a legacy channel to assist in determining an estuary restoration plan. Thanks to a 2021 Stewardship Seed Funding grant from the RDN Drinking Water Watershed Protection Program, equipment and supplies were obtained, allowing us to install three Tidbit temperature data loggers in the estuary pond, the legacy channel, and the

French Creek mainstem. We also installed stream gauges at the Estuary Pond and Legacy Channel. A stream gauge had already been placed at Barclay Bridge by Ministry of Forest, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, who monitors water flows there.

We have been collecting water quality data weekly for water temperature, dissolved oxygen, specific conductivity and turbidity from June 8 to the present at the Estuary Pond, Morningstar Creek and French Creek at the Barclay Bridge. Stream gauge readings were also recorded weekly. Monitoring will continue until June 2022, when the temperature data from the Tidbits will be downloaded and reviewed by DR Clough Consulting, along with the water quality and quantity data for development of the estuary restoration plan. Those faithfully involved in these measurements are Don McConnell, Rene Pelkman, Antonia Colapinto, Barb Riordan, Catherine Watson, Brenda & Richard Miller and Sandy Robinson.

Measurement conditions have varied from beautiful summer mornings with birdsong to delight the ear, to pouring rain, freezing conditions, snow, high winds and raging high waters, all taken with great aplomb by our hearty volunteers.



Don McConnell recording data at the French Creek Estuary Pond, Spring 2022.

Dudley Marsh Updates

By Eamon Stinson

The Dudley Marsh stores massive quantities of water all year. Huge inflows of rain and runoff in the winter are stored and then slowly seep or flow from the marsh to feed the French Creek and surrounding habitats with water in the spring and summer months when it is needed the most. Think of Dudley as a big sopping wet sponge.

Flows for 2021 into 2022 have been positive. At no point in the season did the water levels fall below the 'danger zone' - a welcome observation as we experienced quite a dry season in 2021. One call was made in 2021 to have the feeder pipe that channels water out of the marsh flushed out as debris from wood, plants, and animals had blocked it, preventing the steady flow of water out of the marsh into the creek.

Given the stability of the weir in 2022 and efforts to bring more awareness to the marsh in terms of maintenance and funding, it looks to be a great season ahead for this most valuable natural asset!

Get Involved!

Upcoming Projects

Blackberries and Butterflies

By Barb Riordan

Who doesn't love blackberries and butterflies? But there can be too much of a good thing. Take for instance the blackberry fields in the French Creek Estuary Land. This is the Himalayan Blackberry, a highly invasive species that has been identified as a primary ecological threat to the estuary land by the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute (MABRRI). Although there appears to be lots of birds using the blackberry fields, Himalayan Blackberry is actually poorer quality habitat than native shrub species and results in decreased biodiversity of plants and animals. There are 19 Blue-listed species using the estuary land so conserving biodiversity is important. Six of those species are aerial insectivores that would benefit from replacing Himalayan Blackberry with



Himalayan Blackberry Field in Estuary Land

native shrubs and trees: Purple Martin, Barn Swallow, Black Swift, Common Nighthawk. Townsend's Big-eared Bat and Blue Dasher Dragonfly.

For that reason, we are planning to remove some of the blackberry and replace it with native vegetation that attracts the aerial insect species that are prey for these insectivores. These aerial prey species require specific plants at different stages of their life cycles which are not found in a Himalayan Blackberry monoculture. In other words, our goal is to restore the natural habitat for these species.

But how will we know if we have been successful? That's where the butterflies come in. We have received a grant from the BC Nature Foundation to conduct surveys on the insects and birds that are currently using the blackberry fields and are waiting to hear if we will get the remainder of the funds needed from the BC Conservation Foundation. These surveys will provide us with a baseline on the abundance and diversity of species that can be compared after the habitat restoration work is completed to see if we made a difference.

We're going to need lots of volunteers for the surveys who will be led by: Dr. Scott Gilmore, Biologist at the Pacific Biological Station; Dr. Joel Gibson, curator of Entomology at the Royal BC Museum; and Heidi vanVliett, MSc, Biologist in Training, Vancouver Island University. If bird identification is your thing or capturing and identifying insects (training will be provided) is something that turns your crank, then have we got the job for you! Stay tuned for more details.

Trees Become Forests **Friday April 1, 1-3 pm**

Friends of French Creek Conservation Society has an exciting opportunity to partner with young climate activists from local high schools to plant trees along the lower corridor of the creek. FFCCS pots up native tree and fosters them to put into the ground all over the



watershed. Now, we hope to settle into various places a few hundred trees with the enthusiastic help of teens and FFCCS volunteers.

If you have a truck or a van, and can help move young trees in pots from our Grafton Avenue farm to the French Creek Community Park on Lee Road, please contact Sunshine Goldsberry at sunshinegoldsberry@telus.net.

Come along and bring a shovel!



Hogweed history in the making! Summer 2011.

Giant Hogweed Alert!

The invasive plant Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) has been largely removed from the French Creek stream edges over the last 15 years. We get informed of found plants, or asked to identify Giant Hogweed several times a year. Please don't hesitate to send a note to communications@ffccs.ca if you spy a very large, hairy-leafed plant that pops up in the creekside areas.

Hamilton Marsh Tour

The annual Hamilton Marsh Tour is on this spring at the tail end of the Brant Wildlife Festival, on Saturday April 16th, from 10am to 3pm. FFCCS and the Arrowsmith Naturalists will be leading tours. The site is off Hilliers Road, and there are signs posted to lead the way.

Hamilton Marsh is the largest wetland in this area, and just outside Qualicum Beach as one heads for the Port Alberni junction.

The View From There

Send Us Your Photos!

Now that you've been all caught up on what we're up to, we want to know what you've been up to! Do you have a particular trail or shore that you love to walk? Have you captured a beautiful sunset? Can't stop snapping photos of your favourite native plant or wildlife? Send us your photos and help us create a photo gallery just for you, "The View From There". Each 'Creekside News' newsletter will feature photos by you, our wonderful members, sharing moments you've captured while out protecting, working on, or enjoying this beautiful island we call home. We can't wait to see "The View From There"!

Please send your photos, along with your name, the approximate date the photo was taken on, and the location it was taken at to:



antonia.westcoast@icloud.com



Membership Application Form

| Friends of French Creek Conservation Society – Membership Form 2022 | | | |
|---|------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | New Member | <input type="checkbox"/> | Renewal |
| | | Date: | |
| Last Name: | | First Name: | |
| Street Address: | | | |
| City: | | Province: | Postal Code: |
| Phone (Primary): | | Phone (Secondary): | |
| Email Address: | | | |

Membership Fee:
\$15.00 Annually

Please mail your completed membership form along with a cheque made payable to:
Friends of French Creek Conservation Society
PO Box 331
Qualicum Beach, BC
V9K 1S8

Questions? Contact Us:
www.ffccs.ca
communications@ffccs.ca
250-248-8809



“A river is water in its loveliest form; rivers have life and sound and movement and infinity of variation; rivers are veins of the earth through which the lifeblood returns to the heart.”

-Roderick Haig Brown