

South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program



2008 - 2009
Annual Report

*The core administration of the South Okanagan
Similkameen Conservation Program (SOSCP) is
supported by Partner contributions. SOSCP would
also like to recognize the generous support of the
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SOSCP

South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program

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Front Cover Photo: Debbie Clarke

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



As SSCP Partners we continue to move forward in the shared conservation objectives of our region.

In February of this year with the help of Bryn White, Program Manager, we initiated the establishment of the 2009 working committee, bringing together SSCP Partners and others to discuss the continued development of the process for the Regional Biodiversity Conservation Strategy project. The Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (BCS) is intended to assist local governments and other land managers with integrating biodiversity issues and opportunities into land use planning, development processes and decision making.

As manager of the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre it is always in my interest to collaborate with ecosystems experts, including those with traditional ecological knowledge. And it has been my pleasure as the 2009 SSCP Chair to work with Bryn and some Aboriginal community leaders to begin developing relationships for regional ecosystems health.

It is important that the SSCP continue in priority setting, leveraging and coordinating conservation efforts that remain relevant to its membership partnership.

We must remember that as partners we are the SSCP. We all have strengths to contribute to the program and to the community. Let our voices be heard. Give support to the SSCP with your expertise. Give support to the SSCP with your dollars. We can move forward. And we can make a difference in our communities and “ensure the health of ecosystems in the South Okanagan.”

It has been my pleasure being the 2009 Program Chair, and I look forward to a continued relationship in 2010 as the Past-Chair.

Sincerely,
Charlotte M. Stringam
Chair, SSCP

PROGRAM MANAGER'S REPORT



It is challenging times for conservation in this global economy, and yet the program and partners remain committed to working together to protect the unique landscape of the

South Okanagan and Similkameen. Diminishing capacity for conservation and mounting threats to the future ecological integrity of this special place is only serving to deepen our resolve and heighten our sense of urgency to help everyone, every community, understand their role to play in the protection of the full range of life in all of its forms.

Biological diversity and the integrity of our environment are often treated as outside entities, apart from the equation of “important” aspects of human life. The fact is that biodiversity is essential to our health and our economic and cultural futures. It is the foundation of our economy and our prosperity, and is critical to our sense of place and well being. It is the key to resilience in a rapidly changing world; it may be the best gift we will ever give our children.

It was a pleasure to work with Charlotte Stringam this year in her role as SOSCP Chair. Charlotte is the Executive Director of the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre and is an Osoyoos Indian Band elected Council member. When Charlotte was asked to join the SOSCP Executive, I was moved by her dedication to be of service not only to her community but to the conservation community of SOSCP. Charlotte once told the very heartfelt story of how she came to return to this area, and SOSCP is very fortunate to have benefitted from her homecoming. Charlotte has been a supportive and strong member of our Executive and I have appreciated her commitment as Chair of the program, and to achieving the broader goals of the program.

The Executive Committee as a whole is one of the reasons that the SOSCP continues to be a successful example of the power of collaboration. A small group of partner representatives come together every two months to assist

the Program Manager with the day to day components of the program. The SOSCP Executive is an active, involved, and supportive committee, reflective of the overall conservation ethos in the South Okanagan Similkameen.

Highlights of the Year's Accomplishments

The Program continues to make significant contributions to conservation and sustainability in many program areas. Partners can be very proud of the accomplishments and successes of the past fiscal year, 2008-09 presented in this Annual Report.

Partnership Building

The SOSCP partnership continues to evolve and form connections with organizations and initiatives contributing to the overall conservation objectives in the South Okanagan and Similkameen.

During 2008-09 SOSCP welcomed the Village of Keremeos to the table as its newest partner, and I began to work in earnest to support the community planning and visioning initiatives within Keremeos and throughout the Similkameen Valley. I am represented both on the Project Steering Committee and Resource Team for the Similkameen Valley Planning Society's “Sustainable Similkameen” valley-wide planning process.

I have also been very proud to have been involved with a number of our partners to establish a capacity building strategy for funding to provide additional environmental planning assistance to local government. Through a truly collaborative approach, local government partners, OSCA, and funders such as the Real Estate Foundation of BC have come together to support technical and planning assistance, including the contracting of a shared environmental planner for three municipalities (Summerland, Keremeos and Oliver).

In our endeavour to truly maintain an ecological corridor and consider the landscape as a whole, we are pleased to continue to work with our partners and new associates in Washington State. SOSCP has been communicating with the Washington Biodiversity Project and Council and

PROGRAM MANAGER'S REPORT

organizations working on implementing components from the Washington State Biodiversity Conservation Strategy as well as state-wide wildlife corridor connectivity analyses. There is a significant amount of co-learning and enthusiasm for cooperation from partners involved on both sides of the border as we each advance the science and policy recommendations for biodiversity conservation within our shared ecological corridor.

At the last AGM, SOSCP recognized several individuals for their significant contributions to conservation in the South Okanagan-Similkameen: Drew Carmichael – retired BC Ministry of Environment Regional Manager, and former SOSCP Chair; Joanne Muirhead – former Site Manager, Executive Director and now Board Director of the Osoyoos Desert Center; Harold King – volunteer extraordinaire, Director of the Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society and Oliver-Osoyoos Naturalist Club; and, Jeannette Armstrong – renowned Okanagan Syilx Canadian author, artist, educator, and indigenous civil rights activist. Each of these individuals is a dedicated conservation practitioner and has contributed to the success of the SOSCP.

The Program Manager continues to represent SOSCP on the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council, an ad-hoc technical committee to the Okanagan Basin Water Board, and is proud to have been involved with the development of the Okanagan Sustainable Water Strategy and the implementation as Co-Chair of the Council's Communications and Outreach Team.

The SOSCP Program Manager also attended and presented the 2009 BC Land Summit in Whistler as a Board member of one of the six organizing agencies, the Land Trust Alliance of BC. This interdisciplinary conference outlined how other professions view current and emerging land issues in BC, provided opportunities for discussion and debate, and established productive working relationships across disciplines (including the Land Trust Alliance of BC, Appraisal Institute of Canada, BC Association, Agrologists, Landscape Architects, Planning Institute and the Real Estate Institute of BC).

The Land Summit was another example of the leadership of the Real Estate Foundation of BC in supporting and

sponsoring dialogue toward sustainable human settlement issues. The theme of the conference was “adapting to change” and keynotes included Robert F. Kennedy Jr., and Thomas R. Berger. The Program Manager presented during the concurrent sessions with the LTABC Executive Director and Grasslands Conservation Council on Successful Private-Public Land Conservation Partnerships.

Long Term Program Funding

In November of 2008, the SOSCP watched with anticipation as its sister initiative in the East Kootenay region worked with the Regional District of East Kootenay in the Upper Columbia Valley to establish a Local Conservation Fund. Local governments in Canada and the United States have established funds to support the conservation of watersheds for drinking water, wildlife habitat, open space, recreation and local food production. In 2006, 74% of the 182 conservation fund proposals on U.S. ballots were passed by voters.

The East Kootenay proposal called on the Regional District to establish a dedicated fund garnered by a property tax of \$20 per parcel. The local government took the concept to the people and the idea was supported by referendum. One year later, the East Kootenay Conservation Program and Regional Districts are deciding how they will spend the first \$230,000 towards fish and wildlife conservation, watershed conservation, and open space conservation – including family ranches and forested land.

A local conservation fund is one of the most effective ways to garner significant resources for conservation efforts and it is one of the mechanisms being explored for the Okanagan region.

Currently, efforts to secure long-term funding outside partner contributions are being focused on building the SOSCP Endowment Fund held with the Community Foundation of the South Okanagan.

The Real Estate Foundation of BC continues to be a stalwart supporter of the work of the SOSCP, including the core administration as well as technical and planning support that the core SOSCP program is undertaking with local and

PROGRAM MANAGER'S REPORT

regional governments. In addition, the Real Estate Foundation of BC, through the Communities in Transition Program, has supported a capacity grant to enable environmental planning to occur within a number of municipalities in the region. A shared environmental planner and increased technical support is the result of SOSCP partners, funders like the Real Estate Foundation of BC and local governments coming together to cooperate for sustainability.

Maintaining the Partnership and Communications

The SOSCP monthly newsletter continues to be a helpful mechanism to communicate news, coming events, announcements, resources and partner profiles to better communicate the activities of the partners within the program and to the community in general. Program profile and environmental information this year was strong again in the print media, including the local newspapers.

The website continues to be an evolving resource. The site has gone through another transition on the Community Mapping Network host site and features a land use planning page with links to tools and guidelines, news, announcements, searchable project database, and links to research, resources, and partners.

Implementing the Strategic Plan

The Program Managers' role is to assist with the communication, coordination and implementation efforts of partners in fundraising, planning and delivery of conservation projects. The planning, delivery and resulting conservation outcomes in this region are impressive. The rest of this report is dedicated to showcasing the extent and results of those efforts and I encourage you to read on. One of the priorities of the past year for the Program Manager has been to work with partners to establish the ground work for a Regional Biodiversity Conservation Strategy. A conservation strategy is intended as a policy framework that sets priorities for identifying, preserving and restoring important natural areas and considers options for conservation of entire ecosystems and watersheds that go beyond municipal or rural boundaries, and across all land tenures. Conservation strategies are important tools for governments and other agencies to be

able to incorporate habitat information and sustainability considerations into decision making.

The notion for a Regional Biodiversity Conservation Strategy was raised in the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen Sub-Regional Growth Strategy under an environmental protection goal and policies to coordinate management of regional biodiversity conservation and support stewardship strategies. The SOSCP is well positioned to take the lead with its partners and associates as a natural progression of work that respects the science-based, landscape approach central to the program. Since the initiation of the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy concept at last year's AGM, fundraising has been a significant focus. In addition, a Steering Committee, Technical Committee and a number of Working Groups have been established, in order to guide the project, and create the science-based spatial framework and analysis that will form the basis for biodiversity conservation priorities and recommendations.



It has been an incredibly rewarding year to be able to work within this program and tackle the challenges we face alongside so many good people doing so many good things on the landscape.

Bryn White
Program Manager

SOSCP BACKGROUND

The South Okanagan Similkameen is a National Treasure

The South Okanagan and Similkameen landscape is the only one of its kind in Canada. It is a desert-like environment with uncommon richness and rarity of species and ecosystems including wildlife and ecosystems found nowhere else in our country, and in some cases, nowhere else in the world that makes. It is celebrated as one of the few “hotspots” of biological diversity in our nation, and unfortunately, it is also one of the most endangered.

The South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program (SOSCP) follows a long history of dedicated conservation activity in the region, and for the past nine years has represented a unique effort of cooperation of local, regional, provincial and national organizations towards conservation of the rare and endangered wildlife and habitats found here.

By working together, sharing information and resources, the Partners believe they can achieve more than they could alone. This type of partnership between Government and non-government organizations is setting a model for conservations in other areas.

Over this time, the program has grown to include 47 partner organizations, each signing on to the shared goals of conservation. The Statement of Cooperation outlines the program principles for partnering together and speaks to the South Okanagan-Similkameen as a special place, where the future of biodiversity is secure and the ecological integrity of the unique landscape is protected. The statement reflects the understanding that biodiversity is a key component of Canada's national heritage and its future is threatened.



Further, it asserts that it is not too late; and highlights that the protection of this special place is our shared responsibility, acknowledging the role of every individual and organization, and specifically the special role and unique perspectives that Aboriginal people of the South Okanagan-Similkameen have to contribute to the future of these natural systems.

The Partners developed a long range strategic plan with a



SOSCP BACKGROUND

vision for SOSCP: “A healthy environment that sustains the diversity of indigenous plants and animals while enriching people's lives”. This vision reflects the desire for both environmental and economic sustainability.

In order to achieve the objectives for the conservation of biodiversity, partners have established specific science-based goals related to conservation of important habitat types, species and have developed approaches and strategies appropriate to the mandates of the partners,

SOSCP Teams:

Science

Applying scientific knowledge

Outreach

Involving the community in conservation

Stewardship

Voluntary caring for the land

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Applying First Nations' knowledge and ecological heritage

Land Use Planning

Assisting in land use decisions

Habitat Securement

Securing critical habitats

A Biodiversity Conservation Strategy

In December of 2008, the SOSCP and partners launched the concept of a Regional Biodiversity Conservation Strategy. The project is Chaired by the SOSCP Program Manager, with Project Management assistance from the Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance. The proposed process for accomplishing the development of the strategy begins with the background: establishing the project scope and objectives as guided by a Steering Committee and special working groups including the SOSCP Chair and Program Manager, BC Ministry of Environment, Environment Canada, Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen, Ministry of Community and Rural Development, Nature Conservancy of Canada, South Okanagan Similkameen Syilx Environmental Committee, En'owkin Centre and Okanagan Nation Alliance.

The Steering Committee has established a draft Project Charter including Vision, Mission, Goals and Objectives. The SOSCP employs a science-based approach to conservation; therefore a significant amount of initial work on the strategy has been to establish the habitat and biodiversity assessment work plan. A Technical Committee has been tasked with working alongside the Steering Committee to outline methodology for the “spatial framework”; the data layers and analysis will help assess and evaluate the variety of existing habitat and biodiversity values in the region to support biodiversity planning. The resulting maps will outline the size and location of habitat reservoirs and refuges, connectivity corridors, relative rankings and critically important areas for biodiversity, and a management layer that will identify opportunities for biodiversity conservation efforts.



2008 - 2009 AWARD RECIPIENTS

“The South Okanagan Similkameen is a better place because of the dedication and contribution of organizations and individuals that advance conservation in their own unique way.”



Doreen Olson

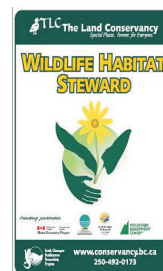
After a 30 year career with Air Canada, Doreen chose to come to the South Okanagan. Her leadership and entrepreneurial skills and love of the natural world have shaped her "retirement". Doreen operated a Bed and Breakfast for bird watchers, gaining accolades from clients and attention from the prestigious Small Planet Guide. She is a respected 15-year member of the South Okanagan Naturalist Club, assisting with many club activities and fundraising events as well as participating in Christmas Bird Counts. Doreen was one of the founding members of the Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance (OSCA) and volunteered as Meadowlark Festival Coordinator during its formative years. In 2002 Doreen was honoured with The Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal for her significant contribution to Canada, her community and fellow Canadians through volunteer

work for the natural environment. Doreen continues to be an active citizen, organizing events, meetings and other activities related to environmental issues and SOSCP recognizes her contribution in raising awareness and understanding of our natural treasures.



Partners in Business and Stewardship of the Land

This year, the SOSCP would like to recognize a number of individuals from one sector of the business community that are doing special things for the land in partnership with the Land Conservancy of BC's Stewardship and/or Conservation Partners Program.



O'Reilly's Organic Farm Bed & Breakfast

Contact: David O'Reilly and Allison Cran

37617 97th St., Oliver, BC V0H 1T0

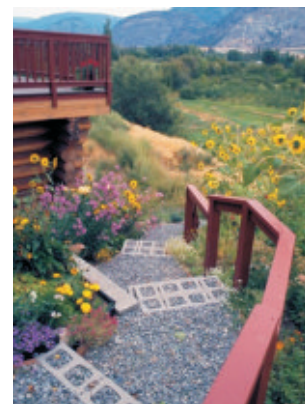
Phone: **(250) 498-6044**



O'Reilly's Organic Farm Bed and Breakfast is an oasis of peace and serenity in this busy world. This B&B offers spacious bedrooms - each with an exquisite view of the Okanagan Valley and wholesome, delicious vegetarian breakfasts while looking out over their working orchard.

CONSERVATION: Riparian conservation goes hand-in-hand with organic fruit production at this farm on Park Rill Creek. David and Allison care for their property and know that the creek that runs through their property and its fringe of trees and shrubs (riparian area) are good for their farm, and vital to the health of the region as a whole. They are encouraging neighbours to protect the creek and are active members of "Friends of Park Rill".

David and Allison began their stewardship work on the property by reducing the amount of mowing near the creek to recover trees and shrubs within the waterbirch-dogwood plant community. To assist the recovery of the habitat, 670 native shrubs and trees were planted, with assistance from the South Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship program.



2008 - 2009 AWARD RECIPIENTS



God's Mountain Estate

Contact: Sarah Allen and Richard Goodall
4898 Lakeside Road, Penticton, BC V2A 8W6
Phone: (250) 490-4800

An Okanagan Valley Bed and Breakfast on a 115 acre property is a rustic Mediterranean style escape. Accommodations are provided, as well as, a full kitchen and dining facility for the use of their guests, should they wish to make their own picnic, lunch or dinner.

CONSERVATION: Sarah and Richard are in the process of going organic with their vineyard, their variety of fruit trees, and their heritage vegetable garden.

They are active Conservation Partners with *TLC The Land Conservancy* and are proud stewards of 105 acres of natural grasslands and cliffs located upslope of their Bed & Breakfast. As one walks up their nature trail behind the B&B, one notices the scent of vanilla from the magnificent ponderosa pines and the healthy cover and variety of bunchgrasses and wildflowers that protect the sensitive arid soils. California bighorn sheep take shelter from predators on the rocky cliffs, along with and a myriad of birds that nest and roost there. The not so popular but federally threatened rattlesnakes find a safe refuge amongst the rocks.



Kambo Farm/ Ciliegia Villa

Contact: Ranbir and Shinder Kambo
12795 87th St, Osoyoos, BC
Phone (250) 495-7155

Ciliegia Villa offers five luxurious Villas located in the only pocket desert in Canada. Guests are invited to have a peaceful and relaxing stroll through the orchard, and view the diversity and abundance of seasonal fruits at Kambo Farms.

CONSERVATION: Ranbir and Shinder balance their cherry tree farm, villa, and wetland in a very giving manner. The story of the wetland is quite heroic. Ranbir and Shinder found out that many years ago, there used to be a wetland where their orchard trees now grew. With this knowledge, in December 2008, they decided to take the trees down, re-dig and re-build the pond. In spring of 2009, natural seepage filled the pond and both Great Basin Spadefoots and

Painted Turtles have been discovered since. With the assistance of TLC's SOS Stewardship Program and dedicated volunteers, the Kambos restored the 10 metre riparian zone around the pond this year. Monitoring and restoration will continue as the Kambos are 'Wildlife Habitat Stewards' with TLC's SOS Stewardship Program.



2008 - 2009 AWARD RECIPIENTS



Bighorn Ridge Guest House

Contact: Carla Leinweber and Roger Hawthorne,
2357 Rolling Hills Road, Okanagan Falls, BC V0H 1R2
Phone: (250) 497-8981 Toll free: 1 (866) 339-8139

This custom design guest house is located on a ridge overlooking Vaseaux Lake, mountains, and Blue Mountain Vineyard. This is an adult-only, pet-friendly guest house with two private suites - each sleeping 2 adults.

CONSERVATION: Carla and Roger have fashioned their buildings to blend in with the surrounding natural area, and have a minimalist outdoor footprint (no lawn or landscaping).

The grasslands on the whole property are part of the stewarded area, including to the edge of buildings. They are Wildlife Habitat Stewards with TLC's South Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Program stewarding 9 acres of antelope-brush grassland with a few scattered ponderosa pines. They share their property with species at risk such as the Bighorn Sheep, Western Rattlesnakes, Behr's Hairstreak butterfly, and the Western Skink, as well as, many other wildlife species.



High Chaparral Guest House

Contact: Bruce Brownstein and Linda Sheehy
13990 Fairview-Patten Road, Oliver, BC
Phone: (250) 485-2797

Bruce and Linda (left).
Bruce and TLC Volunteers helping with native plant vegetation project (right).

Nestled high in the hills West of Oliver, the High Chaparral Guest House offers privacy and commanding views of the valley with no other building in sight. This is an adult-only, dog-friendly guest house with two private suites - each sleeping 2 adults.

CONSERVATION: Bruce and Linda are in the process of negotiating a voluntary stewardship agreement with TLC's South Okanagan – Similkameen Stewardship Program to become Wildlife Habitat Stewards. Their 80 acre property surrounding the Guest House has beautiful rolling hills and cliffs in the ponderosa pine-bunchgrass ecosystem. They share their property with several species at risk including Nuttall's Cottontails and Western Rattlesnakes.



TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

Traditional Ecological Knowledge is the knowledge that was gained by many thousands of years of being part of the land and its many cycles of life. The Syilx worldview of the land, plants, birds, animals, fish, amphibians and all that surrounds us is a very different worldview then the worldview of Western Society. That worldview kept the Syilx nation in complete harmony with the land and is the knowledge that kept the land and the Syilx healthy for all those many thousands of years. It is that knowledge that is combined with western science, which increases the chance to rescue what is left of the natural world. It is knowledge that we as Syilx people are willing and ready to share with the science community. The Syilx people are part of the health of the land and should not be left out of any decisions that affect the land in our respective territories. Together we truly can make a difference.

This year the En'owkin Centre's TEK team has been involved in many activities in their territory. The En'owkin Centre's TEK team has been working closely with organizations, groups, Indian Bands, City Councils, RDOS, schools, Okanagan College, universities and other entities that are connected and concerned with the environment including; SOSCP, Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance, Okanagan Nation Alliance, South Okanagan Similkameen Syilx Environmental Committee, BC Parks, the Nature Trust of BC, The Land Conservancy of BC and Canadian Wildlife Service.

Species at risk surveys were carried out on the Locatee lands (now known as Ecommunity Place). The six species at risk surveyed included the Great Basin Spadefoot, Tiger

Salamander, Yellow-breasted Chat, Western Screech-Owl, Gopher Snake and Behr's Hairstreak. The TEK team has collaborated with biologists Rene McKibbin for Yellow-breasted Chat monitoring, biologist Sara Ashpole for amphibian monitoring and biologist Jason Emery for habitat restoration.

Further, the TEK team continued their work with Jacquie Likins of OSCA and their Outreach program to deliver Reconnect projects that brought area school students to the Ecommunity place to experience Syilx knowledge and perspective first hand. Students participated in planting activities and listened to a Syilx leader. The Reconnect project was also extended to Wildlife Management areas such as McLean Creek in Okanagan Falls, Kobau Park in Cawston, and other places that OSCA arranged for and partnered with.

The En'owkin TEK team partnered with BC Parks this year to conduct a search for special pictograph sites on the west side of Vaseaux Lake. The site was located and documented and now will be protected for all time. TEK is very pleased to have helped find, document and protect a traditional site.

The En'owkin TEK team supported Okanagan Nation Alliance and their work on McIntyre Dam. TEK helped with the protocols that were necessary before and after a project so that the natural flow of nature was not disturbed. The Okanagan Nation Alliance Fisheries installed new fish friendly gates on the McIntyre Dam allowing salmon to finally make it over the dam to their main

SOSCP



TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

spawning grounds further up the Okanagan River. On September 30, 2009, TEK was on hand to welcome and watch the first salmon to go over the gates at McIntyre Dam in 100 years.

Finally, the TEK team is planning a Syilx traditional burn in a controlled access area or wildlife management area. The En'owkin Centre and the TEK team will be working with the Okanagan Nation Alliance fuel load management specialist, BC Parks, Forrex grassland expert, Forestry and possibly other bands to try to accomplish this sometime in the future. The Syilx people have traditionally used fire through many generations to maintain good growth of special plants and also to keep the fire fuel load down. Recent science has confirmed the Syilx use of fire.

The En'owkin Centre TEK team looks forward to working with all partners and is open to consider projects in the future within the Syilx territory.



STEWARDSHIP

One of the many definitions for stewardship is “the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care”. The members of SOSCP Stewardship team work in partnership with owners and managers of private land to help support their voluntary stewardship efforts. In 2008-2009, there was a continued focus on habitat which supports species at risk.

South Okanagan-Similkameen (SOS) Stewardship Program

This was the 15th year of the SOS Stewardship Program, which provides information, support, and resources to individual private landowners. The Land Conservancy of BC has been administering the program since 2000, and is grateful for the ongoing financial support of our many partners and supporters including Environment Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program, the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, and TD Friends of the Environment. In 2008-9, program staff and contractors worked directly with 148 landowners, providing them with information on habitats, species at risk and promoting sustainable land use practices. Thirty hectares of habitat were improved by the removal of garbage, invasive weeds, invasive fish, and through planting of native species. Six landowners signed voluntary stewardship agreements covering ten hectares of land, which provides habitat for at least 15 species at risk (SAR). Sixty people attended five community stewardship events, which raise awareness of species at risk and encourage neighbourhood participation. Further, 41 people were involved in five habitat restoration events and a further 17 habitat enhancement projects were completed including vegetation planting, invasive species removal, residence creation and exotic species removal (goldfish). Fifty people attended a recognition ceremony in celebration of the fifteenth year of the program. Over 300

people received two editions of the SOS Stewardship newsletter, and nine media articles covered the results of our work. Two presentations on habitat securement were delivered to a combined audience of approximately 80 people.

Conservation Partners Program

The Conservation Partners Program is delivered by TLC around the province, and recognises agricultural landowners who practise sustainable farming methods, including the stewardship of natural habitat. There were 14 active partners in the South Okanagan-Similkameen area this year.

Puddles for Peepers

South Okanagan landowners that own, or adjacent to wetland habitat were contacted to discuss habitat importance, function, sensitivity, and retention. A total of 25 landowners were visited from one to 15 times June 2009. Of these, four new consultations were made and two enhancement projects were initiated. New landowner contact included wetland excavation, garbage removal, amphibian monitoring, terrestrial habitat and habitat enhancement recommendations.

Landowner discussions included findings from previous amphibian monitoring, permission to access for monitoring in the current year, and habitat enhancement opportunities were discussed (e.g. planting, weeding, garbage removal, terrestrial habitat enhancement). Expertise was also provided to landowners, the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen, and local conservation organizations (DUC, UC, OSCA, and TLC) regarding mosquito control and risk of West Nile Virus when requested. Select extension materials



STEWARDSHIP

were provided to landowners where requested, e.g. Amphibian ID card. Twenty-two landowners participated in amphibian surveys to determine species diversity, relative abundance and breeding success. Additionally, nighttime auditory surveys for calling frogs along the Hike and Bike trail occurred on two occasions. Nine properties participated in restoration activities and eight landowners worked towards future restoration projects.

Interpretive signs are in progress for the Osoyoos Desert Centre (Great Basin Spadefoot), the DUC Winters Property (Great Basin Spadefoot), Road 22 Kiosk (Tiger Salamander), and Webster property (Western Painted Turtle).

Partnership with the Invasive Bullfrog Project (Sara Ashpole, MOE/HCTF funded) is in progress to coordinate and compliment landowner contact at infected and adjacent sites.

Riparian Fencing Project

This project involved the fencing of riparian areas to prevent damage from livestock and has been very successful. The project was funded by the Habitat Stewardship Program and administered by The Nature Trust of BC. This past year, 7 fencing projects were completed in Oliver, Osoyoos and Cawston. Total habitat protected by this year's project was 56 hectares consisting of riparian thickets and wetlands with a history of livestock grazing. The focal species for habitat protection on this project were Yellow-breasted Chat and Western Screech-Owl (although benefits from the project are equally important to a broad range of species at risk).

Nature Trust Conservation Crews

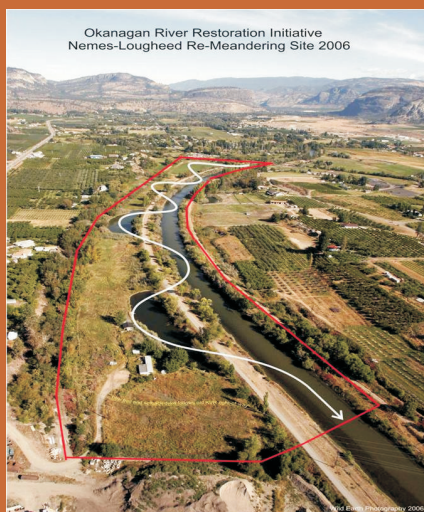
The Nature Trust of BC, with partner funding from the BC Conservation Corps, the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, and Human Resources Development Canada, employed a conservation youth crew consisting of 3 individuals from May through September. The conservation crew conducted a variety of land management activities on conservation lands throughout the Okanagan-Similkameen, including fencing, invasive plant inventory and removal, species inventories, habitat monitoring, and rubbish removal.

Okanagan River Restoration Initiative

During the 1950s much of the Okanagan River was straightened, narrowed and dyked to control flooding. This, along with subsequent development adjacent to the river has resulted in the loss of approximately 90% of important aquatic and riparian habitats.

In August 2009, the Ministry of Environment, the Okanagan Nation Alliance and the many partners involved in the Okanagan River Restoration Initiative directed the completion of Phase 1 of this important project. It involved the reconnection to historic floodplain and re-establishment of a meandering channel along 600 meters of Okanagan River located north of Oliver. This will provide huge benefits for a wide range of aquatic and riparian species, including sockeye and chinook salmon, rainbow trout, and several endangered wildlife species.

Restoration of disturbed and newly created riparian areas created by this



STEWARDSHIP

project has begun with the planting of native vegetation. The plants will make a significant contribution to the long term success of the project in terms of restoring aquatic and riparian habitat for a wide variety of fish and wildlife species. Restoration of riparian vegetation also provides benefits to the many residents and visitors who utilize the new hiking/biking path.

Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program (WiTS)

This was the second year for the Wildlife Tree Stewardship (WiTS) Program in the Okanagan- Similkameen. The program extended from Osoyoos north to Kelowna and west to Keremeos, and received monetary aid from three funding agencies: EcoAction, the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund and Service Canada. In 2008, ten dedicated volunteers assisted with the monitoring of approximately 70 wildlife tree nest sites. Emphasis this year was on monitoring the re-occupancy of nest sites by Lewis's Woodpecker. Some surveys were also conducted for two other at risk cavity nesters: Western Screech-Qwl and Williamson's Sapsucker. The program was closely linked with BC Nature, Partners in Flight, as well as the South Okanagan and Oliver-Osoyoos Naturalists Clubs, with members from each club participating in the program. With the assistance of a Service Canada grant, WiTS was able to hire a full time summer student who helped to coordinate the volunteer monitors. The student also expanded the outreach and education component of the program. The emphasis was on the development of a wildlife tree extension program for elementary students.

Invasive Plant Education and Coordination

Invasive plant education and coordination continued to be a function of the South Okanagan-Similkameen Invasive

Plant Society (SOSIPS) and the Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS). The 2008 Education Program continued to focus on the 'Dirty Dozen', the top twelve unwanted invasive plants of the Okanagan-Similkameen. Four new species-specific fact sheets were developed, expanding the existing series of fact sheets to a total of 22. The Bully Plant Elementary School program engaged over 400 students from five different schools. Six community presentations were conducted, two weed pulling events were organized and two agricultural field days were held. A display booth was set up at seven community events, providing information to hundreds of people. Warren the Weed Warrior, the RDOS invasive plant mascot, attended four events, handing out carabineers and activity books to hundreds of enthusiastic spectators.

The Penticton Herald newspaper continued their support of the 'Weed of the Week' series, with a total of 29 published articles. The Coordinator assisted over 130 land owners or managers who had invasive plant enquiries. Approximately 60 biological control releases (natural insect enemies) were made by the Coordinator for seven different invasive plant species, on both public and private lands.

A new 3-year management project was initiated on Crown lands west of Penticton, involving Gorman Bros, BC Transmission Corporation, the area rancher and the Ministry of Forests and Range. SOSIPS managed the fourth successful year of the Cooperative Puncturevine Project in cooperation with municipal Public Works Departments and the Ministry of Transportation. Additionally, SOSIPS participated in the fifth year of the Weeds Cross Borders project, which aims to achieve a long-term management plan and course of action to control invasive plants traveling across the border between BC and Washington.



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Developing a “science-based” approach to conservation is a central mandate of the SOSCP. There are many organizations providing scientific information for planning, priority setting, implementing conservation actions, and evaluating efforts. During the past year, members of the scientific network have been actively conducting research. The South Okanagan Similkameen is a home to a disproportionate number of species designated as “at risk” by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). Active habitat and species research is being conducted in this area for many species to determine their range, habitat needs and other impacts to their survival.

BC Ministry of Environment

The BC Ministry of Environment assisted RDOS in completing the Foreshore Inventory Mapping on the south end of Okanagan Lake. Inventory of at-risk plant species occurring below the high water mark (HWM) of Osoyoos Lake (excluding Osoyoos Indian Band foreshore) was contracted out to a botanist specialist. The occurrence records will be incorporated into the Okanagan Large Lakes Foreshore Protocol. Further, the BC Ministry of Environment conducted the annual Riparian Areas Regulation (RAR) compliance monitoring.

A number of inventory projects were conducted in the Okanagan by the BC Ministry of Environment. With assistance from headquarters and Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the Rocky Mountain Ridged Mussel inventory was conducted on Osoyoos Lake, Okanagan Lake, Okanagan River and Similkameen River. Partnering with the BC Conservation Corps,

inventory for Nuttall's Cottontail, Half-moon Hairstreak, Behr's Hairstreak, Tiger Beetles, Mormon Fritillary (*erinna* ssp), Immaculate Green Hairstreak, Grand Coulee owl-clover, Branched Phacelia, and Okanagan Efferia were completed.

Both the BC Ministry of Environment and Environment Canada continue to develop recovery strategies for species at risk. This past year, six recovery strategies were posted and included the Behr's Hairstreak, Branched Phacelia, Lyall's Mariposa Lily, Toothcup, Scarlet Ammannia, Rusty Cord-moss, and Badger. All recovery strategy plans can be found at:

(<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/recoveryplans/rcvry1.htm>).

Additionally, inventory and some monitoring of the short-rayed aster, Grand Coulee owl-clover, snakes, Half-moon hairstreak, showy phlox, and Lyall's mariposa lily were completed. The goal for the current and future years is to continue monitoring the short-rayed aster and Lyall's mariposa lily, and find soil associations for the Grand Coulee owl-clover.

BC Conservation Foundation

The British Columbia Conservation Foundation's mission is to make a positive contribution to the conservation of BC's fish, wildlife and ecosystems is through the provision of



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administrative, project management and technical field services. BCCF works closely with partners and also independently to undertake inventory, research, enhancement, restoration, resource stewardship and environmental education projects. In 2009, BCCF participated in five projects in the South Okanagan region. The most comprehensive project was a BCCF field crew working under the guidance of Orville Dyer, at the Ministry of Environment office in Penticton. This crew of two technicians completed numerous surveys of the local at-risk grassland species. It is anticipated that the results of these surveys will be used for future COSEWIC reports and Wildlife Habitat Area proposals.

In addition, BCCF has three employees working under the direction of the Canadian Wildlife Service in the South Okanagan area. They are assisting with the GIS analysis and ground truthing for the South Okanagan Biodiversity strategy, performing at-risk songbird surveys and participating in the bullfrog control and outreach program. Another BCCF employee compiles reports for the Southern Interior Beetle Action Coalition.

Environment Canada

Environment Canada either completed or provided funding for a number of projects in the South Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys in 2008-9.

Restoration of riparian and wetland habitats at Vaseux-Bighorn National Wildlife Area is ongoing, with a further 3 ha being restored in 2008, adding onto the 3.5 ha restored in previous years. Focal species making use of this restoration site include the endangered Yellow-breasted

Chat (*auricollis* subspecies) and species of special concern (Rubber Boa, Western Painted Turtle, and Western Toad). Surveys for Yellow-breasted Chats were conducted on most suitable habitats in the south Okanagan valley, resulting in the documentation of 48 nesting territories, including 10 new ones. The chat's preferred habitat of riparian thickets has been transformed into urban and agricultural developments, with only 13% of this habitat remaining in the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys. The objective of this long-term study is to track the population size, habitat selection and productivity of the Yellow-breasted Chat in the South Okanagan Valley.

Ongoing habitat restoration and species at risk inventories continued to be implemented by the En'owkin Centre at the Locatee Lands on the Penticton Indian Reserve, targeting the needs of Behr's Hairstreak, Yellow-breasted Chat, Great Basin Spadefoot, Gopher Snake, Tiger Salamander, and Western Screech-Owl (*macfarlanei* subspecies). This location supported six Yellow-breasted Chat territories this year, which is the most since surveys began annually in 2001 with only two territories. Chats are definitely showing a breeding response to the expansion of wild rose habitat at this site.

In the summer of 2008, surveys for Half-moon Hairstreak (butterfly) were completed on the National Research Council lands (Dominion Radio Astrophysical Observatory) at White Lake, in order to obtain more information about the size and structure of the population and begin to understand the habitat associations and possible impact of cattle grazing regimes on the species. Nesting Sage Thrashers were also monitored and habitat mapping initiated. DRAO also made progress on the preparation of a



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multi-species management plan for the property. The efficacy of a snake fence in the vicinity of the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre, run by the Osoyoos Indian Band, was evaluated. The summer of 2008 also saw the continuation of a long-term mark-recapture and radio-telemetry study on Western Rattlesnakes; and the expansion of that project to include Gopher Snakes and Night Snakes in the same area. The project also worked with local vineyard crews and resort staff to help field workers identify snakes, understand how to work safely with them, and understand threats to all snake species.

Okanagan Basin Water Board

The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is a local government organization that works on identifying and resolving critical water issues in the Okanagan valley. Highlights of recent Water Management Program initiatives are included below.

Water Conservation & Quality Improvement Grant Program: Under this grant program, eight projects were funded in the Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen for 2008-09. The Osoyoos Lake Sediment Coring is one of those projects; a partnership between UBC-Okanagan and the Ministry of Environment with support from the Osoyoos Lake Water Quality Society and Okanagan Nation Alliance. By taking core samples of the lake sediments, researchers established historic water quality information; determining the nutrient characteristics from pre-settlement time and comparing them to current levels. This data helps inform nutrient targets for the lake today.

Groundwater Bylaws Toolkit: The Groundwater Bylaws Toolkit was developed to help local governments protect groundwater. It provides the basics of groundwater science, clarifies who manages what aspects of groundwater, and discusses land use planning tools that local governments can use to protect groundwater quality and maximize aquifer recharge. Each tool is clearly explained and sample policy and bylaw language is provided that can be tailored to each unique area. The Toolkit also highlights the good work some B.C. local governments are already doing. The OBWB is now helping Okanagan local government planners identify how the Toolkit can be applied in their areas.

Water Supply & Demand Project: The OBWB is working in partnership with the Ministry of Environment and other agencies and organizations to develop a water budget for the entire Okanagan Basin that takes into account current availability and needs, and estimates how these will be affected by climate change and population growth. Phase 2 of the project, which involves data collection and reporting and developing models, will be completed at the end of this year. There is already great demand for the information collected, and the project steering group is working to determine the best way to share it with non-profit groups, local government planners, and others. For more information about these and other OBWB projects, please see www.obwb.ca.



OUTREACH

The SOSCP Outreach Team is dedicated to promoting education, extension and hands-on activities around conservation and sustainable development projects that influence the South Okanagan Similkameen. The goal is to foster increased awareness and participation amongst the communities of the region. The Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance (OSCA) leads the Outreach Team of the SOSCP in partnership with many organizations and groups including the En'owkin Centre, The Land Conservancy of BC, the BC Ministry of Environment, the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen, the City of Penticton, FORREX, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service, Wildlife Tree Program and the Nature Trust of BC. Outreach is focused on three fronts:

1. Educating the public on species and habitats at risk and engaging them in outdoor restoration and field activities.
2. Educating target groups, workers, work places with ecological information and best practices to benefit species at risk.
3. Providing ecological information to planners, elected officials and land managers through contract work managed by OSCA.

Biodiversity Conservation Strategy

OSCA has assisted the SOSCP Manager and partners to initiate this conservation strategy development process. OSCA has taken a significant role in fundraising and project management for this project, and has also assisted SOSCP and Land Use Team partners develop capacity for technical and planning support to local governments.

Agricultural Environment Partnership Initiative

In 2008, this program in partnership with Bear Smart was funded by the BC Agriculture Council. The program delivered ten 1.5 hour field seminars on snake safety, bear safety, and amphibian information to vineyard and farm workers.

A new publication on being bear safe for agricultural properties was completed in English and Punjabi and amphibian ID cards were distributed to field workers.

Eco-Management Workshops

OSCA planned and delivered workshops/seminars/industry meetings/ or conference presentations with the following groups: agricultural sector (vineyard owners/managers, orchardists); roads, highways and parks contractors (public works); real estate developers; environmental professionals; Regional District advisory planning committees, chambers of commerce or tourism development groups. Target messages were best management practices and enforcement of federal and provincial legislation that protect species and habitats at risk. The program is coordinated by Margaret Holm with consultants and government agency representatives hired or participating in the industry seminars.

Some of the material developed last year included a brochure and support material for developers to address



OUTREACH

incentives for sensitive development, a planning sustainability handbook for vineyards and a new species at risk amphibian pamphlet targeted to golf course managers, pond and landscape contractors.

Efforts were expanded to work with BC Wine Institute, Pacific Agri-food Research Station, viticulture consultants, and Okanagan College viticulture program on reducing vineyard expansion onto grasslands. From January to March 2008 the program participated in the Sustainable Viticulture initiative of the BC Wine Grape Council and assisted with the development of an Ecosystem Chapter for the Sustainable Viticulture Handbook. A community planning seminar on achieving habitat protection through by-laws and strict standards for environmental assessments for rural area planning committees and elected officials was delivered. Assistance was provided to parks and public works departments on ecological standards for working in sensitive habitats. On November 2008 the program with municipal public works & parks department organized a workshop "Working In, and Restoring Sensitive Habitat" in Oliver. Staff from several rural areas and municipalities attended. Lastly, in March 2009, the "Natural by Design: Sustainable Development for Rural Areas" forum on development in sensitive habitat for developers, planners & advisory planning committees was held in Osoyoos. It attracted an audience of planners, developers, advisory planning committee members, architects, and QEPs to hear about sensitive development in Ucluelet and share ideas on sensitive community planning for the South Okanagan-Similkameen.

Media

Seven full-page articles appeared in the Penticton Herald and featured Pallid Bats, Western Screech-Owl, White-headed Woodpecker, Gopher & Western Rattlesnakes, Badgers, Behr's Hairstreak and Mormon Metalmark. Four industry magazine publications were completed for "Orchard & Vine Magazine" and "The Grower's Journal" covering the topics: Restoring & Protecting Wetlands on Agricultural Property, Lewis's Woodpecker, Working in Snake Country, and Badgers. The Badger article resulted in a new location phoned into "badger hotline" and is now identified to the recovery team.

ECOSTudies 2008

The ECOSTudies program celebrated its sixth year of delivering environmental education programming to schools (Kindergarten to Grade 8) throughout the South Okanagan-Similkameen. ECOSTudies programs are designed to tie into the Integrated Resource Packages that are set forth by the BC Ministry of Education. These packages are curriculum guidelines for teachers and are used by ECOSTudies to develop and facilitate programming that offers environmental education on local species and spaces while meeting curriculum mandates. In 2008, a number of new programs were introduced: "What's the Buzz?", "It's not Easy Being Green", "Big Horn Sheep", "Rattlesnakes of the South Okanagan Similkameen" and "Eating Like A Bird". Season specific programs were offered such as "Go Batty!" in the fall with guest educator Tanya Luszcz. ECOSTudies was granted a permanent parks permit for Vaseux Lake, Sun Oka Park and Haynes Point so that the program could continue to deliver "in nature" field trips.



OUTREACH

ECOSTudies received a contribution from TD Friends of the Environment to assist in the development, administration & promotion of the program. Ducks Unlimited and OSCA renewed their partnership for the delivery of Project Webfoot, an outdoor wetland program at Vaseux Lake. The Contribution Agreement facilitated educator fees, administration overhead and a bus subsidy. OSCA maintained partnerships with the RDOS, SOS Bear Smart Project & the En'owkin Centre. New partnerships were formed with the City of Penticton through the Penticton Museum & Archives and the Water Stewardship Division. All the partnerships involve a fee for service agreement where ECOSTudies promotes, administers and refers the environmental education programs of these organizations.

A total of 91 ECOSTudies "in class" and "in nature" programs were delivered to 2275 students throughout the South Okanagan-Similkameen. As well, there were 26 program referrals to the partner organizations. Thank you to all the educators and partner organizations for making the 2008 ECOSTudies Program a success. ECOSTudies would like to give a special mention to Sherri Klein and Laure Neish who "retired" from the program.

Meadowlark Festival 2008

The eleventh annual Meadowlark Festival delivered by the Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance (OSCA) took place from May 15th to 19th, 2008. Ninety-two events were offered at indoor and outdoor venues throughout the South Okanagan-Similkameen. There were approximately 2200 local community members and out of town visitors that participated in these various events.

All events were designed to highlight the importance of conservation of the fragile ecosystems, habitats, and species of the South Okanagan-Similkameen while also providing knowledge regarding the cultural heritage of the valley. Events such as "Fragile Grasslands of the South Okanagan Similkameen", "In the Thicket of Things" (about the Yellow-breasted Chat), "Kettle Valley Railway and History Tour", "Cottonwoods Birding Tour", and "Birds and More Bus Tour" were examples of the most popular tours. Approximately 85% of the tours and events were sold out. Ten of the events that were offered were designed specifically for children one of the highlights being the "Voices In Nature" Concerts at the Cleland Community Centre. These concerts were delivered by Holly Arntzen and the Dream Band and featured 500 youth from around the valley singing songs about ecology, salmon, trees and more.

The 2008 Meadowlark Festival artist was Jane Kenyon whose beautiful textile piece entitled "Meadowlark Nest" was a unique addition to the festival prints, cards, t-shirts and tote bags. Jane also hosted a special exhibition at the Penticton Art Gallery entitled "Fragile: Handle With Care" which featured her tribute to the endangered species of British Columbia depicted in her original textile pieces.

The Meadowlark Festival Banquet at the Penticton Trade and Convention Centre was well attended and featured keynote speaker Richard Hebda who spoke about the diversity of our grassland ecosystems, the effects of climate change and the importance of making the proper decisions for conservation.



OUTREACH

The Meadowlark Festival was coordinated by the OSCA Board of Directors, Jacquie Likins, Barbara Bird, and Rosa Hopkins. It was made possible by the donations and sponsorship of many local community organizations, businesses, individuals, local and federal government, ENGOs, and the contribution of many hard working volunteers. Many thanks are extended to all volunteers, as without their continued support and contribution, the success of the festival would not be achievable.

Spotlight on Species

The Spotlight on Species program promotes awareness and recovery action surrounding COSEWIC designated species at risk in the South Okanagan-Similkameen valleys. It is funded by the Environment Canada Habitat Stewardship Program. Targeted audiences and general public are engaged by attending workshops and community events. They are informed via information displays, newspaper articles and print material. Events are held in target locations identified by SOSCP priority mapping: Outreach material is distributed and participants are given tools to undertake stewardship actions. Pamphlets are also provided to community and information centers. The Spotlight on Species program also partners with many local organizations and team members of the SOSCP to ensure successful and informed program delivery.

The Spotlight on Species Program hosted the following events and workshops in 2008: BC Rivers Day, "Too Valuable to Lose: Yellow-breasted Chat Habitat Reconnect and Awareness", Backroad Protocol in Wetlands and Grasslands to Sportsmen's' Association and ATV clubs, Badger

Outreach Seminars to ARGO road crews from Princeton/Keremeos and Osoyoos/Anarchist and the Similkameen Nature Expo. The Spotlight on Species media campaign presented articles on Antelope Brush, Bear Awareness, Western Screech-Owl and Riparian Areas. Print material that was developed were Badger Identification Cards, Mormon Metalmark Identification Cards, a new Antelope Brush Awareness poster and Amphibian Identification card.

The Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre

Nk'Mip has made species at risk and snakes at risk a focus of public outreach programs and school programs. Daily visitor programs educate thousands of residents and visitors each year about the need for habitat protection and respect for the Western Rattlesnake and five other snake species in the region. Staff working at all Osoyoos Indian Band businesses, including vineyard workers are trained on rattlesnake and gopher snake identification and safe relocation. Decreased fear of snake encounters results in greater understanding and protection of these species at risk, creating a culture of tolerance and enjoyment of snakes.



LAND USE PLANNING

2008-09 was a busy year for the Land Use Planning Team, with its members sharing ideas, expertise, information, and working together on a number of conservation initiatives. The focus was on developing effective working relationships and partnerships with local governments, and providing planning support and input to a variety of land use initiatives and issues. These included the Regional Growth Strategy and proposed secondary growth areas, as well as, specific development proposals.

A strategic planning session for the Team produced an update to the Work Plan and a Team Action Plan, including leads for the actions, timelines and outcomes, resources, and opportunities for new team members. In 2008, much of the Land Use Planning Team's focus shifted to the South Okanagan Regional Biodiversity Conservation Strategy. This exciting initiative has involved several members of the Land Use Planning Team; however, Team members were also involved in a number of other important conservation initiatives, and are developing tools and information to support and encourage conservation-based land use planning throughout the region.

The Team includes representatives from Ducks Unlimited Canada, the Grasslands Conservation Council, Environment Canada, Ministry of Environment, Okanagan-Similkameen Conservation Alliance, the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen, the Land Conservancy of BC, BC Ministry of Forests, the Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society, and Communities in Transition Program of the Real Estate Foundation.

In March 2009, Land Use Planning Team members thanked Rob Hawes for chairing the Team for the past 4 years, and also thanked Ducks Unlimited Canada for sponsoring Rob in that role. The Team leadership has transitioned we are fortunate to have Tasha Sargent (GCC) and Jan Kirkby (Environment Canada) co-chair the Team.

Developing Sustainable Land Use Capacity for Local and Regional Government

The SOSCP has established a regional environmental planning table that encourages a community and culture of learning and is responsive to the needs of land use practitioners. Through this collaborative process, SOSCP and local government partners, Oliver, Summerland and Keremeos have addressed the need for greater environmental planning assistance through the development of a capacity building strategy. Capacity for environmental planning and technical support has been garnered through funding commitments from the Real Estate Foundation of BC Communities in Transition partnership program, the Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance, and the communities themselves. This successful approach has allowed for the contracting of a shared environmental planner for ten months to provide for hands-on assistance to the communities in addition to other technical, planning and municipal law assistance that is available for the review of Official Community Plans and bylaws if required. The partners collaborate to guide the activities of the shared environmental planner and manage the project details.

SOSCP



LAND USE PLANNING

The intention of improving technical and planning capacity is to provide consistent baseline information to address ecological values, including ecosystem mapping, identification of environmentally sensitive areas, and recognition of special features and hotspots. Planning and technical support provides leading edge information pertinent to land use bylaw provisions (official community plans), development permit areas (derived from ecosystem mapping) or other suitable mechanisms to protect ecosystem values. SOSCP and Land Use Team partners continue to establish sources of ecological expertise for local governments engaged with the development community at the neighbourhood or site plan level, thus helping ensure recognition of sensitive ecosystems/connective corridors in the planning approval process.

Improving our Land Use Knowledge Base

An important project to refine Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory (SEI) was undertaken by SOSCP partners Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen (RDOS) and the Nature Trust of BC with funding from the Habitat Stewardship Program in order to provide an up to date and accurate mapping product for the region that would separate non-sensitive components from within polygons identified as sensitive. The refined product is available for a study area that includes most of the lower valley bottom area of the RDOS and member municipalities. The refined SEI will assist the RDOS with updating their Environmentally Sensitive Development Permit areas for new development and to more precisely identify the sensitive components of polygons to focus environmental consideration where it matters the most. The results will be available to other local governments to consider with their planning. In addition,

RDOS undertook a project to map sensitive ecosystems in areas where mapping has not occurred traditionally, including rural areas to the Town of Princeton.

Planning in the Similkameen Valley

For the first time, residents of the Similkameen Valley, from Princeton to Chopaka have joined together to plan for a Sustainable Similkameen Valley and SOSCP has been privileged to be part of this exciting undertaking. The Similkameen Valley Planning Society, a collaboration of rural Directors, Mayors and Lower/Upper Similkameen Band Chiefs initiated a concept to establish a sustainability plan for the region. Seventeen panel members representing all sectors and geographic areas of the Similkameen will establish a socio-cultural, economic and environmental sustainability strategy that will maintain and enhance the quality of the rural and small town lifestyle. One of the main objectives of the strategy is to protect the Valley's water, land, air quality and biodiversity.

(Photo of Steering Committee – back row: Susanne Thuerer, Chris Garrish, Bryn White, Marilyn Harkness, Walter Despot, front row: George Hanson, Carrie Terbasket.)



LAND USE PLANNING

Planning for Change Workshops

The Grasslands Conservation Council (GCC) held a very successful series of Planning for Change workshops throughout the Thompson-Okanagan. The GCC is also developing South Okanagan priority grasslands mapping, as well as, a methodology and process to conduct ecological area assessments for local governments and developers. By bringing science and land use planning together, they are able to provide concrete recommendations that deflect development away from core grassland areas while proposing alternative land use options.

Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) License Initiative

The Grasslands Conservation Council has been actively involved in promoting legislation for licensing and registering off-road vehicles. British Columbia is the only jurisdiction in North America (including Mexico) that does not have such legislation, and it is likely that regulations controlling off-road vehicle use will be adopted.

Wetland Stewardship Partnership

The multi-agency Wetland Stewardship Partnership has produced [*Wetland Ways: Interim Guidelines for Wetland Protection and Conservation in British Columbia*](#), a series of guidelines and best practices developed to promote best management practices for wetland conservation in BC. Wetland Ways will be field tested over the next two years among key stakeholders and is available on www.bcwetlands.ca.

Green Bylaws Toolkit

Outreach continues for the *Green Bylaws Toolkit for Conserving Sensitive Ecosystems and Green Infrastructure*

(www.greenbylaws.ca) through a series of workshops and one-on-one meetings with planners provided by consultants in different regions in BC, and more recently through the Fraser Basin Council's Smart Planning for Communities program (www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/programs/smart_planning.html).

Users of the Green Bylaws Toolkit have provided excellent feedback and an update is planned for release in Spring of 2010. New case studies, examples of local government legislation, and sections on climate change, species at risk, and working with First Nations will all be added. Land Use Planning Team members participated in the development of the Okanagan Basin Water Board's *Groundwater Bylaws Toolkit* (www.obwb.ca/157), which will be offered as an appendix to the *Green Bylaws Toolkit*.

South Okanagan Wildlife Management Areas

The Planning Section of the BC Ministry of Environment continues to seek establishment of Section 16 Land Act Reserves on parcels that were recommended for inclusion into the South Okanagan Wildlife Management Area (SOWMA) via the Okanagan Shuswap Land Resource Management Plan (2001) and the subsequent Land Act Review (2004). These reserves are an effort by the BC Ministry of Environment to help conserve fish and wildlife habitat on lands identified as suitable additions to the existing WMA which was established in 1980. These proposed additions have high conservation value for a variety of species at risk and include several important habitat types that are under continued development pressure in the South Okanagan Valley. Presentations to local Advisory Planning Commission (APCs) were conducted over the last year, namely in Oliver and Osoyoos. Local APCs supported the proposed reserves.



HABITAT SECUREMENT

The purpose of the Habitat Securement Team is to work strategically and cooperatively to secure land and interests in land, to conserve natural habitats and priority ecosystems, as well as ensuring their appropriate management.

The Habitat Securement Team is comprised of a number of agencies and organizations involved in land securement, including Ducks Unlimited Canada, The Nature Trust of British Columbia, The Nature Conservancy of Canada, The Land Conservancy, Environment Canada, Ministry of Environment, and the Okanagan Region Wildlife Heritage Fund Society.

The Habitat Securement Team has been actively working to secure critical habitat in the South Okanagan - Similkameen. There are currently over 54,000 hectares of conservation land held by partners in the South Okanagan – Similkameen Conservation Programs. There are, however, many critical habitats that still require protection. Overwhelming development pressures have resulted in many critical habitat lands being priced out of reach for conservation agencies. This means that alternate securement initiatives, such as covenants, donations, and partnerships are more important than ever.

The Nature Trust of BC received a donation of land adjacent to the Naramata Benchlands subdivision. The donation consists of 2 parcels of land, totaling 3.5 hectares (8.7 acres). The habitat is sloping grasslands and riparian with rock outcrops and mixed tree cover. Naramata and Arawana Creeks both run through the property, which forms a

conservation linkage between Naramata Creek Regional Park to the west and the Kettle Valley Railway to the east. The forested portions of the property offer habitat for species including the Lewis's Woodpecker and Western Screech-Owl. Several rock outcroppings and bluffs are ideal habitat for snakes and reptiles.

The Land Conservancy of BC and the En'owkin Centre continued their efforts to secure and protect the Locatee Lands adjacent to the Okanagan River on the Penticton Indian Reserve. This important riparian habitat is home to Yellow-breasted Chats, Western Screech-Owls, Great Basin Spadefoots and Tiger Salamanders. This year, 32 hectares (79 acres) of land has been secured under a 5-year lease, with funding through the Habitat Stewardship Program and Aboriginal Funds for Species at Risk.

The Nature Trust of BC completed a purchase and donation securement project in Rock Creek, adjacent to a donation completed last year. Located in the Kettle Valley on Ingram Mountain, the 89-hectare (220-acre) property is on the north side of the Crowsnest Highway 3 between the communities of Rock Creek and Midway. The property is primarily mixed grassland, with rock outcroppings and scattered patches of mixed forest. An intermittent stream provides riparian habitat and a drinking source for wildlife, including elk and black bear. The rock outcrops adjacent to grasslands provide habitat and denning sites for Western Rattlesnakes, Rubber Boa, and Racers.

Ducks Unlimited Canada also received an Eco-gift of land at Oyama. This 1.6 hectare (4 acre) parcel of land contains a wetland, known locally as Marsh Lake, located on the



HABITAT SECUREMENT

isthmus of land between Wood Lake and Kalamalka Lake. The highly productive marshland provides valuable habitat for breeding waterfowl and other water birds.

Habitat Securement Team member agencies are working on a number of securement projects involving key habitat in the South Okanagan –Similkameen. These projects involve acquisition through purchase or donation and conservation covenants.

Skaha Conservation Area

Since acquisition of the Skaha Conservation Area, The Land Conservancy BC, the Province of British Columbia and the Nature Conservancy of Canada have been managing the property for conservation and non-motorized recreation interests. BC Parks has developed a grassland restoration project amongst parking stalls at the newly completed public access point to the Skaha climbing bluffs. Bluebunch wheatgrass is flourishing in this smaller scale component of the project. Visitor use has been high as people come to discover the climbing area and enjoy the hiking trails on the property. Interpretive kiosks are being developed; here is a draft of one panel which will eventually be installed for all visitors to enjoy.



THE NATURE OF THE BLUFFS

Grasslands are a rich but vulnerable landscape. On the eastern slopes of Skaha Lake, rolling hills of bunchgrass, sparse Ponderosa Pine forests and rugged rocky outcroppings offer a refuge for an abundance of plants and animals.

Many grassland species face an uncertain future. Some of these, such as Big Horn Sheep, are still a common sight. Others, like the Night Snake, are more elusive. Yet all rely on this landscape for survival. Without it, they will no longer be elusive; they will simply be gone.

SOME OF SKAHA'S RARE SPECIES

 <p>Big Horn Sheep (<i>Ovis montanus</i>)</p> <p>One of the most iconic symbols of the West, the Big Horn Sheep is a true survivor. It has adapted to a wide range of habitats, from alpine tundra to desert scrub. Its thick, curved horns are a testament to its strength and resilience.</p>	 <p>Night Snake (<i>Diophis obsoletus</i>)</p> <p>This elusive snake is a true nocturnal creature. It is often found in the same habitats as the Big Horn Sheep, but its nocturnal nature makes it difficult to spot. It is a vital part of the local ecosystem.</p>	 <p>Interior Western Screech-Owl (<i>Otus b. macrotis</i>)</p> <p>This owl is a true nocturnal creature. It is often found in the same habitats as the Big Horn Sheep, but its nocturnal nature makes it difficult to spot. It is a vital part of the local ecosystem.</p>	 <p>Flat-topped Broomrape (<i>Hebecladus repens</i>)</p> <p>This rare plant is a true survivor. It has adapted to a wide range of habitats, from alpine tundra to desert scrub. Its thick, curved roots are a testament to its strength and resilience.</p>
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BC Parks | BC Parks | BC Parks | BC Parks



PARTNER INFORMATION

BC Conservation Foundation

Barb Waters
Regional Manager
 #200A - 1383 McGill Road
 Kamloops, BC V2C 6K7
 Phone: 250.828.2551
 Fax: 250.828.2597
 kamloops@bccf.com
 www.bccf.com

BC Lake Stewardship Society

Carolyn Johns
Director
 4 -552 West Ave
 Kelowna, BC, V1Y 4Z4
 Tel: 250.717.1212
 Fax: 250.717.1226
 carolynj-bclss@shaw.ca
 www.bclss.org

BC Ministry of Agriculture & Lands

Carl Withler
Agriculture Stewardship Coordinator
 200-1690 Powick Rd
 Kelowna BC
 Email: Carl.Withler@gov.bc.ca
 Website: www.gov.bc.ca/agf/

BC Ministry of Environment

Grant Furness
 Steve Matthews
Acting Regional Manager
 102 Industrial Ave
 Penticton, BC, V2A 7C8
 Tel: (250) 490-8277
 Fax: (250) 490-2231
 Email: grant.furness@gov.bc.ca
 steve.matthews@gov.bc.ca
 Website: www.gov.bc.ca/wlap/

BC Ministry of Forests & Range

Alex McLean/Anne Skinner
Range Officer
 102 Industrial Place
 Penticton, BC, V2A 7C8
 Tel: (250) 490-2222
 Fax: (250) 490-2231
 Email: Alex.McLean@gov.bc.ca
 anne.skinner@gov.bc.ca
 Website: www.gov.bc.ca/for/

BC Wildlife Federation

Paul McLean
Provincial Representative
 RR 1, Site 105, Comp. 4
 Keremeos, BC, V0X 1N0
 Tel: 250.499.0099
 pmclean1@telus.net
 www.bcwf.bc.ca

BC Wildlife Federation Okanagan Region

Joan McKay
President, Okanagan Region; BCWF
 51-1840 Oliver Ranch Road
 Okanagan Fall, BC, V0H 1R0
 Tel: (250) 497-7031
 Fax: (250) 497-7032
 Email: mandjmckay@shaw.ca
 Website: www.bcwf.bc.ca

Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC

Mike Mackintosh
Executive Director
 2165 Palmerston Avenue
 West Vancouver, BC, V7V 2V7
 Tel: (604) 257-8528
 Cell: (604) 512-4796
 Fax: (604) 922-6502
 Email: macbeagle@telus.net
 Website: www.burrowingowlbc.org

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society BC Chapter

John and Mary Theberge
CPAWS Representatives
 RR3, Site 25, Comp. 82
 Oliver, BC, V0H 1T0
 Tel: (250) 498-5432
 Fax: (250) 498-5432
 Email: johnmarythe@explorenet.com
 Website: www.cpaws.org

Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Adrian Wall
Habitat Management Biologist
 1751 10th Ave, SW
 Salmon Arm, BC, V1E 4P3
 Tel: (250) 804-7008
 Fax: (250) 804-7010
 Email: WallA@pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca
 Website: www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Destination Osoyoos

Jo Knight
Director of Tourism & Visitor Experience
 9912 Hwy 3,
 Osoyoos, BC, V0H 1V0
 Tel: (250) 495-3366
 Fax: (250) 495-8081
 Email: jknight@osoyoos.ca
 Website: www.destinationosoyoos.com

District of Summerland

Sam Elia
Council Liaison
 13211 Henry Ave.
 Summerland, BC V0H 1Z0
 Tel: (250) 404-4040

Dominion Radio Astrophysical Observatory

Ron Casorso
Site Infrastructure Manager
 717 White Lake Rd.
 Penticton, BC, V2A 6J9
 Tel: (250) 490-4304
 Email: Ronald.Casorso@nrc-cnrc.gc.ca

Ducks Unlimited Canada

Brad Arner
Manager of Conservation Programs, Canadian Intermountain
 954-A Laval Crescent
 Kamloops, BC, V2C 5P5
 Tel: (250) 374-8307
 Fax: (250) 374-6287
 Email: b_arner@ducks.ca
 Website: www.ducks.ca

En'Owkin Centre

Jeannette Armstrong
Executive Director
 RR2, Site 50, Comp. 8
 Penticton, BC, V2A 6J7
 Tel: (250) 493-7181
 Fax: (250) 493-5302
 Email: enowkin@vip.net
 Web: www.enowkincentre.ca

Environment Canada Canadian Wildlife Service**Pacific Yukon Region**

Barry Smith
Regional Director
 Tel: (604) 940-4700
 Fax: (604) 946-9022
 Email: barry.smithr@ec.gc.ca
 Website: www.pyr.ec.gc.ca/en/wildlife/

Federation of BC Naturalists

Bob Handfield
Regional Representative
 P.O. Box 2007
 Penticton, BC V0H 8K3
 Tel: (250) 497-8702
 Email: bobnmarg@telus.net
 Website: www.naturalists.bc.ca

FORREX

Chris Hollstedt
Chief Executive Officer
FORREX Head Office
 Suite 702, 235 1st Avenue
 Kamloops, BC, V2C 3J4
 Tel: (250) 371-3929
 Email: chris.hollstedt@forrex.org
 Website: www.forrex.org

PARTNER INFORMATION

Grasslands Conservation Council of BC

Bruno Delesalle
Executive Director
 954 A Laval Crescent
 Kamloops, BC, V2C 5P5
 Tel: 250-374-5787
 Fax: 250-374-6287
 Email: bruno.delesalle@bcgrasslands.org
 Website: www.bcgrasslands.org

Habitat Conservation Trust Fund

Brian Springinotic
Manager
 100 - 333 Quebec St
 Victoria, BC, V8V 1W4
 Tel: (250) 356-6124
 Toll free: 1-800-387-9853
 Fax: (250) 952-6684
 Email: brian.springinotic@hctf.ca
 Website: www.hctf.ca

The Land Trust Alliance of BC

Shelia Harrington
Executive Director
 204-338 Lower Ganges Rd.
 Salt Spring Island BC, V8K 2V3
 Tel: (250) 538-0112
 Fax: (250) 538-0172
 Email: sheila@landtrustalliance.bc.ca
 Website: www.landtrustalliance.bc.ca

North Central Washington Resource

Conservation and Development Council
 Samantha Bartling
USDA/NRCS/NCW RC&D Coordinator
 1251 2nd Ave South, Suite 101
 Okanogan, WA 98840
 Tel: (509) 422-2750 ext 107
 Fax: (509) 422-0532
 Email: samantha.bartling@wa.usda.gov

Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program

OCCP Coordinator
 Tel: (250) 503-3074
 Email: occp123@gmail.com
 Website: www.grasslands.org/occp.htm

Okanagan College

Kaya Forest
Biology Professor
 583 Duncan Ave West
 Penticton, BC, V2A 8E3
 Tel: (250) 492-4305
 Fax: (250) 492-3950
 Email: kforest@okanagan.bc.ca
 Website: www.okanagan.bc.ca

Okanagan Region Wildlife Heritage Fund Society

John Holdstock
Treasurer
 1326 Scott Crescent
 Kelowna, BC, V1A 2P7
 Tel: (250) 769-3952
 Fax: (250) 769-0727
 Email: jholdstock@shawcable.com

Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance

Sally Killberg
Chair
 233 Main St, Mezzanine
 Penticton, BC, V2A 5B1
 Tel: (250) 492-4422
 Toll free: 1-866-699-9453
 Fax: (250) 492-5275
 Email: okanagansal@yahoo.ca
 Website: www.osca.org

Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society

Sheila White
Secretary of Membership
 P.O. Box 787
 Summerland, BC, V0H 1Z0
 Tel: (250) 494-8996
 Email: anglerem@telus.net

Osoyoos Desert Society

Denise Eastlick
Executive Director
 P.O. Box 123
 Osoyoos, BC, V0H 1V0
 Tel: (250) 495-2470
 Toll free: 1-877-899-0897
 Fax: (250) 495-2474
 Email: mail@desert.org
 Website: www.desert.org

Osoyoos Indian Band

Charlotte Stringham
OIB Council
Executive Director Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre
 RR3, Site 25, Comp 1
 Oliver, BC, V0H 1T0
 Tel: (250) 495-7901
 Fax: (250) 495-7912
 Email: cstringham@oib.ca
 Website: www.oib.ca

Osoyoos Lake Water Quality Society

Michelle Jefferson
Director
 P.O. Box 1382
 Osoyoos, B.C., V0H 1V0
 Tel: (250) 495-3134
 Report Hotline: (250) 495-3366
 Fax: (250) 495-3392
 E-mail: micjef@telus.net
 Web: www.olwqs.org

Osoyoos Oxbows Restoration Society

Sherry Linn
Secretary/Treasurer
 PO Box 535
 Osoyoos, BC, V0H 1V0
 Tel: (250) 495-7891
 Email: eike@vip.net

Pacific Salmon Foundation

Paul Kariya
Executive Director
 300 1682 West 7th Ave
 Vancouver, BC, V6J 4S6
 Tel: (604) 664-7664
 Fax: (604) 664-7665
 Email: pkariya@psf.ca
 Website: www.psf.ca

Partners in Flight

Tanya Luszc
BC/Yukon Great Basin Program Manager
 102 Industrial Place
 Penticton, BC, V2A 7C8
 Phone: 250-490-8286
 Fax: 250-490-2231
 Email: Tanya.Luszc@gov.bc.ca
 Website: www.pifbcyukon.org

Penticton Museum and Archives

Peter Ord
Manager/Curator
 785 Main St
 Penticton, BC, V2A 5E3
 Tel: (250) 490-2451
 Fax: (250) 492-0440
 Email: peter.ord@penticton.ca
 Website: www.penticton.ca/museum

Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen

Dan Ashton
RDOS Chair
 101 Martin St
 Penticton BC V2A 5J9
 Toll Free: 1.877.610.3737
 Phone 250-492-0237
 Email: dashton@rdos.bc.ca
 Website: www.rdos.bc.ca

PARTNER INFORMATION

Royal BC Museum

Rob Cannings
Curator of Entomology
 675 Belleville Street
 Victoria, BC, V8W 9W2
 Tel: (250) 356-8242
 Toll free: 1-888-447-7977
 Fax: (250) 356-8197
 Email: rcannings@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca
 Website: www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca

Southern Interior Bluebird Trail Society

Lee McFadyen
President
 P.O. Box 494
 Oliver, BC, V0H 1T0
 Tel: (250) 495-7891
 Email: mariposaorgf@hotmail.com
 Website: www.bcbluebirds.org

South Okanagan Rehabilitation Centre for Owls

Ken Fujino
Manager
 P.O. Box 1166
 Oliver, BC, V0H 1T0
 Tel: (250) 498-4251
 Cell: (250) 488-5435
 Fax: (250) 485-0188
 Email: sorco@telus.net
 Website: www.sorco.org

The Land Conservancy of BC

Bill Turner
President/Executive Director
 301-7195 Esquimalt Rd.
 Victoria, BC, V9A 3N6
 Tel: (250) 479-8053
 Email: bturner@conservancy.bc.ca
 Website: www.conservancy.bc.ca

The Nature Conservancy of Canada BC Region

Barbara Pryce
Okanagan Program Manager
 RR1 S6 C1, Kaleden, BC V0H 1K0
 Tel: (250) 497-8010
 Cell: (250) 487-8852
 Fax: (250) 497-8014
 Email: Barbara.Pryce@natureconservancy.ca
 Website: www.natureconservancy.ca

The Nature Conservancy Washington State

Todd Chaudhry
East Cascades Forests Program Manager
 217 Pine Street, Suite 1100
 Seattle, WA, 98101
 Tel: (206) 343-4344
 Fax: (206) 343-5608
 Email: tchaudhry@tnc.org
 Website: www.tnc-washington.org

The Nature Trust of BC

Jim Hope
Land Manager
 260 1000 Roosevelt Crescent
 North Vancouver, BC, V7P 3R4
 Tel: (604) 924-9771
 Toll free: 1-866-288-7878
 Fax: (604) 924-9772
 Email: jhope@naturetrust.bc.ca
 Website: www.naturetrust.bc.ca

Town of Oliver

Stephanie Johnson
Director of Development Services
 35016 – 97th Street
 PO Box 638
 Oliver, BC, V0H 1T0
 Tel: (250) 485-6200

Town of Osoyoos

Barry Romanko
Chief Administrative Officer
 Box 3010, 8711 Main Street
 Osoyoos, BC, V0H 1V0
 Tel: (250) 495-6515

University of British Columbia

Dr. Tom Sullivan
Professor of Agroecology
 180B-2357 Main Mall
 Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4
 Tel: (604) 822-6873
 Fax: (604) 822-2184
 Email: tomsu@interchange.ubc.ca
 Website: www.agsci.ubc.ca

University of British Columbia Okanagan

Karen Hodges
Assistant Professor, Biology
 Bert Brink Canada Research Chair in Conservation
 Biology
 University of British Columbia Okanagan
 3333 University Way
 Kelowna, BC, V1V 1V7
 Tel: (250) 807-8763
 Fax: (250) 807-8005
 Email: karen.hodges@ubc.ca
 Website: www.ubc.ca/okanagan

University of British Columbia – Okanagan

Daniel Durall
Associate Professor
 3333 University Way
 Kelowna, BC, V1V 1V7
 Tel: (250) 807-8759
 Fax: (250) 807-8005
 Email: daniel.durall@ubc.ca
 Website: www.ubc.ca/okanagan

Village of Keremeos

Joni Heinrich
Chief Administrative Officer
 PO Box 160702 - 4th Street
 Keremeos, BC, V0X 1N0 Canada
 Phone: (250) 499-2711
 Fax: (250) 499-5477
 Email: cao@keremeos.ca
 Website: www.keremeos.ca

SOSCP TEAM INFORMATION

SOSCP Chair

Charlotte Stringam
Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre, Osoyoos Indian Band
 RR3, Site 25, Comp1
 Osoyoos, BC V0H 1T0
 Tel: (250) 495-7901
 Fax: (250) 495-7912
 Email: cstringam@oib.ca

Program Manager

Bryn White
*South Okanagan Similkameen
 Conservation Program*
 102 Industrial Ave
 Penticton, BC V2A 7C8
 Tel: (250) 490-8225
 Fax: (250) 490-2231
 Email: Bryn.White@gov.bc.ca
 Website: www.soscp.org

Land Use Planning Team

Tasha Sargent
 Jan Kirkby
*Grasslands Conservation Council
 Canadian Wildlife Services*
 Email: tasha.sargent@bcgrasslands.org
 Jan.Kirkby@ec.gc.ca

Outreach Team

Ellen Simmons
Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance
 246 Martin St, Suite #203
 Penticton, BC, V2A 5B2
 Tel: (250) 492-4422
 Toll free: 1-866-699-9453
 Fax: (250) 492-5275
 Email: ecommunity@vip.net
 Website: www.osca.org

Science Network

Orville Dyer
BC Ministry of Environment
 102 Industrial Ave
 Penticton, BC V2A 7C8
 Tel: (250) 490-8225
 Fax: (250) 490-2231
 Email: orville.dyer@gov.bc.ca
 Website: www.soscp.org

Habitat Securement Team

Carl MacNaughton
The Nature Trust of British Columbia
 RR#2, Site 42, Comp. 17
 Oliver, BC, V0H 1T0
 Tel: (250) 498-5474
 Fax: (250) 498-5475
 Email: cmacnaughton@cablerocket.com
 Website: www.naturetrust.bc.ca

Stewardship Team

Alyson Skinner
Stewardship Coordinator
 210-262 Main St
 Penticton, BC, V2A 5B2
 Tel: (250) 492-0173
 Fax: (250) 492-0176
 Email: ASkinner@conservancy.bc.ca
 Website: www.conservancy.bc.ca

Traditional Ecological Knowledge Team

Jeannette Armstrong
En'owkin Centre
 Address: RR2, Site 50, Comp. 8
 Penticton, BC, V2A 6J7
 Tel: (250) 493-7181
 Fax: (250) 493-5302
 Email: enowkin@vip.net
 Web: www.enowkincentre.ca

SOUTH OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN CONSERVATION PROGRAM PARTNERS

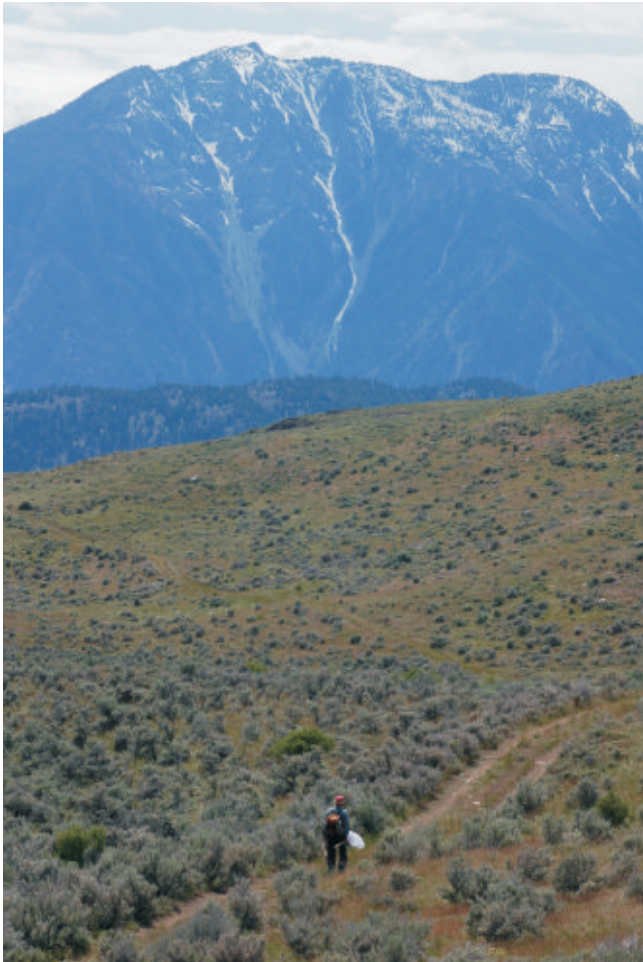
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 BC Ministry of Forests & Range
 BC Wildlife Federation
 BC Wildlife Federation, Okanagan Region
 Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC
 Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society –BC Chapter
 Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada
 Destination Osoyoos
 District of Summerland
 Dominion Radio Astrophysical Observatory
 Ducks Unlimited Canada
 En'owkin Centre
 Environment Canada – Canadian Wildlife Service
 Federation of BC Naturalists, Thompson-Okanagan Region
 Forest Research Extension Partnership
 Grasslands Conservation Council of BC
 Habitat Conservation Trust Fund
 North Central Washington Resource Conservation Development Council
 Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program
 Okanagan College
 Okanagan Region Wildlife Heritage Fund Society
 Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance
 Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society
 Osoyoos Desert Society
 Osoyoos Indian Band
 Osoyoos Lake Water Quality Society
 Osoyoos Oxbows Restoration Society
 Pacific Salmon Foundation
 Partners in Flight
 Penticton Museum and Archives
 Royal BC Museum
 Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen
 Southern Interior Bluebird Trail Society
 South Okanagan Rehabilitation Centre for Owls
 Town of Oliver
 Town of Osoyoos
 The Land Conservancy (TLC) of BC
 The Land Trust Alliance of BC
 The Nature Conservancy Canada
 The Nature Conservancy, Washington State
 The Nature Trust of BC
 University of British Columbia, Faculty of Land and Food Systems
 University of British Columbia Okanagan
 Village of Keremeos



South Okanagan
 Similkameen
 CONSERVATION PROGRAM

PROGRAMME DE CONSERVATION
 du Sud de l'Okanagan
 Similkameen

SOUTH OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN - OURS TO TREASURE



Coordination is a key principle of the Program

If you, or your organization, would like to support the coordinating functions of the SOSCP, please contact us:



Environmental Legacy Fund

P.O. Box 24081
Penticton, BC V2A 8L9
Phone: 250.493.9311
Email: info@sfso.net
Website: www.cfso.net



South Okanagan-Similkameen Conservation Program

Bryn White
Program Manager

Phone: 250.490.8225
Cell: 250.462.7322
Email: bryn.white@gov.bc.ca
Website: www.soscp.org

Conserving Canada's Desert Country