

# South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program

*Celebrating a Decade of Conservation*



**10**  
**ANNIVERSARY**  
**2000 - 2010**

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## Message from the Chair and Vice-Chair

Ten years of conservation! This is truly a milestone and there is much to herald. The partnership has grown from humble but earnest beginnings with six partners to now 50. The SOSCP story is about conservation yes, but it is also about the dedication of so many people who have worked tirelessly to create conservation success here. Conservation projects that represent South Okanagan Similkameen ecosystems have been completed; awareness of how precious this landscape is not only in Canada but globally has grown; inclusion of a broad diversity of partners has been achieved.

But there is much to be done. In these slim valleys, plants and animals not found anywhere else in Canada still need safeguarding. Conservation needs to become part our communities' every day thinking. We hope the next ten years brings universal care and reverence for the environment that we call home.

Congratulations SOSCP!

Steve Matthews  
BC Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations

Barb Pryce  
Nature Conservancy of Canada



## Foreword

The SOSCP partnership is at a significant milestone after completing our tenth year and is taking time to reflect on the results of our collective efforts to protect, enhance and restore nature in the South Okanagan for now, for us, for visitors and for future generations.

Here's how, together, we make a difference.

### Securing Important Natural Areas

### Voluntary Caring for the Land

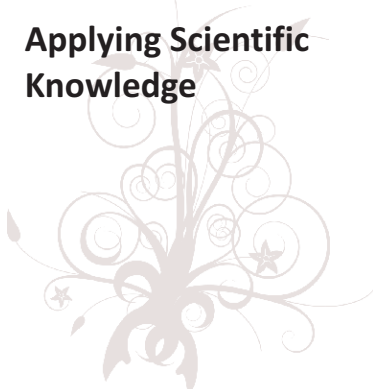
### Involving the Community in Conservation

### Applying First Nations' Wisdom

### Assisting in Land Use Decisions

### Applying Scientific Knowledge

- Over 3,300 hectares of vital habitat are currently protected through private land trust acquisitions and donations.
- We work with private landowners to help them care for, and enhance the natural values on their properties.
- We actively promote conservation covenants and other forms of land protection to encourage property owners to protect sensitive habitat.
- We have raised the profile of the environmental values of the area, so the public sees it as more than a place for people. We have built support for conservation and protecting biological richness.
- We do habitat restoration on the land, including restoring a section of the Okanagan River to its natural state.
- Our work has led to provincial policies and management guidelines to protect the habitats of species at risk.
- Almost 22,000 hectares of Wildlife Habitat Areas have been designated in our Forest District since the year 2000.
- We have led recovery for species at risk through pioneering efforts at the landscape level.
- Nearly double the number of Wildlife Management Areas (355 hectares) are proposed to be added to the South Okanagan.
- We have increased our partnership with local governments (municipalities, regional districts) in conservation. We are now seeing biodiversity protection incorporated into Official Community Plans.
- We are supporting comprehensive outreach programs including the Meadowlark Festival, wildlife forums, work-place seminars, industry meetings, and programs for school children and the general public.
- We have 50 partners under our banner.





## Message from the Program Manager

This “*Decade of Conservation*” retrospective is not meant to be a comprehensive audit or inventory of investments, or projects, but a glance at some of the highlights the conservation program and partners have achieved over the years of working together. Looking through the past annual reports has been a pleasurable experience – much like reminiscing through family photo albums. I have had the privilege of being involved in wildlife and conservation work here for almost ten years – five of which have been deeply associated with SOSCP. This is not a long time compared to some of my colleagues, but I have come to love this place and can't imagine being anywhere else.



Like watching your family grow and change the partnership has also evolved over time. The landscape has also changed noticeably over the life of the program with new additions to conservation and stewarded properties, and the loss of other sensitive habitats. The economy has fluctuated, shifting the degree to which we are able to deliver programs and projects. What has remained however, is the community of dedicated individuals and organizations that have worked together tirelessly to conserve the future of this region and the unwavering public support for a high quality of life – all connected to land, wildlife, clean air and water.

Bryn White, Program Manager

## South Okanagan Similkameen – a National Treasure

The South Okanagan and Similkameen is a unique region of Canada, recognized provincially and nationally as a biodiversity hotspot for the richness and rarity of species and habitats. The region is an important ecological corridor between the arid areas to the south and the grasslands of the Central Interior of BC, and is the only “pocket desert” in Canada. The South Okanagan-Similkameen is renowned as having one of the highest proportions of the country's species and ecosystems that are considered at risk.

Accelerating urban, rural and agricultural development has put a great deal of pressure on this important region. Ecosystems that were rare on the landscape to start with, such as the rolling sage-brush grasslands, wetlands, and riverside cottonwood forests, are being lost forever – and so with them go the natural assets and services they provide to the human communities and economies that depend on them.



Since the year 1800 in the Okanagan:

- More than 93% of natural areas of the Okanagan River have been lost
- More than 84% of wetlands have been lost
- Between 40 and 70% of the gentle slope grasslands and shrub-steppe have been lost.

The Okanagan-Similkameen valley corridor is integral to maintaining the biological diversity of British Columbia. That is why the South Okanagan Similkameen has been, and continues, as a focal area for cooperative conservation work.

## Program History

The formation of the SOSCP follows a long history of dedicated conservation activity in the region. Habitat conservation for wildlife began in the 1960s with the securement of important lands that are the basis for provincial parks and ecological reserves.

In 1990 the BC Ministry of Environment, Canadian Wildlife Service, University of BC Department of Zoology, Royal BC Museum and The Nature Trust of BC published a South Okanagan Conservation Strategy, known as "SOCS". It was developed in association with the Nature Trust of BC's South Okanagan Critical Areas Program (SOCAP) and the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund's Okanagan Endangered Species Program. The goal was to merge the efforts of these two projects, garner input from other resource agencies and land users, and develop and prioritize management activities for the conservation of natural habitat and the unique flora and fauna in the South Okanagan. It was a five year plan for the period 1990 to 1995.

*The objectives identified over twenty years ago are still relevant today:*

- Identify and protect the remaining threatened habitats;
- Identify priority species that are at risk;
- Protect and enhance the populations of species designated nationally or provincially at risk by implementing recovery and management plans;
- Ensure that no additional species become endangered, threatened, rare, of management concern or extirpated;
- Encourage interagency coordination and planning to improve awareness and incorporate conservation of natural habitats and priority species into their programs and encourage public participation in this process;
- Encourage the balanced use of public and private lands that allow sustainable use of the land while maintaining and enhancing the natural biological diversity of the south Okanagan; and,
- Promote public awareness of the values and importance of south Okanagan natural habitats and their unique flora and fauna.



## Launch of the SOSCP Partnership

The idea of a formalized conservation program partnership was conceived by six wildlife and land trust agencies: Environment Canada, BC Ministry of Environment, Land and Parks, the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, The Nature Trust of BC, The Nature Conservancy of Canada and The Land Conservancy of BC. The group collaborated with additional organizations on a vision document entitled, "South Okanagan-Similkameen Conservation Program, Prospectus: Conserving Canada's Desert Country," which outlined the heightened need for conservation in this special region and invited the participation of all organizations and individuals with an interest in the aims of the Program to prioritize, leverage resources and work together.



In 2000, 200 people gathered on a hot sunny day at the Osoyoos Desert Centre. Federal Environment Minister David Anderson and Joan Sawicki, Minister of Environment, Land & Parks signed the "Statement of Cooperation for the South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program". The Statement outlined the importance of the South Okanagan Similkameen as a unique landscape that is critical to Canada's national heritage, the common goals and beliefs of conservation as a shared responsibility and the special role of the Aboriginal people in the future of the South Okanagan Similkameen. Witnessed by OIB Chief Clarence Louie and Roger Mayer, RDOS Chair, nineteen partner organizations signed the agreement with the intention that new signatures be added as new partners embrace the vision of SOSCP

*The partner's original vision was –*

*"A healthy environment that sustains the diversity of indigenous plants and animals while enriching people's lives."*

*Four strategies were proposed for achieving the Program's aims:*

- *Expand community involvement;*
- *Promote ecologically sustainable land-use;*
- *Enhance stewardship on private and public land; and,*
- *Negotiate acquisition of key habitats, focusing on the species at risk found in the area.*

Two additional important aspects of the program were also highlighted, including a science-based approach and a strong acknowledgment of the role of First Nations' Traditional Ecological Knowledge in conservation.

*2000 SOSCP launch and signing of Statement of Cooperation*





## Program Organization

The purpose of the SOSCP is to coordinate conservation efforts in the South Okanagan and Similkameen. By working together and sharing information and resources, the partners believe they can achieve more than they could alone. The success of this type of partnership between government and non-government organizations has provided a model for other regions of the province where similar partnerships have been established.

A number of direct approaches to conservation have been agreed upon as the core of the SOSCP initiative and partners organized themselves around “teams” to plan and coordinate activities in their respective areas:

- Science Team - applying scientific knowledge
- Outreach Team - involving the community in conservation
- Stewardship Team - voluntary caring for the land
- TEK Team - applying First Nations' knowledge and ecological heritage
- Land Use Team - assisting in land use decisions
- Acquisitions Team - securing important habitat

Three managers have coordinated the program over the past ten years, beginning with Rob Hawes who worked from 2000 to 2004, Rick McKelvey from 2004 to 2005, and Bryn White working from 2005 to the present. Each manager has had a unique vision for the program, and has shouldered an intensive workload while coordinating and supporting the partners and teams as they carry out the important work of conservation.



*Biodiversity Conservation Strategy Advisory Committee*

A Steering Committee of all the partners meets once per year at an annual meeting, with an Executive Committee (an elected subset of the Steering Committee) meeting more frequently and overseeing the day-to-day functioning of the program. The program partners have shared in the task of chairing the program, alternating between government and non-government organizations.

The lean budget for the core program is supported by a combination of partner contributions, foundation funding and project dollars. Conservation investments in the South Okanagan Similkameen have been in the tens of millions. The program has been able to leverage an incredible amount of capacity because of the strength of the partners. The Real Estate Foundation of BC has been a long-standing and stalwart supporter of the administrative core of the program, which as any organization knows, is the hardest aspect to fund.

SOSCP is successful because of the dedication and contribution of individuals that advance conservation in their own unique way. Over the years, many dedicated individuals and businesses have been acknowledged for their contributions to conservation in the Okanagan and Similkameen by the program.

Conservation has also lost key champions along the way and they are remembered fondly by each and every one of us.



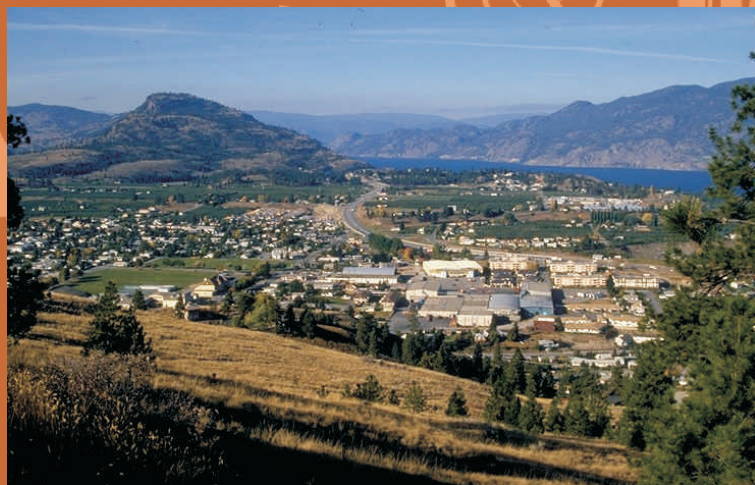
Dr. Vernon (Bert) Brink, a prominent UBC agricultural scientist and a life-long conservationist possessed a vast love and knowledge of the outdoors. He was supportive of programs that helped educate and encourage landowners to better maintain their grasslands. Bert received many awards throughout his distinguished career, including the Order of Canada and Order of British Columbia. In 2007, upon receiving the Lieutenant-Governor's Conservation Award, former Lt.-Gov. Iona Campagnolo described Brink as “B.C.'s icon of conservation and sustainability.”



John Holdstock, Past Chair of the SOSCP, representing the Okanagan Region Wildlife Heritage Fund Society, was a highly engaged partner in the SOSCP, and personally helped to raise several hundred thousand dollars to buy and preserve critical wildlife habitat throughout the Valley. A long time member of the of the Kelowna and District Fish and Game Club, well known to all sportsman's associations, John remained active with the B.C. Wildlife Federation long after serving as president. His credo was, “The world is run by those who show up”.

*partnership-community*







## Strategy - Acquire key habitats

The purpose of habitat securement is to secure land to conserve natural habitats and high-priority ecosystems, as well as to ensure 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 BC, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, The Land Conservancy of BC, Environment Canada, the Province of BC and the Okanagan Regional Wildlife Heritage Society.

### Identifying Land for Conservation

SOSCP partners set goals in 2000 for the amount of important habitat to be managed to maintain the diversity and abundance of wildlife and ecosystems unique to this region. These targets were based on four main habitat types: grasslands and shrub-steppe, wetlands and riparian areas, coniferous forests and rugged terrain. Targets included land that could be managed for biodiversity, stewarded through agreements or purchased outright.

*Over 3,300 hectares of important natural areas have been secured by land trusts such as The Nature Trust of BC, The Land Conservancy of BC, The Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Okanagan Region Wildlife Heritage Fund Society in the South Okanagan Similkameen. Land trusts purchase property, and also accept donations or gifts of land. These private conservation lands are an integral part of the total 140,000 hectares of protected habitat in our region.*

As the knowledge base of the South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program matured, it became apparent that the goals for the four broad habitat categories needed to be reconsidered. The original targets were revised in 2006 to make sure that all valuable and threatened ecosystems were considered, including lakes, rivers and streams as a fifth habitat type of importance. In addition the SOSCP established a Landscape Recovery Strategy and adopted goals towards managing, stewarding and

conserving in relatively natural condition, 40% of the historic area that each of the important habitats would have covered around the year 1800. Detailed mapping of past and current habitats allows partners to see what ecosystems have been lost over time, where



goals are being met, and where to direct future efforts. Today, most experts suggest that 40% is a conservative goal to meet the needs of biodiversity.

### **Eco-Regional Assessment**

In 2007, The Nature Conservancy of Canada and their partners completed the Okanagan Eco-regional Assessment. It was a cross-border project wherein high-priority biodiversity sites were identified. The assessment was distributed to federal, provincial and local government agencies, First Nations, and conservation organizations so that they could use the results to assist their decision-making. NCC is using the results to determine local areas for conservation work in the South Okanagan and Similkameen and other areas in the southern interior.

### **Biodiversity Ranching**

The Nature Trust of British Columbia and its conservation partners have established two biodiversity ranches covering land that stretches from White Lake to Vaseux Lake. Encompassing 43,830 hectares, the ranches include purchased private land, leases, and associated Crown grazing licenses. The goal of the biodiversity ranch program is to develop working ranches that protect wildlife habitat while still functioning as viable, self-sustaining cattle businesses. By maintaining and restoring ranch grasslands, the hope is that these properties can support thriving native plant and animal species and provide a stable income for a number of agriculture-based households. In addition, the program demonstrates biodiversity friendly land use practices for other land owners and managers to consider. The Nature Trust is accomplishing its goal through partnerships with ranchers, ecologists, the local community, government agencies and conservation organizations.

### **Skaha Bluffs Conservation Area**

In 2008, The Nature Conservancy of Canada, Land Conservancy of BC, and BC Ministry of Environment partnered with supporters to purchase the 304 hectare property adjacent to the popular Skaha Bluffs climbing area. The property has long been a high priority on the SOSCP securement list. It contains a wide variety of habitats including grasslands, rugged cliffs, pine and fir forests, and riparian habitat. The conservation area is habitat for a variety of species at risk including California Bighorn Sheep with both summer and winter sheep range and is a popular area with rock climbers. The Skaha Bluffs conservation lands are an important addition to the matrix of provincial parks and other private conservation lands, maintaining connectivity for wildlife on the eastern hillsides of Penticton. As trails are established it will also become a more popular recreation area for local walkers and hikers.





### ECOMmunity Place, Okanagan River

The Land Conservancy of BC and the En'owkin Centre continue their efforts to secure and protect 32 hectares of Locatee lands adjacent to the Okanagan River on the Penticton Indian Reserve. This is one of the last remaining Black Cottonwood riparian ecosystems left on the Okanagan River, and is home to Yellow-Breasted Chats, Western Screech Owls and a variety of amphibians. Currently under a lease agreement with the owners, the En'owkin Centre has established the ECOMmunity Place project on the site—bringing together learning, conservation and culture. ECOMmunity provides a “natural” venue to host programs and tours where groups can explore the natural and cultural qualities that define the South Okanagan. Restoration and protection projects offer opportunities to educate and involve the public.

### Twin Lakes

Currently, The Nature Trust of BC has an opportunity to purchase one of the largest intact private grassland properties in the South Okanagan Valley; a 2000 acre property at Twin Lakes.

Predominantly grasslands, the land also has significant riparian and wetland habitats and without protection, has high potential for future development. Adjacent to The Nature Trust White Lake Biodiversity Ranch, the Twin Lakes project will help minimize habitat fragmentation and ensure connectivity with adjacent conservation lands, providing greater opportunity for wildlife to thrive. If The Nature



Trust it is successful in acquiring the property, critical grassland, sagebrush shrub-steppe, dry forested ecosystems and riparian habitats will be preserved forever in an area that is described as the “biodiversity jewel in the crown of the Okanagan”. The purchase will effectively double the extent of conservation holdings in the White Lake Basin area and compliment further the complex of conservation properties such as the Vaseux Bighorn National Wildlife Area and White Lake Grasslands Protected Area.

*sustainability*





The Nature Trust, Canadian Wildlife Service, the BC ministry of Environment, Ducks Unlimited Canada and others have been working cooperatively on the management of biodiversity throughout the White-Lake Vaseaux corridor since 1975.

## Strategy ~ Promote ecologically sustainable land-use

Sustainable land use is achieved through land use planning by government agencies, regional and local governments and band councils as well as appropriate land management by local industries. The Land Use Planning Team works primarily to support local and regional governments building technical and planning capacity by providing ecosystem mapping, examples of protective bylaws, and ecological advice during development application processes. The team also provides advice, encouragement and decision support tools for other land use decision makers and stakeholders.

### Mapping Support

The South Okanagan Similkameen was one of the first regions of the province to have biophysical mapping at a scale more appropriate for community planning. From the mid- 1990s onward, Terrestrial Ecosystem Mapping (TEM) and Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory (SEI) have provided and refined information about important ecosystems, connections between sensitive ecosystems and the wildlife they support, and the tools available for their protection. The BC Ministry of Environment, Canadian Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited Canada, the BC Conservation Data Centre and other partners and funders were involved in the development and extension of Sensitive Ecosystem Inventories for this



region. The data and accompanying conservation manual “Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory: Vernon to Osoyoos” (including the lower Similkameen Valley) is a key resource for land trusts, stewardship groups, crown agencies, local and regional governments and other land use decision makers to set and act on conservation priorities. With the continual refinement and improvement of this data, as well as the support of the Land Use Team, local and regional governments have moved forward in establishing Environmentally Sensitive Development Permit Areas through municipal and rural Official Community Plans. Ecosystem mapping coupled with supporting tools and interpretation has proven to be extremely important for sustainable land use and management decisions.

### **Crown Land**

In 2001, fifteen Wildlife Habitat Areas were established as Wildlife Habitat Area Reserves under the Identified Wildlife Management Strategy of the Forest Practices Act. Under the same act, winter ranges were established for moose, mountain goat, mule deer and elk. A total of 22,050 hectares have been protected as Wildlife Habitat Areas in the Okanagan Shuswap Forest District since 2000. There are now also map reserves in place for proposed additions to the South Okanagan Wildlife Management Area. The 16 additions, totalling 355 hectares, would nearly double the size of the WMA. The additions focus on antelope brush and other sensitive grassland ecosystems.

Several special natural feature areas, known as Goal 2 sites, were identified and recommended for protection by the Okanagan Shuswap Land and Resource Management Plan. Oliver Mountain (356 hectares) and Anarchist Larch (278 hectares) are two of the larger sites identified. These sites remain unprotected and it is hoped that, in the years to come, these sites might be formally established following through on the recommendations of the Okanagan Shuswap LRMP. SOSCP partners are also providing information on a referral basis to crown land adjudicators in relation to the biodiversity values and risks to biodiversity related to disposal of crown land parcels.





**Community Planning**

The Land Use Team has provided advice for several community planning initiatives such as the Rural RDOS Areas E and, District of Summerland, and Town of Osoyoos Official Community Plan reviews, assisting the City of Penticton to identify sensitive habitat for the Northeast Sector, and the Town of Oliver Smart Growth workshops.

For the first time, residents of the Similkameen valley from Princeton to Chopaka joined together to plan for the future of the valley forming the Similkameen Valley Planning Society. Rural directors, mayors and band chiefs initiated and saw the completion of the “Strategy for a Sustainable Similkameen Valley” published in 2010. The SOSCP Program Manager participated in the planning process and prepared a baseline report for the study, “Natural Environment and Biodiversity of the Similkameen Valley”.

**Regional Growth Strategy**

The South Okanagan Regional Growth Strategy (RGS), launched in 2004 and adopted in 2010, is a long term commitment to manage growth in the south Okanagan by the Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS). It is a long-term planning project that deals with growth management over a 20-year period. The South Okanagan RGS was developed over five years using a collaborative process that involved ongoing work with the public, First Nations, local, regional, provincial and federal governments. Ultimately, the RGS aims to ensure that growth in the south Okanagan takes place in a sustainable manner. To accomplish this, the South Okanagan RGS takes a "big picture" approach to planning which identifies and prioritizes goals across the region to meet common social, economic and environmental objectives.

The SOSCP Program Manager participated in the RDOS Regional Growth Strategy Advisory Committee to present information, review documents, and comment on and assist with develop of policies that reflect the conservation goals of the SOSCP. Environmental indicators were finalized for the Regional Growth





Strategy in 2006. The Land Use Team also provided the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen with support and technical information on habitat conservation priorities that accompanied a report by Hobson and Associates, called “Environmental Issues and Options for the South Okanagan Regional Growth Strategy”. This work was central to the concept of launching a regional strategy for biodiversity conservation as a response to regional growth and development planning.



### **Keeping Nature in Our Future: a Regional Biodiversity Conservation Strategy**

The notion for a regional biodiversity strategy was raised by the RDOS Growth strategy to fulfill the goal of environmental protection and policies to support environmental stewardship and land management. A conservation strategy is a policy framework that sets priorities for identifying, preserving and restoring important natural areas and considers options for conservation of ecosystems and watersheds that go beyond municipal boundaries and across all land tenures. Biodiversity strategies are important tools for all governments and agencies to incorporate habitat information into decision making.

The strategy can be a tool to assist local governments as they incorporate habitat and sustainability considerations into community and neighbourhood plans, watershed management, parks and recreation master plans, subdivision and development bylaws. A successful strategy envisions the region as an interconnected community system, joined by nature, economy, and culture and identifies ways to sustain them for future generations.

Beginning in 2009, the SOSCP took the lead in this science-based, landscape approach, collecting spatial information as the foundation for the strategy. Collecting the spatial data and presenting it in a format that is meaningful to local government and land managers has been a slow process but confidence in the methodology behind data is of the



utmost importance. The resulting maps will outline connectivity corridors, areas of relative importance for biodiversity, critically important areas as well as a management layer showing land ownership and opportunities for conservation efforts and cooperation.

Up-to-date and refined habitat mapping is needed by local governments who are in the process of reviewing Official Community Plans and wish to designate areas as environmentally sensitive. So even before the biodiversity strategy maps were complete, spatial data was shared with local government planning departments in RDOS Area H (Rural Princeton), Oliver, Keremeos, and Summerland. This information helped delineate Environmentally Sensitive Development Permit Areas. Given that the Regional Growth Strategy was centred in the South Okanagan, it was important to support the Similkameen Valley as decision-makers and the community came together to plan for sustainability. Map data was also used to complete the document "The Natural Environment and Biodiversity of the Similkameen Valley" for the Similkameen Valley Planning Society.

### Environmental Planning Support

In 2006 SOSCP partners contributed funding support for the Regional District to hire an Environmental Planner to facilitate incorporation of environmental values and help in various aspects of the Regional District's planning and development services work. In 2008, the SOSCP Program Manager collaborated with local and regional government partners to further build environmental planning capacity. With funds from the Real Estate Foundation of BC, Habitat Stewardship Program and contributions from participating local governments, the SOSCP contracted an Environmental Planner that would be shared amongst participating municipalities to provide technical assistance. The shared planner was

### Science on the Ground

Developing a "science-based" approach to conservation is a central mandate of the SOSCP. There are many organizations within the partnership that are advancing scientific study to assist with ecosystems and species recovery. Many organizations provide scientific information for land use planning, identifying high-priority habitats to protect, and implementing conservation activities. Provincial and Federal Governments continue to conduct habitat and species surveys, examining the effects of threats such as invasive species, pesticide use, and habitat fragmentation.

An eight year study at Nk'Mip Resort on the Osoyoos Indian reserve, on the effects of development on rattlesnake populations, has resulted in recommendations for fencing to mitigate snake road mortality and protection of key travel corridors. The decline in amphibian populations has lead to research on the long-term effects of pesticides on amphibian development in the Oliver-Osoyoos area. A successful project measured the impact of building new ponds to improve breeding success for Great Basin Spadefoot. Spadefoots as well as other amphibian species were the focus of a road mortality mitigation study looking at using culverts and other structures to prevent road mortality along Highway 97. There are over 60 species that are considered at risk in the South Okanagan Similkameen, each with their own set of problems and questions associated with how to conserve their future. Academic institutions, governments and other organizations are working together to address these questions through dedicated research projects



hired in 2009 to work with Oliver, Summerland and Keremeos, and in its second year the program includes work with the City of Penticton and aspects of building and delivering the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy products for the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen. The partners work together to guide the activities of the shared planner and manage the project details. The planner

provides proactive and as-needed support with ecosystem mapping information, assistance with the technical language to facilitate new bylaws that define and protect sensitive natural areas, and ecological and policy expertise during development application processes.



*Sustainable Similkameen Committee*

The intention of improving technical and planning capacity is to provide consistent baseline information to address ecological values including ecosystem mapping and identification of environmentally sensitive areas and to develop consistent environmental standards that can be used by planning departments throughout the region.

### **Local Government Planning Round-table**

In 2009 the SOSCP Program Manager also established an environmental planning roundtable that encourages information sharing and developing regionally consistent approaches to land use that are responsive to the needs of communities. Through this collaborative process, SOSCP and local government partners strengthen their capacity to garner technical and planning support. SOSCP hosts this roundtable several times a year to learn from invited speakers about innovative work going on in other regions of the province.

SOSCP partners have worked hard to promote the resources and planning tools offered by initiatives such as: the BC Ministry of Environment's "Develop with Care" guidelines for local governments and developers, "Planning for change" workshops by the Grassland Conservation Council, and the "Model Green Bylaws Toolkit" prepared by the Wetland Stewardship Partnership.

### **Invasive Plant Management**

Invasive plant education and coordination continues to be a function of the South Okanagan Similkameen Invasive Plant Society and the Regional District Okanagan Similkameen. The SOSIPS Coordinator advises on control programs, conducts invasive plant surveys on public and private land, releases bio-agents, and delivers general education through print media, workshops and displays at public events. Under with auspices of the Regional District, landowners have access to invasive plant identification bulletins and technical advice on control options. Ongoing management projects have





been initiated with managers of Crown land, municipal public works departments, and the Ministry of Transportation.

### **Support to industry**

SOSCP partners have made it a priority to work with the agriculture industry, utility companies, and developers to offer advice on land management practices that benefit sensitive habitats and species at risk. Agricultural land has an important role to play in maintaining local biodiversity. Agricultural workshops encourage sensitivity to the local environment so that healthy natural areas can thrive along with the ranching, orchard and vineyard industries. Improving awareness about the importance of choosing previously developed agricultural land for new orchards and vineyards rather than converting natural habitat is ongoing.

The Grassland Conservation Council (GCC) works with land managers to achieve sustainable management practices to protect grasslands. The GCC works with ranchers, local governments and conservation organizations to assist with grassland management. “Grassland Monitoring Manual for British Columbia: a Tool for Ranchers”, provides a strong systematic approach for evaluating the health of grassland—both the changes seen on the land base and changes to expect based on ranching management practices.

Habitat Sensitive Development Guides for South Okanagan Municipalities, available at planning department front counters, is a series of SOSCP and local government partner-produced brochures for land developers that outline sensitive habitats in each municipality and the environmental bylaws, process and practices that must be followed. Establishing and communicating clear environmental guidelines and expectations for development early in the development application process, can save money and time for everyone involved.

### **Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)**

Federal Species at Risk Legislation has mandated that, “The traditional knowledge of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada should be considered in the assessment of which species may be at risk and in developing and implementing recovery measures”. Further, The International Convention on Biological Diversity outlines the requirements of signatory parties to “respect, preserve and maintain the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity”.



*Traditional Knowledge Keeper Richard Armstrong*



knowledge

Locally, the goal of the TEK Team is to develop an integrated approach in utilizing Traditional Ecological Knowledge to foster and enhance habitat recovery. A key objective of the TEK team is to incorporate this



knowledge in a meaningful way into the conservation work of SOSCP partners. The TEK team relies on the advice and input from TEK advisory committees made up of band members who are knowledgeable about the environment as active harvesters and hunters. The team assists environmental agencies with advice on the recovery of endangered species on provincial, municipal, federal and conservancy lands, explaining TEK values including the community significance of plants and animals and their habitats. Traditional Ecological knowledge experts have assisted SOSCP teams with consultations such as the Vaseux Bighorn National Wildlife Area Management Planning, protection of conservancy areas including the Marron River, Skaha Bluffs, and locatee lands that are part of the Penticton Reserve. TEK/Species at Risk assessment reports were completed for Wiltse Flats area, Trout Creek, Skaha Bluffs, White Lake Conservation Area, Kennedy Property, and Enloe Dam.



TEK committees assist local First Nations with assessments of lands in proposed development sites or conservation areas to determine TEK values and correlate them with species at risk values. The TEK Team provides advice to Chief and Councils on referrals on crown land development by the province – TEK

can provide knowledgeable specific information on historical and current use practices and add to the analysis of loss of use. It also assists bands in land use planning and decision making on reserve.

The En'owkin Centre maintains TEK Biologists to provide advice and information on specific species. A TEK coordinator coordinates TEK meetings and a wide variety of outreach events at ECommunity Place. En'owkin TEK staff work with agencies such as BC Parks, The Nature Trust, The Land Conservancy of BC, and Canadian Wildlife Service to document species at risk as well as culturally important plant and animal species. Collaborative work is ongoing with the Ministry of Forests and Range, Penticton Indian Band, FORREX and BC Parks on the use of fire to maintain forest and grassland health. Several sites are being reviewed for implementation of traditional burns.

The TEK team has supported Okanagan Nation Alliance work on Columbia River system salmon





restoration on the Okanagan River, and in 2009 they were on hand to welcome and watch the first salmon go over the gates at McIntyre Dam in 100 years.

## Strategy ~ Enhance stewardship on private and public land

The Stewardship Team works in partnership with landowners, land managers, and community groups to promote and enhance the stewardship of land and water habitats--with emphasis on those habitats needed by species at risk. This is done by providing land owners with information, advice, technical support, and even physical help to complete stewardship projects. The stewardship team also discusses conservation covenants, stewardship agreements, land donations and acquisitions.

Stewardship Team members work with the Science team to identify high-priority lands where species at risk are likely to occur. Stewardship opportunities identified in Species at Risk Recovery and Action Plans are integrated into stewardship planning, targeting land owners who have habitat used by identified species.

Targeted one-on-one landowner contact focuses on owners of key riparian habitats, antelope-brush habitat, land adjacent to California Bighorn Sheep, and coniferous forests suitable for White-headed Woodpeckers, badgers and Burrowing Owls. In some cases, the most effective approach is to work with a group of landowners in their neighbourhoods. Community stewardship initiatives involve hundreds of participants who live near important habitat areas such as the Marron Valley, Lower Park Rill, Anarchist Mountain, Upper Carmi, Heritage Hills and West Bench.



*Conservation Partner David O'Reilly*



*stewardship*



### South Okanagan Similkameen (SOS) Stewardship

Private land stewardship started in the region with the inception of the SOS Stewardship Program in 1994 under the umbrella of the South Okanagan Conservation Strategy (SOCS). It was supported in the first few years by The Nature Trust of BC, Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, the Okanagan Region Wildlife Heritage Fund Society, and the BC Ministry of Environment. In 2000, The Land Conservancy of BC accepted administrative and operational responsibility for the program. In the early years, landowner contact focused on property owners with large holdings—many of whom were ranchers. SOS Stewardship has grown to encompass all landowners living on or near sensitive habitats.



**Snake Barrier Fencing Project**

**Snakes are found in this vineyard. To reduce snake encounters and prevent snakes from entering the vineyard an innovative type of fencing made of hardware cloth (coarse screen) has been installed around the perimeter. Escape funnels and artificial cover objects have been installed to ensure snake safety.**

**Supported By:**

- South Okanagan-Similkameen Stewardship Program
- BCAC
- Habitat Conservation Trust Fund
- South Okanagan Similkameen
- TLC
- Habitat Stewardship Program
- Environment Canada

*Timhorn Creek VINEYARDS LTD.*

Northern Pacific Rattlesnake

Gopher Snake

The program has been well supported by funders and partners, and in 2003 was given the BC Ministry of Environment's Award for Excellence in Stewardship. They now work directly with over 150 landowners, providing information on habitats, species at risk, invasive plant management, hands on habitat improvement and restoration, and sustainable land use practices. In 2009 SOS Stewardship celebrated 15 years in the South Okanagan-Similkameen with 200 hectares under stewardship agreements in this program.

### Agricultural Conservation Partners

The Conservation Partners Program is an initiative of The Land Conservancy of BC (TLC). The Program supports good land stewardship for the benefit of both agriculture and conservation. By providing recognition, incentives, and assistance, TLC helps farmers and ranchers protect, enhance or restore natural ecosystems. Activities can include planting buffer areas for wildlife and insect pollinator habitat, fencing riparian areas, adopting eco-forestry practices or restoring fish spawning areas. Participating farmers and ranchers are recognized through a "Conservation Partners" sign which they can attach to their farm gate or use as label for their produce or wine.



conservation



## Wildlife Habitat Stewards

The SOS Stewardship Program established the “Wildlife Habitat Steward” program to acknowledge and support private landowners who are actively preventing habitat losses on their properties. Nine major landowners in the region are in the program, taking care of the grasslands, wetlands, or riparian vegetation on their properties. Their commitment is been marked by either signing a voluntary Stewardship Agreement or placing a legal Conservation Covenant on their properties. In recognition, the landowner receives a 'Wildlife Habitat Steward' gate or entrance sign, and is promoted as being one of The Land Conservancy of BC partners. Stewards also receive extra assistance with wildlife surveys and habitat assessments and enhancement projects. The program also provided important recognition for agricultural and accommodation businesses, profiling their stewardship activities.



Habitat Steward Doreen Olson

The following businesses and individuals in the Okanagan and Similkameen are either Wildlife Habitat Stewards or Conservation Partners:

*Bighorn Ridge Guest House*

*Casa del Mell Orchards*

*Dumpling Dale Organic Farm*

*Forbes Family Farm*

*Harker's Fruit Ranch*

*Jill Salter*

*Mariposa Organic Farm - Sage Winds Division*

*Nugteren Farm*

*Rob Webster*

*Summerhill Pyramid Winery*

*Triple F Farm*

*Ven'Amour Organic Farm & Forbidden Fruit Winery*

*Firman Family*

*Doreen Olson*

*Dust Farm*

*God's Mountain Estate*

*High Chaparral Guest House*

*Kambo Farm / Ciliegia Villa*

*Mountain Springs Nature Retreat*

*O'Reilly Farm & Bed and Breakfast*

*Rolling Sage Orchard*

*Tinhorn Creek Vineyard*

*Valentine Farm & Guest House*

## Riparian Habitat Protection

Initiated in 2000 and administered by The Nature Trust of BC, the “Riparian Habitat Protection” project has helped erect 55 kilometres of fencing to safeguard over 400 hectares of habitat adjacent to streams,





ponds and waterways. The program was started to physically conserve and recover critical riparian ecosystems for species at risk. The Nature Trust delivers the program funded by the Habitat Stewardship Program. Each year, 20 to 30 hectares are targeted for rehabilitation and protection. For example, in 2006 a project protected a riparian pasture from livestock trampling by installing an alternative water structure to keep cattle away from a creek. The program has completed 57 fencing projects with private landowners, conservation organizations, government agencies and First Nations.

### **A River Runs Wild**

The Okanagan River Restoration Initiative (ORRI) is a multi-phased project aimed at re-naturalizing important sections of Okanagan River, providing benefits for a wide range of aquatic and terrestrial species. ORRI brought together the BC Ministry of Environment, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Okanagan Nation Alliance and other national and international partners to restore a section of one of Canada's most biologically rich, but endangered ecosystems. Completion of the first phase of the multi-year restoration program in 2009 has already shown great benefits.



Following severe flooding in the 1940s, the majority of the Okanagan River was channelled and diked, leaving only six kilometres of the river's natural 70 kilometres intact and destroying critical fish and wildlife habitat. Phase 1 of the ORRI project involved relocating 1.2 km of dike for floodplain expansion, a dual channel river design, and construction of a 600 meter meander channel. Habitat features were added to restore natural spawning and rearing habitat as well as riparian vegetation. Phase 2, which involves construction of an additional 600 meters of meander channel is currently in the planning stage, is scheduled for completion in 2012.

Funding has come from the BC Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, Canadian Habitat Stewardship Program, Okanagan Region Wildlife Heritage Fund Society, The Land Conservancy of BC, and Douglas County, Grant County, and Chelan County Public Utility Districts in the US. The Okanagan River Restoration Initiative is an excellent example of an innovative and effective partnership between provincial and federal agencies, private and non-profit sectors, and First Nations. In 2011 the project was a finalist for a BC Premier's Award.





**Nature Trust Conservation Crews**

Each year the Nature Trust of BC with partner funding employs a conservation youth crew to conduct a variety of land management activities on conservation lands throughout the Okanagan and Similkameen. Activities include species inventories, invasive plant surveys and removal, fencing and habitat improvement. This crash course in conservation leads many crew members to choose careers in biology and land management.

**Puddles for Peepers**

In the South Okanagan Similkameen, where wetlands are rare on the landscape, it is recognized that even small wetlands (less than 1 hectare) affectionately known as “puddles” are extremely productive and important to many species. Running from 2003 to 2009, the Puddles project worked with property owners living on or adjacent to small wetlands. Landowners were contacted to discuss the habitat importance of wetlands, sensitivity, and how to retain habitat values. The Land Conservancy, SOS Stewardship, Puddles for Peepers, and Amphibian Monitoring Project worked together to contact over fifty landowners. Of this group, 39 agreed to participate in amphibian surveys and six land owners worked on restoration activities on their properties.

**Maintaining Wildlife Trees**

The Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program or WiTS, is a voluntary program to identify and monitor the nesting activity of cavity-nesting birds that are considered at risk. WiTS began in the Okanagan in 2006 with five focal species: Western Screech Owl, Williamson's Sapsucker, Lewis's Woodpecker, White-headed Woodpecker, and Flammulated Owl. The program works closely with BC Nature, Partners in Flight, and the South Okanagan and Oliver-Osoyoos Naturalists Club.



## Strategy ~ Expand community involvement

Public events and programs raise people's awareness of species and habitats at risk and conservation opportunities in the region. Whether it is going on a bird watching fieldtrip, learning to build an owl box, joining in a river clean-up, or attending a talk on bats, public events bring attention to species at risk in the region and engage people of all ages to become advocates for wildlife and their habitats. Okanagan College, OSCA, the Osoyoos Desert Centre, the South Okanagan and Oliver-Osoyoos Naturalist Clubs are regular sponsors of educational events and activities.

Fostering increased environmental awareness, and public involvement and commitment to conservation is one of the goals of the SOSCP Outreach Team who work with the public, schools, industry, and outdoor recreation groups to foster increased awareness about the natural areas of the Okanagan and Similkameen.

The South Okanagan and Similkameen region has experienced significant growth with expansion of urban, rural and agricultural development in the past ten years. Members of the Outreach Team host seminars and workshops for elected officials, planning staff and public advisory committee members; providing education on protecting sensitive habitats and showing examples of community planning innovations from other regions of B.C.

### **Research Shows Public Concern for Wildlife and Natural Areas**

An SOSCP sponsored public opinion poll of 300 residents in 2008, looked at the level of concern people give to the environment in this regional district. Consistent with a previous poll conducted in 2004, an overwhelming 91 % of residents agreed that protecting natural ecosystems and wildlife is needed to maintain the quality of life in the South Okanagan and Similkameen. 84 % of those interviewed were very or somewhat concerned about loss of natural areas due to development, while 81 percent were concerned about loss or extinction of wildlife species. 87 % of residents polled feel that local and regional governments need to do more to protect the environment and over three-quarters of those surveyed feel that stricter regulations are needed. A large majority of South Okanagan Similkameen residents support the idea of a dedicated conservation fund for the region. 86 % of those polled strongly or somewhat support establishing such a fund to protect watersheds and establish green corridors for wildlife habitat and recreation.

### **Financing Conservation**

In 2009, the East Kootenay Conservation Program (sister initiative to the SOSCP), with support from local





government partners and their constituents, established a conservation fund based on a property tax system. A \$20 per parcel each year helps to support wildlife and habitat conservation in parts of the East Kootenay Regional District and communities. Throughout B.C. there are examples of communities that have established funds through different mechanisms to support parkland acquisitions, watershed protection, as well as wildlife and habitat conservation. The SOSCP Program Manager and partners have now developed a resource for local governments and community organizations called *“Establishing a Regional Conservation Fund in British Columbia”*. The guide outlines the legal basis and options for establishing a fund and builds on the successful case studies throughout BC.

### Meadowlark Festival

The Meadowlark Festival has become a high-profile community event hosted by the Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance. Participants explore and celebrate this unique eco-region through a variety of field trips ranging from geology field trips to botany hikes and sustainable building tours. SOSCP partners have the opportunity to profile their conservation work to the public by taking people to parks and protected areas. Now considered one of British Columbia's premier environmental events, the Meadowlark Festival involves over ninety events, fifty volunteers, and 1800 tickets purchased. Hundreds of children and adults also have the opportunity to attend free events during the four day festival.



### School Programs

Many groups including the En'owkin Centre, Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance (OSCA), Osoyoos Desert Centre, and Nk'Mip Desert Cultural centre offer a wide variety of environmental programs to schools in four school districts. These programs engage over five thousand students and teachers per year in outdoor field trips, classroom studies, and habitat restoration projects. OSCA's EcoStudies program, initiated in 2002, works with a variety of program partners such as the Penticton Museum, Regional District, Ducks Unlimited, and SOS Bear Smart to offer hands-on classroom sessions and field trips that engage and inspire students about the natural world.

community





### ECOMmunity Place

Established by the En'owkin Centre for educational outreach to schools, conservation agencies and the public, the ECOMmunity Place is on the Penticton Indian Reserve, situated on lush riparian habitat near the Okanagan River. Guided field trips provide schools with educational programs that incorporate curriculum projects with environmental studies, cultural arts, story telling and Indigenous drama; thus raising visitor awareness around environmental values and the Syilx culture. During the summer months ECOMmunity Place offers a variety of programs, hosting unique out-door tours combining science with Syilx culture.

“Reconnect –Reconnecting People and Spaces” is a joint OSCA and En'owkin program where Aboriginal and non-aboriginal students participate in a two stage restoration project at four sites that are valuable for species at risk. An emphasis of the project is to connect Western science and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) points of view, and to connect the two communities for meaningful participation in stewardship. In 2009 the program expanded to include adult volunteers who wanted to learn more about TEK and scientific conservation concerns values around species at risk. Small restoration projects have been ongoing on a number of conservation properties in Osoyoos, Cawston, Penticton and Oliver.

### Industry education and partnership

OSCA's Eco-management workshops focus on providing information to industry and agricultural producers on improved practices for land management that can benefit sensitive habitats and species at risk. Work includes seminars for the viticulture industry and parks and public works departments on habitat restoration and work place awareness and management of species at risk. Partnership with the Environmental Farm Plan and BC Wine Grape Council has facilitated contributing to new grape industry best management guidelines, including the new BC Sustainable Winegrowing Program “Sustainable Practices for BC Vineyards” guidebook.

The long running “Snake Smart” program funded by the Habitat Stewardship Program is offered to outdoor workers such as orchard and vineyard workers, golf course staff and utility companies. The program emphasizes snake identification, safety and management so that workers are not afraid of snakes and snake mortalities are reduced. Five species of snakes found in the Okanagan-Similkameen are species at risk due to habitat fragmentation, persecution and road mortality. Identification posters and pamphlets are offered in four languages to benefit local and seasonal agricultural workers.

Public utility companies such as Fortis and Telus not only participate in species and habitat seminars but have partnered in restoration efforts to improve habitats along utility corridors used by the Mormon Metalmark and Behr's Hairstreak butterflies.



## SOUTH OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN CONSERVATION PROGRAM PARTNERS March 2011

BC Conservation Foundation	The Nature Conservancy of Canada – BC Region
BC Lake Stewardship Society	The Nature Conservancy of Washington
BC Ministry of Natural Resource Operations	The Nature Trust of BC
BC Ministry of Agriculture	Town of Osoyoos
BC Ministry of Environment	Town of Oliver
BC Nature	North Central Washington Resource Conservation and Development Council
BC Wildlife Federation	Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program
BC Wildlife Federation – Okanagan Region	Okanagan College
Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC	Okanagan Region Wildlife Heritage Fund Society
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society – BC Chapter	Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance
Canadian Intermountain Joint Venture	Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society
City of Penticton	Osoyoos Desert Society
Conservation Northwest	Osoyoos Indian Band
Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Osoyoos Lake Water Quality Society
Destination Osoyoos	Pacific Salmon Foundation
District of Summerland	Partners in Flight
Dominion Radio Astrophysical Observatory	Penticton Museum and Archives
Ducks Unlimited Canada	Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen
En'Owkin Centre	Royal BC Museum
Environment Canada – Canadian Wildlife Service Pacific Yukon Region	Southern Interior Bluebird Trail Society
Federation of BC Naturalists	South Okanagan Rehabilitation Centre for Owls
FORREX	South Okanagan Naturalists Club
Green Earth Movement (GEM) Penticton High School	The Land Conservancy of BC
Grasslands Conservation Council of BC	University of British Columbia Okanagan
Habitat Conservation Trust Fund	Village of Keremeos
The Land Trust Alliance of BC	WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife



## CELEBRATING A DECADE OF CONSERVATION





## Support SOSCP

If you, or your organization, would like to support the important work of this collaborative partnership to “Keep Nature In Our Future” contact Program Manager Bryn White.

Tax receipts are available.

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**Conserving Canada's Desert Country**

