

Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society Spring & Summer 2022 Newsletter



A beautiful fall morning from the viewing tower at the S'amunu/Somenos Conservation Area

President's Message – by Paul Gowland



President Paul Gowland with Gina and Adam, our Watershed Stewardship Specialists (Barry Hetschko photo)

Recently, I listened to a podcast describing the impact of urban development on biodiversity. Many species of plants and animals are adversely affected by development, especially in parts of the world where cities are huge and population density is high. Our S'amunu / Somenos Watershed has been greatly modified by development over the last 160 years, with only some parts resembling what existed long ago. The podcast on urban diversity was not all gloomy though: along with recognition of the problems caused by urbanization there are many academics, government agencies and not for profit groups working on ways to

mitigate and reverse the damage that has been done. One method the podcasters discussed is termed 're-wilding.'

Re-wilding is a process to help land return to its original state. This could mean things like planting a variety of native plants along a creek or leaving our municipal forests to grow without interference. Re-wilding allows degraded areas to return to their natural state, with a little help to get started. This is what our Society wants to do in many small steps. We plant trees and shrubs, remove invasive species, restore stream habitat, and install nest boxes to encourage the return of native species. These restoration efforts are at a macro level; what we seldom see is the life at the micro level: invertebrates, bacteria, fungi and so on. These organisms are an important part of biodiversity but must be left to recover from environmental damage on their own.

ED Report

It has been an exciting 4 months since our last newsletter. Spring is bursting around us, and it is time to get the GreenStreams Project shovels back in the ground by planting riparian vegetation to shade out the ‘Parrot’s Feather’ in Somenos Creek (see for more on this, below). Springing into the action as well is Kaitlyn Berry, SMWS member and our new newsletter editor who we have to thank for this current version and versions-to-come. Welcome aboard, Kaitlyn!

Sadly, we lost Adam Dewar, our Terrestrial Watershed Stewardship Specialist, who left us to return to school. In his place we welcome YEXPILEMTEN/John Etzel Jr, who will be joining us as our Traditional Watershed Stewardship Specialist (but more about this later).

This spring saw the renewal of our BC Community Gaming Grant sponsored Community Stewardship Program where we work with, and train, community volunteers in all aspects of ecological restoration to help restore the S’amunu Watershed to its former glory as the largest salmon nursery on Southern Vancouver Island. We have work to do for our birds too as the agricultural fields are slowly filling with ‘Yellow Flag Iris,’ a beautiful but dangerous invasive species that can colonize large areas and limit the reoccurrence of natural species that benefit Somenos. Topping this wonderful season off are the wonderful volunteers who come out to support our work, including every member of our board of Directors.

Goodbye Adam Dewar and Welcome YEXPILEMTEN/John Etzel Jr



Adam

Adam arrived as our Terrestrial Watershed Stewardship Specialist last May and left 2 months shy of his first year with us to return to school. Adam’s attributes were many: he was a pleasure to work with and had excellent knowledge of wetland construction. He also had a positive influence on the Cowichan Secondary School students who volunteered during the planting of the Beverly Street Stormwater treatment wetland after the second round of digging ponds and channels. He will be missed!

YEXPILEMTEN/John Etzel Jr became our part-time Traditional Watershed Stewardship Specialist on May 1st with funding from the BC Real Estate Foundation. The position is good until December 15th of this year, and we are working hard to find funding to hire him full time. YEXPILEMTEN’s work will be assisting our Aquatic Watershed Stewardship Specialist, Gina Hoar, in all aspects of our work and working in the field leading volunteers for our riparian planting projects to challenge the ‘Parrot’s Feather’ infestation in Somenos Creek. His other important work will be



YEXPILEMTEN

strengthening our ties with Cowichan Tribes, our GreenStreams and WildWings Festival partner, as all our work takes place in the traditional territories of the Cowichan Nation.

Terrestrial Update – by Gina Hoar

We are very excited to continue moving forward with our GreenStreams Project terrestrial restoration efforts throughout the S’amunu/Somenos watershed in 2022. With our creek assessments having been completed in the summer of 2021, we are ready to start restoring the S’amunu



SMWS Director, Barry Hetschko planting at Averill Creek



Invasive plant removal at the Somenos Garry Oak Protected Area

Watershed streams riparian areas. Our main areas of terrestrial focus in the watershed this year will be centered on managing and removing invasive species, planting trees to help restore the riparian environment, and using live-stake techniques to shore up eroded and erosion-prone sections of creek. There will be plenty of opportunities to get your hands dirty, so make sure you keep your eyes peeled for email from the SMWS alerting you

to different volunteer events going on throughout the spring, summer, and fall. Weekly events will fall on both weekdays and weekends to ensure as many scheduling conflicts as possible are avoided. Come help return the watershed to its former glory, the breadbasket of southern Vancouver Island!

Upcoming volunteer work parties:

Wednesday: May 18, June 1, June 15

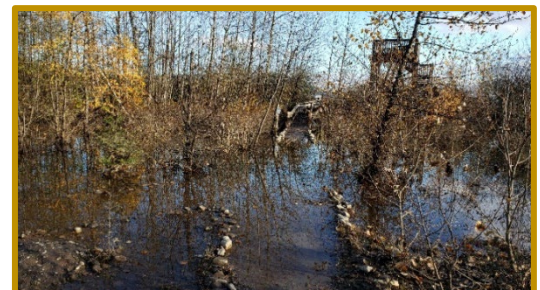
Saturday: May 28, June 11, June 25

Please visit our event calendar for further details:

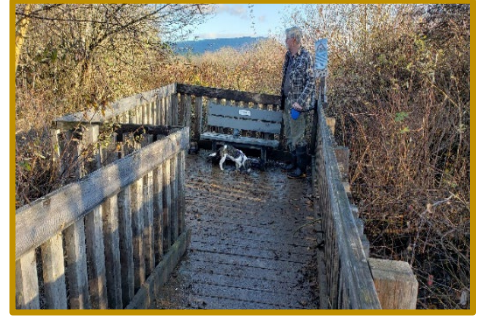
<https://www.somenosmarsh.com/calendar>

The Big Flood – by Malcolm MacLeod

After the storm last November, we observed the Somenos Marsh area from the end of Vista Street up off of Cairnsmore Street and could see the water over the one lane of the north bound highway and the Open Air Classroom fence was out of place. On the first day that the floodwaters had gone down far enough to allow access to the Open-Air Classroom, Karen and I went for a visit. We wore boots as there was still 8 inches of water in the parking lot. However, it didn’t extend to the gate, and we could see that the fence had actually floated out of the ground (see photos to right).



From the entrance gate to the boardwalk, it was above water except for about 4 inches of water over both approaches to the tower and to the board walk but only for about 20 ft. The surface of the walk was above water and there was evidence that the water had been up to and even over the top rail and that is 32 inches tall (below left photo). The first platform at the end of the side shoot called 'Derrick's way' had floated up and was on quite an angle as it had hung up (below middle photo) and had to be trimmed to allow it to go

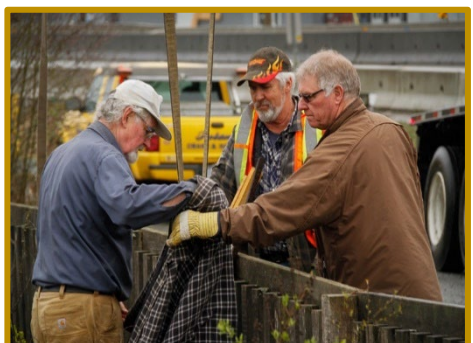
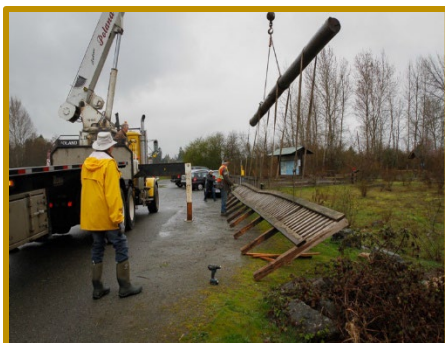


back down again, several weeks later, when the water level had dropped enough. We could see where a beaver had cut off a 2-inch sapling at the height of the top of the rail.

As we travelled on, there was a lot of debris and some silt but the situation was not too bad until we got to the north part of the walk closest to Bings Creek. This part was covered with a fine slippery silt up to 3/8 inches thick for about 400 ft. We were the first ones there except for a small animal that had left some tracks. We realized that we had to clean this mess off as soon as possible both for safety reasons and before it dried, so we put a call out for a work party for the next morning. Between 6-8 people came out with brooms, shovels, rakes, and hoses, and worked for 4-5 hours.

Interestingly enough, there was a lady who visited who had a meeting with a small animal that she met along the south section in the middle of the walk. They had a standoff with both just staring at each other until she captured some photos. We thought it was a beaver but weren't too sure since the image was too small to see on her phone. Another thing we saw were several small snakes which had obviously drowned.

Lastly, we finally got the fence at the marsh put back in place after about four months (photos below). It had floated out during the big storm and flood of November 15th last year. We got Andrew Poland with his



cousin John and his crane truck to lift it so that we could prepare the fence and ground to put it back in the ground. They volunteered their time and truck. The posts had to be cleaned and the holes dug out after the ground had dried. It took little more than a half hour to put it back and then with the help of some school students we leveled and tamped it in the next day. Thanks so much to Poland Crane and Hauling, our newest Friend of Somenos (FoS). (Photos by Barry Hetschko).

Spring is really Springing out there – by Barry Hetschko

Somenos Birding Tips 101

“When the Indian Plum goes to bloom, keep an eye out for the arrival of the Rufous Hummingbirds.”

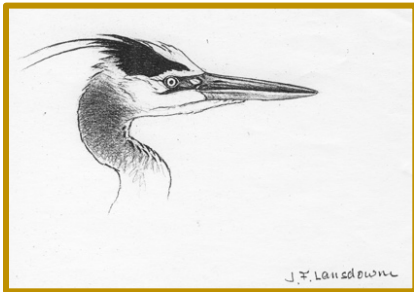
(Encyclopedia of Derrick Marvin)



Indian Plum (photo by Barry Hetschko)



Rufous Hummingbird (photo by Barry Hetschko)



A SMWS legacy moment

The Heron head on our logo was gifted to us in 1989 by J Fenwick Landsdowne, Canada’s greatest bird artist.

In memoriam: George Seymour – by Paul Fletcher

I first met George when he was first elected to council in 1996 and I was (apparently) a hot-headed environmentalist. Somehow, we meshed, and he became my mentor for many years as he gently coaxed me through the North Cowichan political quagmire of that time. Always a supporter of Somenos Marsh, George, and his lovely wife Marie-Claire, became early members in the SMWS and maintained their membership throughout his 15 years as a North Cowichan Councillor. George was also North Cowichan’s representative on the Somenos Management Committee, the group of property owners, NGOs and government agencies that manage the S’amunu/Somenos Conservation area. My condolences to Marie-Claire and the rest of his family.



George Seymour, Friend of Somenos

Big O Tire Fire

On September 8th, Big O Tire experienced a fire in one of their buildings. Fire departments from North Cowichan and surrounding areas tackled the blaze, using gallons of water and fire retardant, all of which flowed down the storm sewer system into the Ducks Unlimited Pond just south of the BC Forest Discovery Centre. Remains of tire ash remain in the ditch lining the highway beside the BC Forest Discovery Centre. We are unsure of the impact the contaminated water had on the pond, particularly young salmon that are downstream from the pond. We continue to investigate the necessary processes for cleanup and evaluation of the impact on the Somenos Marsh environment.



Tire ash residue in the ditch flowing into the Ducks Unlimited Pond



2021 WildWings – Owustenuxun/Jared Williams serving the salmon at the Pi'kwun (salmon barbecue) held at Tl'ulpalus Beach in Cowichan Bay

WildWings Nature & Arts Festival 2022

We are so happy that we can host this year's month-long festival (and basically COVID-free!) With this positive outlook for the future, the planning for this year's festival is now in spring gear as we confirm participants and venues. This year the festival subtitle is "Bringing back the Steelhtun" and this reflects one of the SMWS's primary focuses in the S'amunu/Somenos Watershed. Just *Jakes Restaurant* are already back on board sponsoring this year's Artist of the Somenos as well as providing their restaurant for the festival launch party and WildWings Art show opening reception. The SMWS September newsletter will have more details about our 13th WildWings.



Traditional Paths and Future Ways presentation with Harold Joe at Ye'yumnuts



Imagine waking up to this view every morning

Somenos Marsh Swallow Box Update – by Barry Hetschko

The Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society is looking to expand their Nest Box Program. At present, Somenos Marsh has over 60 nest Boxes located around the Open-Air



One of the new Swallow nest boxes at the Open-Air Classroom

Classroom and the farm fields along Beverly Street and the Trans Canada Hwy. This summer we are hoping to add another 20 new nest boxes with

the help of Nature Trust. The original goal, set back in 2017, was to have 100 Swallow nest boxes placed out in the Marsh. With staff changes and the last couple years taken up by COVID, we have fallen behind our goal. However, 2022 is looking to be a great year for the Marsh and its avian community. Conservation is making a difference where you live. Thanks so much to all involved!

Website Refreshment

SMWS staff have been working diligently on a revamp of our Somenos website as it is becoming dated and does not provide easy access to all the research material that we have in our Somenos Library. The Somenos Research Library is the fulfillment of a long-term dream, and part of the commitment of our GreenStreams Project to make the SMWS the repository for material pertaining to the Somenos Watershed. This website-redo is progressing under the excellent guidance of Sarah Mulluck, our website design volunteer. Thanks so much to Sarah and the great work she has been doing. Please have patience as we redo the site page by page. Follow the progress at: www.somenosmarsh.com.

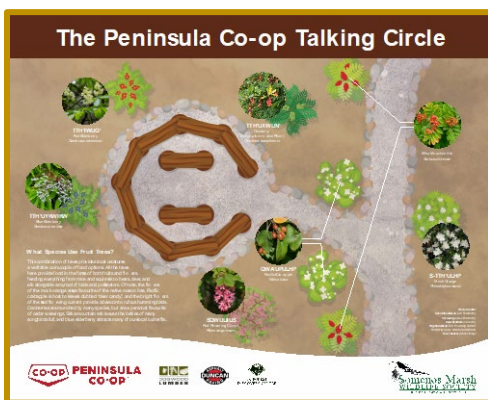


The completed Peninsula Co-op Talking Circle

Talking Circle

The Peninsula Co-op Talking Circle Project at the Open-Air Classroom is now completed. The benches are installed and survived the winter floods thanks to our MacGiver's construction skills; the native fruit trees are in the ground; the correct Hul'q'umi'num names have been identified for each tree; and the sign has been installed.

An opening ceremony is being planned to thank our main sponsor, Peninsula Co-op, and the other contributors: Island Paving, Dogwood Lumber, and the BC Forest Discovery Centre. Chelsea Hamre of Inspire Creative in Ladysmith designed the sign and Genevieve Singleton and Philomena Williams provided the correct Hul'q'umi'num translations for the trees. Malcolm (MacGiver) MacLeod (board member) led the construction which most of the SMWS board supported. The Peninsula Co-op grant also contributed to improvements to the ramps leading to the boardwalk and tower as well as the addition of two more picnic tables.



The new Talking Circle sign with native tree descriptions

McKinnon Farm

We were recently contacted by a member of the McKinnon family, whose roots go back to the early days of the 'Somenos Flats' (as Somenos Marsh was once known). They wanted to talk about donating to the Open-Air Classroom boardwalk in memory of their family. In the ensuing conversation we discovered that a trove of photos existed, a couple of which are below. These are just teasers as we will be learning more from the

family to help determine where the site of the old Mill was located as it was originally built on the land that the McKinnon's eventually owned. (Photos courtesy of the McKinnon family).



'McKinnon's Crossing'



Yes, Somenos flooded back then as well.

'Parrot's Feather' on the Move



'Parrot's Feather' sprouting from the dead mass.

The scourge of Somenos Creek and invasive south American aquatic weed, 'Parrot's Feather,' continues to spread and do unpredictable things that we have yet to understand. Last summer, the weed covered 75% of Somenos Creek with dense mats of vegetation that anchors itself to the sides and bottom of the creek. The impact is huge as oxygen levels are diminished and creek waters are warmed as the 'Parrot's Feather' absorbs radiation from the sun. This year, much of the plant flushed away during the winter rains leaving a lot of debris on higher ground as well as downstream on farmers' fields. This has created a disposal issue as new shoots are already growing from the washed-up 'Parrot's Feather' (see photo). The worrisome thing about this plant is that it will adapt to local climate conditions, meaning that the longer it is here, the less effect the winter freezing will have on it. Oddly, it no longer grows at the mouth of Somenos Creek where it once thrived.

After 6 years of studying 'Parrot's Feather,' we are convinced that it can never be completely removed from Somenos Creek. The best solution in our minds now is to purchase or build an aquatic harvester that either cuts the plant close to the creek bottom, or pulls it out by the roots to create channels that improve water quality for migrating salmon to reach their spawning areas or the Cowichan Estuary for the next stage of their lives. This year's management will focus on monthly monitoring and shade tree planting along the riparian corridors while we research harvesting machines and disposal protocols.

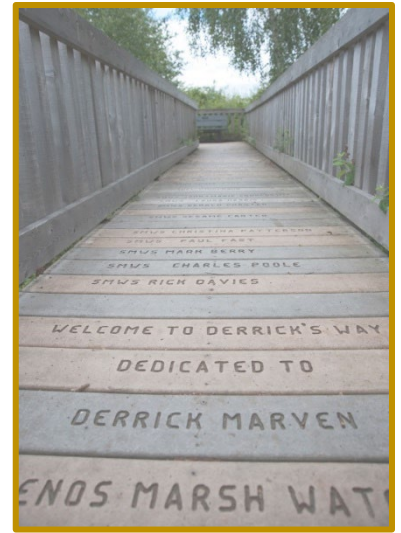


'Parrot's Feather' on sale in local garden market

You can do your part to prevent further infestations of our waterways by not buying the plant for your aquarium or pond and, if you see it on sale, inform the retailer of the risks associated with it.

'Derrick's Way' Extension Project

We don't like to sit on our hands for very long, and we are pleased to announce plans for our next wildlife viewing infrastructure: a small extension of 'Derrick's Way,' the small spur that currently ends at a little wildlife viewing platform, and a bench named 'For the Birds,' to bring wildlife watchers closer to the field edge and improve winter migrating waterfowl viewing opportunities. Planning is still in the very early stages with approvals still needed from several agencies, including the property owner, North Cowichan, with whom we have an agreement with to manage the Open-Air Classroom property. Stay tuned as we report on the progress of this project.



'Derrick's Way' with the 'For the Birds' platform in the distance

That's all for now. Thanks for reading...



Fall Geese coming in for the night – S'amunu Kaatza/Somenos Lake