

Simms Creek Stewardship Society Annual Report 2009



Cover Figures: The upper two photographs show the Simms Creek stewards in the operating room at the hatchery removing adipose fins from Coho salmon fry. The lower two photographs show Simms Creek stewards planting the berms of the newly excavated pond along ERT Road.

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The Society and the Creek

Simms Creek Stewardship Society received its registration as a non-profit organization at the beginning of 2003. It was established as a community-based group dedicated to the stewardship of Simms Creek. The society's goal is to work with local residents and businesses, other non-profit organizations and all levels of government to maintain and restore the existing ecological integrity of Simms Creek, its tributaries and associated wetlands.

Simms Creek was named for Hubert and Lottie Simms who ran a farm at the mouth of the creek starting about 1920. The creek empties into Discovery Passage at the meeting with the Strait of Georgia. The main stem of Simms Creek is about seven kilometers long and it has about ten kilometers of tributaries. The watershed includes working forest, an experimental forest, a major highway, and residential neighborhoods of Campbell River, British Columbia. The experimental forest, called Beaver Lodge Forest Lands, is 520 hectares that is held in trust by the Province of British Columbia. Roughly half is covered with seventy- to ninety-year old second growth.

President's Message

Development pressures eased slightly in 2009 as the downturn in the economy took its toll, although activity appeared to be increasing by the final quarter of the year. There has been no indication yet of development west of the Inland Highway; this likely will become an issue for us once again as the economy continues to improve.

The return of adults in the fall of 2009 was, to put it mildly, discouraging especially in light of the fair to good to excellent returns reported from other systems. There was, once again, the addition of 6000 hatchery Coho salmon fry (adipose fin removed). This year there were also enough hatchery chum fry available to allow the addition of about 30,000 to Simms Creek.

Our major project in 2009 was the creation of a water storage pond, about 750 square metres in surface area, adjacent to the ERT road. This project, funded by The Campbell River Salmon Foundation, continued the program of augmenting the water supply to extend the time of continuous flow in the creek.

It was gratifying to see one of our group, Mr. M, recognized for his contributions by receiving the 2009 Individual Stewardship Award from the City of Campbell River.

Mr. E
March 2010

Members

For the year 2009, Simms Creek Stewardship Society had thirteen members. Members voted to have all officers return to the same posts.

Mr. E, President
Mr. T, Vice President
Mr. G, Treasurer
Mr. M, Secretary
Mr. B
Mr. C
Mr. K
Mr. L
Mr. McD
Mr. McL
Ms. R
Mr. R
Mr. S

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Financial Statement

Balance forward	\$ 866.94
<u>Income</u>	
Memberships	\$ 110.00
Campbell River Salmon Foundation grant (for ERT pond)	\$ 1000.00
Interest	\$ <u>0.12</u>
Total income	\$ 1110.12
Total	\$ 1977.06
<u>Expenditures</u>	
Society annual report filing	\$ 25.00
Volunteer insurance: Speirs & Co. Limited	\$ 170.00
Pacific Streamkeepers Federation	\$ 15.00
ERT pond creation	\$ <u>1000.00</u>
Total expenditures	\$ 1210.00
Balance	\$ 767.06

Note that the portion of the 2008 grant from Pacific Salmon Foundation in excess of the costs (about \$700) will be returned.

Projects

The Simms Creek Stewardship Society not only is an advocate for a healthy Simms Creek in the growing City of Campbell River, its members put their backs and sweat into improving the quality of the creek as a salmon habitat.

As an advocate, the society provides input to government, as described in the "Input to Government" subsection.

The "Remediation" subsection contains projects of water retention, of habitat enhancement, and of what the public might never notice because the result is a creek and surrounding forest that are restored to a natural state. The "Investigation" subsection outlines some of the activities that extend our knowledge of the creek, so that we improve our ability to speak for the creek in the future.

As in previous years, members of Simms Creek Stewardship Society continue to give to other organizations in the community. Some of that work is listed under the "Helping Other Organizations" subsection.

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Input to Government

Settling Ponds: Developers of new subdivisions nowadays expect to add storm water settling ponds. As a pond does its job, the settled out material reduces the volume of the pond, making the pond less effective at settling out material. Simms Creek Stewardship Society members suggested to the City of Campbell River a cleaning of the ponds. In autumn, the City did respond with the vacuuming of material from a pond on Rockland Road. It took about ten hours spread over two days. Simms Creek Stewardship Society will continue to work with the City to clean out other ponds in the watershed.

Invasive Mapping: With his experience in invasive removal in the Beaver Lodge Forest Lands, Mr. M was able to guide a Victoria-based employee of the Ministry of Forests to the various infestations, so that they could be entered into the provincial Invasive Alien Plant Program database. Apparently, there are few other forest-dominated areas mapped in this way.

Remediation

Additions of Salmon Fry: The very low adult return in fall of 2008 forced once again a reliance on the fish hatchery to stock the creek. In June 2009, members, their families, and acquaintances all helped in clipping six thousand adipose fins, at a bit faster clip than previous years even with the higher than usual count. Then, after the fry recovered from their surgery, a similar group distributed the Coho salmon fry into Simms Creek.

ERT Pond Creation: Below the water table, the ground does hold water, perhaps at about ten percent of the volume of what is usually called earth. Digging a hole that is connected to the creek allows the full hundred percent of the volume to be water. Furthermore, evaluations of the forest in the Simms Creek watershed noted a lack of open water habitat. A grant from the Campbell River Salmon Foundation allowed the Simms Creek Stewardship Society to excavate a pond adjacent to a Simms Creek tributary near the ERT Road. A group of loggers directed by Mr. Mallinson under the Community Development Trust Project felled the alder trees on the site to prepare for the excavation. The water in the pond hopefully will extend the flow of the tributary farther into the summer drought, as well as develop an open water habitat.

Water Level Monitoring: The spring of 2009 was the first in which the expanded Butterfly pond could play its role in extending the season of water flow in its tributary. Mr. E, especially, kept a close eye on the water level in the pond and adjusted the outflow, in order to make the wet season for the tributary as long as possible.

Gravel Placement: In previous years, chinook salmon have spawned in the short stretch of creek between the counting fence and the highway bridge. The leftover gravel from the 2008 placement went into the creek this year. There was a report of a Coho salmon pair using the new gravel.

Beaver Emulation: Last year's effort to plug the leaks in the south fork weir slowed the unexpected water flow somewhat. Acting like persistent beavers, and taking inspiration from their methods of dam construction, the Simms Creek Stewardship Society again applied mud to the upstream side of the weir.

Invasive Removal: Invasives are non-native plants that spread easily and crowd out native flora. Almost always during removal of invasives, evidence of refuse dumping comes to light, suggesting that nearly all infestations could have been avoided if humans did not dump yard-waste at the forest edge.

Several patches of Scotch broom, Lamium, periwinkle, and English ivy are in a low-effort maintenance phase. Patches on Huckleberry trail (3 patches), near the north gate on ERT trail (2 patches), on Hideaway trail (2 patches), next to the McPhedran parking lot, near the large sign on Rockland Road (2 patches), in the Parkway and Alder gully, and along the paved bike path near Alder fall into this category.

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Even though few stems are growing in any of these locations, years of occasional removal will be needed before extirpation is accomplished.

The Japanese knotweed at two locations along Airport Main, the Lamium along the lower stretches of Simms Creek, and the snag circle Comfrey all required a couple of hours of effort for their annual cleaning passes. The Japanese knotweed - after several years of pulling - is still so robust that it is easy to dismiss as just wishful thinking that it might be starting to weaken. The Lamium patch was surprising in the limited re-growth; perhaps just luck or perhaps technique has improved.

An additional patch of periwinkle was found near Pony trail. It received a first pass cleaning. Another patch of Lamium in the Parkway gully was hit, in the toes so to speak, in order to stop its creep across the bottom of the gully.

The Ministry of Forests invasives expert pointed out two new problem plants. Huckleberry trail has some hawthorne, and the reservoir road has some tansy ragwort.

Garbage: Sometimes, writing the Annual Report feels like writing a script for a blockbuster movie. For example, beyond the mundane who-done-it-of garbage at the forest edge, there is occasional deep mystery. What forces caused a motorist driving down a city street to swerve to the curb, to stop, to whip out a can of undercarriage rust inhibitor, to apply it, and to throw the can in the ditch before continuing on his way again? For another example, two piles of garbage sat together in the forest along Rockland Road for two or three years. Of all passers-by, only a steward's superhuman eyesight could see it. Only a steward could penetrate the force-field that a few roadside trees put up, thereby gaining access in order to remove the garbage. It took a steward to send it the myriad millimeters to oblivion, in a vessel usually called a garbage can just down the street.

Debris Removal: The lower reaches of Simms Creek receive water much too quickly from developed areas of the city via storm sewers, and to make matters worse, the creek is confined in places. The debris in the creek can scour spawning beds or punch a hole in the fish fence during high water events. To minimize the problems, again this year, members walked the creek to remove woody debris and garbage.

Trail Maintenance: Mr. McD made an effort throughout the entire year to keep trails in good shape near the Sportsplex. Hopefully, his work kept more feet on the trail, and off of adjacent vegetation in the riparian zone of Simms Creek.

Investigation

Fish Counts: Counts provide an overall diagnostic of how livable the creek is for salmon. Two accurate counts are made each year. A count of adults that are returning to the creek to spawn provides an idea of how many eggs might be laid. A count of year-old Coho salmon in the spring shows how many completed their fresh water stage.

Approximately 7500 Coho salmon fry left Simms Creek for the next stage of their life in the North Pacific Ocean. Of that total, only 430 had their adipose fin clipped. That suggests only a 9% survival rate of the five thousand hatchery fry put into the creek one year ago. Funding for the spring counting services of Mr. Cunning came from Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and its Public Involvement Program.

The fall count of Coho adults returning to Simms Creek to spawn was disappointing, a dozen. Funding for the counting services of Mr. Cunning came from Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and its Public Involvement Program.

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Project Site Identification: The number of projects completed each year is limited. However, those couple of sites came from a much longer list of candidates. Members investigated several sites for water retention projects and for spawning gravel placement. Some sites rejected in 2009 might still become the chosen site in future years.

Volunteered Time on Society Projects

The following table lists the hours that members and other area residents contributed to projects initiated by the Simms Creek Stewardship Society. Each of the projects has been described in earlier sections of this report.

<u>Project</u>	<u>Member hours</u>	<u>Other hours</u>
Settling Ponds	1.5	0.0
Invasive Mapping	2.5	0.0
Additions of Salmon Fry	21.1	12.4
ERT Pond Creation	47.2	14.2
Water Level Monitoring	60.0	0.0
Gravel Placement	24.2	12.0
Beaver Emulation	10.8	5.4
Invasive Removal	50.0	2.2
Garbage	17.1	0.0
Debris Removal	6.0	0.0
Trail Maintenance	15.0	0.0
Fish Counts	131.1	8.5
Project Site Identification	15.1	2.0
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Total	401.6	56.7

Helping Other Organizations

Members of the Simms Creek Stewardship Society helped out other organizations in the community with the following events and projects. The hours volunteered total seventy-three.

Watershed Walk: Discovery Coast Greenways Land Trust and Spirit of BC Committee sponsored a series of walks in spring. Mr. M led one of those walks through the Beaver Lodge Forest Lands. He led a second walk on Mount Washington for the Strathcona Wilderness Institute.

Campbell River Salmon Foundation: Its annual fund raising dinner took place in March.

Chinook Eggs: A project to enhance a chinook salmon run at Philips Arm required capture of brood stock from the river running into Philips Arm.

Chum Eggs: A Fisheries and Oceans Canada project to start a chum salmon run in area creeks required egg collection from chum returning to the Campbell River. A group of members, their families and friends, all helped with the cleaning of the eggs at the eyed-stage.

Willow Creek Tree Planting: The Willow Creek stewards planted a large number of trees to deactivate an old road.

Acknowledgment of Support

Simms Creek Stewardship Society could not have accomplished a number of projects in 2009 without support from other organizations and from the general public. We would very much like to thank:

- Campbell River Salmon Foundation for financial support
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada Public Involvement Program for financial support
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada for archiving services
- Mr. Peters of Fisheries and Oceans Canada for technical assistance
- Quinsam Hatchery for training and facilities use
- Discovery Coast Greenways Land Trust for equipment loans, supplies and donated services
- Ministry of Forests for invasives disposal
- Mr. Mallinson and his group for felling alders on the pond site

Simms Creek Stewardship Society also would like to thank the members of the community who contributed time to projects during the year.

Invitation to Participate

Membership in Simms Creek Stewardship Society is open to anyone in the community. The society is not just about fish counting. A broad spectrum of personal focus (e.g. nature interpretation, fund raising, publicity, web site master) can find a place in the society, thereby allowing us to expand our activities and to become better at stewardship of Simms Creek. Our website lists upcoming meetings and events. See www.CRWatersheds.org, click on Simms Creek, then click on Events. The regular meetings usually take place on the fourth Wednesday of each month.

Membership is not the only path to contribution. Ideas for projects and communication of opportunities to acquire resources can be given to any member.