
South Okanagan-Similkameen STEWARDSHIP News



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Fall 2008

Welcome to the fall/winter issue of the Stewardship News, brought to you by the South Okanagan-Similkameen (SOS) Stewardship Program of TLC The Land Conservancy of BC. We're one of 46 partners in the South Okanagan-Similkameen Conservation Program. Enjoy stewardship updates and information from our program as well as from those of our partners.

Stewards in Action...

Overlooking Vaseaux Lake south of Okanagan Falls is a bench land of wineries with postcard-perfect views. Amid the green rows of vines sits a dry oasis of 10 acres owned by Roger Hawthorne and Carla Leinweber. They chose to keep their entire property as natural as possible while building an adobe house and their Bighorn Ridge Guest House. Both buildings blend into their natural surroundings to such an extent that the cacti are even invited all the way into their living room.



Carla and Roger enjoying the fall sunshine in front of their guesthouse.

“Keeping the spirit of the grasslands intact was important for Carla and I,” says Hawthorne. “When we were building, we wanted minimal destruction of the antelope brush and shrubs.”

Their beautiful property of antelope brush, wildflowers, sage, and bunchgrasses is an important refuge for wildlife of the arid Okanagan valley including some species at risk.

“The birds here are amazing. Our property is like a bird sanctuary. The birds have lots of insects to eat and snags to perch on!” explains Hawthorne.

The importance and value of Bighorn Ridge for native plants and animals is priceless now that such a large percentage of the antelope brush grassland around them has become vineyards. When asked why they kept

their property natural instead of converting it to a vineyard like the adjacent lands, Hawthorne expressed “You’ve got to keep what you can because there’s so little of it left.”

Their guests feel the same way. “Guests absolutely love it,” says Hawthorne. “They’re so glad that they could stay in nature. They can hear the wind singing through the shrubs and trees. They appreciate being in nature while surrounded by vineyards.”

Hawthorne and Leinweber have signed on as Wildlife Habitat Stewards with TLC’s South Okanagan-Similkameen (SOS) Stewardship Program. They have signed a Stewardship Agreement and intend to keep their property natural. The SOS Stewardship Program is assisting them with invasive plant removal, restoration of an eroding slope, and will be providing them with a landowner recognition sign for their property entrance.

For more information on Bighorn Ridge Guest House, check out www.bighornridge.com.



Even the birds get first class accommodation.

A summer with TLC's SOS Stewardship Program

Parting thoughts from our summer students

TLC's Okanagan Office employed two students this summer as technicians for the South Okanagan - Similkameen (SOS) Stewardship Program. Many of you may have seen them weeding, building bat and owl boxes, contacting land owners, or working in the office. Here they explain what they enjoyed most about their summer experience and why they chose to work for TLC.

Matt Godfrey



Matt is from Penticton and is studying advertising and Chinese at Brigham Young University in Utah. He is presently in China at Nanjing University. Happy travels Matt!

The highlight of my summer was having a job that taught me.

Combining studies, interacting with resident experts, working in the field, and outside-of-work recreation, I gained a lot of practical knowledge. This summer opened my eyes to positive and negative elements of our environment that I never knew existed. Working with TLC gave me a fresh perspective on conservation. People with an understanding of the environment are needed in all employment areas. After experiencing land conservation and stewardship this summer, I hope to spread these ideals in the business and communication community around the world.

Jordan Edwards



Jordan lives in Kelowna and is working on his Bachelor of Science degree at UBC-Okanagan. He's also busy managing the Orchard City Hockey League in Kelowna and the River City Hockey League in Kamloops. All the best Jordan!

My summer was filled with everything from computer work to outdoor field work. Some of the highlights included working with biologists collecting data for amphibian habitats, doing wetland planting and restoration, invasive plant removal, writing Species at Risk information for landowners, and installing bat boxes. All in all, I appreciate having been able to spend my break from classes working with what I truly love: plants and animals.

You Are Making a Difference!

By Paula Rodriguez de la Vega, TLC's South Okanagan - Similkameen Stewardship Program

The South Okanagan - Similkameen (SOS) Stewardship Program would like to give landowners and volunteers a big round of applause! Take a look at all that has been accomplished over the last four months thanks to your involvement.

- 52** – the number of volunteers involved in SOS Stewardship Program activities.
- 49** – the number of people that attended Community Stewardship Events (Kitley Lake, Upper Carmi, Lower Similkameen)
- 15** – the number of pick-up truck loads of invasive plants taken to the dump.
- 14** – the number of landowners who benefited from SOS Stewardship's Weed Warrior Crew.
- 11** – the number of bat boxes that were built by SOS Stewardship and installed by land stewards.
- 10** – the number of Western Screech Owl boxes that were built by SOS Stewardship Program. Some are

still available! Contact us if you're interested.

- 9** – the number of landowners that benefited from habitat improvement projects on their properties.
- 1** – the number of ponds where invasive goldfish were removed for the benefit of endangered frogs, spadefoots, and salamanders.



Volunteers planted native shrubs along the edge of this pond in order to create valuable wildlife habitat.

Grasslands: Going, Going,...

By Jordan Edwards & Matthew Godfrey, TLC's South Okanagan - Similkameen Stewardship Program

The South Okanagan-Similkameen is home to over 60 federally listed species at risk. That's more species at risk than any where else in British Columbia. Why? In part, this is due to the unique arid grasslands in these valleys.

Grasslands are areas with low precipitation where the prevailing plants are shrubs and grasses. They are a very sensitive, sometimes under-appreciated part of the environment. Though grasslands seem very simple, they actually provide habitat for just as many species as forests do. One percent of BC's area is grassland, but 30 percent of BC species at risk rely on these fragile habitats. Examples include Tiger Salamanders, Behr's Hairstreak butterflies, and the Rubber Boa.



Not many low elevation grasslands remain in the south Okanagan nor Similkameen.

Photo by Chris Bull.

The Okanagan and Similkameen valleys historically provided a wildlife corridor connecting the Interior grasslands and forests of BC with the Columbia Basin in Washington. As agricultural and urban development

Landowner Tips:

What can you do to conserve grasslands?

Just over 30 percent of the land base in the South Okanagan-Similkameen is privately owned. Most of this is at lower elevation, which is also where the drier and rarer grasslands occur. As a private landowner, you can make a big difference to grassland conservation. Responsible land stewardship is a key in preserving our grasslands.

If you have natural grassland areas on your property,

- ☑ Learn more about these biological treasures.
- ☑ Keep vehicles and off-road vehicles on main roads. This helps to reduce erosion, weed spread, and disturbance of wildlife.
- ☑ If you have livestock, monitor the rangeland and ensure that over-grazing does not occur.
- ☑ Use fencing to manage livestock grazing and limit duration of use.
- ☑ Monitor your property and look for opportunities to enhance it, such as planting native species or controlling weeds.
- ☑ Investigate land securement options such as conservation covenants.
- ☑ Speak out on behalf of the grasslands. The intense development pressure in the valley is making the protection of natural areas increasingly important.



Grassland restoration in progress.

TLC's South Okanagan – Similkameen Stewardship Program works with landowners to protect, enhance, and restore natural areas on their properties. If you need any help or advice, or if you feel that your property is a good candidate for a restoration project, please feel free to contact our office. You can also check out: www.conservancy.bc.ca/sostewardship

expanded, many species that were unique to these narrow valleys have entirely disappeared from the region (scientists call this 'extirpated'). Some of these are the Burrowing Owl, the Short-horned Lizard, and the Sharp-tailed Grouse.

Badgers on Your Farm or Ranch?

By Paula Rodriguez de la Vega, TLC's South Okanagan - Similkameen Stewardship Program

If you have badgers on your property, consider yourself lucky! These animals are very rare in British Columbia. Although they were likely widespread in the late 1800's, it is believed that in the Okanagan and Similkameen combined there are fewer than 45 badgers.

Some landowners have expressed concerns about badgers on their properties. We looked into what badger scientists are discovering and found that badgers can be very beneficial.

Badgers are related to wolverines and otters, and are the only carnivore in our province that burrows after and eats other burrowing animals. They are amazingly powerful, capable of digging into the most hardened soil in pursuit of their prey (pocket gophers, marmots, and ground squirrels). I know, you're thinking that burrows aren't good for livestock or farm machinery. But is this really true?

Myth #1: Badger burrows cause injury to livestock (eg. broken legs).

Fact: Damage to livestock caused by badger burrows is rare. Injury relating to burrows made by other burrowing animals (i.e. marmots, ground squirrels, or pocket gophers) is also rare.

Studies conducted in BC, Alberta and Saskatchewan showed that damage caused by badgers to livestock was exceedingly rare (in British Columbia < 1% of respondents claimed damage by badgers). Another study surveyed large animal and mixed practice veterinarians located in areas where

badgers range. Of the 95 veterinarians surveyed, 11 reported treating animals injured in badger burrows within the past 5 years. Only 1 of 27 veterinarians from British Columbia reported encountering an injury due to badger burrows.



There are less than 45 badgers left in the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys. Photo by Richard Klafki.

Myth #2: Badger burrows damage farm machinery.

Fact: Damage to farm machinery caused by badger burrows is rare. However, damage to farm machinery by other burrowing animals (marmot, ground squirrels, or pocket gophers) is more common. Badgers prey upon these rodents, so badgers help landowners with rodent population control.

The same study as above showed that damage caused by badgers to equipment was exceedingly rare in British Columbia (< 1% of

respondents). Research in the Thompson region indicated that 90% of badger burrows occurred at sites with greater than 7% slope and that badgers rarely burrowed into flat ground. Since most machinery is used on flat ground, it is unlikely that operators would encounter badger burrows during normal activities.

Myth #3: The federal Species at Risk Act will take your land away if you have badgers on your property.

Fact: Badgers are listed as endangered on Schedule 1 of the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). Landowners should rest assured that there are no provisions under SARA to expropriate private land.

SARA currently depends on voluntary stewardship by private landowners to protect badgers, their dens, and their habitat. Note that under the BC *Wildlife Act*, it is illegal to harass or kill a badger anywhere in BC.

If you have any badger questions, please check out the Badger Hotline below. If you would like to know how to identify a badger burrow, please call 250-492-0173 to receive a Badger Burrow Identification Card.



**Badger
Hotline**
1 888 223 4376
www.badgers.bc.ca

Primary source:

Weir, R. D., H. Davis, and D. Gayton. 2004. Survey of Badger Burrow Damage to Machinery and Livestock. Artemis Wildlife Consultants & FORREX, Armstrong, British Columbia, Canada.



New Booklets Available



Ponderosa Pine and Wildlife



Pine Beetles in the Okanagan and Similkameen

Call us at 250-492-0173
to get your FREE copy!

Funding for Fencing Available

By Paula Rodriguez de la Vega, TLC's SOS Stewardship Program

Do you need fencing to keep cattle, horses, or other livestock away from a sensitive area (i.e. intact grasslands, wetlands/streams, shrubby areas, aspen stands)? The South Okanagan-Similkameen Stewardship Program has funding available to assist ranchers and other landowners with these kinds of fencing projects. Landowners can apply for up to 50% of the fencing costs, and your 50% of matching funding can include in-kind labour.

Please contact us to find out if your project is eligible. We will be asking for details such as the amount & type of fencing you need, what natural values you are hoping to

protect, how much you can contribute to the cost of supplies or labour, and what other techniques you are using to manage livestock in environmentally sensitive areas on your property.



Fencing to protect creek-side vegetation and water quality.

Time to Retreat to the Bat Cave!

By Aaron Reid, South Okanagan - Similkameen Community Bat Project Coordinator

Fall is here and our local bats are busy putting on their last grams of fat to prepare for winter hibernation or migration. Eleven of our fourteen bat species will hibernate locally within deep rock crevices, caves or old mines, while the other three bats species will migrate to winter ranges or even further to warmer climates where insects are available year round.

Similar to our local bats, the South Okanagan Similkameen Community Bat Project is winding down its summer field season. It has been a busy summer thanks to the many people who contacted the project to report their bat roosts. To date, the project has been contacted over 100 times by local residents to report bats, seek information about bat houses, and inquire about many other bat related questions. The

project has documented 33 colonies and identified 6 species of bats through site visits. As well, over 30 bat houses were built and put up by local landowners at 4 different bat house building workshops.



*Local youth shows off his handy work at a bat house building workshop hosted by the Osoyoos Desert Centre this summer.
Photo by Aaron Reid.*

Just because the bats will soon be hibernating for the winter, it does

not mean that the Community Bat Project will be too. There are lots of things to do. Winter is a good time to build a bat house and get it ready to install next spring. So make sure to visit the web site and download (free) the detailed plans of North America's most successful bat houses. Feel free to call us and find out the best place to install your house to increase your chances of success. If you didn't get around to calling in and reporting the bats in your belfry this year, don't worry. They will be back next year and you can contact us then.

Thank you for your support and interest and feel free to contact the project anytime:

Toll Free: **1 866 678 BATS**
Local: **250 485 4321**
Email: **info@bcbats.ca**
Web Site: **www.bcbats.ca**

A Reminder on Puncturevine

By Lisa Scott, South Okanagan-Similkameen Invasive Plant Society

Puncturevine (*Tribulus terrestris*) is one invader that continues to plague the Okanagan-Similkameen region, and residents are urged to continue to be on the lookout for this noxious weed.

Lisa Scott, Coordinator for the South Okanagan-Similkameen Invasive Plant Society (SOSIPS), has kept busy this summer. The Society receives a grant from the Ministry of Transportation every summer to treat puncturevine along roadsides in rural Oliver and Osoyoos, and the Keremeos-Cawston area. While the treatment program has drawn to a close for the season, Lisa continues to receive reports of puncturevine in new locations.

The number of local residents who now recognize puncturevine and hand pull plants along roadsides and trails has impressed Lisa. For anyone not familiar with the plant, it is an annual that branches from the base and spreads along the ground to form dense mats with tiny, yellow flowers. The stems are covered by hairy leaves that are divided into six to eight leaflets. Its most distinguishing feature is the seedpod, which consists of five sections that break into tack-like structures with stiff, sharp spines that easily puncture bicycle tires. The weed is most commonly found along road shoulders, vacant lots, beaches and unpaved parking sites, with stems reaching up to three metres (ten feet) in length.

Puncturevine is particularly challenging to control due to its ability to germinate throughout the summer months; therefore, one treatment at the beginning of summer is not enough. Landowners must be vigilant, checking puncturevine prone sites approximately every three weeks, starting in June and continuing until September.

New plants should be destroyed to ensure seeds do not form.

At this time of year, most plants are large with spiny mature seedpods. Lisa advises landowners to carefully hand pull or dig up these plants and place them in garbage bags for disposal at the local landfill. As some seedpods will fall to the ground, landowners should make note of the location of any puncturevine infestations, and start monitoring these areas in early June next year.

To find out more information about the puncturevine management program contact Lisa at sosips@shaw.ca or phone 250-404-0115. For more detailed information on puncturevine, pick up an information fact sheet available at the Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen office at 101 Martin Street in Penticton, or go to the Regional District website www.rdos.bc.ca and scroll down to Invasive Plants under the 'services' section, or visit the provincial government's "Weeds BC" site at <http://www.weedsbc.ca/>.



Puncturevine has tiny yellow flowers and spreads along the ground to form dense mats. The seedpod (right) has stiff, sharp spines. Photos by Lisa Scott.

Workshops/Events:

Community Stewardship Events Near You - Marron Valley, Anarchist Mountain. Landowners in those communities will receive a postcard with more information. Be sure to check your mailbox!



Learning about bats at a Community Stewardship Event

Agriculture Environment Partnership Initiative

By Margaret Holm, Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance

The Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance (OSCA) in partnership with the BC Agriculture Council, The Land Conservancy's SOS Stewardship Program, and SOS Bear Smart was busy delivering field seminars and preparing new documents for the agricultural community:

- “**Amphibians and Agriculture**” industry awareness brochure & “**Bears on Your Property**” (in English and Punjabi)

- “**Snakes & Species at Risk**” CD resource guide for agricultural advisors
- **Snake Safety and Awareness** ID brochures and posters are now available in four languages
- Updated **Snake Hazard Assessment** document

To get copies, please contact OSCA at 250-492-4455 or email them at outreach@osca.org.

A Successful Season for the Wildlife Tree Stewards

By Julia Cannings & Lisa Scott, Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program

The Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program for the Okanagan-Similkameen (WiTS-OS) had a productive field season. Previous projects from last year were maintained this season, most notably the monitoring of Lewis's Woodpecker. There were also surveys of Flammulated Owl, Western Screech-Owl and Williamson's Sapsucker conducted this year.

This year, WiTS-OS had ten dedicated volunteers. All were oriented at the beginning of the season with a training workshop and each had their own set of trees to monitor. Over all, WiTS-OS monitored 70 nest trees. The majority of WiTS volunteers monitored Lewis's Woodpecker nests to determine re-occupancy, with this year's results indicating a re-occupancy rate of approximately 30 percent.

Thanks to funding from Service Canada, we hired summer student Julia Cannings. Julia was responsible for education and volunteer coordination. She set up the WiTS-OS display board at the Oliver Sunshine Festival, the Naramata August Fair, and the Penticton Peach Festival, as well as the Penticton Farmers Market. Julia distributed fact sheets and engaged children with wildlife tree activities.

Julia also developed eight wildlife tree activities for grades K-12, which will be delivered through the Eco-Studies Program. In the future, we are also hoping to have some programs accessible to teachers via the internet. The activities range from creating life size tree murals with woody debris, to creating living life webs, where each child plays a role in the forest ecosystem.

WiTS-OS also conducted several different phone surveys this summer. Forest Districts throughout the Southern Interior were targeted with questions pertaining to firewood cutting, while local arborists and municipal parks employees were asked various questions about wildlife tree and danger tree assessments. We collected a large amount of useful information that will help guide WiTS-OS in future years.

The Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program accomplished so much this year thanks to the help of so many participants. WiTS-OS would like to extend a big thank-you to all our volunteers and partners and we hope to see you all next year!



White-breasted Nuthatch. Photo by Terry Spivey USDA.

Stewardship Options 101: Stewardship Agreements

By Lucy Reiss, *The Land Conservancy*



We are excited to announce that Enotecca Winery and Resorts is the latest landowner to sign an agreement recognizing their intention to protect the creek and riparian area on their Osoyoos property (LaStella). Clean up and planting of the riparian area started this spring!

'Stewardship Options 101' is a series featured in *Stewardship News* to provide you with information about the many options available to landowners in BC to conserve natural areas on their property. This issue's topic is stewardship agreements.

As with all conservation options, stewardship agreements are entered into voluntarily. They are a written, non-binding agreement between a landowner and a conservation organization such as *TLC The Land Conservancy*.

Stewardship agreements are not as long-term as conservation covenants (which are intended to last in perpetuity), and because they are not a legal document, they are much simpler to enter into. They are usually two to four pages long, and lay out the details of your property, how you agree to steward it, and what the SOS Stewardship Program can offer in return. They often have a five year term, but can be renewed or cancelled at any time.

If you are interested in having your commitment to taking care of your land recognized, but are not quite ready for a more formal arrangement, a stewardship agreement might be right for you. For more information, please contact the TLC office at (250) 492-0173.

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If you would like to receive our newsletter by email, please email: prvega@conservancy.bc.ca