



Background:

The Forbes Wetland Trial Enhancement Project started 10 years ago with the building of the trail, and the enhancement of the wetland which sits on private land and the Town of Oliver land. After 8 years, the wetland needed a little help again.

In fall 2009, an event was held to enhance the area: 25 residents joined to plant 130 native shrubs, grasses, and perennial flowers along the wetland and the drier upland section. They also cleaned and weeded, and took in presentations on the Great Basin Spadefoot, Western Painted Turtle, and gardening with native drought-tolerant plants.

This spring, there will be an installation of a bench and interpretive signs, as well as a Spring Clean up and an educational Frog Watch and Turtle Watch Program.

This project is made possible thanks to funding from the Habitat Stewardship Program, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, and the Town of Oliver, as well as contributions from the Forbes Family Farm, the Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance, and The Land Conservancy's South Okanagan- Similkameen Stewardship Program.

The Okanagan River was dyked and straightened over 50 years ago, dramatically reducing the spawning reaches for Columbia River sockeye and Chinook salmon. Associated wetlands that extended along the floodplain were impacted by this process as well as by in-filling of wetlands by agriculture and urban development. Research shows that since 1800, over 90% of wetlands in the South Okanagan have been destroyed. Scientists now know of the negative impacts to plants and wildlife, as well as to water quality. Efforts to conserve and restore the remaining wetlands are on-going to the long-term well being of our environment and community.

Wetlands are an essential ecological feature in any landscape. They are primary habitat for hundreds of species of waterfowl as well as many other birds, fish, mammals, amphibians and insects. Wetlands naturally filter and recharge the water that later comes out of our faucets downstream. They act like giant sponges, slowing the flow of surface water and reducing the impact of flooding. Thus, wetlands provide valuable functions, values and benefits to both people and wildlife.

In semi-arid areas like the South Okanagan and Lower Similkameen, riparian areas are important for maintaining plant and animal diversity for the whole region. Studies have shown that 80 percent of wildlife are either directly dependent on riparian ecosystems or use them more frequently than other habitats. Extensive, healthy riparian systems are

critical for wildlife, and habitat restoration and protection are high priorities for wildlife management.

Forbes Family Farm brothers Gord and Steve Forbes said that, “Painted turtles used to be quite abundant in this area about 30 years ago when there were more wetlands around. The turtles used to hibernate in the sand banks closer to the river. The landscape has been dramatically modified though, and we haven’t seen any for some time now.”

The Western Painted Turtle and the Great Basin Spadefoot are both Species at Risk that require both wetland habitats and upland drier habitats to survive. The Great Basin Spadefoot is a desert-adapted, threatened amphibian that breeds in the wetlands. They are voracious predators eating lots of aquatic insects, including mosquito larvae. As adults, spadefoots spend most of their time in drier upland areas, often buried in sandy soils to avoid the heat of summer and the cold winters.

TLC:

TLC The Land Conservancy of BC is a registered charity and land trust protecting natural areas, historic sites, farms and ranches, and places of recreational importance. Since 1997, *TLC* has protected over 125,000 acres of sensitive and threatened lands around the province, involving more than 300 projects. With offices in Victoria, Burnaby, Penticton, Kimberley and Prince George, *TLC* has grown to include over 7,000 members, and is now part of an international network of National Trusts with over 7.5 million members. www.conservancy.bc.ca.

The goal of *TLC*'s SOS Stewardship Program is to assist landowners with restoration of natural habitats.

OSCA:

The Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance (OSCA) is non-profit organization with charitable status dedicated to promoting environmental conservation values. Established in 1998, OSCA is a locally based, grass roots organization. The objectives of OSCA are achieved through the development of communities programs and strategies to conserve the Okanagan-Similkameen ecosystem for the benefit of all.

Accomplishments of OSCA include the delivery of several major programs such as the annual Meadowlark Festival, ECOStudies environmental youth programs, Eco-Management Workshops and the Spotlight on Species Program. OSCA also delivers other ongoing community outreach presentations and workshops relating to the conservation of biodiversity. OSCA is also the lead of the outreach team for the South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program. www.osca.org

In partnership:



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Town of Oliver, Forbes Family Farm