

# Citizen science in action, protecting B.C. habitat

**KIM STEPHENS, RICHARD BOASE  
AND ERIC BONHAM**

Throughout B.C., an amazing network of volunteer groups is working to protect, restore and enhance local streams. This movement has its roots in the partnership-based Urban Salmon Habitat Program of the 1990s.

Under the program's umbrella, provincial staff fulfilled a coordinating role with local government, keeping elected officials informed on the activities of stewards within their community. The approach greatly enthused citizens and elected officials alike to commit to the program, resulting in the regeneration of salmon habitat through innovative restorative projects.

Today, the scope of involvement and influence of stream stewards is expanding beyond the creek channel. What happens on the land matters to streams. Hence, stewardship groups are champions for community-scale responsibility. Given staffing

and funding constraints, creative partnerships with stewardship groups are truly a win-win for local governments — especially when stewardship groups can access funding sources that local governments cannot.

Teamwork for the common good is a powerful and often transformative experience, particularly when a longer-term vision for a local creek-shed engages multiple interests, disciplines and local government. Collaboration taps into the passion and ingenuity of volunteers who are driven by commitment.

On Vancouver Island, for example, beacons of hope are the Bowker Creek and Brooklyn Creek restoration initiatives.

Provincially significant precedents, each has a long history in demonstrating how local government partnerships with stewardship groups can improve where we live. These precedents represent a range of situations: Bowker in the urban heart of the Capital Region; Brooklyn

in the suburban Comox Valley.

In Metro Vancouver, groups such as the North Shore Streamkeepers are making a difference. The streamkeepers' collaboration with the District of North Vancouver underpins a water-quality monitoring program. The district purchased state-of-the-art equipment and trained 10 volunteers who conduct sampling close to their neighbourhood.

Stewardship groups provide excellent training and field educational opportunities for young people, the next generation of leaders, particularly so when supported by local government. Streamkeepers volunteers include a new wave of young professionals. They are choosing to become active community leaders by getting involved in something they are passionate about.

On Vancouver Island, another example of collaboration is a provincial government program to train community stewards to undertake streamflow data collection in small streams. Stewardship groups have

local knowledge about local water resources; and are the most invested and most connected to the land base. Involving them in streamflow measurement fills a gap at the local scale where flow data are sparse to non-existent.

"My hope in leading this program is to leverage interested parties to collect the data they are interested in, or that may have value to them now and in the future, to allow better resource decision-making," says Neil Goeller, the provincial government's regional hydrologist for the West Coast Region. He is hands-on in training community volunteers.

"With this training, combined with education about cause-and-effect, we can speak with authority when we state that what happens on the land matters to streams. We will be that much more effective when partnering with local governments in decision processes that revolve around the land-water relationship," says Peter Law, president of the Mid Vancouver Island Habitat Enhance-

ment Society. The foregoing Vancouver Island examples of "citizen science in action" will be featured in the upcoming Second Annual Vancouver Island Symposium on Water Stewardship in a Changing Climate, in Parksville in April.

Initiated by the federal government, the Wild Salmon Policy 2018-2022 Implementation Plan highlights the demand for integration of resources, disciplines, different levels of government and the stewardship sector to collectively focus on the role of restorative land development.

The call, then, is for the implementation of a new land ethic such that "restorative land development results in sustainable stream stabilization." Local government collaboration with the stewardship sector is an essential factor to bring this vision to fruition.

Kim Stephens, Richard Boase and Eric Bonham are all involved with the Partnership for Water Sustainability in British Columbia.

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