

SCCA Newsletter: Summer 2016  
*Editorial - Water Woes at Chapman Lake*  
By Linda Williams



It's been over two decades since the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD), the Tetrahedron Alliance and many other community groups sat at the Ministry of Forests Tetrahedron Local Resource Use Plan table united against any further industrial activity in the headwaters of our community's drinking watershed reserves. Working together the community eventually achieved Park Act protection for Tetrahedron Park.

According to the Parks Master Plan, Tetrahedron Provincial Park was established with three priorities. First, and most importantly, to provide representation in the BC Parks system for the ecology of coastal high elevation ancient forests. Tetrahedron forests are among the oldest in Canada. Secondly, to protect the ecological (including hydrological) integrity of the largest source area of public water supply within the SCR District. Thirdly, to provide non-motorized, low impact back country recreation in a wilderness setting.

The first priority of the park is to protect an ecologically viable, intact ancient forest of a type that has very little other representation in the world. For this reason the park has Class A status, the highest level of land protection available in BC. The park designation also achieved protection of the water source for 90% of water consumers in the SCR District.

The Tetrahedron Park Master Plan contains measures to ensure that the priorities for which the park was established prevail over time. Primary among the measures are requirements for comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and public consultation whenever new activities are proposed.

The EIA is fundamental to protecting park values and finding a balanced way to accommodate community water supply needs. For the past two decades the SCCA has worked closely with the SCR District on water issues, but our mandate is to protect ecologically significant lands and waters. The SCR District agreed to the provisions of the Tetrahedron Park Management Plan. The issue is about water supply and park protection.

The Tetrahedron Park Master Plan outlines how to achieve the right balance for the park and water source protection.

Recreation is not allowed to compromise the environmental values of the park or the ecology of the water source areas. Period. Likewise, the current SCR District water supply "panic" should not be allowed to compromise the environmental integrity of the water source areas. This is in everyone's best interests, right now and in the future.

Why has the SCR District waited 20 years to resolve supply issues while water shortages compromise our rural lifestyles? Blaming environmentalists is convenient but absurd, evidence of a lack of common sense. Currently, the treatment plant is running at capacity and there is not enough water during the summer for residents who have paid for the system to reliably carry on activities that are part of the fabric of life on the Sunshine Coast. This includes the growing of food, as if that is a luxury.

Since the Tetrahedron's designation, no new community water supply sources have been developed. Instead the recommended course of action is to more than double the drawdown from 3 to 8 meters on Chapman Lake. This proposal, always rejected by past SCR District Boards, recently gained support due to last year's so-called water supply "emergency".

The proposal for “emergency drawdown” infrastructure as a permanent feature in Tetrahedron Park is neither sustainable, nor a solution. This appears to be poor planning masquerading as an emergency.

The SCRD doesn’t have approved amendments to their Park Use Permit to undertake the proposed works and has been notified that a new EIA is required. The drawdown project would ultimately entail \$7,400,000 from water subscribers. We say that the money is better spent on diversifying our water sources. Why is the SCRD seeking authority to borrow money before completing an Impact Assessment and doing the required public consultation?

There’s no need for panic. There’s a short-term solution. An emergency syphon system purchased by the SCRD in 2015 is permitted in Tetrahedron Provincial Park. It can be deployed with far less impact and at much less cost when and if another emergency like last year’s occurs again. The cost of the pump was \$154,398.

The syphon system eliminates the need for blasting, tree removal, a work camp, use of heavy machinery, trench material removal and spoilage area in the heart of the park. Most importantly, it would also ensure that the drawdown of Chapman Lake would occur in real emergencies only and not to compensate for the ongoing over-allocation of available water. Environmental reality is that we need new water, not water that comes at great expense from the most precious park in our region.