



The Struggle over Gospel Rock: Perspective on an Ongoing Saga

by Katie Janyk

As you are no doubt aware, the Gospel Rock neighbourhood plan has been in the works for several years now. First, a factual history of the process...

This area in Gibsons has been the subject of controversy for more than 20 years. The latest attempt at a plan for these privately owned lands came as a result of the 2005 Town of Gibsons official community plan (OCP), which designates the land as a "neighbourhood plan area." This designation froze all development permitting within the area until a neighbourhood plan is in place. So, regardless of current zoning for any of the 11 properties involved,

continued on page 3

Friends of Davie Bay Seeking Full Environmental Assessment

by Margot Grant

"We're fairly optimistic," said John Dove of Texada Island's Friends of Davie Bay, after the group presented a petition to the BC Supreme Court in Vancouver on February 1. "The judge seemed very understanding of our position." The Friends of Davie Bay (FODB) have asked the court to withdraw any licences, leases, permits or other types of authorizations provided to LeHigh Hanson Materials Ltd for a giant new quarry on Texada Island. They want an environmental assessment first.

The case is important because, if Justice Peter Voith grants the request, it will create a precedent. The provincial government would have to change the way it issues mining permits. More environmental assessments would have to be carried out.

The FODB seek a court order declaring that an environmental assessment is required when the infrastructure, equipment and operational plan of a proposed project indicates that the mine will have the ability to produce more than 250,000 tonnes a year. So far, projects with a proposed output of less than that have been exempt from assessments.

At issue is the term "production capacity." In the case of Davie Bay, LeHigh wants to build a limestone quarry on 31 hectares with a mining reserve of 100 million metric tonnes and a loading ramp capable of processing 2,500 tonnes per hour. The mine would only need to operate eight hours a month to produce 240,000 tonnes a year. Clearly, the FODB argue, the quarry is set up for a much bigger operation.

In their petition, they stated that "production

continued on page 4



The western long-toed salamander is one of eight amphibians found regularly on the Sunshine Coast. At least two are at risk. Rick O'Neill photo

Get Ready to Experience the Sunshine Coast's Great Spring Migration

by Rick O'Neill

Everyone is familiar with the migration of birds in the spring and fall. Some people are also familiar with the migration of the caribou herds, which at one time roamed across two-thirds of the province east of the Coast Mountains but are now seriously reduced in size, especially in the southeast part of BC.

Not many people seem to know that we have local migrations here on the

continued on page 2

Inside This Issue

Wilson Creek watershed update 4
All about carbon offsets 5
Progress made at Jefferd Creek 6
Joint watershed management 7
Bute Inlet IPPs dead in water 8
Executive director's report 9
Powell River roundup 10
Messages from the chair 11
Alexandra Morton on May 24 12
Here's how to join the SCCA 12

continued from page 1

Amphibians of the Sunshine Coast

Sunshine Coast. Our migrants are the amphibians. The distances covered are not as spectacular as the flights of some bird species, and the creatures involved are far smaller than the caribou. However, they are still important in the ecological web of life. Many amphibians migrate from the forest to ponds in the spring and return to the forest in late summer or fall. No one knows how many individual animals live here, as they are difficult to count, but the Sunshine Coast still has a reasonably healthy population of amphibians. This may not last, though, if we continue to destroy their habitat through development and reckless resource exploitation.

Amphibians are frogs, toads and salamanders. Three species of frog—the Pacific treefrog, red-legged frog and tailed frog—can be found in our area, as can five species of salamander. The western redback and ensatina are terrestrial salamanders, laying their eggs on land, under logs or roots, while long-toed and northwestern salamanders and roughskin newts are aquatic, laying eggs in water. The western or boreal toad has become very rare on the lower



Northern Pacific treefrog.

Rick O'Neill photo



The northern red-legged frog is considered "at risk." Rick O'Neill photo

Sunshine Coast and may be extirpated. The conservation status for all species is listed below. It's important to realize that even species listed as "not at risk" are still experiencing widespread habitat loss and fragmentation, particularly from industrial logging.

Amphibians need forests with damp areas and ponds that are free of herbicides and pesticides. They are very susceptible to toxins in the water and the air, which makes them one of nature's best indicators of ecosystem health. Declines in amphibian populations are often signs of larger environmental problems. It is time humans everywhere began to realize that the forests and streams in our natural world are not simply resources to be exploited and destroyed for short-term economic gain. They are the life-support systems of the earth.

If you are interested in learning more about our native amphibian species, there are excellent books and websites available. One of the best books is *Amphibians of Oregon, Washington and British Columbia*, by Charlotte Corkran and Chris Thoms, published by Lone Pine. A pamphlet showing local species is available from the SCCA and can also be found on the internet at www.rainfrog.ca.

- | |
|---|
| <p>Northern Pacific treefrog (<i>Pseudacris regilla</i>) Status: not at risk</p> <p>Coastal tailed frog (<i>Ascaphus truei</i>) Status: special concern (in BC)</p> <p>Northern red-legged frog (<i>Rana aurora</i>) Status: special concern (in BC)</p> <p>Western or boreal toad (<i>Anaxyrus boreas boreas</i>) Status: special concern (in Canada)</p> <p>Western redback salamander (<i>Plethodon vehiculum</i>) Status: not at risk</p> <p>Oregon ensatina (<i>Ensatina eschscholtzii oregonensis</i>) Status: not at risk</p> <p>Northwestern salamander (<i>Ambystoma gracile</i>) Status: not at risk</p> <p>Roughskin newt (<i>Taricha granulosa</i>) Status: not at risk</p> <p>Western long-toed salamander (<i>Ambystoma macrodactylum</i>) Status: not at risk</p> |
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continued from page 1

Ongoing Saga of Gospel Rock

no development permit applications (ie, no building) will be entertained by Gibsons until the plan is finalized.

About five years ago, the owners of Block 7, which includes the uplands known as Little Africa, the downhill slopes and all the presently undeveloped waterfront, applied to develop their property. This triggered the present neighbourhood planning process. Gibsons council appointed a select committee of property owners and other residents to devise a plan and bring recommendations to council. The town hired consultants (which the property owners paid for) to lead the planning process. After innumerable meetings and much public consultation (including a public poll), there were still two options on the table. The options were essentially alike. However, one (Plan A) showed waterfront development on the two pieces of land at either end of the property. Plan B included less greenspace on the uplands than Plan A, but showed no waterfront development. Both options attempted, with varying degrees of success, to address issues involving scenic viewpoints, wildlife corridors and the conservation of ecologically valuable dryland forested hillsides. And, of course, as greenspace percentages increased, population density rose. It should also be noted that the 2005 OCP designated the entire Gospel Rock waterfront and the dry upland slopes as undeveloped.

The poll of residents indicated a 60 percent preference for Plan B, the “no waterfront development” option. The select committee, although divided—and unhappy about the trade-off of upland greenspace for waterfront—recommended that Plan B be placed before council for further refinement, conditional on addressing numerous environmental and social concerns.

Thus the Gospel Rock refinement working committee was born, comprising Gibsons Mayor Barry Janyk, two Gibsons councillors, development and planning consultant Art Philips (representing several of the landowners) and planning consultant Michael Rosen (advising the town). Town planning and infrastructure staff were also at the table. All committee proceedings were open to the public. Select committee members were interviewed, and written and verbal public comments were routinely received by the refinement committee. Recently, the refinement committee presented its recommended Gospel Rock neighbourhood plan to a Gibsons “committee of the whole” meeting, requesting that the plan go before council for the next step in the approval process.

Council, should it approve the proposed neighbourhood plan for advancement, will then enter into a public hearing process, during which the proposed plan will be put before the public, perhaps in an open house format, and any and all comments will be received by council to guide it in its decision to approve, or not approve, the proposed plan.

So, what is all the wrangling about?

Well, the proposed plan presently before council looks very different from the Plan B that the select committee recommended “for further refinement.” Building density has greatly increased—possibly to as many as 800 units. Wildlife corridors have been narrowed and moved. Although the bulk of the rare dryland forested hillsides have been preserved, there are now allowances for considerable disturbance within some portions. Potential short-term access to those lands has been proposed from the top of Bayview Heights Road. And, most significantly, the waterfront

lands at either end of the property (which the select committee and the public had recommended be preserved in their natural state) are now showing as potential development sites. While there are several differences between the original Plan B and the refinement committee’s proposed plan, it seems that public sentiment is focused on the “waterfront/no waterfront” issue.

The Friends of Gospel Rock, aided by SCCA executive director Daniel Bouman, has taken the position that the proposed neighbourhood plan varies so significantly in many instances from the OCP that to even consider adopting it is impossible until the OCP is revised—a huge and lengthy undertaking that would eventually



Gospel Rock, at the heart of the controversy. Tella Sametz photo

require official public hearings. The legal implications of this position are presently being examined.

For its part, the refinement committee feels that, after much struggle, it has arrived at the best possible compromise between landowner rights, environmental and the public good. In addition to the proposed plan, the committee’s final report included a number of policy recommendations that committee members feel will ensure that the plan incorporates community values.

One very significant recommendation in the proposed plan is that, notwithstanding the fact that the waterfront lands remain marked as potentially developable properties, there be a freeze on waterfront development until the end of March 2012, to allow the public or some other entity to purchase these lands from the owner for a park. Mayor Janyk has said that Gibsons is not able to take the lead on this. There are, however, funds in the town’s park acquisition budget that we hope might be available to assist in such a purchase, if enough monies were committed from other sources. Indeed, fundraising efforts have already started—with an event at Celebration House on March 12.

The political ramifications of the Gospel Rock issue are obvious, especially in an election year. No one group of citizens will be 100 percent happy with *any* plan for these lands. One thing is certain: many dedicated folks, elected and not, have poured thousands of hours and endless energy into the Gospel Rock neighbourhood plan process—mostly for no remuneration. And they are to be commended for their efforts.

See the SCCA website (www.thesc.ca) for more information—or contact the Friends of Gospel Rock Society.

continued from page 1

Friends of Davie Bay

capacity” should be taken to mean the amount the quarry is capable of producing, not what the company says it will voluntarily limit its output to. “The capacity of a gas tank is the volume of gasoline that the tank can contain at a single time, not the amount of gas actually in the tank,” the petition said.

The FODB argued in court that once a quarry and its infrastructure are built, a company can apply for a permit allowing for production of more than 250,000 tonnes per year



The FODB and SCCA directors on the island (which hosts an endangered plant community) where LeHigh proposes to locate its barge-loading facility. Tella Sametz photo

without any legal requirement for an environmental assessment.

“It was clear the judge understood this,” said John Dove. “He opined that there appeared to be a ‘perverse incentive to overbuild’ a project. His statements echoed what we said in our petition.”

According to the FODB, Justice Voith said he “was bothered

by” LeHigh’s statement that “the potential capacity of an individual piece of equipment is not determinative of overall capacity; the regulations would capture almost every mining project in the province if that was the case.”

At the same time, says John Dove, the Powell River Regional District (PRRD) has helped the FODB more than was anticipated. “To our surprise they passed a motion saying that, if LeHigh would produce more than 240,000 tonnes, the district would ask the Integrated Land Management Branch to stop the project.” Any leases and activities on Crown land have to be approved by the ILMB. The ILMB makes its own decisions.

Davie Bay and the land around it are an important and ecologically fragile area. The cave and karst system near the proposed quarry have been identified as the most extensive and well decorated of all the known karst caves along the BC mainland coast. Large parts of it have never been properly explored. The FODB fear that blasting would damage the caves and disrupt the delicate water system.

This summer, the PRRD recognized that the acquisition of Stromberg Falls near the proposed quarry was a priority. The falls are part of the unique karst topography. The district also designated the Davie Bay foreshore as a “secondary park and greenspace priority.”

The district has concerns about the loss of public access to the Davie Bay foreshore and the island if the quarry is built. The conveyor that would transport the aggregate to the loading facility would make such access difficult. Both the district and the FODB are also concerned about access to a provincially designated UREP (Use, Recreation and Enjoyment of the Public) site at the north end of the bay.

More information will be made available at daviebay.com.

Wilson Creek Watershed Update

by Daniel Bouman

The SCCA has learned that Sechelt Community Projects Incorporated (SCPI)—the District of Sechelt’s logging company, sometimes known as the “community forest”—is attempting to proceed with logging in the Wilson Creek watershed, possibly as early as this spring.

Our association has written a letter to SCPI requesting that it undertake a thorough “coastal watershed assessment procedure” or CWAP before starting any logging in the Wilson watershed. This watershed has highly significant fisheries values, including coho salmon and cutthroat trout runs. The results of a CWAP would moderate the timing and pace of logging so that these values would not be threatened.

The Ministry of Forests ordered International Forest Products (Interfor) to halt logging in the Wilson watershed in 2001 because extensive recent harvesting was threatening hydrological

stability. A CWAP was never carried out, and Interfor gave up its chart area to SCPI in 2006.

Conditions in the watershed are worse now than they were in 2001; large-scale logging on private land took place in 2007, which increased hydrological instability. Unfortunately, deregulation of the forest industry under the new *Forest and Range Practices Act* has eliminated requirements to maintain hydrological stability in fish-bearing watersheds unless these are designated as “fisheries sensitive watersheds.” Government, however, has not acted to designate any “fisheries sensitive watersheds” in BC. This is the loophole that is now being exploited in order to log in the Wilson watershed. The lack of FSW designation is putting fish at risk all over BC.

Our members feel strongly that it is time for SCPI to start delivering on the promise of stewardship that they have spent so much money promoting. Our letter to SCPI is available on the SCCA website (www.thescca.ca), as is a companion piece entitled “Logging, Deregulation and Hydrological Assessment in the Wilson Watershed.”

Want to Buy a Carbon Credit? Here's What You Need to Know

by Gayle Neilson

I've had to fly to Ontario on family visits recently. Since flying produces such heavy CO₂ emissions, I decided to purchase carbon offsets from the airline, which was Air Canada. The offsets were surprisingly inexpensive and the company made it easy to do. There was that warm and fuzzy feeling about "doing my bit," but then I started wondering about the types of offsets I was purchasing—especially since I intend to do it from now on, for any flight I feel I have to make.

I turned to a handy guide put out by the David Suzuki Foundation, along with the Pembina Institute. Who knew that something I thought might be pretty simple actually required a 78-page instruction manual? It turns out that there are no regulations covering the quality of offsets. There are several recognized standards, however, by which you can measure what's on offer.

The basic goal, of course, is to reduce one's carbon footprint, and we all know there are many ways to do this. It's particularly critical for Canadians, since our emissions per capita are among the highest in the world—weighing in at 22.7 tonnes per Canadian per year, according to the Suzuki/Pembina report. There's a record to take no pride in.

With the growing cost of fuel, a number of us are achieving savings by driving less and investing in fuel-efficient vehicles. But, clearly, there are many other things we can do as individuals to reduce our footprint. Even walking or riding a bike once a week makes a difference, as do such actions as turning down the thermostat. Because of the CO₂ cost of transporting goods, buying local and eating food in season saves on the footprint too. Perhaps even more important is helping one's workplace reduce its CO₂ footprint.

I subscribe to the ethic of "reducing, re-using and recycling," and I use my car as little as possible by combining trips and taking my bicycle. But if I find that my conscience is still bothering me, which companies should I turn to for purchasing carbon offsets?

Well, the Suzuki/Pembina report says that the most effective carbon offsets are projects investing in renewable energy, especially ones created through the existence of the carbon market and not merely the result of "business as usual" (a concept known as "additionality"). Planting trees is less effective; trees do sequester carbon, but they may be cut down or burned eventually, thus returning the CO₂ to the environment. Other offset projects include retrofitting office buildings and capturing methane from landfills.

The carbon offset market includes "compliant" and "volun-

tary" components. I guess I was part of the voluntary market by purchasing offsets for my flights. The compliance market is much bigger and includes government-regulated programs, such as the European Union Emission Trading system. In the voluntary carbon market, businesses are the biggest purchasers of offsets. Here are some: Google, TD Bank, NewsCorp, Vancity and the Vatican! Maybe we should make sure we support businesses that do this (though I'm not necessarily recommending that you become Catholic).



The Suzuki/Pembina report says that the criticism levelled at those who buy carbon offsets to assuage their consciences (as I did, I suppose) is just not accurate, so that made me feel better. Here's the quote: "Offsetting can be seen as a voluntary application of the 'polluter pays' principle, whereby those who produced the pollution take responsibility for cleaning it up." (Oil companies wreaking environmental havoc of epic proportions in the tar sands take note.)

The report goes on to say that offsets are not a silver bullet, but that the need for action is so urgent that they are one of many things we must do. So here's the bottom line: there are 14 main companies offering carbon offsets in Canada and many others globally. The top-rated Canadian outfits from Suzuki/Pembina's point of view are Less (renewable energy projects; less.ca), Planetair (renewable energy,

energy efficiency and methane capture; planetair.ca), CarbonZero (energy efficiency and renewable energy; carbonzero.ca) and LivClean (renewable energy, fuel switching and methane capture; livclean.ca).

And in case you're wondering, the company I paid my offset dollars to was not very highly rated. But check it out yourself at the following link: davidssuzuki.org/publications/resources/2009/purchasing-carbon-offsets. There is a surprising amount to know about this subject.

Call for Volunteers and Feedback

Are you interested in becoming a director on the SCCA board? We meet once a month and take on various responsibilities to keep the ball rolling. Contact our board chair, Jason Herz (chair@thescca.ca), if you would like to contribute your skills toward the preservation of biodiversity on the Sunshine Coast.

Not ready for a full-on director's position? Perhaps you could use your talents to assist with one of the committees. Sheenah Main (events@thescca.ca) is our events co-ordinator and Gayle Neilson (membership@thescca.ca) is the membership co-ordinator. Either one would be glad to have you help out.

How are you enjoying our newsletter? It goes out at least twice a year and is available on the SCCA website. Your input is requested! If you have questions, comments or suggestions for articles, please contact Tella Sametz at directors@thescca.ca.

Jefferd Creek: Delivering a Well-Documented Watershed Message

by Rita Rasmussen

Editor's note: *Jefferd Creek, just north of Saltery Bay, is the only water source for the small community of Stillwater. The Jefferd watershed is one of the province's original Section 12 Land Act watershed reserves. It is highly sensitive to disturbance and was severely damaged by past logging. The Stillwater community has worked diligently over many years to protect its drinking water.*

In September 2009, BC Timber Sales (BCTS) gave the Stillwater Improvement District (SID) and the Committee for Protection of Jefferd Creek two weeks' notice of road construction in the

the drinking water officer for the region, initiate a Section 29 investigation under the *Drinking Water Protection Act*. Glover was also requested to enact a Section 25 hazard abatement order, as the issues associated with the proposed road-building activity in the watershed were time-sensitive. When Glover informed BCTS that he would proceed with the investigation, BCTS voluntarily postponed scheduled road building until at least the spring of 2010.

The drinking water officer completed his investigation in April 2010. His conclusions indicated that "there already exists the potential for intermittent degradation of water quality now and in the future" in the Jefferd Creek water supply. He further stated that he could not support compounding the existing risk, and that the BCTS proposal would place additional stress on the source water. As a result of this report, BCTS has not, to date,



Jefferd Creek watershed. The committee and the SID responded immediately and requested, again, that BCTS not start road building. Road building and logging in the watershed has been an ongoing issue since 2004.

The committee contacted the office of Ida Chong, minister of healthy living and sports, and Barry Boettiger, the provincial water officer, to request that legislation under the *Drinking Water Protection Act* be activated. Water users sent letters and emails. MLA Nicholas Simons reiterated his earlier support for the committee and the SID, and the Sunshine Coast Conservation Association lent support as well. The *Powell River Peak* also provided good coverage of the issues.

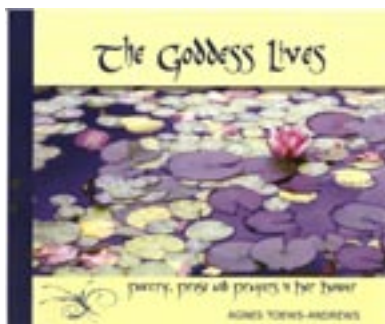
The committee and the SID requested that Dan Glover,

Above: the watershed boundary of Jefferd Creek on the upper Sunshine Coast.
David Moore photo

proceeded with logging in the watershed.

Of course, there are many factors still to be considered. West Coast Environmental Law has provided additional funding to allow our lawyer, Rebeka Breder of Boughton Law Corporation, to continue monitoring the situation.

Jefferd Creek water users have successfully delivered a well-documented message to BCTS: they do not want any more logging or road building in their watershed. Committee members remain vigilant and are dedicated to protecting the Jefferd Creek watershed and the community's drinking water.



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Joint Watershed Management Vision Reaffirmed by SCRD, SIB

by Jason Herz

The Joint Watershed Management Agreement between the Sechelt Indian Band and the Sunshine Coast Regional District jointly asserts management authority over the Chapman Creek and Gray Creek watershed reserves for the purpose of protecting community drinking-water resources. The original agreement was signed on October 1, 2005, after four years of consideration and consultation. On January 6, 2011, the agreement was renewed for a second five-year period.

The agreement is the result of the two parties' shared vision and follows more than 30 years of conflict over the Sunshine Coast's main drinking-water supply — much of it arising from disastrous logging and road-building practices that occurred under the stewardship of BC's ministry of forests.

According to SCRD chair Gary Nohr, "the renewal of the watershed agreement sends a message to the provincial government that the SIB and the SCRD will continue to collectively work toward gaining the authority to manage the source of our water supply."

The document bears the signatures of the chief and three council members from the SIB and all SCRD board members (including those from Gibsons and Sechelt).

In this document, the parties agree to pursue, assume and

exercise management authority over all activities in the Chapman and Gray watershed reserves. The agreement is not about asking the province for permission to manage (though provincial legislation codifying this and other similar agreements will be sought). Rather, the implication is that sufficient social, administrative and legal precedent already exists to justify the right of the parties to assume management authority.

The SCCA strongly supports the Joint Watershed Manage-



Joint Watershed Management Agreement signatories pose for a celebratory photograph at the SCRD offices. Jason Herz photo

ment Agreement and is grateful for the many efforts over many years to make this agreement a reality.

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Major Developments for IPP Projects on Bute and Toba inlets

by Lannie Keller

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency has announced that the Bute Hydro Project Review Panel has been disbanded. This clearly indicates that the project as originally proposed is dead. You may recall that, when Plutonic Power put the Bute project temporarily on hold, we had concerns about the possible loss of the high-level federal environmental review that our collective public efforts had helped achieve. Recently, West Coast Environmental Law assisted Friends of Bute Inlet (FOBI) in advocating for the Bute review panel to be maintained. We



Homathko River entering Waddington Harbour at the head of Bute. Damien Gillis photo

have just learned that while the new environment minister, Peter Kent, has disbanded the panel, he still promises that when (or if) the project proceeds, a new panel will be appointed to conduct the same review. We are pleased with this commitment (full document at www.buteinlet.net).

In another bit of news, Plutonic Power and Magma Energy announced a sale/merger proposal on March 7, 2011. Magma Energy is a Vancouver company with international interests and “renewable” projects in the US, Iceland, Peru, Argentina and Chile. The merger is designed to create a more powerful entity with greater access to development capital. After the merger, Plutonic and Magma will be known as Alterra (more info at www.buteinlet.net).

BC rivers will receive special attention when the Outdoor Recreation Council issues its 2011 Endangered Rivers List. Bute Inlet’s 17 rivers were FOBI’s top nomination. Although the Bute Independent Power Project (IPP) is completely mothballed, Plutonic still asserts its intention to proceed. FOBI made a second endangered river nomination at Toba Inlet, where the Upper Toba River and Jimmie Creek are threatened by the Upper Toba Project (a Plutonic/GE Energy IPP). These rivers are above Plutonic/GE river diversions at East Toba and Montrose Creek, which commenced operations in 2010.

There is a critical lack of information about the East Toba and Montrose IPP developments, due to remoteness and the minimal

or infrequent reporting requirements, but we do know that, during construction, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (FOC) took issue with some significant-impact incidents, and that there are ongoing environmental concerns and technological challenges. Reliable sources tell us that both the East Toba and Montrose plants have been non-operational for several months because of winter freeze-up. Furthermore, the runner blade at the Montrose turbine is already badly damaged by glacial silt and needs to be replaced. Possible and likely future problems include impacts to fish and habitat from release of glacial silt buildup at the weirs. Other cumulative impacts are unknown!

FOBI is adding the Upper Toba River and Jimmie Creek to our own “critically endangered” list because Plutonic and GE are poised to commence development there. They have obtained a BC environmental certificate and also a BC Hydro energy purchase offer. High development costs had put this project on hold, but the sale/merger of Plutonic and Magma Energy can produce the required development capital. And completion of the Upper Toba project will make the adjacent Bute Inlet development more viable.

Upper Toba River and Jimmie Creek are significant habitat for spawning coho. In project guidelines, the FOC set “instream flow requirements” that Plutonic strongly contested as “too high” and said those IFRs made the project “uneconomical.” Two unusual events followed: FOC refused to negotiate the instream flows, and Plutonic agreed to the “uneconomical” flow requirements. This raises some questions. Is the project economically viable with the current flow requirements? Could financial pressures later lead to instream flow levels being lowered below the recommended standards? FOBI asserts that the East Toba and Montrose projects should prove their environmental claims (and economic benefits) over a period of at least a decade before



Looking south down Bute Inlet. Damien Gillis photo

additional developments are allowed in the Toba valley.

Many thanks to all of you who wrote concerning BC’s Water Act Modernization. We’ll share any news we receive. Please remember that our website at www.buteinlet.net is up-to-date, highly informative, interesting—and sometimes fun!

Cheers, from the FOBI ground crew (buteinlet@gmail.com).

Talking About Old Growth: The Executive Director's Report

by Daniel Bouman

As most folks will know, old growth issues everywhere in BC are highly controversial and hotly contested on both scientific and emotional grounds. This is true in our region as well. By retaining old growth we not only protect all the species we know about, but also those that we don't know about. This latter category is important because we've hardly begun to identify the majority of living things. Scientists speak of old growth retention as a "coarse-filter" approach to the protection of biodiversity. In our area, old growth is defined as more than 250 years old and is intended to represent the climax expression of forest ecosystems.

"Have we protected enough old growth to ensure a high probability that biodiversity will persist over time?" This is the big question. And in order to discuss it, we need to break things down a bit. There are 24 landscape units within the 2.5 million hectare Sunshine Coast Forest District. Let's look at the Chapman Landscape Unit (Sechelt to Howe Sound) as an example and also consider the distribution of old growth from mountain-top to seaside.

There's a huge inventory of old growth in our forest district and also in the Chapman Landscape Unit. If you charted the amount of land in each age class, the biggest category by far would be old growth. However, the vast majority of this inventory is in the high-elevation forests of the mountain hemlock moist maritime (MHmm) sub-zone. Most of this forest is in ancient climax condition. Major disturbances like forest fires are rare; that's why we find amazing trees like 2,000-year-old yellow cedars in these stands. Most of this sub-zone is not practical or economical to log. We have more protection for these ancient forests than for any other forest type. That's the good news. The bad news is that *any* logging in this ecosystem is destructive and unsustainable. I feel strongly that in order to protect biodiversity and preserve ecosystem services all logging in the MHmm sub-zone should be permanently prohibited.

Downhill in the next ecosystem group (the coastal western hemlock very-moist maritime or CWHvm sub-zone), trees grow much faster and the land is much more profitable to log. This land goes in and out of snow cover in spring and fall and is subject to dangerous rain-on-snow events during the winter. About 13 percent of the CWHvm sub-zone is protected in "old growth management areas" or OGMAs. These OGMAs are mostly unconnected fragments of inaccessible terrain or ones with poor timber quality. More logs have been cut in the "vm" than in any other ecological zone. The timber supply here is quickly becoming depleted; the old growth inventory is reaching the minimum allowable level; and the landscape is more and more dominated by very young age classes.

Further down the hill we come to the lower mid-elevation forests of the coastal western hemlock dry maritime (CWHdm) sub-zone. These ecosystems are directly above the areas we live in and typically do not appear as hemlock forests. That's because wild fires sweep through them every 200 to 600 years, and in their wake pioneer forests of Douglas fir emerge. These stands are among the most productive forests on the planet. Typically, not all the trees die in these fires; the survivors are referred to as

"veterans." Scientists use the term "high disturbance regime" to describe this phenomenon. The natural occurrence of old growth in the CWHdm sub-zone is quite low, probably around 30 percent of the land base. The current inventory in the CWHdm sub-zone of the Chapman Landscape Unit is about three percent, all of which has been captured in OGMAs. Another six percent of the land base is protected as "recruitment OGMAs," so that eventually the level of old growth will rise to nine percent. The OGMAs of this sub-zone are, once again, mostly a collection of unconnected fragments that are unloggable or uneconomical.

The last ecosystem group extends from lower mid elevations to the waterfront and is called the CWH extra-dry maritime



Retain old growth, preserve biodiversity.

Tella Sametz photo

sub-zone (the "xm"). This is where we live and where we have converted a very large portion of the land base into non-forestry uses. Ecologically speaking, "xm" is drier than "dm" but otherwise very similar, with a history of fire, the presence of pioneer fir forests, and isolated fragments of old growth (less than three percent coverage). As with "dm," the "xm" OGMAs are mostly recruited from underage stands. Far too much logging has occurred here in far too short a time period—including logging in very young stands (60 years old), which has accelerated sharply in the last few years. In short, the "xm" is in terrible shape and lacks adequate retention for biodiversity protection. Any opportunity to protect land—Crown and private—in this ecological zone should be pursued as vigorously as possible.

Is sufficient land protected in the Chapman Landscape Unit to maintain biodiversity? No, not by a long shot. Only the high-elevation forests are intact. The tiny percentage of land retained as OGMA is too small to capture a full representation of forest types and plant communities—and therefore too small to reasonably ensure that biodiversity will persist over time.

I feel strongly that anyone who wants to pursue additional protection for forests in this forest district is more than justified in doing so on the basis of currently available scientific information. Over the next six months the SCCA will be putting together a program of visual presentations about ecology and forest inventories that we hope will make these concepts more interesting and easier to understand.

Upper Sunshine Coast News: The Powell River Roundup

by David Moore

Sunshine Coast Trail Western Forest Products' current logging and future plans are putting the trail at considerable risk of damage and disturbance. SCCA members in Powell River are seeking better protections for the SCT by meeting with the company to explain the concerns. Lars Hawkes and David Moore have drafted a list of proposed forest management guidelines and presented it to Stuart Glen of WFP for discussion. They also met with the Powell River Parks and Wilderness Society to seek support and suggestions. PRPAWS endorsed the initiative to seek more formal protection of the Sunshine Coast Trail and agreed with the proposed guideline objectives. With the recent construction of cabins and shelter huts, the SCT is developing into an outstanding tourist attraction; its protection from logging encroachment and subsequent "blowdowns" is increasingly urgent. The SCT passes through the logging tenures of five large enterprises: Western Forest Products, Island Timberlands, BC Timber Sales, the PR Community Forest and the Sliammon First Nation.

Savary Island Savary Island's rare and endangered forested sand dune ecosystem was described in the last SCCA newsletter—as was a standoff between the Nature Trust of BC and a private owner of the 133-ha parcel, both of whom hold an undivided 50 percent share in the property. The private owner wishes to partition his share, and the Nature Trust wants the parcel to remain intact. The owner took the dispute to court and won. The court approved a "patchwork" division of the land with no regard for environmental values. The Nature Trust appealed last December, and the panel of judges has yet to issue a ruling. Referral agencies such as the Ministry of Environment and Powell River Regional District are under pressure to approve the "patchwork" plan. A partial victory for conservation has been achieved with a Ministry of Environment recommendation to partition the land in a diagonal bi-section that keeps most of the forested sand dune topography intact. The PRRD has subsequently decided to support this approach. The provincial approving officer has yet to make a final decision. For updates, readers should refer to the



"Vancouver Boulevard," the sand track that runs through the undeveloped centre of Savary Island. David Moore photo

Savary Island Land Trust Society website at www.silts.ca.

Texada Island The PRRD and Powell River Economic Development Society are putting money toward a study that will look at building a deepwater port terminal and cargo storage facility on Texada Island, with a view to attracting the international shipping industry. This initiative occurred with the consent of the regional director from Texada but without public consultation. A predictable backlash of angry responses is now being heard from community groups on Texada. While at present this scheme seems far-fetched, there would be serious implications for both the upper and lower Sunshine Coast were



Western Forest Products cutblocks are having a significant impact on the Sunshine Coast Trail. David Moore photo

it to develop. Southern waters would see a dramatic increase in freighter traffic, with a related disruption of marine ecosystems.

Douglas Fir Beetle (*Dendroctonus pseudotsugae*) The mountain pine beetle is well known for its impact on lodgepole pine forests throughout interior BC. An insect with a similar life cycle now presents a threat to coastal forests. The Douglas fir beetle invades the nutritious cambium layer just beneath the bark and lays eggs that hatch into larvae that feed on the tree. It also carries a fungus that invades the system of living tissue. The species is indigenous to the coast and plays an important role in the natural forest ecology. It attacks weak trees that have been damaged or blown down, as the defences of healthy trees are normally adequate to resist widespread infestation. However, if extraordinary quantities of blowdown and other logging waste produce a spike in the insect population, the beetles will invade living trees and cause extensive damage to commercial stands.

The logging industry is now publicizing its alarm over a perceived "outbreak" of Douglas fir beetles. In the Sunshine Coast Forest District, Western Forest Products will attempt to control this year's emerging adult beetles by logging many small stands of healthy trees, leaving them on the ground as "bait" and then hauling the trees to saltwater. This approach, which the company says it developed with expert entomological input, has the appearance of an emergency measure. A more thorough review of all the contributing factors might include consideration of current and past logging practices, as well as other human activities such as those related to climate change.

Many Messages from the Chair

by Jason Herz, SCCA Chair

This year is shaping up to be rather a busy one:

☉ We've received **funding** from the Vancouver Foundation, Mountain Equipment Co-op and Patagonia (part of which will carry into 2012) to do project work in the area of habitat protection. Stay tuned for details.

☉ We've also been invited to participate in the protection of some significant lands through the use of **environmental covenants**. This is a wonderful way to secure the future of special natural areas.

☉ The SCCA will be participating with the Sunshine Coast Regional District and other stakeholders in the **Chapman Watershed Water Source Protection Technical Group**—a great opportunity to further protect our drinking water watersheds.

☉ We hope that you will soon see some interpretive signage regarding **glass sponge reefs** at a few locations along our waterfront. This will be in cooperation with and through the support of the District of Sechelt, SCRDR, Town of Gibsons and Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. The reefs are a fascinating area of great biodiversity, once thought to be extinct but now known to exist off BC's shores and nowhere else in the world. Our very own Jurassic Park!



The Celebration of Conservation was fun for young and old.



Sweet Cascadia at the Celebration.

Tella Sametz photos

☉ Mark your calendars! October 22 will be the 2011 date for our famed **Celebration of Conservation**, a fun time and an opportunity for everyone to come out and support the protection of biodiversity on the coast. Last year's Celebration was a

great success (see photos). Special thanks to all silent auction donors, volunteers and attendees. This year's event will again be at the Sechelt Seniors Centre. Sweet Cascadia will be back! If you'd like to help out, please contact SCCA events co-ordinator Sheenah Main (events@thescca.ca).

☉ We are working to raise the profile of the SCCA within the community. Please stop by and say hello at our display booth, which will be out at various events. We will be hosting Alexandra Morton and hopefully several other well-known figures here on the Sunshine Coast this year for speaking engagements. Watch out for details.

☉ Please come out for the very important **SCCA Annual General Meeting**, to be held on May 14, 11 am, at the Chapman Creek Fish Hatchery, 4381 Parkway Road, Wilson Creek.

☉ Watch out also for a **great raffle** to be held SOON. A lovely handmade wooden rowboat built and donated by Nicol Warn will be the first prize, with fine local art by Katie Janyk, Kathi Dunlop and Mellon Glass for second prize and a getaway at Robert Creek's Crystal Ranch Guesthouse for third.

☉ All over the region we have **IPPs** (independent or "run-of-the-river" power projects) presenting potentially significant impacts to both pristine and already disturbed rivers. These projects threaten to criss-cross the area with transmission corridors and access roads. We continue to monitor **logging activities** in our region (see page 4), while also keeping a close eye on the issue of **bulk water bottling**.

☉ The SCCA will be involved in several joint projects. One will be with Deer Crossing the Art Farm to create an **installation/performance piece with an environmental theme**. The other is a **bat conservation event**.

☉ We continue to liaise with all levels of government and participate, time permitting, wherever environmental issues are present. No small task! If you'd like to help, please contact a director or email us through the SCCA website (www.thescca.ca).



Nicol Warn's rowboat raffle prize.

Call for Nominations

Since 2006, the SCCA has, from time to time, presented an environmental achievement award in honour of John Hind-Smith, an inspirational Sunshine Coast conservationist who died in 2005. If you know of a worthy candidate and would like to nominate someone for the 2011 John Hind-Smith Award, please contact SCCA chair Jason Herz at chair@thescca.ca. For a biography of John, go to the SCCA home page at www.thescca.ca and click on John Hind-Smith under "Archives."

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For more information about the SCCA and to view this newsletter online (in full colour), please visit our website at: www.thescca.ca



Hmmm, wonder where those raw logs are heading? Tella Sametz photo



Alexandra Morton on Sunshine Coast!

The SCCA welcomes Alexandra Morton to Roberts Creek Hall, Tuesday, May 24 at 7 pm. Alex is an inspired speaker, a courageous activist and an award-winning author. She is also a scientist and whale researcher and is spearheading the fight to preserve wild salmon.

Alex's talk, "Calling The Wild Salmon People," focuses on the need to save wild salmon from Norwegian-owned salmon feedlots. She has witnessed first-hand the impact of salmon farms on fish and whales at her Broughton Archipelago home. Alex has collaborated with scientists across North America and Europe and taken her fight to every government level.

Please join us for this important fundraising event. Don't miss the opportunity to speak with Alex during a Q&A period following her presentation. Lend your support to Alex's tireless efforts to save our wild salmon. (And listen to Alex on CBC's "Ideas," Radio 1, April 6, 9-10 pm.)

Sunshine Coast Conservation Association

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Individual name: _____

Individual membership: \$20

Other family members: _____

Family membership: \$30

Group or business name: _____

Group membership: \$30

Mailing address: _____

Business membership: \$100

Additional donation: \$ _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Website: _____

I prefer to receive newsletters by regular mail. (Unless specified, newsletters and other information will be sent by email.)

The purpose of the Sunshine Coast Conservation Association (SCCA) is to preserve the natural biodiversity of the Sunshine Coast region for the present and future benefit of humanity and all life.

As a member of the SCCA, I accept its purpose as stated above.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Please mail cheque or money order with this completed application to: SCCA, Box 1969, Sechelt, BC V0N 3A0
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