

Friends of the (Penticton) Oxbows

Strategic Plan

November 2015

Introduction

Since the Friends of the Oxbows set out to promote the rejuvenation and conservation of the Penticton oxbows, much has happened and it's time to take stock of where we are and update our strategic plan. Along with some of the background information presented in our first plan (2012), we provide a synopsis of what has been accomplished since 2012 against the goals and objectives we set then, and we present our plans for the next three years, essentially through 2018. Comments are welcome, and any ideas you may have as to what else we should consider, or how we might go about attaining our goals, are welcome. Your input can be channeled through Ray Halliday, Chair, 250-462-2466, Bob Anderson, Secretary, 250-492-2493, or through email to Bob at joybob@shaw.ca

Background

Channelization of the Okanagan River in the Penticton area eliminated flooding in the lowlands between Okanagan and Skaha lakes, and allowed the development of a major part of modern Penticton. Wetlands still exist adjacent to the river channel, now in the form of oxbows or large ponds, but these are in poor shape in relation to what they used to look like before the river channel was built.

Wetland loss and water conservation is an issue world-wide, and is of particular concern in a dry area like the South Okanagan. While no one is advocating a return of the river to its former channel, the Friends of the Oxbows believe the remaining wetlands should be better managed. What one sees now on entering Penticton along Highway 97 is a collection of rather degraded, remnant wetlands, fragmented and enclosed by roads and other developments. As stated in our 2012 Strategic Plan, the Penticton oxbows show the accumulated impacts of neglect and abuse. In addition to sedimentation caused by stormwater flows into some oxbows, ongoing impacts of stagnation from reduced water flows, the presence of introduced invasive plants and animals, the remnants of historic structures, the removal of vegetation, and a concentration of natural and human-placed debris are apparent.

The Friends of the Oxbows continue to believe there is an opportunity to showcase these wetlands much more positively, with minor improvements. The end result would serve two major purposes: 1) a much more enlightened approach to wetland and water conservation by the City of Penticton would be immediately evident, consistent with the region-wide concern about the need to conserve and manage water well; and 2) the entrances to Penticton on Hwy 97 would be much more attractive, consistent with

Penticton's contention that the city is a desirable community and a major tourist destination.

Vision

Our vision is for the oxbows to be returned to a more natural state than they are in now, with healthy riparian vegetation, water flow and water quality restored to the extent possible, to enhance the quality of life for Penticton residents and visitors alike.

Mission

Our mission is to work cooperatively with others, encouraging partnerships to restore native species and their habitats to the Penticton oxbows.

Principles

The over-arching goal of the Friends of the Oxbows remains as it was, namely to see that the oxbows become a source of pride for the citizens of the City of Penticton, by having them restored to a more natural and aesthetically pleasing state. We believe this will result in a healthier local environment, will improve the quality of life of residents and visitors, and will provide an attractive entrance to the City by travellers coming from the north or the south.

The Friends of the Oxbows continues to recognize that our approach must be practical, compatible with community needs, supported by local citizens, and founded on up-to-date scientific and technical information. We continue to emphasize partnerships as the way to achieve our goals. To encourage partnerships, we foster the sharing of knowledge, the responsibility for actions, the credit for achievements, and in the process, we believe we are facilitating a reduction in costs for any one interest for the work needed.

Goals and objectives for the period 2015 to 2018

Our Goals by and large remain as they were in our previous strategic plan, with some modifications. What follows are our updated Goals and Objectives, with a synopsis of what we have been able to accomplish against our Goals as established in 2012.

Goals

1. Increase knowledge base.

Accomplishments

Land ownership adjacent to the oxbows seemed an important element in 2012, but it has proved difficult to determine. As we believe it is imperative that we work directly with the Penticton Indian Band and the City of Penticton, just knowing who the agencies responsible for land management near the oxbows are is likely adequate for the moment.

Basic knowledge of the biology, hydrology, and water quality of the oxbows has likewise proved difficult to acquire. Some water quality data were collected for the City by Summit Environmental Consultants as part of the City's updating of its stormwater and sewer management plan. Preliminary water quality information was collected by Okanagan College as part of a First Year environment course. Data were collected by several consultants working for Gable Craft Homes, who plan to develop a housing project near Warren Avenue. Monthly bird counts on the oxbows were initiated by the South Okanagan Naturalists Club. Water quality data in the Brandon Avenue have been collected since May 2015 by the Friends of the Oxbows.

Objectives

1.1 Continue to develop and promote programs to collect and summarize hydrological and biological information for use in developing protection, enhancement, and evaluation plans by 2018 .

Strategies

Although some progress has been made on data collection, much remains to be done. We propose to work to continue to collect data on species presence and abundance, on limnological characteristics of the wetlands, and on how water flows, or might flow, through and between the oxbows. This will be accomplished through partnerships with others capable of data collection, and through the assistance of paid consultants as funds can be found through grant applications.

1.2 Review legal and administrative tools that could be used to support protection and enhancement opportunities on the oxbows by 2018

Strategies

There may be tools useful for promoting conservation of wetlands that we as a group are not aware of. We will review available Best Management Practices and similar publications to determine what else can be done to encourage oxbow protection and rejuvenation. We will also attend seminars as they come to our attention on such things as writing grant applications, and on the requirements of specific funds that might be used to meet our goals.

1.3 Determine landownership within or adjoining the oxbows(ongoing).

Strategies

Consult with City and Penticton Indian Band officials to determine who owns parcels of land adjacent to the oxbows as required. In order to garner support for the rejuvenation of the riparian areas, and to assist landowners to steward their land in a fashion that will protect and enhance riparian areas, land ownership still needs to be known.

2. Restore riparian vegetation

Accomplishments

Some progress has been made in managing riparian vegetation, but there is much left to do. In our 2012 Plan, we felt we needed to develop a plan for beaver and carp management, both of which species can have a significant negative effect on riparian and aquatic vegetation. We were able only to develop internal policy towards their management.

We participated in the replanting of riparian vegetation in the Ellis Creek basin, and one of our members has been very active in working to control weeds at various locations along the northern oxbows. We also took advantage of every opportunity to provide landowners with ideas as to how they could protect and revegetate riparian areas adjacent to their properties.

We provided ongoing input to development plans on Locatee lands near Warren Ave that will result in significant revegetation and rejuvenation of that oxbow if the development proceeds.

Objectives

2.1 Develop a policy statement with respect to beaver management by 2018.

Strategies

Although beaver are an important and integral part of most natural wetlands, they are highly destructive in the short term and in confined spaces like the Penticton oxbows. Many large trees have over time been wrapped with wire mesh, which has undoubtedly prevented their destruction by beaver. We will provide land owners with information as needed on ways to protect their property from beavers, but we don't at the moment see the need to promote active removal of beavers.

2.2 Develop a policy for carp management by 2018.

Strategies

There are no data to indicate the extent of the problem posed by carp. It is widely known that they create very turbid water and that they can remove a lot of submerged vegetation that may be important to indigenous species. However, with at the moment limited fisheries interest in the oxbows, it will be difficult to promote their removal. As data on water turbidity and temperature, and the impacts of carp on those parameters as well as primary productivity become more available, carp management may become a higher priority. Our strategy at the moment will be to collect data as we can on their abundance and impact, and promote their control as opportunity permits

2.3 Work with Penticton Indian Band, landowners, and other partners to restore and protect aquatic and riparian vegetation by 2018.

Strategies

We will continue to contact all landowners adjacent to both sides of the oxbows, on an opportunistic basis, to provide them with information on how to protect and rejuvenate riparian vegetation near their properties. Many written resources are available from the Stewardship Centre and the Naturescape British Columbia program that can be used to help develop individual plans for riparian area conservation. Where willing landowners are identified, we will work with other organizations engaged in similar work to help develop and implement private land stewardship projects.

As some property owners appear to have trespassed onto to provincial crown land we will work with them on a priority basis to reestablish riparian margins wherever possible.

3. Manage silt loads and yard waste entering specific oxbows

Accomplishments

With the installation of the silt interceptor on Brandon Avenue by the City in November 2014 we believe significant progress was achieved towards this goal at the Brandon Ave oxbow. In spring 2015 approximately five cubic metres of silt was removed from the silt trap in the interceptor, which is a significant reduction in the amount of silt entering the oxbow in the time since the interceptor was installed.

Objectives

3.1 Monitor the effectiveness of the silt interceptor installed on the Brandon Ave storm sewer by 2018.

Strategies

The city will report the amount of sediment removed each time the silt trap is cleaned. We will chart those data and report as we are able.

3.2 Remove sediment from the Brandon Ave oxbow by September 2015.

Strategies

We have been working with the City and the BC Ministry of Environment to facilitate the removal of silt from the Brandon Ave oxbow. A Water Act permit to allow sediment removal was granted in September 2015, however the construction window was too narrow to allow dredging that month. Subsequently, the clean-out has been rescheduled to September 2016, and will be conducted by the City of Penticton.

3.3 Stop the dumping of yard waste into oxbows by adjacent landowners by 2018.

Strategies

One of the issues we have noticed frequently in our work to rejuvenate the oxbows is the amount of trespass use they receive from Penticton residents. Many landowners have cleared vegetation from their property lines down into the oxbows, thus greatly impacting the riparian zone. Technically, this is illegal. We will contact all landowners on the Brandon Ave oxbow and politely point this out to them, offering advice on how they can become part of the solution rather than the problem.

4. Develop public awareness and increase support for oxbow conservation

Accomplishments

We have been quite successful in our attempts to attain this goal. We increased our email membership to 120; we applied for funds from several sources and managed to enter into a cooperative arrangement with Ducks Unlimited; we took every opportunity to inform local politicians and citizens of our interests and plans; we participated in the Meadowlark Nature Festival for the fourth year; and we made another appearance on local TV thanks to Shaw Cable.

Objectives

4.1 Increase membership in the Friends of the Oxbows to at least 200 by 2018.

Strategies

There is much work to be done to return the oxbows to a semblance of their former natural state. We believe we need more workers to assist in our efforts. We propose to recruit more members by holding semi-annual meetings with themes and invited speakers, and by developing hands-on projects for riparian enhancement. We believe in both cases that if the activities we promote are fun, and results can be seen quickly, we will entice more members. We will look for members that want to assist directly with our planned actions. If we get enough new members that wish to become involved on our steering committee, we will develop a management structure with subcommittees for various actions. That should facilitate sharing of the work load.

4.2 Seek support from conservation funding bodies and conservation groups by 2018.

Strategies

There continue to be many organizations already working elsewhere in BC on projects like the enhancements we propose. We will meet with as many of those as we can to develop common approaches, and where possible, enlist their support and resources to implement our plans. We believe that the completion of a more comprehensive conservation plan and the development of working arrangements with groups like Ducks Unlimited will facilitate procuring necessary funding.

4.3 Inform, meet with, and, where possible, partner with local, regional, provincial and federal politicians or their representatives, in support of the goals and objectives of the Friends of the Oxbows by 2018.

Strategies

We will continue to meet regularly with our MP, our MLA and with Penticton Mayor and Council, to further promote the protection and enhancement of the Penticton oxbows.

We will also continue to meet with the Chief of the Penticton Indian Band, and with other Band members and Officials. We intend to continue to meet both informally and formally with Band Officials and members to continue our efforts to protect and enhance the Penticton oxbows.

5. Plan for the conservation and rejuvenation of all the Penticton oxbows

5.1 Develop a general conservation plan for all the Penticton oxbows in cooperation with Penticton Indian Band and other partners by 2016

Strategies

As we have worked to promote the conservation, protection and rejuvenation of the Penticton oxbows over the last five years we have been somewhat opportunistic in our approach. Our priority was the Brandon Ave oxbow, so heavily impacted by storm drain sediment. However, a range of other opportunities continue to present themselves as we work towards the goals outlined in our previous strategic plan. Consequently, we believe it is time to develop, at least conceptually, what we would consider to be the ideal result of conservation efforts for all the oxbows. We will work with the Penticton Indian Band, the Okanagan Nation Alliance, Ducks Unlimited, and any other potential partners we encounter to develop a model of how we see the oxbows being protected and managed into the foreseeable future.