



Friends of the Oxbows

NEWSLETTER

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Friends of the Oxbows

In 2008 a group of three citizens residing near the oxbow wetland at the foot Brandon Avenue met to discuss what they could do to promote rejuvenation of this rapidly infilling water body. They decided they would call themselves the Friends of the Oxbows (FOTO), and that they would lobby for a clean-up of this and the other Penticton oxbows wetlands. There are now well over one hundred supporters and this number continues to grow.

Brandon Avenue

What a difference a year makes! On Sept. 21st last year a massive clean-up of the Brandon Avenue Oxbow began. Years of sand and soil deposited from the storm sewer draining into this oxbow had resulted in the south end being virtually filled with cattails growing in the accumulated debris. There was no longer room for the Western Painted Turtles, Mallards and Great Blue Herons that once called this wetland home. Only the outlet pipe catch basin had a puddle of water, with just a trickle of water heading to the north end of the oxbow. The rest of the area was sand and silt.

The week-long project, utilizing two excavators and several trucks resulted in the removal of approximately sixty loads of debris. As a result, the oxbow is now returning to the wetland treasure it had been thirty years earlier. Riparian growth has returned to the excavator access points. At least two Mallard families have been raised and the turtles are returning with twice the number per observation. A lone Great Blue Heron has taken up residence and seems to enjoy the fish it catches for its dinner.

The Brandon Avenue Oxbow is slowly returning to the wetland it once was. The eight years of lobbying for the rejuvenation of the Oxbow resulted in success. The Friends of the Oxbows and supporters are working towards the clean-up of the other Penticton oxbows.



Water Quality

FOTO has been collecting data on water quality on the Penticton oxbows, and on adjacent waters, for about the past two years. Those data have been summarized in a report that is posted to our website. Parameters we have measured include temperature, pH, conductivity and turbidity. We have data for all the oxbows south of Ellis Creek on the city side of the channel, and for Okanagan Lake, Shingle Creek, the Channel, and Skaha Lake.

The parameters measured give us a simple and cost effective picture of the general condition of our oxbows. We conclude that our oxbows are reasonably healthy with respect to pH and conductivity, but likely would benefit from some improvements to turbidity. Although the oxbows are not heavily turbid, there is little or no flushing of these water bodies and fine sediment tends to build up. When such fines are disturbed by wind action or by carp feeding and spawning the water

can become cloudy. This causes a reduction in productivity as light penetrates less well in turbid water. Less light means less plant growth, with attendant impacts up the food chain. We believe full rejuvenation of the oxbows requires increased water flowing through them to aid flushing and to add nutrients.

Outreach

FOTO took part recently in three events where we were able to highlight the efforts we are making to improve the condition of our oxbows. On 26 April we had an information booth at the Cherry Lane Mall during Earth Day. It attracted great interest with over half a dozen agreeing to support FOTO.



On 8 May we took part in the annual Open House at the South Okanagan Rehabilitation Centre for Owls in Oliver, with an information kiosk and pictures of our oxbows and associated wildlife. Although we did not keep track of exactly how many people came to our display, more than 2000 people attended the open house, and many were exposed to FOTO's efforts. Everyone was, as usual, supportive of our cause.



On 20 May we conducted another tour of our oxbows under the auspices of the Meadowlark Nature Festival (MNF). Eleven people joined the tour, mostly from the local area, and a few from the Vancouver area. As in the past all were amazed that such a resource as our oxbows was so readily accessible within the city. Naturally, all concurred that FOTO was on the right track in our attempts to draw attention to the plight of the oxbows, and were pleased to see the results of our efforts to have the Brandon Avenue oxbow cleaned up. This was the fifth MNF tour we have conducted in as many years. Slowly but surely we are getting the word out!

Bird Counts Resume

For the third consecutive year the South Okanagan Naturalist's Club (SONC) has agreed to conduct monthly bird surveys at the oxbows south of and including Ellis Creek detention pond. Three surveys have been conducted to date, and data entered into FOTO's survey data base. The results of the previous two years of survey effort were reported on last fall, and that report can be found now on our recently updated website. We look forward to seeing some interesting changes in species diversity and numbers at the Brandon Avenue oxbow after it was cleaned out last September. As always, we are greatly appreciative of the efforts the highly skilled birders from SONC are contributing to the cause. This is citizen science at its best!

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Information about our group can be found on our website at: <http://pentictonoxbows.ca>