



Friends of the Oxbows

NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 17 Summer 2018

Cherry Lane

On April 21st Friends of the Oxbows (FOTO) had an information booth at Cherry Lane Mall to celebrate Earth Day. It attracted great interest, with over a dozen agreeing to join our FOTO support list. Of special interest was Steering Committee member and Historian Randy Manuel discussing the many historic photos he provided illustrating the Okanagan River as it was historically. It provided the major transportation route between Okanagan and Skaha Lakes. The remnants of this river, the oxbows, are what Friends of the Oxbows and the Penticton Indian Band and our supporters are working to preserve.



Meadowlark Tour Update



For the fifth year Friends of the Oxbows hosted a tour of the Penticton oxbows under the auspices of the 21st Meadowlark Nature Festival (MNF). But before the tour, retired biologist Rick McKelvey also presented a talk at the 12th edition of the local Pecha Kucha night at the Cannery Brewery. “Pecha Kucha” is a Japanese term meaning “chit-chat”, and the concept of short talks originated in Tokyo in 2003. Each speaker is allowed 20 slides, and 20 seconds for each slide. The result is generally a fast-passed evening with a lot of information disseminated in an entertaining fashion. For this particular event the 20 speakers consisted of 19 biologists and one painter, so it was very much in keeping with the intention of the MNF. Naturally, Rick’s talk focused on the oxbows, but more specifically on FOTO’s contention that they need the help of Penticton’s citizenry, and in particular should be declared and managed as parks.

The oxbow tour on Saturday was also a great success. Rick and Bob showed 13 participants all the wetlands south of Ellis Creek detention pond. This year the staging area was at Sudbury Beach, just off Skaha Lake Road. This was the most convenient meeting point yet, as there was ample parking, we could explain a bit about the oxbows and their history using our display boards, and we could see the old river mouth before we started via car pool into the tour. We then set off to Industrial Place on the Channel Parkway, and visited all the wetlands in order back to our starting point.

All participants were, as we have seen in the past, quite impressed with the fact that such habitats can be so readily accessed from within our city! It is through efforts like the Meadowlark Nature Festival tour that Friends does most of its “work”. We believe the oxbow wetlands we share with the Penticton Indian Band are important local habitats, and an impressive range of biodiversity can be seen right in our own backyard. Thanks to all those who attended, and we hope you can help us with our vision of more actively managed and rejuvenated local wetlands.

South Okanagan Rehabilitation Centre for Owls

Friends of the Oxbows participated for the third year in early May in the annual open house of the South Okanagan Rehabilitation Centre for Owls. This event is always well attended, and this year was no exception, with over 2000 people visiting the displays and the facilities. This is always a great opportunity for FOTO to make our case for the management and rejuvenation of the Penticton oxbows. Everyone visiting our display was enthusiastic about what we are working towards. This year our display focused on the need for more active intervention in the management of our oxbows. As there is at the moment no way to protect and manage natural areas (those few that remain) in the City of Penticton, FOTO is advocating for a class of municipal park that would do just that. At the moment the oxbows show on the Official Community Plan as dedicated to parks, but they are not managed as such. The recently tabled Penticton Parks Master Plan also failed to recognize the need for actively managed “natural area parks”, so FOTO is turning more of its attention to promoting the management of our oxbows as nature parks. We believe with a more affirmative designation by the City that it will be possible to find non-government conservation agencies that are willing to invest in rejuvenation and on-going management of these important wetlands.

Benthic Invertebrate Sampling at the Brandon Avenue Oxbow

In the summers of 2016 and 2017 Friends of the Oxbows had arranged to have benthic invertebrates sampled at the Brandon Avenue Oxbow, as a measure of water quality in support of our on-going chemical and physical measurements of water quality parameters. Just as we were getting the wrinkles out of our sampling techniques we lost our volunteer technician through a move out of the area. Fortunately, we were able to persuade another keen volunteer on our support list (Friends of the Friends of the Oxbows!) to continue on the important work initiated by our previous tech.

Our new invertebrate sampling technician is Dan Denesiuk, and he writes:

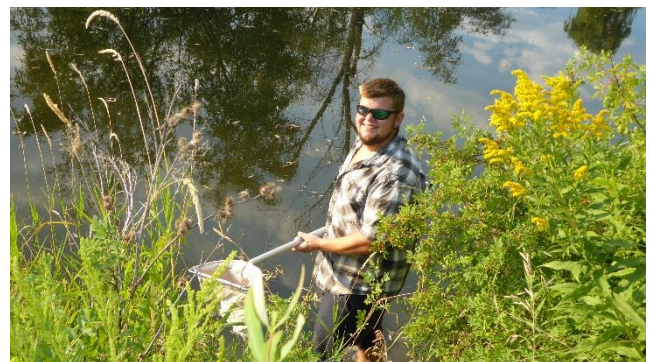
“I moved back to Penticton recently, after being away for many years pursuing post-secondary education and expanding my job experiences. It is a great feeling to be back, and I have secured a job as an Ecosystem Biologist for the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural

Resources Operations and Rural Development. I feel I can finally settle down here and start contributing to the community and getting more involved. I had reached out to the Friends of the Oxbows back in 2017 asking to if there was anything I could do as a volunteer. I was pleased to be approached this spring by Rick and Bob asking if I would like to take on the aquatic invertebrate sampling that had been conducted over the previous two summers. I was happy to accept this opportunity, and began to communicate with my predecessor to find out more about the sampling done previously.

This summer I got out to the Brandon Ave oxbow three times during the month of June to sample, armed with a brand-new high-tech net provided by FOTO. Each time I sampled in the same two spots that used in the past, using the same techniques. This involved scooping the net along the bottom of the pond, in open water, and against the aquatic vegetation (bumping it to try and dislodge insects). I then transferred the net contents into a white tray filled with water, and proceeded to pick out all of the aquatic critters, identifying them and tallying up the number of each species present. The different species of insects tend to have different tolerance levels to water quality, and so their relative abundance to one another (or absence) can be used to calculate a Water Quality Index (WQI).

These data are meant to be collected every year, and over time trends (hopefully positive!) revealed. Next year, I plan to expand my sampling protocol to include other locations in the Brandon Ave oxbow, and hopefully begin to sample other Penticton oxbows as well. I am very grateful to FOTO for providing me this opportunity to give back to the community and contribute in a way that puts my many years of university to good use!”

Welcome aboard, Dan, and we look forward to seeing the results of your efforts, which when available will be on our website.



Dan collecting specimens



Locating and examining specimens

Streams in the Penticton Area

Randy Manuel

Humans appear not to be as bright a species as we most times like to think. In fact, we place ourselves in harm's way in such a consistent manner that it is a wonder we have grown to over seven and a half billion souls on this fragile planet. Two examples in our area come to mind – fire suppression and alteration of stream flow patterns. Here in the Okanagan, a valley in which the ecology is based on post-fire regeneration of grasslands and forests, we build in fire interface zones, using building materials that can easily ignite, such as cedar shakes for roofing. We also build on known flood plains, altering the landscape in an unplanned fashion, and are then amazed when a road or hillside collapses due to alteration of the natural drainage system.

Today I am going to focus on some of the changes we have brought to the drainage patterns in the Penticton area that I have been able to piece together from many personal contacts over the years, and from information gleaned from the Penticton Archives. While we as Friends of the Oxbows continue to promote a more enlightened approach to our few remaining oxbow wetlands, it is instructive to look at all the other changes to local drainage patterns that have occurred over the years. Though it is unlikely we will be able to reconnect the oxbows to the flow of the Okanagan Channel, perhaps we can find ways to bring more water into these wetlands by looking at where water once flowed in the Penticton area.

European settlers in the south Okanagan first started to manipulate the land as far back as 1860, when J.C. Haynes dug ditches from a nearby stream to his kitchen garden at the Customs House in Osoyoos.

In Penticton, Tom Ellis placed a small diversion dam on a seasonal stream off Penticton Creek near present day McNicol Park School in 1865. He diverted 1000 miner's inches (an older measure of volume equivalent to about 27 ft³/sec, so a substantial amount!) of water down Forestbrook Creek (also known as Shatford Creek) to his homestead ranch on Windsor Ave.

This small creek crossed Main Street several hundred feet north of Edmonton Ave, and traversed Fairview Road 120 feet south of Preston Ave, entering the Okanagan River near Knapp's Plant Land. Forestbrook Creek ran as late as 1948, when Penticton Creek had its last fling at a major flood, sending water pouring down this remnant seasonal brook.

Within the city between Okanagan and Skaha (Dog) lakes there were six creeks: Penticton Creek, and its' offshoot Shatford Creek; Ellis Creek (also known as Nanisheen Creek); Troy Creek; Athens Creek; and Ellis Creek south branch.

Penticton Creek, it seems, may have several ground water seeps, as water runs consistently under buildings on the west side of the 200 block Main Street. Shatford Creek seems to be "sleeping" as nothing has been seen from it since 1948.

Ellis Creek was once multi-channeled, showing up as a main stream, not where we see it today, but flowing out of its canyon just east of the City Works Yard and heading more to the south than it does today. After following the foot of the Dartmouth escarpment it stayed to the south of Secrest Ave, crossing South Main Street near Galt Ave, then making its way south and west towards Brandon Ave, where it entered the river at the south west end of that street.

Maps do not show the main stem of Ellis Creek in its current position until 1930. Annual flooding of the alluvial plain on its old course was not conducive to orchard production. Confining it to the current course seemed the best plan, as the land east of Main Street between Carmi Ave on the North and McDougall Ave on the south (Great Canadian Super Store location) was Penticton Indian Reserve Number Two, and not being used.

Troy and Athens creeks are what one might call "ghost creeks", as they appear and disappear seasonally and over the course of their old channels. Currently Troy Creek bubbles out of the ground just at the west end of Parker Motors' south west lot. It once ran south westerly, picking up a south branch about 500 feet west of Main Street at Okanagan Ave West. Here the original creek worked its way towards the west end of Wyles Crescent at which point it became a pond in Monty's Flower Shop green house and gardens back in the 1940's and 50's. From there it continued west through Coldron Court towards Chatham Place and then entered the Warren Ave Oxbow. Today the "ghost" is alive and well appearing between a townhouse and apartment complex on Atkinson Ave just west of Parker Motors. As well, it seems that the south branch has popped out of its grave at 53 Okanagan Ave, where water is currently running out onto the street and alley at a respectable rate!

Athens creek is not to be outdone. Over 80 years ago it was the cool repository of bootleggers' booze. It poked itself out of the ground about the middle of the Cherry Lane Mall parking lot's northwest corner, just where the Willow tree is presently. It then made its way to the Okanagan River entering on the south bend of the Warren Ave oxbow. Today it runs between the two north towers and the group of six to the south on Atkinson Ave across from the Hudson's Bay store at Cherry Lane Mall. West of those towers it goes towards Lions Park, where it enters a culvert, resurfaces on the northwest side of Warren Ave, and goes past the houses on the south end of Troy Place. Both Troy and Athens creeks have been active for the past two summers, taking "short cuts" through underground parking garages and the basements of homes on Roy and Okanagan Ave.

Ellis Creek South Branch seems to be quiet at this point.

The creeks, the Okanagan River and the two lakes in Penticton have been a source of life, transportation and recreation for humans over thousands of years. Yet with all this knowledge of these waterways, we build over them, beside them and change their courses, and get upset when they yell back at us. There were major floods from our local creeks in 1928, 1935, 1942 and 1948. There was a just-averted flood on Ellis Creek above Main Street just this spring. Okanagan Lake came to more than "full pool" more times than have been recorded and at least three times in the last 28 years it has reached the "once in a 100 year flood event" status...someone must have learned to count under the new math system.

People and those that make the rules in regards to where, what, why and how a building must be built need to get a handle on what mother earth wants for our lakes rivers and creeks. Building codes should be set with a view to maintaining and managing our scarce water resources, not trying to alter, relocate or "disappear" them. With climate change we can expect more frequent returns of "100 year events" over the next decade or two.

Now is the time to review how we deal with our water and wetland resources and take a more enlightened approach to their management. Perhaps we can find ways to reactive some of our lost waterways, and have them restored as productive riparian corridors within the city. This will not only serve to enhance and conserve biodiversity in our city but may also provide a contingency for future flood events that seem bound to occur with our more volatile weather patterns.



Our Website <http://pentictonoxbows.ca/> is generously sponsored by:



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We have refreshed our newsletter to display our new logo. This logo was designed by Deborah Halladay, donated to FOTO.

We have published an Oxbow Management Plan and other information about our group which you can see on our website at: <http://pentictonoxbows.ca>