

Friends of the (Penticton) Oxbows (FOTO)

Strategic Plan Update

January 2020

Introduction

Once again it is time to take stock of what the Friends of the Oxbows (FOTO) have been able to accomplish in our quest to have the Penticton oxbows managed in a more enlightened fashion. Some progress has been made since we began our quest, but much remains to be done. Along with some of the background information presented in our first plan (2012) and in our 2015 Update, we provide a synopsis here of what has been accomplished since 2015 against the goals and objectives we set then, and we present our plans for the next three years, through 2021. 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 Halladay, Chair, 250-462-2466, or

Glenda Ross, Secretary, 250-462-7500, or through email to Glenda at glendaross00@gmail.com

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 are issues world-wide, and are 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 can and 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 removal of vegetation, and a concentration of natural and human-placed debris are apparent.

FOTO continues to believe there as an opportunity to showcase those 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 aquatic and riparian vegetation, and 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 unchanged, 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 profiling of partner achievements. 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 2019 to 2021

Our Goals remain much as they were in our previous strategic plans, 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 re-established in 2015.

Goals

1. Increase knowledge base.

Accomplishments

We have made significant progress in acquiring basic knowledge of the biology of the oxbows, through five years of bird surveys in conjunction with the South Okanagan Naturalist Club. We have collected water quality on the oxbows and adjacent waters over the past four years. And we have collected preliminary data on benthic invertebrates in the Brandon Avenue oxbow. Data on hydrology and the species and distribution of plants in and near the oxbows have proved more difficult to obtain.

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 for all oxbows by 2021 .

Strategies

We will continue to work 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

As time and opportunity permits we will continue to review available Best Management Practices and similar publications to determine what else can be done to encourage oxbow protection and rejuvenation.

1.3 Determine land ownership 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

Restoration of riparian vegetation has proven to be a difficult and slow process. FOTO has participated whenever possible in projects on other wetlands in the Penticton area to replant vegetation, and weeding and trash pick-up is ongoing by one of our former Steering Committee members in the Ellis Creek basin area. FOTO continued to provide input to development plans on Locatee lands near Warren Avenue that will result in significant revegetation and rejuvenation of that oxbow as the development proceeds. FOTO has also participated in agency-sponsored seminars on how to protect wetlands on private property. Beaver management has not proven to be as important an issue as at first thought. Many landowners have taken measures to protect their trees by wrapping them with wire mesh. Carp management remains a concern. Through our water quality program we have found water turbidity to be at times high in the oxbows, and carp are known to stir up sediments as they forage.

Objectives

2.1 Provide advice on beaver management as and when requested to 2021 (ongoing).

Strategies

We will provide land owners with information as needed on ways to protect their property from beaver, but we don't at the moment see the need to promote active removal of beaver.

2.2 Develop a policy for carp management by 2021.

Strategies

Besides creating very turbid water carp are also known to remove much submerged vegetation that may be important to indigenous species. 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 will continue to be to collect data on carp abundance and impact, and to 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 2021 (ongoing).

Strategies

We will continue to contact landowners adjacent to 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. We will continue to encourage the City to protect their easement properties and to control trespass use of the oxbow edges wherever it occurs.

3. Manage silt loads and yard waste entering specific oxbows

Accomplishments

Following the installation of the silt interceptor on Brandon Avenue by the City in November 2014 the City removed approximately 340 m³ of sediment from that oxbow in September 2016. FOTO continues to monitor water quality, bird numbers and benthic community dynamics at the Brandon Avenue oxbow.

We have also determined that the City has or will install silt interceptors on all remaining storm drains entering the oxbows.

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 Support the removal of sediment from other oxbows by September 2021.

Strategies

There is a need to rejuvenate all the oxbows to some extent, and removing accumulated sediment is one way this can be accomplished. Agencies willing to perform such work need assurances however, that the landowners (the City and the Penticton Indian Band) will legally protect the wetlands from future development. Wetland management agencies need to know their investments in conservation will be protected into the future, and legally binding landowner agreements are the primary tool.

FOTO will work with the City and the Band to develop legal protection for the oxbows, and we will work to facilitate the engagement of conservation agencies willing to help with wetland rejuvenation.

3.3 Stop the dumping of yard waste into oxbows by adjacent landowners by 2021 (ongoing).

Strategies

One of the issues we continue to notice is the amount of trespass use the oxbows receive from Penticton residents. Many landowners have cleared vegetation beyond their property lines down into the oxbows, thus greatly impacting the riparian zone. We will continue to work to encourage the City to enhance protection of the oxbows and to enforce trespass use of the city easements on the east sides of the oxbows.

4. Develop public awareness and increase support for oxbow conservation

Accomplishments

We continue to work towards increasing awareness of the plight of the Penticton oxbow. We have increased our email membership to over 150; we have taken every opportunity to inform local politicians and citizens of our interests and plans; we have participated annually in a range of nature festivals and events; and we continue to liaise with the Penticton City Mayor and Council and members of the Penticton Indian Band.

Objectives

4.1 Increase membership in the Friends of the Oxbows to at least 200 by 2021.

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 will continue to 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 groups by 2021 (ongoing).

Strategies

There continue to be many organizations already working elsewhere in BC on projects like the enhancements we propose. One such very successful local initiative is the Okanagan River Restoration Initiative (ORRI), comprised of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, BC Environment, the Okanagan Nation Alliance, and many others. FOTO will continue as a member of ORRI to develop common approaches, and where possible, enlist their support and resources for projects complimentary to our plans. We continue to believe that the completion of a more comprehensive conservation plan and the development of working arrangements with groups like Ducks Unlimited Canada will facilitate procuring necessary funding for oxbow projects.

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 2021 (ongoing).

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.

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

Accomplishments

A comprehensive management plan was drafted in 2016 and is to be found on our website. Much is yet to be done, however, as we work to ensure that the City will protect lands within its jurisdiction, and as we work to help the Penticton Indian Band protect and manage lands within its jurisdiction on the oxbows. Only when there is clear legal protection for the lands bordering the oxbows can we begin to arrange for other agencies to invest resources in rejuvenating those wetlands.

5.1 Engage and work with the City of Penticton to develop a Natural Areas Protection Bylaw, to include the oxbows, by 2021

Strategies

As stated elsewhere, we believe the oxbows need legal protection before money is likely to be spent on their rejuvenation. Legal protection could take the form of a bylaw to protect them as natural areas. We will continue to work with the City to help develop this idea further, with the intent of elevating the level of legal protection the oxbows enjoy.

5.2 Engage and work with the Penticton Indian Band to help develop protection plans for the Penticton oxbows within Reserve lands by 2021 (ongoing).

Strategies

We believe there are opportunities for the Band and locatees to protect and enhance oxbow habitat on the west side of the Penticton oxbows. The centre of the original Okanagan River channel was established early in the last century as the boundary between federal land on the west (Penticton Indian Reserve #1) and provincial Crown Land (the City of Penticton) on the east. To be effective, conservation efforts are required on both sides of the oxbows. We will work with the Band and Band members as and when required to develop plans for oxbow conservation. FOTO will ensure that both the Band and the City are apprised of our interests and efforts in fostering joint conservation and rejuvenation of the Penticton oxbows.