



Friends of the Oxbows

NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 11

Winter 2014

With this Newsletter we are pleased to report that the vision of the Friends of the Oxbows for the Penticton Oxbows... "for the oxbows to be returned to a more natural state..." is another step closer. We appreciate your support as well as the support of the other over one hundred members.

We first met in the fall of 2008. Since that first meeting, we have formed a Steering Committee consisting of Chair and Biologist Ray Halladay, Secretary Bob Anderson, Past Chair Ted Makar, Biologist Rick McKelvey, Historian Randy Manuel and Agrologist Allan Garland.

We have published a Strategic Plan and a Prospectus, which you can see on our website at:

<http://members.shaw.ca/pentictonoxbows/>

Brandon Avenue Oxbow Update

After beginning our work to raise the profile of the Penticton oxbows five years ago, improvements to the Brandon Avenue oxbow have been initiated. Following a presentation by FOTO to the Committee of the Whole in April 2014, Penticton City Council directed staff to support and assist in our applications to perform improvement works for the Brandon Avenue oxbow. Our focus has been on two initiatives: 1. to install a silt interception device to prevent or limit the ongoing siltation process; and, 2. remove the silt that has already accumulated in the oxbow. To this end, we can report that the City completed installation of the silt interception device just upstream of the outfall on Brandon Avenue in late November 2014 as part of its Upgraded storm water system improvements. In addition, FOTO has worked with City staff to draft and submit an application to Environment Canada's



National Wetland Conservation Fund for removal of the silt in the oxbow on Brandon Avenue. As FOTO is not a registered society, we cannot receive funds directly from most funding organizations. The City agreed to act on our behalf, and the application was submitted by the City to Environment Canada, also in late November 2014. We will keep you posted on the outcome of that request! When obtained, funds will be used to pay for silt removal from the oxbow, and to purchase some riparian plants for replacement of those lost during the cleanup. Your assistance, as a volunteer, will be welcome at that time to help with replanting. Silt removal cannot happen before July 2015, due to the need to limit impacts specifically to the Western Painted Turtle, and other biota.

Currently FOTO is looking for more partners to help with data collection and evaluation of the impact of silt removal, silt load reduction, and rejuvenation of the Brandon Avenue Oxbow. We are seeking partners to undertake bird and turtle surveys before and after silt removal. We are also looking for other sources of funds with which to improve the data base on all the oxbows, in particular water quality and hydrology. We will keep you updated as progress is made in these areas and advise if there are further opportunities for volunteer involvement.

Warren Avenue Oxbow

Progress is slowly being made with the proposed development on the Penticton Indian Band land adjacent to the Warren Avenue Oxbow. As you might recall, FOTO has, with the approval and support of the Band land owner (locatee), been working with the developer in an attempt to have the oxbow wetland well looked after as the uplands are converted to a more intensive use. The developer informs us that all the necessary environmental approvals have been obtained from the federal government. They have also applied for a provincial Water Act permit to undertake works in the oxbow. The latter will include removing an existing berm across the oxbow, sloping the banks on the west side to a more natural contour, and replanting riparian vegetation. Lease arrangements are expected to be completed by early 2015, with housing construction to start in spring 2016. FOTO has been very pleased to have been able to be part of this development from the outset. We are confident that if proposed environmental protection and enhancement measures are applied, the productivity of the oxbow will be improved as the development proceeds.



Oxbow Bird Count

Friends of the Oxbows has formed an alliance with the South Okanagan Naturalists Club, to undertake bird and turtle counts throughout the Penticton oxbows. It is anticipated that the counts will begin sometime after February 2015. FOTO will meet with members of the Naturalists Club sometime in mid-February, to design the survey, agree on the methods to be used, and to tour the oxbows that will be included. These data, besides providing baseline information on bird species diversity and turtle populations, will be used in the future to evaluate the effectiveness of enhancements to the oxbows, beginning with the removal of sedimentation in the Brandon Avenue Oxbow.



ORRI Penticton Channel Spawning Platforms Meeting

The Friends of the Oxbow are pleased to have been recently invited to share interests with the Okanagan River Restoration Initiative (ORRI). As result of the activities of ORRI and its supporting organizations there are now large numbers of Sockeye and Chinook salmon spawning in the upper Okanagan River Channel - something that hasn't occurred in almost 100 years! At a recent meeting, attended by our FOTO Chair, Ray Halladay, an ORRI progress report was presented. In 2014 over 300,000 sockeye entered the Okanagan River. The two platforms (spawning beds), installed this year, were used to capacity. We congratulate the Okanagan River Restoration Initiative on their success!



Bullfrogs

In our Fall 2013 edition of our Newsletter we indicated that the American Bullfrog, a highly invasive species, may have infiltrated the Okanagan wetlands. Alsyon Skinner, Executive Director of the Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Society, informs us that the presence of the American Bullfrog has not been confirmed in the Penticton oxbows, though there are

historical records. That is not say they are not present, however, as the survey last year was of short duration.

The bullfrog has a very distinctive croak. To help you identify this frog refer to

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfR1OYyQv2Q> .

To aid in ongoing efforts to monitor the presence of this bullfrog it would be helpful if our members report any sightings they may have. If you see or hear any bullfrogs somewhere in the Okanagan please let FOTO know.



We are grateful for your support and would appreciate any suggestions you might have on how to implement our vision for the oxbows. Our contact information follows. We would appreciate knowing about your experiences, recently and historically, relating to the oxbows.

Contact us directly, or visit our website to learn more about us. See you on the Oxbows in 2015!

We invite you to visit the:

Friends of the Oxbows website at:

<http://members.shaw.ca/pentictonoxbows/>

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