



Friends of the Oxbows

NEWSLETTER

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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 with the commitment of the City of Penticton to dredge out the sand and silt in the Brandon Avenue oxbow. We appreciate your support as well as the support of the other over one hundred and twenty 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, and Nutritionist Jacquie Bird.

We have published a Strategic Plan and a Prospectus, which you can see on our website at: <http://members.shaw.ca/pentictonoxbows/>

An Historic Perspective

Randy Manuel, Friends of the Oxbows

The story of Okanagan River is as old as the earth itself. Born out of the remnants of Ancient Lake Penticton, it once flowed north into the Fraser River drainage system during the last ice age. The River's shift from north to south in its quest to reach the sea began when the last block of ice that once jammed up against the towering cliffs of McIntyre's Bluff, finally let go in a dramatic (in geological terms) out-wash. This caused the great grey carved clay cliffs that we see around the Penticton/Naramata area.

The Syilx people were the first to use the river for food and transportation, travelling the Similkameen and Okanagan Rivers and the valley lakes in cottonwood dugout canoes. Charles Wilson, Secretary of the British Boundary Commission 1858-1862 noted the following while surveying the boundary in the south Okanagan. *"The Indians at Okanagan have a very clever way of catching salmon running at this time in great numbers; they make an artificial leap of wicker work right across the river over which the fish only jump to tumble into a basket or cradle ready for them on the other side."* {written August 12th 1860}.

Settlement in the region saw the first use of purpose built steam boats to run the river between Okanagan and Skaha (Dog) Lakes. In 1893 William Snodgrass of Okanagan Falls (called Dog Town then) had a vessel built for him.



The CPR Ship S.S York ran Okanagan River to Skaha Lake. There it pushed an 8-car rail transfer barge from a dock just west of the airport (now Barefoot Beach Resort) to Kaleden and to transfer the train back to rail at OK Falls for its run to Oliver.

The JESSIE was 30 ft. by 7 ft. and had a tunnel drive prop....good on the lake but meant for poor steering in the river. In 1894 a small stern-wheel boat of 55 x 15 ft. ran the river and lake. Called the Fairview, it burned at Okanagan Landing. It's replacement, the Greenwood, at 89 x 17 feet, weighing in at 142 tons suffered the same fate, burning to the waterline in 1899. Navigating the river was a challenge at the best of times due to the oxbows, currents, sandbars and switchbacks, as well as overhanging river bank trees. Ship captains complained of snags, sandbars and broken windows from overhanging branches.

In 1910 the Dominion Government put the dredge Heron to work on the river. It cleared snags, cut trees and dredged sandbars. It even cut across an oxbow to create an island near Green Ave., this to shorten the river, and to avoid one very large loop which caused issues with boat traffic. The CPR, not wanting to lose any trade on the river run from Penticton to Dog Town, put its own vessel the KALEDEN on the river in 1910. This 94 x 19 stern-wheeler made one run only, for the return trip took over a week, with the ship suffering damage to its super structure. Despite work by the government dredge, commercial navigation ceased in 1910. The KALEDEN instead returned to Okanagan Lake and worked that lake until it went out of service in 1920.



*The old Okanagan River bed at Brandon Ave this summer.
The S.S. York once travelled along this river.*

Partnership with the Penticton Indian Band

Ted Makar, Friends of the Oxbows

The Friends of the Oxbows or FOTO have always sought to build good relations with all whose properties adjoin the oxbows. Since these oxbows form much of the boundary between the Penticton Indian Band (PIB) lands and those within the City of Penticton, our group has recognized the need to learn the Band's point of view about this shared boundary.

As past chair of FOTO, through meetings with Richard Armstrong, PIB Traditional Knowledge Keeper, and Joan Philip, PIB Lands Manager, we were able to jointly publicize the need to protect and rejuvenate the oxbows. Articles in publications, meetings in the Enowkin Centre and Band offices, and meetings with Penticton's Chief Engineer, Ian Chapman, followed. Later, with the addition of biologists to FOTO, we were able to give technical assistance to the Band's submissions for grants in aid of the recovery of the oxbows.

Our good relations with the Band grew and we received permission to conduct Meadowlark Festival tours of the oxbows led by Rick McKelvey and Ray Halladay. Rick also gave advice to the environmental consultants engaged in the proposed development of a PIB locatee owned property.

By keeping contact with the Band, our understanding of the many stakeholders of the lands surrounding the oxbows grew. These stakeholders included Federal, Provincial, Municipal, and Band governments and some of the private (locatee) land owners who are Band members. The full support of all these, particularly the Band's and the City of Penticton's councilors, continue to be promoted by the activities of all members of FOTO,

Update on the Brandon Avenue Oxbow Rejuvenation

Rick McKelvey, Friends of the Oxbows

Progress is being made in our efforts to have the Brandon Avenue oxbow cleaned up and restored to a more productive state, albeit somewhat more slowly than we had hoped for.

Last November 2014 the City of Penticton installed a storm-water interceptor on the storm sewer running west on Brandon Avenue and emptying into the oxbow at the foot of that street. This is a large sewer pipe (app. 1m in diameter) and we presume it is draining a significant amount of the surface water of the city south, east and west of Brandon Avenue. A large amount of sand and other road grit has been deposited into the Brandon Avenue oxbow over the course of time from this storm sewer, with the result being the rapid infilling of that oxbow.

The City reported to us that approximately five m³ of material was removed from the interceptor on its first annual clean-out, in August 2015. That is almost a quarter of a dump truck load of sand and silt that did not end up in the oxbow, and we believe this is a major improvement in how the oxbow is managed to receive storm water.

If we presume that about this much silt has been flowing into the oxbow since it was last cleaned out, about 15 years ago we believe, this means that approximately 75 m³ of silt, or over four truck loads, has been deposited into the oxbow in that time. The silt interceptor will reduce the annual rate at which this oxbow has been silting up significantly, and we congratulate the City for taking this action.

As to the actual cleanup of the Brandon Avenue oxbow, there was a delay in getting receipt of approval to remove material from the oxbow from BC Ministry of Environment, so the actual cleanup could not occur as we had hoped in September 2015. The license has been issued, however, and the City has assured us that funds earmarked for the cleanup this year will be carried forward and available for next year. As there is a short period of time available for this type of work, due to the needs of turtles, fish

and migratory birds using the oxbow, September is the only month in which the work can take place. It has been rescheduled therefore, for September 2016. FOTO provided the City with the first draft of the application for the license to remove this material from the oxbow, and also assisted with data collection on the depth and nature of the bottom substrate in the oxbow.

As we have stated from the outset, we believe the Penticton oxbows can be managed much more productively than they are now, while still functioning as urban wetlands and providing the receiving environment for storm water runoff. As these oxbows are all that remains of what were once quite extensive wetlands along the Okanagan River, we believe they need to be managed much more carefully than they have been.

Although wetlands over the course of time will eventually fill in and evolve eventually to dry land, in a natural riverine environment new wetlands would continually appear to replace those that had silted in. Our Okanagan River system has been so highly modified to meet the needs of the human population that there are now no new wetlands being created. We believe, therefore, humans must intervene periodically to adjust the impacts we have imposed on these remaining wetlands, in order to keep them functioning as wetlands.

The reduction of the amount of silt entering the Brandon Avenue oxbow in particular, and the removal of the silts that have accumulated in the last 10 to 15 years, will showcase a more constructive approach to urban wetland management, and allow the oxbow to continue to provide for a range of local fish and wildlife populations.



Meadowlark Tour members guided by FOTO biologist Rick McKelvey at the Warren Avenue oxbow.

Trail Maintenance

Allan Garland, Friends of the Oxbows

The provincial *Field Guide to Noxious Weeds and other Selected Invasive Plants of British Columbia (ISCBC, 2014)* is the resource to identify plants and to prioritize which ones to eliminate. Within Penticton, the weeds of greatest concern at present are Puncture-vine, Hound's-Tongue, and Burdock because of their clinging burs or sharply pointed seeds.

FOTO is concentrating on those weeds bordering the oxbows and along human or animal trails to facilitate nature lovers and tours during the Meadowlark Festival. Residential homeowners and commercial businesses are responsible to control noxious weeds and other plants on their own properties at their own cost, things like knapweed, thistles, and unwanted trees.



On November 7, 2015, Friends of the Oxbows members Allan Garland, Eric Pierce, and others assist the Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Society with providing mulch to protect the plantings at the mouth of Ellis Creek.

Ducks Unlimited Canada Support of FOTO

Ray Halladay, Chair, Friends of the Oxbows

Friends Of The Oxbows (FOTO) officially formed in 2008. In 2012, Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUCKS) biologist Bruce Harrison responded to FOTO's request for assistance and met with steering committee members to tour a number of the oxbows. Bruce followed up with written comments for FOTO's consideration. Those comments have formed the basis for the scientific approach FOTO has taken towards the protection and enhancement of the oxbows and they are reflected in strategic and other documents prepared by FOTO. The comments included the need for documenting the occurrence of plant and animal species, habitats, hydrology and land ownership adjoining or affecting each oxbow. They form basic priorities of FOTO along with equally essential priorities for public education and the development of partnerships. In 2015 DUCKS responded again, this time when Brad Arner, DUCKS Provincial Manager, offered to explore the potential for working in partnership with FOTO and others. That support, backed by DUCKS outstanding reputation for achievement in wetland conservation, and recent positive responses by PIB and City leaders and representatives, bodes well for achieving the goals of protection and enhancement of the oxbows.



Friends of the Oxbows members Ted Makar (FOTO), Brad Arner (Ducks Unlimited), Jacquie Bird (FOTO), and Alan Garland (FOTO) touring the site of newly installed turtle gates on the east side of the airport fence with Al Peatt (biologist with the ONA).

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