



Friends of the Oxbows (FOTO)

NEWSLETTER

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Your investment may be at risk

By Bob Anderson

The time has come for us to remind Penticton City Council that there is an urgent need to preserve and enhance our oxbows. Not only is wildlife habitat at risk, but so are the investments in our homes.

One Realtor I approached estimated that the degradation of the oxbows could lower the value of a \$400,000 property by at least \$25,000. Many of the oxbows near or adjoining our properties and neighbourhood have become an eyesore. They are filling with debris and silt from roadways, and are becoming uninhabitable for fish and wildlife. Consequently waterfowl and other wildlife are seen less and less frequently.

Friends of the Oxbows has been encouraging the City of Penticton to preserve and rejuvenate the oxbow wetlands. We have seen some success with the City's work on the Brandon Avenue oxbow, but much is still to be done.

The alternative is the Penticton oxbows will fill in and the birds and mammals that you once enjoyed viewing will no longer remain.

An email from you to our Mayor describing your concerns will help bring attention to the plight of our Oxbows. The Mayor can also be reached by phone at 250-490-2400, or by mail at 171 Main Street, Penticton, BC, V2A 5A9 and by email at john.vassilaki@penticton.ca



Which oxbow would you like to live next to, the one above or the one below?



Water and Wildlife Surveys on the Oxbows

The fourth year of water quality testing and the fifth year of surveys of birds and other wildlife using the oxbows have been completed, and summaries are now available on our website (www.pentictonoxbows.ca). Water quality surveys lead us to conclude generally that the water in the oxbows is neither bad nor particularly good. In other words, given that the oxbows are the receiving environment for stormwater drainage from the adjacent uplands of the city, and that in

most cases they have only an inflow from ground water sources, they are not in any serious trouble. We measure only very general parameters, so we can't say much about specific pollutants that might be present, but from the data we do have the oxbows appear to be reasonably healthy. Parameters we measure that are of concern however, are temperature and transparency. As there is only limited inflow of water to the oxbows, and no outflow, temperatures get very high in the summer, and as you've probably noticed, very cold in the winter. Water transparency is affected by sediments in the oxbows, some of which comes from the storm drains and some results from accumulation of plant material year to year. When the sediments are stirred up by the wind or species of fish like the non-native carp, the water becomes muddy, and light cannot penetrate very deeply. That in turn affects which plants can grow in the oxbows, and thus can be a detriment to biodiversity and overall productivity.

Bird surveys, in a word, have been quite variable between years. What is evident however, is that the oxbows are used by a range of species (over 70 identified so far), and that there are peaks of use in fall and spring (migration periods). Many factors throughout the range of the species using the oxbows can influence population numbers. So far, we have not been able to detect any specific trends in use of our oxbows, but five years of data, believe it or not, is a relatively short collection period for detecting such trends. Rates of use are similar between years, so for the moment it appears, the oxbows continue to fill an important habitat function in the local area. We will be conducting surveys again this year, so maybe as the amount of information increases, we will hopefully be able to say more about the importance of the oxbows. It's a matter of record that the variety and numbers of wetland species have declined significantly from historic levels, mainly as a result of the loss of over 95% of the wetlands between Okanagan and Skaha Lakes. Still, we are lucky to have the oxbows habitats that remain, basically in our backyards!



Our Website <http://pentictonoxbows.ca/>
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