

For Immediate Release  
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**Following a recent amendment to a Capital Regional District water license, flow releases into Craigflower Creek from Thetis Lake are now assured, benefiting thousands of juvenile Coho Salmon and Cutthroat Trout.**

**VICTORIA:** On May 8, 2013, the Capital Regional District (CRD) approved an amendment to the Thetis Lake Regional Park water storage license establishing a supplemental flow from Thetis Lake into McKenzie and Craigflower creeks from May to December.

Improving summer water flows into Craigflower Creek has been a longtime goal for the CRD and BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF).

BCCF Project Manager, James Craig, says habitat for salmonids in these flow-challenged streams in the greater Victoria area will fare better in the face of climate change, with the supplemental flow. "This is one of the most effective, wild-fish producing storage projects BCCF has led to date."

In the winter months, water naturally spills over the Thetis Lake Dam and supports fish rearing in Thetis Creek, Prior Lake, McKenzie Creek and Craigflower Creek. But in summer, the spillway dries, and discharge from the upper watershed drops close to zero. Many downstream sections of the creek dry up, particularly in drought years such as 2003, 2006 and 2009, and thousands of Coho salmon and Cutthroat trout fry become stranded or perish.

A strategic partnership was established in 2008 between BCCF, the CRD, local stream keepers, Songhees First Nation, the Provincial Fish & Wildlife Branch (F&W), and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) to initiate the Craigflower Flow Enhancement Project.

Assessments in 2010 of the proposed lake level changes predicted no significant recreational or environmental impacts. In 2011 and 2012, CRD and partners conducted summer-long trial releases of water from Thetis Lake to augment stream flows and assess changes in the park on a "real-time" basis. Over a whole summer season, Thetis Lake naturally drops about 30cm due to evaporation. Under the approved flow release strategy, levels will be allowed to drop no more than 47cm up to Labour Day, and no more than 74cm by October 31. CRD park staff will manage the water release based on daily lake water levels starting May 1<sup>st</sup>, when the lake is full at the spillway.

The typical release during the summer will be about 10 litres per second, and will enhance 4.7km of stream channel and fish habitat from the lake to the Gorge Waterway.

"Improved summer water flows could potentially double Coho and Cutthroat smolt production from the Craigflower Creek watershed," said Craig, "enhancing angling opportunities and helping to ensure these stocks remain resilient in the face of climate change."

As part of the trial water release over two summers, CRD Regional Parks and BCCF conducted extensive monitoring of the ecosystem and park user impacts resulting from slightly lower water levels in Thetis Lake.

“CRD is pleased to continue our support of this project that has significant ecological values and conservation benefits,” said Larisa Hutcheson, General Manager of CRD Parks and Environmental Services.

The lake will drop to its lowest level in late October, when the swimming season is over.

This project is funded by the Province’s Living Rivers Trust Fund (Living Rivers – Georgia Basin/Vancouver Island), the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, the Pacific Salmon Commission Southern Fund, and the CRD.

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