

Crofton dam changes to help fish in Richards Creek
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The Crofton Lake Dam is undergoing modifications to improve water flows to an important fish-bearing stream in the Cowichan Valley.

The District of North Cowichan in a project supported by Living Rivers - Georgia Basin/Vancouver Island and Fisheries and Oceans Canada is planning construction in mid-late June to install additional piping at the dam to supplement water flows to Richards Creek.

"Upper Richards Creek is a gem, with excellent physical habitat that only lacks sufficient summer flow to produce more wild fish" said James Craig, BC Conservation Foundation.

No longer the primary domestic water supply for the Town of Crofton, Crofton Lake has storage that can be used to benefit fish. A portion of the water supply will be used each summer to improve rearing conditions for Richards Creek salmon and trout.

With climate change that is expected to bring more frequent and extended droughts, this type of stream flow improvement project may become more common. A habitat assessment conducted by DFO and BCCF in the winter of 2007/08 identified at least 765 m² of additional habitat available to fish if 400 gallons per minute were released from Crofton Lake.

The District of North Cowichan is able to increase the flow because they now supply Crofton with Cowichan River water via Catalyst's water treatment plant and use Crofton Lake only as an emergency backup supply.

"We were supportive of this venture and looked at it as an opportunity to increase fisheries productivity by providing a substantial increase in rearing habitat on Richards Creek," said John Mackay, Director of Engineering and Operations, District of North Cowichan.

Funding was provided through the LR-GB/VI program and the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund. The District of North Cowichan has donated staff and engineering time and will oversee construction.

Dave Tattum has been contracted by BCCF to engage local farmers in discussion about the project.

Ongoing monitoring of the effectiveness of the increased flow in Richards Creek will be undertaken by DFO.

"We will be monitoring water level, flows and temperature in the creek to confirm that the benefits of this project are realized," said Margaret Wright, DFO.

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