

Westwood Lake dam released at stream
Robert Barron, The Daily News
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For the first time in more than 100 years, water from Westwood Lake is again flowing into Darough Creek, a natural stream from the lake that dried up when Westwood was dammed.

Representatives from the City of Nanaimo, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the province and a number of organizations involved in the ongoing "Salmon in the City" project were on hand Monday for the official opening of the newly constructed siphon at Westwood Lake that will increase water flows into Darough Creek and the adjoining Millstone River. The increased water flows are intended to help keep sufficient water flowing through the Millstone River, and its new 800-metre bypass channels built last year to help juvenile salmon in the water system survive the yearly dry season.

"This project is unique in that we're creating a new coho spawning system here in Nanaimo as opposed to most of our projects that try to restore salmon spawning habitats," said James Craig, project manager for the B.C. Conservation Foundation. "It's not something we do too often."

The \$420,000 Millstone River bypass project, spearheaded by DFO and funded by a host of partners, allows the salmon to bypass a series of waterfalls in Bowen Park that presented a barrier, preventing them from reaching productive spawning grounds and rearing habitat above the falls.

For the past eight years, crews have been catching and trucking several hundred salmon upstream each fall and releasing them above the falls to imprint the Millstone water system on them in preparation for the opening of the bypass channel last spring, which is also expected to be used by cutthroat and steelhead trout.

A report written by DFO scientist Mel Sheng for the city in 2004 stated the construction of the channels through Bowen Park could support more than 30,000 coho smolts, similar to the production in Englishman River. However, low flow rates in the Millstone River's water systems during the traditional dry period in August, September and October see water flows in the system decrease to less than half a litre a second, while the optimum flow for the juvenile salmon in the water system is at least nine litres per second.

When the City of Nanaimo decided to conduct a \$500,000 seismic upgrade of its dam on Westwood Lake, the city agreed to place a pipe one metre below the top surface of the dam to allow water to be released directly into Darough Creek, which leads to the Millstone River, to increase water flows in the system when required.

Westwood Lake now contains six centimetres of stored water, enough to keep the Millstone system supplied with the required water levels for three months, but its expected the coming rainy season will fill the need in just a few weeks.

Sheng said juvenile coho salmon "in huge numbers" have been spotted as far in the system as Brannen Lake for the first time this spring.

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