

For Immediate Release
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A water release from Thetis Lake Regional Park will be re-established this summer as part of a trial to improve Craigflower Creek fish habitat.

VICTORIA: The Craigflower Flow Enhancement Project (CFEP) is an initiative of BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF) in partnership with Capital Regional District (CRD), local streamkeepers, Songhees First Nation, the Provincial Fish & Wildlife Branch (F&W), and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). The CRD and partners will support a trial to re-establish a water release from Thetis Lake to augment stream flows in middle and lower Craigflower Creek.

Saanich North and the Islands MLA Murray Coell commends the proactive measures being undertaken to enhance a vital fish habitat. "Partnerships such as these, involving stakeholders across various levels and departments of government, agencies and individuals demonstrate the commitment made to adapting to climate change and wise water stewardship."

BCCF Project Manager James Craig describes Craigflower Creek as a small, flow challenged but productive cutthroat and coho stream that drains into the Victoria area's Gorge Waterway. With significant portions of the watershed intact and protected by park status, Craigflower Creek offers great potential for increased fish production with a small release from Thetis Lake Regional Park to maintain flows throughout the summer.

"CRD Regional Parks is pleased to collaborate with our partners for this trial project," said Lloyd Rushton, General Manager for CRD Parks and Community Services. "Helping to restore summer coho and cutthroat habitat demonstrates our commitment to environmental stewardship in the region."

Faced with climate change resulting in longer and more severe droughts in southern BC watersheds, stream rearing trout and salmon stocks experience reduced productivity due to declines in habitat quantity and quality.

Benefits of improved base flows in Craigflower Creek have been previously estimated during feasibility work in the late 70s and early 80s. "In 1983, DFO and MoE estimated that "sustained flow (of ~0.75 cfs) from Lower Thetis Lake could potentially double salmon and quadruple cutthroat trout production in Craigflower Creek," added Craig.

During the trial, Regional Parks and the BCCF will monitor ecological and park user impacts resulting from the lower water levels as part of the project. Park users are advised to use caution in the water and when swimming due to lower water levels in lower Thetis Lake. Use of existing storage will occur from June to October and will result in approximately 30 cm (12 inches) of drawdown over and above natural losses such as evaporation. At the end of the season, stakeholders will meet and review the outcomes of the trial release to consider aspects

of the strategy that worked, unanticipated issues or impacts that need addressing, and how changes to the strategy could better meet mutual objectives.

Getting the water back into Craigflower Creek has been a goal of the Esquimalt Anglers Association for many years. “We want to see a self sustaining coho salmon population in Craigflower, but that can’t be achieved without water in the creek,” said Bruce Bevan. He added, “Drought proofing highly developed watersheds needs to be a priority for all levels of government.”

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