



THE CAPITAL AND VANCOUVER ISLAND

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Partnerships save fish by keeping water running

JUDITH LAVOIE
Times Colonist

Lifesaving water continued running in some creeks around Greater Victoria this year where, by late summer, dead fish are usually strewn over dry stream beds.

Pools, connected by trickles of water, allowed salmon and trout to survive in areas such as Charters River, McKenzie Creek and Craigflower Creek because of creative partnerships among different levels of government, First Nations and non-profit groups.

B.C. Conservation Foundation, through Living

Rivers Georgia Basin-Vancouver Island, looks for where fish runs can be improved with projects such as watershed conservation or small-scale water storage on streams with chronically low summer water flows.

With climate change resulting in longer and more severe droughts, it is becoming more urgent to ensure there is water for fish, said BCCF project manager James Craig.

"Innovative, partnered solutions are required," Craig said.

The Charters River project brought together Juan

de Fuca Salmon Restoration Society, Capital Regional District, Habitat Conservation Trust, Pacific Salmon Foundation and T'Sou-ke First Nation.

"Virtually all of the summer flow in Charters River had, for decades, been provided by leakage from the old Sooke water supply pipeline," Craig said.

"With the recent CRD supply line replacement project, Charters would have dried each summer, devastating the system's coho and trout populations."

Funding from the various organizations paid for a \$100,000 "plumbing fix,"

which allows a small diversion of the water supply to be diverted to Charters River where it supports thousands of young coho and trout, Craig said.

In McKenzie and Craigflower creeks the water is coming from Thetis Lake on a trial basis.

There is a release system from the lake, dating back decades, but the original water licence did not call for fish conservation, Craig said.

"CRD parks obviously wants to maintain the parkland, so we've had a trial release," he said.

"It has been very successful. This year, Craigflower

has been kept flowing all summer. The CRD wants to do this for another two or three years on a trial basis and then it would be a real victory from the fish perspective if the water licence was changed."

Coho and cutthroat trout are the big beneficiaries, Craig said.

The drawdown meant Thetis Lake was about one foot lower than usual this summer. Lloyd Rushton, CRD parks general manager, said the effects are being monitored.

"We are looking at the impact on the lake and recreational activities and

we will gauge how much improvement there will be in fish stocks in the creek. We need to look at both ends," he said.

Getting water back into Craigflower Creek has been a dream of the Esquimalt Anglers Association for 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 spokesman Bruce Bevan.

"Drought-proofing highly developed watersheds needs to be a priority for all levels of government."

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