

For Immediate Release
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Water stored at Westwood Lake in Nanaimo will be used to improve fish habitat conditions in Darough Creek and Millstone River.

NANAIMO: The City of Nanaimo, in a project supported by Living Rivers – Georgia Basin/Vancouver Island and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, has begun working on a project that will provide increased flows from Westwood Lake into Darough Creek, the Millstone River, and the Millstone’s Bowen Park side channel constructed in 2007.

Craig Wightman, Senior Fisheries Biologist BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF), said stream-rearing salmon and trout will benefit. “Like many other urban streams on Vancouver Island, the Millstone River suffers from very low summer flows and its juvenile fish stocks experience relatively high competition and mortality as a result.”

The Millstone River bypass channel through Bowen Park was designed to develop a self-sustaining coho run of 3,000 fish. The channel was opened in the fall of last year and has proved successful by enabling salmon and trout access to the upper watershed and some of its more productive habitats. Added Wightman, “To maintain or further improve these rearing habitats, adequate water flow is critical. Westwood Lake is well suited to provide additional flows, being relatively large and having existing licensed storage held by the City of Nanaimo for recreation purposes.”

Mel Sheng, Restoration Biologist with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, said trial stocking of adult coho in the upper watershed in recent years led to spawning success and exceptionally high fry and smolt numbers, confirming the Millstone’s rich productivity with adequate stream flows.

To accomplish this, a siphon will be constructed through the top section of the Westwood Lake Dam drawing water from the lake and discharging into Darough Creek, which is a tributary to the Millstone River. The work will coincide with the City’s seismic upgrades at Westwood dam.) An excavator will begin laying pipe out from shore for the siphon. Protective measures are being implemented to mitigate impacts to fish and other aquatic life during the construction phase.

Installing the siphon and a proposal to increase the lake’s spring level by 15 cm requires BC Ministry of Environment (MoE) approval. Nanaimo City Council unanimously endorsed the application for a new water licence at its last meeting. Final MoE approval could take several more months. In the interim and pending an amendment to the existing water licence, a small amount of water, 9 litres/second, or the equivalent of about two milk jugs per second will be released through the siphon in August and September of this year to Darough Creek, the lake’s historic outlet. That water will flow into the Millstone and allow the new side channel in Bowen Park to be fully wetted all summer long. DFO aims to upgrade the outflow weir at the west end of the lake in Phase II to raise the spring lake level and then release the new storage from August to early October. Feasibility studies have shown minimal impacts to amphibians, fish, birds and plants with this level of increase.

The City has been very supportive of the Millstone project as a whole, and was a key funding partner during last year’s side channel construction phase. Scott Pamminer, Water Resource Technologist, City of Nanaimo said residents will hardly notice the change in the lake level. “None of the existing trails surrounding the lake will be affected by the increase in volume.” The additional stored water will also help improve water quality for recreational users by maintaining higher levels through July and August.

Project funding has been provided by the Living Rivers-Georgia Basin/Vancouver Island Program, the Pacific Salmon Commission and the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation. The City of Nanaimo has donated staff and engineering time and is overseeing construction. The project was initiated by Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and is

supported by Nanaimo Fish and Game Protective Association, Island Waters Fly Fishers, Vancouver Island University, Friends of the Millstone and the Ministry of Environment.

Mel Sheng, DFO, added, “Water released this summer will be closely monitored to ensure the best fisheries benefits are realized without impacting recreational use.”

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