



OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN STEWARDSHIP NEWS

May 2024

Planting in Summerland Students Help Decommission Trail

In partnership with the District of Summerland and under the guidance of local biologist Dwight Shanner, Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship kicked off a spring planting season at a park on Landy Cres. in Summerland's Trout Creek with Mr. Hutchinson's class.

This project was necessary because of a small amount of trail-braiding. Trail-braiding happens when people create new paths off of existing ones in order to avoid minor obstacles or to create shortcuts. While these additional paths might seem convenient, they are very damaging to plants and wildlife habitat. It is important to stay on existing trails and not cut any corners. If you see piles of sticks or logs blocking a path, it is best to avoid that area and follow the original trail.

Thanks to these students and other partners, we were able to plant trees and shrubs over a small braided trail and increase the amount of future habitat for wildlife!



You did it!

Back in December, our previous field truck was hit while parked on the street overnight and later written off as a total loss.

Last month, thanks to the many generous donors who donated to our campaign, we met our fundraising goal and were able to buy a new-to-us Ford F-150! We are so grateful to each and every person who donated to the campaign and are so pleased with our new truck. Thank you!

Harnessing native pollinator power

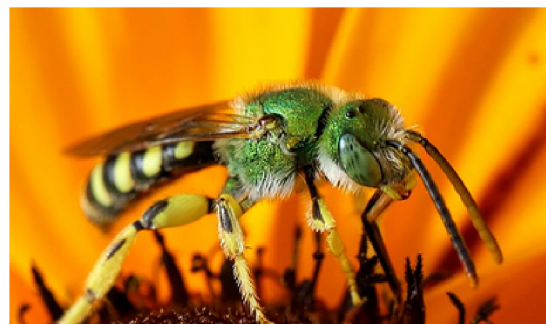
It's a common spring sight in our valleys - beehives scattered through fields and orchards, spreading honeybee pollination power around the province. However, disease, drought, and parasites have left apiarists fighting battles on all sides trying to maintain their hives.

So what can one do to improve an orchard's resilience to the sting of honeybee losses? Provide homes for native pollinators! An orchard with healthy natural habitat and pollinator-friendly practices can support huge numbers of pollinators and other beneficial insects, some of which are even more efficient at pollination than honeybees. While others even do double duty and both pollinate and eat pests. These insects may already be present around your orchard, so encouraging them to thrive requires only a few adjustments to management practices and a bit of space for them to stay.

Leaving large natural areas undisturbed is the best practice to encourage pollinators as these areas already provide both food and shelter, but if there are no natural areas nearby, then creating habitat patches can still be beneficial. Planting windbreaks or hedgerows in under-used areas or along fence lines offers shelter for pollinators, provides food, and creates nesting areas.

Dave and Gabi Cursons planted a shelterbelt on their farm in Cawston, B.C. decades ago. They say they're more likely to see beneficial insects, frogs, and other helpful wildlife than on some conventional farms. By planting certain types of shrubs and wildflowers, they encourage beneficial insects while discouraging pests.

Across the highway, Willis and Bronwyn Brown of Brown-Schneider Farm reached out to OSS for assistance with a shelterbelt project and have since been establishing native plants along their fencelines to help protect their organic farm from pesticide drift from neighbouring farms.



At times, managing both agriculture and conservation can feel a bit like juggling. In March, OSS brought in Wildlife Habitat Steward Willis Brown of Brown-Schneider Organic Farm and Tamara Richardson of Cornucopia Crop Consulting to discuss the value of incorporating native plant hedgerows into farming operations at a workshop in Cawston. The workshop was attended by 25 local producers interested in bringing more biodiversity and pollinators to their farms.

When asked about why maintaining hedgerows is key to their farm, Willis says:

“

We have farmed successfully with intentional hedgerows and wild spaces here for generations, and it's the way! Not just for the ecosystem services like pollinators, predators, and protection from erosion, or for the intrinsically valuable life forms that share our space, but because we too are a life form not separate from our environment! Wild spaces make our farms more inspiring, bountiful, and beautiful places. They affect the style of our existence.

~Willis Brown, Brown-Schneider Organic Farm



Create drought-tolerant pollinator habitat

To create refuge habitat, choose native long-blooming wildflowers such as yarrow, brown-eyed susan, showy milkweed, and asters to provide year-round nectar for the pollinators to eat after fruit trees have finished flowering. Even predatory insects can live twice as long when there are flowers around, as they will also eat nectar if they temporarily can't find prey. Shrubs such as wild rose, mock-orange or willow provide habitat structure. Many pollinators and predatory insects need dead wood for nesting; this can include fallen logs, untreated fence posts, and even old wooden sheds. Bumble, mining, and carpenter bees need loose, bare soil for nesting.




Matching the area you want to restore to a wild spot nearby with similar soils and sun exposure can increase the chances that the plants you choose will do well.

Some Shrubs, Flowers & Ground Covers for Pollinators




Bloom time



-  Spring
-  Summer
-  Fall

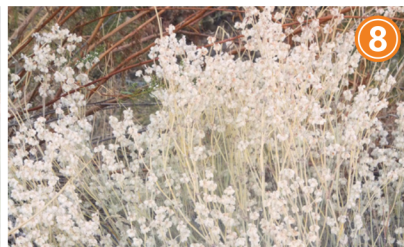
Watering needs

-  Drought tolerant
-  Water in dry spells
-  Needs some water

Sun preference

-  Full Sun
-  Part Shade
-  Full shade

1	Yarrow (<i>Achillea millefolium</i>)	 		
2	Showy Aster (<i>Eurybia conspicua</i>)			
3	Showy Milkweed (<i>Asclepias speciosa</i>)			
4	Brown-eyed Susan (<i>Gaillardia aristata</i>)	 		
5	Saskatoon (<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i>)			
6	Snowberry (<i>Ribes cereum</i>)			
7	Oregon-grape (<i>Mahonia aquifolium</i>)			
8	Snow Buckwheat (<i>Eriogonum niveum</i>)	 		
9	Rabbitbrush (<i>Ericameria nauseosa</i>)			
10	Kinnickinnick (<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>)	 		



New web resource!

If you're a producer and need a one-stop spot to find relevant resources, particularly for orchards, vineyards, and ranching, we have pulled together relevant information including implementing best management practices for wildlife, applying nature-based solutions to commonly faced issues on the farm, and potential sources for funding available direct to producers. Check it out and let us know if there are other things you would like to see included:



www.farmstewards.ca

WANTED: Open Forests

Wider open spaces needed

We know our cities and urban areas need more trees to provide cooling shade in hot summer months and insulation in the winter. Some of our forests, particularly our riparian forests should be dense with a shrubby understory, however, most of our low elevation forests should have wide open spaces between trees to be healthy. Dry, open, low-elevation forests of mostly Ponderosa Pine and Interior Douglas Fir are an important ecosystem in the Okanagan and Similkameen and provide critically important habitat for species such as the Lewis's Woodpecker, Flammulated Owl, and Black Bear. The open spaces that should exist between these trees are becoming choked with saplings, and the pines and firs are spreading into and taking over other important ecosystems such as our dry interior grasslands.

Forest fire prevention has led to large changes in what was a fire-maintained ecosystem. Historically, small fires would frequently burn through the forest, in some areas as frequently as every 7 years. These smaller, low-intensity fires help reduce some of the overabundance of saplings in the forest understory and also take care of the excess dead wood and needles that can lead to big destructive fires. Without fires, all those small saplings survive and grow too close to each other, leading to very skinny 'toothpick' trees and little on the ground other than pine needles. Even though there are more trees, the habitat quality declines, there is little to eat on the ground, and good bird habitat is lost due to the trees having fewer thin branches and cones. Some patches of this dense forest can still be beneficial as it gives animals some dense cover and can provide protection from snow in the winter but too much of this forest is a problem.

Although our houses, towns and agriculture make prescribed fires difficult, there are still things you can do to improve habitat and reduce wildfire risk. Removing many smaller, younger trees gives more space for large trees to grow and thrive and allows more light to penetrate to the forest floor, giving more grasses, flowers and shrubs a chance too.

Resource: Rocky Mountain Trench Blueprint for Action https://sernbc.ca/uploads/46/Blueprint_for_Action_2006.pdf



Dense 'toothpick' forests (middle) are a higher fire risk and are poor habitat for Threatened wildlife such as Bighorn Sheep and Lewis's Woodpecker (left). These species, and many others, need healthy, wide open forests with big trees (right).

We gratefully acknowledge that our work takes place on the traditional and unceded territory of the Syilx and Secwépemc people.

For more information
please contact OSS at:

E: info@osstewardship.ca
P: 250.770.1467
W: www.osstewardship.ca
 
@osstewardship

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