

Field Notes



OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN STEWARDSHIP

November 2025

Working with Nature

Simple, Nature-Based Solutions for Healthier Land

From eroding streambanks to thirsty soils, landowners across the Okanagan and Similkameen are facing the same challenges. The good news? Nature already has the solutions. By using nature-based solutions, we can work with natural systems to create landscapes that are more resilient, productive, and beautiful.

One of the most effective ways to prevent erosion and improve water quality is by restoring riparian buffers (the native shrubs, trees, and grasses that grow along creeks, ponds, and lakes). These plants hold soil in place, slow runoff, and filter nutrients before they reach waterways. On farms, they also provide habitat for beneficial insects and birds that help control pests.

On sloped or dry properties, native plantings can replace thirsty lawns and stabilize hillsides. Once established, species like mock orange (pictured), snowberry, and bunchgrasses need little to no water or maintenance while supporting pollinators and songbirds. In orchards and vineyards, planting wildflower strips or hedgerows attracts bees, butterflies, and predatory insects that naturally reduce pests and improve fruit set.

Small actions make a difference. A rain garden captures and filters stormwater that might otherwise flood driveways or carry pollutants into streams. Bird boxes, bat houses, and small piles of rocks or woody debris provide shelter for native wildlife.

These simple, nature-based solutions protect soil and water, boost biodiversity, and help our communities adapt to drought and extreme weather- a true win-win for people and nature. At Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship, we work with landowners to plan and restore habitat on farms, ranches, vineyards, and home properties. We offer free site visits, technical advice, and sometimes even native plants to help get you started.



Nature-based solutions are ways of solving problems by working with nature instead of against it. They use natural processes like planting trees, restoring wetlands, or creating wildlife habitat to help address challenges like flooding, drought, and enhancing food production. Nature-based solutions use the power of healthy ecosystems to make our communities and landscapes stronger, safer, and more resilient.

LEARN MORE



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Communities in Action

Caring for nature starts close to home, and when communities come together, the impact grows far beyond any single site. Four community-led projects in Kelowna and Vernon are showing how hands-on restoration can rebuild wildlife habitat and strengthen connections to the land.

These projects involved creating better wildlife habitat, by planting native trees and shrubs in mainly wetlands and riparian areas. With more than 80% of wetlands and riparian areas lost, these remaining habitats are essential for many of our local species including birds, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals. With support from the City of Kelowna, the North Okanagan Naturalists Club, the North Okanagan Regional District, Associated Environmental, Awaken Nature Education Program, and many dedicated volunteers, we were able to plant over 1100 trees and shrubs vital habitats for birds, amphibians, and other wildlife.

Wetlands and Wildfire Resilience

One of the project locations was at Knox Mountain Park in Kelowna. This beautiful park is mostly made up of low elevation forest, but tucked away in the forest lives a marsh as well as the serene Kathleen Lake. With help from the City of Kelowna and a local plant group, we were able to plant more than 200 trees and shrubs between the two spots. The main plant that we wanted to incorporate into the area was Aspen, mostly due to its firefighting abilities.

A week prior to the planting at Knox Mountain, a prescribed burn was performed at the park by the City of Kelowna. This was done to help reduce the amount of fuel made from fallen pine needles and other brush. With less fuel, future fires will not burn as intensely and will cause less damage to the surrounding area. It is also healthy for forests and grasslands for fires to take place periodically. Fires can help with releasing nutrients and giving plants more space to grow. Past fire suppression has caused an overgrowth and encroachment of vegetation in areas that should be more open, so more fires are beneficial when done in these safe and controlled conditions.



Aspen: Nature's Firefighter

Did you know that aspen trees can help slow the spread of wildfires? Aspen have moist, broad leaves and smooth bark that resist burning. Their open canopies allow more sunlight to reach the ground, encouraging lush green understory plants that also hold moisture- all of which add up to make aspen stands natural firebreaks.

Encouraging or restoring aspen on your property can increase fire resilience while supporting wildlife and soil health. Aspen groves provide habitat for birds, pollinators, and small mammals, and their deep roots help stabilize slopes and improve water retention.

If you have aspen on your property, consider protecting and maintaining them by preventing overgrazing, allowing natural regeneration, or planting a few new shoots. Over time, these living firebreaks can help protect homes, crops, and surrounding landscapes while adding beauty and biodiversity.

Communities in Action

Volunteers Return to Thomson Marsh and Swan Lake

Thomson Marsh and Swan Lake may sound familiar to those that have followed our past projects, and this year we went back for another round!

Thomson Marsh is a public park in the Mission area of Kelowna. Last year we planted 380 trees and shrubs, with the goal to enhance wildlife habitat along the water. With the success of last year's planting, the plan this year was to extend the planting area even further and add over 350 plants.

The fun continued in the RDNO at Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary, where the North Okanagan Naturalist Club, in collaboration with Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship, continued the ongoing restoration by planting native grasses, flowers, shrubs, and trees to restore the grassland environment adjacent to the wetland area.

We could not have achieved these events without our wonderful volunteers that came out to our planting events. Volunteers are a core part of restoration work, and their time, knowledge, and care is what makes projects like these possible!



Restoring Riparian Habitat at sncəmałqtn Agricultural Park

The sncəmałqtn Agricultural Park, in Vernon's BX area, is a 132 acre community property dedicated to sustainable farming and education. This property had recently been purchased by Electoral Areas B and C as a way to preserve the land for community uses such as: farmland leases, a community garden, a food forest and pollinator meadows, a community farm, and a research and teaching farm. In addition to being a resource to humans, the area will support wildlife as well with the development plan including set-asides for a habitat protection area so that local species can have a place to call home.

As part of this dedication to wildlife habitat, collaborators from Associated Environmental, the RDNO, BX Swan Lake Community Association, and Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship are restoring a wetland area on site. The first phase of work completed by Associated Environmental reshaped the stream channel to restore natural water flow and improve wildlife habitat. As a second step to the restoration this fall, 320 native trees and shrubs were added to the Agricultural Park by community members and Awaken Inquiry & Adventure Okanagan. Together, we were able to plant species such as red-osier dogwood, blue elderberry, saskatoon, hawthorn, snowberry, native willows, black cottonwood, and wax currant to support a riparian buffer on the site.



Raptors

Nature's Pest Control



Rodents can cause costly damage in orchards and vineyards, but local raptors—like owls, hawks, and kestrels—offer a natural, effective solution. These skilled hunters can be encouraged to stay by adding simple features such as nest boxes and perching posts. The result? Fewer rodents, less need for costly rodenticides, and a healthier, more balanced ecosystem.

Raptors are reliable pest managers, hunting rodents, insects, and even starlings that damage crops and infrastructure. Great Horned Owls, Red-tailed Hawks, and American Kestrels all prey on voles, mice, and gophers that tunnel through roots, chew irrigation lines, and girdle young trees. A single Red-tailed Hawk can eat up to 1,000 rodents a year! Some species, like the American Kestrel even help with insect control, feeding on grasshoppers, caterpillars, and other crop pests.

Fun Fact: Western Screech-owl



Did you know that most owls species found in the Okanagan and Similkameen are small to medium sized. One of these smaller owls include the Western Screech-owl.

While at first glance you might mistake them for their cousin, the Great Horned Owl, they are quite small in comparison, being only about the size of a medium sized to-go cup.

Western Screech-owls are listed as endangered in BC due to loss of riparian habitat and proper nesting trees. To make up for this loss in habitat, consider putting up a Western Screech-owl nesting box if you live near a waterbody.

How to Attract Raptors to Your Property

1. Install Nest Boxes



- Barn owls and kestrels readily use man-made boxes.
- Use the North American plans for Barn owls boxes since our owls are bigger than European Barn owls.
- Mount boxes on poles or buildings 10–15 feet above ground, facing away from prevailing winds.
- Space kestrel boxes a few hundred metres apart near open hunting grounds.
- Nesting platforms can also attract great horned owls and red-tailed hawks.

2. Provide Perches



- Raptors need elevated hunting spots.
- Add T-posts or wooden perches (12–15 feet tall) every few acres near rodent activity or crop rows.

3. Conserve Natural Habitat



- Leave field edges, grass strips, or standing dead trees (snags) when possible.
- These areas support both raptors and the small mammals they feed on, while improving biodiversity



Avoiding Pitfalls

Skip rodenticides: poisoned prey can harm or kill raptors as well as any other predators, such as domestic cats and dogs.

Keep netting tight: loose netting can trap and kill owls, hawks, snakes, and small birds.

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

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