



OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN STEWARDSHIP NEWS

November 2022

Stewardship Gets a New Look!

Chair of the Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Board and Artist, Dianne Bersea, has designed a new logo for Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship.

While our salamander logo will always have a special place in our hearts, parts of the logo were shared with another local organization and our board unveiled a new look at our past Annual General Meeting! We will be updating signs and informational materials over the coming months!

This season by the numbers:

29

habitat restoration projects

2744

native trees, shrubs & wildflowers planted

2586

kg of invasive plants and garbage removed from wildlife habitat

135

volunteers supporting wildlife conservation



It's time to renew your annual membership! Visit www.osstewardship.ca/membership or mail \$10 cash/cheque to:
6-477 Martin St
Penticton, BC, V2A5L2

Stewardship at Skaha Park Pond



Skaha Park Pond has had not one, not two, not even three- but FOUR "green-ups" in the past 6 months. In addition to planting 634 Indigenous trees and shrubs, we have also held 6 training workshops ranging from Beginner Birding, to Amphibians, as well as Native Plants and Pollinators and even a Bioblitz!

A huge Thank You goes out to all our board members, volunteers and members of Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship who kicked off the fall planting at this urban pond in September, as well as the Penticton Excel School and families of Dragonfly Pond Society, who continued planting at the pond later on in the season.

These native trees, shrubs, and wildflowers will increase the riparian habitat around Skaha Park Pond for all the birds, turtles, frogs, and other wildlife who live there.

Snake Den "Renovations"

For the past two years, with funding from the Greater Vernon Trails and Natural Areas grant, OSSS has been enhancing habitat at North Vernon Park at 20th and Deleenheer.

In addition to working with plants, we consulted with snake expert, Mike Sarell, to provide protection and more habitat to the hibernacula (den) that was previously completely exposed. This provides the snakes using this den site with more hiding spaces, temperature profiles, and protection from persecution (direct, targeted human threats). While we understand that this limits how much you may be able to see the snakes, snakes prefer it this way!

The dens along Deleenheer are home to two kinds of snakes: the Terrestrial Gartersnake and the Common Gartersnake pictured to right.



Did you know?

Snakes overwinter in underground hibernacula (dens). These dens must be deep enough for snakes to avoid freezing to death but also cold enough so that body fat isn't metabolized too fast which would cause them to starve.

While some snakes overwinter with only the same species of snake, many will overwinter in communal dens. Some snake species, like gartersnakes will often share dens with other species, like gophersnakes and Western Yellow-bellied racers.

Further, snakes are known to be den-specific. Much like how salmon know how to make their way back to their natal stream to spawn, snakes return to the same den year after year. This makes them particularly susceptible to development of our rugged hillsides.



How Do Other Reptiles Survive Winter?



While Western Skinks and Alligator Lizards find hibernacula (dens) much like their slithery cousins, Painted Turtles do something a little different.

Painted turtle adults will overwinter under ice, sometimes buried half a metre in the mud- they can survive more than 100 days in water at 3°C without food or oxygen. Hatchlings will usually remain in the nest over winter (usually buried by mom in a sandy beach) before migrating back to their pond in the spring.

Painted turtles can survive freezing partly because they have some control of how ice forms inside them. Winter temperatures signal their liver to produce a sort of "anti-freeze" that causes very small ice crystals to form. By keeping ice crystals small, damage to surrounding tissue is minimized.

Like all turtles, painted turtles have lungs and during warm months they get most or all their oxygen by breathing air. However, while submerged for the winter, they can absorb some oxygen through their skin, mouth and cloaca (yes- their butt!)

WILDLIFE HABITAT STEWARDS



Wildlife Habitat Stewards are voluntary caretakers of important wildlife habitats on their owned or managed properties. Through our Wildlife Habitat Steward initiative, we enter a partnership with land owners and managers.

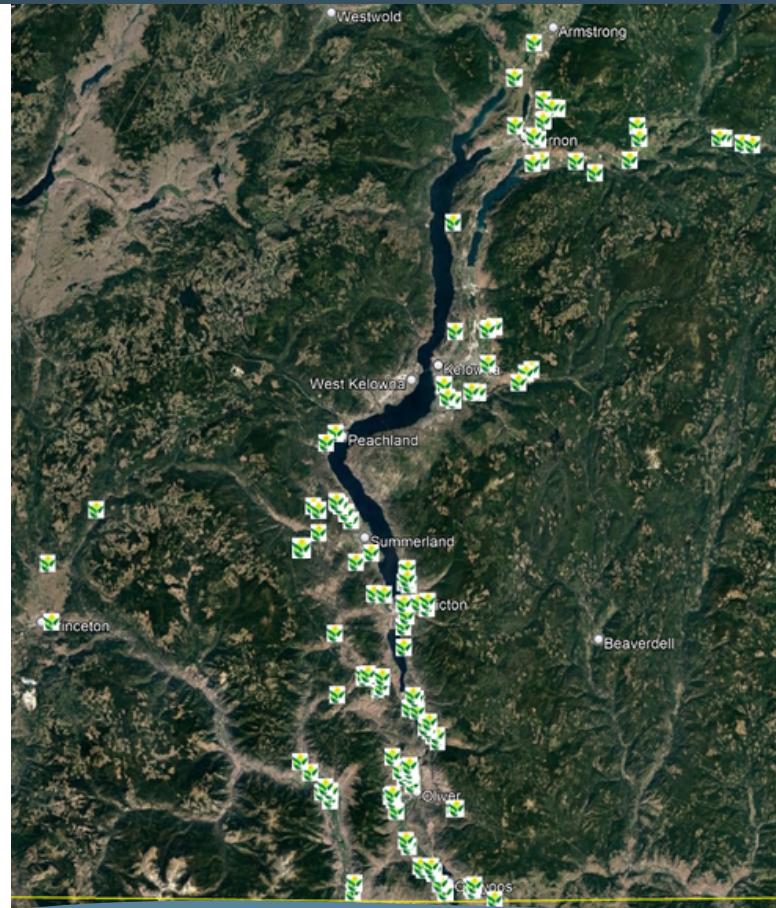
Being a Wildlife Habitat Steward does not mean you can't "use" your land. Wildlife Habitat Stewards still maintain their agricultural, tourism and other land use practices on their properties while implementing best management practices for wildlife. There is no loss of ownership or rights- it's a partnership.

While OSS staff make recommendations, or suggestions, of things we think might enhance natural areas on properties for wildlife, it is Stewards who are the drivers of any projects or land use practices that they choose to undertake- that is to say, we don't tell landowners what to do- we make suggestions, you make decisions. This ensures that all projects are win-win.

Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship provides Wildlife Habitat Stewards with recognition, technical support in habitat enhancement projects, management plans, and assistance with implementation of best management practices for wildlife on their properties..

**Interested in the
Wildlife Habitat Steward initiative?
Contact OSS:
email info@osstewardship.ca
phone 250-770-1467**

WILDLIFE HABITAT STEWARDS



OSS currently partners with over 120 Wildlife Habitat Stewards throughout the Regional Districts of North Okanagan, Central Okanagan and Okanagan-Similkameen.

These stewards range from owning/operating homesteads, ranches, orchards, vineyards, and even golf courses.

The thing each of our Wildlife Habitat Stewards has in common is that they are taking care of natural habitats on their properties- from wetlands to shorelines next to creeks, shrubby grasslands and rugged terrain.

Stewards sign a partnership agreement where we outline some recommendations for stewardship and how OSS can support you with them.

Do you want support managing natural areas on your property, or simply want to learn more and see if it's a good fit for you?



Contact us (info@osstewardship.ca or 250-770-1467) to arrange an on-site visit to introduce you to the program, answer questions and do a preliminary assessment of the wildlife habitat on your property.



If interested, we enter into a voluntary Stewardship Partnership. This is a signed written document describing natural areas on your property and your intent to steward them for local wildlife.



We provide you with a gate-post sign and if you wish, we can promote our partnership with you publicly on our website and through media articles.



Once you have become a Wildlife Habitat Steward, you will be eligible to receive assistance and support with habitat enhancement projects on your property (native plant re-vegetation, livestock exclusion fencing, ATV exclusion fencing, bat and bird boxes).

Swan Lake Stewardship

Restoring a Reed Canary Grass Infested "pasture"

With 18 volunteers from the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club and Associated Environmental Consultants, we planted 100 trees and shrubs at Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park just north of Vernon last week! The planting was done in 5 separate plots among the reed canary grass "pasture" to provide more patches (starting points) for the riparian forest to grow from.

We often talk about how great and underappreciated grasslands are, so why are we trying to convert a grassland into a forest? It's because this "grassland" isn't really a grassland at all. Reed Canary Grass is an invasive grass that grows in dense monocultures that do not allow for any other plants to grow. It can fill in shallow wetlands, which impacts breeding areas for amphibians and in some cases even creates a barrier for salmon and other fish.

Reed Canary Grass is extremely hardy and tough to remove, but one way to help control it is to create shade with an over-story of native trees and shrubs, which is what we are doing with this planting. It doesn't grow as well in the shade, so other native plants are able to get a chance to grow. These native trees and shrubs will also be used for food and habitat by birds, insects, and other wildlife like deer.



Wetland Loading...

New wetland at Curlew Orchard

In October, OSS also helped the Ling-Allens of Curlew Orchard create a small wetland on their property. Wetland habitats, like this one are really important, not only as a food and water source for our wildlife, but also as buffers to floods and droughts.

We have lost 85% of our wetlands in the Okanagan so these small wetlands can pack a big biodiversity punch! Many of our small wetlands will dry out for part of the year and these ephemeral (seasonal) wetlands are particularly important to amphibians, who rely on the safe, fish-free environments to lay eggs.

We can't wait to watch all the native trees and shrubs grow up and to see this green oasis take shape!

Eneas Creek Yellow-flag Iris Community Project

A project with amazing community involvement!

Since 2016, the Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Society (OSSS) has been working with local landowners along Eneas Creek and in the Garnet Valley to enhance and restore wildlife habitat along the creek. Between 2016 and 2019, we planted 2100 native trees and shrubs on the Okanagan Crush Pad property and have been doing invasive plant management since then.

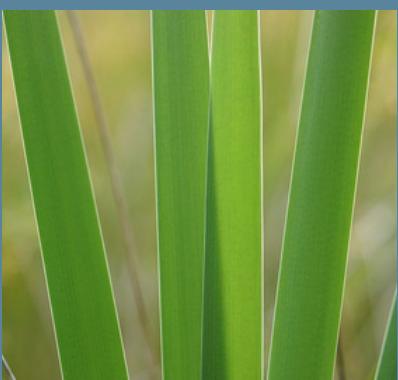
Recently, we have focused on removal of Yellow Flag Iris from the creek. Yellow Flag Iris is a destructive invasive plant that chokes the creek and reduces habitat quality for wildlife while also increasing local flooding where it forms dense mats, blocking water flow. It spreads through underground rhizomes as well as seed dispersal. To remove the iris, expert Dr. Catherine Tarasoff recommends cutting back plants and installing a thick benthic barrier (PVC) for one year to suffocate the roots of the plants. Work such as this needs to be conducted with appropriate Permits/Notifications and in the fisheries work window.

Four new stewards joined us through this initiative, and we completed iris removal on 5 Wildlife Habitat Stewards' properties, starting in upstream locations and working downstream in the direction that seeds are spread.

A Case of Mistaken Identity!

When not flowering, Yellow Flag Iris looks similar to cattails. Cattail leaves are arranged in rounded layers rather than flat like the yellow flag iris. Additionally, Yellow Flag Iris have a distinct ridge up the length of their leaves.

Cattail



Yellow-flag Iris



Step by Step

Building on Past Projects

Many of our large planting projects are often done in stages. Sometimes it is just too big of a project to complete in one year and other times, we want to trial a small area to make sure it is a viable project before expanding to a larger area.

This year, we completed the third stage of a fallow hay field restoration in Farleigh Lake and the second stage of a riparian buffer enhancement project in Cawston!

We also completed a second phase of planting at North Vernon Park with students from Awaken Inquiry & Adventure Okanagan at Clarence Fulton Secondary School.



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

For more information please contact OSS at:

E: info@osstewardship.ca
P: 250.770.1467
W: [@osstewardship](http://www.osstewardship.ca)

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