



OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN STEWARDSHIP

Field Notes | Summer 2026

Stewardship in Action



Making room for Western Screech-owls

Western Screech-owls are a threatened species that rely on old cottonwood trees for nesting cavities. With support from the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, landowners along Coldstream Creek are installing owl boxes provided by Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship (OSS) to create much-needed habitat for these natural rodent hunters. More than 100 residents recently attended an owl presentation and evening "owl prowling" to listen for calling owls along the creek. If you live near the creek and think your property may be a good fit for a nest box, please contact us at info@osstewardship.ca or 250-770-1467.

Living with Wildlife on Anarchist Mountain

Thanks to a partnership between OSS and the Anarchist Mountain Community Society, residents of Anarchist Mountain have been gathering on the last Saturday of each month to learn about the wildlife and ecosystems that make their community unique. Supported by the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, the speaker series has attracted approximately 25 participants each session, with topics ranging from stewardship on the mountain, wildfire ecology, and bats to upcoming presentations on California Bighorn Sheep, invasive species, and cougars. The series is designed for Anarchist Mountain residents, but if you'd like to see a similar program in your rural community, we'd love to hear from you.



Helping Farmers Harness Nature's Pest Control

20 community members joined OSS and the Okanagan Fruit Tree Project for a hands-on workshop exploring how farms can work with nature to manage pests. With funding from the Sitka Foundation, participants installed a kestrel nest box, swallow nest boxes, and raptor T-posts to attract birds that help control rodents and insects naturally. By creating habitat for these beneficial species, farmers can support biodiversity while reducing reliance on pesticides. If you are a farmer in the Okanagan or Similkameen interested in stewardship support for your property, visit farmstewards.ca or contact OSS to learn more.



Drought Comes Early

From a press release by Okanagan Nation Alliance in May, “The Syilx Okanagan Nation has formally declared a Watershed Emergency across the Okanagan, Nicola, Similkameen, Kettle, Salmon, and Bessette watersheds in response to accelerating drought, ecosystem decline, and growing threats to water security.”

Low snowpack and high temperatures this spring have resulted in concerns of drought for the summer. Water restrictions are beginning to roll out and it is time to assess our individual water usage.

Gardens and lawns are the second largest consumers of water in the Okanagan. To reduce the impact to our local environment, we must all do our part in water preservation this summer.



Graphic from Okanagan Basin Water Board Drought Bulletin: Illustrative percentage of rain received in Penticton, Kelowna and Vernon from Jan. 1, 2026 to June 10, 2026 vs. the missing amount of the 1991-2020 historical average expected by June 10 each year. Data from Environment and Climate Change Canada.

5 ways to save water in your garden

- 💧 **Beat the heat with mulch.** Mulches help conserve water by reducing evaporation and keeping soil cool. Rock-covered landscapes can create heat-island effects, raising soil temperatures and making plants work harder to survive hot, dry summers.
- 💧 **Water when it counts.** Irrigate between dusk and dawn when temperatures are cooler and winds are lighter. This reduces evaporation and ensures more water reaches plant roots rather than being lost to the air.
- 💧 **Make every drop count.** Drip irrigation delivers water closer to plant roots, reducing evaporation, runoff, and overspray.
- 💧 **Capture rain when it falls.** Use rain barrels to collect rainfall and store it for use in your garden or yard.
- 💧 **Plant for the climate.** Incorporating xeriscaping principles and drought-tolerant native or climate-adapted plants can dramatically reduce water needs while providing habitat for pollinators and wildlife.

Resources

Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship
www.osstewardship.ca/resources

Okanagan Xeriscape Association:
okanaganxeriscape.org

Sagebrush Nursery
www.sagebrushnursery.com

Xeriscape Endemic Nursery
www.xeneco.ca

Rethinking lawn

Drought tolerant options for your yard

Many people want a lush and tidy yard with curb appeal. While lawns have long been the standard way to achieve this more and more people are ditching lawns in favour of alternatives that use less water and require less maintenance.

Lawn alternatives - If you like open spaces and soft ground cover you can walk and play on there are a few non-grass options. Micro-clover is a great option, drought tolerant these tiny plants are legumes meaning they make their own nitrogen allowing them to thrive in poor soils without fertilizer. Yarrow is native and very tenacious, if mowed it stays a soft ground cover or you can let it flower for the pollinators. For very dry yards, creeping thyme is another great option. Creeping thyme requires no mowing and has tiny little purple flowers.

Meadows- While lawns are biodiversity deserts, grasslands and meadows are vibrant places full of life. In our dry climate, meadows and grasslands tend to dry out and turn golden by July. Grasslands are home to 30% of BC's threatened and endangered species. While retaining natural grassland is something that we should always strive for, if you're starting from a typical yard, a xeriscape garden might be easier to build and maintain than a natural Okanagan or Similkameen grassland.

Xeriscape- Xeriscape comes from the word xeric meaning dry. It is dry or drought tolerant landscaping or gardening. Just because you aren't using much water doesn't mean you need a moonscape of stone. Xeriscape is all about choosing the right plants for where you live. We aren't living in a coastal temperate rainforest full of dripping moss, but that doesn't mean you can't have lush gardens full of flowers. Many of our native plants make fantastic additions to gardens and provide food and habitat for our native wildlife. Or if you'd rather some ornamental plants, try a colourful garden full of lavender, hollyhock, moonshine yarrow, and blue mist spirea! Mixing native plants with ornamental plants can create a vibrant garden with lots of habitat for native birds and pollinators as well as lots of visual interest for the gardener.

Zeroscape or Xeriscape?



There are so many benefits of swapping out your zero-scaped rock-covered yard with a xeriscape pollinator garden and one of them is that a xeriscape garden can actually help cool your yard! Yards full of rock act similarly to a parking lot and can create "heat islands" by soaking up heat from the sun and then radiating it back to the surrounding area, causing your house to heat up a lot more in these already hot summer months. If you'd like to keep your house cooler and have a beautiful yard, along with supporting native pollinators, check out our blog post here: <https://tinyurl.com/ossxeriscape>

Stewardship Starts With You

When people hear the word "stewardship," they often picture large-scale conservation projects or protected areas. But stewardship starts much closer to home. It begins with everyday people choosing to care for the land, water, and wildlife around them. At Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship (OSS), we believe that everyone can make a difference. Whether you own a farm, manage a vineyard, care for a backyard, volunteer at a community event, or simply want to learn more about local wildlife, there is a place for you in stewardship.

Over the past decade, OSS has worked alongside local residents, farmers, ranchers, businesses, and community groups to conserve and restore important wildlife habitats throughout the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys. Together with our community partners, we have supported stewardship on nearly 10,000 acres of land and helped plant tens of thousands of native trees and shrubs to enhance habitat for wildlife.

Every project, no matter the size, contributes to healthier ecosystems and more resilient communities.

Ready to get involved?



Attend a workshop!
Join our e-news list at
www.osstewardship.ca/fieldnotes
to learn about opportunities near you



Volunteer
www.osstewardship.ca/volunteer



Become a Steward
www.osstewardship.ca/volunteer



Find us at your local farmers' market



Learn More on our Websites
www.osstewardship.ca/resources
www.farmstewards.ca



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Healthy ecosystems don't happen by accident. They are the result of thousands of individual actions taken by people who care about the places they live. Whether you're planting native flowers, restoring habitat on your property, volunteering at an event, or simply learning more about local wildlife, everything adds up!

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
www.farmstewards.ca
 
[@osstewardship](https://www.instagram.com/osstewardship)

Partners in stewardship and conservation

Sitka Foundation, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, Okanagan Basin Water Board, Central Okanagan Foundation, RDNO's North Okanagan Conservation Fund, RDOS's South Okanagan Conservation Fund, BC Community Gaming Grant, Valley First, Canada Summer Jobs, Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program

**Donations to be directed through www.osstewardship.ca/donate-now
All donations to OSS will receive a tax receipt.**

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